

Scripture Truth



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Blind unbelief...
The Psalms of Passover
"The Times of the Gentiles"
What happened at Creation?

What the Lord is to His people
How the Holy Spirit directs our
hearts to Christ

October – December 2010

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

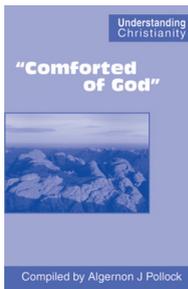
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Annual Subscription 2010

£9.50 Post Free UK – £11.50 Post Free Overseas

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Registered Charity No. 223327

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“Blind unbelief...”

“Science, the system of belief founded securely on publicly shared reproducible knowledge, emerged from religion... There is no reason to suppose that science cannot deal with every aspect of existence. Only the religious... hope there is a dark corner of the physical universe, or of the universe of experience, that science can never hope to illuminate. But science has never encountered a barrier...”

Faith in the living God has been attacked like this before. When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded tiny Judah in about 700 B.C., he waged a psychological warfare first. He sent a trio of officials to undermine the confidence of king Hezekiah’s officials, and of the ordinary people of Judah with two claims (see 2 Chronicles 32:12-15):

- Hezekiah’s reforms had displeased Jehovah by destroying the high places and altars and centralising worship at Jerusalem
- “No god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of my hand or the hand of my fathers. How much less will your god deliver you from my hand?”

Sennacherib’s claims based themselves on “publicly shared”, and seemingly “reproducible knowledge”, just like Professor Atkins’. The so-called neo-Assyrian empire had been expanding irresistibly for about two centuries by the time of this boast. The mental world of the time was attuned to explaining this. Gods were thought of as territorial (cp. 2 Kings 17:26). If a kingdom was conquered, then either (a) its god was no match for the Assyrian gods, or (b) its god had gone over to the side of the Assyrian gods. The Assyrian officials deployed both arguments (see too 2 Kings 18:25). How ludicrous was the claim that the God of the tiny, shrunken, city-state of Jerusalem-Judah was the God of the whole world, the Maker of heaven and earth, the living God, all others being no-gods! And, anyway, hadn’t He been displeased by Hezekiah’s literalistic suppression of the people’s folk worship at their shrines, and enforcement of the worship laid down in Deuteronomy 12?

Christians today are nowhere near as mentally battered as these starving citizens of Jerusalem were. Read Lennox’s book (note 1), for example! Can you see the hole in line 1 of the above quotation from Atkins? Faith in the living God *wasn’t* easier then than now to the natural man! We often imagine it was.

There isn’t space on this page to go into how Hezekiah and Isaiah met this challenge by faith and were vindicated (2 Chronicles 32:20; 2 Kings 19:6) – because I want to end with the cases of Jeremiah and Habakkuk. Jeremiah died in exile in Egypt, and never saw the fulfilment of his prophecy of the seventy years. But was he wrong? And Habakkuk? Read his third chapter.

¹ Peter Atkins, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Oxford, as quoted in John Lennox, *God’s Undertaker. Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford, Lion Hudson, 2007) p. 8.

The Psalms of Passover

John Weston

How pleasant is the sound of praise! The ancient Passover ritual included the singing of certain psalms. This article introduces them, and expounds the first (Psalm 113) in heart-warming fashion, in relation to the Lord's Supper.

In previous articles we have considered the cups of Passover and the bread of Passover.¹ Now we shall direct our attention to the psalms that are sung during this celebration. These psalms, 113-118, are known as the “hallel” psalms. Psalm 136 is known as the “great hallel”.

The Hebrew word for “psalm” is *mizmor*, which means “something sung”. But the title given to the whole book of the psalms is *tehilim*, which means “praises”.

Reading through the hallel psalms, I have given each of the six a title:

- Psalm 113 Redemption praise
- Psalm 114 Liberation praise
- Psalm 115 Exhortation praise
- Psalm 116 Resurrection praise
- Psalm 117 Universal praise
- Psalm 118 Acclamation praise.

God willing, we will consider each of these in a series of short articles. As we read them we must keep in mind that, as they were sung in the Upper Room, the central feature was the table, on which could be seen the bread and wine. To the Jews these were symbols of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, while to the Christian, they set forth the great redemptive work of our Saviour, delivering us from the slavery of sin and cleansing us by the precious blood of Christ.

*There is
power
in praise*

Time and time again in the Hebrew we have the word *hal-lelu*. This is the imperative form of the verb “to praise,” and invariably added to it as the object of praise is, “Jah” – “God”. “Hallelujah” gives a glorious climax to the whole book of Psalms, the last five each beginning and ending with it. This reminds us that we are an “Easter people”, and that “hallelujah” is our song. There is power in praise,

¹ In the April and July issues, 2008.

and this should be reflected in our personal and public worship. Praise is faith in action.

One of *our* chief sources of praise is of course the hymnbook, containing words penned by godly men and women down through the centuries. We can take these words, and make them our own as we lift up our voices in praise and worship. However, such words will not come easily to our lips if the hymn book is only opened in meetings. We read our Bible daily: can we not give some time to reading our hymnbook too?

Let us now consider the happy uplift and empowerment that we can derive from the first hallel psalm.

Psalm 113: Redemption praise

Reading this, the first of the hallel psalms, we notice that

- Verses 1-3 speak of His wonderful Name
- Verses 4-6 speak of His wonderful love, and
- Verses 7-9 speak of His wonderful grace.

His wonderful Name (verses 1-3).

“Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and for evermore.” Immediately we are confronted with the challenge, as “servants” – or, really, *bondslaves* – of the Lord, which reminds us of our responsibility to Him. Again, the imperative form is used. “Praise ye the LORD! Praise, O ye servants of the LORD, Praise the Name of the LORD!” (v.1, KJV). A glorious subject indeed to occupy us during our earthly pilgrimage!

Verses 2 and 3 emphasise the universal blessing that His name brings. A vast company of the redeemed would spring from that small company in the Upper Room. “From this time forth.” Surely this found its fulfilment at Calvary. The disciples were to be the harbingers of the gospel message. Shortly after singing this, almost within hours, the veil of the Temple was to be torn down, and the way back to God was to be made possible. “There is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12) – this the message that was to be proclaimed from east to west, from childhood to old



*We read
our Bible
daily: can
we not give
some time
to reading
our hymn-
book too?*

age, from dawn to sunset throughout the world. The Lord's Name is to be praised. The prophet Malachi prophesied, "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my Name shall be great among the Gentiles... for my Name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:11).

His wonderful love (verses 4-6).

"Who is like unto the LORD our God... who humbled Himself...?" We proclaim His exalted place. He is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens. He is eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient. Yet He *humbled Himself*. We see Him in the Upper Room, washing the disciples' feet. We follow Him into the Garden, where He allowed Himself to be taken as a Lamb to the slaughter. In weakness He was crucified.

