

Scripture Truth



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The Psalms of Passover

What the Lord is to His people
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What happened after the Creation?

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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

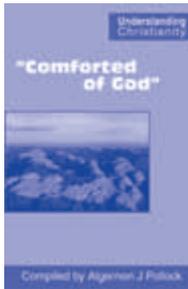
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The “quiet time”

A few years ago I read some soul-baring by an evangelical speaker (I forget who) about his bitter regret at having, in his more youthful ministry, belittled the “quiet time”. He had lived to see the widespread neglect of this vital element of personal Christianity, and the consequences of it.

Never belittle the “quiet time” – to yourself, or anyone else. The Lord Jesus Himself “having risen a long while before daylight [...] went out and departed to a solitary place; and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). Of course we are not subject to regulations (Colossians 2:20). But there are some spiritual disciplines, just as there are some bodily disciplines, which are pretty vital. Our “quiet times” can be in the evening if the morning is impossible – but being alone with God when the brain is fresh is better than when it is jaded. Sometimes every regular practice will be impossible – we don’t have to feel a conscience about it. But if it’s becoming impossible too often, it probably means that *something else* in our habits needs changing!

In our “quiet times” we need to read the word of God, and pray. Reading should be primarily in order to hear what God has to say to me today – about Himself, about His Son; and about myself – His promises to me, His challenges, His guidance, His encouragements, His loving rebukes. Praying needs to be earnest, not perfunctory. If we find reality in our reading and earnestness in our prayer difficult, chances are that our lives are not governed by the *obedience of faith*. If they are so governed, there will be plenty of things to seek His will and to pray earnestly about!

Unless we spend time “in the sanctuary”, we shall not see the Lord’s beauty, power and glory (Psalms 27:4; 63:2). And we shall not be able to view the perplexities of life from God’s perspective (Psalms 73:17; 77:13). We shall not be able to distinguish self-will from God’s will, and say, “Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.” Neglect of the “quiet time” will leave us “too earthly minded to be any heavenly use.” *And it is how the slippery slope of backsliding first manifests itself.*

Theo Balderston

With reverence and godly fear

Gordon Hughes

Overwhelmed by the holiness of the One behind whom she stood, the “woman in the city” wept. Overwhelmed by the grace shown him, a king’s grandson called himself “a dead dog”. Awed by the glory of Solomon the queen of Sheba had “no more spirit in her.” As now “brought near” to God, are these our attitudes too?

Introduction

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28, 29, NKJV).

These words were penned to Jewish Christians who had not long been liberated from the bondage of the Law and Judaism. In contrast to the systems of tabernacle and temple worship which, apart from the high priest, effectively shut men off from God, they had learned that in Christ they had “a new and living way” into the presence of God, so that they now had “boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19, 20). But that boldness must go hand in hand with “reverence and godly fear.”

As Christians today, we still rejoice in that same openness of access to, and closeness of relationship with, God. There is a danger, however, in this 21st century, that we fall into an over-familiarity in our relationship with God. Our holy boldness still needs to be tempered with “reverence and godly fear.” Let us never lose the sense of awe and wonder that we, once dead in trespasses and sins and far from God, can have anything at all to do with Him!

It is striking that when king Nebuchadnezzar required his wise men to tell him both the dream which he had had and forgotten, and its interpretation, they replied, “It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king *except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh*” (Daniel 2:11). We should remember that, at that time, Babylon was one of the leading civilisations of the day. The “Hanging Gardens of Babylon” was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and testifies to the knowledge and skill that was available then. Yet the limit of that human knowledge finds expression in that mournful lament, “the gods whose dwelling is not with flesh.” What seemed utterly impossible to those wise men, in the grace of God we have come to know: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His

glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

This article is based on some Scriptures which were read recently during a Breaking of Bread and which serve to illustrate attitudes appropriate to the presence of God. From childhood, all of us learn more readily through pictures. It is appropriate, then, that in His Word God often sets out the lessons we need to learn in picture form. So to our three pictures.

Awed by His holiness

Please read Luke 7:36-50.

“A woman in the city who was a sinner...stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears” (vv.37,38). Why did she weep? Perhaps it was the sense of her sinfulness and the recognition of the sheer holiness of the One in whose presence she now stood. But the Lord had not yet spoken one word to her. Nor did He need to! In His presence, she was well aware of her utter sinfulness. Shortly, the Lord would have words to say to Simon the Pharisee, for he had totally failed to recognise that holiness. It was sufficient now for this woman to acknowledge her sinfulness in His presence by this act of weeping.

That holiness of His presence is dramatically illustrated in the case of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). Jesus’ message to her accusers was simply, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (v.7). He then stooped and wrote upon the ground, with nothing more to say to them. What was the result? “Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last” (v.9). None of them dare stand in the presence of such holiness! The oldest, with his longer experience of life and its accompanying failures, had the grace to acknowledge this and to go out first. But the Lord was too holy to condone the woman’s sinful behaviour. His gracious word, “Neither do I condemn you”, is tempered by His warning, “Go and sin no more” (v.11).

The prophet Isaiah also had to learn the holiness of God (Isaiah 6:1-8). In the temple Isaiah was given a glimpse of the glory of God. He heard the seraphim cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (v.3). That threefold ascription of holiness embraced God in His totality – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Isaiah could only cry out, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (v.5). But Isaiah was to experience cleansing – a burning coal touched his lips. Isaiah learned that day, as the psalmist had in an earlier

We, too, know that same forgiveness of God ...

day, “There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Psalm 130:4). As a token of that forgiveness, Isaiah’s cry of dedication, “Here am I! Send me”, is taken up by God with the commission, “Go, and tell this people”.

But to return to the woman in Luke 7. The Lord in His grace would not leave that woman in her despair. Knowing full well “her sins which are many” (v. 47), but knowing, too, that the work which He would later do at Calvary’s cross would answer for those sins to a holy God, He says to her, “Your sins are forgiven” (v.48). Then He adds, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (v. 50).

We, too, know that same forgiveness of God through the work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). But let us never forget the holiness of Him with whom we have to do!

Awed by His grace

Please read 2 Samuel 9:1-13.

