

Scripture Truth



Inside:

"Father, I will..."
Beware of your Bibles!
And finally, New Creation!

Trouble, and how to meet it
The Revelation of Jesus Christ
The Christian, the kingdom,
and the "rapture"

Volume 58 No.4 October – December 2013

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

Editor's e-mail: editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is published every three months to expound the teaching of the Scriptures so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

Annual Subscription 2013

£10.00 Post Free UK – £12.50 Post Free Overseas

Contents

Beware of your Bibles!	85	“Father, I will...”	98
Trouble, and how to meet it	86	The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Thyatira, Sardis	102
And finally, New Creation!	92	The Christian, the kingdom, and the “rapture” .	108
		A Goodly Cell	Back cover

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Authorized (King James) Version (KJV). Rights in the Authorized Version are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press.

Scripture quotations marked (RV) are taken from “The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Translated out of the Greek: Being the Version Set Forth A.D. 1611, Compared with the Most Ancient Authorities and Revised, A.D. 1881”. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881.
or “The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues : being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised”. Oxford: University Press, 1885.

Scripture quotations marked (Darby Trans.) are taken from “The Holy Scriptures, a New Translation from the Original Languages” by J. N. Darby (G Morrish, 1890).

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from
The Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised edition)
Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica (formerly International Bible Society).
Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, an Hachette uk company
All rights reserved.

‘niv’ is a registered trademark of Biblica (formerly International Bible Society).
uk trademark number 1448790.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NEB) are taken from the New English Bible, copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press 1961, 1970. All rights reserved.

Front cover: Lilies at Cobble Hey Farm

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is the imprint of the Central Bible Hammond Trust

Registered Charity No. 223327

All business correspondence and orders should be addressed to:

SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

31-33 Glover Street, CREWE, Cheshire CW1 3LD

Tel: 01270 252274

Fax: 01477 587454

Beware of your Bibles!

I was taken aback recently to discover that the introduction to “The Prophets” in a new edition of a “conservative” Bible translation placed Jonah and Daniel after a heading stating that “Opinion is divided as to the chronological places of the following prophets.” That’s certainly a statement of fact, but the editors could have recorded it whilst listing these prophets according to the dating indicated by the books themselves. By placing Daniel last in their list (even though it is alphabetically *second!*) the editors are endorsing the view that the book is a pious fraud composed not in the sixth century B.C., but about four hundred years later, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes; and that the prophecies it contains are intentional fakes. But the Lord said, “...spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (Matthew 24:15, etc.). That should be the end of all controversy for the believer. Similarly, by placing Jonah just before Daniel they are casting doubt, to say the least, on whether the book records the actual experiences of the eight-century prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. But the Lord placed His own imprimatur on those experiences (Matthew 12:40-41), and made their historicity a test of the veracity of His foretelling of His own resurrection.

The same introduction also studiously avoids saying that Isaiah 40-66 came from Isaiah, as is affirmed in John 12:38.

Similarly, the same volume’s note on the “General Epistles” takes the modernists’ side on 2 Peter by sidestepping the question of its authorship. But if Peter did not write this Letter, it should be excluded from the canon of Scripture, since it so plainly claims to be his letter (2 Peter 1:16ff). It is not true that NT writers would have been happy about others impersonating them in letters: see 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17.

None of this, however, is about the merits or demerits of this or that Bible *translation*. I merely mean to warn that the notes to be found in many Bibles on sale today may look authoritative, but must be read with caution, because much that nowadays markets itself under the “evangelical” label has departed far from the axiom of inerrancy that used to be inseparable from evangelicalism.

Trouble, and how to meet it

2 Kings 4:8-37

Theo Balderston

Not every species of the trouble to which man is born is perhaps addressed in the Shunammite's story, but many, many Christians have found deep instruction and encouragement in it.

The great woman of Shunem is truly one of the great people of the Bible.

Her home was on the plain of Jezreel, where, as Edersheim informs us, "Far as the eye could reach spread rich fields, till the distant horizon was bounded on either side by the heights of Tabor and Carmel. About midway between these two points lay the quiet village of Shunem."¹ Penury was not her problem: when the Bible calls her a "great woman," it means she was wealthy (cp. 1 Samuel 25:2; 2 Samuel 19:32). Despite this, her ear was eager for the word of God. *She* took the lead in constraining Elisha to eat bread. (v.8). Although her husband was old he was not incapacitated (cp. v.18), but perhaps he had little wish to invite a prophet to supper (cp. v.23). Elisha seems to have been reluctant to accept what might merely have enabled the well-to-do to fulfil their social duty. But evidently the persistence of the "great woman" changed his mind. And no doubt his experience of the dinner table and of the great woman pressing him with searching, but godly, questions soon convinced him of her character.

The visits became regular, and the woman obtained her husband's consent to build and furnish the famous "little chamber on the wall." Edersheim thinks that, conveniently for Elisha, this room would have had independent access via an outside stair. And evidently the room *was* useful, for one day Elisha climbed those stairs and, rather than sitting on his chair, lay on the bed, doubtless exhausted by the long foot-travelling his ministry demanded.

As pre-eminently a minister of grace (whereas Elijah had been pre-eminently a minister of judgment), his mind then started working. What gratitude had he shown to the woman who had shown such concern for him? (v.10)

The grace of God is a holy, searching grace.

But the grace of God is a holy, searching grace. Just as in the case of Naaman (cp. 2 Kings 5:10), Elisha first of all deals rather remotely with her by this curious device of speaking to the lady standing in front of him through Gehazi his slave. Through

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *Elisha the Prophet. The Lessons of His History and Times* (London, new edition, c.1882), p.92.

Gehazi he tests her with the offer of influence in high places such as he, whom kings feared, was able to exercise. What remedies of wrongs done, what possibilities of further wealth, even what Naboth's vineyards might a word from Elisha in the king's ear not have elicited! And what a chance for admission to the society of the royal court!

Her sturdy reply, "I dwell among my own people" (NKJV), indicates that she neither needed help outside her kinsfolk nor sought royal society. Evidently with this reply she left. She had no wish to be seen as someone hanging about for royal favours.² Elisha then turns to Gehazi for further ideas for a "thank-you." Gehazi, with the acumen of the observant natural man, had sized up the situation and could correctly diagnose it for his master. "She has no son, and her husband is old." She lacked something that no wealth or royal influence could secure.

Recalling the woman now that her character has been tested, Elisha addresses her directly with words of grace that spoke to her deepest sorrow. "About this time next year you shall embrace a son." Not having a son was no doubt a deep, hidden wound in her heart, both as a woman and because she had not been able to continue her husband's name and inheritance in Israel. Just how deep this went is disclosed by her reaction. "No, my lord, do not lie to your maidservant" (v.16). She did not think the promise fulfillable. She could not bear to have her hopes even briefly raised in this matter, and dashed again. No doubt she had prayed long years without the outcome she wished. But now God had spoken through Elisha, so it happened exactly as she had been told.