How beautifully this is expressed by Paul in the well-known passage in his letter to the saints at Philippi:

Christ Jesus... humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name (Philippians. 2:5-9).

No wonder Philipp Bliss could exclaim, "Hallelujah, what a Saviour"! Through His wonderful love, and great work of redemption, He has placed our feet upon a rock, and put a new song in our mouth, even praise unto our God (cp. Psalm 40:3). No wonder we sing:-

Wonderful, wonderful Jesus
In the heart He implanteth a song
A song of deliverance, of courage and strength,
In the heart He implanteth a song.²

His wonderful grace (verses 7-9).

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with the princes..." His is a grace that reaches out. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick... I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" – so said our Lord Jesus (Matthew 9:12-13). The gospel cry goes out to all the "whosoever" (cp. John

² Anna B. Russell (1921).

3:16) – to every corner of humanity. We can but respond in the words of the hymn,

Love lifted me.

When no one else could help, love lifted me.³

But there is more! The psalmist reminds us that He sets them with the princes of his people (v.8), with the nobility. Oh, shades of Mephibosheth! To sit at the King's table. Once living in Lo-de-bar, the place of no pasture, but now in the palace of the King (2 Samuel 9:4,13). As Beverley Shea used to sing, "I'm a child of the King".

What grace! To become a kingdom of priests, living stones in His Temple (1 Peter 2:5, 9). All these undeserved blessings are made possible by the precious blood shed for us at Calvary, and symbolised by the cup of blessing on the Passover table.

Hannah experienced this grace in her life, and became "a joyful mother of children" (last verse of psalm). We too are brought into the family of God, surrounded by brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

Yes, we are a praising people, We have a new song to sing. Let this song go round the earth – that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Praise the Lord! Yes. hallelujah!

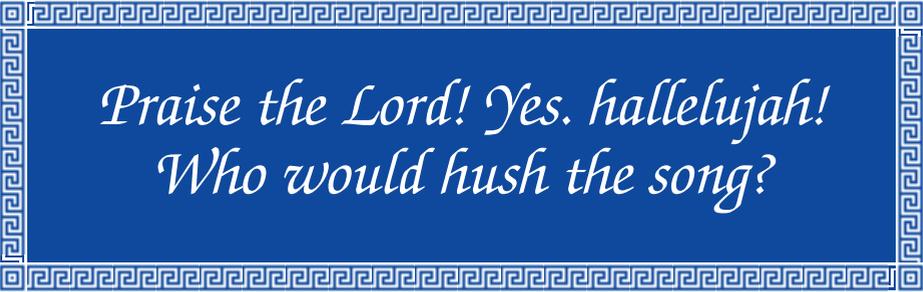
Who would hush the song?

Join with saints from every nation,
Every tribe and tongue.

Praise the Lamb, for He is worthy,
Sweet eternal strain!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah

Praise the Lord! Amen.⁴



*Praise the Lord! Yes. hallelujah!
Who would hush the song?*

³ James Rowe (1912).

⁴ H.D'A. Champney (1854 - 1942)

How the Holy Spirit directs our hearts to Christ

Yannick Ford

Sometimes our doctrines can be empty boxes. Most readers will know that the great work of the Holy Spirit in us is to glorify Christ, and to take of what is Christ's and show it to us (John 16:14). But can we fill this box with substance? That's just what this article does!

It's a tremendous blessing that we have the Holy Spirit. And there are many, many ways in which He works in us, but here I want to focus on just one, and that's the way in which He attaches us to the Lord Jesus. One of the interesting things about the Holy Spirit is that He's not there to draw attention to Himself. He's purposefully taken that – perhaps not *hidden* role, because the Scripture clearly teaches about Him – but *self-effacing* role. He doesn't draw attention to Himself – He seeks to attach us to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we find in John 16:13-14. “However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (NKJV). That's one of the marvellous ministries of the Holy Spirit. He shows us the glories of the Lord Jesus.

Paul instructs us to “seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). To do this, we're going to need someone who can tell us about these things, and it's the Holy Spirit who makes these things real and living to us. When I think about the Lord, I often think about Him as He's portrayed to us in the Gospels. This is very valuable and necessary, of course – it's a great and wonderful study, as well as being one of the strongest proofs that Christianity and its message are true. But the Holy Spirit also tells us about the Lord in His glory now. We need to think about the Lord where He is, and that is indeed one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit.

Let's consider some passages where this is explored a bit further.

Romans 5:5

Here we read that “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” This is both the first time that we read of God's love in the epistle to the Romans, and also the first real mention of the

Holy Spirit in terms of His dealings with us. Romans is where Paul explains the Gospel. He sets out how we can obtain the righteousness of God. Right at the beginning of Romans, Paul says that the gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. And he goes on to say, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith” (1:16-17). Paul stresses that the *righteousness* of God is revealed in the Gospel. He doesn’t say that God’s *love* is revealed, although that is true. The first thing is to see (i) our total lack of righteousness, and inability to become righteous in our own strength, and (ii) God’s provision for us. This is the subject of Romans chapters 1-4. When we have understood these things, we then realise the immensity of God’s love in the way in which He has made us righteous in Christ.

Therefore it is appropriate that he speaks about God’s love in chapter 5:5. Paul says, “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” This means that we don’t just understand God’s love in a theoretical way, but it’s made real to us by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who, in the Word that He Himself has inspired, instantly directs our gaze to what the Lord has done. “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6). Thus the Holy Spirit makes us feel the love of God – “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.” But He directs us to what the Lord has done. He doesn’t want us to rely on feelings, but He directs us to a solid fact – “Christ died for the ungodly”. J. Pellatt wrote, “But we do not learn the love of God by studying our hearts”. Instead, we look at what the Lord has done. We make a mistake if we look inwards at our feelings to feel and be reassured of God’s love. The Holy Spirit loves to direct us to what the Lord has done, and is doing for us, and in that way “sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts.”

Ephesians 3:14-21

This is Paul’s wonderful prayer for the Ephesian believers. He prayed that “God would grant [them], according to the riches of His glory ...” (v.16). There’s quite a difference between giving something *out of* your riches, and giving something *according to* your riches. Paul prays that God will grant us “according to the riches of His glory” to “be strengthened with might, through His Spirit in the inner man.” We need more of this “strengthening”!

But see what the purpose is: “... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (v.17). So here again, the Holy Spirit’s desire is to attach us to the Lord Jesus. God wants us to understand His tremendous plan – to “be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height.”

