

Scripture Truth

Solomon
Together
The God of All Grace
Questions and Answers
The Sure Purposes of God
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

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Editor: Gordon Hughes

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The Sure Purposes of God

Part I

Jim Wolf

So often our plans and purposes are thwarted by circumstances outside our control. That never happens with God! “God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year” runs the opening line of a well known hymn. Some of the obscure statements of Scripture become full of life and meaning when the spotlight of the rest of Scripture is brought to bear on them. The writer wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to a former editor of Scripture Truth, H.D.R. Jameson, whose writings started him off on this series.

Introduction

“Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt” (Numbers 13:22).

The Lord, through the leadership of Moses, has brought the children of Israel to the borders of the land that He had promised would be theirs to possess. His instructions to Moses are to “search out the land of Canaan, which I *give* unto the children of Israel” (Numbers 13:2). Lower down that chapter, in v.22, we find the statement at the head of this section. At first sight, it seems a very strange comment – almost, one might say, a throw-away line, an aside, something of no consequence. But there are no throw-away lines in Scripture, even though modern man seems to think otherwise and throws away whole sections of God’s precious word. Every word and every line are there for our learning and edification.

In this series of studies, we will look not only at the remark made and the places mentioned, but also at some of the places, people and incidents in Scripture that have been used by God in the working out of His purposes. In this way, we will begin

to understand something of the sure purposes of God.

Hebron

Hebron is first mentioned in Genesis 13:12-18: “Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the land of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD”. Abram and Lot have, by mutual consent, come to the parting of the ways, as their herdsmen were prone to quarrel. Abram, Lot’s uncle, should have had the choice of which way to go, but he graciously allows Lot to choose. Lot chose the well-watered plains that were “like the garden of the LORD, like unto the land of Egypt” (v.10). What a contrast to the man of God! Scripture records that the Lord chose the way and the place for Abram. He also made him a promise that the land would one day belong to his offspring.

Abram’s response is a very precious lesson for us all. He first “removed his tent” (he was finished with that place), and then he moved to the place that God had instructed him, Hebron (v.18). But that was not all. He “built there an altar unto the LORD”. It should be remembered that

both Abram and Lot had a knowledge of God. Scripture speaks elsewhere of “righteous” Lot (2 Peter 2:8). But what a difference! Lot was embroiled with the affairs of wicked Sodom, which was to come under the judgment of God. Abram, in obedience to the will of God, sets up camp in Hebron, meaning ‘friendship’ or ‘communion’. So Abraham is spoken of in Scripture as “the friend of God” (James 2:23).

We read also of Moses that “the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exodus 33:11). There can be no higher expression of friendship than this! We can remind ourselves of the wonderful privilege we have been given:

**What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!**

Abram stayed in Hebron for a while, for we see that it was here, under the oaks of Mamre, that he was privileged to receive visitors whom he immediately recognises as God’s messengers (see Genesis 18). By this time, Abram has been given a name change. Abram, meaning ‘exalted father’, is now known as Abraham, meaning ‘father of a great multitude’. He was told that he would be the father of many nations (see Genesis 17). The visitors tell Abraham that his wife, Sarah, who was long past the age of child bearing, would conceive and bear a son.

After the death of Sarah in Hebron (Genesis 23:2,19), we next find Hebron mentioned in Genesis 35. Here Jacob is reunited with his father, Isaac. Again it is seen as a place of friendship, the more

remarkable since it is after a long period of estrangement.

Genesis 37 begins with the statement that “Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger”. We might ask, was this in accord with the mind and purposes of God? We are not told directly, but we may make deductions from the sad things that were taking place in this family i.e. the death of his beloved Rachel in childbirth; the immorality of one of his sons that seems to have gone unjudged; discord, and even hatred, amongst his sons. In the midst of all that, we get the record of Joseph being sent by his father, Jacob, “out of the vale of Hebron” to see if all was well with his brothers. Here we have a beautiful picture of the Father and the Son, in eternal council, with the Son going out willingly to bring into effect all the purposes of God.

If we were to follow the events of Joseph’s life after this time, we would see how wonderfully they foreshadow the life of our Lord in His rejection by His brethren, His humiliation at the hands of strangers, and His raising to a position of glory and honour. We might listen again to that touching scene when Joseph, exalted now in Egypt, causes his brothers to come before him. Oh! how they trembled when Joseph revealed himself to them: “I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt...and God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me hither, but God” (Genesis 45:4-8). Later on, Joseph would say to them, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good...to save much people

alive” (Genesis 50:20). The sure purposes of God are being worked out!

Caleb and Hebron

Please read Joshua 14:6-15.

Some momentous events have taken place between the time when Moses sent in the men to spy out the land (Numbers 13) and the events we will now consider.

The Israelites have spent forty years in the wilderness. The Law has been given; there have been divine judgments for idolatry and disobedience; battles have been fought and won; the River Jordan has been crossed; they are in the Promised Land. The lines have been drawn and the land has been allocated to the different tribes. Which portion each gets for his inheritance will be decided by the casting of lots. However, Caleb of the tribe of Judah steps forward and reminds Joshua of a prior claim to a special portion of the Land.

Caleb was one of the spies sent out by Moses all those years ago. Apart from Joshua himself, he is the only one still alive of those adults who left Egypt. He had been sent to spy out the south lands (the Negev), which included Hebron, where he found and cut a branch from a grape vine that took two men to carry. The grapes of Eshcol were brought back to show the children of Israel the richness of the Land that God had given to them. Sadly, they were more concerned by the reports of the other spies who reported that they were not strong enough as there were giants in the Land. Throughout all the trials and tribulations of the wilderness journey, Caleb *never forgot Hebron*. He lived to see the culmination of God’s

purpose for Israel when all the others perished by the way. We hear his testimony as to how God had preserved him: “I am this day eighty five years old. I am still this day strong, as in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now” (Joshua 14:11). What does he claim as the secret of his preservation? Caleb wholly followed the Lord (v.8). He had waited long years to claim his inheritance. Now he puts in his claim for Hebron, not by lot as the rest of Israel, but by right in accord with God’s promise given through Moses. Hebron was a fitting reward for one who had been faithful in the midst of unfaithfulness, and steadfast in adversity. How good it is to note that God fulfils His purposes to the blessing of many and His promises to individuals who are faithful.

We will conclude this section of our study with those very striking words at the end of Joshua 14: “And the land had rest from war”. How good it is to see God’s gracious hand in the fulfilment of His purposes. He has brought the children of Israel out from their slavery in Egypt. He has dealt with their disobedience, their unbelief, and their rebellious and wayward nature. He has not only declared His love for them, but has proved it many times over. He has brought them to the promised possession. He has marked out Hebron, the place of friendship, for one who has remained steadfast. Now He would give them a period of peace in which to build up the nation.

