

# Scripture Truth



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How far is enough?  
Enlarged by pressure

The sacrifice of Isaac  
Liberty and head-covering  
God's dealings with His people

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

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

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**SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications**

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Tel: 01270 252274

## Liberty and head-covering

“Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). This text is often cited to encourage disregard of some New-Testament precept or other, e.g., women’s head-covering when praying and prophesying (1 Corinthians 11:5).

Those who so deploy Galatians 5:1 overlook one of the primary principles of interpreting Scripture, namely, attention to context. “Bondage” in that verse is amply defined in the preceding verses (4:3, 9, 24-25, 31). It is primarily subjection to the Law of Moses, though secondarily also subjection to “the elements of the world”. “Liberty”, on the other hand, is the status of the son approaching manhood and no longer needing a “tutor” to remind him to watch his “Ps and Qs”, but now innately able to do the things that please his father (cp. 3:24-25; 4:3-6).

That is how the Christian, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, should be. But this liberty surely does not extend to disregarding the plain words of our Father. The issue is so explosive in today’s society that any text that seems to help us to “get round” 1 Corinthians 11:5 (and 14:34) has a very understandable attraction. But the danger of so misusing Galatians 5:1 is that this brings Christians into bondage to the “elements of this world” (Galatians 4:3) – i.e., of *our* world.

Paul’s Corinth was a Roman colony, founded in 44 BC, and it would be dominated by Roman culture. “Respectable Roman women” probably wore a sort of hood in public. What Greek women did is not clear, and whether christian Roman women thought head-coverings needful during meetings held in someone’s atrium, let alone praying at home, is unclear. However there is much evidence that Roman *men* covered their heads when at prayer or offering a sacrifice. A famous statue of Augustus exemplifies this, as do numerous friezes and archaeological finds. Therefore Paul was certainly requiring Crispus, Gaius, and probably Tertius, Lucius, Erastus, and Quartus to offend Roman cultural norms when, e.g., giving thanks for the bread and the cup.

T. BALDERSTON

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:14; Romans 16:21-23. These are all male Roman names, and the list assumes that the Letter to the Romans was written in Corinth.

# Genesis 22

## The sacrifice of Isaac

F.B. Hole

*Continuing a series that started in July 2017.*

Two amazing episodes of *faith* stand out in the life of Abraham. The first was when the promise of a son to inherit the promises was confirmed to him, and, against all natural hopes, he “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3, KJV; cp. Genesis 15:6). In the second he was “justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar” (James 2:21). To this second great event we come in Genesis 22.

“After these things,” we read in verse 1, God put Abraham to the test; and this is always His way. Peter speaks of “the trial of your faith,” and declares that it is “much more precious than [of] gold that perisheth” (1 Peter 1:7). In the earlier episode of faith Abraham’s faith laid hold of God as One who was able to raise the dead (cp. Romans 4:17). Under this test he was now to demonstrate that his faith was indeed in such a God. In a way that would be apparent to any thoughtful observer, he showed his faith by his works.

If considered as a “type”, the chapter has remarkable significance. Here we get father and son both going up together to the sacrifice. In figure, the son is sacrificed and raised from the dead. We have already seen the death of Christ typified in the book of Genesis (i) as atonement – in covering the guilty sinners with coats of skins (3:21); (ii) as the basis of approach to God – in Abel’s sacrifice (4:4); and (iii) as the ground of acceptance – in Noah’s burnt offering (8:20-21).

Now we find a fourth and fuller type in the offering up of the son; and this brings in not only death, but resurrection also. Consequently we find in this story details of very striking significance.

In Genesis 22:2 Isaac is described as Abraham’s “only” son – rendered, indeed, in Hebrews 11:17 as “his only begotten son”. This makes it abundantly clear that Isaac was a type of our Lord; and, further, it sheds light on the meaning of

*In a way that would be apparent to any thoughtful observer, Abraham showed his faith by his works*

*“Whom thou lovest.”  
This is the first time  
that love is mentioned in the Bible*

the words “only begotten” as applied to Him. Ishmael indeed sprang from Abraham but, being after the flesh, he did not count in the Divine reckoning, and so Isaac was unique. So our Lord Jesus Christ was Son of God in a perfectly unique sense.

In Genesis 22:2 God also added the words, “whom thou lovest.” This is the first time that love is mentioned in the Bible; and remarkably so, seeing it prefigures the love in the Godhead of the Father for the Son. Not until we reach the New Testament, and such statements as, “Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24), do we get that love fully revealed. Now that it is revealed, we can better understand the great statement that “God is love.” How fitting that the first mention of love, here in Genesis 22:2, should be typical of that supreme love, which is the fountain from which flows all true love of which we have any knowledge!

The command of God was that this “only son” of Abraham’s love should be offered by him as a sacrifice upon a mountain chosen by God, in the land of Moriah. He was to deliver to death the son in whom all the promises that God had made to him were vested (e.g., Genesis 15:18; 17:7, etc.). This was indeed a tremendous test of faith, as is made so plain in Hebrews 11:17-19, a passage which also explains why Abraham did not fail under it, namely, because he believed that God was able and prepared to raise Isaac from the dead.

The spot chosen for the sacrifice was the place where, centuries after, the temple was built and where Jewish sacrifices were made at the altar of burnt offering (2 Chronicles 3:1). Though Abraham cannot have known it, the circumstances were divinely arranged to complete the typical picture. What we do see in Abraham is the energy with which he responded, rising up early in the morning; as well as the preparation he made to act in obedience: He departed with son, servants, and wood for sacrifice (Genesis 22:3).

*How fitting that the first mention of love,  
should be typical of that supreme love,  
from which flows all true love!*

*The faith of Abraham embraced resurrection.  
He looked forward to the lad, as well as himself,  
coming again to the servants*

On the third day Abraham saw the chosen spot (v.4). This was significant, for in after days he would look back to it not so much as the place of sacrifice as the place where in figure he received Isaac from the dead: therefore as the place of resurrection. The proof that the faith of Abraham embraced resurrection is borne witness to by the closing words of verse 5. In this verse Abraham contemplated the sacrifice of Isaac as “worship,” and looked forward to the lad, as well as himself, coming again to the servants at the foot of the mountain.

Abraham’s confidence as to this “coming again” is the more striking as he himself carried both a knife and the fire (see verse 6); and the wood was carried by Isaac. We may see in this a foreshadowing of what is recorded in John’s Gospel, “He, bearing His cross, went forth unto a place... called . . . Golgotha” (John 19:17).

The sacrifice commanded was to be a burnt offering; hence to Isaac’s eyes the fire and the wood were perfectly natural. The only question raised in his mind was, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (v.7) Abraham’s answer, though he may not have known it, was prophetic of something far beyond his own days: “God will provide [for] Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” No lamb that ever died on any altar, patriarchal or Jewish, was other than provisional, and in view of that which was to come. The question, “Where is THE lamb?” was unanswered until John the Baptist was able to declare, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Abraham, however, was fully persuaded that God would provide the lamb for this occasion; and in that faith father and son went “both of them together” (Genesis 22:6).