And yet, the grace shown her in the baby boy was only a stepping stone to an even worse trial than never having had a son at all (vv.18-21). We can glibly repeat that, "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens" (Hebrews 12:6), but this woman had to experience this in a way that, before it happened, she evidently did not imagine she could

The grace shown her in the baby boy was only a stepping stone to an even worse trial.

endure. We can picture the joy of those years of infancy and little-boyhood, and the pride of both parents, not to speak of the little lad himself, when he was old enough to accompany his father to the fields – he himself the assurance that those fields would not pass to a stranger at his aging father's death. We can imagine the happiness of that glorious morning when, perhaps as often already, he went out to the harvest field; then the pain in his head. The father may not have

² Nevertheless Elisha's offer was later realised, when the woman did seek the king's help, and obtained it due to his huge respect for Elisha (2 Kings 8:1-6).

realised the gravity of the condition, for instead of bringing him home he sent him by a servant. But already by noon the boy was dead.

His mother's reaction was immediate. As long as life was in him, she nursed him on her knees. As soon as life was gone, she carried him out of the door of the house, up those steep stairs, and on to the prophet's bed. In this way she signified that she returned the matter entirely to God, and left it there – as we shall see. And yet maybe there was an element of reproach. She had shown kindness to the prophet, caused the chamber to be built, this very bed to be placed in it; and out of all that had come – this! Better indeed never to have had the promise; better never to have seen the face of her baby son, never to have loved him and experienced his reciprocated love – than *this!*

She carried him on to the prophet's bed. In this way she signified that she returned the matter entirely to God.

But this horror was a test of faith in the God of Israel, who had brought His people out of Egypt and into the land, parcelling it out among their families including her husband's ancestors. She did have that faith. Immediately having laid the boy on the prophet's bed, she asks her husband for a donkey and a household slave to lead it (v.22). "Why are you going to him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath," was his reply (v.23).

His reply is open to diverse interpretations. Had his wife told him the boy was dead? Was this another reason why she had placed him in the prophet's chamber? In this case we can perhaps understand the husband's bewilderment at her suddenly leaving an ill boy. But in this case his reply also means that he was just a religious formalist who didn't believe that prayer works. However, if he did know that the boy was dead, then we can perhaps excuse his thinking that there was nothing more to be prayed for – except for the case of the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17:22). Would not his wife and he have heard of this from Elisha's lips?

The woman's reply ranks among the greatest three words in the English Bible. "It is well"³ (v.23). This was not just a stoical response or stiff upper lip. If she had concealed the boy's death from her husband (something that could only succeed for a short period), her actions and reply can mean only one thing – that *she* believed in the God who raises the dead. What God has done once, He can, if He

³ According to the margin the Hebrew is the single word, "Peace," which, however, carries this meaning.

so will, do again. If she *had* told her husband, her reply need not evince quite such faith, but at any rate she believed that by taking the matter back to its source – the promise of God through Elisha – it would be “well.” This can only mean that she knew the heart of

What God has done once, He can, if He so will, do again.

God. Our troubles may have long roots. Let us seek the enabling to go over the whole history of them with the God who was there from the start of them.

When we need it most, will we know our way to the Man at the right hand of God?

When she needed it most, she knew where to find the man of God: on the hill. *Her husband's question suggests she had often been there before.*

When we need it most, will we, because we have often been there before, know our way to the Man at the right hand of God who constantly makes intercession for us (Romans 8:34), to our great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities? (Hebrews 4:14-15) The place (mount Carmel) was sixteen miles off, so Edersheim informs us,

and the afternoon was no doubt hot. Finding our way to the throne of grace in the worst trials of life may not come easy.

Elisha's eye was caught by this spectacle of someone riding so doggedly in such heat, and he recognised the rider. Something was far wrong. But the LORD had hidden it from him. Except when God sovereignly bestowed revelations, Elisha was subject to all ordinary human limitations of knowledge.

He sent Gehazi to find out. “Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?” The woman's reply demonstrated that she was not at all interested in unburdening herself to any but God. “It is well,” she replies again. How easy it is for us to unburden our souls to almost anyone but God!

How easy it is for us to unburden our souls to almost anyone but God!

But when she does reach God's man, she prostrates herself imploringly, taking hold of his feet, and speaks out the whole history of her distress.

“Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, ‘Do not deceive me?’” (v.26) Her words teach a vital lesson. There is nothing, no sadness, despair, pain of body and heart, no reproach even, that the distressed child of God cannot express before *Him*. Those who love Him do not need to choose their words before Him.

Yet these bitter-sounding words were not unbelief, but supplication. Could *this* have been God's purpose in granting her the child?

Elisha now knows that the matter concerns the child of promise. Thunderstruck, he sends Gehazi with all speed to place the staff representing his prophetic authority on the child's face. But the woman is not satisfied. "As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. And this is what God intended, for Gehazi's efforts were futile (v.31). God Himself was going to meet her in her trial. Elisha realised this: "So he arose and followed her" (v.30). Remarkable grace for that age in a man who had the ear of kings! It speaks of "God with us." Do our prayers just look for a remote divine intervention in our problems, or do we most of all long to know that we are *with*

Having found the presence of God, the great woman turned back to the trouble with God.

God in our trials and He with us? Testing words! Having found the presence of God, the great woman turned back to the trouble with God, as represented in the man of God.

Even though she probably half-expected it, how disappointedly she must have heard Gehazi's report! (v.31) God's dealings with us have to run very deep. We may think that we have experienced enough of God's hand to learn the lesson we well know we have to learn, only to experience a still further setback, because the work has to be still deeper.

The woman had refused to leave the prophet, but there was somewhere she could not go if she was to get her son back. Elisha climbed those stairs alone, and prayed. *He* unburdened *his* soul to God, and he needed solitude for this (Mark 1:35; Matthew 6:6). This was no automatic, magical cure. "Prayer *is* the work," is a saying attributed to J.O. Fraser, the interwar pioneer of mission work in Lisuland, south-west China. Then Elisha "lay on the child, and put his mouth to his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands" (vv.33, 34). Others may think it over-allegorical, but to my mind there is a picture of incarnation here.

"Prayer is the work."

"Our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man."⁴

Only by the eternal Son of God becoming man could resurrection come to man (1 Corinthians 15:21). The next three resurrection miracles of Scripture illustrate this (Luke 7:15; 8:55; John 11:44). But when it says that Elisha "*stretched* himself"

⁴ Charles Wesley.

(v.34), how could a full-grown man stretch himself on a little boy? I think it speaks of the agony of Golgotha. That is also a reason why no-one, not even the mother, could be present.