In our next study, we will, D.V., look at David’s relationship with Hebron and the significance of Zoan.

Together

Donald Hill

The present divided state of Christendom, of which we are all a part, bears sad testimony to the activity of Satan in scattering the people of God. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, “After my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). The Lord’s desire for His own was, and still must be, “that they all may be one” (John 17:11,21,22). Be challenged by this brief look at scriptures which remind us of the ‘togetherness’ which should characterise believers.

Gathered together

“For where two or three are gathered *together* in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The Son of God, the risen and ascended Lord, promises to be with those who meet in His name! Do you gather with others to His precious name?

Assembling together

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves *together*, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Do you buy up every opportunity of gathering with fellow believers? Or do you come into the category, “...as the manner of some is”? Remember, Thomas was not with the other disciples on that first Easter day when they met the risen Lord (John 20:24). What a missed opportunity!

Together to break bread

“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came *together* to break bread...” (Acts 20:7). Are you in your place each Lord’s Day along with those who gather together to remember Him in His death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26)?

Preaching together

“But Peter, standing up *with the eleven*, raised his voice and said to them...” (Acts 2:14). Are you amongst those who stand by the preacher of the Good News – the Gospel of the Son of God? Are we supporting not only by our presence but also by our prayers?

Being together

“Now all who believed were *together*, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Is hospitality a feature which marks us?

Praying together

“So...they raised their voice to God *with one accord* and said, “Lord...” ” (Acts 4:24). These early believers prayed together. This was a time of opposition to the preaching of the Gospel, but the resource of these infant believers was the God of all power! After the prayer meeting, they preached with boldness.

Made alive together

“But God...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive *together* with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up *together*, and made us sit *together* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6). This is the happy lot of all those who were dead in trespasses and in sins, who were under the domination of Satan and subject to the wrath of God shortly to be revealed from heaven (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). God, however, has acted towards us in mercy. He has demonstrated His love towards us in the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus, and has saved us by His grace! In a coming day, our gracious God is going to demonstrate to the world that “we with Christ are one”!

Live together with Him

“...our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live *together* with Him” (1 Thessalonians 5:10). Whether we are called upon to pass through the article of death, or whether we are alive on earth when the Lord Jesus returns for His church, His bride, we shall live together with Him! Wonderful moment when we shall see, be like, and be with the Lord Jesus in the Father’s house eternally (John 14:2,3)!

Comfort together

“Wherefore comfort yourselves *together*, and edify one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). For the believer, the day of wrath is past, since the Lord Jesus bore the judgment of sin at Calvary. All the wrath of a holy God against sin fell on the Lord Jesus. Believing in His work, I am free! What comfort this assurance brings, even in the darkest circumstances! “God...who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4). There is comfort together!

Caught up together

“The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up *together* with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Every redeemed one will take part in this glorious event! There will be no place for objection to any being amongst this august company. Each one will be there because of the One who died at Calvary.

Workers together

“We then as workers *together* with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). Paul was no layabout! He pursued his occupation of tent maker, or leather worker, and certainly worked hard in the Lord’s interests and in the interests of the saints. He desired the blessing both of his fellow Jews and of the heathen Gentiles. He enjoyed the company and help of fellow workers like Silas, with whom he shared a prison cell at Philippi (see Acts 16), and of Timothy (Romans 16:21), Tychicus, Epaphras and others (Colossians 4:11).

The Lord has work for all of us to do. Just as the members of the human body each have their particular role to play, so, too, have the members of the

body of Christ. Are you involved in your local assembly, with those fellow Christians with whom you meet, or do you stand on the sideline and watch others do the work? 2 Corinthians 5:20 reminds us that “we are ambassadors for Christ”. The truth of the Gospel, a message that can bring guilty sinners into relationship with a holy God, has been committed into our hands. Would you describe yourself as a worker in this world in the interests of your absent Lord, who would say to each one of us, “Occupy (‘do business’ or ‘trade’) till I come” (Luke 19:13)? Will He be able to say to you in a coming day, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21,23)?

*The Lord has
work for all
of us to do*



Framed together...builded together

“...Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed *together* groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded *together* for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20-22). In this

particular section of the epistle, Paul is demonstrating the greatness of God's plan of salvation. The Jews had the Law and, as a nation, had been brought into relationship with God. The heathen Gentiles were idolaters, with no covenant relationship with God. But now, through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, both alike could be brought into blessing! Together they would form the House of God, God's dwelling place by the Holy Spirit. The chief corner stone of this building is Jesus Christ. In a previous dispensation, God's presence amongst the Israelites was signified by the cloud upon the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38). Today, the Lord Jesus promises His presence amongst those gathered to His name (see earlier).



Joined and knit together

“Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit *together* by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15,16). This section of the epistle concerns growth – growth in the spiritual sense. Naturally speaking, one would expect a baby weighing half a stone at birth to grow into an adult of eight to twelve stones or more. The Lord has given gifts to His church for evangelisation, for caring for the flock of God, for teaching the flock and for prophecy, speaking the mind of God for that particular time. All these gifts are given with a view to spiritual growth. The main objectives are stated in v.13: “till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”. When these gifts are being used, then believers will be well grounded in the truth and not blown off course by false teachers and false doctrine (see v.14).

Together at last

How fitting that the psalmist should write, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell *together* in unity” (Psalm 133:1). Whatever the failures of the present time, that unity will be fully seen in that soon coming day when the Lord comes for His church. No voice of protest will be raised in that day when, together, we meet the Lord in the air!

“Praise the Lamb”, the chorus waking,
 All in heav'n *together* throng;
 Loud and far each tongue partaking
 Rolls around the endless song.

The God of All Grace

Part I – The God of hope

Jonathan Hughes

“...as good stewards of the manifold (all-varied) grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).
This series looks at the all-varied character of God in His grace towards us.
Be encouraged by it! This article is based on a talk given on London’s Premier Radio.

“Hope is patiently waiting expectantly for the intangible to become reality” (G.K.Chesterton). In the laboratory where I work, often a colleague will express the hope that he will win the lottery, and so not need to return to work! That has not happened yet! Is this what the Christian hope boils down to? A whimsical desire to escape to something better, based more on desire than reality? Not at all! It is for the Christian to wait patiently for it to become reality, and live as though it already were. In the New Testament, hope is viewed as a positive looking forward to something that is favourable. A condemned man may confidently, patiently look forward to the bullet as he faces the firing squad. That, however, is not the thought behind the Christian hope. There is the eager anticipation of good to come. Of the three great values – faith, hope and love – we can see that the essential character of God is love. In this article, we shall also see that God is the author and guarantee of all that we hope for in Christ.

