

# Scripture Truth



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Four seasons  
Babel and blessing  
More than conquerors

Virgin birth and resurrection  
Fifteen words to look forward with  
Faith: its foundation, fortitude and fruits

April – June 2010

# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

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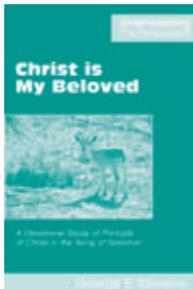
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# Four seasons

Genesis 8:22

God has made four seasons  
for many different reasons.  
Spring and summer –  
flowers do grow;  
autumn, then the winter's snow;  
and so we have four seasons.

In *spring* we plant a little seed  
and cover it with soil.  
We do not see it germinate,  
we do not see it toil.  
For in that seed there is a life  
– the proof we soon shall see:  
a little shoot, so green and bright,  
looks through the earth at me.

The *summer* comes, that little seed  
is now a full-grown plant,  
with lovely leaves and foliage  
and fruit as God doth grant.  
It brings me joy and pleasure,  
with beauty beyond compare.  
And as we pass we often feel  
its fragrance fill the air.



But *autumn* comes, and now we see  
that once fair leaf, as brown could be;  
its life down here is almost gone,  
the withering process hurries on.  
The air, once warm, now seems to chill  
the box upon my window sill –  
once full of blooms that I could see,  
which fade, and droop, dead as could be.

The *winter* winds seem now to blow;  
the nights are long with frost and snow,  
and everything is dead and still –  
no fragrance now the air to fill.  
No life is seen upon the ground,  
or butterflies to flip around.  
The birds don't seem to sing their song,  
the winter is so cold and long.

Life's just like that: God made it so –  
a babe, a boy, a man to grow:  
in *spring*, a bonny little thing;  
the *summer* youthful joys doth bring;  
in *autumn* years a full-grown man  
– so much to do, so much to plan;  
but *winter* comes, hair white as snow  
– just like the plants, we, too, must go.

Lord, give me grace, down here to be  
just like that little flower – for Thee,  
to shed forth fragrance in the night,  
like perfume sweet, for Thy delight.  
While men look on, oh! may they see  
resemblance now of Christ in me.  
And fruit for Thee may still be found  
in life once spent upon the ground.

**Jim Thomson**

# Fifteen words to look forward with

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Laurie Waller

*An edited version of a talk given at the fiftieth anniversary of the present Cromwell Hall, Levenshulme, Manchester on Saturday 19 September 2009.*

*I am grateful to Ian Ralph for making his verbatim transcript available to me.*

## Introduction

Looking back is not what I am about. We want to be looking forward. Five points are laid on my heart for this meeting as a basis for our looking into the future. There are only three words in each of them, so there are in total only *fifteen words for you to remember* on this fiftieth anniversary.

Yes, if the Lord does not come first, some people here today will still be in this world in 2059. What can we give, and what *are we giving*, to younger people to sustain them through the next fifty years, that has so evidently sustained us in the past fifty years? It is all centred on, and, in its final issue, all has to do with the Person of Christ. Who He is, what He has done, where He is and what He is going to do are matters which should be occupying us for the rest of our lives here.

## “Where is He?”

The first of my five points is a question, borrowed – bending slightly the rules of Scriptural interpretation – from those wonderful words that the Magi said in Jerusalem when they came to find the young Child. “Where is He?” they asked (Matthew 2:2, KJV).

Many of us can look back over these past fifty years and see that the Lord has blessed us materially, circumstantially, even spiritually; but *where He is* in our hearts and lives *now* seems to me to be the primary call of the hour.

Where is He in the eyes of God? Where is He in the plan of God? God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:6). He is where God wants Him to be – at the centre of all judgement, all counsel, all worship. Our Lord Jesus is established on His holy hill.

But where is He as far as the world is concerned? He is rejected, neglected and despised. “Away with this Man” (Luke 23:18) was the world’s real opinion two thousand years ago. It will still be its real opinion in 2059 if His appearing in glory has not first smashed their illusions.

“Where is He in the assembly?” is a question we might also ask ourselves. Is He still *to us*, “Head of all things to the church”? (Ephesians 1:22) Is our Lord Jesus Christ the Head of the assembly, wherever, however, we may meet together? Jesus is Lord, and we must each subject our individual lives to His Lordship – how vital

this is! But He is also the Head of the church, the beginning (Colossians 1:18). He has instituted an order in His church – and it doesn't include worship leaders; it doesn't include many other present-day practices. So *where He is in the church* is something of cardinal importance for us to ask ourselves at this juncture.

Finally: Where is He in your heart and life? You may be at this anniversary meeting, but not really a Christian. Let me ask you; is the Lord Jesus *in your heart* and *in your life*? Do you know Him, love Him, and confess Him, as your own living personal Saviour? By far the most important thing you can do in your life is to know that the Lord Jesus is your Lord and your Saviour, your Redeemer, your Friend and Guide through death into eternity.

I would like to think, as my contribution towards the work of Cromwell Hall, that in the problems, decisions and joys of your family lives in coming days, you will frequently repeat the question, "Where is *He*?" It is so easy to be borne along on the rapid current of the twenty-first century and its assumption that "we have all the answers." Perhaps you are a young couple deciding where to live – where is *He* in this matter? Perhaps you are a young man courting a young lady – don't forget to ask, "Where is *He*?" How many marriages have we seen break up, and things fall apart, that would have never happened if both had resolutely and faithfully asked, "Where is *He* in this matter?" Christ is the Head of the household, as He is the Head of the church. Christ is the Head of all things as far as God is concerned. So please take these words, not just as pegs to hang thoughts on, but for practical application and usefulness in your heart, in your life, and that of your family.

### "Hear ye Him"

My second phrase is in Matthew 17:5. The occasion is the mount of Transfiguration where our Lord Jesus is manifesting His glory. Peter James and John are there. And God Himself speaks these wonderful words, "Hear ye Him."

*I  
would  
like to  
think,  
that  
in the  
coming  
days,  
you will  
frequently  
repeat  
the  
question,  
"Where  
is He?"*

Many voices clamour for our attention today, but none equals the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ to which God the Father here directs our attention. And all of Scripture is the Lord's voice.

In some congregations it is the custom to conclude the reading of Scripture with the words, "This is the Word of the Lord." Do we really mean this? In the July 2009 issue of one denominational magazine, a leading minister wrote concerning Ephesians 5:22, "This is definitely not the Word of the Lord." He added, "I can quite see why this passage, which exhorts the wife to be subject to the husband, can cause offence. Further, the very patriarchal idea of a husband being the head of a wife has no longer a place in our Western free democratic society. ... The next injunction about slaves and masters gives the game away, by showing that these ethical demands come from a time and place very different from our own." He implied that we can dismiss the lot as being irrelevant for today.

Men have taken it upon themselves to dissect and dismiss the Holy Scriptures, in which the Lord's voice speaks to us in unequivocal language. They only want it insofar as it fits their preferences.

