

Scripture Truth



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The love of God and the patience of Christ

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The love of God and the patience of Christ

“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5, NKJV). The word translated “patience” here (*hypomonē*) is often now translated as “endurance,” or the like. But “endurance”, on the one hand, ties its meaning too closely to adversity of circumstances (which is not the thought in, e.g., Romans 2:7; 15:4) and on the other neglects the inward attitude that should underpin the visible endurance. Sheer anger can make people endure much. But that kind of endurance is foreign to the NT use of the word. “Patience” is the better translation.

And does our text above mean our love for God, or God’s love for us? Paul’s usage in Romans 5:5; 8:39, and 2 Corinthians 13:14 indicates the latter. Likewise, then, (and contrary to the KJV’s paraphrase), “the patience of Christ” will signify our Lord’s own patience.

These other references to “the love of God” also suggest that in this text too Paul focusses on God’s *present* love for us. Paul desires our hearts to be directed into the present, constant, love of God for us. Similarly, Paul most often uses the name “Christ” in relation to our Lord’s present exaltation: sometimes indeed when referring to the cross, but rarely in relation otherwise to the days of His flesh (though see 2 Corinthians 5:16). These two points strongly suggest that, contrary to many commentaries, Paul is speaking here of our Lord’s *present* patient waiting for the time right for His “cry of command” to summon us to the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16).¹ The Lord in glory is always awaiting that day, and awareness of this would fortify the Thessalonian saints in their ongoing afflictions. It would help them to “...hold fast the confession of [their] hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

And so also for us, in the much more minor afflictions (for most of us) of these unsettling times.

T. BALDERSTON

¹ Cp. Wm. Kelly, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* (London, 1893), p. 204.

Does God care?

A. J. Pollock

It did not look like it: The accepted man, Abel, murdered in jealous hate by the refused man, Cain. It seemed for the moment to be a sorry price to pay as the cost of God's acceptance, though this latter was by virtue of his offering, type of our standing in God's favour through the excellency of Christ's offering. Abel was murdered, and this only hurried him into the everlasting peace of God's presence. Was his usefulness on earth then cut short? Nay, he has preached longer than any preacher ever known. For one thing, he began earlier than any: he was the first to die, and he, being "dead, yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4, KJV). His lips are more eloquent in death than they could have been in life.

Ask Abel, "Does God care?" What answer will he give? There is only one possible answer, an earnest and emphatic "YES!"

It did not look like it: the rough-spoken lord of Egypt made it impossible for Jacob's sons to return for corn, unless Benjamin was with them. The old man, bereaved of his loved wife, Rachel, and her firstborn, Joseph, clung with passionate affection to Benjamin, the sole link with that particular past. When at last he was compelled to part with him, he gave vent to his grief, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Genesis 42: 36). Were "all these things" against him?

Jacob could not see far enough. Little did he think that the shadow of dreaded bereavement resting on his spirit, was in reality but the breaking of the clouds. Instead of losing Benjamin he was about to regain Joseph, and in regaining Joseph, every pinch of want would be a thing of the past when he lived in the land of Joseph's providing, and

*Ask Abel, "Does God care?"
What answer will he give?
There is only one possible answer,
an earnest and emphatic "YES!"*

*Ask Jacob, "Does God care?"
Hear him say to Joseph, for answer,
"I had not thought to see thy face:
and, lo! God hath showed me also thy seed"*

received of his bounty, even though all the rest of the earth was famine-stricken.

Ask Jacob, "Does God care?" Hear him say to Joseph, for answer, "I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo! God hath showed me also thy seed" (48:11).

It did not look like it: the children of Israel, groaning under bitter bondage, smarting under the whip of the cruel taskmaster, their would-be deliverer doing nothing more heroic for forty long years than keeping the flock of his father-in-law at the backside of the desert. And when he made his first effort to gain release for his oppressed countrymen, it was only to make their plight still worse, as the word went forth that no more straw was to be given to the people, and yet the tale of the bricks was not to be diminished (Exodus 5:6ff).

When the people murmured against Moses, they did not look far enough. Could they have seen what lay before them, how differently they would have viewed things! To the question of "Does God care?" the song on the Red Sea's banks (Exodus 15) gives triumphant answer.

It did not look like it: God's anointed hunted like a partridge on the mountains, a king without a throne; at best a motley crew around him in the cave of Adullam, those distressed, in debt, discontented, all with their lives in their hands (1 Samuel 22:1-2). It was a rough experience, and patience and endurance were sorely tried; yet tribulation taught David happier lessons than the prosperity of the throne. Those years of tribulation produced the psalms, which have comforted the saints of God well-nigh three thousand years. When Doeg, the Edomite, tells Saul that David had come to the house of Ahimelech, hear the answer of David's heart to the question "Does God care?" "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth

*Hear the answer of David's heart
to the question "Does God care?"
"Why boastest thou thyself in mischief,
O mighty man?
The goodness of God endureth continually"*

continually" (Psalm 52:1); and when the Ziphims come and say to Saul, "Doth not David hide himself with us?", his response is, "Behold God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul" (Psalm 54: 4); and when he flees from Saul in the cave, he can sing, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise" (Psalm 57:7). So it ever is. God does care, spite of appearances to the contrary.

It did not look like it: What a scene of imposing splendour: princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counsellors, sheriffs, and rulers all going one way. But three men stood against the swiftly flowing tide. How easily might the three Hebrew children have asked in doubt "Does God care?" Would it not be well to submit, and bow to the image of gold? But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had but one thought. To bow to God? Yes! To bow to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? Never! The king, full of fury, commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than its wont. What must the feelings of the three Hebrew children have been as the most mighty men in the army bound them in their coats, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments? But God was sufficient, even for a pass like this. The fiery flames with their scorching breath destroyed the mighty men, whilst they burned the bonds of those devoted youths, and set them free to walk where never mortal man had walked before – upon a pavement of molten fire, without the smell of fire upon them, not a hair of their head singed, and in the best of company, that of the Son of God! The inside of the furnace was better far than the outside. Not victims, but victors were they – delivered by their God; the king's word changed, and his decree altered into giving universal respect to a God who could so act! This was the

unexpected result of their faithfulness and constancy. God cared! And what will He not do for us if we stand true to Him?

It did not look like it: at the end of a faithful course, after years of evangelising and planting churches, the apostle Paul had to say, “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Timothy 1:15). “I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even unto bonds” (2:9). If “Demas hath forsaken me – only Luke is with me” (4:10f). What a contrast: he, who had been in the forefront of the fight, to be forsaken and alone! Yet when he writes, a prisoner, from Rome, with martyrdom before him, he can say to his beloved Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4); and as we read the epistle we can note the long vigorous stride the aged spiritual athlete takes as he exultingly cries, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14).