It will be convenient to focus our thoughts on five aspects of hope.

Absent hope

“That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, *having no hope* and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Here we see the dreadful condition of the person without any knowledge of God. Paul could say to the Ephesian believers that, before they came to Christ, they had no part in the blessings that God had promised. Throughout the greater part of the Old Testament, God had dealt in grace with mankind through His chosen people, the Jews. As Gentiles, then, these recent converts in Ephesus had had no claim upon God. But were they not religious people? For sure! They were fervent believers in the great Diana (see Acts 19). However, religious belief is not sufficient to make something true, and so Paul says that they were without hope. What a dreadful condition to be in! We live in a world today that has so many gods, with fervent believers – the gods of materialism and self-fulfilment, of position, politics and personality. Of all these, attractive and alluring though they may be, Paul has to say that they lead to no hope! It is interesting to note that the first mention of

hope in the Bible is in Ruth 1:12. The story underlines the fact that the individual without God has no hope. Naomi had departed from the best that God had intended for her. Following her husband away from the Promised Land, she had gone to live in Moab. There her sons had married foreign wives, but later died. Her husband had also died and, humanly speaking, she was left with no hope to offer her daughters-in-law. There was no possibility of her having further sons to provide them with husbands, able to secure their inheritance back in Israel. It took the intervention of God, expressed in the faith of Ruth, before hope returned, lasting and permanent.

Only by trusting Christ as Saviour and Lord can we come to know the God of hope.

Abject hope

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

This verse comes in the middle of the great chapter on resurrection. What Paul is saying in this verse has a twofold meaning. If Christ is not risen from the dead, Paul argues, then Christianity is a lie. As such, believers in Christ would be the most pitiable of men. Why? Because we have believed a lie; we are utterly deluded if so. If Christianity could be proved a lie, would we still believe? Of course not! To build one's life on a patent falsehood is foolish! Christianity, however, is absolutely true and so demands our obedience.

But Paul is saying something more here. If Christ is not risen, then our faith would be just for this life on earth, since we also would not live after death. Again this is a pitiful state. I would not be a Christian if it were not for the prospect of life beyond death. That is not to say that there are not very good advantages to being a Christian here and now. Far from it! A lower incidence of mental illness, the ability to recover more quickly from serious disease, the stability of the marriage bond and the family unit, the ability to cope with difficult circumstances – all these have been shown to be better in those with strong religious convictions. Yes, Christianity is beneficial for this life also.

Our real hope, however, lies beyond death. It is the prospect of never ending glory with Christ, at home in His presence, which makes all the suffering and sacrifice of the normal Christian life worthwhile. Paul writes, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Similarly, he adds, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Throughout the terrible persecutions that Paul endured, he never lost sight of the fact that those sufferings were to be viewed with an eternal perspective. What could fifty years of hard labour compare

to an eternity of blessing in the presence of God?

Some years ago, we visited a butterfly farm. We watched as several butterflies emerged from their chrysalises. What a struggle! The temptation to give them just a little poke to help free them was enormous. And yet it would have been cruelty. It is the very struggle that dries the wings and so prepares the butterfly for flight! Surely this must be the way in which we should regard our present lives. Those of us who would, in whatever way, try to live a godly life, will suffer, as sure as day follows night (2 Timothy 3:12). But those sufferings are momentary as they prepare us for an eternity with Christ. All that we are to learn of His sufferings, we do so now by suffering. So let us not give up today if we face hardship, for we believe in the God of hope.

Abiding hope

“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27).

In New Testament usage, a mystery is not something that is strange or a little scary. Rather it is something that was previously hidden, but has now been made clear. Christ in us – what a tremendous mystery to be made known to us, something that we can experience day by day! Think about this for a moment. The God of the universe, Creator and Sustainer of all things – in me! The message to Joseph was that Mary’s child would be Immanuel – God *with* us (Matthew 1:23). That was good. That God would in any way want to be with those whom He had created is wonderful. But what if He was full of anger at our sinfulness? The fact that He was with us then would only mean our utter condemnation! So Paul, then, adds that God is *for* us (Romans 8:31). That is better. The same God who wants our time and our presence is also on our side! So now it is God and I against anything that the world can throw against me. But oh! I am so easily distracted. What if, like a little child, we become separated, and I find myself alone? So we have here Christ *in* us, absolutely inseparable, and that is best! As those who know Jesus as Lord, we have this abiding hope, that He indwells us! He will never leave us, nor

can we ever leave Him though, sadly, we may backslide and lose the joy of His presence. That He indwells us is an absolute guarantee of the glory that is to follow. Things will not always be as they are now. As C.S.Lewis wrote in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: “Wrong will be made right when Aslan comes in sight. At the sound of his roar,



God with us
God for us
Christ in us

winter will be no more". Who can begin to imagine all that will be made right when Jesus reigns? All that is so wrong now will be but a past memory. What a joy to see His face, to hear His voice, and to know that that enjoyment will never end!

This appreciation of Him is something that grows the more we spend time considering Him. We see something of this in the three occasions where Paul's conversion is recorded in Acts. Luke tells us that Paul saw a light from heaven (9:3). Paul's personal testimony before the Jews in 22:6 is of "a great light from heaven" and, later before King Agrippa, of "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun" (26:13). Normally as one gets older, the eyes see more dimly. But in Paul's recollections of this event, the reverse occurs!

Perhaps the sufferings which he had endured had focussed his vision on the One who was able to keep him from falling.

We have an abiding hope within us, but that is not to say that it is a static hope. Quite the opposite is true. We need to spend time daily enjoying the person of the Lord Jesus. A man may be married for many years, yet still his wife may surprise him, making him realise how little he still knows about her! How much more, then, will the Lord surprise us as we take time to get to know Him. Whether we have known Him for a day or for a lifetime, we have an abiding, never ending hope within us, a confident looking forward to all that soon will be, because He is the God of hope.