And then he wants us to “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge”! (v.19) William Kelly wrote, “It may seem a paradox to say so, but a blessed one. He does not mean that we shall ever know it perfectly. But there may be the knowing more and more of that which surpasses knowledge.”¹ I found that helpful, in explaining one of the aims of the Holy Spirit. Another helpful explanation is that of John Gill who wrote, “The love of Christ to His own, to His church and people, is special and peculiar, free and sovereign, as early as His Father’s love, and as durable and unchangeable. The greatest love that was ever heard of. It is matchless and unparalleled. It is exceeding strong and affectionate. It is wonderful and surprising... Now the apostle prays that these saints might know more of this love, that their knowledge, which was imperfect, might be progressive.”²

God can, and *will* grant these requests, greatly above what we can ask or think, and He does so by the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is “the Power that works in us” (3:20). What practical point can I bring out here? It’s one that I need to take great heed of. If I’m going to pray for power and strengthening (which would be right according to these verses), for what purpose am I asking? Is it that I might shine in some way? That would be a wrong motive. Or is it that I might love Christ more? That rather seems to be the point – that we might be able to comprehend the love of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

This is a marvellous chapter. Paul writes that the Corinthian believers themselves are “his letter of commendation”, in virtue of the work of “the Spirit of the living God” in them (3:1, 3). And no doubt the Spirit of God then leads Paul’s thoughts to the difference between the old covenant, illustrated by the ten commandments written on stone; and the new covenant written on the heart by the Holy Spirit (vv.7, 9). The old covenant was a “ministry of condemnation”, because the Law didn’t give life; it gave instructions and prohibitions that men in the flesh weren’t able to keep. There was nothing wrong with the Law as such, but the material that it was working on, if you like, was defective. But he calls the new covenant a “ministry of righteousness”. This is the same “righteousness of God” that is “revealed” in the gospel, as we saw in Romans. And this ministry has surpassing glory (vv.8, 10).

¹ *Lectures on Ephesians*, (London, G. Morrish), pp. 138-9.

² John Gill on Ephesians 3:19. Found at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/ephesians-3-19.html> on 28.08.2010.

The effects of it are written in our hearts by a *ministry of the Spirit*. How does the Holy Spirit effect this? In verse 17 Paul speaks about the Holy Spirit who transforms us as we consider the glory of the Lord, now ascended and glorified in virtue of the perfection of His righteous work upon the cross! In verse 18 we see that we are transformed while we're beholding the glory of the Lord – we're transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. And so, here again, the Holy Spirit is occupying us with the Lord, and He's saying that as we look to the Lord, we're going to be transformed.

And that leads me to a practical point. If I want to be transformed, if I want to grow, do I look to myself – that's not going to be a good idea. Do I seek to improve myself by enlisting the power of the Holy Spirit? That's not the way. But the Holy Spirit will transform us, if we're occupied with Christ.

“Thou sayest, ‘Fit me, fashion me for Thee.’
Stretch forth thine empty hands, and be thou still;
O restless soul, thou dost but hinder me
by valiant purpose and by steadfast will.
Behold the summer flowers beneath the sun,
in stillness his great glory they behold;
and sweetly thus his mighty work is done,
and resting in his gladness they unfold.
So are the sweetness and the joy divine
thine, O beloved; and the work is Mine.”³

I'm not trying to suggest that we shouldn't work or do anything. The apostle says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed” (2 Timothy 2:15). God doesn't expect us to be lazy – not at all. All I'm trying to point out is that it is God Himself who works in us, and just like the flowers in the field turn their heads to the sun, we *will* become more like the Lord Jesus as we consider Him.

An illustration: Genesis 24

Is there any illustration in the Bible that can perhaps help us to understand how the Holy Spirit works to attach us to Christ? I think that the account of Abraham's servant, who was sent to find a bride for Isaac in Genesis 24, is an illustration of this. The servant said to Bethuel's household, “The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was

³ G. Ter Steegen; from Frances Bevan, *Hymns of Ter Steegen, Suso, and Others. First Series* (London, 1894), p. 23.

old; and to him he has given all that he has.” And he “brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing and gave them to Rebekah” (Genesis 24:35-36). Abraham had received back his promised son – Isaac – in something like resurrection, because he’d thought that he’d have to offer him up to God (Genesis 22: 2, 12, 13; Hebrews 11:19). And the servant here said that Abraham had given to his son all that he had. It makes us think about the Holy Spirit in relation to the Lord Jesus, doesn’t it? God has greatly exalted and honoured the Lord Jesus, and has “given all things into his hand” (John 3:35); and the Holy Spirit has come to indwell us and display His glory. The Holy Spirit reveals the Father and the Son to us. He loves to tell of the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We need to be careful when we’re speaking about divine Persons, not to pry into things beyond us, or say things that are incorrect. But it is interesting that when you consider the activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, They all seem to be concerned for the Other. “The Father loves the Son.” (John 3:35; 5:20). The Son loves the Father, pleases His Father (John 8:29;14:31). The Holy Spirit seeks to glorify the Lord Jesus, and to draw people to worship the Father (John 16:14; Philippians 3:3). And it’s the Holy Spirit who reveals the Father and the Son to us. He loves to tell us of the glory of the Lord. In Genesis 24:58 Rebekah is asked, “Will you go with this man? And she said, ‘I will go.’” And in the same way, when the Holy Spirit shows us something of the glory of the Lord Jesus, He leads our hearts to Him.

Revelation 22:17

I finish with one more verse, right at the end of the Bible, containing the last recorded words of the Holy Spirit, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” There again the Holy Spirit is working in the church, seeking to draw out that desire for the Lord to come again, and we’re looking forward to being with the Lord. “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’”

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts, in pointing us to what the Lord has done. He enables us to know the love that passes knowledge. He shows us the Lord’s ascended glory, and so transforms us into His image. He implants in us the word, “Come Lord Jesus!” I feel most encouraged by thinking of these instances of the Holy Spirit’s work. We need to co-operate, if I can use that word, with the Holy Spirit, who’s seeking to attach us to the Lord Jesus; and the Lord’s transforming work will proceed in us.

What the Lord is to His people

The “I AMs” of John’s Gospel

Tom Albiston

Each of the great “I AMs” of John’s Gospel occurs in one of the great discourses of our Lord in that Gospel, and can only be understood from this context. The writer, who lives in Yandina, Queensland, Australia, shows this in relation to “I am the bread of life,” and “I am the light of the world.”

The Lord Jesus in John’s Gospel

The four Gospels record the eternal being, human ancestry, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son of Man. They record also a selection of incidents from His life, and from His words and works. Taken together, the Gospels set forth, not a biography, but a Person. What is important is that through these narratives, we should come to see and know Him whom they reveal. For whatever reason (possibly because we may be too occupied with Christ after the flesh) God did not cause a biography to be written of His Son. But the four Gospels, though intentionally incomplete as a story, are divinely perfect as a revelation. We may not through them know everything that He did, but we *may* know the Doer. The four Evangelists never describe Christ – they set Him forth. They tell us almost nothing of what they thought about Him; they let Him speak and act for Himself.