The outlook could not have looked darker for Mephibosheth. His father, Jonathan, and grandfather, king Saul, had both been killed fighting against the Philistines on mount Gilboa (see 1 Samuel 31). David had since been anointed as king. While Jonathan and David had enjoyed a deep friendship, Saul, consumed by jealousy, had often tried to kill David. What was David to do now? Prudence might have dictated that in order to secure his throne, David should eliminate any possible rival from the house of Saul. That was what Athaliah was to do later to secure her place as queen. In the providence of God, her wicked plan was foiled and one of the royal children was preserved (2 Chronicles 22:10-12). The kingly line of Judah was not extinguished, for the Saviour must come from that royal line!

... but let us never forget the holiness of Him with whom we have to do!

*Is there not still someone
of the house of Saul, to whom
I may show the kindness of God?*

But no! David asks his servants, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?” (2 Samuel 9:3) On being informed of the existence of Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, David sends for Mephibosheth to be brought to the royal palace. Who can tell what thoughts must have passed through the mind of Mephibosheth on that journey to the palace? Was this to be summary execution for the hatred of his grandfather, Saul? He was not left in doubt for long! David’s first words to him were, “Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually” (v. 7).

Confronted by such overwhelming kindness, what was Mephibosheth to do? We read, “Then he bowed himself, and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I’” (v. 8). A king’s grandson he might once have been, but Mephibosheth is not ashamed to take the place of utter worthlessness, “a dead dog”, before David.

As Christians, we, too, have come to know that same kindness of God. Paul writes to Titus, “But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

Mephibosheth was overawed by the magnitude of the material blessings David bestowed on him. But “the grace of God that brings salvation” (Titus 2:11) that has come to us embraces not only the material blessings which we enjoy daily but also those spiritual, eternal blessings which we have in Christ.

*Do not fear,
for I will surely show you kindness*

Paul himself was deeply conscious of the grace of God that had come to him. He writes, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10). This was no false modesty on Paul’s part, but rather a sober recognition of the utter sinfulness of his past life when he had persecuted the church of God. Perhaps that cry of the Lord from heaven when Paul was on the Damascus road had never left him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4)

When confronted by a serious physical ailment, Paul had asked the Lord three times to remove it. Instead, his prayers were answered by the promise of the Lord from heaven, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). That sense of the grace of God shown to him never left Paul. He would write to the Ephesian believers, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given...” (Ephesians 3:8).

When he saw some condemned criminals on their way to public execution, John Bradford (1510-1555), one of the Protestant martyrs, is reputed to have said, “But for the grace of God there goes John Bradford.” John Newton, the converted slave trader, had a similar deep sense of the grace of God shown to him. This is beautifully summed up in his hymn, *Amazing Grace*:

Amazing grace – how sweet the sound –
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

As John Newton lay dying, he managed to whisper, “Remember that I am a great sinner and that Jesus Christ is a great Saviour!” May we never lose the sense of the grace of God that has come to us, but ever hold it in our souls with wonder!

Awed by His splendour

Please read 1 Kings 10:1-10.

The queen of Sheba was herself accustomed to riches and splendour, as the value of the gifts which she brought to king Solomon abundantly testifies. Yet these were as nothing compared to the splendour that confronted her at the court of king Solomon. We read, “And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cup-bearers, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there

*Today, we may only
dimly discern His splendour*

was no more spirit in her. Then she said to the king. ‘It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw it with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me’” (vv. 4-7).

In this lovely picture, we have a foreshadowing of the attitude that properly belongs to all who are brought into contact with our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is indeed “greater than Solomon” (Matthew 12:42). Peter, James and John on the mount of Transfiguration were privileged to see something of His splendour (see Matthew 17). Even as a much older man, Peter never lost the sense of that glory (2 Peter 1:16-18). Exiled on the isle of Patmos, John was again given a glimpse of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9-20). How did he react? “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead” (v. 17).

Today, we may only dimly discern His splendour. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Even that dim discernment should bow our hearts in worship before Him and mould our lives for Him. “What manner of persons ought [we] to be in holy conduct and godliness?” (2 Peter 3:11) But what of that coming day when “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”? (1 John 3:2) Surely then we shall joyfully exclaim, like the queen of Sheba, “The half was not told me!”

But boundless joy shall fill our hearts when, gazing on Thy face,
we fully see what faith imparts and glory crowns Thy grace.

Unseen, we love Thee; dear Thy name! But when our eyes behold,
with joyful wonder we’ll exclaim, “The half had not been told.”

For Thou exceedest all the fame our ears have ever heard;
how happy we who know Thy name and trust Thy faithful word!

(Mary Peters)

*Even that dim discernment
should mould our lives for Him*

What the Lord is to His people

The “I AMs” of John’s Gospel [2]

Tom Albiston

The seven great “I AMs” of John’s Gospel are simple enough to teach Sunday-School children “what the Lord is to His people.” But their fuller meaning depends on the discourses in which each is embedded. This series brings this out, and is well worth careful study.

I AM the Door

There is a connection between the discourse in John 10, in which the Lord declared, “I am the Door”, and the narrative of the man born blind in chapter 9. In that chapter the man finds the “door” through which blessing and liberty are entered under the care of the true Shepherd, the Son of God. However, before the needy man can “enter” the place of blessing and liberty, the Shepherd must Himself have first “entered” the fold of Judaism. This is taught in the allegory which the Lord Jesus uses in reference to the sheepfold in the first three verses of chapter 10. In this allegory “the door” and He who enters thereby are closely related. “The door” is opened only to the true Shepherd (v.2). Those who are not this true Shepherd climb up some other way (v.1). Such are thieves and robbers. The Shepherd, coming in by the right way, calls his sheep by name and leads them *out* (v.3). Judaism was the “fold” in which the sheep had been confined. For their full blessing they must be separated from this fold. This was the work of the true Shepherd, who thus became “the Door of the sheep”.

Therefore we must notice that the symbol of “the door” is used in *three ways* in John 10. It signifies the way by which the true Shepherd comes *in* (v.2). Then the Lord applies it to Himself as the way of *exit* for His Jewish sheep out of the fold of Judaism (vv. 3-4, 7). In the third place He again applies it to Himself, but as the way of *entrance* (v.9). In this connection He does not speak of “sheep”.

The first meaning of “door” – the “door of the fold” that was opened only to the true Shepherd (v.1) – leads us to think of the characteristics which must mark the one to whom the “porter” will open. The Lord Jesus had given every evidence that He was the Shepherd of the sheep.