Verses 9 and 10 relate how full was the measure of Abraham’s obedience. Nothing was lacking up to the point where the death-stroke would have taken place. At the last possible moment the Angel of the Lord intervened.

*“God will provide [for] Himself  
a lamb for a burnt offering.”*

*Though not stated in the narrative,  
we must not fail to notice the submission of Isaac.  
Isaac's experience had to typify  
that which our Lord passed through.*

Abraham's obedience had been tested to the full, and had stood the test: he had not withheld his only son (v.16). This not only proved beyond question that he believed in God as the God of resurrection, but also furnished a foreshadowing of the infinitely greater moment when God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

Though not stated in the narrative, we must not fail to notice the submission of Isaac. No word of remonstrance on his part is mentioned. He typifies the One of whom the prophet testified, "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Isaac's experience had to typify that which our Lord passed through in infinitely greater measure in the garden of Gethsemane.

The voice from heaven arrested the death stroke that was to have fallen on Isaac, and now Abraham's eyes were directed to God's immediate provision; not a lamb merely, but a ram (Genesis 22:11-13). If we desired to have the strongest and most vigorous specimen from among the sheep, we should have to select a ram. This one, moreover, was caught in the thicket by its horns, that were symbolic of its strength; and it was offered as a burnt offering "in the stead of his son" (v.13). Though the actual words, "substitute," or "substitution," do not occur in our English Bible, here we have exactly what these words mean. A substitute is one who stands in the stead of another.

So in this incident, which presents to us the fourth "type" of the death of our Saviour, we have before us salvation by a substitutionary sacrifice. And, further, since the ram was detained by its *horns* to be the sacrifice, i.e., by the strongest part of its frame, we may see how our blessed Lord was held to His sacrificial work by the strength of His love. No nail that ever was forged could have detained him on the cross. What held Him there was love to the Father, and love to us (see John 14:31; 13:1).

Abraham recognized the wonderful way in which God had provided the lamb for the burnt offering, and signaled it by naming the place "Jehovah-jireh," meaning, "The Lord will provide." And out of that sprang a saying which was

still current when, some four centuries later, Moses wrote these things: “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,” or “shall be provided” (Genesis 22:14). That was the language of *faith*, for another four centuries or so after Moses, there stood on Moriah the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite (1 Chronicles 21:15); and some years after that Solomon’s temple was built there. So it became the place for Jewish sacrifices. That to which all these sacrifices pointed took place, however, “outside the gate,” for the Lord Jesus was the rejected One (Hebrews 13:12).

The first call out of heaven, in Genesis 22:11-12, had acknowledged the completeness of Abraham’s obedience: the second call pronounced great blessing, confirmed by an oath (vv.15ff). This is the occasion referred to in Hebrews 6:13ff, when God, “because He could swear by no greater, swore by Himself.” The extent of the blessing might well have staggered Abraham. His seed was to be multiplied (i) “as the stars of the heaven;” (ii) “as the sand which is upon the sea shore;” it was (iii) to “possess the gate of his enemies;” and in it (iv) would “all the nations of the earth be blessed.” It is not surprising, therefore, that God reinforced His pure word by His oath, that there might be “two immutable things” on which to rest.

The ancients knew no more stars than those visible to the naked eye. Only in our day has it been discovered that they are literally as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea shore. We think we may see, in promise (i) above, Abraham’s spiritual seed, whose destiny is heaven (see Galatians 3:7); in promises (ii) and (iii) his earthly seed who, born again and redeemed, will enjoy millennial blessing and victory; and in promise (iv) a prediction to be fulfilled in Christ, who is *the* Seed – in the singular, as Galatians 3:16, 19 points out – the One in whom all nations shall be blessed. All this blessing is guaranteed by the mighty oath of God.

The closing verses of our chapter give us a little further genealogy, and that evidently for the purpose of introducing Rebekah, of whom we are to hear in chapter 24 as the bride of Isaac – who is now, in type, the risen Seed. Before we reach that point, however, we have to see Sarah disappear from the picture, as we shall read in chapter 23.

*From Scripture Truth, 36 (1948-50), pp.187-190, updated for clarity.*

*Only in our day has it been discovered  
that the stars are literally as numerous  
as the grains of sand on the sea shore*

# Enlarged by pressure

## The lesson of 2 Corinthians

David Ross

*Under pressure? Losing heart? A wonderful exposition of God's dealings with us for blessing, focussing on Paul's account of himself in 2 Corinthians. Originally a spoken address, probably between the wars, this article repays re-reading.*

“In pressure Thou hast enlarged me” (Psalm 4:1, Darby Tr.). What do we think that pressure in life does to us? Contracts us, limits us, impoverishes us? Not if we are in the company of Christ! If we are set here for His glory, we shall find that the pressure, the *trials*, the bereavements, the sorrows, the disasters, the disappointments that come upon us will open up for us a large place. We shall not be impoverished, but we shall be made rich and filled with the fulness of God.

Let us consider Paul, this wonderful man of God, in order that we might see Christ magnified in him. It is not with the desire of magnifying Paul that I speak of him, but it is in order that we might see fulfilled his desire, that in his body Christ might be magnified whether by life or by death (Philippians 1:20). We shall do this particularly with reference to 2 Corinthians, a letter which he wrote probably from the city of Ephesus, or shortly after he had left it. Let us consider the pressure that was at that time upon his spirit. Read the eleventh chapter of this epistle – including “the care of all the churches” (v.28) – enough to bow anyone down as you think of the condition of those churches.

To the east of him, in Galatia, the brethren were in danger of leaving the true Christian position and being entangled with the yoke of bondage, a Judaistic adulteration of Christianity. And from across the Aegean Sea news had reached him of the opposite danger, not of legalism but of laxity, where the Greeks of Corinth were translating Christian liberty into licentiousness; and he would wonder whether all his work was to be in vain – both in Galatia, and during those eighteen months in Corinth. Truly Paul was pressed in spirit. And then in Ephesus, a stronghold of demonism, he had been face to face with the powers of darkness and of hell (1 Corinthians 15:32).

At the beginning of 2 Corinthians he says, “I want you to know, brethren, that we were pressed beyond measure”, i.e., “above strength” (1:8); and it is the word “beyond measure” to which I want to draw attention. I happened to look

<sup>1</sup> Much more probably the latter, if we consider, e.g., 2 Corinthians 2:12,13; 7:5. [Ed.]