John, in particular, emphasizes His deity. But John’s Eternal Son is also *King* (e.g. John 1:49), although this is Matthew’s special emphasis; and *Servant* (e.g. John 13:5), although this is Mark’s special emphasis. John also describes Christ’s sinless *humanity* (e.g. John 4:6), although the Lord’s Manhood is Luke’s special emphasis; and it is interesting and instructive to consider and trace both divine and human natures throughout John’s Gospel. At His incarnation the eternal Son of God became the Son of Man. He never ceased to be what He always had been – God the Son. But He became what He had never been before, the human Son of a virgin. He who was from everlasting, stepped into time, and lived, died and rose again among men. He had, and has, divine and human natures. He was God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16).

What the “I AM” is to His people

Therefore the *Word* – that divine Person who became flesh – is very largely the subject occupying the apostle John. What is said of the “beginning of miracles” which He performed in Cana (John 2:11), is true of the whole of John’s Gospel – it is the manifestation of His glory, deity, and humanity.

But together with this, the subject of John's Gospel is *also* the fact that He is the source of eternal life to all who come to Him and believe on Him. In no other Gospel do we hear the emphatic and blessed "I AMs" of the divine Son. We are made to realize that they come from Him who is the I AM, the eternal self-existing One. What weight of authority this gives to His every statement! Seven times the Lord Jesus makes distinct and positive statements of *what He is for those who believe in Him*, each prefaced by His immutable or unchangeable "I AM". They are not exactly statements *about* His deity, though intimately related to it, for this truth runs like a golden cord through the whole Gospel, as we have already seen.

These lovely seven distinct titles of our Lord are embedded in His teaching as recorded by John. Our study of each of them, therefore, requires careful consideration of the context. This will illuminate their meaning.

These titles, in order of their occurrence, are:

- I Am The Bread of Life (chapter 6)
- I Am The Light of the World (chapters 8 and 9)
- I Am The Door (chapter 10)
- I Am The Good Shepherd (chapter 10)
- I Am The Resurrection and The Life (chapter 11)
- I Am The Way, The Truth, and The Life (chapter 14)
- I Am The Vine (chapter 15)

In this article only the first two of these titles can be studied. God willing, the other five will be the subject of a later article.

I AM The Bread of Life (John 6)

The connection between the discourse in which this declaration is embedded and the miraculous feeding of the five thousand which prefaces it, suggests that, just as bread is the sustenance for the natural life, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the sustenance for the life of which He is the Source.

We have His repeated affirmation that this Bread, which He Himself is, has come down "out of heaven" (vv.32, 33, 38, 50, 51, 58). In verses 36-45, the Lord Jesus makes known the Father's work of drawing souls to Himself, and the Son's purpose in coming – to do the will of the One who sent Him. In the same section the Lord also makes known the certainty of His receiving all those who come to Him as a result of the Father's work, His exercise of resurrection power on their behalf, and what their blessing is – "life eternal".

Concerning this *life*, the Lord speaks frequently (vv.33, 40, 47, 51, 54, 58, 63), and twice expresses Himself on this subject from the negative side – "not die" (v.50), "no life in yourselves" (v.53). Neither of these refers to physical death.

The former means, never to know eternal separation from God. The latter means, having no spiritual relationship with God.

Such relationship subsists only in the power of divine life communicated from God. In answering the question, “How can He give us this flesh to eat?” the Lord makes known the foundation upon which all rests – His sacrifice (v.53). It is evident that the spiritual importance of eating and drinking is bound up with *believing*, for he that “believes”, even as he that “eats” and “drinks”, “has eternal life” (vv.47, 54). The blessedness of this life is defined for us in verses 56, 57. “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (KJV). In conclusion, the Lord affirms that, “This is that bread which came down from heaven: ...he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever” (v.58).

John 6 sets forth the abiding sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as the Source and Sustenance of life eternal. All this is connected with the title our Lord takes in it – “I am the Bread of Life”. He uses this symbol – bread – in several slightly different phrases. He is “the True Bread”, “Bread of God”, “Living Bread” and “Bread of Life”. A study of the application of these lovely titles leads to the conclusions that He ever abides the same, that He is the Bread by which we live forever, and that we remain ever dependent upon Him. *He is thus to us the Source and Sustenance of all blessing for all eternity.*

Life eternal is thus our dwelling in Him and He in us (v.56). This is according to the manner in which the Son lived as sent by the living Father (v.57). He did not live an independent life, but one of which the Father was both Source and

*He did not
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Object.*

*So it is
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Object. So it is with whoever eats the Bread of Life. John's teaching in his epistles is in line with this (See 1 John 4:9; 5:11-13). Life eternal is that which the Father has in Himself, and which the Son in humanity has been given to have in Himself (John 5:26). We see Him here, the eternal Son manifested in flesh, receiving all from the Father, and honoured by Him in such fulness that He must be given equal honour with the Father (5:22-23). As the Bread, He is before us in this place of dependent manhood, yet the all-sufficient Source of life to man, and its Sustenance forever.

I AM The Light of the world (John 8 and 9)

The Lord declares this title in connection with two incidents, both the woman taken in adultery (8:1-12), and the blind man of John 9:5. If we learn from John 6 the abiding sufficiency of Christ as the Source and Sustenance of life eternal, we gather from these two chapters (i) truth regarding the Lord's divine testimony, and (ii) the contrast between Himself and the world – light and darkness. We also learn the character of him who rules the darkness (Satan) (8:44), as well as the portion of those who follow the Lord, and thus what His leadership means for them (9:34-38). All of this stands out against the background of truth as to who He is, whose word and work so absolutely set forth the Person Himself, that He can say, "I am the Light of the World". The Lord's words in 8:8-12 serve as a guide to these various features of truth which focus our gaze upon Him who must be found pre-eminent in all things.

In the words "I am the Light of the World", there are three features to consider:

- the Person
- what He is – the Light
- the sphere – the world

The Person. Again, as in John 6, emphasis is laid upon the fact of who He is. He is the eternal Son of the Father – "Before Abraham was, I Am" (8:58). Though in manhood, and speaking of Himself as "a man", He declares "I came forth from God and am come from Him, for neither am I come of Myself, but He has sent Me" (8:42, Darby Trans.). It is the divine Person who was with God and was God, who, coming in accordance with the eternal purpose, took up humanity. This involved dependence and obedience, though He remains all that He ever was. He declares, "I know whence I came" (8:14), "I am from above" (8:23). This, essentially, is His character.