He begins to call His sheep. They know His voice – the blind man is an example of this. To such He is “the door of the sheep,” according to the second meaning of “door”. The Lord leads them out, going before them. “The fold” represents Judaism, in which the sheep were shut up under Law until the faith was revealed which would bring them out of spiritual infancy into full sonship, out of bondage under law into the freedom Christ gives (Galatians 3:23-26; 5:1). This great change could only be through the coming of the Son whom God sent forth in the fulness of time (Galatians 4:4,5).

In the third use of this symbol it is not the question of exit, but of entrance. “I am the Door: if any one enter in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture” (v. 9, Darby Trans.) Note that here the Lord does not say “door of the sheep”; He says “any one”. The Lord is not thinking exclusively of His Jewish sheep (cp. Ezekiel 34:12). He is taking a larger view which embraces others: He has “other sheep” “which are not of this fold” (v. 16). It is all who believe. Jews and Gentiles alike enter by Him into the same blessing (see Galatian 4:5-6). This agrees with the universal bearing of salvation presented in John’s Gospel, and expresses the abounding grace which cannot be confined within the old restricted sphere connected with Law. Then Jews and Gentiles form one flock, as the Lord says, “I have other sheep which are not of this fold. Those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd” (John 10:16, Darby Trans.).

Four features are mentioned in connection with “the Door” of John 10:9:

- entering in
- salvation
- going in and out, and
- pasture.

To *enter* means our coming to and believing on Him. This brings *salvation*. Then we have deliverance from our former position and condition, and a consequent state of freedom or liberty: we can *go in and out*. Finally, we have provision, or *pasture*. We receive His fulness, grace upon grace (John 1:16). We receive salvation and life, passing out of darkness into light; we enjoy the freedom given by the Son through the truth of which His Word is the perfect expression; and then we receive our heritage, the “pasture land” of “all spiritual blessings”. Compare Romans 3, as setting forth salvation; Romans 6 & 7 – our liberty; and Romans 8 – our pasture – the things of the Spirit, the first-fruits of the Spirit, and the glory still to be revealed.

As the Good Shepherd He has power sufficient for every need

I AM the Good Shepherd

The Lord's teaching in connection with His self-declaration as "the Good Shepherd" is also in John 10 (vv.11,14), and develops along two principal lines –

- His relation to His sheep
- The relation between the Father and Himself.

Firstly, let us look at the Lord's relation as the Good Shepherd to His sheep.

As the Bread, He gives and sustains life eternal (John 6:35,57). As the Light, He delivers out of darkness, brings into freedom by the truth, giving the light of life (8:12,32). As the Door, He opens up to us fullest blessing. And as the Good Shepherd He has, firstly, *power sufficient for every need*, assuring preservation from every enemy, and perfect security as guarded by the Son and the Father (John 10:12-14; 27-30). This power flows from the rights of the Person of Christ, but it is exercised in obedience to the Father. The Lord says, "I and the Father are one" (v.30,KJV). How blessed to follow such a Shepherd, who, according to the rights of His Person, can exercise power that no one can hinder or effectually resist. This Shepherd came by the door. It was His absolute right to do so, for He gave the evidence of who He was. He calls, leads out, and goes before His sheep. There are other sheep, whom He must bring and form into one flock under Himself, the one Shepherd (v.16). No-one takes His life: *He* lays it down, and *He* takes it again (v.18). Here is power absolutely superior to all circumstances, and to every enemy. No one can seize His sheep out of His hand. They have the blessedness of such power made good to them in life eternal, and they shall never perish (vv.28-29).

Not only in the matter of *power* is this Shepherd "good", but also in *His perfect devotion to the welfare of His sheep*. He laid down His life for them. In John 6 the Lord Jesus presents the subject of His death as the way by which He becomes the Source of life eternal to those who believe on Him, and its abiding Sustenance. But, as the Good Shepherd, His death is viewed as showing His perfect devotion to the welfare of the sheep (10:11-15).

Preservation and constancy of care are the thoughts associated with “Good Shepherd”. Thus, the laying down of His life is not only spoken of as the one distinctive and all-important act of sacrifice at the cross, but as involving His powerful and abiding concern for His sheep. It pledges all His power and grace for their eternal blessing. Each one of the sheep can say, “He loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). The contrast is the hireling (John 10:12). But our Good Shepherd will not flee from any enemy and leave the sheep to suffer. He not only gathers the flock; He *abides* with it. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep brought again from among the dead (Hebrews 13:20). The relation between the Good Shepherd and His sheep is further developed in the Lord’s words, “I know My sheep” (John 10:14). It is not here a question of seeking and finding the lost, as in Luke 15. It is rather that they are *already* laid “upon His own shoulders [the place of power] rejoicing” (Luke 15:5). In John 10:27-30 the sheep hear the Shepherd’s voice. They can distinguish it from all others; the voice of strangers they know not (v. 5). His sheep are the objects of His love, care and power. He is their Leader, and they follow Him. Going before them, He leads in paths of righteousness, and brings them into the Father’s house. Where the Shepherd is, there the sheep must be also.

Secondly, let us look at the Father’s relationship to the Shepherd and the sheep. The sheep are the Father’s gift to the Son (v. 29). He draws them to the Son, and gives all to Him (cp. John 6:37, 44). This does not end the Father’s interest and care. He still guards them. “No-one can pluck them out of My Father’s hand.” Their security is therefore assured by the Father’s supremacy, and by the unity subsisting between the Father and the Son – “I and the Father are one” (v. 30). He says, in effect, “The Father is in Me and I in Him” (cp. 14:10; 17:21). Then, the laying down of life by the Good Shepherd is referred to as a reason for the Father loving Him (10:17). In all this the Lord Jesus Christ was accomplishing the Father’s will for the full blessing of the sheep.

As the Good Shepherd He shows His perfect devotion to the welfare of His sheep

What happened after the Creation?

David Anderson

This is a “groaning creation” (Romans 8:22). People criticise God for it. But God didn’t create it that way. David follows his article in the last issue on the creation that was “very good” when it left the hand of God, with this article on what happened next.

What happened next?