*How was he “enlarged”?  
He learned not to trust in himself.*

up Mr Wigram’s *Greek Concordance* for a certain word beginning with *hyper*, which [when used as a prefix] means “over-...”. And I found that the great majority of the words that begin with that prefix came from the writings of the apostle Paul. The writings of the period when this epistle was written have this word repeatedly. It tells of a man in the battle of life, a man pressed above measure; and yet in pressure we find that the Lord has enlarged him, and the blessing runs over. The pressure was excessive, above human strength to bear, so that he had the sentence of death in himself (2 Corinthians 1:9). And what did he learn? Oh, what an enlargement he got in that pressure!

How was he “enlarged”? He learned not to trust in himself. What a deliverance that is, and that is why God allows the pressure to come upon us; that is why He allows the sorrow to bow us down; that is why He allows us to be bitterly disappointed – that we may learn deliverance from SELF. In the seventh of Romans we read about SELF, when in that terrible experience Paul found out that within him was something that was exceedingly sinful – above measure, surpassingly sinful (Romans 7:13-14); so sinful that he felt himself chained to a corpse, and cried, “Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24) Oh, the pressure! To find himself bound up with that foul, corrupt self of his! But in the pressure God enlarged him and set him free; and the chapter that takes you to the depth of misery ends with a keynote of victory, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Similarly at Ephesus: the pressure had led to the enlargement, and this man was delivered from himself, that he should not trust in himself, but that he should trust in the God that could raise from the dead – the living God (2 Corinthians 1:9).

As you read through 2 Corinthians, you find alternating the pressure and the enlargement, the fainting and the wonderful strength, the impoverishment and the enriching with the fulness of God. Gospel preachers! when you preach the

*God allows the pressure to come upon us  
that we may learn deliverance from self.*

*There has been revealed a glory that surpasseth.  
And you and I are led into that glory!*

gospel, do you ever feel (as the apostle felt in the second chapter), “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2:16)? Paul’s sufficiency was of God. Then he goes on to think of the glory (chapter 3), and here you have the word “sufficiency” set in contrast to the “ministry of death” that came on mount Sinai (vv.6f). There there had been such a revelation of the glory of God that the face of Moses had shone with the reflex of it, and the children of Israel had been unable to bear looking upon such a glory (see Exodus 34:29ff). And what does Paul say? That there has been revealed a glory that excelleth, that surpasseth, that is above measure, beyond all the glory of Sinai, and has utterly eclipsed it. And you and I are led into that glory! (2 Corinthians 3:9-11) No longer do we need to veil our faces in fear and darkness, but we all, with open face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed (3:18).

Feeling our insufficiency for the ministry of the Lord in any sense of the word, we turn from ourselves to Him, and we realise the greatness of the glory in the face of Jesus; and there is this wonderful enlarging from the mean, small, contracted creatures that we are. We are changed into His image by having our eyes fixed upon Him, the One who fills the heart of God. No longer fearing to look upon that glory, the supreme glory of God, we gaze upon it, for it shines in the face of the One who died for us. And we are not conscious of the shining, just as Moses “wist not that his face shone” (see Exodus 34:29, KJV). If we get occupied with our shining, we are self-occupied, and that will cause the cloud to come upon us. But when the eyes of our hearts, without any cloud, are gazing upon the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is this transfiguration;

*If we get occupied with our shining,  
the cloud will come upon us.  
But when the eyes of our hearts are  
gazing upon the glory of Christ,  
there is the reflection in us of the glory of God*

*Why are we are so little conscious  
of the power of God?  
Perhaps because we are so little conscious  
of the weakness of the earthen vessels*

there is this unconscious result – the reflection in us of the glory of God which is in the face of Jesus.

Chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians tells you about the possibility of “fainting”, i.e., of losing heart. Paul has a terrible burden: the god of this world is against him, blinding the eyes of men (4:4); and he might well faint under the pressure of the bitter opposition. But “in pressure Thou hast enlarged me,” and Paul says that God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus (v.6). As we look into the face of Jesus we are on holy ground; and as we feed on Him, the Bread of God, we find our delight in Him upon whom God feeds.

But now you come to the pressure side (4:7). Where have we the great treasure? In earthen vessels, frail, brittle. Why? That the excellency – the surpassingness – of the power might be of God and not of us. Surpassing pressure and surpassing power! And why is it that we are so little conscious of the surpassing power of God? Perhaps because we are so little conscious of the weakness of the earthen vessels. The apostle protests, in this connexion, against God allowing him to have a thorn in the flesh which seemed to weaken him, and incapacitate and handicap him for the ministry of the Lord. But the Lord says, “My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect “ (12:9) – not in your strength but, in your weakness.

Then Paul begins a series of paradoxes, as we might call them, starting with, “troubled on every side, yet not distressed” (4:8). Do we know anything about that – to know what it is to be right at the centre of the storm cloud? That was where the Lord dwelt. Look at Him on the last night – the night before His crucifixion! All around the storm is raging; the cyclone of the devil’s malignity and man’s hatred was there; but there is that calm spot in which He speaks of

*If we know what it is to company with Christ,  
we may be troubled but not distressed*

*We do need eyesight;  
that is we need to look  
on the things that are eternal*

“My joy” and “My peace”, right in the centre (cp. John 14:27; 15:11). Oh, if we know what it is to company with Christ, we may be troubled on all sides but not distressed; perplexed but not in despair (that might be paraphrased, “at our wits’ end but not out of our wits”); persecuted but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed – all of which might be summed up as pressure on the one hand and enlargement on the other. Human weakness on the one hand only gives the opportunity for the manifestation of the power of God on the other hand.

And then at the end of the chapter there is a beautiful expression, “For which cause we faint not” (2 Corinthians 4:16). (Note that he uses the same word here for “faint / lose heart” as in v.1). Paul, is the pressure not too great for you? Are you not too burdened? But what does he say now? (v.17) “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment” (notice: “momentary and light”, although a little before it had been “beyond measure and above strength”!) “worketh for us a far more exceeding” (here the word for “exceeding” is repeated – remembering your school maths, we might say “exceeding squared”!! – or, a surpassing surpassing) “weight of glory”.

Consider Paul in the first chapter, weighed down above measure; and then consider him as he is looking forward to that day when he will be weighed down above measure with the eternal glory of God! We do need *eyesight*; that is, we need to have our eyes turned from the things of time, from the things that are visible and temporal, and we need to look on the things that are eternal – “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8) – and all the eternal system of things that are linked up with Him. And we shall see the surpassing surpassing weight of glory that lies ahead of those who, it may be, in this the vale of tears, in this day of our testing and our trial, are in pressure. Won’t we let the Lord have His way with us, and in the pressure enlarge us?

And what else do we find? What these Corinthians found, for Paul could speak of the exceeding GRACE that was in them.<sup>2</sup> We get the same expression in the second chapter of Ephesians: “That he might show forth the exceeding riches of His grace” (v.7). And that same man, in the eleventh chapter of

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<sup>2</sup> See 8:6f, where it means “willingness to give”. [Ed.]