The child's flesh became warm, but Elisha went downstairs, walked to and fro in the house and, it seems, said nothing. The mother must have been in an agony of suspense! These moments must have been as long to her as everything that

*Something
very natural
happened.
The child
sneezed.*

had already happened in that long and dreadful day. So it can often seem with our prayers. Then the prophet returned upstairs, repeated the earlier action, and something very natural happened. The child sneezed. Naaman's healing, too, was very unspectacular (5:14). Do you think the mother downstairs didn't hear those sneezes? But she had to wait till Gehazi was sent to call her (v.36). I am sure she revered the prophet, but equally sure that her bowing to the ground was worship of the living God (v.37). *No* words could now express her feelings.

Note that her hopes were realised in resurrection. The Christian's hopes and prayers should be centred on resurrection. The Shunammite shared her experience of resurrection with (ii) the widow of Zarephath; (iii) the widow of Nain; (iv) Jairus and his wife; (v) Martha and Mary; and (vi) Mary Magdalene. Among these it is the faith of the two Old-Testament women that stands out. One was ultra-poor, and a Gentile; the other rich, and an Israelite. But there must be a lesson in the predominance of believing women in all these resurrection events. Does it tell us something about the distribution of true, heartfelt response to God and devotion to Him in the believing community?

What were these two *great* Old-Testament women's names? We don't even know. I doubt that they would have thought it mattered that they are unnamed. The Lord knows their names (John 10:3).

*The Christian's hopes and prayers
should be centred on resurrection.*

And finally, New Creation!

David Anderson

Introduction

Any series on creation* must conclude with an article about new creation.

F B Hole reflected this approach in his book, *The Great Salvation*, and emphasised its importance when he wrote, “We have left ‘new creation’ until the last [chapter of the book] as it seems to be the ultimate thing to which the Gospel conducts us, but at the same time it is evident that God is going to establish it, not because it meets some definite need on our side, but because it meets the need of His holy nature – it is the thing which is suitable to Himself.”¹

This means that the present creation (including the restored creation² in the millennial kingdom of God) is merely a necessary precursor, a platform for God to work out the counsel of His will to achieve His eternal purposes. In a little over one thousand years from now the creation we now live in will have worn out. “Thou in the beginning, Lord, hast founded the earth, and works of Thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but Thou continuest still; and they all shall grow old as a garment, and as a covering shalt Thou roll them up, and they shall be changed” (Hebrews 1:10-12, Darby Trans.). But the new creation is eternally “new in character” (Greek word: *kainos*) rather than “just recent,” i.e., “new in time.” It will never decay; rather it abides forever!

New creation in distinction to the original creation restored

It is true that the Old Testament writers sometimes described as a “new creation” the Edenic conditions of Christ’s kingdom when this present creation will be restored. But it must be emphasised that this is different to what the apostle John wrote of in Revelation 21:1-8. This contrast was pointed out in my previous article, “Creation Restored.”² As Hebrews 12:26-27 makes clear, everything “that has been made,” that is, the entire material universe, will be consumed, leaving only that which endures for eternity (cp. 2 Peter 3:10-13).

Behold, I make all things new!

Following his vision of the final judgment of mankind in Revelation 20:11-15, John sees a new heaven and a new earth in the new vision of 21:1-8. The first heaven and earth will have passed away. 2 Peter 3:10-12 explain that they will be burnt up and dissolve in the judgment. Revelation 21:1 ends with the statement, “and the sea was no more” (ESV), suggesting that nothing will disturb or trouble the eternal state of bliss in which God dwells with man (v.3; for the figure of

* This series has continued in *Scripture Truth*, with interruptions, since July 2009.

¹ F B Hole, *The Great Salvation* (London, 1937), p.115.

² See ‘Creation Restored’, *Scripture Truth*, July 2013.

Righteousness will not need to reign in the new creation, for there will not be even the potential for sin.

speech, cp. Jeremiah 49:23). The vision emphasises things belonging to this present groaning creation which will all be absent. Tears, death, mourning, crying and pain all will be no more (contrast Romans 8:22-23). Righteousness will dwell there (2 Peter 3:13). Unlike in the millennium, righteousness will not need to reign in the new creation, for there will not be even the potential for sin (cp. Revelation 21:8). God Himself will have His dwelling-place [or, tabernacle] with men (21:3). And notice His tender and intimate touch, “God will wipe away every tear from [his people’s] eyes” (v.4a). At the command of His throne, “Behold, I am making all things new” (v.5), new creation is brought to completion with the announcement, “It is done” (v.6a, cp. Psalm 33:8).

In vv.2-3, the Church³ is brought into focus as

- “The holy city” – it bears the nature of God, consistent with our holy calling (cp. 2 Timothy 1:9 with Ephesians 1:4 & 2:21).
- “The new Jerusalem” – not the old earthly, literal city, but a city in figure that symbolises the home of the heavenly saints (cp. Revelation 3:12).
- “From God” – it is divine in origin.
- “Out of heaven” – in its character as well as its location (cp. Hebrews 3:1).
- “A bride adorned for her husband” – prepared to belong to Christ for eternity,⁴ the object of His eternal love (cp. Ephesians 5:25-27).
- The eternal dwelling place of God, the culmination of that which is true of us even now in time: “In [Christ] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

The Beginning of the creation of God

We know that God began the original creation by creating the heavens and the earth on Day One, and that He completed this creation when He created Adam

³ Notice that the Church is the product of God’s new creation work: “that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (Ephesians 2:15-16).

⁴ 21:9-22:5 present a different vision of the Church, which, as the Lamb’s wife, rules with Him over both heaven and earth in the Millennium (cp.21:24; Ephesians 1:9-11).

God began the original creation by creating the heavens and the earth. But the new creation starts with the Man whom God raises out from among the dead. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

and Eve last on Day Six (Genesis 1:1, 26-31). God breathed into man the breath of life (2:7). But the new creation *starts* with the Man, the Christ, whom God raises out from among the dead to new life (Ephesians 1:20-22; Romans 6:10). In Revelation 3:14 Christ is called “the beginning of the creation of God” (KJV), echoing the name assigned to Him in reference to His resurrection in Colossians 1:18-19: “He is the head of the body, the church. *He is the beginning [of the new creation]*, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (ESV; my expansion and emphasis). This description of Him immediately follows verses 15-17, where He is identified as the Creator and Sustainer of this present creation. Therefore in God’s new creation, which is both established in and maintained by the risen Christ, He is also the pre-eminent One.

“In Christ” there is new creation now!

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 believers already belong in a spiritual way to the new order of new creation: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Verses 15-21 of this chapter present seven facets of this doctrine of new creation *now*:

- Every believer is a new creation because he/she is seen by God as being “in Christ” (cp. Ephesians 2:10). Ephesians 1 explains in detail what it means for believers to be “in Christ,” and highlights that their election was according to the eternal purposes of God.
- “The new has come.” As new creatures “in Christ” all believers experience new creation realities now! New birth has given us new life, a new beginning, with new desires, new aspirations, and a new hope. 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 draws a comparison between God’s new-creation work of shining into our hearts and His old-creation work of commanding the physical light to shine

*Every believer is a new creation.
As new creatures "in Christ" all believers
experience new creation realities now!*

out of the darkness (Genesis 1:2-3). The Spirit of God and the word of God conjointly produced the natural light, and thereby they pictured the work of God when a person is born anew into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5, Darby Trans.). However, in new creation the light-source is the face of Jesus Christ, and the shining is the glory of God!