Thank God that "Hear ye Him" has been central to the testimony of Cromwell Hall. We look upon this Book as the incontrovertibly infallible Word of God. It shouts to us in our generation and will still shout in generations to come, "Hear ye Him." Again may I ask you to write the words, "Hear ye Him" across the ground of your daily lives, your families, your assembly, your business. Make "Hear ye him" a living reality, not a dead doctrine. Does it govern every decision you make? Take no notice of the modern chewing up of the Scriptures and spitting most of it out! This sort of thing has seeped into good Christian companies of people, where brick by brick radical Christianity has been dismantled in our life time. Let us not fear, because the Lord Jesus said at the founding of the church, that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). The false prophets and wrong voices of this day serve, if for nothing else, to warn to us to be on our guard, lest certain men creep in unawares and cause havoc in the churches where we are (Jude 4; Acts 20:29-30). *Hear ye Him.*

### "It is finished"

My third point is the three wonderful words from John 19: 30. "It is finished."

This was not a mere final gasp by the Lord Jesus; it was not some kind of collapsing or yielding to greater powers, it was a triumphant cry. The writers of the Gospels make it plain that when Jesus spoke, it was with a *loud voice* (cp. Matthew 27:50). "*Finished!*" Let the word cascade down the centuries in volumes of triumphant melody and in all its life-giving power.

This is the very bedrock of Christian preaching. All that we have to proclaim is based on and was effected by the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary's cross.

Finished! The long line of prophecies and the Scriptures fulfilled.

Finished! The pathway of an obedient earthly life.

Finished! The work that His Father gave Him to do.

Finished! The types and shadows of Jewish ritual.

Finished! The work of man's redemption.

*It is finished.* I never tire of tracing through the tenth chapter of Hebrews, the words, "there is no more offering for sins;" "no more conscience of sins" (Hebrews 10:2, 18), and marking and delighting in them, because the work of our Lord Jesus is complete. It can neither be added to nor taken away from; it is complete because *He* did it, bringing glory to the Father, honour to His Name, blessing to men, defeat to the devil, and triumph to all who believe in His wonderful work.

*It is finished.* This strikes at the very root of the dismantling of Scripture going on in the present day. Salvation is not a reward for "do-gooders." "According to the Scriptures," (1 Corinthians 15:3) salvation was brought to us by the work and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary's cross. We must never get away from this. Faith has brought the truth of it to our souls:

We did not see Thee lifted high,  
Amid that wild and savage crew;  
Nor heard Thy meek, imploring cry,  
"Forgive, they know not what they do!"  
Yet we believe the deed was done,  
That shook the earth and veiled the sun.<sup>1</sup>

### "He is risen"

"*It is finished*" automatically leads us to three other words, this time from Mark's Gospel. "*He is risen*" (Mark 16:6).

"He rose again the third day according to the scriptures." The *fact* of it is enforced in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. And from verse 13 of this chapter, we see how Paul draws the argument out of the fact. If Christ be not raised we are of all men most miserable (v.19); we are ... false witnesses (v.15); our preaching is vain ... your faith is vain (v.14); we are yet in our sins (v.17). And those who have died in Christ have been forever lost (v.18). Everything revolves round verse 20, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." If any-

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Gurney (d.1862), based on a poem by Anne R. Richter (d. 1857).

thing charms, thrills and motivates our hearts, it is the fact that we are not looking into the grave of some erstwhile holy man, or alleged prophet, or someone who said he had dug up some golden tablets in a mountainside, or any other falsified thing, but we are talking about a risen, living, precious, coming Saviour.

The fact that Christ died, was buried, and rose again is the absolute authorisation for all that we believe; and all that we hope for is underwritten by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. [It] stands there as the assurance that God will yet judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained, our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31); and that He is coming again.

“We serve a *living Saviour*.” His own words are, “I was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore” (Revelation 1:18). We are not serving a dead Saviour, a lifeless god or idol. He is *living* in the presence of God at this moment as a Man, “alive for evermore.” He was the *Firstfruits* of them who slept (1 Corinthians 15:20). We are the “second fruits,” for we shall share in His resurrection at His coming. This brings me to my final point, without which the other four are incomplete.

### “This same Jesus”

We find it in Acts 1:11. “*This same Jesus*, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

“*This same Jesus*.” Does that thrill your heart? Does it make you feel glad that you are a Christian? Not only is He alive for evermore, He’s coming back!

He is not sending an angel – He is coming Himself, – *this same Jesus*. He is the same Jesus of whom we read in the pages of the Gospels, the One who healed the leper, who brought life to Jairus’ daughter, who healed the widow of Nain’s grief and anguish, who put the children on His knee. *This same Jesus*, not a reinvented twenty-first century model of Him, not an angel, not a new power. It is the same Person, the same Jesus who brought grace and truth in equal qualities. I think of the old verse we used to sing,

And when He comes in bright array,  
And leads the conqu’ring line,  
It will be glory then to say,  
That He’s a Friend of mine.<sup>2</sup>

The message of that remarkable book, the Acts of the Apostles, begins with *this same Jesus*. From “this same Jesus” who is coming again, the proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection lifts off like a rocket. That is really what the opening chapters of Acts are: a tremendous “whoosh” that pushes the church out from its inconspicuous beginnings when a few men and women prayed in an upper

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<sup>2</sup> J.H. Sammis (1846-1919).

room that God would bring blessing, to the power of the Holy Spirit, incalculable by man, jet-propelling the gospel out into the world.

*This same Jesus*, who went up from the world, will “in like manner” come again. Many voices clamour for our attention, our money, for power over our lifestyle, but we have a treasure that is beyond calculation, which is undying, and which will see us through time and into eternity, even our Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful “blessed hope” this is (Titus 2:13)! Meanwhile we thank God for the blessings, encouragement and help that He gives us in seeking to be witnesses too for Him “in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

### Conclusion

Finally, we direct our thoughts to 2 Timothy 4:8. Looking forward to his own imminent martyrdom, and conscious of having fought the *good* fight and kept the faith, Paul added a little clause that suits today’s occasion wonderfully: “And unto all them also that love His appearing.” For fifty years the message of our Lord Jesus coming again has been preached in this hall. If the hall is here in another fifty years, may it be that the message of the coming of our Lord Jesus will be preached, spoken of, sung about, because Jesus is coming again. Amen! When He comes, may He find our hearts expecting Him.

Do you expect Jesus to come, even today? Are you making your plans *if God wills*? Or do you think, “My plans have to happen because I made them so?” Jesus is looking for those who *love* His appearing. In 2 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul says, “The Lord direct your hearts ... into the patience of the Christ” (Darby Trans.). If *we* are waiting, what do you think that *He* is waiting for? To have with Him the Bride of His choice and His making – the church which He loved and gave Himself for.