Abundant hope

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, *that you may abound in hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

In this verse, we have the two characteristics of an abundant hope. As we are occupied, in increasing measure, with all that God has in store for us, then our lives will be characterised by joy and peace. This is not even left to us to work out. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit. It has been well said that we do not need more of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit needs more of us! We do not need to pray for another Pentecost for God to send the Spirit again. But we do need to pray that the Holy Spirit will have free access to my wallet, to my T.V. control, to my workplace, and to every other aspect of my life. I was humbled years ago when a

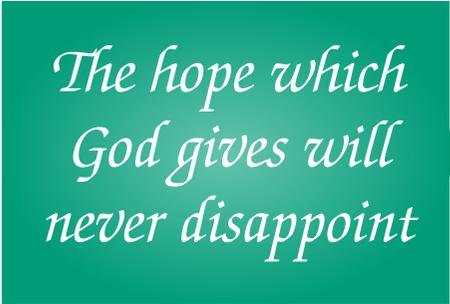


young sister told me that she would pray before she bought some new clothes, that the Lord would show her which to buy. About such seemingly small things the Holy Spirit should have full control as well as what we consider the ‘big things’ in life. That young sister’s life was life full of the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 5:5, Paul adds, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us”. Our hearts are not so big that the Holy Spirit is poured out fully and still there is room left over! No, it is more than that! Once our hearts are full and overflowing, there is still an ocean left to come! And this hope does not disappoint!

Who has not felt the bitter pain of a disappointed hope? It may have been in love, or at work, in the family, with our children. But the Holy Spirit would remind us that, like a great palm tree in the desert, the hope which God gives will never disappoint. Just when we think that we have come to an end of all that He has for us, then we realise that we have hardly started exploring the limitless inheritance we have in Him. The more our mind is filled with heavenly matters the more we will be filled with His joy and peace and, coincidentally, the more earthly good we shall be. What an example Stephen was in this! The stones might be breaking his body on the outside, but they never touched him on the inside. Who could be at

peace in such a violent situation? Who could find joy under the weight of a stone? Only one who was occupied with Christ, standing at the right hand of the majesty on high. What Stephen saw there is there for each one of us, if we will only look at Him rather than the latest football score, bank balance or the troubles in the world! As Stephen died, he did so full of hope, for he saw the God of hope.



*The hope which
God gives will
never disappoint*

Active hope

“And everyone who has *this hope in Him purifies himself*, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Here we have the last mention of hope in Scripture. We do not read about hope in the Revelation, perhaps because there the Church is largely viewed as in heaven, already experiencing the reality of the hope, which she had patiently expected. It is fitting, then, that John reminds us that this is not just all pie in the sky! No, the individual who is really focussed on the hope that is in Christ, will be most strenuous in applying it to life now. In the previous verses, John has considered the love that God has lavished upon us in bringing us into the family. He has

brought before us the fact that we shall see Him face to face. So then, in view of this, we are to live pure lives. We live in an impure society. Look at the adverts, or rather don't! In the street, it is almost impossible to avoid hearing the foul language in the mouths of children, taught by their parents. In the newspapers, we are confronted by the latest boardroom scandal. At every level, we are surrounded by impurity. As we live in the world, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid becoming soiled by our exposure to it.

Like Peter and the other disciples, we need to let ourselves be washed by the Lord (see John 13). Since He is no longer here in person, He carries this work on through our reading His word and through our fellowship with other believers. There also needs to be an active avoidance of situations we know will do us no spiritual good. Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife, rather than stay to try to witness to her (Genesis 39:12). We need to be equally energetic in avoiding situations, when we can, that we know will trip us up. If the hope of the Lord's soon return, and the enjoyment of His presence does not burn very brightly in me, then perhaps it is because some impurity is allowed to thrive in my life. Some wrong thought, some wrong action – something to take the place of hope.

And why do we purify ourselves? It is because we should want to be more like Him, and He is pure. Wonderful Man! He mixed with tax collectors and sinners, but always brought them up to His level! He never shared with them in their impurity, but loved them enough to want something better for them. We are not called to some stone cold purity that exists because it has no contact with impurity. We are called to a purity that is so full of hope in Him that there is no room left for any impurity to get a foothold. We believe in a God who is altogether pure because He is the God of hope.

The poem, *The Pilgrim*, (by Henry N. Cobb), is full of hope. It recounts a conversation which a dispirited pilgrim has with God, and how God then answers each question.

“The way is dark, my Father. Cloud on cloud
Is gathering on my head, and loud
The thunders roar above me. See, I stand
Like one bewildered, Father! Take my hand
And through the gloom, lead safely home Thy child.

*Wonderful Man!
He ... always
brought them up
to His level*

“The way is long, my Father, and my soul
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal.
While yet I journey through this land,
Keep me from wandering, Father. Take my hand
And, quick and straight, lead to heaven’s gate Thy child.

“The path is rough, my Father! Many a thorn
Has pierced me, and my weary feet are torn
And bleeding. Mark the way. Yet Thy command
Bids me press forward, Father! Take my hand
Then safe and blest lead up to rest Thy child.

“The cross is heavy, Father. I have borne so long
And still do bear it. Let my worn
And fainting spirit rise to that blessed land
Where crowns are given, Father! Take my hand
And reaching down lead to Thy crown, Thy child.”

“The Father answers:

“The way is dark, My child! But leads to light.
I would not always have thee walk by sight.
My dealings now, thou canst not understand.
I meant it so, but I will take thy hand,
And through the gloom lead safely home My child.

“The way is long, My child! But it shall be
Not one step longer than is good for thee.
And thou shalt know at last, when thou shalt stand
Close to the gate, how I did take thy hand
And quick and straight, lead to heaven’s gate My child.

“The path is rough, My child! But oh! How sweet
Will be the rest for weary pilgrims meet
When thou shalt reach the border of that land
To which I lead thee, as I take thy hand
And safe and blest with Me shall rest My child.

“The cross is heavy, child! Yet there is One
Who bore a heavier for thee. My Son,
My well Beloved, with Him bear thine. And stand
With Him at last, and from thy Father’s hand,
Thy cross laid down, receive thy crown, My child!”

A Look at Nehemiah for Today

Part 8 – Restoration (7:1-73)

Ted Murray

“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” (1 Corinthians 12:18). In Nehemiah’s day, the proper functioning of life in Jerusalem necessitated contributions from many different people. It is still so in the life of the church today.

Although the chapter, from v.6, is largely taken up with genealogy, there are some important lessons for today that can be learned from the first five verses. They deal with the restoration of the life of the city and with the order for daily worship in the Temple. They also highlight those individuals who had proved faithful throughout the difficulties experienced during the rebuilding of the walls. It is not intended to deal with the genealogy which is almost a repetition of Ezra chapter 2 and was discussed there (see *Scripture Truth* July 2002). It should be noted that vv.70-72 provide a more detailed list of gifts to the work. In order to maintain the testimony in Jerusalem, order had to be restored (v.1). It will be instructive to look at the details of this.