The world we live in is so different to the one described in Genesis 1 & 2 – the world which God blessed (1:22, 28 & 2:3 with 5:2). Therefore, as well as asking, “What happened at the Creation?”,¹ we must also ask, “What happened *after* the Creation?” For, each day from Day Three of the Creation Week, God reviewed what He had made, and “saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, ESV). This reached a climax on the sixth day, when, having made and blessed Man, “God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*” – literally, “exceedingly good” (1:31). Man, created perfect, is again the highlight of the creation in the summary statement about “the generations of the heavens and the earth” (2:4-7).

But we are acutely aware that things must have drastically changed for the worse. So we ask the question, “How, and when, did this change happen?” For what human heart does not agonise for conditions where there is no more sin, suffering, pain or death? What human spirit does not subconsciously yearn for a state where righteousness reigns/dwells? Or what part of creation does not exhibit that groaning about which Romans 8:19-23 speak?

The subsequent chapters of Genesis reveal why things at the present time are so different from life for Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. They record three *catastrophic* events concerning Man (and creation):

- the Fall
- the Flood
- the Dispersion.

¹ See the article in *Scripture Truth*, October 2010.

*Things have
drastically changed for the worse.
How, and when, did this change happen?*

The Fall: Genesis 3

It seems that, soon after creation, Adam disobeyed God and sinned by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which he had been forbidden to eat (2:16-17). Whilst Eve was deceived (3:13 & 1 Timothy 2:14), it was Adam, there by her side, who bore the responsibility for their actions. He ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in blatant defiance of the command of God (2:17; 3:6). They had, to this point in their lives, only experienced good. Now they knew evil and were conscious of their sin, expressed by the fact that they knew they were naked (3:7). Consequently, they hid themselves from God. They had died spiritually – although the process of mortality took another 900 years or so for them to die physically. God’s word was true: “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” – literally, “dying you shall die” (2:17, NKJV and margin). And what became true of them became true also of the whole creation over which God had given them dominion. This was shown to them that very same day by God when He made for them garments of skin to clothe them (3:21).

It is so important to see that *this* is why we do not see the creation today as it came from the hand of God. The Fall of Man is a fundamental in the doctrine of the Gospel.² Romans 5:12 teaches that sin and death came through Adam’s transgression. That was when they entered into our world. In other words, there was no sin or death in God’s creation *prior* to the Fall! After that, sin spread to all mankind. Cain was conceived and born after Adam and Eve had sinned (Genesis 4:1). Romans 5:12 goes on to state that Adam, the progenitor of the human race, passed on his fallen condition to his descendants. (This is reinforced in 1 Corinthians 15:22 where Paul states that it is *in Adam* that all die.)

² See also the section, “New Testament Doctrines and Creation” in my article “What does the Bible teach about Creation?” (*Scripture Truth*, January 2010).

Therefore the gospel pronounces a guilty verdict on all mankind: “all [people] ... are under sin” and therefore “all have sinned and fall short...” (Romans 3: 9 & 23, ESV).

But Adam was also a type of the One who was to come (Romans 5:14). Jesus Christ is the Last Adam, the Head of the redeemed race (those who believe the gospel). They partake in the spiritual character and heavenly position of their Head and will bear His image.³ But Christ is also the Second Man who was conceived by the direct action of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The Second Man is entirely different to those of Adam’s race – He “knew no sin,” “He committed no sin,” and “in him there is no sin.”⁴

Adam’s family tree: Genesis 5

The details of the births and deaths of Adam’s descendants through Seth in Genesis 5 enable us to construct a timeline from Creation to the Flood. Adam, the first man (1 Corinthians 15:45 & 47), and Eve, the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20), were created on Day Six of the Creation week in Year 1 A.H.⁵ Seth was born 130 A.H., and so on through to Noah, who was 500 years old before his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, were born. Noah’s father, Lamech, died in 1651 A.H., five years before his own father Methuselah. 1656 A.H. was the year of the Flood. Noah and his three sons connect the antediluvian and postdiluvian worlds of mankind.

The global Flood: Genesis 6-9

After Adam’s initial transgression, the next recorded sin is when Cain murdered his brother Abel (4:3-16). The evil one continued to be active in the fallen world.⁶ Although when Enosh was born to Seth, “people began to call upon the name of the LORD” (4:26), the majority of mankind increased in wickedness. The wickedness of man was so bad, and his heart was so evil continually, that God was grieved in His heart to such an extent that He decided to destroy all created things on the earth (6:5-7). Corruption reached crisis point in Noah’s lifetime, when violence filled the earth (6:11).

So God destroyed the antediluvian world of mankind, along with the earth and all that was in it. Only Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives (and

³ 1 Corinthians 15:42-49.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:47 with 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:22 & 1 John 3:5.

⁵ A. H. is *Anno Homini*s, “in the year of man”.

⁶ 1 John 3:12, 8 & Genesis 6:1-4.

The flood was a total global catastrophe. The topography of the whole earth was changed

all those animals and birds which God caused to go into the ark – 7:14-16), were preserved through the Flood by means of the ark. As Peter informs us in his second epistle,⁷ that world order (or cosmos) – the earth with its people and all animals and birds on it – perished when it was completely flooded with water. The same word of God that had separated the land from the seas on Day Three of the creation week (1:9-10) now commanded the stored water (“the fountains of the great deep”) to burst forth and the windows of the heavens to open. It rained forty days and forty nights. All the high mountains were submerged to a depth of about 6.75 metres. The flood waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days (7:11-24). It was a *total global catastrophe*. The topography of the whole earth was changed in this upheaval. So the world we see today is different from the earth as originally created. But there are present day proofs of the global flood, such as the worldwide existence of fossils.

The true history of the nations: Genesis 10

Chapter 10 is the fourth of the “generation” summaries in Genesis. It differs from the others in that it is about generations of three people – Noah’s sons. The intent is to provide a true history of every nation in the postdiluvian world, so that we know that all mankind descended from Adam *via* Noah. “God...made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth...And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward Him and find Him” (Acts 17:24-27). Verse 32 is an important conclusion of the “table of nations” in Genesis 10, “These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.”

⁷ 2 Peter 3: 5-7 (ASV, 1901).