These things, beloved brethren, are at the heart of our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. They transcend people; they transcend lives that have interwoven with ours; they transcend every ambition and ideal that we have, because they are centred in the Person that God has set above all other persons, His Son, His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

*This  
same  
Jesus,  
not  
a  
reinvented  
twenty-  
first  
century  
model  
of  
Him*

# More than conquerors

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George Davison

*Any idea what this phrase means? The author gives a simple and compelling answer, which will encourage any Christian suffering perplexing troubles.*

*What does the apostle mean by “more than conquerors”? He implies that the saints are stronger after the conflict than they were before entering into it.*

The phrase “more than conquerors,” used by the apostle Paul with such supreme confidence, is but one word in the Greek, and is used only in one verse (Romans 8:37). The word “conqueror” is the word translated in other places as “overcomer”, or more literally “one who gains the victory.” But what does the apostle mean by “*more than conquerors*”? He implies that, not only do the saints pass through these various conflicts, whether caused by men or demons, and emerge victoriously, but that they are also stronger after the conflict than they were before entering into it.

Time after time God allows His people to be in conflict only to cause them to feel their need of His grace and power in going through it; and *with the help of God* they emerge from the trial stronger than they were before they entered into it. We add, going through it with the help of God, for we shall never be victorious without the help

which God alone can give. History records many severe trials through which men have passed, and from which by supreme efforts they have emerged victorious; but it does not record that they were stronger after the conflict than they were before. Only in the spiritual realm can this be experienced.

In demonstration of this, we have in mind to call the attention of the reader to two passages in Scripture, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament, where this encouraging fact is recorded. We hope thereby to encourage all to stand fast in the conflict, and hence not only to emerge victorious, but to have gained more strength as the result of the trial they have sustained. There are two statements in the New Testament which ought to be ever in the hearts of those who desire to be characterized as “overcomers”. These are “stand fast!” (2 Thessalonians 2:15), and “hold fast!” (2 Timothy 1:13). If we

“stand fast” we do not *give way*, and if we “hold fast” we do not *give anything up*.

## Job

In the history of Job, as given to us in the book which bears his name, we see something of the tremendous conflict which rages ceaselessly between the powers of light and of darkness. God draws aside the veil which separates the unseen spiritual world from the material world, and graciously allows us to listen to a conversation between Himself and Satan, the arch-enemy of the saints. This conversation mainly concerns Job, and gives the setting for the further events outlined for us in the rest of the book.

We have not far to look before we discover that Job, though the most righteous man on earth at that time, was in danger of being puffed up as a consequence. He said himself, “I shall die in my nest” (Job 29:18); and it is again recorded, “he was righteous in his own eyes”, (32:1). In the first statement Job was in danger of putting his confidence in the substance which God had blessed him with, and in the second he was assuring himself that he deserved it. But it was God, and not the nest, who was his safeguard; and his righteousness was according to divine estimation and not according to his own. Job needed to learn these two things, and for his own safety and blessing God was about to teach him regarding them.

It is just here that Satan comes into the picture. It is well to notice that God Himself raises the matter of Job’s righteousness with Satan, and not Satan with God. God saw that Job needed a lesson for *his own safety*, and He used Satan to teach him this lesson. The enemy, ever ready to attack the saints, takes advantage of the liberty given him by God, and sets about to destroy everything in which Job had placed his confidence, whether his family, his wealth, or his health; but the one thing Satan could not destroy was his *faith*. Praise God for that!

Stripped of everything in which his confidence lay, his wife unsympathetic and his three friends scornful and giving him up as one who would not listen to wisdom, Job is left with only his faith in God. It is then that God begins to rebuild him on a much safer foundation, till at the end we read, “So the LORD blessed the *latter end* of Job more than his *beginning*” (42:12). Could Job not have said, with twice the possessions and once again a family surrounding him, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us”?

## Simon Peter

The New Testament reference is to the apostle Peter. He was the most outstanding of apostles, always named first in the lists of the apostles, yet with a weakness well known to our Lord. And in view of the great service he would ultimately render, this needed to be

dealt with. Once again we see Satan used in the matter, and the Lord allowing him to attack His servant.

We read, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31, 32). May we ever remember that, no matter what Satan desires, not one hair of our heads can he touch without divine permission. Both Job and Simon are seen in the hands of Satan for a time, but in each case Satan could go only as far as divine wisdom allowed him. So whilst Satan was allowed to lead Simon into a temptation, and caused him to fail in it, all he really succeeded in doing was to destroy Simon’s *self-confidence*; he could not destroy his *faith*. Thank God he never will be able to destroy the faith of any saint of God, however severe the trial may be through which he may be allowed to pass.

What chagrin must have filled the heart of Satan as he discovered that his attack upon Simon had made him a stronger man than he had been before! Did ever a man more fearlessly declare his attachment to the Lord than the disciple who before had denied that he

knew Him? Moreover, Peter *did* give his life for the Lord at the end of his service, and we can be assured that when that moment came he would face death in the true confidence which faith alone can give, and not in some fancied strength – which as men in the flesh we do not possess. Peter surely could also have said, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

### Ourselves

May we then face the future with this confidence, determined to “stand fast” and to “hold fast”. What may yet lie ahead for any one of us so far as our earthly path is concerned, we cannot tell. God knows our hearts, and if He detects something there which is a hindrance to our growth or our service for Him, He may allow Satan to buffet us as he did with yet another servant – Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7). Yet, if we face this trial with God, and go through it with the strength which faith in God alone can give, we too shall emerge stronger than we were before, and we shall be able to say, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

From *Ministry by George Davison, extracted from “Precious Things”* (Norwich, n.d.), pp.86-7.

*What chagrin must have filled the heart of Satan as he discovered that his attack upon Simon had made him a stronger man than he had been before!*

# Virgin birth and resurrection

## Did they happen and are they credible?

“Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?”  
(Acts 26:8).

“Why  
should  
it  
be  
thought  
incredible  
by  
you  
that  
God  
raises  
the  
dead?”

Why are the accounts of our Lord’s birth in Matthew and Luke so divergent? The rest of their two Gospels more or less track each other, but not their beginnings.

If we read the beginning of Matthew alone, we would never guess that Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem *from* Nazareth. If we read Luke alone, we would never guess that there was a flight into Egypt. There are no shepherds in Matthew, no magi in Luke. In Matthew the Lord’s birth and its supernatural character are announced to Joseph in a dream; in Luke, by Gabriel to Mary. Both supply genealogies of our Lord, but they are different (Matthew 1:2ff; Luke 3:23ff). Does this mean that the “nativity sections” of the two Gospels are myths made up by Matthew and Luke, and that the virgin birth is a fable?