2 Corinthians, tells you of all the pressure through which he went. If you want to read and know what he calls “light afflictions”, read that eleventh chapter of this epistle, a chapter not sufficiently well-known. When we think of our petty trials, and are weighed down by them, it would be a very good thing for us to get a sense of proportion, by reading what this man of God went through, and what he called “light.” And then we shall see that anything we have been bowed down under is a mere trifle.

This man, that knew pressure beyond measure (2 Corinthians 1:8), was the man that was privileged to have revelations beyond measure: for the “abundance” [of revelation – 12:7] is the same word I have been speaking of – “exceeding and above measure”. He received an abundance of revelation, but along with that abundance of revelation he received a thorn in the flesh. Why? If we get merely the revelations of God, the truth of God, without something to balance it, we become exalted, and if he got revelation above measure, he also got the ballast to keep him steady along with it. What does he call this thorn in the flesh? “A messenger of Satan to buffet me” (12:7), dealing blow upon blow. Perhaps you know what it is to be buffeted. Some of us hardly get our heads above water but we get buffet upon buffet. Abundance of revelation, abundance of buffeting, and with it all abundance of STRENGTH. “My grace is sufficient,” says the Lord, “my strength made perfect in your weakness” (12:9). And so, to balance this exceeding pressure, we read of the “exceeding glory”; the “exceeding power”; the exceeding weight of glory”; the “exceeding grace”; the “exceeding revelation”. And, we can add, that we may know the LOVE (exceeding, surpassing knowledge!) – the love of Christ, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God (Ephesians 3:18f). If the Lord allows us to pass through sorrow, if He allows blow upon blow to fall upon us, sorrow after sorrow to come upon us – it is in order that we might be *enlarged*. What is the hand that sends? It is the hand of infinite love, and the love of Christ is the love that surpasseth knowledge; and yet we can come to know it and be filled with all the fulness of God (Ephesians 3:19).

Shall we rebel against God’s way with us? Shall we spurn the hand that brings discipline with it? Or shall we not put ourselves into His hands, and – if He allows us – to be weighed down? And, remember, with that weight, with that pressure, that trial, come the enlargement, the enrichment, the enlightenment, and the filling – with the love of Christ surpassing knowledge – into all the fulness of God.

*From Scripture Truth, 38 (1953-55), pp. 49-53. Edited for clarity. David Ross (c.1883-?) was a schoolteacher and servant of the Lord associated with the Old Schoolhouse, Edinburgh.*

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## After Psalm 84

Lord of the worlds above,  
how pleasant and how fair,  
to those who know Your love,  
Your habitations are!  
Where two or three  
in Your dear name  
together come  
there will You be.

The swallow makes her nest  
beside Your altars, Lord;  
and we should seek our rest  
where Your Name is adored.  
Our hearts rejoice,  
in word and prayer  
of brothers there  
to hear Your voice!

And though our feet will ache  
while troubled vales we tread,  
yet we a wellspring make  
by worshipping our God:  
to hymn Your fame  
in godly fear  
will our souls cheer,  
like welcome rain.

To spend one sacred hour  
where Christ is magnified  
is far superior  
to thousand days beside.  
His praise to tell,  
I'd rather ask  
for doorman's task  
– than elsewhere dwell!

The Lord is Sun and Shield  
to those who seek His face;  
and them, redeemed and sealed,  
He'll rapture by His grace.  
My heart will sing  
to find that there,  
in place so fair,  
Christ's *everything!*

*Based on Isaac Watts, 1674-1748*

# God's dealings with His people

G.V. Wigram

*Another specimen of lively, but sobering, experimental ministry, this time drawing lessons from the lives of the patriarchs. Psalm 107 seems to have been read as a preface to this address, and its relevance to the talk will be obvious.*

Were I to ask, "In what consists joy in the Holy Ghost? What is it?", you would probably say that the special characteristic of our joy is that it is based on *faith*; the mercy of God acting in His Son, Jesus Christ, and bearing on each heart with divine power. Perceiving this basis, we see that our joy is not in what is in *self*, but in what is in *God*. I would add, not only so, but there is a dispensational peculiarity in the joy which we ought to have. Resulting from faith, the joy flows out from the Resurrection Man borne up and seated at the right-hand of God. Not only are we saved by grace, but – in the special way of these dispensational privileges – in the Son having come forth from the Father's presence, in order to make us people of heaven and not of earth.

But further, as to our joy, a great deal depends upon our walk. *All* the children of the Father are blessed, but those who are not living in such a way as to be walking as before Him, lose as to joying in God. Three examples will illustrate what I mean: Lot, Abraham, Jacob.

Lot's *position* was false, whereas the position of Abraham was true. Lot was a righteous man; his righteous soul was vexed from day to day in Sodom (2 Peter 2:8<sup>2</sup>). Why did he experience so much trouble regarding his circumstances, losing his property, children, liberty – everything swept away from him? Why, in the very place he had chosen to live in and where he looked for ease, did he find those to vex and trouble him? *Because he was in a false position from the very beginning.*

He had had a call from God, and started with Abraham on the ground of that (Genesis 12:4). He went out, but all his after-course had *self* for its centre. He did not keep before him what *God* had said, namely, "...the land that I will show thee" (v.1, KJV). Thus his was not the walk of faith. Though he had *heard* the call, he did not *hold* the call; it did not characterize him all along: hence his fallen position. Still, God's mercy is shown to Lot in it: he proves how the vessel

<sup>1</sup> Wigram's original had four "types", including Isaac, but as his remarks treat Isaac solely as a "type" of Christ, and not as an example of the experimental ways of God, I omit them. [Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> Peter's characterisation of Lot as "righteous" doubtless rests on Genesis 18:23ff. [Ed.]

*Lot had had a call from God, but all his after-course had self for its centre. Though he had heard the call, he did not hold the call.*

may be thoroughly wrecked down here as to testimony, and its works all burnt up (cp. 19:28f); and yet, at the last, though suffering loss, he is saved so as by fire (cp. 1 Corinthians 3:15).

This wonderfully explains the condition of [some] Christians in the present day. I believe there is often a mistake in questioning whether a person is the Lord's or not, just because they do not come up to the standard of our own minds. But God did not question whether Lot was a "righteous man." We want first largeness of heart to judge as God judges, and then grace to see where the failure is. It is said, "Oh! they don't have light." No; that is not it. I believe that the present state of [what is characteristically] Christendom originates in this, that people *have not learnt to walk with God*. Are you serving the living and true God in whom is your strength, and from whom your joy springs? If not, the truth will not, cannot, have its power.