*It only took a couple of hundred years
for postdiluvian mankind
to manifest the same evils
as their antediluvian forebears!*

The global dispersion: Genesis 11

10:8-10 is another important section, because it introduces Nimrod, a person with a big reputation in the immediate postdiluvian world, “a mighty hunter before the LORD.” He established his kingdom at Babel in the land of Shinar. Although God had told Noah and his sons to spread out and fill the whole earth (9:1 & 7), their descendants chose to settle down in the plain of Shinar (11:2). With the Flood as recent history, and Noah still alive upon the earth (he died 2006 A.H.), their evil intentions soon became clear. In direct opposition to the word of God, they joined together and said, “Come on, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, the top of which may reach to the heavens; and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be *scattered over the face of the whole earth*” (v.4, Darby Trans.). God recognized that this scheme was the beginning of people’s determination to assert their combined will without any reference to Him, their Creator, and to raise themselves up as gods. This was a sin of the same magnitude as Adam’s. God immediately intervened in judgment to disrupt the tower-of-Babel project. He said, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech” (v.7, ESV). The building project was abandoned because God confused their languages (Babel meaning *confusion*). His judgment was intended to put a stop to this anti-God movement.

Again, it is vital to believe that this is the true history of the languages in the world, and that at this time God dispersed mankind from Babel over the face of all the earth, with the result that people came to live in every part of the world. This global dispersion probably took place during Peleg’s lifetime, for 10:25 states, “for in his days the earth was divided” (Peleg meaning *division*). According to chapter 10 Peleg was the sixth generation from Noah. He was born one hundred years after the Flood in 1757 A.H., and he died in 1996 A.H. It is staggering to realise that it only took a couple of hundred years or so for

postdiluvian mankind to manifest the same kind of evils as their antediluvian forebears! Thankfully, 11:10-26 give hope. From Shem's "generations" arose Terah's "generations" (vv. 27-32), which include Abram, who was born in 2008 A.H. – 2 years after the death of Noah.

The Creator to the rescue⁸

As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they realised they were naked. They used fig leaves to make loin cloths for themselves (3:7). They hid from God because these coverings were inadequate. But God provided garments of animal skins to clothe them properly (3:21). He also promised the defeat of Satan through Eve's seed (3:15). Then He prevented access to the tree of life (3:22-24). By these actions God gave the first indications of His plan of salvation. When mankind became so evil that God had to judge the world by the Flood, He provided salvation for Noah and his family by means of the ark (6:8 – 8:19). After the Flood, God started anew by blessing Noah's family (9:1). He provided meat as food to sustain human life in the changed climatic conditions of postdiluvian world (9:2-7). He established an everlasting covenant with all living creatures, signified by the rainbow (9:8-17), with the words: "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (8:21-22).

But in the process of time Noah got drunk, and Ham's actions were an indication that humanity was going its own way again. As just shown, very soon after the Flood, it set about excluding God altogether at Babel. The global dispersion by which God judged them (see above) did not change man's mind. Rather, as Romans 1:18-32 reveal, mankind only increased in ungodliness and unrighteousness. So God abandoned them to their own reprobate mind. From that society He called out Abram (Abraham), the father of the faithful (Genesis 12:1-3, Romans 4:16 & Galatians 3:7-9). Through Melchizedek,⁹ Abram was specifically blessed by "the Possessor (or, Creator, ESV) of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:18-20). And to Abraham the promise was made that from his Seed (Christ) salvation and blessing would come for all mankind (12:3, 22:18 & Galatians 3:8, 14, 16).

⁸ For fuller expositions of these dispensations see the editor's articles "What is a dispensation?" (April 2009), "Grace and judgment after the Flood" (October 2009) & "Babel and blessing" (April 2010)

⁹ p. Hebrews 5:6 & ch.7.

The Psalms of Passover

John Weston

Six psalms (113-118) are sung since ancient times as part of the Passover celebration. This series, commenced in October, applies them to “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Psalm 114: Liberation praise

“No human mind has ever been able to equal, much less to excel, the grandeur of this psalm.”¹

Psalm 114 is a celebration of God’s spectacular intervention in history on behalf of the people of Israel. We can read it in the light of the sin and judgment we have been saved *from*, and of all that we have been saved *to*.

Over four hundred years had passed since Jacob and his family found shelter in Egypt from the famine. Gradually over these years their numbers multiplied, as did the hostility towards them. They became slaves, and were subjected to harsh living and working conditions. Then, under God’s guiding, Moses led them out of Egypt. The Red Sea, or “sea of reeds”, miraculously opened up to allow them to pass through on dry ground.

The “sea of reeds” becomes the baptismal font of Israel (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:2), and in this psalm we have a sense of joy and excitement in the miraculous liberation. Creation jubilates, blessings abound. The God of Jacob is exalted. We recall how both Moses and Miriam burst into song, giving us the first recorded song in scripture (Exodus 15:1, 20).

The crossing took place seven days after the Israelites left Egypt, and so to-day it is usual to read the relevant portion from the Torah on the seventh day of Passover. This portion, of course, contains Moses’ triumphant Song of the Sea (as Exodus 15 is called).

This song of Moses will be heard again (Revelation 15.3).

In verses 3 and 5 of the psalm, we have the telescoping of two notable events of this liberation – the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan some forty years later. As we meditate upon Israel’s liberation, and our own liberation from sin’s dominion, we are confronted with God’s abounding mercy; specifically with

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, on Psalm 114.

- His divine grace
- His divine presence, and
- His divine blessing.

His divine grace. The all-knowing God was not only fully aware of their state in Egypt, but also of their future failings – but He bore them on eagles’ wings (Exodus 19:4). Such was His grace.

In the Haggada of Pesach, the text which is read during the seder ritual at Passover, there follows this prayer after Psalm 114:

“Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast redeemed us and our ancestors from Egypt and brought us to the enjoyment of this night... Then we shall give thanks unto thee with a new song for our deliverance and for the redemption of our souls. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hast redeemed Israel.”

As it has often been said, “Mercy saves me from what I deserve. Grace gives me what I don’t deserve.” How truly this was borne out, not only in Israel’s liberation but also in the liberating experience of each believer!

For what were we that Thou on us
 Such love should’st ever pour?
 We bow, and filled with joy and awe,
 Father and Son adore.²

Judah becomes His sanctuary (v.2). The Hebrew term for “sanctuary” – *qodesh* – has a more general meaning of “holiness”. Judah is not only liberated, but becomes the place of God’s holiness. As the body of Christ we, too, are collectively a holy people. God sees us through Christ. Peter reminds us of our position. “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [behaviour], because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15,16; cp. 2:5, KJV). A high calling indeed!