I suggest, rather, that the divergence between the two nativity accounts is deliberate. Of one thing we can be certain, Matthew and Luke did not collude in writing up their accounts! They are *entirely* independent. Yet both agree absolutely on certain matters: that the Lord was born in Bethlehem, that Mary was His mother and Joseph her betrothed husband, that He was of the lineage of David. *And that He was born of a virgin.*

The sceptic might reply that Matthew and Luke each independently felt the need to supply some fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14, and so each invented a virgin birth. The implication of this theory is that both Matthew and Luke separately started their Gospels with what they knew to be a lie, for if each had been deceived by a story in common circulation among Christians, why do the other parts of their nativity narratives not show more similarity? But if these two Evangelists each felt this compulsion, why did

Mark and John not also feel it? Why do Paul, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews never mention the virgin birth? And if Luke was “into” fabrication of narratives, why did he not insert a mention of the virgin birth into Paul’s sermon in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16-41)? Even on the sceptics’ own terms, this theory is very weak.

None of the differences in the accounts of the Lord’s birth are contradictory; they just give different “bits of the jigsaw.”<sup>1</sup> I suggest that the Holy Spirit arranged it so, in order for there to be two undeniably independent witnesses to the virgin birth.

Similarly in relation to the resurrection. Here the divergences are smaller, but the accounts of the resurrection in the four Gospels are quite hard to fit together. This proves that the Gospel-writers did not collude to harmonise their accounts of the resurrection either. And none of them colluded with Paul, who alone mentions the Lord appearing to the five hundred brethren and to James (1 Corinthians 15:6,7). These five independent accounts are, then, also strong historical testimony to their central point of agreement: that the Lord rose from the dead.

I suggest, therefore, that at the points where the Holy Spirit well knew that the attacks on the factual accuracy of the history of our Lord would centre – on His virgin birth and resurrection – He arranged that the narratives of these events should show the most independence, so that here, even disregarding divine inspiration, the natural corroboration of their historicity would be strongest.

A historian who came across several obviously independent accounts of a non-miraculous event would conclude that the testimony to matters which they all reported was very strong. So why would an unbelieving historian (in fact most unbelievers) not be persuaded by such independent testimony in the case of these two miraculous events?

Before answering this, something needs to be said about the purposes of Bible miracles. They served various purposes, but that of proving that there is a God was never one of them. The Bible says that *creation* is the witness to the existence of one God (Acts 14:15-17 and esp. Romans 1:19-22). Sometimes miracles confirmed that Jehovah is the living God, in contrast

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<sup>1</sup> Two explanations for the differences between the genealogies are (i) that Matthew gives Joseph’s ancestry, Luke Mary’s; or (ii) that both give Joseph’s ancestry, but Matthew gives the official line of succession to title to the kingship, whereas Luke gives the actual natural line, father to son.

to idols (1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 5);<sup>2</sup> or authenticated His servant (Exodus 4:1-9; 14: 31). Sometimes they occurred because there was no other way for the thing to be done: the virgin birth and the resurrection are prime examples of this. Sometimes they heightened believers' awareness of the living God, as often with Israel in the wilderness. But the Bible does not instruct us to use records of miracles to persuade people to believe the gospel - for a simple reason. It would leave the unbeliever in charge and make him or her the judge of whether God has a right to be believed in. The unbeliever would decide the criterion, graciously condescending to believe in God if He "passed." What blasphemy! The only way to God is the humbling way of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Nonetheless, unbelieving humanity is held responsible for its rejection of God's wonderful works, as the example of Pharaoh shows. And believers can be unsettled by unbelievers' scepticism. So it is not pointless to ask why unbelievers generally do not believe the miracles, despite good historical testimony to them.

### The impossibility of miracles?

The reason for their scepticism lies in some version or other of the celebrated disproof of all records of miracles by the atheistic eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume. Defining a miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature," and "the laws of nature" as occurrences which have never been observed not to happen, he argues that "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish."<sup>3</sup> And that, even were a testimony given whose falsehood would be more miraculous than the miracle, this would only establish a probability in favour of the miracle testified to, not the certainty of it.

This is a very clever argument from a brilliant mind. Its cleverness consists in the fact that to *Christians* the value of a miracle is precisely that it *is* outside the limitations of nature. This is *their* claim, not Hume's. They would be most unhappy if someone came up with an alleged demonstration that

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<sup>2</sup> As regards the argument that the miracles claimed by competing religions cancel each other out, the Bible's answer is that false religion may be accompanied by miracles, but the miracles of the living God surpass them (Exodus 7: 8-12; 8:19; Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Revelation 13:14-15).

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *Enquiry concerning human understanding* (3rd edition 1777, often reprinted), Section X, "Of Miracles," paragraphs 90, 91.

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in certain extremely rare circumstances people do rise from the dead, and hence that Jesus' resurrection *is* conformable to "the laws of nature". Hume attacks Christians on their own ground. He asks, "Why should any rational persons ever believe a claim both that something happened *and* that it was beyond the power of nature for it to have happened?"

Notice, however, that this argument of Hume's is not an argument against *the possibility of miracles happening*, but against the rationality of our ever *believing anyone's report* of having witnessed one, unless the report satisfied conditions which he thinks no actual testimony could satisfy. This was clever too. It sidestepped the need to devise a logical proof why miracles cannot happen – an impossible undertaking; and it neatly evaded the problems he might have encountered with the church authorities if he had made the attempt.

Notice, too, a further implication of his confining his argument to *reports* of miracles. He never discusses what he should do if he personally experienced what appeared to be a miracle. It is not that he would have been stumped by such a possibility. Probable answers can readily be put into his mouth. It is just that he never thought that any rational person *would* see what looked like a miracle. This shows that he did not start with an open mind about the possibility of miracles, even if he did not expressly argue against this possibility. He started from the closed mental position that they do not happen – implying that he started out from an assumption that there is no God. But if there is no God, events contrary to "the laws of nature" are impossible, since "nature" is all that there is. But if there is a God, it is not at all implausible that He should sometimes do extraordinary things outside the normal limitations that He has imposed on "nature". The whole essay is a long detour round this simple point, which wouldn't have sounded half so clever.

And Hume's atheism is also the implicit reason why today, when confronted with the robustness of the Bible testimony to the virgin birth and the resurrection, people are unmoved. They may advance various of

*People's basic reason for not considering the evidence for Bible miracles is a mindset that has ruled out the possibility that there is a God.*

Hume's lesser arguments in defence of their scepticism. For example they might cite the "ignorance" and barbarity of the apostles (cp. Acts 4:13), but, if asked whether for that reason judges ought to instruct juries to pay less attention to the testimony of the uneducated than of the educated, they would probably back down. They might cite the remoteness in time, but this would only be relevant if the virgin birth and resurrection were remote in time relative to the first documentary evidence. However, in fact there is no more than two decades in the case of the resurrection, say four in the case of the virgin birth. People's basic reason for not considering the evidence for Bible miracles is still Hume's: it is the product of a mindset that in advance of the evidence has ruled out the possibility that there is a God.