The cases of Abraham and Jacob are very different to Lot's, and they end in brightness. Abraham's is a course of steady faith all through. In him God showed out how a saint could walk with Him, as a son with his father. There is a remarkable repose about it; whenever trials came he was always outside of them. He walked in the light; and as to the details of the end of his life, they are characterized by a happy, peaceful passing on. He sees Isaac happily settled (Genesis 24), and then comfortably withdraws from the scene. Abraham had once belonged to a set of idolaters. God lets a stream of heavenly light into his soul. He embraces the promises, and, becoming a pilgrim and a stranger, he sets out for the city of God; but he does not get it — there is the *clue*<sup>3</sup> — he is taken away from the scene, and he goes on spinning the thread in the glory.

In Jacob we find family dealings characterized by God's mercy to him, in spite of all his trickery and artful ways. There is contention *in the flesh* for the things God had promised *to faith*. But God makes good all blessing connected with Christ, in spite of all. With Christians now, too, God has to break down the flesh; and then what can they do? Nothing, but cry to God. What marked [unbelieving] Esau is what so often marks [even] believers now: *flesh*, which only cares for the gifts of God so far as they minister to the flesh [cp. 27:38ff;

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this enigmatic statement refers to Hebrews 11:9,13,16. [Ed.]

33:9]. Or sometimes, like Jacob, believers value God's gifts, but seek to appropriate them in their own way. In due time we see that God leaves Esau, the empty professor, and takes up the younger brother, Jacob, the one on whom He had set His eye, and brings him back to the father's house. We see the sovereignty of God's love in all that.

In the case of Jacob we see the two natures — the world acting on his heart (i.e., the flesh in him), and that which in Jacob corresponds to the Spirit indwelling us (not, however, in the same way in which we have Him since the revelation of Christ). The conflict between the two natures was the result of God's supplanting of the first Adam in him.

In Jacob there is the old nature at work continually. God had met with him [at Bethel – see 28:13 – and repeated the promises to him]; but still he went on as before. When on his way back to the land, he ought to have had full rest of soul; but we find him still arranging all in his mind [see 32:6ff] as if he had no God of resurrection as *his* God. Why thus? Because he was acting from the old nature; and [similarly] it is that there must necessarily be a pulling down from us, that would not be necessary if we were walking in the Spirit. If God had permitted Jacob to go on, it would have been putting His sanction on those ways; but Jacob has to find that, after all, what was in his own heart was not enough, even for himself. God pulls him to pieces, and makes him to know that with all his arrangements he cannot even tranquilize his own poor, timid heart. When he really got close to God (32:24ff), it was quite another thing. Then he learnt what *he* was; previously it was all his family circumstances, etc., that occupied him, just as it constantly is with ourselves when we are out of God's presence, and planning, scheming, etc. God “lets us down into ourselves”, so to speak, just to show us what we are; and when we get to our wits' end, what do we find there? Nicely ordered plans? No; we have found utter weakness; but we have found *God* there. There is the “brook”, and we do not know how to get over it. But we have found *God* meeting us there, and carrying us over to the other side; and we are like Jacob limping upon his thigh. If you have learnt the gospel, you know God is now measuring *Christ* in you, not man after the flesh. Yet still the old nature is always showing itself, especially if there is any energy of character; and God cannot give the blessing till He has broken down the

*God “lets us down into ourselves”, so to speak, just to show us what we are; when we get to our wits' end, we find utter weakness; but we have found God there.*

*The flesh is always inclined to sit down in the wrong place. God was going to destroy that place, and Lot had to be roused out of it.*

flesh, and made you go crippled all your days. One cannot carry one's vessel full of grace, unless one has been content to be accounted by one's neighbours the chief of sinners.

When I look upon young Christians I feel for them exceedingly. I know that they *have to* learn this lesson as to the flesh, but I do not know *how* God will teach it to them. Young Christians have not learnt experimentally that the flesh is a bad thing. They have not been in prominent places, set upon a pinnacle, and the flesh, they may argue, has not come out in them as in Peter, in David, and others. If wise, they may learn what they are in the presence of God from the testimony of the Word of God, from looking into the wounds of Jesus. This is learning it *inside* the sanctuary, otherwise you must learn it *outside*. As for aged saints, and those who are established, I know that I find it uncommon hard, when perhaps I have been in communion with God, to have to say, Well! must I then go on still with this horrid heart of mine? Yes; and, as one goes on, the worse one finds the flesh to be. Jacob had to learn what limping flesh was all his days, even when he went before the king (cp. Genesis 47:7). You must learn more and more of the evil of your flesh, as you learn more and more your portion in Christ.

In connection with these three characters we learn that everyone has his especial time of trouble. *Lot* had his first wrench out of the world in being sent out from his country with Abraham; but after that he found that he had got under the governmental dealings of God — of Him who would not allow worldly *Lot* to go on quietly, and sit down to rest wherever he chose. The flesh is always inclined to sit down in the wrong place. God was going to destroy that place, and *Lot* had to be roused out of it.

*Abraham* had two troubles — his wrench out of his country (and it is not pleasant to leave everything); and then, through going down into Egypt, he had one experience of the same kind that *Lot* *always* had — he sold his wife, and lost his honour. Both these troubles of Abraham were at the beginning of his course,<sup>4</sup> both the wrench from the world, and the bitter experience he had as

<sup>4</sup> Though actually he had to learn it twice: see Genesis 12:10ff & 20:2ff. What was once our besetting moral problem will tend always to be it. [Ed.]

*There may be many ships leaving the port,  
and perhaps only one  
reaches the harbour without damage.*

to the flesh. With Jacob they came at the end of his course.<sup>5</sup> In all this the moral sovereignty of God in His making the vessels is seen.

There may be many ships leaving the port, and perhaps only one out of the many reaches the harbour without damage. One comes in at one time, another after a storm which may overtake it at any part of the voyage. It seems as if a soul must be left to itself, “*alone*” with God, to show just what it is, and to be weaned from everything but God. God there communicates to the soul from Himself what the soul would not get elsewhere; and all this is connected with God’s forming a vessel for Himself. God not only puts you in Christ, and purges you that you may bear more fruit, but He also has to form your character. A parent might witness in his children improvement in certain aspects that had been unpleasant, and yet see that the spring of the character was untouched. But another time he may be able to get at the root of those things which grieve him. This is what God does; He at last met Jacob in himself, then the springs are touched, the flesh is crippled. I may be at the close of my pilgrimage, and I may have been brought through the process, and still God may have to retouch the vessel in some points.

There is great joy in seeing that, *little* as we are, we have a connection with all His plans in His eternal counsels from the beginning, and with all His glory hereafter. There is not a single tiny thing which touches any one of us, which is not thus connected with Him. There is rest of heart in seeing Him thus above, below, around: God is never taken by surprise, never taken aback, never startled. He counter-works. He brings out blessing according to His own counsels, notwithstanding all the horrible way in which Satan works things around us.

*“God’s ways with His people”, Memorials of the Ministry of G.V. Wigram (London, 2 vols., 1880, vol.1, pp. 89-96). Originally delivered c. 1854. Abridged and edited for clarity. I am indebted to STEM Publishing for permission to work from their digitised copy.*

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<sup>5</sup> Presumably alluding to the loss of Joseph, whom Jacob believed to have been killed (Genesis 37:34). [Ed.]