The gatekeepers

In appointing gatekeepers (or porters), Nehemiah showed that he was aware of the need to maintain vigilance regarding what was happening outside the city. In this way, he would ensure that no evil would have access into the place where God’s name was honoured. Today we, too, have a responsibility to be vigilant as

to the encroaching influence of this present evil world (Galatians 1:4). On every hand, we see the effects of this influence. Fashion is one area which can exert its influence on many of us. Paul, writing to Timothy, emphasises the need for modesty in apparel (1 Timothy 2:9). It appears that in today’s fashion, it is not what is worn but what is exposed that counts! There is a temptation to older as well as younger to follow this trend. Are our gatekeepers failing in their duty, for fear of offending some, in drawing attention to this trend? The gatekeepers in Nehemiah’s day had the task to shut the gates, not only on the Sabbath, but whenever it was necessary. From what we read, this caused uproar both in as well as outside the gates (see Nehemiah 13). We may not appoint gatekeepers in the church today, but their tasks ought to be maintained. Older sisters in the church in Crete were to instruct the younger ones (Titus 2:3-5). Today there is a need for this practice to be continued.

In Christendom in general, the task of the gatekeeper has almost disappeared. Church councils meet, it seems, to find

Faithful throughout the difficulties

ways of accommodating the trends practised by the world – and woe betide those who object! The gatekeepers were first allocated their duties by King David (1 Chronicles 26:1-19). They were men of pedigree, from the tribe of Levi, whose fathers had carried the ark, the Tabernacle and its furnishings through the wilderness. They were people who valued and cared for the things of God. We need to question ourselves as to the value we place upon the things concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. What is our appreciation of His person, His work and His word?

The singers

As well as the gatekeepers, singers were appointed (v.1). The singers were first installed by King David for Solomon's Temple (see 1 Chronicles 25). They were from three families, some 288 in all, and were divided into groups of twelve. In Nehemiah 12, we read of two choirs, drawn from villages around Jerusalem, who sang at the dedication of the walls. The thought of the singers would suggest to us today those of God's redeemed people who willingly offer the sacrifice of praise to the Lord (Hebrews 13:15). In Nehemiah's day, they sang so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard a great way off. While our singing must, in the first instance, be offered to the Lord, it would be good if our singing was as attractive to those who heard it. One of the problems of singing together can be that each has his or her own idea as to how fast, or slow, the tempo should be. We do not listen to the others with whom we are singing or, in some cases, to the accompanying instrument. Consequently, the

song of praise becomes almost a discordant sound.

The Levites

The Levites are also mentioned (v.1). These were the people whose task it was to assist the priest in the daily services of the Temple. They had the mundane tasks of making sure that there was water in the laver, that there was enough wood for the brazen altar, that the ingredients for the incense were in the storehouse, as well as numerous other tasks needed for the offering of the daily sacrifices. Without their help, the Temple worship would be the poorer.

From 1 Timothy 3:8-13, it would seem that the corresponding tasks in the church today are to be carried out by the deacons. We do not have the laver as in Tabernacle and temple days, but there is still a need for the cleansing and the refreshment of God's word to be made available. We need to be reminded of what took place on the altar of Calvary, and we need that supply of spiritual incense to help us to offer that sacrifice of praise unto God.

In addition, there are the more mundane tasks which still have to be done in each assembly. These include the cleaning, the setting out of the chairs, the heating arrangements, the disposal of gifts and the paying of bills. All these need to be undertaken by someone. Sadly, it is often left to one, with little help from others. When Paul wrote to Timothy, the task of the deacon was not a solitary one. There were several deacons in a local church and, in today's situations, there is still the need for such. Are we helping to fulfil

these tasks or are we just turning up expecting everything to be in place?

Hanani and Hananiah

In v.2, we see that Nehemiah gives his brother, Hanani, and Hananiah, the ruler of the palace (or ‘commander of the citadel’), charge over Jerusalem. Here were two dependable men. “He was a faithful man, and feared God above many” may refer primarily to Hanani. It was Hanani who had first travelled from Jerusalem to Shushan to share with Nehemiah the desperate need in Jerusalem (1:2). It is good to see that, amongst all the problems and difficulties, here was a man who was consistent. Here was a man at the hub of things; he was aware of the difficulties and problems of the day and was willing to do something about them. There is a need today for men of God who are aware of matters as they may arise to take the lead, but not lord over, each assembly of God’s people. Hanani was marked by his faithfulness. There are still those who, thank God, are still among us and who carry on the task given to them no matter what the difficulties in which they may find themselves. These men and women, on whom the assemblies are dependent, keep things going week by week, come what may. Faithful to what they have been taught and believe, they would teach others those same truths (2 Timothy 2:2). What a need there is for such today in the church worldwide!

The other feature that marked Hanani was that he was God-fearing. This is not being terrified of God, but rather giving to God the reverence due to Him as

Creator, Redeemer, Saviour, recognising Him as the One who is immortal, dwelling in light unapproachable (1 Timothy 6:16), yet the One whom we are privileged to know as our Father. Hanani knew God only as the Almighty. He had seen with his own eyes how God had preserved and restored the remnant of Israel. He would have heard from Ezra how God’s good hand had been upon them as they had journeyed back from Babylon. Hanani would have seen the rebuilding of the Temple, and would have heard from Nehemiah how God had answered his prayer for his people. He would have seen how God had enabled those few people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and would himself have experienced the blessing of God. Today, we also can look back upon our lives and see how the Lord has been working. We can see how blessing has been showered upon us. We recognise thankfully that we have been brought into the good of God’s purposes, brought into the knowledge of His secret, the mystery of the Church (Ephesians 3:2-6).

The work to be done

Having given the credentials of the men who had the responsibility for the groups mentioned in v.1, Nehemiah now details the duties they were to discharge. In particular, they were to oversee the gatekeepers – that group of men who were responsible to uphold the safety and integrity of Jerusalem. The gates had to remain closed until the sun was up (v.3). In other words, they had to be able to recognise who were coming through the gates. No enemy was to be admitted. In our day, when visitors arrive for the breaking of

By their fruits ye shall know them

bread and are not known to us, it is necessary to ascertain who they are and from where they come. Usually they would bring a letter of commendation with them to verify who they are and, in turn, to bring the greetings of their local assembly.