Why, then, ought rational people to consider the possibility of a miracle? It is rational to do so if there might be a God, because He might be communicating with us in this way. Rational persons will recognise the possibility that if God is different from His creation, He may well have intervened in ways that contravene the limits on the operations of nature that He has ordinarily imposed, just in order to reveal this differentness. They will be prepared to recognise that miracles by the one God will not be random, incoherent or pointless, but will look for a rationale and coherence that shows them to be coherent Self-revelations of that One God. They will note the sobriety, the reserve of the Bible accounts of miracles – for example, that they show no interest in how the loaves were multiplied, or in giving extravagant accounts of how the resurrection happened. Such people will recognise that, as the Bible says, they themselves have a fierce, innate aversion from believing in such intervention by the God of the Bible, because this would force them into accepting what He says about them – that they are sinners and deserving of judgment. They would therefore recognise that there is no such thing as an impartial evaluation of the case for miracles.

### Why people believe things

Hume argues that in judging the veracity of an extraordinary report, people balance their belief in the truthfulness of the witness against their own experience of the regularity of nature. However, there are many cases nowadays where the latter side of the balance is missing. People *believe* in things for which there is no evidence whatsoever, purely because of their faith in the truthfulness of "science": extra-terrestrial life, "dark matter", multiple dimensions, parallel universes. These are not "scientific observations" of

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regularities in nature (indeed it is cheerfully conceded that some of them might never be observed), but just human reasonings, usually mathematical, from what is observed to what might exist unobservedly. Those who believe in these alleged phenomena do so because of faith in the reasonings of scientists, even although other, as yet unthought-of theories might in the future explain the observed phenomena more economically and without such weird implications.

The lesson from this for this article is that people do not engage in the comparison between reports of extraordinary happenings and their own observations of the regularities of nature that Hume supposes. They decide whether they trust the source of the report. But, although science has a deservedly high reputation for the truthfulness of its observations, it is a very biased judge as regards reports of miracles. For the whole rationale of “science” is to formulate explanations of observed phenomena which do *not* invoke supernatural action, and rule out such as do. “Science”, just as much as those who hang on its theories, has no “open mind” regarding Bible miracles.

Now, “if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater” (1 John 5:9). God caused two independent accounts of the virgin birth to be composed, and five clearly non-collusive accounts of the resurrection, to provide historical testimony to them of a strength rare in ancient history. This was so that people could have no excuse for despising His witness concerning His Son (same verse).

Note, however, that the Bible also says that merely human belief that the Bible miracles happened is not real faith (John 2:23-25). Such faith would be no stronger than our reasoning; and it would depend on us, not God. To be certain, we need to be born again, something that God works in us as we believe in His Son *refusing to do a miracle*, and rather dying on a cross for love of us (Matthew 27:40-44; John 3:15-16).

*“Science”, just as much as those  
who hang on its theories,  
has no “open mind” regarding Bible miracles.*

# Faith: its foundation, fortitude and fruits

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## Hebrews 11-13 <sup>1</sup>

Donald Hill

*Are you swimming “against the tide”? This is what faith enables the Christian to do. Articles on the earlier chapters of Hebrews appeared in the October and January issues.*

### What faith can do

Hebrews 11 is the famous “faith chapter”. It follows directly from the latter part of Hebrews 10. In 10:20 Paul tells his readers about the “new and living way” into the holiest, God’s very presence, due to the “once-for-all sacrifice” of the Lord Jesus which has “perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” (10:14). He then draws practical consequences in 10:22-25. We should:

- Draw near to God
- Hold fast to the Christian faith and not slip back into the old order.
- Consider fellow-believers – helping as we see need.
- Meet with fellow believers for fellowship. I need to get my priorities right!

But this will need *faith*. In the magnificent temple system everything was visible, tangible and audible. The people could see their high priest, could touch and identify with the sacrifices offered for their sins, and even when the high priest was inside the earthly “holy of holies” they could hear the bells jingling which hung from the fringe of his robe, and know that the blood of the atonement had been accepted! (Exodus 28:33-35; Leviticus 16:15-19) But for Christians, our acceptance in the heavenly “holiest of all” is known only by faith. Heaven itself is a matter of faith. Some of the “Hebrews” were in danger of casting away their confidence; they needed patience. Paul reassures them that “He that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:35-37). He then cites the great verse in Habakkuk 2:4, “The just shall live by his faith.”

### The faith chapter

This leads us into Hebrews 11, the great *faith* chapter.

- Verse 1 is a statement showing the effect of faith.
- In verse 2 Old-Testament saints are commended for their faith.
- In verse 3 faith embraces creation as being the handiwork of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Articles on Hebrews 1-10 appeared in October 2009 and January 2010.

Moses  
chose,  
he  
esteemed,  
and  
finally  
he  
refused.

He  
also  
endured.

- The remainder of the chapter gives us examples of OT saints who lived a life of faith, each one portraying some aspect of it.

*Verse 4* tells us that Abel approached God *by faith*, on the ground of sacrifice. *Verse 5* states that “Enoch walked with God” *by faith* (cp. Genesis 5:22), and was taken to heaven without dying. He serves as a picture of believers to-day, who will be taken to heaven without dying if they are on the earth when the Lord returns for His church (John 14:3). *Verse 7* shows Noah acting *in faith*, in building the ark and escaping judgment. *Verses 8-10* tell us that Abram’s faith linked him with another world.

*Verses 13-16* are important verses telling us the power of faith. Old-Testament saints “died in faith” – meaning that they died “not having received the promises.” Their faith looked entirely to promises of which they saw no realisation during their lifetimes.

*Verses 17-19* cite the extreme test of Abraham’s faith when he had to lay Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. But this faith was answered when they returned together from mount Moriah.

*Verses 20-21* remind us of Isaac blessing his sons and Jacob his grandsons, each giving priority to the second-born – *by faith*. The blessings did not concern things present but “things to come.” *Verse 22* shows us the same faith in Joseph, the man who had such power and position in Egypt. But by faith, he looked forward to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. That is why “he gave commandment concerning his bones,” namely, that they were to be laid to rest in Canaan (Genesis 50:25).

*Verses 23-28* of Hebrews 11 detail the life of Moses, showing how *by faith* he overcame the present world. He *chose*, he *esteemed*, and finally he *refused*. He also *endured*. *Verse 29* recounts how Israel under the leadership of Moses crossed the Red Sea *by faith*.

*Verse 30* tells of Joshua’s and Israel’s *obedience of faith* to God’s word in marching round the walls of Jericho for seven days, before the walls collapsed and they conquered

the city. Verse 31 encourages us by the example of the faith of an unlikely person, Rahab, in hiding the Israelite spies, and then placing the scarlet cord in the window of her house perched on the city wall, in order to escape the judgment of Jericho.

Verses 33-34 give examples of the *power of faith*, including Daniel being preserved in the den of lions and his three friends being preserved in the fiery furnace. Verses 35-38 recall how faith enabled many men and women both to endure and also to suffer.

