

Scripture Truth



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The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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The sceptre of wickedness

The world always was hostile in heart to the gospel. It always did lie “in the wicked one,” and Christians have always had to overcome it in their personal life and witness (1 John 5:4, 19, KJV). In previous generations there was a surface veneer of Christianity, but even then society rejected Christ in its heart: the things of Christ were not polite talk outside church. I once did a computer search of the word-pair “cross” & “Christ” in the back files of *The Times* newspaper from the early nineteenth century onwards, and was amazed that it almost never came up, except in discussions of religious art. We might imagine Britain was basically Christian in the 16th and 17th centuries – but ask the Puritans, the Christians on the spot! Now, however, the antagonism is public, and already enshrined in law. And yet the Christian walks through this world as the follower of a crucified Saviour who died unresistingly for us. And we have to take up our cross (Matthew 16:24). This involves (among other things) taking the place of powerlessness and outsidership in relation to the world’s politics that Christ took. Political involvement corrodes Christianity: to be effective, it involves forming power-coalitions with Christ-haters. Soon it will be Christ’s day, and all rulers will bow down before Him (Psalm 72:11). But this is not yet (in that sense) “the day of His power” (Psalm 110:3). It is the day of the patient appealing of His grace to sinners, not of His judgment (cp. Isaiah 42:2, 3; Matthew 12:15-21; 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:1-10). Consistently with that, we don’t refuse to respect governments, however odious their policies (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17). However, they cannot compel us to disobey God (Acts 4:19-20). Nowadays, it seems, even infant school-teachers are expected to tell little children that it’s OK for a man to marry a man. And so on. Here and there the sceptre of wickedness rests upon the lot of the righteous (cp. Psalm 125:3), and our world begins to look like the world of the first Christians. We enter an age of persecution, and 1 Peter 3:14-15; 4:13-14 clearly set out how we are to react to it. However, God has left His people the most potent of political weapons – prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Tell them about heaven

G. Christopher Willis

At a south German wedding the bride's father gave some homely advice to the newlyweds, centring on the words, "Make sure you bring the children home to heaven with you." The same thought underlies this lovely article by a China (after 1949, south-Asia) missionary.

We all know the story of Caleb and how he went to spy out the land with Joshua and ten others. The ten brought an evil report of the land, but Caleb and Joshua brought up a good report, and urged that Israel go up to possess Canaan immediately, "for we are well able" (Numbers 13:30, KJV).

We know the rest of the story, too, and how all Israel refused to listen and had to turn back into the wilderness for forty years. And Caleb had to turn back with them. But I believe that Caleb's heart was in Canaan through all those years. And I think that many an evening through those forty years, when the camp was pitched in that great and terrible wilderness with those vast mountain peaks, red and bare, towering up to the sky, then little Achsah would sit with her brothers (1 Chronicles 4:15), close up to their father. I expect Achsah was on his knee, with his arms around her, and maybe they had a bit of camp fire; and then Caleb would tell them a story, and I can just see them listening with breathless interest. There were stories of giants: real, true giant stories, giants that her own father had seen with his own eyes; and then he would tell about their castles and the cities with walls up to heaven (see Numbers 13:28). And he would tell of the fruit and the bunch of grapes that had to be carried on a staff by two men; and the best part of all, he would end up by telling the children that through their God they were well able to overcome all giants, and that these cities and castles would one day soon belong to Israel!

But perhaps the favourite story would be the story of Hebron. I suppose the story would start away back in the days of Abraham when his nephew Lot had taken first choice of the land, and gone to live near Sodom. *That* was the time when Abraham went and pitched his tent at Hebron, and built an altar there. And it was there that Abraham later bought the cave of Machpelah, to bury Sarah. In that same cave Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham their father, and there Isaac and Rebekah were buried; there Jacob buried Leah his wife, and to the same cave was Jacob's body brought from Egypt.

And sure I am that Caleb would tell the story of how Jacob sent Joseph his beloved child out from the Vale of Hebron (Genesis 37:14), and all the lovely story that children love so well would be told again to Achsah and her brothers. And the father would end the story by saying, "And that is our inheritance. Hebron, the dearest spot in all the land of Canaan is for us! It is ours! It belongs

to you children and to me! And he would tell how Moses swore on that day, saying, "Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God" (Joshua 14:9, 14). Yes, he would say, Hebron is for me and for my children! That land is yours. And I can see little Achsah's eyes glisten as she takes it all in, and makes it all her own. She would know all about that bunch of grapes that had to be borne of two, and she had heard all about the fruits of the land of Canaan.

And so, long before ever her eyes had seen the land of Canaan, her heart had learned to love its hills and valleys, its fruits and its pastures; and she learned to value it at its true worth. For we learn best to love our own country when we are children.



Ah, you dear young parents, how little we are apt to value those evenings, perhaps with the children on our knees, or at our feet in front of the fire, – or maybe after they are in bed, and they say, "Tell us a story!" That is a chance you would give all you possess, later on, to have once more. Now it is yours. Now you may teach them to love that Heavenly Land towards which you are travelling. Now is your chance to teach them the true worth of the Heavenly Country. The hearts are young, and the love is fresh and warm, now is your chance; a

chance you will never, never have again. I know the day has been ever so full, I know you are tired, I know how much easier it is to sing "Jesus, Tender Shepherd hear me", and kiss them Goodnight, but it is a golden opportunity lost, worth more than all the gold in this world.

How often do we only discover the marvellous opportunities we have had when those opportunities have fled, and the sweet stories of old have lost their charm from contact with the sordid stories of this world. But it was not his own child alone whose heart was won by these stories; his nephew Othniel, who was but a boy in those days, was also won. Perhaps Othniel learned to love not only the fields of Canaan, but also his fair young cousin Achsah, in those weary wilderness days; for we find that when they reached the promised land, and the fight for it had come in earnest, his uncle Caleb says, "He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son

of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife" (Judges 1:12, 13).

I think Othniel and Achsah were of one mind about the land of Canaan, and when she came to him, she moved him to ask of her father a field. But there was no need for Othniel to ask on her behalf, for the father himself loved her; and it was an unmixed joy to him that he had a daughter who loved the land that he loved.

Little wonder with such a father that Achsah wanted all she could get of that beloved inheritance! And I am sure it gladdened old Caleb's heart to see his dear child get down off her ass, as she came up to him. He could see she wanted something, and so the question, "What wouldest thou?" (Judges 1:14-15, Darby. Trans.). Do you think he was vexed with the boldness of her request, "Give me a blessing for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water"? Did he reply, "I've given you a south land already; is that not enough? Why should I give you any more?" No, no! Achsah was a daughter after his own heart, she valued the land of Canaan, and she wanted some of the springs of Canaan, and he gave her double as much as she asked for! That is just like our own Lord! "I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked" (1 Kings 3:13).