Shouldn't this encourage us? Are we forsaken, left alone, isolated? Then it is the time to lean upon the Lord Himself. We may with grief see the multitude turn away, but like Paul we may, unmoved, press on. In whatever circumstances we are, He is sufficient for us. To have His company, and His smile, is essential. Nothing else is.

Scripture teems with illustrations of how God cares, and of how short-sighted man is in looking at the events happening to him. Yet even with such a wealth of illustration, how little we are prepared to bring God into our calculations! How we leave Him out, thus losing both in peace of mind and steadiness of purpose!

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ... We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Romans 8:31, 37). Surely we need never raise the question, “Does God care?” but henceforth calmly rest in the abiding sense of His ceaseless and untiring love.

From Scripture Truth, 1(1909), pp.54f.

*Surely we need never raise the question,
“Does God care?” but henceforth calmly rest in the abiding
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The communion of faith

Learning to listen

Jonathan Hughes

This article is an abridged version of a Truth for Today radio talk, first broadcast on 31st May 2020. See www.truthfortoday.org.uk.

Perhaps you have heard the saying that “so and so is so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good.” On the surface of things, there may be a grain of truth in this. We might all be able to think of some folk who appear so other-worldly that the ordinary events of this life have no impact on them, nor they on this world. However, as we will see, nothing could be further from the real truth. It is those who are truly heavenly-minded that are most useful in this world.

We will focus initially on the first verses of the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Genesis, as they provide us with an interesting comparison that will set the scene for the rest of our article.

“Then the LORD appeared to [Abraham] by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing beside him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground” (Genesis 18:1,2, NKJV).

“Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face towards the ground” (Genesis 19:1).

I think that the contrast that we have in these two verses could not be more telling as regards the spiritual condition and priorities of these two men. Earlier in their history Abraham and Lot had separated as they had both grown rich and prospered (Genesis 13). Their herdsmen had come into conflict as they increasingly struggled for water and grazing for their flocks. Lot had chosen the well-watered and fertile plains of the Jordan and gone to live near to the exceedingly wicked city of Sodom. Abraham had gone in the opposite direction and pitched his tents far away from others.

By chapter 19 we find Lot sitting in the gate of Sodom. To “sit in the gate” was to be in a position of some authority and influence. This was where the city elders would meet and discuss all the news and make decisions that would affect the lives of the citizens of Sodom. So Lot had opted for a place of importance, and for the comforts which city-living would bring. Undoubtedly

he was a man of faith, and his position was not easy. We read in 2 Peter 2:7-8, "...righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)."

Lot may well have hoped that by becoming a part of the decision-making process, by getting involved in the government of the city, he would be able to restrain the evil of his day and be a force for good. This is a noble aim, but also a forlorn one. Lot was a man whose testimony was blown. In Genesis 19:9, as the men of Sodom are actively engaged in terrible behaviour they say to Lot, "Stand back!" Then they said, "This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them." Far from the people of Sodom appreciating Lot, they resented him and his presence amongst them. All he had left to him was the bitter anguish that their immorality would cause him. There was also a sadly corrosive effect on his own soul. When the holy messengers first arrived in Sodom after their visit to Abraham (19:1ff), we read that Lot *rose* to meet them. However in 18:1 we read that Abraham *had run* to meet them. I think that continuing exposure to evil dulls our spiritual sensibilities and lowers our spiritual fervour. Whilst Lot may well have been glad to have these divine messengers, there may also have been a subtle embarrassment that held him back and left him dreadfully conflicted. I know I have felt like this before! Maybe some unconfessed sin or desire to please self has left me less than eager to come into the Lord's presence. Perhaps I arrive at the Lord's Supper with nothing to say, no contribution of worship to make, and a clock-watching attitude that leaves little room for an experience with Jesus.

There was also a corrosive effect upon Lot's family. The message of God's impending judgement that Lot brought to his sons-in-law left them thinking that he was joking (19:14). In verse 26 Lot's wife dies due to her being unable to tear herself away from the comfortable life that she had made for herself. In verses 30-38 Lot's daughters show just how wrong a twisted religion, that conforms on the outside but is very wrong on the inside, can be. They do not want to marry a foreign husband, one who is not of the chosen people of God. But their solution is unspeakably gross. The children they bore would become the enemies of God's people for generations to come and cause them great

*Continuing exposure to evil dulls our spiritual sensibilities
and lowers our spiritual fervour*

grief. And yet from one of their number, Ruth the Moabite, David – Israel's great warrior king – would also come, and through him, Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Such is the gracious power of our omnipotent God!

As a husband and a father, I need to challenge myself as to what influence I have within my own family. My choices will have a direct impact upon their spirituality. In my pursuit of worldly position, advancement at work, or of my hobbies, my family may lose the spiritual example that will keep them close to the Lord. Lot wanted to have it all, and found that he ended up with nothing! There must be a solemn warning for each one of us today in the sorry life of Lot.

However Abraham stands in lovely contrast to all this! Outwardly, he had taken the harder path, the desert and the wilderness. Far from the cities, he seemed to have forfeited the position to influence affairs. Living in a tent, he remained at heart a pilgrim, whereas what filled Lot's heart were his possessions. So the divine messengers find Abraham at the door to his tent, ready to move whenever God called. As soon as he sees them he runs to meet them. Abraham was an old man but he did not mind running! If we want to truly listen to God, then we do need to have a heart that longs to be in His presence – a pilgrim heart. Although Abraham was rich, he had never settled into a comfortable existence in this world. He was waiting, listening for his God to tell him where next to go.

Perhaps of all the temptations we meet in this life, the subtlest of all is the comfort zone, that invitation to settle for less, to go for contentment when the stresses and miseries of over-achievement beckon. The way that takes you out of the comfort zone is the path less travelled by. Most of us, when we come to that place where the two paths divide, prefer the one that leads to safety, to warmth, to comfort.

Abraham was not that kind of man. Living as a pilgrim, he is ready for when his visitors appear – almost expecting them. He runs to meet them and implores them to break their journey with him. Once the meal is prepared for them, he stands and waits as they eat. Perhaps in his experiences of God he had already learned patience. I know that if it had been me, I would have wanted the divine message first and then food later. Not so Abraham. If God had a

*Perhaps of all the temptations in this life,
the subtlest of all is the comfort zone*

*There is a time to act and work hard,
but there is also a time to wait and listen*

message for him, then God would deliver it in just the right time, and Abraham was content to wait and listen.

How often I might try and force God's hand! I can see a work needs to be done and so I scheme and strive, trying to make it happen the way that I think it should. It is so frustrating that nobody else seems to think like I do and join me in making it happen! Of course, there is a time to act and work hard, but there is also a time to wait and stand still and listen, and Abraham knew this.