But *verses 39-40* bring the general conclusion that all of these men and women of faith in the Old Testament “earned a good report” *in the past*, but still wait for the promises in which they believed to be fulfilled *in the future*. The fulfilment would all depend on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The blessings of

- the church in our day
- Old-Testament saints
- the nation of Israel in the future
- the nations of the earth through Israel

*will all and only come to pass* on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary:

- The church will have the better portion as the Bride of Christ.
- Old-Testament saints will be in heaven as friends of the Bridegroom (the Lord Jesus).
- The nation of Israel will be blessed on the earth and will become the head of the nations.
- Through Israel, who will be God’s messengers in that coming day, the nations of the earth will come into earthly blessing when

“Jesus shall reign where’er the sun  
Doth his successive journeys run,  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
’Til moons shall wax and wane no more.”<sup>2</sup>

## Chapter 12

Verses 1-2 bring the great “faith chapter” to its culmination. Verse 1 sums up chapter 11 as displaying a “great cloud of witnesses” who ran the “race of faith” in their day, and spur us on to run this race in our day, laying aside all sin and all “weights.” The race is a marathon rather than a hundred-metre sprint, and therefore endurance is needed. Verse 2 sets before us the supreme Example of the Lord

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Watts.

*Spiritual  
energy  
is  
needed  
to run  
the  
Christian  
race;  
“uplifted  
hands”  
indicate  
that we  
need  
to pray.*

Jesus, our “File Leader”, who has run the race, facing every kind of opposition. The race completed, He is now seated in the heavens.

*Verses 3-4* encourage us to consider the Lord Jesus and His earthly pathway when we are inclined to faint on the heavenward journey.

*Verses 5-11* tell us that the difficulties of the path of faith include an element of chastening by the Father. But this is a proof of sonship – of having been brought into His family. God is looking for holy sons and daughters because He is holy. Therefore (verses 12-13) spiritual energy is needed to run the Christian race; “uplifted hands” indicate that we need to *pray*.

*Verses 14-17* warn us not to be Esaus! He missed out on the blessing by selling his birthright to Jacob. We need to beware.

*Verses 18-24* sum up the leading differences between the Christian hope and the Old-Testament relationship with God. We have not come to mount Sinai where the Law was given, a fearful place for the Israelites (cp. Deuteronomy 4:23-26) and even Moses. Rather we “have come” to *eight things*, which are to be laid hold of *by faith*.

They are

1. “Mount Zion.” This means the earthly Jerusalem. Psalm 78 shows the failure of Israel under the Law, but at the end of it we see God acting in grace. He chose Judah, “mount Zion, which he loved,” and David (vv.68-72). This is the promise that God will restore Israel in grace.
2. “The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” The cities of men are marked by death. The death column of the daily newspaper, the cemetery and the crematorium are all evidence of this fact. Faith, however, looks on to a coming day of blessing where everything vibrates with *life*.
3. “An innumerable company of angels.” Today, angels are guardians (Hebrews 1:14). In the future they are

described as ascending and descending on the Son of Man, and so continuing to serve (John 1:51).

4. "The church of the firstborn." Scripture speaks of the Lord Jesus as the Firstborn, and in this way safeguards His *pre-eminence* (Colossians 1:15-18). "The church of the firstborn" tells us that the church will have the pre-eminent place in heaven, being the nearest to the heart of Christ.
5. "God the Judge of all." To-day, unrighteousness marks man's world, but in a coming day when the Lord Jesus is in control, judgment will be fair. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).
6. "The spirits of just men made perfect." When the Lord Jesus returns for the church, Old-Testament saints will be raised to their appointed place in heaven – "friends of the Bridegroom" (cp. John 3:29).
7. "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." The Lord Jesus will be central to the future scene of glory. He should be central to our hearts now, every day, and also when we gather together to His Name.
8. "The blood of sprinkling." The work of the Lord Jesus, in giving His life and shedding His blood, is the only basis of blessing both now and eternally.

After this magnificent account of what we have come to by faith, Hebrews 12:25-29 deliver a warning about turning away from all that God has provided. God has spoken *in Son*. Then don't refuse Him who speaks from heaven! Our God is, after all, a consuming fire (see Exodus 24:17).

### Chapter 13

Verses 1-9 contain a number of exhortations relating to our conduct in the world.

- Love for, and kindness towards fellow believers (verses 1-2).
- Consideration of the suffering of fellow believers (verse 3).
- Holding marriage in honour before God, and refusal of loose living (verse 4).

*"The church of the firstborn" tells us that the church will have the pre-eminent place in heaven, being the nearest to the heart of Christ.*

- Contentedness, not covetousness (verses 5-6).
- Recollection of those who have been our guides in the Christian pathway and imitation of their faith (verse 7).
- Avoidance of the snares of false teaching. Does it measure up to the truth of Scripture? (verse 9)
- And, whatever the changes and adversities, “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and today and forever”! (verse 8)

*Verses 10-15* exhort Christian Jewish readers to take their place with Christ, outside the temple system. It begins with the words, “We have an altar.” The “we” refers to believing Jews and Gentiles who compose the church, and who approach God on the ground of the work of the Lord Jesus. Jews clinging to the law and the temple worship (which still existed at the time this epistle was written) have no part in this!

*Verse 12* tells us that the Lord Jesus was given the outside place – He was crucified outside the city wall. “Outside the camp” therefore indicates that the believers of that day should be free from all the trappings of Judaism – the temple worship, the Aaronic priesthood, animal sacrifices and the like. They should realise that the Lord Jesus means everything! It is *by Him* that the sacrifice of praise is offered to God – He leads the worship (verse 15).

*Verses 16-22* contain more exhortation – doing good, obedience to our spiritual leaders – those who have taught us the truth of God.

The doxology of *verses 20-21* commits the readers to the *God of peace*. The Lord Jesus *made peace* by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20), and rose again from the dead. Not only is He the “Good” Shepherd who died for us (John 10:11); He is also the “Great” Shepherd who cares for us. By His death we have an eternal salvation based on the blood of the everlasting covenant (or, testament).

It is God’s desire that His will should be worked out in our lives. God’s grace should be our portion (verses 21, 25).

*The  
Lord Jesus  
will be  
central  
to the  
future  
scene of  
glory.*

*He  
should be  
central to  
our hearts  
now,  
every day,  
and also  
when  
we gather  
together  
to His Name.*

# Babel and blessing

## Abraham and the Gentiles

Theo Balderston

*The  
“humanist  
project”  
of  
uniting  
mankind  
in its  
common  
humanity,  
is  
actually  
very  
ancient.*

### Babel and modern humanism

In Genesis 10 the Holy Spirit describes the division of the human race into families, nations, and tongues (vv.5, 20, 31, 32). Genesis 11 describes why this division occurred. It was a judgment from God (vv.6-9). But Genesis 12 explains why human history was not terminated there and then.

Some time after the Flood humanity had moved south-eastward, presumably down the banks of the Euphrates, and used the clay and the bitumen pits of southern Mesopotamia to build a city and a tower whose top might reach to heaven (11:1-4). With this they would “make a name for themselves” (NKJV), and a universal reference-point to keep in touch with each other.