The Light. The Person of whom we have been speaking calls Himself "the Light". Two features express the meaning of this title as it applies to Him – His character as from above, and His testimony. These are clearly and briefly stated in John 3:31-34. "He that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath

seen and heard, that he testifieth... For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God” (KJV).

In agreement with this, the Lord here speaks in chapter 8 of being sent by the Father (8:16, 18, 42), and states explicitly what His testimony is. “He that sent Me is true”, etc. (v.26); and, “I do nothing of Myself; but as my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him” (vv.28, 29). Similarly, “I speak that which I have seen with My Father” (v.38); and, “The truth...which I have heard of [i.e. from] God” (v.40). Therefore it follows, as He said, “If ye continue in My word ... ye shall know the truth” (vv.31-32).

In this way we learn what comprises the Light. *Its distinctive characteristic is that the Father is made known in the Son* – “If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also” (8:19).

The sphere in which the Light shines. This is the world. The wideness of the sphere marks the universality of the Light. It is for all, not for any special class, nation, or race. “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men” (1:4 – see 1 John 1:1-7 for further reference). The word “world” here is also used to express its moral character, as the Lord makes clear in connection with our subject. He says to the Jews, “Ye are from beneath... ye are of this world”. He stands in strongest contrast – “I am from above... I am not of this world” (John 8:23). They will not come to Him for life. They refuse the light which is shining. This exposes the character of the world, and also brings into view the spiritual power which rules it. Satan is its prince and god. Compare Ephesians 2:1-3; 6:12; Colossians 1:12-13; Galatians 1:4, Acts 26:18.

All the light there is for the world is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the true Light, the only Light for you and me!

*All the
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What happened at Creation?

Genesis 1, 2

What does the Bible teach about creation, Part 2.

David Anderson

Divine creation as revealed in Genesis is not an option for the Christian! The first part of this series (January 2010) discussed the New-Testament's teachings about creation. We saw that the NT assumes the Genesis account; teaches that creation was Christ-centred and Christ-certified; and that creation underpins all its major doctrines. This being so, the present article goes back to Genesis. What is God saying to us in the original account?

Genesis 1:1 is God's position statement about His creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” are the very first words of Scripture. Ten English words translate the seven original Hebrew words. In that sense they are a *complete statement* about creation. The remainder of the Genesis account (and all other teaching on creation throughout Scripture) simply elaborates this emphatic statement.

The Hebrew word for “God” is *Elohim*, which is a plural noun (in fact denoting more than two). He is the eternal, almighty, majestic, omnipotent, supreme, absolute, self-existing One. In Genesis 1 we are told that He created (a singular verb) the whole realm of space (the heavens) and the earth by calling them into existence from nothing.¹ But He also created time – so we may paraphrase verse 1 as “when time started, God created”. In verse 2 the specific activity of the Spirit is mentioned; and the words “in the beginning” are also the opening words of John's Gospel, where the New-Testament revelation is that it was the Word (i.e., the Son) who created all things (John 1:1-3). The whole Godhead was involved in creation.

The focus of these opening two verses is the earth. Verse 2 goes on to describe its initial condition as being “without form and void”, that is, both unformed and uninhabited. The best analogy that we can use here about the Creator is that He is like a potter,² who first of all makes the shapeless clay before moulding it into the shape(s) he has in mind. Most importantly, Isaiah explains that His design intent was not to leave the earth in that condition but to make it

¹ Romans 4:17 & Hebrews 11:3.

² cp. Isaiah 29:16 & 64:8; Jeremiah 18:3-4, 6.

suitable for mankind. “The LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty,³ he formed it to be inhabited!); ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other’” (45:18, ESV). Genesis 1:2 also states that darkness was over the face of the deep with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. The immediate effect of the Spirit’s movements was the creation of light (vv.3-5). God created both the darkness and the light (Isaiah 45:7). He deliberately worked this way and separated [i.e., provided a distinction between] the two. He is “the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine” (2 Corinthians 4:6, Darby Trans.). And so the first day ends this way – the light (morning) follows the darkness (evening).

Day One: The fundamentals, vv.1-5

On the first day of creation, God created:

- Time: “in the beginning” – the clock started to tick.
- Space: “the heavens.”
- Matter: “the earth” (mainly solids, but also liquids – notice the emphasis on water).
- Energy: “the light” (fundamental for life).

From these created things, God set about to structure/fashion/form His creation and to fill the earth to make it habitable by man, His special object in creation. God could have done everything instantaneously on Day One but He took five more days to do it! Each day “God said... And it was so.”

Day Two: The “expanse”, vv.6-8

God spoke, and made an expanse [or, canopy] to divide [separate] the waters around the unformed earth. This canopy is described as a “mist” in 2:6. It is difficult to know (in our postdiluvian world⁴) exactly what this was, but nowadays the sky is usually regarded as what God named as “heaven” in verse 8. It would seem that the expanse of verse 15 is outer space; but that of verse 20 is the earth’s atmosphere.

Day Three: Earth and seas, vv.9-13

God gathered all the waters together to form “seas”, and separated them from the dry land (“earth”). He caused all kinds of vegetation – plant life and trees, each with the ability to seed – to come into existence on the land. These were provided as food for animals and man (vv.29-30). Now there was life! Twice

³ “Empty” = “without form” in Genesis 1:2.

⁴ 2 Peter 3:5-7 describe the earth as surrounded by water and explain the way in which that antediluvian world was changed at the Flood.

*When in
verse 25 God
had
reviewed all
His work,
He “saw
that it was
good” (v.25).*

*But it was
only after
man had
been
created that
“God saw
that it was
“exceedingly
good”.*

over (vv. 10, 12) God saw that what He had done was good.

Day Four: Sun and moon and stars, vv.14-19

God appointed light-bearers to regulate life for man by making the sun and the moon (and the planets and the stars). There is an up-front statement of intent: “God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years’” (v.14). In some translations, verse 16 ends with an add-on or passing comment: “and the stars”. However, the ESV translation of verse 16 (with RSV and others) shows the stars as on a par with the sun and the moon: “God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars.”

Day Five: Populating the seas and skies, vv.20-23

God completely filled both of these spheres with all kinds of creatures, both great and small. Verse 21 uses the special word “create” to describe the making of living things with personality, i.e., conscious life (“every living soul”, Darby Trans.). God gave abundant life to all: “And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’” (v.22).

Day Six (a): Land creatures, vv.24-25

God filled the land with all kinds of land animals and creatures, again, both great and small – and also those which are now extinct, e.g., dinosaurs. The world was now ready for man.