What a joy to the old uncle's heart must that nephew have been! He was a man after his own heart, one worthy of the daughter he loved so well. Nor was this all. As the years rolled by, and Israel departed from the Lord, so that His anger was hot against His people and He sold them into hands of their enemies, "when [they] cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel... even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother" (Judges 3:9, 10, KJV). Yes, Othniel was the first of that line of "deliverers," those "judges" that God raised up for Israel in their distress. I like to think that Othniel and Achsah were prepared for these honourable mentions in the Word of God, through the stories they had heard in the wilderness of the land that, not having seen, they loved.

Lord, help us so to win the hearts of our children!

They tell us that the name "Caleb" means "a dog," and we know that Caleb was famous above all else because he wholly followed the LORD his God. See Numbers 14:24; Joshua 14:8, etc. A good dog wholly follows his master, and is absolutely loyal to him. Perhaps it was this "spirit" (Numbers 14:24) in Caleb that so greatly influenced his daughter.

But godliness is not inherited, and, sad to say, we find that Nabal, a man who was churlish and evil in his doings, was of the "house of Caleb" (1 Samuel 25:3).

– The original article was entitled, "Caleb", and published in *The Steward*, vol.11, no. 11 c. 1957. It later formed a chapter in the writer's *To the Parents of my Grandchildren* (Bible Light Publishers, Hong Kong).

A king with a large heart

Donald Hill

A new-year message about a fresh start by a king with a zeal for God and love for his people!

King Hezekiah was a king with a large heart, a zeal for God, and an inclusive spirit. We see this in his first actions upon his accession to the throne (2 Chronicles 29-31). If all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable, then what lessons do we need to draw out from the life and example of this king? Like the Bereans, let us search the scriptures, but to see whether these things are so with us!

Apostasy and restoration

Hezekiah's upbringing was certainly no help to him. The history of his father, Ahaz, is summed up for us in 2 Chronicles 28:1-3, "He did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD... [H]e... made molten images ... burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire after the abominations of the heathen..." (KJV). Amongst his many deeds displeasing to the LORD was the closing of the doors of the temple (v.24). As a consequence:-

- The priestly company and the Levites were unemployed – there was no response to Jehovah. God-fearing Jews were denied the opportunity to worship Jehovah.
- There was no morning or evening sacrifice.
- There was no light – the seven lamps on the lampstand were not lit.

- Sin offerings, burnt offerings, peace offerings ceased; the seven feasts of Jehovah were not kept.

And Hezekiah's prayer of repentance underlines that Ahaz did not force this on an unwilling nation! "*Our fathers have trespassed...*" (29:6). The nation had divided following the death of king Solomon. Israel, made up of the ten tribes, had set up their own religious centre at Samaria and worshipped the two calf-idols, one at Bethel and one at Dan, that their first king, Jeroboam, had given them (1 Kings 12:28-29). And now Judah, made up of the two southern tribes and centring on Jerusalem, had suppressed the divinely instituted worship of the living God! A divided nation with failure in both kingdoms!

But what a transformation took place following the death of Ahaz and the accession of Hezekiah! The beginning of 1 Chronicles 29 contrasts sharply with the previous chapter:

- Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (v.2).
- He commenced his reign by reopening the doors of the temple (v.3).
- He immediately acknowledged, in the hearing of the priests and Levites, the guilt of the nation in forsaking Jehovah and shutting the doors of the temple (vv.6-7).

- He instructed the priests and Levites to sanctify themselves and the house of the LORD their God (vv.4, 12-15).

Having rigorously cleansed the temple in eight days, they took another eight days to set everything in order for the service of the sanctuary. Eight is the number of resurrection – of a new start.

Atonement for all Israel

Once the temple order was re-established, Hezekiah called together the rulers of the city, and ordered that seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs and seven he-goats be offered as a sin offering for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and for Judah (v.21). But just for the sin of Judah? No! The blood made atonement “for all Israel: for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel” (v.24). Hezekiah saw the people as one people – as God saw them. He had an inclusive heart.

A burnt offering was offered up and, when it began, “the song of the LORD began” (v.27), with the Levites singing psalms of David and Asaph. Levites and people bowed their heads and worshipped (vv.27-30). This was true joy and responsive worship. Hezekiah then invited the people in general to present their sacrifices. In this way order was re-established in the service of Jehovah.

An irregular passover

All this had taken place in the first half of the first month of the year, but it proved impossible to keep the

passover on the fourteenth day of the month (cp. Exodus 12:2, 6). Hezekiah wanted to keep the passover, however, and so, as allowed for by Scripture, it was agreed to keep it in the second month (2 Chronicles 30:1-4; cp. Numbers 9:10-11). Was king Hezekiah exclusive, only inviting those of the kingdom of Judah? No! Taking advantage of Assyria’s invasion of the kingdom of Israel at that time, the king and his princes sent messengers inviting Israelites of the ten tribes to obey the Lord’s command in celebrating the passover (cp. Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 12:11). There were those in the northern tribes who mocked the messengers, but many responded to the invitation and made the journey to Jerusalem, God’s gathering centre, to keep the passover (2 Chronicles 30:5-11). Hezekiah, the princes, and people in Judah were all of one mind and heart. A large company was present in Jerusalem to celebrate both passover and the feast of unleavened bread. But before they killed the passover, the people destroyed the altars to heathen gods which were in Jerusalem (30:13-15). Here was zeal! However, among those who had journeyed to Jerusalem from the north were many who were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. But, because their hearts were right, Hezekiah prayed for their pardon, and they were partakers in the feast of the passover (vv.17-20).

The feast of unleavened bread was kept not only for seven (see Exodus 12:15), but for fourteen days. Fourteen days

without leavened bread! This indicates a desire to put evil away (cp. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:8-9). The Levites taught the people; confession was made; everyone rejoiced; and Jehovah received His portion. What a happy condition prevailed! Finally, the priests and the Levites blessed the people, and heaven listened (2 Chronicles 30:22-27).

Putting things right

On dispersing, the people were so “on fire” for Jehovah that they destroyed every evidence they could find of idolatry, not only in Jerusalem but in Judah and Israel (31:1). Hezekiah directed the re-establishing of the orders of priests and Levites that David had inaugurated (v.2; cp. 1 Chronicles 23-25). He also appointed proper material provision for the priestly company and for those involved in Levitical service, to support them in the service of Jehovah and “encourage them in the law of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 31:3-4).