Three verses of Count von Zinzendorf’s forty-four-verse hymn express it so beautifully:

Jesus the Lord, our righteousness!
 Our beauty Thou, our glorious dress!
 Midst flaming worlds in this arrayed,
 with joy shall we lift up the head.

² C.Helena von Poseck.

Thus Abraham, the friend of God,
thus all the saints redeemed with blood,
Saviour of sinners, Thee proclaim,
and all their boast is in Thy name.

This spotless robe the same appears
in new creation's endless years;
no age can change its glorious hue;
the robe of Christ is ever new.³

Divine grace indeed!

His divine presence. Liberation is only the first step following our new birth. There is always more to follow. Surely this is the implication of the unusual way in which this psalm commences, "When Israel came out of Egypt" – a sentence pregnant with meaning, leaving us in expectancy as to what will follow. In a few verses we are taken right through the desert journey to the Jordan crossing, forty years later. For the believer, we are reminded that, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The crossing of the "sea of reeds" was followed by divine care – a cloud by day and fire by night – until the journey's end. When the cloud moved, it was a signal for the children of Israel also to move (Numbers 9:17-23). How sensitive we should be to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit!

Throughout our journey we can sing, "All the way My Saviour leads me;" or,

Is the wilderness before thee –
desert lands where drought abides?
heavenly springs shall there restore thee
fresh from God's exhaustless tides.

Though thy way be long and dreary
eagle strength He'll still renew:
Garments fresh and foot unwearied
tell how God hath brought thee through!⁴

Yes, "moment by moment we are kept in His love, moment by moment we have power from above."⁵

³ Trans. John Wesley. Version printed in *Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Songs* (Wooler, 1978), no. 45.

⁴ John Darby.

⁵ After D.W. Whittle, 1893.

His divine blessing. “Great God of wonders, all thy ways are righteous, matchless and divine!” The psalm reminds us of God’s blessing to Israel, reminding us too that our God is the God of all creation. The mountains and hills [of life] lose their significance (vv. 4, 6): no longer do we fear them as menacing obstacles. We are “more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” And we have the “blessed assurance,” that “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28, 37).

I love the promise in Isaiah 54:17, “No weapon that is formed against thee will prosper.”

I am reminded that

- The Seed of the woman will bruise the serpent’s head.
- Goliath had his head cut off with his own sword.
- Haman was hung on his own gallows.
- The very spear that pierced our Lord’s side drew forth the blood to save.
- The earthquake that wrecked the prison in Philippi resulted in the conversion of the prison keeper and his family.

“The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs” (v.4). The poet Cowper calls out,

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take!
The clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

In summing up, we cannot do better than to end as we began, by quoting Spurgeon:⁶

“[The Lord] supplies our temporal needs from sources most unlikely... As for our spiritual necessities, they are all met by the water and the blood which gushed of old from the riven rock, Christ Jesus.

...We join then with the singers around the Passover table and make their Hallel ours, for we too have been led out of bondage and guided like a flock through a desert land, wherein the Lord supplies our wants with heavenly manna and water from the Rock of ages. Praise ye the Lord.”¹

⁶ See note 1.

Alpha people

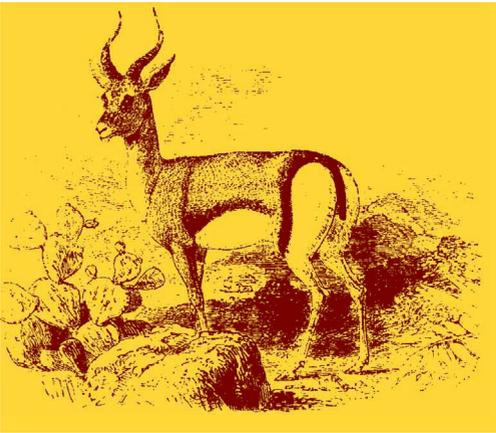
Dorcas

George Stevens

Continuing a very practical series that the writer sent me some years ago.

“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36, KJV).

Dorcas means “gazelle” or “roe.” The figure is used in poetry to represent that



which is timid and beautiful. If Dorcas lived up to her name then she would have been dressed with “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4). The gazelle was also a clean animal (Deuteronomy 12:15); and Dorcas, being called a disciple, was cleansed by the precious blood of Christ. The gazelle was also very fast, which suggests someone normally full of energy.

The force of the word “disciple” is “learner.” It reminds us of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His word. Dorcas is most likely to have been of the same disposition, as the word is used specifically of her. The word also suggests people who follow Christ. As Peter writes, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth...” (1 Peter 2:21-22). Oh, that we may desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Dorcas was “full of good works.” She had therefore certainly been born again, because Ephesians 2:10 tells us, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

*Dorcas was “full of good works.”
She had therefore certainly been born again*

Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” The fact that she was full of good works reveals that she was *full* of love for Christ. A good work is one that is (a) done in the will of God, (b) to benefit others, (c) with God getting the glory. It is a selfless work. The context shows us that her work was done with a needle. After her death, the widows showed Peter the coats and garments she had made. It seems that it was a specific service of Dorcas to help widows and their families. It seems that some of these may have been unbelievers because Peter, after raising her from the dead, called for the *saints* and *widows*. The word “saints” is a word to describe “Christians”.

This would have pleased God who always makes provision for the fatherless and the widow. For example, Deuteronomy 24:21 states, “When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow”, whilst Psalm 146:9 states, “The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow....”

Dorcas was also “full of almsdeeds.” The word is connected with mercy, compassion and pity. She gave according to the greatness of the need. The “deeds” aspect suggests that she gave time and energy to put alms to good use – as seen by the coats and garments she made. This made her a careful steward of both money and time. Because of her manner of life, she grew in favour with both God and man.

We must also note two other things. The first, that although she lived in apostolic days, there was no healing of the sickness that Dorcas had. She died. Yet her death was to be for the glory of God because, once raised by Peter, many others believed.

The second point is the lovely way the Holy Spirit records the tenderness of Peter, “But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive” (Acts 9:40-41). What a touching scene! Peter seems to reflect the Person of Christ here, for he raised Dorcas in a very similar way to the way in which Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus.

She gave time and energy to put alms to good use

Why, then, the Law?

Theo Balderston

Rightly understanding the reason for the Law of Moses is fundamental to Christian doctrine.