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# How far is far enough?

Peter Ollerhead

One of my earliest memories is of being taken by my father to a local river in a “secret” valley, about eight miles from Crewe. We had no car, so I was transported on a cushion tied to the crossbar of his bicycle. I also ought to mention that this was in 1942, when I was five years old. There were other places on the way where we could have stopped, yet I am glad now that he determined to pedal as far as was necessary for me, even at a young age, to see such a scene. Over the years he took others to this little-known beauty spot, so that they too could appreciate its tranquil calm and beauty.

In this article I wish to highlight three occasions when Christians went “as far” as they were led.

The first of my Scriptures is Luke 24:50, when the Lord led the disciples out as far as Bethany, where He lifted up His hands and blessed them. There is truth for us beyond Bethany, but let me isolate some of the truth that is exemplified at that village which, as we all know, was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. From John 11:3 & 5 we learn that there was an appreciation of the Lord’s love. To them, however, His love was powerless once death had intervened (v.21). Yes, they were confident that if the Lord Jesus had been there before Lazarus died, then his death could have been prevented. As yet they did not know the love that never fails. For them, as for us, John 3:16 succinctly unfolds the amazing story of the all-conquering love of God. How precious for us to know something of the depth of His love! One of the earliest hymns I learnt as a child in Sunday school was:

“I am so glad that my Father in heaven,  
tells of His love in the Book He has given;  
wonderful things in the Bible I see  
– this the dearest, that Jesus loves me.”<sup>1</sup>

I was so young that I thought the hymn was wrong, for I knew my dad had gone fishing. How thankful I am that my sister continued to take me to Sunday school. Now I have learned that the Father’s love is the source of all. The Lord prayed that the Father’s love might dwell in us (John 17:26). Have we each got a deep sense of the Father’s love?

Something else we can learn at Bethany is that the glory of God was revealed there (John 11:4). That glory was manifested when the Lord exercised His power over death, when He cried, “Lazarus come forth!” Wonder of all

<sup>1</sup> Emily S. Oakey [?] c. 1871.

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How much do we appreciate  
the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?*

wonders – for He had shown wonders to the dead. The dead had risen to praise Him. (See Psalm 88:10)

To behold the glory of the Lord is one of the lessons of Bethany. Peter and John beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration, a sight that they never forgot. The Holy Spirit will lead us to behold, in measure, something of the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father. I would also suggest that this is a revelation in which we all share when we become believers in the Lord Jesus. One of the facets of our conversion experience is belief that the Lord Jesus is risen from among the dead and received up into glory. This appreciation of resurrection life is further embellished by the truth of John 11:25. How much do we appreciate the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?

O Lord, thy glory we behold,  
though not with mortal eyes;  
that glory on the Father's<sup>2</sup> throne,  
no human sight describes.

My third 'Bethany' truth (and there are others) is the identity of the Lord indicated in Martha's confession, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11: 27, KJV). Again, I am convinced that this truth is at the centre of the gospel. To be a Christian it is essential to believe that He is Lord; the eternal Son of God. This is what it means to believe in Jesus. That Jesus is God incarnate, who died that we might live, revealed by the Holy Spirit of God to us poor erring sinners, is the epitome of God's grace. What can be greater than to know the living, eternal, invisible God, while dwelling in mortal flesh in this material world? This is a stupendous truth. Do we also appreciate just what He has done? Paul wrote about this in his well-known lines, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

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<sup>2</sup> J.N. Darby, 1800-1882.

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the Son of God.”  
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One more truth from the home at Bethany is in verse two of John 12, “There they made him a supper, and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.” My point is a simple one, in that the verse indicates the supremacy of the Lord. Notice, “they made Him a supper”, and “[they] sat at the table with Him.” Though it is a simple point, nevertheless it is important, for He is supreme in all things. Does He take this place in our lives?

I am ever grateful to the Lord for His servants who in past years ministered to me and others, imparting something of the preciousness and glory of Christ and of His intrinsic greatness. They unfolded from Scripture impressions of the Father’s love in all its power to combat the evil influences of this present world. I was made aware of the life beyond the grave and the supremacy of Christ. I am ever grateful to those ministering brothers (and praying sisters) who metaphorically led me out as far as to Bethany to reveal its truths.



Moving on, let us quickly glance at Barnabas, who travelled from Jerusalem as far as to Antioch (Acts 11:22). I have no doubt that there were some at Jerusalem that were very disturbed by the news from Antioch, where Greeks were being accepted into the church after confessing the Lord and being baptised. They were concerned that Gentiles becoming Christians, even through the “Door of the Synagogue”, would dilute the moral and religious purity of the ancient religion, unless they were first circumcised (Acts 15:1-5). Some of this type trailed Paul, seeking to disrupt his ministry and decry his apostleship (Galatians 2:4,5). What did Barnabas see when he arrived at Antioch? Gentiles in great numbers being converted – which to him was not a cause of concern: for look how Scripture describes what Barnabas saw,

“Who, when he came, and had *seen the grace of God*, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cling to the Lord” (Act 11:23; italics added).

What a noble man was Barnabas! His eyes did not balk at the problems that Gentiles entering the church would bring, especially in the eyes of some in Jerusalem. He saw instead the grace of God bringing people to trust and believe in the Lord. What do our eyes see when we look at other Christian groups?

*What a noble man was Barnabas!  
His eyes did not balk at the problems  
that Gentiles entering the church would bring.*



Lastly, another Scripture from Acts, this time chapter 28:15, where we read about a group of brethren from Rome travelling thirty or forty miles as far as the Forum of Appius to greet Paul. How far are we willing to travel to have fellowship with our brethren? Sometimes we would rather remain at a distance than disturb our comfort. Perhaps there were those at Rome who considered Paul a trouble-maker and so were reluctant to join the welcoming group. Notice again the result of the advance party's actions: "...whom when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage." Do our actions and attitudes towards our brethren cause them to give thanks to the Lord and gain courage in the Christian pathway through this world? Are we willing to spend time, energy, and money in the ministry of Christ? All the brethren at Rome could have waited until Paul reached them there. Instead they expressed their fellowship by travelling to welcome him. How cheering for Paul, and those brethren with him, to be welcomed by the assembly at the Forum of Appius. We must not forget that the apostle was a prisoner. His reputation to some was suspect. To be actively welcomed by those who came from Rome, and not ostracised, was a sign of happy fellowship. No wonder Paul was encouraged and thankful. There is much to discourage us in today's scene, so I pray that we might all travel as far as we can along the varying paths outlined above.

*How far are we willing to travel  
to have fellowship with our brethren?*



*I pray that we might all travel  
as far as we can along  
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# Heaven on earth?