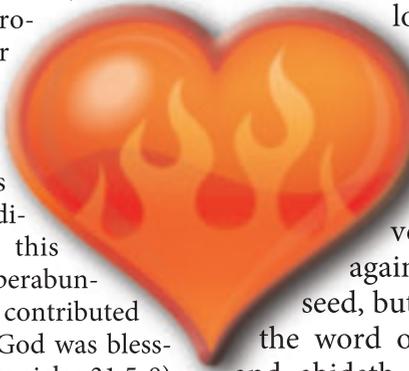
Hezekiah himself provided the regular offerings (see Numbers 28-29), but the people had to support the priests and Levites. They readily responded to this command, and a superabundance was promptly contributed – an indication that God was blessing His people (2 Chronicles 31:5-8). Revival! Recovery! Restoration! Rejoicing! Reconciliation! What a lovely picture! The exercise to put

things right for the honour and glory of Jehovah sprang from Hezekiah’s heart and not his head! “Man looketh on the outward appearance but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

What about your heart? What about my heart? Are they on the lines of recovery, revival, restoration and reconciliation or am I amongst those in Israel who mocked the messengers? There are sad, isolated, lonely saints of God whose hearts are right and who love the Lord Jesus. Nurtured in the assemblies and in assembly truth, they long for fellowship according to the divine ordering but partisanship and “small hearts” deny them. The desire of the Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep is, “that they all may be one” (John 17:21).

“And soon shall come that glorious day,
When seated on Thy throne,
Thou shalt to wondering worlds display,
That we with Thee are one.”¹

Meanwhile wouldn’t it be lovely if saints of God moved forward into another year (D.V), loving “one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever”? (1 Peter 2:22-23)



¹ J.G. Deck, 1802-84, adapted.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Introduction

Donald Davison

The book of Revelation is the Bible's finale, not just an appendix for specially interested people! Its arresting opening verses are the subject of this article.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The book of Revelation is often avoided, and spoken of as a difficult book to understand. This is true to some extent, but the God-given title itself should encourage us to think differently about it: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass” (Revelation 1:1, KJV). And the very title, “Revelation,” encourages us to seek the Lord’s mind to understand it as much as we can, with the Holy Spirit’s help.

What a title to commence a book with! “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”! Who would not be interested in such a grand and glorious theme as this – the revealing, the unveiling, the bringing to light of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ! No other book in the world has such an awesome beginning. It has pleased God to give this revelation to His Son to show to us. The Lord communicated this great message to John *via* an angel, and the apostle bears faithful witness and testimony to all the things he saw.

Reading it

Every scripture of God is good, but this book carries a special blessing to everyone who “reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things written therein...” (v.3). This is the only book in the scriptures which promises such triple blessings at its very outset to those who read it, hear it, and keep it. What greater incentive can we have to study this book than this from God Himself and our Lord Jesus Christ?

“For the time is at hand.” The constant viewpoint of the New Testament is that these things “must shortly come to pass” (v.1). Although the book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible, it is not some kind of appendix dealing with a distant future which we can ignore for all practical purposes. The fact that these things are “near” means that the “servants” to whom the book is addressed (v.1) need to keep its contents constantly in mind if they are to serve God truly and faithfully now. More than nineteen centuries may have passed since John wrote these words. But through every one of these centuries God was best served by people who were burdened by the knowledge that John wrote (from chapter 4 on) about things that could commence *at any time*.

From verse 4 onwards John faithfully carries out the tasks which were about to be given and shown to him.

Grace to you

Verse 4. The book is written to the seven assemblies in Asia. The number seven, as we know from both the Old and New Testaments, is the number of perfection or completeness. There are *seven* feasts in Leviticus 23, *seven* parables in Matthew 13, and *seven* Spirits, churches, seals, trumpets, and bowls (not to mention others) in Revelation. For a proper understanding of prophecy throughout the scriptures it is vital to understand the dispensational nature of the seven feasts, seven parables and seven churches. A careful study of these yields great rewards.

The book of Revelation brings before us many judgments, but at the outset the message is clothed, for our encouragement, with the words, “Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was and who is to come.” *Grace* is the free, unmerited love of God which has acted towards us, though undeserving, and sought and brought us to Himself. *Peace* is the result subjectively, in our hearts and consciences, because every barrier has been removed between us and God, and a harmonious relationship restored.

The awesome God

These blessings are ours, and they come from Him “which is, which was and which is to come” (v.4). This threefold statement concerning God discloses to us His eternal, unchangeable existence. Throughout the book we do not find the terms of the near relationship in which we know divine Persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but rather names and titles by which God has been pleased to reveal Himself in relation to earth and His earthly people, the Jews. In the Old Testament God revealed himself as “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14), the eternally self-existing One, as well as in various other ways. In the New Testament God has revealed Himself to us in the Son and speaks to us, His heavenly people, in terms of the nearer relationship of “Father.” But in the book of Revelation, where all things upon earth as well as in the heavenly regions are going to be laid bare and dealt with judicially, the terms of nearness and relationship are replaced with terms which carry the thought of some distance. Supreme majesty, discriminating judgment and the supreme power of God are given by such titles as “Lord God Almighty” (e.g. Revelation 4:8; 15:3).

How blessed we are to live in this era of nearness and relationship, of heavenly, and eternal blessings. Our near position to God as Father is brought before us in verse 6.

The message is clothed with spiritual power: for it is also “from the seven Spirits which are before his throne” (v.4). The Holy Spirit is spoken of in this way to impress our hearts with the plenitude of His quality and power, coming from

“his throne,” i.e., from the eternal centre of administration in the universe. A similar expression in relation to “the Lamb” is given in 5:6.

Thirdly, the blessings of grace and peace of verse 4 also come to us “from Jesus Christ” (v.5). In verse 1 the revelation is said to come from Jesus Christ and God; and in verses 4 & 5 the salutation comes from the eternal God, from the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ. So, at the outset, we have all three divine Persons actively engaged in giving us an understanding of all that is being done on earth now, during the soon-coming millennium, and eventually in eternity. This becomes clear as we progress through the chapters.

Our Lord Jesus is described as “the faithful witness” (v.5). There are many witnesses (or “martyrs”) in scripture who have remained true to their calling, but I am sure all would say that throughout His life, from birth to death, He was the only One who in every respect was completely *faithful* in all that He thought, said, and did. And now in resurrection He is also “the first begotten of the dead” – that is, first or chief in rank, place and status (see Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15). And He is “the prince [leader or ruler] of the kings of the earth.” Our Lord Jesus is supreme above all earthly monarchy, and as “Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16) is first in rank in every sphere, above all who in any way exercise lordship. Such a description of such a Person gives immense weight to what the first few verses have promised regarding the contents of this “revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is no wonder, then, that John breaks forth in the first of eight doxologies in the book:

To Him who loves us

“To him who loves us” (v.5, Darby Trans.) Christ has not only loved us in the past but “loves us” (present tense) as now on the other side of death to the same degree as He did before; and He will do so forever.