- “Old things have passed away” (v.17, KJV). In the death of Christ, God has put away everything pertaining to our old life (Romans 6:4, 6; Colossians 2:11-14).
- “From now on we regard no-one according to the flesh” (v.16, ESV). Our relationships are transformed by our transforming relationship with the Lord Jesus.
- Everything is from God (v.18), and designed by Him for His own satisfaction and pleasure (cp. Revelation 21:3).
- God accomplished new creation through His righteous work of reconciliation. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (v.21). In the new creation, *all things*, which were all tainted by sin in the old creation (cp. Job 15:15), will be made new, and finally and totally reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20).
- God brings in new creation through Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 speak of His love, His death, and His resurrection, and their subjective effect upon us. If His death be regarded as the womb of new creation, then His resurrection is the birth of new creation.⁵ But “through Jesus Christ” also means that, spiritually, new creation is even now maintained for believers in the power of His endless life and the permanency of His priesthood (Hebrew 7:16 & 24). We are “all of one” with Him in His risen manhood (2:11).

⁵ For example, NKJV, *Vine’s Expository Reference Edition* (Thomas Nelson) gives in the margin of Acts 2:24, “Lit. ‘birth pangs,’ for ‘pains of death.’”

*If God's physical creation displays
His eternal power and divine nature,
our new-creation "good works"
manifest His grace and love.*

New creation in action

“For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). According to verses 14-16 real piety concerns the manifestation of my new life “in Christ.” Everything in Christianity is about “walking by this rule,” namely, the rule of my old self having been crucified and replaced by me living and walking in the Spirit (5:24-25). Colossians 3 exhorts, “If then you have been raised with Christ seek...[and] set your minds on things that are above...put to death therefore what is earthly in you...put off the old self with its practices and...put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator... [for] Christ is all, and in all” (vv.1-2, 5, 9-12). Ephesians 2:9-10 says we were saved to be God’s “workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus* for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (italics added). The Greek word for workmanship, *poiëma*, is translated “the things that are made” in Romans 1:20. If God’s physical creation displays His eternal power and divine nature, our new-creation “good works” manifest His grace and love. As members of Christ’s body, we express Him to the world by walking in these good works, which are elaborated upon in chapters 4-6 of Ephesians.

Then cometh the end

Although God started His new creation in the resurrection of Christ, His first creation continues until the end of the Kingdom (i.e., of the millennium). “Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). In its context, this verse describes the unstoppable course and consequences of the resurrection of Christ. Time started in Genesis 1:1, but ends when “God [is] all in all” (v.28), the point at which He is finally able to declare about His physical new creation, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 21:6). The apostle Peter explains how the first creation terminates. “The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Peter 3:10). In verses 12-13 he says that these final judgements intro-

duce the day of God, or the eternal state, in which righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and new earth.

This is our destiny, and since we are, *even now*, spiritually God's new creation in Christ, it follows that our conduct in this present world must comply with Peter's admonitions of verses 11&14. "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

And in relation to our destiny in the new creation, we read something incomparable in 1 Corinthians 15:28. "When *all things are subjected to him*, then the Son himself will also be subjected to *him who put all things in subjection under him*" (italics added). Notice the strong emphasis on Psalm 8:6 in the italicised clauses, emphasising that in verse 28, just as in verse 27, Christ is still viewed as Son of man. Yet in its wording verse 28 refers to the Lord in His greatness as "the Son" to show that what is about to be stated is not at all what one would have expected. The Son will be "subjected" to God (the KJV's "subject" is wrong). This verse proves that the Son is not intrinsically subject to the Father; if He were, He would not need to be *subjected*. But even One so great as the co-equal Son will voluntarily subject Himself as Son of man to God *for ever*. Having taken manhood upon Himself out of love for His Father and love for us, He is never going to abandon it. He says, in the Old-Testament picture, "I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free" (Exodus 21: 5). He remains the risen Man throughout eternity as well as being "God blessed for ever" (Romans 9:5); for ever the Man who is Head over all things to His Church, and Husband to His bride. And the object of His lovely action is "that God [Father, Son and Holy Spirit] may be *all in all*." The Trinity alone in its untouchable glory, for ever utterly distinct from every creature. But at the same time our creaturehood established eternally in new creation by the Son Himself remaining the risen Man for ever with all who are raised with Him. What a wonderful thought!

Exhortation and Doxology

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (2 Peter 3:18).

Christ remains the risen Man throughout eternity as well as being "God blessed for ever".

“Father, I will...”

John Duncan

“Rabbi” Duncan (1796 - 1870) was Professor of Hebrew at the Free Church’s New College, Edinburgh, in its evangelical “golden age,” and was both erudite and “a man of tender piety and of a lowly, loving spirit.” This abridged sermon is a most moving meditation.

“Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24).

[In this chapter] Jesus presents various petitions for His disciples. He characterizes them as those whom the Father had given Him; [and] as those to whom He had given the Father’s words, who had received the Father’s words, who had known that He came forth from the Father [and] believed that God the Father sent Him.

Thus characterized, He prays for them that they may be kept from the evil that is in the world. In the world they are, and of the world they originally were; but He has called them out of the world into His own fellowship. And the world has hated them because it hated Him. Of the world’s hatred they are aware; for they know how they themselves, when they were of the world, hated Christ, and hated the people of Christ for Christ’s sake. Not that they hated them, perhaps, in every respect. It is not the entire man frequently that the world hates – it is the *new-born* man. Abstracting his Christianity, the world may see much in a man that it likes; but that which distinguishes him from the world is that which the world hates – in short, his union to Christ, his faith in Christ, his love to Christ, his devotion to Christ. And alas! there is a lesson by which believers are ever kept aware of this hatred – their own flesh, which lusteth against the spirit, still participates in it; there is within themselves a witness to the world’s hatred. Well, for a man in this world, bound by manifold ties which connect him with his kind, to be kept out of the evil that is in the world – that is the exercise of the astonishing power of the grace of God for which Christ prays – that these, while left in the world which is so full of evil, should be kept from the evil that is in the world.

And that, kept from the evil, they should be led into the positive good. “Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth.” [Further.] Christ also prays, “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us.”

But Jesus has here a consummating prayer. “Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.” You will see that in these words Christ anticipates His going to the Father. “Where I am” – where I am about to be – where, having finished the work given me to do (which He speaks of also by anticipation as completed), I enter.