Promises absolute and conditional

To start with statistics: Blessing from God is mentioned far more frequently in Genesis and Deuteronomy¹ than in any other Old-Testament book. God's purpose in creation was *blessing!* (Genesis 1:22,28; 5:2). Following the Flood He blessed Noah and his family, despite knowing that in its heart humanity was no different from the humanity for which He had just judged the earth (8:21 with 6:5). But much the most of the references to blessing in Genesis occur in the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These promises were absolute: nowhere are they said to be conditional on the obedience of their descendants. They depended solely on the LORD's electing love, answered by Abraham's simple faith (Genesis 15:1-6).

But the blessings promised in Deuteronomy were conditional. The everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:13,19) made with the patriarchs and its absolute promises were not replaced. When God first revealed Himself to Moses, He revealed Himself as the LORD (JEHOVAH, YAHWEH), the God of the patriarchs who was now going to fulfil the promises to them (Exodus 3:6-17; 6:2-8). And therefore Moses both began and ended Deuteronomy by reaffirming God's absolute promise to them (Deuteronomy 1:8,11; ch. 33). Yet God now laid down a condition for enjoyment of the central blessing promised to the patriarchs – the Land of Israel. The condition was obedience to the Law, and the great object of the book of Deuteronomy was to impress this upon Israel. God embodied this condition in another covenant now made at Sinai with *them* – the descendants of the patriarchs (Exodus 24:7-8; Deuteronomy 4:13). This covenant also offered something not promised in the patriarchal covenant: *life* (Deuteronomy 4:1; 30:15-20; Romans 7:10). However, because it required obedience on the part of Israel, it had a reverse side also absent from the covenant with the patriarchs: the *curse*.

The two kinds of promise – the absolute and the conditional – are reconciled in Deuteronomy 30:

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and

¹ “Blessing” occurs in Deuteronomy in 7:12ff; 11:27-29; 15:4-6; 16:10; 23:20; 24:19; 26:13-15; 27:11-26; 28; 30:15-20

your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you... to the land your fathers possessed..." (vv. 1-3,5, NKJV).

The key to this reconciliation is that God Himself will "circumcise their hearts" (30:6), once the long history of experience under the Law had proved them incapable of circumcising their own hearts, the thing Moses had urged them to do in 10:16. This theme is then taken up in Jeremiah's new covenant, where the absolute character of the covenant can again be emphasised (Jeremiah 31:31-37; cp. Ezekiel 36:24-32).

The Law and the revelation of God

The above account makes the Law sound like a long detour back to the starting-point. In some sense it was: God's blessing would only ever be realised on the basis on which it was first promised to Abraham – His own sovereign good pleasure. However the Law involved a greater *revelation* of God. "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name, LORD [i.e., JEHOVAH] I was not known to them" (Exodus 6:3). Of course the Name JEHOVAH *did* assure Israel that "the everlasting God," to whom Abraham had built an altar (Genesis 21:33), was the same God in whose Name Moses came to them. But they could not know the fulness of meaning of that Name until the experience of redemption from Egypt powerfully *proved* that God, the I AM THAT I AM, was indeed THE SAME to them as He was to the patriarchs, and for ever would be THE SAME.

But the revelation of this Name went further than this. Before bringing them into the Land, He brought them to *Himself* at Sinai (Exodus 19:4). He communicated the first and central part of the covenant – the ten commandments – directly to them, beginning with the words, "I am JEHOVAH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt..." (Exodus 19:20-21; 20:1-19). He told them of His purpose to make them His "special treasure", a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" – if they would indeed obey His voice and keep his covenant (19:5-6). Once the covenant was made, the elders of Israel were given a glimpse of Israel's special intimacy with the living God: "They saw God, and ate and drank" (Exodus 24:3-12). And then God could give Moses directions on the mount concerning both the construction of "a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (25:8), and the consecration of priests to serve in it (chapters 25 – 31). These directions started with the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat, concerning which Jehovah said, "There will I meet with you [i.e., with Moses], and I will speak with you..." (25:22). The main content of the ark was the tablets of the ten commandments: the Law was the basis of Israel's approach to God.

Israel alone was brought into this relationship (cp. Psalm 148:14), so Israel alone had the Law (Deuteronomy 4:7, 33-40; Psalm 147:19-20; Romans 9:4). This was because Israel's being brought into so special a relationship with God required a

*Israel alone was brought into this relationship,
so Israel alone had the Law*

special *holiness*. “Be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8). Thus the Law was a wonderful revelation of God through His commandments. Through it Israel, and only Israel, “knew his will” (Romans 2:18). The Hebrew word that is consistently translated “law” primarily means, we are told, “instruction”. The Law was instruction concerning God and His ways. The spirit of this is captured in Psalm 119, where a godly Israelite says, “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation,” and “unless your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction” (vv. 99,92) – and much else besides (cp. Psalm 19:9-10).

“Why then the Law?”

Similarly, Paul the Christian wrote, “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (Romans 7:22). And so should we. But this was only half of the truth concerning the Law. As well as bringing instruction about what God is, the Law also brought instruction about what *man* is. Using the word “Law” in its wider sense of “instruction”, Paul used a collection of excerpts from the psalms to prove that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:9-20). He described the Law as a “ministry of condemnation” and of “death” (2 Corinthians 3:7,9).

According to Paul, the Law was added to the Abrahamic covenant “because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Galatians 3:19). At first sight this seems to imply that the Law was just a kind of holding operation intended to prevent Israel getting into even worse sin through there *not* being a Law – until it was time for Messiah to come. No-one, however, with any knowledge of the historical books and the prophets could imagine that the Law stopped Israel from sinning. Paul himself had just written that whoever was under the Law was under its curse, citing the grim conclusion to the recitation of the curses on Mount Ebal (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26). He probably referred to this “Scripture” again in Galatians 3:22 when he wrote that “the Scripture has confined all under sin.” This means that the Law shut them up to the proof of their own inability to obtain righteousness by any other means than sheer faith. They were thus “shut up to the faith” (vv. 22-23, Darby trans.). This was how

*Paul wrote, “I delight in the law of God according
to the inward man”. And so should we.*

it prepared the way for Christ. Paul much develops this argument in Romans 3, and 7:7-13.