Once the meal is over, the LORD God reveals His message – more waiting, and then the long-promised son. Abraham may have already learnt the lesson of patience – about twenty-five years of it – but he was going to learn it again. So often in life God would teach us the same thing over and over until we really are like the Lord Jesus. But then the time came for the Messenger to leave. Was one divine message enough for Abraham – the man of faith and friend of God? Oh no! So, in chapter 18:16,17, as the messengers leave, we read that “Abraham went with them to send them on their way. And the LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing?’” For the rest of the chapter we have this amazing conversation as Abraham pleads for the lives of people in Sodom, and God graciously gives Abraham what he asks for. In fact, as things turn out, God goes far beyond what Abraham dared to ask for. You see, we can never care more than God does. Abraham, the pilgrim, the separate spiritual man, may well have had a heart full of love for his fellow-man, but God's heart was far bigger!

The contrast with Lot could not be greater. We have seen how Lot lost almost everything, but Abraham is left full. He has a wife who respects him, and the promise of a son, whose descendants, many years into the future, would give rise to Boaz, another man of faith, who would marry Ruth the Moabite descendent of Lot. The wonderful, unimaginable ways of grace that God weaves together across the tapestry of time! God uses the faithful and the worldly alike to accomplish His great plan of salvation. “So”, you might say, “what is the point of being a pilgrim, of suffering the exertions of achieving more?” That is an important question and one that we need to answer clearly. I think it likely that we are only going to follow the path less walked, along with Abraham, if we can see that it works. I think that in these two chapters we have

*Both Lot and Abraham saw the judgement of God,
but only Abraham understood what God was doing*

three answers that are really vital if we are to live victorious Christian lives to the full.

Firstly, on a purely selfish and physical level, ask yourself who came out of this encounter with God the richer in terms solely of the things of this life? Unquestionably Abraham. It is one of the great deceptions of the devil that the believer who sacrifices everything has nothing! We fear that, if we give up our time, our money, our career, or whatever else it may be, then this world will be a poorer place for us. We fear that we only live once and we will have missed out on something good. Undeniably, we may miss out on something good, but only to have God pour into the void something far better!

And yet so often I still hesitate to give up something for God, just in case! That must be why Abraham was a man of faith and I am not. He gave up home and friends and influence and found that he had not given up anything at all. Thus his faith grew and grew every time he tested God. He found God more than able!

Secondly, on a more global scale, we might ask who was more use to their fellow men? We have seen already that Lot's testimony was resented by the people of Sodom and that it was little more than a joke to his family. When the judgement of God fell, Lot had to be dragged away from the scene of carnage, unable to do anything for those around him and, with a weak faith unable to face the pilgrim life, wanting only to settle down again in a little city. Abraham on the other hand had spent time in the presence of God, interceding in prayer. Through his actions, any righteous people in Sodom would have been granted a reprieve.

We may often feel that we want to improve the society in which we live. That is right and proper. God does too! I think from these two chapters, though, we see that the best way to do this is not by immersing ourselves in the politics of our world, or by forming societies for the improvement of things. The best way we can really have an influence upon our society is by spending time with God and praying for our friends and neighbours. God may well then send us to them to serve and speak to them. We have already seen this in the life of Abraham. There is a time to act – for food banks and acts of charity, for speaking out against injustice and immorality – but that time is always after we

have spent time with God first. It is as He sends in preparation for what He is going to do.

Thirdly, both Lot and Abraham saw the judgement of God. Both of them *saw* what God was doing, but it was only Abraham who *understood* what God was doing. That path of closeness to God – and, in at least some measure, understanding what God is doing – is a path that is open to all. But we only enjoy communion with God when, like Abraham, we live in daily dependence on God. If we are not listening for His voice, then we are unlikely to hear Him when He does speak. If we are not living the pilgrim life with Him, then we are unlikely to really know His voice. It is a remarkable privilege to be able to enter into the thoughts of God and His purposes, but it must start with a desire in our hearts to listen to Him.

In John's Gospel, chapter 10, Jesus spoke about His sheep knowing His voice and hearing His words (v.27). Then they would follow Him where He led them. I know that so often I blunder about life, not really knowing what the right thing to do is. When I have a choice to make, I fret and worry. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that I have not spent enough time beforehand, learning to listen to the voice of God in my daily quiet times of prayer and Bible study. The option of understanding the ways of God is open to us all as it was to Abraham, but it will not happen by chance. Desiring time in His presence even when, figuratively speaking, God is ready to move on, so that we leave our comfort-zone to go with Him, is the challenge to each one of us today.

As I draw to a close I would like to challenge you, and in doing so, challenge myself, as to what this pilgrim pathway is going to look like in modern days. The pilgrim life must involve holding the things of this life as lightly as possible.

We need to be aware that there is a danger in possessions, in that they tend to tie us to this world, and start to take our focus off the Lord and onto the possessions. Abraham had learned to be aware of this, and it was one of the reasons why God would call him "His friend."

So, dear reader, where are you sitting today? Completely immersed in this world's problems and delights? Or are you waiting for God to speak and call you to increasing intimacy with Him?

Are YOU waiting for God to speak?

Paul's neglected letter

Galatians 1:6 - 2:21

Theo Balderston

Not long (it seems) after Paul had evangelised the Galatians,¹ certain Jews, professing Christians, had gained the ear of his converts and were persuading them that Paul had taught them only half a gospel. The other half (according to these interlopers) was that, as well as believing in Jesus, they also needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. But this was putting something else alongside faith in Christ crucified and risen as necessary for salvation (cp. 1 Corinthians 1:23). It was “a different gospel” to the gospel he had taught them, one that nullified the grace of God (Galatians 2:21, ESV). It imperilled the salvation of those who listened to it, and therefore those who taught it were “accursed” (1:6-9, NKJV). Paul’s denunciation of their teaching could hardly have been stronger.

These circumcision-teachers had evidently dismissed “Paul’s gospel” as a message he had no authority to be preaching. It did not, they said, have the authority of the twelve apostles, and they accused Paul of having invented it himself. This is the charge that Paul answers in the section of Galatians running from the eleventh verse of chapter 1 to the end of chapter 2.

Not so, Paul replies. He had not invented it. The gospel he preached was not “according to man”: he had not made it up, nor learned it from any man. God Himself had revealed it to him (1:11-12).

There was nothing in the unconverted Saul of Tarsus that would have had any tolerance for the simple gospel of grace. On the contrary, he had shown no mercy to (what he would now call) the church of God; rather, he had been its leading persecutor (1:13). (Note how readily this confession springs to Paul’s lips [cp. Philippians 3: 6; 1 Timothy 1:13]. One gets the impression that, forgiven though he was, this appalling stain on his record never left his consciousness.) His understanding and performance of, and zeal for, what he now called “Judaism” had excelled that of his contemporaries. The Jewish education of the law-teachers who were seeking to subvert Paul’s simple gospel could not match the Jewish education of Saul of Tarsus. *He* had “sat at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3) – some claim, I imagine.