*It was an impossibility that we could be saved,
and He not drink the cup.*

“I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.” Jesus in Gethsemane had taken the cup which the Father there put into His hands, after praying thrice, “If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, Thy will be done.” The humanity of the incarnate God shrank from the taking of the cup; and He did take it – voluntarily, obedientially. Remember that though it was not the eternal Godhead that suffered but the humanity, it was a person and not a nature that suffered – God-man. He was crucified in weakness, and He took the cup in great weakness. “He fell on His face, and His sweat was like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” “There appeared unto Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him.” What a wonderful mystery, when He took that cup! What a wondrous cry, “Father, if it be possible!” His human soul looked to the omnipotent God, with whom all things are possible; and He said, “If this be possible...” But if not, “Not my will, but Thine, be done.”

And it was an impossibility that we could be saved, and He not drink it; it was to be drunk by Him or by us. The wisdom of God could devise no better scheme of salvation; the love of God could go no further; and the humanity of the Lord Jesus, subsisting with His divinity, could do no more than drink that cup. He drank it – till He exclaimed, “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” Then the bitterness of death was past.

“Not my will, but Thine, be done” – [that was] in Gethsemane. “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.” “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but took upon Him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Not that He ever was disobedient, though He learned obedience. This was a new task, [and] this was the moment, this was the time. “Not my will, but Thine, be done.” “He became obedient unto death.”

*“Not my will, but Thine, be done”–
[that was] in Gethsemane.*

*Now He intimates His own will,
“Father, I will...”*

Now He intimates His own will, “Father, I will...”⁴¹ This is language which is peculiar to Christ. We never read of apostle or prophet so addressing God. The incarnate God, the Man Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, thus prays, “Father, I will.” And what is His will? “That they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am.”

How does He designate the objects of this prayer? “Those whom thou hast given me.” Jesus, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, got the sheep at the Father’s hand. “Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus prays that these not only may be brought into communion with Him in *grace* (that He had [already] prayed for: “keep them from the evil, sanctify them through Thy truth”) but into communion with Him in *glory*, “that they be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

Our communion with the Lord Jesus is not destined to be always of the mediate kind which it at present is. “Now,” says the apostle, “are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” It is a great thing to be the sons of God now; “but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” “That they may behold my glory.” The apostle Paul thus describes believers on earth: “We all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory.” Faith’s view of Christ is transforming, is glorifying. But it is not so transforming, not so glorifying, as the vision of immediate presence. Faith is an imperfect medium of communion with Christ. It is a true medium, the only medium we have here on earth, and yet it is an imperfect medium.

*However different the life of sight
is from the life of faith,
their principle is the same –
beholding the glory of Christ.*

[Nevertheless] we see that, however different the life of sight in the glorified is from the life of faith in the justified, their principle is the same – beholding the glory of Christ: beholding the glory of Christ by faith here, and there beholding and saying that the half, that the thousandth part, had not been told us. This is the one thing which constitutes the sameness of grace and glory – the beholding of Christ.

Ah! what an object this is for faith [now] to gaze on His glory as exhibited in Scripture testimony! But what an object, when we gaze not only with unveiled face – for that, the apostle says, is the privilege of faith – but in immediate presence! And if the sight of Christ be so transforming here, what will the sight of Christ be there, through eternal ages! Ah! this is what will never tire a saint; this is what never tires the eye of faith now. Ah! it *is* tired sometimes, but sight never will tire. His beauty, His excellence, His glory – an eternity does not waste it.

“Not my will, but Thine, be done.” “By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.” And now if Christ hath done the Father’s will, the Father will hear Him always. For those whom Christ hath bought, whom Christ hath called, whom Christ hath reconciled – Christ got them from the Father. “I will that they whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

“Seeing we look for such things.” And we *must* look. He cannot be split and separated from His salvation. Sense of unworthiness would keep us back – but dishonour Christ by rejecting Him? Ah! surely that – never! Well, then, if we have Christ, we must make our account with it to get grace and glory with Him. We cannot get grace and glory without Him, and we cannot get Him without getting grace and glory with Him. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Don’t let fancy fly up and make an imaginary heaven; we must live the life of faith now – faith wide as the Word of God, and narrow as the Word of God. I say narrow as the Word of God, shutting out all fancies; and wide as the Word of God, which reveals all we need.

O fit and prepare us! “It doth not yet appear what we shall be” – let the veil still hang; “but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Not as our poor faith realizes Him, but “as He is.”

Note. This much-abridged version of an undated sermon comes from Duncan’s *Pulpit and Communion Table* ed. David Brown (1874; reprinted Inverness, 1969). It is reproduced in the spirit of Hamilton Smith’s *Gleanings from the Past*.

¹ The respected and godly eighteenth-century German scholar, J.A. Bengel, remarks of this in his famous *Gnomon*, “It is to be interpreted, *I will*; for *I would desire*, is too weak a rendering. Jesus asks with the right of a claim... as the Son, not a servant.” (Ed.)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapters 2:18 - 3:6. Thyatira, Sardis

Donald Davison

The first division of the “Revelation” which the Lord “signified... unto His servant John” concerns “the things that are” (Revelation 1:1,19), and is delivered in a series of seven Letters to seven assemblies in Asia. In our previous article we saw that these seven Letters are further divided into two groups.¹ Those to the first three assemblies – Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum – form the first group. Prophetically, these first three assemblies represent conditions in the Church over the period until the rise of the papacy in the sixth or seventh century. Moreover Ephesus and Pergamum are called on to repent *as assemblies* (nothing is said to Smyrna to warrant a call to repentance).

Thyatira

Thyatira is the first of the remaining four assemblies, which form the second group. However in the case of Thyatira the invitation to repent is no longer extended. It had formerly been extended to the evil-doing section of the assembly, and had been refused (2:21). But there are a few individuals in it whose faithfulness is recognised and who receive the Lord’s commendation and encouragement (2:24-29).

Thyatira represents the condition of the Church from the rise of the papacy and through the “dark ages” until the time of the Reformation of the sixteenth century – a period of about a thousand years. Taken together, then, the last four assemblies take in the long period from the rise of the papacy until the Lord comes again. Indeed the Letters to the last four assemblies all make mention of the Lord’s coming (2:25; 3:3, 11, 16), indicating that these four churches each symbolise aspects of the history of the Church that will run concurrently until the end of this Christian era. These mentions of the Lord’s coming also carry the additional thought of encouragement and incentive to faithfulness.

Thyatira is also the central Letter of all seven, and it is the church to which the Lord has the most to say. As in all the other Letters, it is the “angel” of the church who is addressed (2:18), as representing the responsible element in the assembly. The Lord’s opening words are very solemn and powerful. We have noticed that in the opening of the previous Letters the Lord introduces Himself by a reference to some aspect of the form of His manifestation to John in the vision of chapter 1. Here, however, a difference is first introduced. The Lord introduces Himself to the Thyatiran assembly as the “Son of God,” giving weight and character to what He is going to say. In chapter 1 He had appeared to John as “one like unto

¹ See *Scripture Truth*, July 2013, pp. 64ff.