Lord, on the throne Thy love’s the same
As once upon the cross of shame:
In lowliness thou cam’st to die;
Thou livest now for us on high.¹

“And has washed us [loosed us, freed us, cleansed us, bathed us all over] from our sins in his own blood” – that is, in all the value of His sacrifice for us. There is nothing else in the whole universe which can cleanse us from our sins, or is of value in the presence of God, except the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:12). Its cleansing is permanent in its effect and eternal in its value.

Not only are we loved and washed, but we are also made “a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (Revelation 1:6, Darby Trans.). This high honour and distinction bestowed upon us is in contrast to the privilege Jehovah promised His

¹ Mrs G. Helyar, 1899.

people Israel of old if they were obedient to His voice (Exodus19:5, 6). We know they did not obey and so lost that privilege. We by faith and grace in our day are given this wondrous position before God as being both “royal” and “holy” priests. Each and every believer today is a priest before God. It is upon this truth that the “priesthood of all believers” is established. 1 Peter 2:5 states we are “an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,” and in verse 9 we are “a royal priesthood” to “shew forth the praises [excellencies, virtues] of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light” (KJV). We have this dual privilege of “offering up” to God in worship and “telling forth” in word and life to those in this world.

Every eye shall see Him

This is a prophetic book. Therefore, having spoken of our *present* blessings – of the Lord loving us, cleansing us and making us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father – immediately the Holy Spirit brings before us the thought of the Lord’s coming, or second advent. “Behold, he cometh with clouds” (Revelation 1:7). This refers to the time of His public appearing to this world to set up His kingdom of power, glory and righteousness upon the earth – the millennium as we often speak of it. We are very familiar with the thought of the so-called “rapture” of the saints prior to the setting up of His kingdom, and sometimes forget that the one is necessary in order to bring about the other. Many times we have been reminded that it is necessary for the Lord to firstly come “for us” at the “rapture” in order that we can come “with Him” at His appearing. The one is the precursor of the other. It is to this second part of His “coming” that this verse refers.



Behold, He cometh with clouds

Daniel 7:13 refers to this event: “one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven;” and the Lord Himself, in His great prophetic outline, says, “They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). Clouds denote the presence of the Lord. The major part of the Revelation from chapter 6 onwards deals with the events immediately prior to this aspect of His coming, then with the events following the establishment of His kingdom that lead eventually to the eternal state (Revelation 21:1-5).

“Every eye shall see him.” This is a statement of fact. Not that all will see Him at the same time but all will see Him either as Saviour or as Judge. The Christian company will be among the first to see Him when we rise to meet Him at the moment of the “rapture”, and when, as 1 John 3:2 clearly states, “we shall see him as he is.”

A particular class of persons is now referred to – “they also which pierced him.” The Jews who personally rejected the Lord when He was here “shall look upon me whom they pierced” (Zechariah 12:10). Then will Isaiah 53:5 become true of them nationally, when they say, “But he was wounded for our transgressions,” etc. And what shall we say about the soldiers who physically crucified the Lord, and the soldier who actually “with a spear pierced his side”? (John.19:34) “Every eye shall see him and all kindreds [tribes] of the earth shall wail [lament] because of him.” “Even so, Amen.” Verse 7 ends with these words of divine affirmation as to the truth of what is written coming to pass. There is no doubt whatsoever as to these events taking place.

Alpha and Omega

“I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 1:8). This reference to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet would signify the complete alphabet of letters. And this is used here to represent the totality of all that can be revealed of God and by God. There is no other revelation outside of the scriptures. Any claim by any other to have come from God is a figment of man’s imagination and a lie of the Devil. Some translations include the words “the beginning and the ending;” if so, these words merely underline a similar truth that God is the origin and source of all creation and is the ultimate End in view of all. For the term “which is, and which was, and which is to come,” see on verse 4 above. As if to emphasise to us the greatness of the Person who is communicating these things to us, we note the words “The Lord... the Almighty.” Everything in these introductory verses is from “the Lord” the supreme Governor of the universe and “the Almighty” the all-ruling, mighty, omnipotent God.

“To [Jesus Christ] be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” Well might the Spirit conclude verse 6 with this doxology to Him, using terms that the Bible reserves for God alone! And we can add our Amen! as the truths of these first eight verses of Revelation sink into our souls.

Alpha People

Gaius

George Stevens

Continuing our instructive occasional series on lesser-known Bible characters.

“The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 1-2, KJV).

His name

Gaius was one of the most common names in the Roman world. It is not surprising, then, to see that there were three other men named Gaius in the New Testament. One was a Macedonian who was seized along with Paul in the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). The second was another travelling-companion of Paul’s, but from Derbe in Lycaonia, central Asia-Minor (Acts 20:4). The third was a Corinthian convert of Paul’s who showed the apostle hospitality during his visit to Corinth (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14). The fourth was the Christian to whom the apostle John addressed his third epistle. This is the man we will study briefly here.

Some connect the name to the Latin for “to be glad.” That makes it a hard name to live up to, but this Gaius certainly made the old apostle rejoice! (3 John 3) Assuming he lived up to his name, he demonstrated that, for the Christian, happiness does not depend on circumstances totally; it depends on faith. “Blessed [happy] are all they that put their trust in him” (Psalms 2:12; cp. 5:11; 34:8; 84:12). Faith leads to a closer walk with God, and the result, as we find in Psalm 1:1, is happiness. “Blessed [happy] is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” Gaius certainly “walked in

*Happy are all they
that put their trust in Him*

*By this shall all men know
that ye are My disciples,
if ye have love one to another*

the truth,” living it out in ways we shall shortly see. He was “a happy man” in God’s eyes, and surely also happy in his own soul too.

Loved

The next thing we note about Gaius is that he was “well-beloved.”

Christians had come to appreciate him and to love him. He was a man who drew out affection. He was certainly loved by the apostle John because the “I” of “whom I love in the truth” is emphatic (3 John 1). This love was the result of several things. Firstly, Gaius was a convert of the apostle John, for John includes him among “his children” (v.4). So John was a kind of spiritual father to Gaius. I’m sure that each of us can think of someone who has been a spiritual father or mother to us.