Then comes one of the great “buts” of the New Testament (1:15). “But when it pleased God...”. God had separated Saul of Tarsus to Himself from birth (as

¹ See “Paul’s neglected letter: Galatians,” *Scripture Truth*, January 2021, pp. 245ff.

*There was nothing
in the unconverted Saul of Tarsus
that would have had any tolerance
for the simple gospel of grace*

He had Jeremiah – see Jeremiah 1:5), but He had left him to develop into an ultra-zealous rabbi until the appointed day had arrived for “the light above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26:13, KJV) to shine into his soul. God revealed His Son not simply *to*, but *in* Saul, so that he saw the Son of God, who had loved [him] and given Himself for [him] (Galatians 1:16; 2:20). Paul does not here dwell on light from heaven in itself, but on the revolutionary change it wrought in his being: cp. 2 Corinthians 4:6. Only that could account for the transformation of Saul the esteemed young rabbi into Paul the despised gospel-preacher.

It is evident that the few words by which Paul here sketched his conversion must have resonated with his readers, otherwise he could not have hoped to move them by recalling it. Anyone can claim a vision. But the sketch would no doubt remind them of the “conversion testimony” they had heard from his very lips, and of the burning reality that it was to him. That testimony would have left them in no doubt that God had indeed revealed His Son in Paul. They would recollect his declaration of the particular task that God had marked out for him – “that I might preach Him among the gentiles”. To man’s mind, Saul’s intense and narrow education in Judaism made him exactly the wrong person to spearhead the gentile mission. But to God, it was exactly the right preparation for such a task, partly because Paul could refute the Judaizers like no-one else, and so maintain the purity of the gospel like no-one else. Paul’s

*God revealed His Son not simply to, but in Saul,
so that he saw the Son of God,
who had loved him and given Himself for him*

preparation seems to demonstrate the importance to the purposes of God of refuting the Judaizing error.

Paul emphasises that after his call he had not sought instruction and training from any human source, and in particular had not travelled back to Jerusalem to receive it (1:16-22). If the Judaizers had been telling the Galatians that he had learned the gospel as a student of the twelve apostles, they were wrong.

The sojourn in Arabia (1:17) must surely mean that three years elapsed between Acts 9:22 & 23. Scholars surmise that “Arabia” here means the great desert to the east of Damascus. Did Paul learn there, with God alone, the truths of justification by faith, of the heavenly calling, of being “in Christ” and its implications? Very likely.

A brief visit to Jerusalem followed, in which he met up with only Peter and the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:18-19). This statement seems to mean that by being introduced to Peter and James, Paul was *virtually*, but not bodily, introduced to all the apostles (cp. Acts 9:27). Paul has to affirm this before God (1:20): presumably the Judaizers had disputed it. Galatians 1:19 does not deny that he had contact with the “ordinary” disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 9:28). Thereafter he had gone to “lie low” in his boyhood home of Tarsus in Cilicia (Galatians 1:21; Acts 9:30). He would not have met any apostles there!

His next visit to Jerusalem was not until fourteen years later (Galatians 2:1). Opinions differ as to whether this was the visit to convey famine relief from Antioch (Acts 11:28ff), or the visit to attend the so-called “council of Jerusalem” of Acts 15. One advantage of the former, and of postulating an early date of the Letter, is that otherwise one must assume that Paul passed silently over the “famine visit”, whereas the force of his argument depends on his having listed the sum total of his meetings with the twelve to date, so demonstrating the slightness of his contact with them.²

Whichever visit, the “chief men among the brethren” there had *not* required the gentile Titus to be circumcised – thus falsifying the Judaizers' claims that these “chief men” supported their cause (Galatians 2:3). On the contrary, it was “false brethren,” secretly brought in to “spy out” the gospel liberty preached by Paul and Barnabas, who had agitated for Titus's circumcision. Once again, Paul has no hesitation in branding those who opposed his gospel of justification by faith alone as false Christians. His account implies that there had been a controversy and struggle in Jerusalem over this point, but that the

² On the other hand, the earlier date for the Letter would force us to read the end of 2:5 as “...might continue with [the likes of] you”, as Paul had not evangelised Antioch of Pisidia by the time of Acts 11:28ff.

*Peter's failure demonstrates that
what once was our besetting sin
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We always need to be on our guard
against our natural selves!*

circumcisionists had not carried the day. At any rate, though aware that Titus had not been circumcised, the “pillars” in Jerusalem – James, Cephas and John – had extended “the right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas as regards their gentile mission (Galatians 2:9). They were not at odds with Paul.

But though they did this, certain of their followers certainly disapproved of eating with gentiles (Galatians 2:12). There is no prohibition in the Law against eating in a gentile’s house, but this prohibition seem to have had the force of law in the first-century Jewish mind (Acts 10:28). (Of course, eating gentile food ran the risk of transgressing Levitical dietary laws, and this was probably in the background of the issue that blew up in Antioch.) When “certain men from James” arrived in Antioch, Peter, who was already there, stopped eating with gentiles, not out of conviction, but out of fear of these men. Paul calls his action “hypocrisy” (Galatians 2:11-13).

Peter’s failure here demonstrates that what once was our besetting sin will always tend to be our besetting sin, no matter how long we have been on the Christian path. Peter’s faith had given way to fear when, against the Lord’s instruction, he had followed Him to the high priest’s courtyard, with the result that he denied his Lord. Peter’s faith gave way to fear again in Antioch when these men “came from James”. We always need to be on our guard against our natural selves!

Other Jewish believers in Antioch imitated Peter’s “hypocrisy” and “even Barnabas was carried away.” Their action had tended to force gentile believers to submit to Levitical dietary laws (2:14) – i.e. to add something to simple faith as if necessary for salvation.

This had provoked Paul into decisive counter-action. In the presence of the church he confronted Peter regarding his “hypocrisy”, and reminded the great apostle of the basis of their salvation. How can someone be righteous in God’s sight? Unconverted Jews could be fairly relaxed about this matter, so scholars

*Conformity to the Levitical dietary laws
undid the simplicity
of being justified by faith alone*

tell us. They could salve their consciences by offering sacrifices to cover their defaults. First-century Judaism, so we are told, confined “sinning presumptuously” or “with a high hand” (see Numbers 15:30) to the sin of apostasy: sacrifices would cover everything else. But the awakened conscience could not let itself off so lightly (see Romans 7:7-12). Therefore Peter and Paul had both learned that only faith in Christ Jesus could make them right in God’s sight. And they had indeed put their faith in Him^{3*} (Galatians 2:16).