*Thyatira is the central Letter
of all seven, and it is the church to which
the Lord has the most to say.*

the Son of man” (v.13, KJV), thus bringing His manhood into focus. But in addressing this church as “the Son of God,” He emphasises His essential Deity, and therefore His attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. He is the One who is all-powerful, all-knowledgeable and present in all places at all times. This gives emphasis to His supremacy and authority over all which bears His name in testimony here.

However, the Lord’s description of Himself then continues in the terms of the vision of the first chapter (1:14-15): “He that has His eyes as a flame of fire, and His feet are like fine brass” (2:18, Darby Trans.). Fire is a symbol of judgment, but brass signifies that which is able to withstand the fire without itself being consumed, as seen in the altar of brass in the Tabernacle. What His eyes discover to be unsuitable and dishonouring in the public profession of His name will be crushed under His burning feet.

In Pergamum we had the marriage of the Church with the world. In contrast, here we have the Church ruling, or seeking to rule, the world. Revelation 18 gives the full account of the crushing of the corrupt system that Thyatira represents in a soon-coming day.

In view of the serious accusations with which the Lord is going to censure this assembly, the fivefold commendation in verse 19 is remarkable. It indicates the qualities marking those who were true to Him in such corrupt conditions – namely, their love, faith, service, endurance, and last works more than the first. The commendation throws into relief the Lord’s unchanging affection for those who are His own in whatever conditions they are found here.

Verses 20-23 are very solemn, and contain the Lord’s unsparing judgment of conditions in this assembly. The opening of verse 20 ought to read, “But I have against thee,” and omit the phrase “a few things.” The Lord’s words are urgent and full of His impending judgment of what they were allowing in their midst. The period of papal domination is what is prophetically outlined in this Letter. Jezebel – “that woman” – was Ahab’s queen who was the cause of idolatry in Israel (1 Kings 16:31). Rome has spuriously elevated “Mary” to a place of pre-

*The period of papal domination
is what is prophetically
outlined in this Letter.*

eminence in its system, giving her a place of “deity” to whom prayer is addressed. In so doing it robs our Lord Jesus of His true place of being the only One worthy of worship, and the Scripture of truth is disregarded which says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1.Timothy 2:5).

There is not space in this article to go into all that is being said to and about this church, but verse 21 gives the Lord’s assessment of its moral condition. “I gave her time that she should repent, and she will not repent of her fornication” (Darby Trans.). Rome still exists, unchanged, slowly recovering, but her doom is fixed and eternal. Rome will not repent but will go on to “great tribulation,” destruction and death (verses 22-23) along with “her children” – those who actively continue to promulgate her pernicious and murderous ways (cp.18:24). But verse 23 is also intended as a confirmation and a warning to all of us of the Lord’s all-searching eyes that see all that is going on in our assemblies, and of the certainty that each system, as well as each individual, will receive their just reward in the Day of Judgment, either good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

*But verse 23 is also intended as
a warning to all about the Lord’s
all-searching eyes that see all that
is going on in our assemblies.*

In verse 24, in the midst of appalling conditions in this assembly, the Lord gives those who are faithful to Him encouragement for the present and hope for the future. He speaks directly to them, and distinguishes a few – namely, “the rest... as many as have not this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan...” (Darby Trans.) – from the main body of corruption in which they were found. In common speech the word “remnant” describes an end or left-over piece of cloth that is of not much worth. But Scripture gives “remnant” [or, “the rest”] a different sense. It carries the thought of a few who are a genuine and true sample of what all who profess the name of Christ should be. Graciously the Lord says to them, “I do not cast upon you any other burden.” This is for their present encouragement; but they are also given the direction, “What ye have, hold fast till I come” (v.25). Here is the first direct promise of the Lord’s coming in these seven Letters, and it was given for the hope and encouragement of His people in the midst of appalling conditions. During such periods of great persecution and many martyrs, we see the Lord always has those who are faithful to Him, whatever the cost to themselves.

This encouragement is followed by the Lord’s promises to the overcomers [i.e., “those who get the victory”], and it seems that in this Letter only “the rest... as many as have not this doctrine” (v.24) can be “overcomers.” The mass, or body, of the assembly are no longer looked on as those who are willing to return to first principles, only the “remnant” whom the Lord accounts willing to remain faithful to Him and who seek to carry out His mind and will. Days of individual and “remnant” character are in view, in which the Lord looks for a response from each individual to His revealed will. This is good encouragement for us today.

The character of promise to these “overcomers” is significant. Whereas the system of papacy sought and seeks ultimate “power over the nations,” this very power, or “authority” (Darby Trans.) is what will be given to the faithful, who will also “shepherd” or “rule” the nations (verse 27) in association with the Lord in the day when He comes to reign supreme over all as King of kings and Lord of lords (Psalm 2:8-9; Revelation 19:14-16).

Almost like an afterthought an extra promise is given. “And I will give to him the morning star.” For the saints who are upon earth when the Lord comes to set up His kingdom He will appear as the “Sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4.2) bringing in “the day of display.” Prior to this, He comes for us as “the Morning Star,” to catch us away at the rapture to be with and like Him forever. But as “Sun of righteousness” He will usher in the day of His appearing and glorious reign. We are still in the night of His rejection before He appears as the Sun rising in all its strength. It is for Him as the “Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16) that we wait.

*It is for Him as
the “Bright and Morning Star”
that we wait.*

Well might we heed the exhortation of verse 29, “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies.”

Sardis

Once more the “angel” (speaking of the responsible element in the assembly) is the addressee of the Letter to Sardis (3:1). Prophetically, this church represents what has resulted from the Reformation of the sixteenth century, so that since that time Protestantism has run concurrently alongside the dark affairs of Thyatira – as still witnessed around us.

The Lord presents Himself to this assembly as “He that has the seven Spirits of God.” This takes our minds back to 1:4, in relation to which it was already remarked that “seven” speaks of the plenitude of the power of the Holy Spirit in all the things of God, whether in the assemblies or in the world; and therefore the fulness of power by which the Lord sees all, knows all, and is active in every circumstance in relation to God. The description continues (alluding to 1:20), “and the seven stars,” these representing the seven assemblies as responsible to cause heavenly light to be displayed in this dark scene.

Therefore in this opening verse of chapter 3 the Lord knows all that they are doing in His Name. He knows that they profess to have a name for which they are living; but to His eyes, looking for life, they are seen to be dead. A sad result in what started out so well with the vibrancy of divine life – that it should have diminished to being but a shell without life! This divine comment raises an immense question for us. Are we only *professors* of His name or are we truly *confessors*, seeking with His help to be living for Him? The exhortation in verse 2 is

*Are we only professors of His name
or are we truly confessors?*

to those who have life to “be watchful [vigilant] and strengthen [establish] the things that remain.” God always has His people here, some of whom “are ready to [or, ‘about to’] die.” Are we willing to help revive them? We may at times appear to be few, but if we seek to be faithful to Him we are able to count upon divine support and help. But sadly the majority of works being done in this assembly were “not perfect [or, ‘complete’] before God” (3:2).