But we see in v.3 that the gatekeepers were to be vigilant not only at their watch station, but also at their own front doors. This surely is another salutary lesson for us. Sadly, in our day, there are things which may not be seen in our assemblies, but have gained access into our homes. We see how Satan has gained access through materialism, television soaps, family ties and a host of other things. To obtain the things which we have been led to believe are necessities for every day living, we are working longer hours to pay for them, no longer able to support mid-

week meetings and even cutting back on our time spent in the presence of the Lord. The need to earn more in order to buy more has taken a pre-eminent place in our lives, excluding the One who is pre-eminent by right (Colossians 1:18).

As in Nehemiah's day, today there is a shortage of people to fulfil the tasks for the smooth running of the assembly. Many places have to rely on the faithful few to be there, to oversee the week by week functioning of the assembly. Help is needed! God put it into Nehemiah's heart to gather the nobles and the people together so that they might register by their genealogy (v.5). He was to question their right to be there in the land. We cannot carry out such a task because only the Lord knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19). But the Lord has also said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). We should be able to discern how believers are progressing by their walk and by the effect they have on others (1 Timothy 4:15). In Nehemiah's day, there were those who had to be excluded from the people of God (vv.61-64). They were not able to establish the fact that they truly belonged to Israel. Today, in the church at large, there are those who do not produce evidence of their new birth and their new life in Christ. May we each one give evidence in our lives in our assembly, at work and at home, that we love the Lord, that we faithfully follow Him, and diligently serve Him according to His ways!

Solomon

Donald Davison

“The queen of the South...came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42). Sadly the Jews failed to recognise the greatness of the One who was among them. This article uses the effect that Solomon had on the Queen of Sheba to promote the greatness of the Lord Jesus. Read it and worship Him!

Solomon, the man of peace

In a previous article (see April '06), we looked at David and his anointing as king over Israel. David is described as “a man after God’s own heart”. In the features we looked at, he is a type (or, picture) of our Lord Jesus.

In his lifetime, David dealt with Israel’s enemies so that the nation might enjoy peace. But now Solomon, David’s son, reigns in his stead. Because his father had conquered all Israel’s enemies, Solomon is able to say, “But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil concurrent” (1 Kings 5:4). David, whose name means ‘beloved’ necessarily had to be a man of war. He is succeeded by Solomon, a man of peace. Solomon’s name comes from the Hebrew, ‘shalom’, which means (among other things) ‘peace and prosperity’.

By faith, we today trust in “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Peace is the cessation of all hostilities. The first word that the Lord in resurrection spoke to His disciples was “Peace be unto you” (John 20:19). “Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1) is amongst the first of the blessings that come to us in the Gospel. We now are the possessors of “the peace of God that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). In our daily circumstances, we have the wonderful support and encouragement that “the God of peace shall be with [us]” (Philippians 4:9).

Dispensationally, David prefigures our Lord Jesus who, when He comes to reign upon earth at His appearing will first of all deal with every opposing element. Then, in His ‘Solomon’ character, He will usher in His glorious kingdom of righteousness and peace, lasting for 1,000 years. Today, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life (Romans 5:21). In the millennium, righteousness will reign (Isaiah 32:17). Finally, during the eternal day at the close of the millennial kingdom, righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13). Never again will there be any opposing element to disturb throughout that eternal day!

All taint of sin shall be removed,
All evil done away,
And we shall dwell with God’s Beloved
Through God’s eternal day.

Some twenty or so years after Solomon ascended the throne, the Queen of Sheba came to visit him (see 1 Kings 10). During those years, Solomon had done many wonder-

ful things, including the building of the Temple. His fame and influence had spread far and wide. She came to try, or test, him with many hard questions, or enigmas. She is typical of the Gentiles, we amongst them, who now come to Christ for salvation. But she is typical also of those Gentile nations who will come to reverence and worship the Lord at Jerusalem during His millennial kingdom reign.

She may have had problems in her own country which prompted her to approach Solomon, having heard of his fame and wisdom. She came with a great entourage of men and of substance. But most of all, she spoke to him “of all that was in her heart” (v.2). This reminds us of the time when we first came to the Lord. It was a heart matter when we had to lay bare the thoughts of our hearts before Him, when we found in Him the answer to our sin and the problems of life. Whatever problems she brought with her were solved by Solomon. Nothing was too difficult for him! Over and over again, each of us, as believers, has proved this to be true of the Lord Jesus. Unlike the Queen of Sheba who eventually had to leave Solomon and return home, we, by faith, continue to remain in communion with the Lord throughout our lives in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Eight different features of the glory of Solomon impressed her. We will look at each of them in turn.

His wisdom

This is what, by faith, our Lord Jesus Christ is made to each one of us: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Wisdom has been described as the ability to solve moral problems. This is exactly what we, like the Queen of Sheba, have proved by faith in our lives and experience.

The house that he built

Solomon’s house was a material building. What the Queen of Sheba saw in her day was but a pale reflection of our spiritual blessing today. We are reminded of the Lord’s words that we belong to that spiritual structure of which He says, “I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). As believers today, we are “of the household of God” and are being built up “together for a [dwelling place] of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-21). In connection with God’s house, our Lord Jesus is spoken of as being Son over it, that is, in the administration of it and, for our encouragement, it is said, “whose house are we” (Hebrews 3:6). Peter states that we are “living stones, being built up into a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Solomon’s house did not continue. Not even the most powerful forces of all evil combined can shake the foundations and security of the house which our Lord is building and to which we, by grace, belong! Solomon’s house was earthly, material and temporal. The house to which we belong is heavenly, spiritual and eternal.

The house to which we belong is heavenly, spiritual and eternal

The food of his table

What fare and feasting were witnessed at Solomon's table! May we not also say what holy joy and feasting there is for us at the Lord's table and all that is before us each Lord's day morning as we remember Him in His death? It has been pointed out that 'the Lord's table' is a moral term used by the Spirit of God to describe the whole circle of Christian fellowship into which God has called us. The Lord's supper is the greatest privilege connected with this circle. It is a little misleading to say that we are always at 'the Lord's table'. We are always in the fellowship of which the table speaks, but only weekly do we break bread. Then we are privileged to remember the One who died to bring us into that fellowship. We feast upon what God feasts upon – His delight in His Son, His pathway through this world, and the work which He accomplished upon the cross.

God now brings thee to His dwelling,
Spreads for thee His feast divine,
Bids thee welcome, ever telling
What a portion there is thine.

The sitting of his servants

The word for 'sitting' is also translated several times as 'dwelling'. The picture suggests to us the thought of rest and peace in the Lord's presence. In Matthew 11:29, He invites us to come to Him and He will give us rest. This is rest of conscience from the burden and guilt of our sins. He goes on to say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me...and ye shall find rest unto your souls". Once on the Christian pathway, and yoked inseparably to Him, we have peace in our daily circumstances in the company of the Lord as He walks life's pathway with us.