Secondly, John’s affection was strengthened by the fact that, as already said, Gaius was walking in the truth. He was prospering spiritually. In so doing, he was revealing Christ in his life. How good it is to see those whom you’ve had a part in bringing to Christ continuing in the faith.

Thirdly, we know that love begets love (vv.3, 5). This was true of Gaius because we read that others commended his love to the rest of the church. He showed himself to be a real disciple of Jesus, who had said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Hospitality

One of the marks of that love is hospitality. And Gaius was prepared to show hospitality not only to the Christians he knew but also to those who were strangers to him yet preaching the same gospel (vv.5-8). No doubt he gladly complied with John’s admonition to “bring [them] forward on their journey after a godly sort” (v.6), i.e. to supply the needs of those itinerant preachers as they left. He lived out the Christian doctrine that declares we should distribute to the necessity of saints and give hospitality without moaning about it (Romans 12:13; 2 Corinthians 9:7).

The above are some of the qualifications of a bishop (1 Timothy 3:2). It is therefore of interest to highlight the fact that Gaius was part of a local church that was governed by a man who loved the pre-eminence. His name was Diotrophes (3 John 9). Now this man would not give time or space to the apostles. In fact, he slandered them. He would not receive other Christians either. Any of the church who would receive them, he rejected (v.10). As Gaius was one of those who *did* receive fellow Christians, then Diotrophes would have had him put out of the church. Nevertheless, Gaius was a true fellow-helper in the gospel even though rejected by a man who sought his own glory. This letter shows that Gaius had the right manner and attitude in Christian things. John was revealing qualities in Gaius which qualified him as a true overseer of the local church. If other members of the church read the letter, then they should have accepted Gaius as one of their leaders.

After studying these facts about Gaius, we need to ask ourselves several questions:

- Are we happily trusting in the Son of God?
- Do we love one another?
- Do we walk in the truth of the gospel of Christ?
- Have we been hospitable to fellow Christians whether known to us or not?
- Have we helped preachers in their work by supplying their needs?
- Do we recognise and use the talents that God has given us?
- Do we recognise and encourage the use of talents that God has given others?
- Do we follow that which is good? (cp. v.11)

Searching words!

*Bring them forward on their journey
after a godly sort*

Living the Truth

A study of John's first Letter

Philip Nunn

Are you baffled by the apparently meandering style of John's first Letter? Try this short, encouraging vade mecum; it will help you to make its message your own!

From the earliest records, this writing has been referred to as John's first Letter. True, it lacks the names of writer and addressees, as well as the conventional opening greeting and concluding salutation. It starts and ends abruptly. But it is the way the writer addresses his readers that makes it feel letter-like. John uses expressions such as "My dear children" (2:1, NIV), "dear friends" (2:7), and "brothers" (3:13). He also identifies closely with his readers: for example, he is concerned about their joy (1:4), about their confusion caused by division (2:19), and about deficiencies in their expressions of love (3:18).

It has a rather baffling style. John does not build up an argument or answer questions systematically, like the apostle Paul does in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Instead, like jazz music in which different instruments take rather irregular turns in leading, it introduces a number of themes, like love, light, obedience, truth, knowledge and life. Some are mentioned once, some return and are amplified.

What moved the apostle John to write his Letter? The goal of his Gospel is evangelistic. "*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:30-31). However when it comes to this first Letter, John wants to help believers to steer clear from lies, sin, and error, and enjoy their new Christian life to the full! On five occasions he informs his readers why he is writing, and these five 'reasons' provide a useful structure to explore the content of his first Letter.

I. So that you may experience FELLOWSHIP (1:3)

Fellowship is much more than a general chat with a cup of coffee after a Christian meeting. For the apostle John, fellowship is an important matter; it is something unique and uplifting that can only be lived among true believers. Fellowship is the translation of the Greek word "koinōnia," which means "having something in common." And what do we Christians have in common? *Christ!* In order to promote Christian fellowship, John starts his Letter by sharing with his readers what he had heard, seen, looked at, and touched concerning Christ, the "Word of life" (1:1-3).

Christian fellowship can be confused with the type of happy comradeship enjoyed between football fans, that revolves round their club's success or otherwise. True fellowship among Christians is based on personal fellowship "with the

Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1:3). This gives us something fantastic in common as a basis for inter-believer fellowship. It is easy for Christian fellowship to be exclusively equated with the activities of "our" group and the success of "our" religious endeavours. True Christian fellowship revolves around the Father and the Son. Could you to be doing more to transform some of those mere "coffee chats" and "football-fan-type" get-togethers into moments of true fellowship?

2. So that your JOY may be COMPLETE (1:4)

For many, the word 'joy' is not one they would rapidly associate with their Christian experience or local church life. For the apostle John, joy was important, and he desired for himself and his readers not only partial joy but "complete joy." Some old manuscripts have "our joy," and others "your joy." The "our" could also include the readers. In this, the apostle was following the Master's desire. For, after using the illustration of the vine and the branches to encourage His disciples to remain in Him, the Lord Jesus explained, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that *your joy may be complete*" (John 15:11; cp. 17:13). Clearly, for the Lord Jesus "complete joy" in the Christian life was something He desired for every believer.

This "complete joy" does not laugh in the face of suffering. The Lord Jesus Himself also wept (John 11:35). The apostle John knew the pains caused by divisions, separations (2:19), and frustrated expectations (3:18). At times we also may be called to "suffer according to God's will" (1 Peter 4:19). But the general tone of our Christian life should be one of thankfulness and joy. We need that divine joy in order to press on. As Nehemiah put it, "for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Of course a sense of responsibility is important; however faithful but miserable Christians are in danger of making Christianity unattractive to seekers. Is your Christian experience moving in the direction of "complete joy"? Does something inside you need to change? "We write this to make your joy complete" (1:4).

3. So that you will NOT SIN (2:1)

Today we are prone to avoid the word "sin", and use terms such as "mistakes", "unsocial behaviour" and "alternative lifestyle." John mentions sin twelve times in this Letter. His concern is that believers should take sin seriously, avoid sin, be determined to "walk in the light" (1:7), and, once aware of sin, judge and confess

*I have told you this
so that ... your joy may be complete*

it (1:9). Putting the different references together, we find that the apostle makes clear the following four points:

(a) *For God sin is a serious matter*: The problem of sin was so serious that the Father had to send His Son “as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (4:10). Our sin and our sins required the death of the Lord Jesus; and it is only the blood of Jesus that “purifies us from all sin” (1:7). “But you know that he [the Lord Jesus] appeared so that he might take away our sins” (3:5). The radical and costly solution is clear evidence of sin’s awfulness.