Verse 3 is a call to remember what we have received and heard in the past. For the present we are to “hold fast” [“keep,” Darby Trans.], that is, not to give up nor give way; and we are to repent. If we do not watch [keep awake] the Lord warns He will come to us at a time not expected and catch us napping – asleep on duty! Thyatira seeks to rule the world, but in Sardis we see elements of the world invading the church. Let us keep clear of all that is dishonouring to Him. In the midst of all that professes the name of Christ we find again “a few” in unsoiled garments; and they receive the tremendous promise of being morally suitable and worthy, in a soon-coming day, to walk with Christ in white (v.4).

The promise to the overcomer in verse 5 is exquisite, encouraging, and stabilizing. It holds out the eternal prospect

(1) Of being clothed in white (speaking of purity) that will never ever be marred – for there will be no stain of sin to mar it.

(2) Of their names never being blotted out of the book of life. Eternal security is theirs. Those blotted out of the book of life are merely outward professors of Christ. True believers will never, can never, be blotted out. See Philippians 4:3 & Revelation 13:8 for confirmation that the names of true believers are written there in the book of life of the slain Lamb from the foundation of the world. Only those who are not written in “the book of life” (20:15) will be cast into the lake of fire.

(3) Of the Lord Himself owning them by name as His in that day when He presents them faultless before and in the presence of His (and our) Father and the holy angels (cp. Jude 24).

And once again: well might we echo the closing words, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”!

*For the present we are to “hold fast”,
that is, not to give up nor give way.*

The Christian, the kingdom, and the “rapture”

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

Theo Balderston

Is the phrase, “...rest with us when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (v.7, NKJV), compatible with the doctrine of a “rapture” preceding the “appearing”? To follow the point at issue you need to read the Bible passage first!

In order to make sense of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 we needed to understand what problem had prompted the Thessalonians to ask their question concerning “the times and the seasons” (v.1). We saw that this problem was lack of assurance of salvation, and that Paul’s response focussed on this lack. His response made clear that the day of the Lord had nothing to do with them.¹ Similarly, we need to understand what prompted Paul to write 2 Thessalonians 1 if we are to make sense of this chapter, and avoid misinterpretation of v.7.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 tells us that Paul’s main reason for writing this second Letter was news that his new converts in Thessalonica were being troubled by a teaching that “the day of the Lord” had already started. All Old-Testament references to the “day of the Lord” portray it as a day of judgment; and therefore it follows that the Thessalonians were interpreting the severe, and now quite prolonged persecutions and afflictions they were undergoing as a mark of divine displeasure. Once again we must recollect the acute self-reproaches and lack of assurance to which new believers are prey. Attributing this new teaching (quite erroneously) to Paul himself (see 2:2), they must therefore have concluded that Paul had recanted on his view of the Lord coming “with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13) to inaugurate the day of the Lord. They also presumably now thought that Paul’s own afflictions meant that even he had somehow incurred the Lord’s displeasure. This may be why Paul expressly says, “rest [or, ‘relief’]... with us, at the revelation of Jesus Christ,” in verse 7. But this is to get too far ahead in the explanation of the chapter.

This background explains the course Paul takes in this chapter. In 1:3 he notes that his earlier exhortation to mutual love (see I, 4:9-12) was bearing much fruit, and tells them (II, 1:4) how that he, Silvanus, and Timothy gloried in the way they were reacting to their persecutions. If Paul had considered them to be suf-

¹ See the article “The Christian and the day of the Lord” in the last issue, pp.79-84. The series on the “rapture” in Thessalonians commenced in January 2012.

fering judgment for their misbehaviour, he would hardly have been glorying in them. Their present tribulations, he tells them, are a “manifest token” [or, “evidence”] of God’s righteous judgment” (v.5). This could have sounded like just what was worrying them – except that Paul continues, “to the end that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.” The sentence has taken a turn that allays their anxieties.

The day of the Lord will inaugurate the kingdom and is a judgment of the living (see Matthew 13:41-43; 25:41ff) in contrast to the judgment of the dead at great white throne (Revelation 20:11ff.). The introduction of the kingdom is, however, also a time of reward for believers (Luke 19:15ff; 2 Timothy 4:8). Paul is not thinking here in terms of the *basis* of salvation in unmerited grace. He is thinking of how it would be righteous for God in the kingdom to treat those who have suffered for the name of Christ. Paul’s reassurance hinges on the *righteous* character of the kingdom that will be inaugurated in power by the day of the Lord.

This is crucial to his argument. The phrase, “righteous judgment” (v.5) is the same as in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 16:18. “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just [‘righteous’] judgment.” This sets out the standard of justice that God demanded of the Israelite judiciary. The words “righteousness” and judgment” are paired more than sixty times in the Old Testament, key cases being 2 Samuel 8:15 (the standard of justice administered by David), Psalm 72:2 (the standard of justice to be administered by Messiah); and Psalm 89:14 (the standard of the LORD’s judgment). See too Isaiah 51:4, 5. So in 2 Thessalonians 1:5 “righteous judgment” is the kind of judgment that one would expect in “the kingdom of God.” The thought, that the “righteousness” of the kingdom consists of balancing righteous vindication against righteous judgment, is central to vv.6-10. Paul’s concern is not with the relative timing of the relief and the vengeance, but with reminding his readers of the righteous balance required by the character of the kingdom, with the aim of convincing them that, since the “balance” at time of writing was the reverse of righteous, this cannot be the day of the Lord.

Would it, then, be *justice* for them to be suffering the judgments of the day of the Lord and their persecutors to be enjoying favour? That would be the nonsensical implication of the day of the Lord having already started whilst they were still suffering persecution. Should not rather the believers who were currently suffering persecution for the kingdom (including Paul as well), be counted worthy of that kingdom and of its reward at the revelation of the Lord Jesus with His mighty angels, it being a righteous thing for God to recompense affliction to their persecutors, and relief to them, together with Paul?

This last sentence is, I think, a reasonable paraphrase of the meaning of verses 5b-7. The word translated “rest” (v.7, RV) or “relief” (ESV, NIV, NRSV) is *anesis*, and balances the word for affliction (*thlipsis*) by both words having the same final syllable “-sis.” Paul chose *anesis* to make the point that their kingdom experience will be the reflex of their current *thlipsis*, not to indicate that their blessing will start then. He focuses not on when their relief will begin, but on what will be “due” to them in the epoch in which they falsely imagine themselves now to be. And it is not misleading for Paul to follow the words “relief with us” by the words “at the revelation of the Lord Jesus,” because reward is associated with the righteous government of the kingdom, and their *anesis* then will be their public reward for their *thlipsis* now.²

With the phrase, “at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven,” Paul’s mind is also moving on to another point that demolishes their strange idea of already being on the wrong side of the Day of the Lord. The coming of that Day, far from being imperceptible (as must be the case if it had already started), will be totally unmissable. Paul uses the vivid language of vv.7b- 10 to emphasise its “unmissability.” He cites no special revelation as his authority for this description; his authority seems to be the Lord’s own words (e.g. Matthew 24:30-31), together with such Scriptures as Zechariah 14:3-5. It will be a *revelation* (“unveiling”), with angels and flaming fire, and a day when the saints are so displayed that Christ will be admired and glorified in them in the sight of the whole world (vv. 8,10). So it certainly couldn’t have started yet.