## Revelation 21

T. Balderston

*Is the heavenly city an earthly bride? Earlier articles on the “terrestrialisation” of the believer’s hope appeared in the April 2015 and April 2020 issues of Scripture Truth.*

The doctrine that Christians will be raised at the first resurrection to spend eternity on earth, and that they will sojourn in heaven only during the period between their death and resurrection, now attracts a large following among evangelicals. Revelation 21:1 – 22:5 is frequently cited in support of their case. It means the opposite. This article will commence with 21:9ff, and deal only briefly with 21:1-8 at the end.

John beheld a city descending out of heaven (v.10), and supporters of the “earthly calling” of the church regard the mention of the city “descending” as implying that it is to be pictured as actually “landing” on the earth.

Of course, John’s vision of a city is not to be taken literally: it is just an elaborate metaphor for (i.e., figurative description of) “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (v.9, NKJV). But his “metaphor” was meant to be visualised. We know this, because John actually *saw* his vision. “Now I saw...” in 21:1 is not just a form of words. We find it confirmed in the fact that what he saw most clearly were its wall, gates, and foundation (21:18-21a). Street, river, and tree apart, most of the “city” itself was something of a blur: it was only the light radiating from it that impressed itself on his mind (21:12-21). This vagueness about the city itself long puzzled me, since the city is surely more important than the walls that enclosed it – until I realised that this corresponds exactly to how someone on earth would see a city slowly descending from heaven above. Foundations and walls would be the parts most clearly seen.

Visualising metaphors is often revealing. True, not everything implied by a metaphor belongs in the metaphor. For example, saying that “the camel is the ship of the desert” does not imply that there is sea in the desert too!

*John actually saw his vision.  
This is exactly how foundations and walls  
would be the parts most clearly seen.*

Nevertheless, visualising a ship crossing the featureless wastes of the sea, alerts us to the perils of crossing a featureless desert. Visualisation helps us realise a hidden depth in this metaphor.

The original listeners to John's book would notice, in Gog and Magog and in the city with walls and twelve gates, close parallels to Ezekiel's prophecy (see chs. 38-39; 40:2; 48:30ff). This would cause them to try to visualise John's visions in Revelation 21 in order to work out the connexions between John and Ezekiel. Suppose they took the further step of visualising what John's vision did *not* show, namely, the "city" actually "landing" on the earth: what conclusions would they draw regarding the implications of John's "city" for Ezekiel's prophecy?

There is one huge difference between Ezekiel's city and John's – the dimensions! John's "city" was to be pictured as 12000 stadia (i.e., between 1170 and 1380 miles) square. Taking the shorter length, if John's city were pictured as centred on the site of Ezekiel's city, its eastern wall would run north-south about 40 miles east of Baghdad (!); its northern wall would run east-west through some of the seven cities of Revelation 1:11; its southern wall through upper Egypt about 30 miles south of Aswan; and its western wall some 500 hundred miles into the present Mediterranean! The first listeners to John's book lived in commercial cities with far-flung connexions (see Acts 16:14). They would understand how far 12000 stadia reached. And, in knowing this, they would realise that if John's "city" were to be pictured as centred on the site of Ezekiel's city, it wouldn't so much *occupy*, as *swamp and ignore* the land of Israel.

If that land had been a mere "sideshow" in Ezekiel's prophecy, then this "problem" in picturing John's city on the site of Ezekiel's might be dismissed as a minor blemish. But in fact Ezekiel carefully describes the apportionment of the restored land among the twelve tribes; and the restored land and new city are inseparable (ch.48). Restoration in covenant grace to the same land as

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had been forfeited is a major theme in his book (6:2ff; 7:2, 23ff with 36:1ff; 11:16-17; 20:40; also 37:12, 25ff; 39:25ff). Indeed his entire prophecy could be regarded as a commentary on Deuteronomy 29:1 – 30:10. God’s cleansing and renewal of Israel’s heart, and his glorifying of Himself in the sight of the nations, are connected with restoration to the *Land*, not with the new city (36:16-38). Therefore visualising John’s “city” as superimposed on Ezekiel’s city, but swallowing up the Land, would take the heart out of Ezekiel’s book. Turning from metaphor to meaning, if John’s city had fitted neatly over the land, it might have signified the Abrahamic promises being made good to a multi-ethnic bride. But a city sited indiscriminately on the entire middle east must surely signify God’s disregard of these covenant promises.

But the John who wrote Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 could not have meant this. In condemning those “who say they are Jews and are not”, he cannot have been merely defending the Jews’ ethnic identity, but their place in the counsels of God too. Many, of course, turn the plain sense of these two verses on its head in order to deny Israel’s place in the counsels of God, but the sixth chapter of Ignatius’s *Letter to the Philadelphians* (c. 110 AD) confirms the presence in Philadelphia of exactly the people John had referred to – of gentiles who taught Judaism.<sup>1</sup> John cannot in Revelation 21 have been writing the nation of Israel out of God’s purposes.

Is there a way of picturing John’s “city” as terrestrial, and yet not as smothering the Land of Israel? Might Ezekiel’s prophecy and John’s perhaps foretell different epochs in the future dealings of God? Does Revelation 21:9ff perhaps belong to the period *after* the judgment of the Great White Throne (20:11-15), whereas the silence of Ezekiel regarding that judgment perhaps locates chapters 36ff of his prophecy in the period *before* it? In this case John’s “city” might picture the bride of Christ as occupying the same central place on the earth as Israel (cp. Ezekiel 5:5), but in a subsequent, new-creation epoch when Israel’s place in the counsels of God would be fulfilled and past history.

The snags with this attempted reconciliation of John with Ezekiel are the great high wall and the angels guarding the gates (21:12-13). Manifestly the angels are there to exclude all the unclean and those who make an abomination and a lie (21:27). But if these unrepentant idolaters and sinners had already been confined to the lake of fire (21:8), there would be no need of wall or of angels at the gates. Certainly Revelation 21:1-8, following seamlessly on from 20:15, describes the “city” in the new creation. But the description of the city in John’s second vision (21:9ff) fits the millennium, when many who submit to the rule

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-philadelphians-longer.html>

*It would be preposterous to regard the top 1165 miles of John's city as depicting a terrestrial people!*

of the Lamb will do so only feignedly (see 20:1-10; cp. Psalm 18:44, KJV margin).<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, in my view the only possible way of envisaging John's metaphorical "city" as not conflicting with Ezekiel's land, is not to envisage the former as "settling" on the earth at all. The verb translated "descend" (*katabainō*) is indeed used in the Greek version of the OT concerning the LORD's literal descents to the earth (e.g. Exodus 3:8; 19:18), but also figuratively of His coming forth from the seclusion, so to speak, of heaven, in order to involve Himself in the affairs of men. Compare Psalms 18:9; 144:5; Micah 1:3, 12. Revelation 21 is a figurative chapter, and this suggests that the latter, more figurative, uses of *katabainō* are the relevant ones here. The participial form ("descending") is used to emphasise the heavenly origin of the "city"; but in John's book this verb does not imply any particular *destination*. Cp. 10:1; 18:1; 20:1.