(b) *This world is an enemy territory*: The social current in which we live is not neutral. We are under strong pressure to accept the Godless values of society. John reminds his readers that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (5:19). Therefore the logical command, “Do not love the world or anything in the world...” (2:15-16).

(c) *Genuine Christians don’t continue in sin*: Can a Christian live comfortably in sin? The apostle replies, “No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (3:9). John does not endorse the doctrine of sinless perfection on earth (1:8, 2:1). But he strongly affirms that if a person continues comfortably living in sin, he or she may be religious, but not “born of God.” I suggest that before we try using these apostolic words to judge others we use them to x-ray our own hearts.

(d) *A clean start is possible*: What happens when a Christian fails and sins? “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (2:1). The first important step is to recognize that we have sinned. Then follow sincere repentance and confession of sin. And what a fantastic promise: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”! (1:9) God promises to forgive, not because He is “loving and kind” but because He is “faithful and just” in applying Christ’s redemptive work on our behalf. Do you still feel guilty over a sin you have confessed? Accept God’s words as true. Rest on His promise of forgiveness.

*No-one who is born of God
will continue to sin*

4. So that you may AVOID being DECEIVED (2:26)

The apostle John had noticed that genuine believers can get confused, can believe lies, can be led astray – they can be deceived. According to the ideas of “modernism” that developed from 18th century “Enlightenment,” reason and experimentation are the only tools to discover truth. But in the sphere of human self-understanding the ideas of “postmodernism” have, from the 1980s onwards, tended towards a dissolution of the very idea of “truth,” substituting for it simply the idea of “meanings” shared by particular groups. This has now also affected the way many Christians understand doctrine and theology. But for John “truth” is absolute and important. He mentions “truth” many times in this Letter and in his Gospel. In fact, of all the times the word “truth” is used in the New Testament about forty percent come from John. What you believe in is important. John wanted his readers only to believe in what is true. The truth is located in “what was from the beginning” (2:24), and this word “beginning” means what was taught by the Lord and the apostles (cp. 1:1 & John 15:27), in contrast to the novelties of those who had recently left them (2:19). This apostolic teaching, plus the “anointing” (2:20, 27) of the indwelling Spirit, gives discernment in all essentials of the Christian faith. It preserves us from blindly following old teachings which lack foundation in Scripture, just because we have always done so, or new trends and interpretations, just because everyone else is doing so. If we are genuinely open to listening to God's voice through His Word, His “Anointing” will guide us.

Let's turn now to some “truths” that John seeks to clarify in this Letter.

(a) *The truth about Jesus:* Who is Jesus? Is He really God? Was He really human? During the first four centuries of the church, such questions kept many Christians busy because of the many heresies that emerged concerning the true nature of Jesus Christ. In this Letter we notice that the apostle is correcting the view that Jesus was not truly human. John says: I heard Him, I saw Him, I touched Him – He was fully human (1:1-3). But He is also the Son of God (4:15), the Christ (5:1), and God Himself (5:20). Notice that John opened his Gospel with this same important truth (John 1:1). Fellowship is not possible with those who hold an incorrect view of Jesus Christ.

(b) *The truth about obedience:* Some say that we must obey God's commands in order to earn our salvation. Others that obedience and lifestyle are unimportant in the Christian life, and only faith matters. What is the truth? That saving faith will always find a way to express itself through obedience. “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (2:3, 4).

*The truth: about Jesus,
obedience, love,
the indwelling Holy Spirit and prayer*

(c) *The truth about love:* Is love a warm emotion? Is it enough to “feel loving” towards God and our fellow humans? John explains, as he also does in the Gospel, that true love is always connected with some form of action (3:16, John 3:16, 14:21). Love for God cannot be separated from obedience: “This is love for God: to obey his commands” (1 John 5:3). “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him” (2:5). Similarly, our love for fellow humans must be expressed “with actions and in truth” (3:16-18).

(d) *The truth about the indwelling Holy Spirit:* Do all Christians have the Holy Spirit? The apostle John assures his readers that, “*you have* an anointing from the Holy One” (2:20), and “this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it *by the Spirit he gave us*” (3:24). In conclusion, “We know that we live in him and he in us, because *he has given us of his Spirit*” (4:13). See Paul making the same point in Romans 8:9. You may feel something, or you may feel nothing. Our feelings do not alter the reality that all Christians have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. That is God’s revealed truth. Our calling now is to allow the Spirit of God who dwells in us to also fill us (Ephesians 5:18).

(e) *The truth about prayer:* Prayer is a beautiful topic, simple and yet there is much to learn. In the Gospels we don’t find the disciples asking the Lord Jesus to teach them how to lead a church, how to preach, how to heal the sick or drive out demons. But we do find them asking Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Over the years, many formulas have been given on how to get God to do what we want. The truth is the other way round: God is the Boss and we are the servants. John reminds his readers that effectiveness in prayer is related to their daily walk with Jesus (1 John 3:21-22), and to seeking and asking in line with God’s will (5:14-15).

5. So that you may KNOW that you have ETERNAL LIFE (5:13)

For the apostle John, knowledge and assurance are important. He uses the word many times in this Letter and in his Gospel. After conversion, many of us struggle with doubts: Am I really a child of God? Is it true that I am eternally saved? Such doubts are not new. Satan knows very well that doubts over our salvation cut deep and hurt; they take away our joy, they shake our foundation. The apostle John wanted his readers not only to be saved, but to know they were saved, to

enjoy the assurance of being a child of God. Therefore he writes, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that *you may know that you have eternal life*" (5:11-13). To help believers understand and rejoice in this certainty is one of the reasons John wrote this Letter.

Sometimes I feel saved, sometimes I don't. Certainty cannot depend on my feelings. Personal experiences may be good, but our souls find rest, and doubts give way to certainty, as we learn to *believe God's word*. For a few years after my conversion I struggled with serious doubts. I wanted some determining experience to settle the matter once and for all. Such experience never came. Certainty about my salvation only came as I learnt to believe God's promises, to trust God's word. And when doubts return, I return to the promises. If you also struggle, memorize and choose to believe God's powerful promises. Start for example with this one, "I tell you *the truth*, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has eternal life and will not be condemned*; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Assurance will come as you discover God's promises and believe them. How do you feel when someone does not believe what you say? How do you think God feels when we read His promises and continue to doubt? In this Letter the apostle John explains twice that when God states a truth and we don't believe it, "we make him out to be a liar" (1:10, 5:10). And God is no liar! God doesn't need to promise anything. The only reason He promises something is so we may "know", believe, and enjoy the peace of assurance.