If we read 1:10 in the light of 1 Thess. 3:13 & 4:14 it is plain that “When he comes to be glorified in his saints” describes the saints as coming *with* the conquering Saviour. This phrase should be compared with Romans 8:17, which says (lit.) that we shall be “co-glorified” [with Him]. “When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). Wonderful day! Paul is contrasting an imaginary, already-present “day of the Lord,” with the real and still-future day of the Lord; an imaginary “unfair” day with the real and “righteous” Day, an imaginary cryptic and elusive day with the real, and manifest, unmistakable and glorious Day, an imaginary false day in

² The use of the word “relief” may be illustrated through an everyday example. “I felt entitled to expect relief from my toothache at my appointment with the emergency dentist. Instead he refused to pre-empt what my ordinary dentist would do, and I was left with the pain.” The correctness of this statement is not voided by the fact that for the hour before my appointment (on New Year’s Day, 2012) I had no toothache, due to having applied a frozen compress to my cheek on the advice of NHS Direct. Whether or not I felt the toothache as I entered the surgery, I believed I could expect relief from it through my visit. And just as the “compress” remedy needed to be “firmed up” by dental treatment, so the rapture is presented in Thessalonians as a preliminary to the Appearing (see 1 Thess. 4:14-17).

No cross, no crown.

which the saints are on earth with the actual Day when they come with Him in glory. So one thing is sure: the Thessalonians were not now in it.

And Paul adds the phrase, “because our testimony unto you was believed” (v.10) as a further reassurance to the Thessalonians that they too will belong to that company in whom Christ will be glorified, because they believed the gospel. Here Paul speaks of salvation in its basic sense, which is not a matter of reward for faithfulness. Paul’s Letters give clues that he preached an identical gospel in every place, founded on justification by faith. Their appearing in glory on that day is guaranteed by the faith that justifies through the death of the Lord Jesus (see Romans 3:21-26, that most central of NT passages), even if it will *also* vindicate them, the persecuted. However in verses 11-12 Paul goes on to pray that God will empower them so that the name of our Lord Jesus is glorified in them *now*, as He will be glorified in them in that day also. God has chosen them for salvation (2:13), but “in sanctification of the Spirit” (RV) as well as “in belief of the truth.” Their assurance of salvation does not obliterate their responsibility in every department of life to act now as befits that salvation.

This must have been a deeply reassuring chapter for the Thessalonians to read. And for us too. But it contains the solemn message: no cross, no crown. This was not an issue for the Thessalonians: they had “taken up their cross” for Christ in abundance. But ourselves? The New Testament is quite clear on this. Our Christianity is shown to be real by our taking our place now alongside a *rejected Christ*. There are many ways of slinking out of this imperative in today’s world, as in every past form of the world. There are many “Christianities” today that try to live as though Christ were accepted in this world. (They can only imagine this by not confessing His Name.) But the Lord Himself made clear the impossibility of this idea (John 15:18-25). 2 Thessalonians 1 is a reality check on the genuineness of our faith in Christ. But do not lose heart! If you are only too well aware of how you have failed in this (as the writer is), recollect the Lord’s unflinching prayer for Peter, and restoration of His servant (Luke 22:31-32, 61; John 21:15-17).

As already said, Paul’s point in this chapter is not the chronology of the Lord’s coming, but the question whether there is any credibility to the idea of the day of the Lord being already present. Nevertheless it does carry a chronological implication. Paul does not warn them in this chapter to be prepared for an even worse

This passage offers no support for the idea that the church will have to go through the great tribulation

tribulation to come. This passage offers no support for the post-tribulationist idea that the church will have to go through the great tribulation of Matthew 24:21 and Revelation 7:14.³

But it has another implication. The chapter makes it unlikely that Paul had held out avoidance of suffering to *the Thessalonians* as an advantage of the rapture of the saints! Those who maintain that the rapture will precede the great tribulation have sometimes done this. But, though none of us in ourselves relishes tribulation, we are told to “glory in tribulations also,” and to “count it all joy... when [we] meet trials of various kinds” (Romans 5:3, KJV; James 1:2, ESV); and Paul told the Philippians that it was a privilege to have been “granted on behalf of Christ, not only believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29, NKJV); and the apostles in Jerusalem rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name (Acts 5:41). Paul told his early converts in Pisidia that “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). It is regrettable that avoidance of suffering has been held out as an advantage of the fact that the Lord may come at any time; and it has given the opponents of this doctrine a handle for condemning it.

“Glory in tribulations also”

³ This article assumes the “futurist” interpretation of these passages as indicated by Revelation 1:19, on which see Donald Davison’s article, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” in the April issue of this magazine, p. 41.

Cheering Words Calendar 2014

The 2014 calendar is now available from STP, with two pictures (one on either side of the calendar back):

Porthleven, Cornwall



Lilies at Cobble Hey Farm

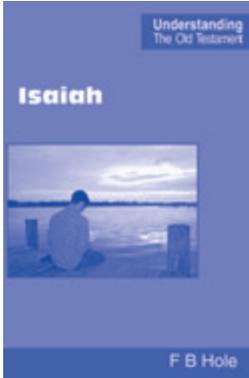


Individual calendars are priced at **£6.00** plus postage. Postage and packing for a single calendar to one address costs **£2.50** to the UK, **£5.45** to Europe and **£6.00** to the rest of the world (by surface mail).

For prices and postage costs for larger quantities, please contact STP at the address inside the front cover, or refer to our web site:

<http://www.scripture-truth.org.uk>

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



New from STP: Isaiah by F B Hole

Paperback; 192 pages

STP price: **£6.50** plus postage & packing

We are pleased to announce the publication, for the first time in book form, of the valuable series of Bible Study articles on the whole of the book of Isaiah which appeared in *Scripture Truth* from 1956 to 1958. Mr Hole examines Isaiah's prophecies concerning Jesus Christ and God's past and future plans for Israel, with words of encouragement and challenge for Christians today.

The above items are available from STP at our address inside the front cover

A Goodly Cell

Why should I quit my prison cell?
Nay, good my Lord;
Here shall I stay thus wrapped well
Within Thy Word.
Confined thus remain I free
To praise Thy Name,
To hear Thy quiet voice, and see
My Hero's fame.

Thus may all other longings cease,
Except for Thee.
Prayer and all goodly joys increase,
Transforming me.
Let silly worlds without confound,
Fight, fret and flit:
'Tis Truth and peace within are found
In Holy Writ.

C.J.