The wonderful picture we have of Mary of Bethany (see Luke 10), sitting at the feet of Jesus hearing His word illustrates this. She is at rest and at peace in His presence. In John 12, she is again at the feet of Jesus, this time anointing His feet with the "ointment of spikenard, very costly", in view of His burial. Firstly, she is seen receiving instruction from Him; then she is seen ministering to Him. In John 1, we read of two disciples of John the Baptist who left him and followed Jesus. At Jesus' invitation, they

came and saw where He dwelt, and remained with Him that day. They enjoyed the blessing of a whole day in the company of Jesus!

O patient, spotless One!
Our hearts in meekness train
To bear Thy yoke, and learn of Thee,
That we may rest obtain.

The attendance of his ministers

This can be translated as ‘the order of service of his attendants’. Ordinary servant duties as well as the service of worship are expressed here. This is clearly a picture of our present position in this world. We are here as servants of the Lord to represent Him in our lives before others. When we trusted Christ as Saviour, we became the Lord’s freedmen. At the same time as being set free from being “servants of sin”, we became “servants to God” and the Lord Jesus (Romans 6:17,22). Of such servants, the Lord Jesus says, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (John 12:26). ‘Honour’ can be translated ‘fix a valuation upon’. Some soldiers returning from a campaign receive the Distinguished Service Order for acts of bravery. Very remarkably, in a coming day our God and Father will, as it were, give out His D.S.O.’s for faithful service here.

The highest form of service we can render to Him is the service of worship. Two words (in the main) are variously translated as ‘worship’ in the New Testament. One, meaning ‘to render religious service or worship’ is found in scriptures such as, “we...worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:3); “How much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14); “We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28). That service of worship we begin in our lives here will continue in glory, for we read, “His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22:3,4).



The second word with which we are familiar is continuously translated ‘worship’. It is best illustrated in the Lord’s words to the woman at Sychar’s well: “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23,24). We are in the unique position where every department of our lives is affected by, and in, the service of God: physi-

For the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints

cally, as ‘living the Gospel’; spiritually, in the inestimable privilege of spiritual worship rising spontaneously from our redeemed hearts to the Father and the Son.

Their apparel

Solomon’s servants were dressed in robes provided by himself, in accordance with the position they occupied in the royal presence, in a way that was suitable to himself and for his own pleasure and delight. We, too, are before the Father, clothed in all the acceptability of His beloved Son: “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved”. As such, He has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:6,3). Having been clothed suitably and acceptably by God, we are as fit for His presence as is His own Son! We can say, “He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

But we can go far beyond the prophet, Isaiah, for in the picture presented to us in Luke 15, we hear the father say, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet”. We have been brought into the place of reconciliation and sonship. We have our share in the divine joy and merriment of the whole Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – for we read, “And *they* began to be merry”.

Soon we shall be clothed with the wedding garment when the time of the marriage of the Lamb comes, of which we read, “And his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be clothed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints” (Revelation 19:8). We shall then be seen to be for the joy, delight and satisfaction of the heart of the Lord throughout the millennial day and on into eternity where forever we shall be “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2).

His cupbearers

This brings us to the matter of responsibility. The cupbearer, or butler, was responsible for preserving the purity of the king’s wine and for serving it to him. To prove that the wine had not been tampered with, the cupbearer himself would drink a portion of the wine in the presence of the king. We read of “wine which cheereth God and man” (Judges 9:13). What cheer and joy we give to the Lord as we seek to serve Him here!

To maintain a standard fit for the king required great faithfulness and diligence on the part of the butler. Paul writes, “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). In Luke 12:42, our Lord commends the faithful and wise steward for giving his household food in due season. The Lord Jesus adds the prospect of further blessing at His coming again, stating that he would make such a “ruler over all that he hath”. What a privilege, as well as a responsibility, it is to seek to discharge our service to the Lord faithfully, whether in public or in private!

As we seek to minister Christ to the hearts of His people now, as we seek to build them up in a day of ruin, and as we seek to win the lost, there is blessing now and also the wonderful prospect of a place of favour and reward in a soon coming day. So Paul, as he came to the end of his life, could write, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7,8).

His ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD

This brings us to the thought of the Lord’s resurrection, ascension and glory. The word translated ‘ascent’ is the word used in the burnt offering. That offering was wholly for the delight and pleasure of God; its fragrance was to ascend slowly and continuously to Him. This contrasted with the sin offering which was consumed quickly.

The word ‘ascent’ speaks of the measured, regal approach by which Solomon went up to the house of the Lord – with due reverence and unhurriedly. We are reminded of the forty days which the Lord spent unhurriedly upon earth after His resurrection with His disciples, encouraging and blessing them before His departure to heaven. His words to Mary are especially applicable: “I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). We are brought into a new relationship with the Father in association with the Son!

Consequent upon His ascension, we are told, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Ephesians 4:8). Each one of us has been blessed by our ascended and glorified Saviour and Lord. The story of our Lord’s coming into this world in love and grace ends in His return in glory! Before He went to the cross, He could pray to His Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:4,5). “God was manifest in the flesh...received up *in glory*” (1 Timothy 3:16) – what a fitting climax to the story of grace!

Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed

The Queen of Sheba

Little wonder that we read of her, “There was no more spirit in her” (v.5). When she contemplated Solomon in all his glory, it literally ‘took her breath away’! The marvellous, matchless story of our Saviour, who He is, what He has done, and where He now is, is truly ‘breathtaking’. It should fill us with wonder, love and praise.

She says to Solomon, “It was a true report that I heard in my own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom” (v.6). Isaiah asks the question, “Who hath believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1). Through great grace, we are able now by faith to say that we have believed the report concerning our Lord Jesus. She goes on to say that she did not believe until her eyes had seen it, but that the half had not been told her! She saw and then she believed. This reminds us of the Lord’s words in resurrection to Thomas: “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

The standing of Solomon’s servants and their happiness is her next consideration: “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom” (v.8). How happy we, too, should be that “we have access by faith into this favour wherein we stand” (Romans 5:2)! A standing in the presence of our God in all the favour of His Christ is our unassailable position before Him! We are as clear from all judgment as Christ is clear of it. We are accepted and are as near as He now is before His God and Father, made now our God and Father.

So nigh, so very nigh to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.

So dear, so very dear to God
More dear I cannot be;
The love wherewith He loves the Son,
Such is His love to me.