Conclusion

The apostle John was no theorist. Yes, he laid great value on "knowing" and "truth" – but for practical reasons rather than academic ones. We know that the old, loving apostle experienced "great joy" when he came across believers, young or old, who were "walking in the truth" (2 John 4). If you were to meet him, would your way of living also give him reason to rejoice?

*You may know
that you have eternal life*

Creation's hallelujah-crescendo!

Creation in the Psalms, Part 3

David Anderson

The One who determined the number of the stars binds up the broken-hearted (Psalm 147:3,4). What a cold and empty universe, by contrast, the atheist imagines he inhabits!

By contrast the last six psalms express the relationship of praise that all creation ought to have with its Creator.

Introduction

I stated in “Creation in the Psalms” Part 1,* that some psalms include a celebration of the creatorial power that will introduce the glorious rule of Messiah. But it is in the final six Psalms (145-150) that creation’s “hallelujahs” are concentrated. For Christian believers “hallelujah” is the language of saints who anticipate, and in the future participate in, “the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.”¹ In this respect, the praise of the books of Psalms and Revelation coalesces. However in this article I would like to highlight the ways in which these “hallelujah psalms” celebrate the blessed reign of the Creator over His restored creation.

Psalm 145

Each of the psalms 146-150 starts and finishes with the refrain, “Hallelujah” or “Praise the LORD”; however their grand finale of praise to the Creator flows out of Psalm 145. This psalm is entitled “David’s psalm of praise” in the KJV. Literally, this is “David’s praise”, or, as has been written, “‘David’s Praise-Song’ ... [and, as] the closing verse of Psalm 144 seemed to anticipate the kingdom, [so] now the King Himself is extolled.”² As David’s last psalm, it consummates all his personal worship found in his other psalms. “My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD” (Psalm 145:21a, ESV). It is full of hope of Jehovah’s rule: for example, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations” (v.13). And it extols the greatness (vv.1-7), the goodness (vv.8-10), the glory

* *Scripture Truth*, July 2012.

¹ Revelation 11:15, with 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

² J.M. Flanigan, *What the Bible Teaches – Psalms* (Kilmarnock, John Ritchie, 2001), p. 617.

(vv.11-13), the providence (vv.14-16), and the saving grace (vv.17-21) of David's "God and King" – as He addresses Him in verse 1. It is the last alphabetical psalm, and so it is a complete³ acrostic of praise from the "sweet psalmist of Israel," whose prophetic vision of the Creator present upon earth was of "One [who] rules justly over men... He dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth" (2 Samuel 23:1, 3-4).

Not only does the psalmist himself praise, but so do restored Israel in each ensuing generation throughout the entire Millennium (v.4). They triumphantly praise and laud the LORD because they know their Creator, and have first-hand experience of Him. They know all about Him – all His majesty, His awe-inspiring acts, His ever-flowing, abundant goodness, His ability to establish and maintain righteousness, His grace and His tender mercy (vv.5-9). But above all they appreciate His steadfast love [or loving kindness] (v.8b).⁴

Every part of His creation ("all that he has made", v.9) benefits from His presence and responds appropriately with thanksgiving (v.10a). However His saints are able to bless Him (v.10b); and they speak of the glory of His kingdom and tell of His power, making Him known to the children of men throughout the entire globe (vv.11-12). The result: "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9 & Habakkuk 2:14); and there will be universal acceptance of the sovereign Creator – "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations" (v.13). When this occurs all David's desires are satisfied: "May the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! The prayers of David...are ended" (Psalm 72:19-20).

Psalm 145:14-20 suggest that David also recognised what dependence on the Creator's constant benevolence will mean in practical terms. Throughout the Millennium, there will be:

- Help for the vulnerable (v.14).
- Food for all creatures (vv.15-16).

³ This assumes acceptance of the inclusion of v.13b, i.e. the Hebrew letter Nūn, as in the Septuagint version.

⁴ High points are always reached in Israel's history and worship when they remember Jehovah's steadfast love – His character as revealed to Moses when he requested to see Jehovah's glory. Cp. Exodus 33:18-19 & 34:6-7 with 1 Chronicles 16:34 & 41; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 6:12-14; 7:1-3 & 6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11; Psalms 118 & 136; Jeremiah 33:11.

- Speedy answers for those who pray (vv.18-19).
- Total preservation of those who love Him (v.20).

David concludes his meditation on Messiah's rule with thoughts that the praise will outlast the Millennium (and the end of time) and will continue into eternity.⁵ "My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever" (v.21; cp. v.1).

At length, the final kingdom
No bound, no end possessing,
When heaven and earth
God all in all
Shall fill with largest blessing:
All root of evil banished;
No breath of sin to wither;
On earth, on high,
Nought else but joy
And blissful peace for ever.⁶

Psalm 146

The praise of Psalm 146 contrasts dependence upon man – of whatever status (vv.3-4) – with the blessedness of the one whose help and hope are in "my God" (v.2). As a godly Israelite the psalmist personally appreciates His grace as revealed by the name the "God of Jacob" (v.5a). Like Jacob, he has come into the blessedness of God's faithfulness. His hope is in his God, who is "the LORD...who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (v.5-6a). The Creator is the compassionate One who has sovereign rights that are both judicial and moral (v.7); and hence the praise repeats the themes of justice, providence, saving grace and tender mercy found in Psalm 145:6b-9. It also resembles Psalm 145 in climaxing with the enduring praise of the everlasting reign of the LORD (v.10). Hence the repetition of the opening refrain, "Praise the LORD!"

⁵ In v.13, the term "everlasting kingdom, which endures throughout all generations," means that the Lord's kingdom will continue, never to be superseded, until the end of time (cp. Daniel 2:44); and then it will be delivered up to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

⁶ G. Gilpin.

Praise is good, pleasant and fitting for the people of God

Psalm 147

Psalm 147 invites re-gathered Israel to praise their God (vv.1-2 with v.12), who is at once identified as the great and powerful Creator (vv.4-5, 8, 14-18) and the tender Protector of them, His new-covenant people (vv.2-3, 6, 11). Verse 4 says He is the same One who determined the number of the stars and named all of them! (cp. Isaiah 40:26-28) Verses 8-9 arise from a second invitation to praise (v.7) and include praise/thanks for His providential care for all His creatures (including the ceremonially unclean ravens!) *via* the natural food cycle. His providential care is executed by His creatorial control of the elements (snow, wind and water) and their seasonal variation through the means of His commanding, powerful word (vv.15-18). But to restored Israel He gives peace and prosperity – “the finest of wheat” (v.14). Hence the invitation to “praise the LORD” is renewed in verse 12, with verses 13-20 listing reasons for it. Most of all, Israel’s special relationship with Jehovah includes the privileges of knowing – and propagating – His written word (vv.19-20 with 145:11,12). Hence the final refrain, “Praise the LORD!”