But forcing gentile converts to conform to the Levitical dietary laws undid the simplicity of being justified by faith alone, i.e., by grace alone. We should note in passing that Old-Testament saints, too, had cast themselves believingly on the mercy of God (Romans 4:5-8).⁴ But the covenant of Sinai had not yet been terminated, so they kept it, though knowing that it convicted them. That day has now ended (cp. Galatians 3:23ff). Paul’s issue with the law-teachers was not over whether Christians ought to identify as Jews rather than as gentiles, or as *vice versa* (as some sociologically-minded writers have maintained). It was about the fact that to be saved at all we must rely on no work of ours, but only on Christ crucified.

Peter’s retreat into law-observance made it appear to onlookers as if he thought that dependence on faith alone had led him into sin (2:17-18). Rather, faith in Christ had led Paul into a far more serious estimate of sin. “I through the law died to the law...” (Galatians 2:19). Romans 7:7-12, already cited above, partly explains this. Far from the Law being his means of salvation, it had become his death-sentence.

But he had also been crucified with Christ (2:20). This doesn’t mean that non-Christian Jews regarded him as “as good as dead”. The rest of the verse forbids such an interpretation. Rather, in God’s sight *Paul* had been crucified when Christ was crucified. It is not just that his sins were judged and atoned for in the cross: *he* as a person had been judged there. So he must regard himself as a

³ See Note at end of article.

⁴ Albeit imperfectly, as the light of the gospel had not yet dawned. E.g., Nehemiah 5:19.

*“I through the law died to the law...”
But he had also been crucified with Christ*

judged person. This meaning best fits the corollary, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” God had judged him as a person, so that he (Paul) might live unto God (2:19), in laying hold by faith on the resurrection life of Christ; and this was realised in Paul hour by hour, as he “live[d] by faith in the Son of God who loved [him] and gave Himself for [him]” (2:20). This, too, is fundamental to “Paul’s gospel”.

Paul never for one waking moment forgot the unutterable greatness of the Person who had inexplicably loved proud, Christ-hating, cruel, Saul of Tarsus so much as even to give *Himself* on a cross for him. Did Paul ever know the Lord Jesus “in the days of his flesh”? The answer is unclear (2 Corinthians 5:16). But Paul’s testimony surely permits each believer humbly yet truly to say, “The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Taking Romans 7:7-11 together with Galatians 2:19-20, we may conclude that it was only once Paul knew that the gospel was true through God’s Son having been revealed in him (Galatians 1:16) that he could at last accept the Law’s verdict on him, and say, “I, through the law, died to the law, that I might live unto God.”

Truly Paul’s gospel, unlike that of the Judaizers, did not nullify the grace of God (2:21). On the contrary, it revealed its uttermost extent. This verse passes a stern verdict on all “gospels” which seek to fuse man’s good works with faith in Christ and His cross. They *nullify* grace.

* The Greek of 2:16 says literally “faith of Jesus Christ” – twice, and some now translate this phrase as “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”. Our Lord was indeed faithful to God (Hebrews 3:2; cp. Numbers 12:7), but that thought is not present in the context. Nor does the context speak of the Lord’s *faithfulness* to us, but rather His *uncalled-for* love to us (v.20). And not the complete intention, in itself, to die for sins, but the actual death is what atones. So I accept the verdict of many other scholars that the phrase indeed means “faith in Jesus Christ”. This point applies to the same construction in 2:20, except that there it is faith in the risen and ascended Son of God.

Genesis 24

A bride for Isaac

F. B. Hole

Continuing a series that started in July 2017.

The first six verses of chapter 24 show that Abraham laid two stipulations on the servant he sent on the long journey to Mesopotamia to bring back a wife for Isaac (v.10): first, that the wife should not be taken from among the Canaanites; second, that though she should be of his own kindred, the union should not be allowed to lure Isaac back to the land whence his father had come out. The chosen woman must be willing to share the position of stranger which Isaac occupied in the land of promise. She must come to him; he was not to go to her.

If, in our day, every Christian contemplating marriage were to observe carefully the principles underlying these two things it would make for spiritual prosperity. The breach of them has brought about untold disaster, as is too often painfully manifest.

These opening verses of our chapter show us that Abraham remained true to the call of God that he had originally heard; and did it not only for himself, but for his children and household after him; thus justifying the Lord's estimate of him as expressed in chapter 18:19. The seventh verse of the present chapter supplements this by showing the full confidence he had that the Lord would support this faithful adherence to His word.

Twice in these verses (vv. 3, 7) does he speak of the LORD God of heaven. Stephen has informed us that it was "the God of glory" who had appeared to Abraham when he left Ur (Acts 7:2). The God of heaven is far above all the little storms and frustrations that fill our small world. And so the servant is now sent forth with the assurance that direction would be given by God's angel, leading him to the suitable wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:7). The mission was only to fail if the chosen woman was not willing to follow the servant to the waiting bridegroom.

*The chosen woman must be willing
to share the position of stranger with Isaac.
She must come to him; he was not to go to her.*

*The servant would not even eat
before he had delivered himself of his charge*

The servant was put under oath regarding the above-mentioned stipulations, and with this he departed, fully equipped by his master since he had control of his master's goods (v.2). In this He clearly serves as an appropriate "type" of the Holy Spirit. Moreover the servant addressed himself to his mission in a prayerful spirit. However, the way he addresses God, as recorded in verse 12, shows that his knowledge of God was of a second-hand nature. He knew Him as Abraham's God rather than as his own. In this the "type" falls short.

And this leads us to remind readers that no "type" is perfect in all its particulars. If we recognise this limitation we shall be saved from the effort to force meanings into small details connected with the person or incident forming the "type", which so often ends in what is fanciful and imaginary.

But in spite of this limitation in the servant's prayer, it was of a most intelligent nature, and it met with a remarkable and immediate answer. He was confident that the damsel God provided would be of a gracious and willing spirit, and this character would be evidenced by her response to his request.

And so it came to pass – and that at once. Before he had done praying, Rebekah arrived, and acted with all the grace he had specified. Moreover she was a "chaste virgin" (v. 16), such as Paul desired the church at Corinth should be for Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2); and this is what the completed church will be by the work of God when she meets her heavenly Bridegroom in the air at His coming.

The answer to the servant's prayer was complete as well as immediate. She was of the right kindred and there was accommodation in her father's house. The servant had just to bestow on her gold ornaments as an evidence of what was to come, then, bowing his head, he worshipped the Lord.

Laban now comes into view. For some reason Bethuel, though the father, does not take the prominent place that was customary. Later, in chapters 29 & 30, we hear more of Laban through his dealings with Jacob, and his self-seeking character comes clearly to light. But a trace of it is at once revealed here. His effusive welcome of the servant was connected with his sight of the costly gifts

already bestowed on his sister (24:30). But over all this rested the hand of God pursuing that which He purposed.