When Jehovah had told Israel that if they obeyed His voice they would be His special treasure, the people had rather glibly assented, without waiting to learn the terms of this obedience (Exodus 19:5,8). But even after they had heard the ten commandments, plus three further chapters of largely practical laws, their confidence in their own ability to observe it seemed unshaken. Rather, they had repeated their assent in virtually unchanged words in 24:3, whereupon the covenant was solemnly concluded (Exodus 24:7-8).

But even while Moses was on the mount with God, they had made a “graven image” (32:4). Only a month after receiving the ten commandments, their true state of heart was exposed, when under Aaron’s leadership – no less – they had broken the chief of them (20:4,23). They were sinful people, and could not meet God’s demands for relationship with Himself. And yet, upon Moses’ intercession, God had relented of His stated purpose to destroy them, and reaffirmed His purpose to lead them into the Land, conformably to His unalterable promise to the patriarchs (33:1-2,12-17). From then on the relationship of Israel with God was not purely dependent on their keeping the covenant, but also on grace. The first mention of forgiveness in relation to Israel occurs at this point (Exodus 34:7). In fact, Israel’s relationship with God would be closer under the Law continued in grace than it had been under the Law unmixed. Moses saw the glory of JEHOVAH in a way he had never seen it under unmixed Law (33:18 – 34:9). But it was after this, that even Israel’s approach to God, the highest point of the Mosaic covenant, was desecrated by Nadab and Abihu on the very day of the consecration of the priesthood (Leviticus 10:1-7).

However as yet they were being shown grace only to give them another chance to try to obey the same Law, and thus to *merit* the patriarchal blessings (Exodus 34:10-27; cp. Deuteronomy 9, 10). And although the people had assented, they in reality had no option. When Moses again renewed the covenant in the land of Moab shortly before his death, the people’s assent was neither sought nor given (Deuteronomy 29). The Law was a schoolmaster the people had to have, so that the lesson God had in mind might be incontestably proved. Towards the end of Deuteronomy Moses recited the curses that *would* come upon them because of disobedience to the Law; and by teaching them a song of witness about their own future failure (Deuteronomy 28:15ff, esp. 45; 31:19-20; 32:1-43).

But on the other hand, because the people constantly broke the Law, they constantly had to reaffirm their allegiance to it. At the end of Joshua’s life, (Joshua 24:14-25) the people had again earnestly protested their intention to serve the Lord only, and yet very soon after forgot it, both they and their children (Judges 2:1-12). Samuel had to bring the people back to the Law (1 Samuel 7:3-4). David reminded

Solomon of the requirements of the Law, yet Solomon broke it (1 Kings 2:3; 11:11). The covenant had to be renewed in the time of kings Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kings 11:17; 23:3; 2 Chronicles 29:10). Breaking it was the reason why the kingdom of the ten tribes was destroyed (2 Kings 17:7-17). And the LORD plainly said through Jeremiah that

“I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, “Obey my voice.” Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but every one followed the imagination of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but which they have not done” (11:7-8).

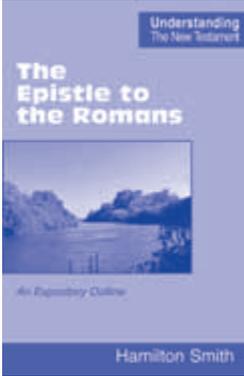
Even after the return from Babylon Nehemiah was forced yet again to renew the covenant in order to bind the returnees to the Law (Nehemiah 9:38; 10:28-29). But Malachi had to condemn the mere lipservice of his contemporaries (Malachi 1:6-8), and his last words echoed the curse of mount Ebal. “Remember the Law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and the judgments... lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (4:4,6).

The Law was given to bring *life*. This is a great theme of Deuteronomy (4:1; 5:33; 8:1; 12:1; 30:15-16). “If there had been a law given which could have offered life, truly righteousness would have been by the law” (Galatians 3:21). “The commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death” (Romans 7:10). Paul’s personal experience mirrored the experience of Israel. Why this long duration of the “ministry of condemnation”? “That *every* mouth may be stopped, and *all the world* may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19). If Israel was condemned, so much the more the idolatrous, lawless Gentiles. When the Lord Jesus came, there was no point in demanding faithfulness to the Law any longer. All that remained was either judgment or sheer, sovereign grace. The latter came! Whereas the Law had only condemned, God now brought out His *secret things* (Deuteronomy 29:29). Believers under the Law had had an inkling of the only way of salvation for themselves and for everyone else (Romans 4:6-8), but now it was fully revealed. “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ!” (John 1:17) “By grace... through faith... not of works!” (Ephesians 2:8-9). In contrast to the public display of judgmental power in the death of the firstborn and deliverance through the Red Sea, grace “came” through a cross, with its “weakness” and shame. There God and His love were fully revealed (John 3:16). Grace brought at last the true knowledge of the Father in the Son, that is, of God as He truly is (John 17:26); and brought believers, not into subjection under the Law, but into adoption as sons (Galatians 4:1-7).

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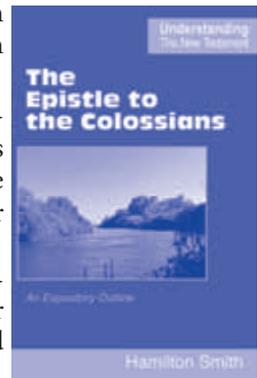
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Oh, fill me with Your joy unspeakable

Oh that my tongue could pour out all the praises He deserves,
that my pen were skilled to write down every line,
as I recite my praises to the Ruler of the earth,
to the God of all eternity and time.

*Oh fill me with Your joy unspeakable,
transport me in my thoughts to think of You.
Let my whole being praise You for Your greatness and Your worth;
help me to live for Jesus, trust in You.*

Your wisdom is unsearchable, your ways past finding out,
your love which passes knowledge floods my soul:
O God who made the universe, concerned with sinful man,
You know the way I take, You lift my soul.

Oh fill me with Your joy unspeakable...

The gift of peace that passes all we comprehend or think,
His answer to the thanks and praise we give,
is comfort to us through the barren land in which we walk,
and it lifts our souls because it proves He lives.

Oh fill me with Your joy unspeakable...

God's gift so indescribable, God's well-beloved Son —
exalt His name and magnify His worth.
I praise Him for His faithfulness, and thank Him for His love,
may His name be lifted up in all the earth.

*Oh fill us with Your joy unspeakable,
transport us in our thoughts to think of You.
Let His church now praise Him for His greatness and His worth,
united in the praises He is due.*

Naomi L. Smith