Day Six (b): Man, vv.26-31

When God created Adam, He achieved His objective. When in verse 25 God had reviewed all His work, He “saw that it was good” (v.25). But it was only after man had been created that “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*” – literally, “exceedingly good” (v.31). The special word “create”

is used in verse 27 to distinguish man from the rest of the animal creation. Verse 26 informs us that man is above all other created life and that he was the special subject of divine counsel: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over [all creatures].” 2:4-7 states that God adopted a special procedure of forming man from the dust of the earth and intimately breathing life into him – different from the animal creation when He spoke life into them. So man became a unique living being. (2:21-23 describe the special way Eve was built out of Adam.)

Being made in God’s image and after His likeness means that man is unique.⁵ This transcendental nature of man manifests itself in:

- Rational thought – man has a mind which is capable of abstract thoughts, reason, originality and genius.
- Conscience – man can make moral choices. Everyone basically knows good from evil.
- Aestheticism – a sense of beauty and emotion.
- A spiritual dimension. Man consists, not only of body and soul, but also of spirit. Therefore he has the capacity to know and worship God. Originally, his spiritual experience was one of direct communion with God.
- Man, being God’s representative, has dignity in creation with “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (v.28). Implicit in “authority over” is “stewardship for” creation (2:15).

The creation week and the Sabbath, 2:1-3

The Spirit of God counts up the days of this first week, using the formula “there was evening and morning,⁶ an [or, ‘the’] xth day” – and this means *literally* a 24-hour day. Each day is chronologically sequential as the repeated use of the conjunction “and” to start the sentences shows.⁷ There may be some significance in the fact that, in the original, only verse 31 prefixes the definite article to the day – “*the sixth day*”, whereas it is not present in relation to the first five

⁵ See “Adam – from the hand of God” in my article ‘*The Son of Man*’ Scripture Truth, October 2008.

⁶ *God always works towards the day*. For example, the millennial day (2 Samuel 23:4 & Revelation 21:25); the resurrection day (Psalm 22 title); and the day of eternity (2 Peter 3:18, ESV & Darby Trans.).

⁷ Similarly, the conjunction “and” time-connects v.1 with all sentences of v.2-5. In other words, vv.1-5 all describe all God’s actions on day one.

This transcendental nature of man manifests itself in rational thought; conscience; aestheticism; spiritual dimension; dignity in creation

days. The sixth was the culminating day of creation, not least because man was created in it.

1:31 draws attention to everything God had made: “behold, it was very good”. His satisfaction was expressed in His rest from work on the seventh day (2:3). He made it a distinct day in the cycle of days that form a week. He blessed it and sanctified it. From the beginning He established the pattern of life for man – to work for six days and hold a seventh day set apart for God. It is very interesting that, unlike other time measures such as months and years, there seems to be no other reason (either in Scripture or in the history/experience/science of mankind) for the measurement of seven days or one week. Its importance is stressed in the Decalogue: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11 – and reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:12-15). It became a distinctive sign between Jehovah and the nation of Israel (Exodus 31:12-17). And the Lord Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man’s benefit (Mark 2:27; cp. Exodus 23:12).

2:1-3 are a summary statement of creation

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them... So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (2:1, 3). These verses bring to a conclusion the events of the creation week and belong to the narrative of chapter 1. 2:4 starts a new section about Man.

The generations of the heavens and the earth, 2:4-7

Genesis is a history book about the important generations of early mankind (2:4).⁸ The remarkable climax of the generations of the heavens and the earth

⁸ Genesis 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1,9; 37:2.

*Jehovah Elohim – the God
who forms relationships with men*

is man! (2:7) God is called Jehovah Elohim (“LORD God”) from chapter 2:4 through chapter 3 – the God who forms relationships with men. Verses 5-6 reveal that throughout the creation week His thoughts were centred on man. Verse 7 explains how He formed man from the ground and gave him life by breathing into him so that he became a unique living being – different to all other creatures – with a unique position in God’s creation. Then the remainder of chapter 2 details God’s attention to man’s welfare and expands on how He provided for mankind. The importance of mankind in creation is also shown in 5:1-2 where their creation is the first-mentioned fact of Adam’s genealogy!

God’s blessing of Man, 2:8-25

Unlike 1:1 – 2:3, these verses are not always chronological. They expand upon 1:28: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” God blessed man by planting the Garden of Eden, as a special environment for man, with food, water and minerals in abundance (vv.8-14). Everything in it was there to sustain man, especially the tree of life – so that man could go on living forever (3:22). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was also there in the midst of the garden, to test man’s on-going relationship with the LORD God. The conditions of this relationship were clearly explained to man in verses 16-17. Eden was supplied with a four-headed river so that there was water in abundance. Over and above all of these things, God blessed man by providing woman for him. The LORD God recognized that it was not good for Adam to be alone. He said, “I will make him a helper fit for him” (v.18). Adam did not find one for himself from the animal kingdom (vv.19-20). So the LORD God built Eve from Adam’s side, and presented her to him as his wife. Adam found in Eve his counterpart, one who was like himself. Thus human relationships were established. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (verse 24), setting forth an eternal reality which awaited New Testament revelation (Ephesians 5:25-32). Human relationships were to be built around the family unit: The intimate relationship of man and wife was based upon their distinctive sexualities (1:27). It was good, proper and healthy (2:25).

*Adam found in Eve his counterpart,
one who was like himself.
Thus human relationships were established.*

Doxology

“Jehovah Elohim is truth; He is the living God, and the King of eternity... He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His understanding” (Jeremiah 10:10 & 12, Darby Trans.).

Note: Words and their significance in the Genesis account⁹

Various Hebrew words are used in Genesis chs.1-2 to describe God’s work in creation. They are:

1. *bara* (meaning to create, make, shape, form) in 1:1, 21 & 27; 2:3 & 4. This verb has only God as its subject and it expresses creation out of nothing.
2. *asah* (meaning to create, do, make, fashion, accomplish) in 1:7, 16, 25-26 & 31; 2:2-4, 18. It is used to describe how God structured and formed His creation.
3. *yâtsar* (meaning to form, fashion, frame) in 2:7-8, 19.
4. *banah* (meaning to build) in 2:22.

The context determines the sense in which any word is used. *bara* is selectively used for highlighting the special work of creating:

- the heavens and the earth, 1:1.
- the first living souls, 1:21 (Darby).
- mankind, 1:27.

However, *bara* is also used interchangeably with *asah* in 1:26-27 & 2:4, where its meaning must include the action of forming as well as creating. Genesis 5:1 equates the two: “When God created [*bara*] man, he made [*asah*] him in the likeness of God”. In 2:3 they are used alongside each other, with the literal meaning ‘created to make’ (AV margin and Darby Trans. footnote).

⁹ For a detailed exposition see Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W. 1996. *Vine’s complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*. T. Nelson: Nashville.