The servant, however, was true to his master, and full of his errand. He would not even eat before he had delivered himself of his charge (24:33). He had only one thing before him. He had not come to enrich Bethuel's house or to improve conditions in Mesopotamia, but to take out of both a bride for Isaac. Here we see a striking type of the Holy Spirit and His mission, which is not to improve world conditions but to take out of the Gentiles "a people for [God's] Name" (Acts 15:14).

To this end the servant retired into the background. He confesses, "I am Abraham's servant." In verse 37 he speaks of Abraham as "my master," and in verse 65 we find him saying of Isaac, "It is my master." So both the father and the son were master to him; and his mission was to extol both. In verse 35 he speaks of the greatness and wealth of Abraham; and in verse 36 he speaks of the son, and he testifies that the father had given to his son "all that he hath." This at once reminds us of John 3:35. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." At this point in the story Isaac typifies the risen Christ, as we have already said. Consequent upon the resurrection and ascension of Christ comes the mission of the Holy Spirit, which the Lord Jesus described in anticipation in John 16:15. "All things that the Father hath are Mine; therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and shall shew it unto you." How all this is typified in the chapter before us is very plain.

Having recounted the greatness of his master – both father and son – the servant related how his way had been opened up and ordered of God. This was evidence that "the thing proceedeth from the Lord," as both Laban and Bethuel recognized (v.50f), and hence they gave their consent to Rebekah's departure, and left the final word to her – though they pleaded for delay.

Before the ultimate decision was made, but in the certainty of it being made, the servant bestowed on Rebekah gifts which were a pledge of the wealth she was going to inherit as the wife of Isaac. Her relatives also were made to

*The servant related how his way
had been opened up and ordered of God.
This was evidence that
"the thing proceedeth from the Lord"*

*Happy is that Christian for whom
the old links with the world are thoroughly broken*

experience the bounty of Abraham. All this was also a seal upon her betrothal to Isaac, so that we may see here a type of the Holy Spirit as both Seal and Guarantee (see Ephesians 1:13,14) – the Seal securing us for the Divine calling and purpose, and the Guarantee being the pledge of the inheritance yet to be ours in its fulness in the coming age.

Verse 54 shows that the servant's mission was of a character that permitted no delay. On the day of arrival the betrothal took place: on the morning of the next day he would be off to his master. For Rebekah the new link was established, so the old link with kindred and country was at once to be broken. This is a wholesome reminder for us that, being linked by the Spirit to the risen Christ, our old links with the world are broken. It is a sad fact that all too many Christians attempt to hold on to Christ with one hand and yet grip the world with the other; but it can only be done for a little while, and at very heavy cost and loss.

Rebekah's relatives pleaded for delay, and so often do the relatives of the believer today. And if we have no relatives to do this, our own foolish hearts will do it even more effectively. The servant, however, would allow no delay. The question was put to Rebekah, for the ultimate decision rested with her. "Wilt thou go with this man?" Was she prepared to entrust herself to the servant who was acting on behalf of Isaac, and to do so at once?

Her answer was simple and decisive – "I will go" (v.58). Here again we may see a "type," or analogy, that may very well search our hearts. Believing the gospel of our salvation, we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, but have we made such a committal of ourselves to Him as is indicated in the story before us? Happy is that Christian who at conversion, or very soon after, is so committed to the leading of the Spirit – who indwells in order to glorify Christ – that the old links with the world are thoroughly broken and to reach Christ in His glory becomes the goal. The spirit of this we see exemplified in Paul, as he has put on record in Philippians chapter 3. May we all go in for this in so real a way that everybody may see that we have made the great decision, "I will go." Rebekah's decision made, her relatives released her with their blessing (v.60). We have to

*Isaac went forth to meet her.
The heavenly Bridegroom will come forth
into the air to meet His bride*

admit that the terms of their blessing have come to pass, but only as the fruit of her going forth to Isaac under the leadership of the servant.

It has often been pointed out that the journey across the desert,¹ however long it took, is related here as though it had been all accomplished within a day. Verse 54 speaks of “the morning,” when the journey started; verse 63 mentions “the eventide,” when the journey finished and Isaac met his bride.

It is worthy of note that Isaac did not receive her when seated in state in his father’s tent, but as one who had gone forth to meet her. The servant recognized the lonely man, walking in the field so meditatively, as his master, and this knowledge he communicated to the bride, who thereupon veiled herself, that, hidden from other eyes, she might be presented to him.

And this very strikingly befits the “type” we are considering. At the end of the church’s pilgrimage the heavenly Bridegroom will come forth into the air to meet her, and then introduce her into His Father’s house. At that glad moment she will be veiled in the all-resplendent light of His glory. Every eye will be upon Him rather than upon her. Later, as we know, the saints will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father; and at the present time the church is not veiled, but in the place of witness as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). But at the end of the journey the Bridegroom will be everything, and the present mission of the Holy Spirit will be brought to a perfect conclusion.

The last verse of our chapter tells us that in acquiring his bride Isaac forgot the sorrow occasioned by the death of his mother. Sarah here typifies Israel, out of whom Christ came as concerning the flesh. At the present time Israel is disowned nationally, but the blank thereby created has been filled, and more than filled, by the calling of the church under the hand of the Spirit.

From Scripture Truth, 36 (1948-50), pp. 192, 204-207; abridged and slightly edited for clarity.

¹ Hole, and many another, assumed that the city of Nahor (24:10) lay due east of Canaan, across an inhospitable desert. Others think that north-west Mesopotamia, near Haran, is meant.

Heaven on earth?

The Synoptic Gospels

Theo Balderston

Denial of the heavenly hope is now widespread, perhaps even dominant, in evangelical literature. This article concludes a series started in the April 2015 issue and continued in the issues of April and October 2020.

There are only a few glimpses of the heavenly hope in the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is because they record the history of our Lord’s ministry during the days of His flesh. He came as the promised King of Israel, of the seed of David (Matthew 1:1 – 2:11). The prophecy of Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, confirmed that “the LORD [had] visited His people,” with the object of raising up a “horn of salvation... in the house of His servant David,” conformably to the witness of the Old-Testament prophets. This One would save them from their enemies, and through Him God would fulfil the covenant-promise to Abraham, by creating a “safe space” where they could “serve [God] without fear, and in holiness and righteousness” (cp. Luke 1:67-79). This was obviously an earthly, not a heavenly, hope.