John's "city" is metaphorically as high as it is broad and long – 1170 miles (21:16). Recollecting the principle of visualisation, even if it *were* situated on the earth, it would be preposterous to regard its top 1165 miles as depicting a terrestrial people! The "city" is designed to refract the glory of God throughout the millennial earth. This is why the "city" [is] "pure gold, like pure [i.e., clear] glass" (21:18, Darby Tr. and NKJV). Translucent gold is an odd concept to us, but the thought surely is that the bride's manifest purity and her preciousness to Christ will be the lens that makes the glory of God visible to the world (21:24a; cp. Isaiah 60:19). The city's hugeness makes the point that the glory refracted through the bride will obtrude on every mind, all discourse, all government, and all arrangements on earth. It will take extreme, devil-induced perversity to refuse this "light" – though exactly this will happen (Revelation 20:7ff).

But what is of special significance to the subject of this article is that the *street* is the only part of the "city" specially singled out as being of "pure gold, like

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<sup>2</sup> The description of the city in new creation (21:2ff) rounds off the long chronological prophecy from 19:11f. The description of the city in the millennium follows this (21:9ff) to round off the book as a whole, whose theme is God at last asserting His governmental rights over the earth: see 21:24ff.

*Even the street!  
Why ever,  
if this “city” is to be visualised as terrestrial?*

transparent glass” (21:21). Even the street! Why ever, if this “city” is to be visualised as terrestrial? What would be the point of picturing the *street* as radiating the glory of God to the inert rock on which the city (on this interpretation) is to be visualised as standing?

The answer must be, that John was not picturing his “city” as planted on the earth at all, but as designed to remain *above* it, so that the glory of God would be refracted through its *base*, as well as through its sides, to all the earth beneath. (For the same thought, see Exodus 24:10 with 12.) John was not depicting “heaven come to earth”, and the saints’ everlasting bliss as earthly. Rather, he was setting forth a bride who would be a celestial link between God and His earth. Whilst Revelation 21:16 may be read as representing a cube (and so calling to mind the cubic holy of holies in Solomon’s temple – 1 Kings 6:20) it can alternatively be read as a square-based pyramid, with its apex at the throne of God in heaven. I find this a helpful visualisation. But, whether cube or pyramid, I think that the words, “The throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it” (Revelation 22:3), mean that the “city” will encompass the throne of God, not that (as many teach) the throne of God will be transferred to the earth. The “city” is to be visualised as having its topmost parts in heaven itself, the rest of it visible above the earth. God tabernacling with men (21:3) does not mean that God will have abandoned heaven any more than Exodus 25:8 meant it.

A further difficulty might be found in the very name of the “city” – “Jerusalem”. Does this name not signify that the Bride of Christ is to be pictured as an earthly city replacing Israel in the earthly counsels of God? Not at all: in Revelation everything is symbolic, and here the city is named “Jerusalem” to signalise its *contrast* to the city named “Babylon” in 17:5. The same angel showed John both cities (17:1; 21:9). And if the “Babylon” of 17:5 is not the literal Babylon-by-the Euphrates (see 17:9), then neither is the “Jerusalem” of 21:2, 10 picturing the literal Jerusalem-in-Judaea. Rather, Babylon is the name of the “great harlot” (17:1, 5), and “harlot” denotes the system of godless power and commerce centred on the city that then dominated the world – Rome. By contrast, the name “Jerusalem” is deployed as a foil to the name “Babylon” to identify the pure bride of Christ as God’s city.

*The name “Jerusalem”  
is deployed as a foil to the name “Babylon”.*

But does Revelation 20:9 perhaps show that the city envisioned in chs. 21-22 is indeed a vulnerable earthly city? No: the walls of the heavenly city of 21:10ff exclude evil, but they do not signify its vulnerability. In 20:9, “camp” denotes either a transient residence, or a military field-base. “Beloved city” alludes to the vulnerable earthly Zion (Psalms 78:68; 87:2; Isaiah 62:4).

And what about the names of the twelve tribes being on the city’s gates? (Revelation 21:12) This is the part of the description most closely resembling that of Ezekiel’s city (48:30-4). There the gateways are said to be the “goings out” (Darby Tr.) of the city, and so there the names of the tribes may speak of the ready comings and goings between all Israel and Ezekiel’s city. Therefore the twelve gates of John’s city (to be pictured as each c. 400 miles apart!) may speak of the special and rare privilege, accorded to the earthly Israel, of access to God and the Lamb, through the celestial bride. Perhaps.

In conclusion: it is usual to interpret Revelation 21:9ff either as a Narnia-like, fairy-tale castle, or as a symbolic jumble whose symbols bear no relationship to each other except in their decoded forms. However, if we regard the chapter as John saw it in vision, namely as *a picture to be visualised*, it clearly cannot portray a terrestrial “city”. Rather, it shows how a heavenly bride refracts the glory of God to the peoples of the earth below.

And in my view the similarity of wording in 21:2 and 21:10 means that the new-creation “Jerusalem” of 21:2-9, similarly, is pictured as descending from heaven to visibility from the earth, and, by mediating His glory to all mankind, becomes His eternal dwelling place among men (v.3). Exodus 25:8, etc., do not mean that Israel of old *was* the tabernacle.

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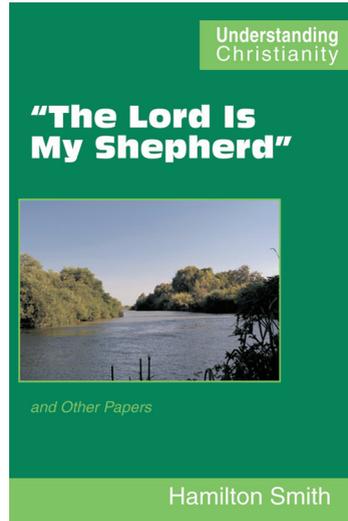
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# Dare to be a Daniel!

Standing by a purpose true,  
Daniel's tiny band,  
since the living God they knew,  
they for Him could stand:

*Dare to be a Daniel!*  
*dare to stand alone!*  
*dare to have a purpose firm!*  
*dare to make it known!*

Pressures for conformity  
dominate the land:  
“with all prayer” we need to pray  
that by faith we stand!

Golden images galore  
our assent demand;  
threaten consequences sore  
if for Christ we stand:

Daniel, on Christ's glorious day,  
in his “lot” will stand;<sup>\*</sup>  
and we by grace of Calvary  
can reach our heavenly land!

*Dare to be a Daniel*  
*dare to stand alone!*  
*God has purposes for you*  
*when man's world is gone!*

After P.P. Bliss, 1838-76.

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<sup>\*</sup> Cp. Daniel 12:13.