But notice that verse 1 announces that praise is good, pleasant and fitting for the people of God (including us!) whenever they fear Him (i.e., accept His all powerful wisdom), and it sets their hope in Him, their trust in His steadfast love⁴ (v.11).

Psalm 148

Psalm 148 commands *universal* praise, that is, praise from the heavens and the earth. We know from Romans 8:19-22 why such praise will rise during the millennial reign of Christ. Verse 4 is an echo of Creation Day Two when the heavens were formed (cp. Nehemiah 9:6); and the “waters above the heavens” suggest the re-establishment of Edenic climatic conditions. Verses 5-6 of this psalm state why heavenly bodies and heavenly beings (cp. 29:1-2) can praise the LORD – it is because He is their Creator, their Controller, and their Sustainer. “He commanded and they were created. And He estab-

*It is the excellence of Jehovah's name
and His transcendent majesty
that generate praise from earth*

lished them forever and ever; he gave a decree which [i.e. this “decree” or “law of nature”] shall not pass away.”

Verses 7-14 invoke praise from the planet earth – the seas and all in them; all the elements of nature; mountains and hills; plants, animals and birds; as well as from all peoples (of both sexes, whatever their status or age). The whole of mankind is required to raise an adequate “hallelujah chorus” (vv.11-13), but the saints are especially needed – “the people of Israel who are near to him” (v.14). “The choice of Israel is regarded as having a central and universal significance for the whole life of creation.”⁷ As J N Darby comments, “The great Creator whom heaven and earth must praise is the God of Israel, and Israel His people.”⁸ Israel are the people called by the Jehovah’s name (2 Chronicles 7:14). It is the excellence of Jehovah’s name and His transcendent majesty (cp. Psalm 8:1) that generate praise from earth (v.13).

Psalm 149

Psalm 149 arises out of Psalms 146 & 148, and anticipates the Millennium by commanding the “new song,”⁹ in which revived Israel shall rejoice in their Maker with joyfulness and gladness of heart (v.2). This ecstatic praise is expressed both publicly and in private (cp. vv.3b, 5b), and is elaborated upon in Psalms 93, 96-99. The children of Zion rejoice in their long-awaited King (149:2). However, according to Psalm 147:20, this rejoicing also occurs when the nation awakes up to the privileges of its vocation (cp. 110:3). But the new song can only be maintained throughout the world on

⁷ W.G. Scroggie, *The Psalms. Volume Three* (London, Pickering & Inglis, reprinted 1967), p. 143.

⁸ J.N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Bible*, (London, 5 vols. 1857ff; reprinted Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot), vol.2, p.185.

⁹ See also Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9

the basis of divine righteousness; therefore 149:6-9 remind Israel to be the effective instrument of God's government (cp. Isaiah 26:9). The psalm ends with a resounding hallelujah of victory!

Psalm 150

Psalm 150 is the grand finale both of these hallelujah psalms and of the entire Psalter. It is a fitting doxology from "everything that has breath" to its Creator (v.6). It is the actual realisation of the hopes and aspirations in Messiah that are expressed in all the prophetic psalms. Verse 1 tells *who* will be praised – the LORD ("Hallelu-Jah") who is also God ("Hallelu-El"); and *where* He will be praised during the Millennium – He will be praised in the sanctuary, His chosen dwelling-place upon earth in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel and the metropolis of the world (cp. Exodus 25:22 with Ezekiel 48:35). But His praise extends to the whole universe and fills His mighty heavens. "Earth and heaven can be utterly at one in this. His [creatorial] glory fills the universe; His praise must do no less."¹⁰

Verse 2 explains *why* He will be worshipped – for what He does through His mighty acts of creation (cp. 33:6-9) and salvation (cp. 106:8-10). He is also praised for His excellent greatness (150:2b; cp. 8:1) – He is the Creator and the Sovereign. Verses 3-5 state *how* He will be praised: it will be with all the instruments that are used in Israel's temple worship. Verse 6 answers the question, "*by whom* shall He be praised?" with its invitation, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!" "All that breathe" are "the glorious variety [of life] that was glimpsed in Psalm 148:7-12, with 'sea monsters...beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds' joined by the whole family of man from kings to children – indeed, as Psalm 8:2 declares, to babes and sucklings."¹¹ Praise the LORD!

Conclusion: O LORD! How long?

Many psalms anticipate the personal intervention of the Creator to restore His creation to Edenic conditions. Their general focus is on Messiah's global reign. "For the LORD, the Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth" (47:2). However, as Christian believers we must finish our study of creation psalms with the wider prophetic view afforded by Psalm 8

¹⁰ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150. Tyndale OT Commentaries*, (London, 1973), p.491.

¹¹ Kidner, p.492.

– namely, of Christ as the Son of Man set over all creation, and ruling in both heaven and earth (cp. Ephesians 1:10 & 22).

Meanwhile, like the godly in the psalms (e.g. 90:13 & 94:3) we cry out, “O LORD! How long?” – for we, too, know that lasting righteousness, peace, prosperity and blessing on earth for mankind await the Christ’s everlasting kingdom.

Come, blessed Lord, bid every shore
And answering island sing
The praises of Thy royal name,
And own Thee as their King.

Bid the whole earth, responsive now
To that bright world above,
Break forth in rapturous strains of joy
In memory of Thy love.

Lord, Lord, Thy fair creation groans,
The air, the earth, the sea,
In unison with all our hearts,
And calls aloud for Thee.

Come, then, with all Thy quickening power,
With one awakening smile,
And bid the serpent’s trail no more
Thy beauteous realms defile.¹²

¹² Sir Edward Denny, 1796-1889.

*Lasting righteousness, peace, prosperity
and blessing on earth for mankind
await the Christ’s everlasting kingdom.*

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The Apple Tree

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my Beloved among the sons.

Song of Solomon 2:3

The Apple tree, among the forest trees,
strikes down its roots into the self-same ground,
shares the same dews with all the trees around;
its leaves are rustled by the self-same breeze.
Yet is it of a nature not like these.

A foliage different from the rest it wears,
a fruit peculiar to itself it bears:
so is the Apple tree among the trees.

And so among the sons is my Beloved.

True Man indeed, with all man's feelings, He;
and as amongst us in and out He moved,
was tempted in all matters like as we.
Yet sinless ever, and by God approved,
He stands unique in lovely purity.

J.M.S.Tait