John the Baptist proclaimed that “the reign¹ of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2, NKJV). “Reign of heaven” means the rule of heaven upon the earth. Our Lord’s ministry commenced with the same words (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15), and in Matthew’s Gospel the same words again epitomise what the disciples were sent forth to proclaim (10:7). The Lord had been born the divinely appointed King of Israel, the Messiah (Matthew 2:2; Luke 2:11; John 1:49), and the name by which He referred to Himself – “Son of man” (however cryptically He used it) – embodied a claim to universal earthly dominion, according to Psalm 8:6-8 and Daniel 7:13-14.

Against this background of the earthly sovereignty that belonged to the Lord as Man already in virtue of His birth (Matthew 2:2; John 18:37), Peter’s words in Acts 2:36 are at first reading surprising: “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Notice the verb “made”. Since the Lord was *already* “Lord and Christ” by virtue of His incarnation, the “Lord-ship and Christ-ship” conferred on Him as ascended Man must be greater than what was His by birth. God conferred this greater “royal authority” on Him as the

¹ “Reign”, or “royal authority and power”, probably better captures the meaning of the Greek word for “kingdom”, which to modern readers sounds like an area of the earth’s surface. It can bear this geographical meaning, but basically the word means “royal authority.” Other Gospels have “reign of God”. I’m treating the two as equivalent.

There are only a few glimpses of the heavenly hope in the Synoptic Gospels. This is because they record the history of our Lord's ministry during the days of His flesh

risen and ascended Man, in virtue of His crucifixion. This is confirmed in Philippians 2:9-11: “*Therefore* [i.e., because of His self-emptying to the point of death on a cross] God also has highly exalted him, and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, *of those in heaven*, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess Jesus Christ as Lord...” [italics added]. This is what is implicit in Acts 2:36.

And, according to Ephesians 1:20-23, God has associated with Christ in His ascended Headship all those who have believed in Him as their crucified, risen and ascended Lord. God has, already, lifted us up *virtually* into heavenly places to share His place, and He will actually do so in the ages to come, in order to display the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus (2:1-7).

However our Lord's ministry prior to His crucifixion scarcely mentioned His forthcoming ascension and what would accompany it. Only (I think) to renegade disciples did He introduce the subject of the ascension – and then as a question (John 6:62). He warned the twelve concerning His crucifixion as soon as Peter confessed Him as Messiah (Matthew 16:21, etc.), and He also gave three disciples a foretaste of His return to this earth in glory (16:28ff). But, except for in John 6:62, He did not tell them about His ascension and the period between His resurrection and return. He told them that He would go away and come again, in order to prepare them for their responsibilities during His absence, but He veiled the fact of His ascension behind the vague terms, “journey” and “far country” (Matthew 25:14; Luke 19:12). In His “Olivet discourse” He spoke about His glorious coming, but without clearly explaining where He would be coming *from* (24:30). Not until the “upper-room discourse” on the eve of His crucifixion did He tell His disciples plainly that He was going to the Father (John 16:22-28).

This explains the slightness of reference to the believer's heavenly hope in the Synoptic Gospels. The passages in the Synoptic Gospels concerning His coming again are Matthew 8:11; 13:41-43; [16:28]; 19:28; 20:21; 22:11ff; 24:30; 25:6, 19, 32ff; 26:29 (and parallels in other Gospels), and additionally Luke

21:31; 23:42f, 51. Of these, Matthew 16:28 means that the Lord will come *back to this world* in His reigning power. Matthew 19:28 also envisages an earthly location. The venue of Matthew 25: 31 would be understood as in this world, and the locations of Matthew 25:6, 19 and Luke 19:15 are not clearly specified. Moreover, when Matthew records that, once the veil in the temple was ripped open, saints rose from the dead and entered the holy city (i.e., Jerusalem – Matthew 27:51ff), this clearly foreshadows a future earthly reign centred on Jerusalem (though Jerusalem is a venue that terrestrialists are not keen to discuss!). And when the Lord said to the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, “I say to you, you shall see me no more again till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD’” (Matthew 23:39), this clearly portended a future earthly kingdom.

Similarly, Luke tells us that the Lord ascended from Bethany, on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50), and angels immediately informed the apostles that He would return as they had seen Him go into heaven (Acts 1:9, 11). Their announcement conforms to Zechariah 14:4, where it is said that “His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives”, and therefore confirms a future earthly reign centred on Jerusalem.

Nevertheless there is another side to the testimony of Matthew and Luke. The final venue mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel is the mountain in Galilee where the Lord had instructed the disciples to meet Him (28:7, 16ff). His choice of “Galilee of the gentiles” (Isaiah 9:1), far from Jerusalem, for imparting “the great commission” seems to be designed to indicate that in the interim between the Lord’s ascension and His return to Jerusalem (Matthew 23:39), Jerusalem would not be the focal-point of God’s actions in the world.

Luke’s second book bears witness to the same point. Just before the Lord ascended from the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Him, “Will you at this time restore the royal power [or, “sovereignty”] to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) The Lord’s reply in the next verse is instructive. He in effect told them not to bother their heads about the timing: “It is not for you to know times or seasons... but you shall receive power... and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” And this indeed foretells the stages by which the gospel would be spread.

*Our Lord’s ministry prior to His crucifixion
scarcely mentioned His forthcoming ascension*

However the unfolding story of these stages did *not* describe an evangelism that established a church centring on Jerusalem. At least five-thousand persons were indeed converted in the early days of the gospel proclamation in Jerusalem (Acts 4:4; 6:1). But the reaction to this success was the imprisonment of the apostles by the chief priests and the Sanhedrin, with a view to their execution (4:3; 5:17ff, 33). God thwarted their plan (5:34ff), but instead they lynched Stephen, and in effect sent him to heaven with the message, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (cp. Luke 19:14). The ensuing fierce and general persecution in Jerusalem caused the believers (other than the apostles) to flee from the city into Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8:1); and in Samaria “the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip” (8:6). Notice that it does not just say, “multitudes”, but “*the* multitudes”. This reads like most of the city. No opposition is recorded; the reception of the gospel in Samaria was far friendlier than in Jerusalem (cp. 9:31; 15:3).

The time was now ready for the fourth and final stage of the itinerary that the Lord had set for the apostles in 1:8, namely, the push “to the end of the earth”. This was soon spearheaded by Paul, at the Holy Spirit’s direction (Acts 13:2), and initially along with Barnabas. For the rest of the book of Acts the record of Paul’s reception in city after city is almost monotonous. Paul and his co-workers almost always visited the synagogue first (cp. Romans 1:16). The synagogue authorities then ejected them for their gospel – and often also made trouble for them with the authorities. But some synagogue-attendees believed, both Jews and gentile “God-fearers”, and a church was formed. How it must have broken Paul’s heart that not a single synagogue as such received the gospel in the towns he evangelised (Romans 9:1-2).