They wanted to preserve the unity of humanity. So the “humanist project” of uniting mankind in its common humanity, often credited to the eighteenth-century “enlightenment”, is actually very ancient. And their strategy for achieving this was a grand project that would glorify *them*, – the kind of role ascribed to humanistic knowledge and other human achievements today.

Indeed, humanity does have a unity: God made it *one* (Acts 17:26). They had all been originally created by God in His own image, but now all bore the image of fallen Adam; they all owed their existence to a marvellous rescue of Noah’s family by the ark, and they all were beneficiaries of amazing divine grace which pledged never to repeat the Flood (Genesis 1:27; 5:3; 7:7; 8:21). The fact, amazingly, that God had given this pledge *because* “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth,” but on the basis of Noah’s having offered one of every clean beast and bird to the LORD (8:20, ESV) was evidently quite forgotten, or entirely suppressed. If they had remembered,

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of what  
really  
united  
them.*

surely they would have continued to offer burnt offerings to the LORD on Noah's altar, and so have kept in touch with each other? Instead, like modern man, they attempted to construct an artificial unity that ignored God and obliterated the facts of what really united them.

But they were wrong to think that God would take no notice. "The LORD came down to see the city and the tower" (11:5). Humanistic scholars smile at the infantile picture of God in this sentence. How wrong! This lovely picture, that repeats itself in many other Scriptures (3:8; Exodus 3:8), displays God's deep interest in man and unwillingness to judge from a distance. It foreshadows the fact that the last Judge will be a Man who has borne all judgment Himself (John 5:27; Revelation 5:6).

But was the LORD's action at Babel entirely *judgment*? Certainly, the LORD is God, and He does not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). But why did God not extirpate self-vaunting post-Flood humanity, surely now on "its last chance"? Why did He merely confuse their speech and scatter them?

#### God the Blessor

The answer is that God's great plan was to bless them! In the very next chapter His promise to Abraham was "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:3). The last previous occurrence of the word "family" is 10:32. This relates the plan of blessing to all the families of the descendants of Noah who had defied Him at Babel! There were other promises to Abraham, notably of the Land to Israel, but the subject of this article is the blessing *of the Gentiles*. The promises to the patriarchs contain much Gentile blessing (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 27:29; 28:14).

But first Abraham had to hear God's call to get "out from your country, your kindred, and your father's house." As long as he remained part of "all the families of the earth" who were intent on ignoring God, he could not be the channel of blessing to them. This is always the case. It is not by submerging ourselves in the world that we can be

its blessing, but only by being first taken out of it and then sent back into it from, as it were, heaven itself (John 17:16-19). This is a truth which Christians today widely disregard.

God promised to bless Abraham and make him a blessing. His only part in this cascading of blessing was *faith*. He “believed in the LORD, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (15:6). Paul is at pains to prove this point (Galatians 3:7,8,15-18). Humanity had been thrice proved; firstly, in innocence in the Garden of Eden, secondly, under conscience between the Fall and the Flood, and thirdly, after the Flood at the tower of Babel. In all cases it had failed. In Abraham, God showed in a preliminary way that He expected nothing from man except faith that looked entirely away from man-in-Adam and his capabilities, and to Himself alone. Salvation does not spring out of the natural order of the first creation. Man’s redemption is not in himself as the moralists teach; it is a new and sovereign work of the living God.

### Israel: blessed to be a blessing?

But now another aspect of God’s promises to Abraham must be “factored in”, so to speak. Before God promised to bless all the families of the earth in Abraham, He promised to make of him “a great nation” (12:2; 18:18), not through natural processes of descent, but through a miracle outside nature – the birth of Isaac. And, following the (almost-) sacrificing of Isaac, God restates the promise of 12:3 to Abraham, but with a significant difference. “In *your seed* all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (22:18).

Such blessing did not come through Old-Testament Israel. In that era Israel was not yet “blessed in order to be a blessing.” Rather, because of their failure to keep the Law, God made them “a curse in all places where I shall drive them” (Jeremiah 24:9; cp. 44:8). Jerusalem would be a curse to all the nations of the earth (26:6), even although always “the apple of [God’s] eye” (Zechariah 2:8). This prophecy, sadly, has been fulfilled throughout history to this day,

Not until Messiah had come, had died for them, and risen again, could Abraham’s “seed” be a means of blessing to the nations. This is the force of Peter’s sermon in the outer court of the temple following the healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate. He repeated the promise of Genesis 22:18. “In thy seed all the kindreds of the earth shall be blessed” (Acts 3:25 KJV). Here “seed” denotes Israel, as represented by the crowd listening to Peter. God’s Servant had been appointed for *them* (see v. 20, ESV), and consequently He was sent to *them* first, to bless them in blotting out their sins (v.19; cp. Isaiah 43:25; 44:22) and in turning them away from their iniquity – something they could not do for themselves (Acts 3:26; contrast Ezekiel 3:19; 18:21,32). Then, when the nations observed concerning Israel that

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In  
Christ,  
God  
achieves  
what  
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vainly  
aimed  
at by  
building  
the  
tower  
of  
Babel.

“they are a seed that Jehovah has blessed” (Isaiah 61:9, Darby. Trans.), *the nations* would be blessed. This is the OT order of blessing, as conspicuously expressed in Psalm 67:1,2: “God be merciful to us and bless us ... That your way may be known on the earth, your salvation among all nations” (NKJV).

### An uncovenanted fulfilment

Only, it didn't happen – *not then*. Israel as a nation no more accepted Peter's gospel concerning Christ risen and glorified, than it had accepted Christ before His crucifixion (Matthew 27:22, 25). When the Sanhedrin lynched Stephen, they sent him to heaven with the message, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). Israel refused the blessing offered in Peter's speech. Yet, despite this, and not long after, Gentiles *were* blessed with salvation. This is because the word “seed” in the promises to Abraham is capable of another meaning. Paul says in Galatians 3:16 that the singular form (“seed”, not “seeds”) implies a single Person as its fulfilment – Christ. Paul apparently applies the Septuagint version of Psalm 72:17b to the interpretation of the promises to Abraham's s/Seed. This reads, “All the tribes of the earth shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed.” This verse echoes both Genesis 12:3 (in the phrase “tribes / families of the earth”) and 22:18, interpreting the “Seed” of this latter promise as Messiah. <sup>1</sup>

However this fulfilment went outside what the OT promises envisaged. Gentiles were to be blessed in Christ, not as Gentiles, but as “*neither Jew nor Gentile*”, as a new creation, and in resurrection (Galatians 3:28; 6:14-15). How was this? Paul introduces *baptism* as the means (Galatians 3:27). Taking for granted that the baptised are also true believers, he evidently assumes what he spells out in Romans 6:3-4, namely, that baptism identifies the

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 71 in the Septuagint. Although generally the Hebrew text of the OT as we have it is more correct than the Greek text of the Septuagint this is not necessarily always so.

believer with Christ dead and risen (see Galatians 2:20 for this identification). Therefore believers are viewed by God as He views “the Seed” – Christ; amazing fact! They have “put on Christ;” they are “all one [man] *in* Christ Jesus.” And therefore, as one in Him, and without becoming Jews (a fact vital for Paul’s argument in Galatians), they have become Abraham’s seed because Christ is Abraham’s Seed, and so they become heirs of the promises to Him (Galatians 3:27-29).<sup>2</sup> They receive the blessing, not as Gentiles and not as Jews, not as males or females, slaves or freemen, but as risen in Christ, in a new-creation order. This was “the administration of the mystery, hidden throughout the ages in God” (Ephesians 3:9, Darby Trans.). Ephesians 3:9 means that this fulfilment was not foreseen in Genesis, although retrospectively it more than fulfils the promises to Abraham.