“The times of the Gentiles”

And the lessons for today

Jonathan Hughes

Why did Abraham intercede for Lot in Sodom? Because God hadn't hidden from him what He was about to do! (Genesis 18:17, 22ff) How was Pharaoh able to prepare for the great famine? Because God had revealed to him what he was about to do (Genesis 41:25). Similarly, God lifts the curtain in Daniel 7 just enough to show us how He sees the present world, and what its end will be, to enable us to act now according to His mind. The article originated as a Truth for Today talk on Premier Radio.

The future changing the here and now

Wouldn't it be great if we could know what was going to happen in the future? I could know which numbers were going to come up on the lottery on Saturday. I could know whether it was going to rain before I put the washing out! But what we actually mean is, wouldn't it be good if we could change the future for our benefit! Because, if we had known those lottery numbers and used them, then what we would have seen in the future would have been quite different from what we saw initially.

But when we look at the second half of the book of Daniel, with its mysterious visions, though it is very much with the view to understanding what will happen in the future, as revealed in the divinely inspired word of God, it is not with a view to changing that future. It is with a view to changing *us* and our behaviour now!

Understanding prophecy

This article is about one of the pivotal visions, that in chapter 7. Before proceeding, it is worth just briefly considering three useful guidelines for understanding the prophetic Scriptures.

Firstly, *all* Scripture is profitable and has a real meaning (2 Timothy 3:16). We are not to write it off as unintelligible or spiritualise it to get some lessons that are true for all time. No, through the prophetic word, God is deliberately revealing part of His future intentions. So these Scriptures are to be taken as having a definite meaning. However, that does not mean they do not need interpretation. As we shall see, when Daniel speaks about a beast, he does not mean a literal animal.

Secondly, we need to know the whole of the Bible. If the Holy Spirit has chosen to use a symbol to represent something in one part of the Bible, we can usually get closer to deciphering it by considering the same symbol in another part of the Bible. We should always look for interpretation of Scripture from within Scripture itself. Happily, in Daniel 7, just like in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13), that interpretation is given in the chapter itself.

Thirdly, where we do not have a definitive explanation of a prophecy, given by Scripture itself, then we need to be very cautious about saying that it can only mean what I say it means. History is littered with dates when Christians believed the world was going to end, based upon some faulty interpretation of some text, and in disregard of Luke 12:40, etc. Much dishonour is brought to the Lord’s name by such dogmatism. By all means, and with the Spirit’s help, we should try to gain as full an understanding as possible of these Scriptures, but let us always realise that we might not be quite right all the time. Prophecy is given in sufficient enough detail to let us know how we should behave now, but if it was given in as much detail as to allow us to set our alarm clocks, we might not bother living in the light of it – just yet!

God’s great overview

Daniel 7 gives us an overview of the *Gentile* supremacy from the time of Daniel until the end of the age. That in itself is remarkable. When God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and made the Israelites His chosen people, He gave them such promises that, had they been obedient to Him, they would have been the world’s only superpower, their kingdom spanning the Levant throughout all ages. Instead they exist today precariously hanging on to a small strip of land next to the Mediterranean Sea, having been at various times dispersed throughout many nations. How very different their history would have been, had they obeyed what God had commanded! When Israel was carried away into captivity, so ceasing to be a power in the world, then began the time that the Lord Himself calls “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).

So Daniel has a vision of four great beasts, coming up out of the waters (Daniel 7:3). Isaiah 17:12; 57:20; and Revelation 17: 15 all use the picture of waters to represent the mass of mankind, uncivilised and without ordered government. Daniel 7:17 tells us that these four beasts represent

four kingdoms, and so to understand the vision we need to identify these four.

Interestingly, Nebuchadnezzar had earlier had a dream involving a great statue, with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and legs of iron. Against this a rock, uncut by human hands had come and destroyed it (Daniel 2:31-45). The two dreams are clearly similar. However, whereas *Nebuchadnezzar* (in chapter 2) could proudly view man’s achievements as a great statue, *God* (in chapter 7) would view the moral qualities of the kingdoms as resembling a beast. In Daniel 2:38, Nebuchadnezzar, the head of the Babylonian Empire, is clearly pointed out as “the head of gold”. So too in 7:4 the Babylonian empire is figured as the winged lion. However, the empire’s rapid decay after Nebuchadnezzar may be indicated by the beast’s transformation into a man (or maybe this indicates the moral improvement there was in Nebuchadnezzar, as he came to acknowledge the authority of God – Daniel 4:34-37).

In the second kingdom, represented by the bear, we see a picture of the Medo-Persian Empire (7:5). One side is raised up because the Persians were by far the stronger part. After this the four-winged leopard arose (7:6). This represents the Greek Empire, established by Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persian empire. It is said that before he was thirty, he sat down and wept, because there were no more lands left to conquer – such was the speed and strength of his conquest. This third beast had four heads, and so after the death of Alexander the empire was divided among four of his generals. Here Scripture is again its own interpreter, as Daniel 8:5, 21, 22 also refer to the Greek empire of Alexander, under the figure of an agile goat.

Finally, a beast like no other arose to represent an empire like no other (Daniel 7:7-8). This represents the rise of the Roman Empire. Such was the accuracy of Daniel’s description of world events covering a period of over five hundred years that Porphyry, an anti-Christian philosopher of the third century A.D., claimed that Daniel could not have been written by Daniel because it so matched actual events. This astonishing degree of historical rigour should come as no surprise to the believer, who fully realises that God is in absolute control of world events. He allows one empire after another to come to prominence to accomplish His will. So this chapter, as well as giving us another tangible reason for trusting in

the reliability of the written word of God, shows us that world events do not just happen by chance. All is foreknown by God, who allows it all to happen for His good purpose. That God is still just as active in the world today is undeniable. He is still accomplishing all that He has purposed to do.

Past its sell-by date?

However, we need to return to this fourth beast. It is seen as going on to the end of time (7:23-27). Does the prophecy fall down because the world clearly did not end with the fall of the Roman Empire? Clearly not! We must remember that Daniel, a patriotic Jew, was very much looking at things through Jewish spectacles. As I travel towards the Lake District, I see in the distance all the hills looking to be very close together. It seems as if, having climbed the first peak, it would be an easy thing to walk from one peak to the next. It is only as you get up close that the valleys in between become apparent, and the two peaks that seemed so close are in fact many foot-weary miles apart! Daniel viewed the rise of the Roman Empire from the time of about 550 B.C., and his focus was on the impact that its rise would have on Israel as a country. He also saw the fall of the Roman Empire at the end of time, and again, the effect that that will have on Israel. The valley that lies between is the Church age, the great mystery of God that has now been fully revealed to us, through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:5, 9). If we compare Daniel 7 with Revelation 13:3 and 17:10-11, then we shall see that the final beast, or empire, receives a near fatal wound, and amazes the world when it rises again. The world may speak of the fall of the Roman Empire, but it will rise again.