At three significant points in the narrative Paul utters the words, “Behold, we turn to the gentiles” (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28). In each of them the context implies a turning-away from the Jews. And Acts practically closes (28:26ff) with Paul repeating the same solemn judgmental words upon Israel from the end of Isaiah 6 that the Lord had pronounced on the crowds in Matthew 13:14f, and that John had cited at the end of the Lord’s public ministry (John 12:39f). From this thread through the Acts we learn the same lesson as taught by the Galilean venue for imparting “the great commission”, namely, that Jerusalem was not to be the centre of the “gospel movement” that resulted from our

*The “gospel movement” centred its hopes
on heaven, from where it awaited a Saviour*

But this higher and wider “kingdom” does not cancel the kingdom as it was heralded in Matthew 3:2

Lord’s crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (John 4:21). And this indicates that the earthly hopes that were centred on Jerusalem were not those of the post-ascension “gospel-movement.” This movement had no earthly centre (certainly not Rome!) but rather centred its hopes on heaven, from where it awaited a Saviour and His upward call that would summon them to the place to which He had ascended (Philippians 3:14,20).

Acts 2:36 and Philippians 2:9f tell us how to understand the word “kingdom” in the Acts and the Epistles. The “kingdom” or “royal authority” that this new movement proclaimed (e.g. Acts 8:12; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 6:9f) must be presumed to have been the higher and wider one connected with the Lord’s ascension, and not just the earth-centred one proclaimed by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2, and by the Lord in Matthew 4:17. And the “royal authority” that the Lord received at His ascension must be the same “royal authority” as Paul’s converts would *inherit* in Christ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; see too 15:50).

But this higher and wider definition of “kingdom” does not cancel the kingdom as it was heralded in Matthew 3:2, etc., nor negate the disciples’ question, “Lord, will you at this time restore the sovereignty to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) God loved Israel (including the ten tribes!) with an everlasting love, and “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Jeremiah 31:3; Malachi 1:2; Romans 11:28f). Our Lord’s reply in Acts 1:7 implies that He would indeed restore Israel’s royal power and sovereignty, but not immediately. The verb “restore” implies that it will be returned to the same “Israel” as had effectively forfeited it back in the times of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and scarcely ever possessed it since (Ezra 7:9).² That is to say, it will be restored to the natural, but now converted, descent of Abraham (see Zechariah 12:10ff). All that the Lord added to the disciples’ question in Acts 1:6 was that the timetable for such a restoration would not be revealed to them. The sovereignty needed for worshipping God without fear, that Zacharias looked for (Luke 1:74f), will return under Israel’s true King in the day that Jerusalem welcomes His coming (Matthew 23:39). This is the context for the Synoptic Gospels’ witness to the

² The precarious autonomy of the Hasmonean monarchy (c.140 – c.63 BC) is the exception. The standard Greek lexicon gives for the verb in 1:6, “to restore to an earlier good state.”

*What would we make of someone
whose thoughts were riveted on the safe-deposit facility
where their jewels were stored?*

future earthly reign of Christ, as in Matthew 16:28, etc. The relationship between the two “sovereignities” is signified in Revelation 21:12 by the names of the twelve tribes being inscribed on the gates of the celestial city. Israel will act as doorkeepers to the city (cp. v.24): the access of the millennium’s earthly citizens to the throne of God will be via Israel and the church.³

My quick survey of the Synoptic Gospels seeks to explain why they contain only rare reference to the heavenly hope. However the Lord did promise both the persecuted disciples and “the rich young ruler” a heavenly treasure (Matthew 5:12; 19:21; Luke 6:23, etc.). Many explain these sayings by invoking a “warehouse” theory of heaven, namely, that heaven is a place where promises and pleasures are currently stored, to be retrieved for earthly enjoyment at the resurrection. However, the Lord also instructed His disciples not to lay up treasure for themselves on earth, but rather in heaven, adding that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). If the “warehouse” theory of heaven were correct, following this instruction would turn the disciples into pathological cases. What would we make of someone whose thoughts were riveted on the safe-deposit facility where their jewels were stored? The Lord said that the disciples’ hearts should be where their treasure is, because having their treasure there would focus their hearts on the place to which He was taking them, for ever.

It was only in the last few hours before His arrest that the Lord told His disciples, “I go to prepare you a place, that where I am, there you may be also.” By His ascension the Lord would prepare a place where they would be with Him for ever. John alone records this promise, a promise which brackets His entire “upper-room discourse” (John 14:3: 17:24). It was one of the chief purposes for which the Lord went away.⁴

³ On this see the article in *Scripture Truth*, October, 2020, pp.219ff.

⁴ On this see the article in *Scripture Truth*, April 2020, pp.142ff.

The Mediatorial Glories of The Son of God: seen in Tabernacle Patterns and Sacrificial Types

by James Green

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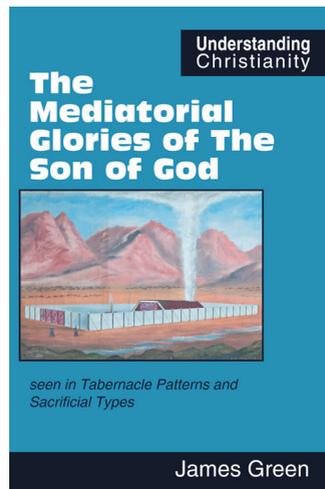
James Green (1859-1936), was a frequent contributor to early issues of *Scripture Truth* in the early part of the twentieth century. By profession he was an artist and lithographer, notable for his illustrations in Arthur Mee's *I See All* and subsequent *Children's Encyclopaedia*.

His artistic talents were put to considerable use in a series of pictures he painted to illustrate the Tabernacle in the wilderness described in the book of Exodus. The original set of pictures were used on several occasions in lectures by A. J. Pollock, author of *The Tabernacle's Typical Teaching*, and by the author. Colour photographs of these illustrate this volume.

He found that his lifetime of study of the detail of the Tabernacle had, "under the hand of the God, resulted in a much fuller apprehension of the glories of Christ, conveyed in the patterns of things in the heavens". *The Mediatorial Glories of The Son of God* powerfully presents the message he delivered in the United Kingdom through numerous lecture series in his lifetime.

The present volume was completed shortly before his death in 1936 and has remained unpublished until now. We are pleased to bring this book into print at last, assured that it will provide as much spiritual refreshment today as when the author first shared his appreciation of its great Subject.

It nicely complements A. J. Pollock's book, concentrating entirely on drawing lessons about Christ from the detail of the Tabernacle in Exodus, on a journey from the Court outside to the Ark at its centre. A. J. Pollock travels in the opposite direction. Both approaches have valuable lessons for us today.



Yesterday, today, forever,
Jesus is the same:
All may change, but Jesus, never,
glory to His name!
Glory to His name!
glory to His name!
All may change, but Jesus, never!
Glory to His name!

Albert Benjamin Simpson, 1843-1919