She then ascribes blessing to “the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice” (v.9). On the earthly side, this looks forward for its fulfilment to the establishment of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus at His appearing to set up righteous rule upon earth for a thousand years. At that time, “a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment” (Isaiah 32:1). We, however, already come under His righteous sway as we acknowledge Him as our Saviour and

Lord. We have the joyful anticipation of His reign in righteousness, for there is already set up in the hearts of His own 'a mini-Millennium' where His will is paramount in our lives.

After all this, the Queen of Sheba gives Solomon gifts of gold, spices and precious stones. We, too, in our service and thanksgiving offer to our Lord the praise and worship of our redeemed hearts and lives, of which He is so justly due. When we remember Him in His death, we think of who He is – His divine righteousness. The spices remind us of the fragrance of those perfect moral features which came out in His life and which were so pleasurable to His God and Father. His complete obedience to His Father's will, His grace, mercy, truth, faithfulness, righteousness and many other moral facets which were completely displayed in Him. His every thought, word and deed were pleasurable to His God and Father. The precious stones tell us of the many glories which are His: personal, moral and official. He is the Son of God, the Son of man, the Son of David, Lord, Saviour, Redeemer, Reconciler, etc.

Solomon, in his turn, gives her "all her desire, whatsoever she asked...of his royal bounty" (v.13). We are reminded of the Lord's words to His own just before He went to the cross: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14). In

response to our keeping His commandments, we would not ask for anything that was not for His glory or was not brought about in our hearts by His Holy Spirit.



And what of 'royal bounty'? We have received "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) from our ascended Lord – forgiveness, salvation, redemption, justification, reconciliation, etc. We truly have been "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Not one spiritual blessing has been held back from us by "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"! Added to this, there are the many material blessings and mercies which we receive daily. We can surely say that we have been, and are being, blessed of His royal bounty!

Like the Queen of Sheba who returned to her own country satisfied, her every need and desire having been met, we can say that we know what it is to have all our need supplied by our God "according to his riches in glory" (Philippians 4:19).

Questions and Answers

F.B. Hole

These questions and answers are reprinted from the book, Key Teachings, by F.B. Hole. His characteristic clarity of expression is seen in his answers to these important questions.



How do you explain such a statement as “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28) and other similar statements which, it is claimed by some, show that the Lord Jesus was not really God?

Supposing we could not explain them at all, these statements, many of which occur in John’s Gospel, would furnish a very slender basis for denying the great fact of His

deity, so fully set forth in John 1:1-14.

The explanation is, however, very simple. The Lord Jesus was the sent One of the Father, “sanctified [i.e. set apart] and sent into the world” (John 10:36), and as such He became the Servant of the Father’s glory and of man’s blessing – the true Hebrew servant of Exodus 21:2-6. The Son, therefore, became subject to the Father, moving and acting in reference to Him instead of acting on His own initiative. Hence, to quote again from John’s Gospel, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do” (5:19). All these and similar scriptures refer to the position which the Son took up in relation to the Father when He assumed manhood.

In the business world we sometimes see a father take his sons into an equal partnership and yet retain for himself a controlling voice in matters of high policy and finance. The sons are on absolute *equality* with their father and far more active than he in executing the firm’s transactions, yet subordinated to his ripe judgment and wisdom. Let this illustration show how amongst men these two things may be present together in perfect consistency with each other.

We distinguish, therefore, between what the Lord Jesus was and is essentially – equal with God, and what He became relatively – subordinate to the Father’s will.



Another difficult passage is Mark 13:32, in which the Lord disclaims knowledge of the day and hour of His return. What is the force of that?

Very similar to what we have just been saying. We would add, however, this: that Scripture always attributes the pur-

poses, counsels, plans of the Godhead, the fixing of times and seasons, to the Father. Note particularly Acts 1:7: “The times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.” It equally attributes action, the execution of the purposes of the Godhead, whether in creation, redemption, or judgment, to the Son. These are deep mysteries of which we know nothing apart from revelation and of which consequently we would speak with deep reverence. It is evident that in Mark 13:32 the Lord Jesus spoke in strict keeping with the whole tenor of Scripture. To Him *alone* belongs the glorious activity, the “coming in the clouds.” To the Father *alone* belong the times and seasons, the fixing of the day and hour.



Scripture plainly teaches us that our Lord was born of a virgin. Modern theologians as plainly deny it, and treat it as a matter of quite minor importance. Is it after all a matter of vital concern?

It is vital in the last degree. Everything that touches the truthfulness of the Scriptures is vital, for if they are not reliable in one detail, can they be accepted as reliable in any?

It is vital, further, inasmuch as the foundations of the faith are connected with it. In 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 we have the Lord Jesus contrasted with Adam. “The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second Man is the Lord from heaven” (v.47). As a matter of mere enumeration, Cain was the second man; from the point of view of this verse he was not: he was only Adam reproduced in the first generation. The people walking the earth today are but Adam reproduced in – let us suppose – the 150th generation. But – mark it well – the Lord Jesus was not Adam reproduced at all. He was the *second* Man. He was *Man*, indeed, for He was conceived *by* the Virgin Mary. He was an altogether *unique* Man of another order, for He was conceived *of* the Holy Ghost.

Every other man inherits the Adamic nature; Jesus did not. Every other man comes into the world under the sorrowful entail (to use a legal word) of sin and death and condemnation, of which the latter part of Romans 5 speaks. In the case of our blessed Lord the entail was broken. He was *not* born according to the laws of human reproduction. He was not of the Adamic race, but Himself, the last Adam, the Head of a new race in virtue of death and resurrection.

All these great facts go by the board if the virgin birth be not true. It is vital indeed!



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“Come!”

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.”

“Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:17,20)

To Thee, the Coming One,
Jesus our Lord,
To Thee, God’s holy Son,
Jesus the Lord,
Sing we now joyfully;
Nearer each day are we –
Nearer to Home and Thee,
Jesus our Lord!

Faith shall be turned to sight,
When we reach Home;
Ended the darksome night,
When Thou dost come.
Oh, morning bright and clear,
When we Thy shout shall hear –
That voice well known and dear,
Calling us Home!

No sighing then, or tears –
All joy at Home!
No sorrow, cares, or fears –
Oh, take us Home!
Lord! full of love and grace,
Reveal Thy glorious face;
Call us to Thine embrace;
Oh, come, Lord, come!

Miss C.H.von Poseck

“And so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

The above hymn by a much loved hymn writer, written in 1941 but believed hitherto unpublished, was sent in so that it might be enjoyed by a wider audience. The Scripture selections are Miss von Poseck’s.