In Christ, God achieves what men vainly aimed at by building the tower of Babel. Oneness is achieved not by what falsely exalts the old man, but in what exalts Christ. Believers are not united in their fallen selves, but in Christ risen, that is, in new creation. Only in the *total judgment* of that old man in the cross of Christ can the true human unity which God purposes be accomplished (see Galatians 6:14-15). How many Christians fail to see this!

### The covenanted fulfilment

Yet there will also be a future blessing of Gentiles *as Gentiles*, according to the Lord’s “Olivet discourse” and to Revelation.

Revelation 1:7 says, as usually translated, that at the Lord’s appearing in glory “all the tribes of the earth will mourn.” John was evidently quoting what he had heard the Lord Himself say (Matthew 24:3, 30). “Tribes of the earth” is identical in Greek with “families of the earth” in Genesis 12:3.<sup>3</sup>

These families of the earth *mourn*. This reads almost like an intended contrast to the *blessing* of Genesis 12:3! For them the Lord’s coming in glory is initially a sad, not a happy event. They evidently have no sense of salvation, unlike the persons who speak in Revelation 1:6, or 22:17. The reason is that they know their complicity in the death of the One who comes as their Judge, yet the verdict on them has not yet been pronounced. Shortly after speaking the same words in Matthew 24:30 the Lord told the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). This describes “all the nations” (v.32) being gathered together before Him *after*

<sup>2</sup> For these promises see Psalm 72:8-11 with Ephesians 1:10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Another translation of Revelation 1:7 is “tribes of the land” – in which case the allusion is to Zechariah 12:12, and the reference to Israel. The other places in the Greek OT where the phrase “tribes of the earth / land” occurs are Genesis 28:24; Psalm 72 [71]:17, Amos 3:2, and Zechariah 14:17.

*The church in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Israel as Israel, and these Gentiles as Gentiles, – all will be blessed through Abraham’s Seed.*

His appearing in glory. The King admits certain of them (“the sheep”) to eternal life, in virtue simply of their reception of “His brothers” (25:40). But “the goats” go into everlasting punishment.

And in Revelation 21:24 we meet these “sheep” again. It describes the nations walking by the light of the city, and the kings of the earth bringing their glory to it. These nations will correspond to “the sheep” of the Lord’s parable. “The city” symbolises the Bride of Christ (21:9). Therefore there will be nations in that time (which I take to be the coming millennium) who will not be part of the Bride, and yet will be blessed. They will have access to “the city” by its twelve gates, which symbolise the twelve tribes of repentant Israel (21:12, 26: 22:2; also 7:4-8). This reads like a New-Testament enlargement of the prophecy of the families of the earth (same phrase as in Revelation 1:7) going up to Jerusalem to worship the King (Zechariah 14:17).<sup>4</sup> Israel will therefore be their “interface” with blessing; but the slain Lamb on the throne will be the Source of all blessing (Revelation 21:27).

Where He displays His healing power,  
death and the curse are known no more:  
in Him the tribes of Adam boast  
more blessings than their father lost.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the church in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Israel *as Israel*, and these Gentiles *as Gentiles*, – all will be blessed through Abraham’s Seed; and this last group – the Gentiles of the millennium – will in a secondary sense be blessed because Israel, the seed, has been blessed. Thus will the promises of Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 and Acts 3:25 be super-abundantly fulfilled.

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<sup>4</sup> See also Isaiah 60:3, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Watts (a verse from “Jesus shall reign where’er the sun”). Accessed in The Cyber Hymnal, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/js/jsreign.htm>, on 12.02.10.

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## Psalm 119

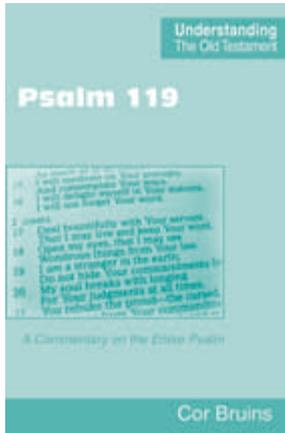
by Cor Bruins

186 pages

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Psalm 119 is the longest of all the 150 Psalms and, perhaps for that reason, its 176 verses are seldom or never read completely either in public or in private meditation or study. This is an immense loss. It has a great subject: the Word of God. It shows how that Word is a treasure trove of spiritual resources for the highs and lows of the



Christian's journey through life. At the moment of conversion every Christian is enrolled as a student in God's school, and finding this treasure requires daily Bible study. Meditating on each day's reading helps promote growth in spiritual maturity, experience of spiritual renewal, and the Holy Spirit can maintain praise to God in a continuous spiritual revival. Why the Psalm should be written as an acrostic is a matter of some interest. Was it simply to aid memorisation of the original Hebrew text? Do the individual letters of the Hebrew alpha-

bet suggest themes concerning God's Word which are taken up in eight-verse sections? Does the current use of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to represent numbers in dates aid our appreciation of the Psalm? It obviously expresses the hopes and fears of a faithful Jew, but what is in it for those under the new covenant? The author emphasises the practical lessons from this Psalm, in order that every reader might come to share his delight in the daily reading of the Word of God and the blessings this brings.

## “A day’s march nearer home”

To waken in the morning,  
and find that Thou art there  
listening intently  
to my every prayer  
for guidance and endurance  
in tasks of each new day;  
and feel Thy living presence  
with me all the way.

In praise to come before Thee  
for each night’s quiet rest,  
and for the many blessings  
that nothing can molest.  
For Thou, O Lord, art with me,  
my guide and stay by night;  
And sweet Thy thoughts are to me  
When breaks the morning light.

So, as upon the threshold  
of each new day I stand,  
to ask for grace and mercy  
from Thine own loving hand,  
Thy strength imparted to me,  
if weakness I should feel,  
Thy peace to calm my spirit  
and all Thy love reveal.

Help me to witness for Thee  
As through each day I go,  
To glorify my Saviour,  
His love to others show.  
Till, when I end life’s story,  
my work on earth is done,  
with joy I shall behold Thee,  
God’s well-belovèd Son.

**Janet D. Gleghorn**