The world may speak of the fall of the Roman Empire, but it will rise again.

The Centre of God's purposes

However, the vision of four beasts is not the sum total of Daniel 7. So we go back to verses 9-14. Daniel is now given a vision of the heavenly realm. How majestic is the view of God! His purity is illustrated in His clothes and hair, His righteous judgement in the flames that consume all that is false, and His greatness reflected in the countless hosts that surround Him. No multitude is big enough to fully show forth the greatness of the One who fills and surrounds the entire universe.

For what purpose is this throne set up and this court now in session?

The Son of Man who approaches the throne in Daniel 7:13 is the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. with Mark 14:62), and what we have here is really God’s final answer to the cross. There, mankind in arrogance said of Him, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). As far as the world in general today is concerned, the cross is still where Jesus ought to be. Its attitude has not changed. But as in all things God will always have the final word. He has determined “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11, NKJV). So in this vision, we are taken into the very presence of God Himself. The Son of Man is brought into His presence and is given an earthly kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14). Already the Son of Man is crowned with glory and honour *in heaven*, where He has entered as my Forerunner – the One who loved me and gave Himself for me (Hebrews 2:9; 6:20; Galatians 2:20). But God’s purposes in Christ are not entirely heavenly. So Jesus is given a kingdom – one that will cover the whole earth, if not beyond! This kingdom will last for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6), and be the fulfilment of all the Old Testament prophets looked forward to, in terms of a time of tremendous blessing for the nation of Israel, and the world in general (see, for example, Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 4:1-4). Because of its length this period of His reign is usually referred to as the millennium.

Recognising all the sufferings his people were to go through before their eventual blessing with Christ, and maybe recognising the reason for those sufferings, Daniel was troubled by his vision (7:28). It is always a good thing when we really let the word of God impact upon us deeply. Too often we read it and it barely registers in our minds.

What it says to us

To my mind, there are at least two practical consequences to us today, which arise from Daniel 7. Firstly, these times in which we live are “the times of the Gentiles”! This world has always been in a state of rebellion to God, and will always be so, until He reigns. The crusades, the last English civil war and republic years, the Continental Thirty Years Wars of religion all bear damning testimony to the fact that we just cannot impose the rules and morals that Scripture lays down on society as a

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whole. More blood has probably been shed, ostensibly in the name of God, than for any other cause; and that is utterly wrong. When we understand that He *will* reign, but only when He is ready to do so, then we can learn to wait patiently for the time when all that is wrong with this world will be made right.

Secondly, this planet is not bound for utter destruction, even if there has been human mismanagement of it. God has decreed that it is on this earth, in the scene of His rejection, that Jesus will reign for one thousand years. Knowing this ought to make the believer a voice of reason and calm in a climate-change debate that sometimes lacks both.

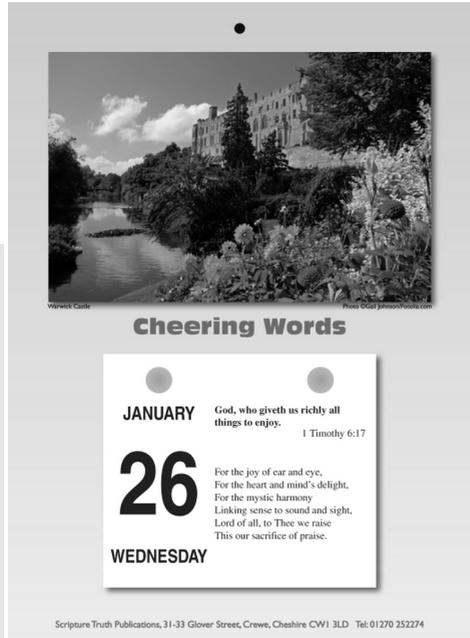
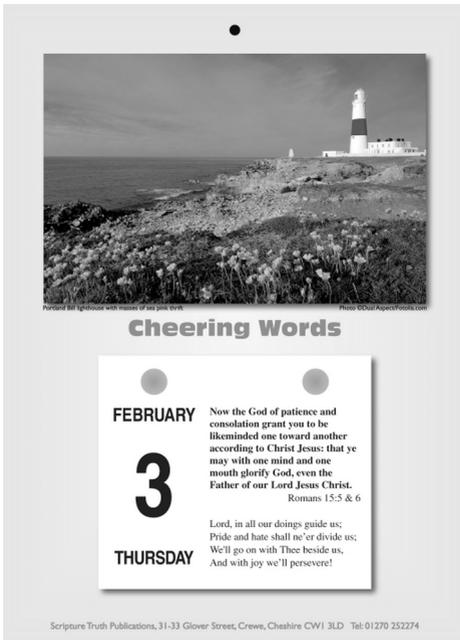
God is firmly in control of all things. He raises up and overthrows empires and governments as He chooses. He does this to accomplish His purposes. That purpose culminates in the time when, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, He Himself will reign over all the earth, and receive the universal acclaim of all beings in the universe. We began by thinking how good it would be if we could know the future, but what we really wanted was to change the future for our benefit. Instead, God reveals certain things about His future that is centred on His Son, so that *we change now*. By trusting Jesus as Saviour, if we have not already done so, we can prepare ourselves to be associated with Him when He reigns, for He shall reign. By living for Him now, and accepting the necessary sacrifices that that entails, we can in our small way ready ourselves for reigning with Him in glory when He accepts the kingdom from His God.

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Cheering Words Calendar 2011

The 2011 calendar is now available from STP, with two pictures (one on either side of the calendar back):

Warwick Castle (shown on the right) and Portland Bill lighthouse with masses of sea pink thrift (shown below).



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from which a price list and order form may be downloaded.

Christ's – by creation and redemption

*Lord, we are Thine; our God Thou art;
fashioned and made we were, as clay;
these curious frames, in every part,
Thy wisdom, power, and love display:
each breath we draw, each pulse that beats,
each organ formed by skill divine,
each precious sense aloud repeats,
Great GOD, that we are *only* Thine.*

*Lord, we are Thine: in Thee we live,
supported by Thy tender care:
Thou dost each hourly mercy give –
Thine earth we tread, we breathe Thine air;
raiment and food Thy hands supply,
Thy sun's bright rays around us shine;
guarded by Thine all-seeing eye,
we own that we are *only* Thine.*

*Lord we are Thine: bought by Thy blood –
once the poor guilty slaves of sin;
Thou hast redeemed us to God,
and made Thy Spirit dwell within;
Thou hast our sinful wanderings borne
with love and patience all divine:
as brands, then, from the burning torn,
we own that we are *wholly* Thine.*

J.G. Deck (1807-84)

As printed in Hymns of Light and Love (Bath)