

# Scripture Truth



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Making the people's heart fat  
How do we know that we  
have a revelation from God?

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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## Walking in darkness?

“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant? He that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the LORD and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that gird yourselves about with firebrands: walk ye in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that ye have kindled. This ye shall have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow...

Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD... Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many” (Isaiah 50:10 – 51:2, RV).

As the acknowledgement of God decays in the wider western society, and the values of humanism triumph; as “knowledge increaseth” (Daniel 12:4) (but knowledge so framed as to prevent people from recognising the agency of God in His creation) – so the Christian who loves [God’s] testimonies, and whose flesh trembles at God’s judgments (cp. Psalm 119:119f) can feel rather alone and as if “walking in darkness”. Where will it all end? How can Biblical Christianity survive? How can we bring up our children? “If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3)

But the “servant” mentioned at the start of the above excerpt from Isaiah is the Person who says in Isaiah 50:4, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary.” We have His word as a light to our feet and a lamp to our path (Psalm 119:105)! The “light” in which the world walks is as temporary as a bonfire, and in the end will only burn those who depend on it. Finally, Isaiah gives his listeners a most encouraging reminder of how the LORD blessed solitary Abraham, the man “who believed God,” and “made him many”.

“The LORD is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1).

THEO BALDERSTON

# The King in His beauty

W.T.P. Wolston

It is a great point for us to seek to cultivate the attitude of soul that comes out in Psalm 45. What the King is *Himself*, is what the queen is occupied with. We should be occupied, in like manner, with what Christ is. We are very apt to drop down into occupation with the blessings which His gracious hand bestows upon us; but in this Psalm it is not what the King does, but what He is, that is dwelt upon. What the Lord values is a heart that delights in Himself.

“My heart is *inditing* a good matter” (Psalm 45:1, KJV). The margin shows the meaning of inditing to be *boiling*, or *bubbling* up. I fear we are not often in this state. It is a great thing to have the heart boiling up with love to Christ. Instead of this, we are often at the freezing-point — very far from the boiling-point in the measure of our devotedness to Christ.

What the “good matter” is, the verse explains: “I speak of the things which I have made touching the King;” that is, what I know of Him; not what I have received from Him, but what He is to me. It is the place His blessed Person has in my soul.

Mary of Bethany chose to be with Himself. She sat at His feet, and listened to His words. To be near and with Him was what her soul desired. Affection for the Lord marked her condition, and her place was at His feet. She was absorbed with the person of Christ. And did she lack intelligence in the things of God? No; but it was not her object. She brake her box of precious ointment over Him, and Jesus said, “Against the day of my burying hath she kept this” (John 12:7). She feared she might not again have the opportunity of doing it.

Others made a feast for Jesus; but surely you would not feast one you knew was about to die. Mary’s act was in keeping with the circumstances of her Lord. The feast was not so: she was at the feast, yet it did not occupy her. The One for whom the feast was made did. Her heart boiled with love to Him. She was the only one there really in the current of His thoughts. The Lord by His Spirit make our hearts to boil with real, true love to Christ! Love can only be satisfied with love. He loved us unto death, and He seeks in return the true affection of our hearts for Himself. He is worthy of it, beloved brethren.

“My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” It is easy to speak of Christ and to praise Him when the heart is boiling with love to Him. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). You say, “The Spirit must move us to worship.” Yes; but if there be not worship, it is evident that the gathering is not moved. It is quite true we are to be subject, in the worship of the assembly, to the leading of the Lord only. So we are taught in the first epistle to the Corinthians; but in this psalm there is subjection to the Spirit of God, and withal a heart overflowing with that which it knows concerning the King.

I envy the state of soul here manifested. Listen to the language: “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips.” The address is to Himself. She is so near she can speak *to* Him. This is further than the bride in the Song of Solomon ever goes. She says much *about* her Beloved, but not much of this nature *to* Him. He is to her the chief amongst ten thousand, and the altogether lovely One; but the one here is so near that she can speak to the King; and all slips out so easily. “Therefore hath God blessed thee for ever” (v.3). In such intimate nearness there is acquaintance with the mind of God as to His purpose concerning the One He delights to honour. “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness.” There is a right sense of the majesty of His Person. He was treated outrageously by man, and the puny but guilty arm of man had been raised against Him in the hour of betrayal and falsehood; but the day would come when He should ride prosperously because of truth.

He was the meek and lowly One; but “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11); and the result of His lowly grace would be His exaltation. “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore, O God, [marg. reading] thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness *above* thy fellows” (vv.6f). Here He is saluted as God; and in Psalm 2 by God as His Son. He is anointed *above* His fellows; He is pre-eminent amongst the fellows.

Who are these “fellows”? Hebrews 2:11ff shows that *we* are His “fellows”: “He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” He leads praise in their midst. And again we read: “We are made partakers (or, ‘fellows’) of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (3:14). He is anointed with the oil of gladness, and the precious ointment drops from the head to the skirts of His garments (cp. Psalm 133:2). In the day of Christ’s glory, when He will ride prosperously, we shall be with Him, and shall share that glory; the oil of His gladness will drop on us.

“All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad” (v.8). There is fragrance in Christ, and that should come out in us. “We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:15).

“Kings’ daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir” (v.9). When the *King* is spoken of, the bride is Jerusalem; so this psalm has a millennial bearing. Israel will look on Him whom

*In the day of Christ's glory,  
we shall be with Him, and shall share that glory*

she rejected and pierced, and will mourn (Zechariah 12:10ff). The Lord will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), and in divine righteousness give them a place in His presence. “Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.”

Then will she consider, and incline her ear to Him. She is to forget her own people, and her father’s house (v.10). But what does this teach *us*? That there must be the bringing in of Christ between the soul and everything here. Nature must be distanced by Him. Christ must be my first object. Is He the first consideration with us? Or is it self and our houses, and the care of them — the family, the friend, or the father’s house? The Spirit of God here says, “Forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house;” and Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).<sup>1</sup>

“So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty” (v.11). He will *then* see beauty in thee. You will then be for Christ what Eve was to Adam; and there is the other side: “He is thy Lord; and worship thou him.” The claims of the Lord weigh with those who have Christ as their object. What joy when our souls in any measure enter into this! Christ eclipsing everything, and worship freely flowing out to Him.

And we read of the beauty of the King’s daughter, that she is “all glorious within” (v.13). Here are her moral adornings, graced in the virtues of Christ. *His* beauty is that in which she shines, and because of it *He* gets praise: “Therefore shall the people praise *thee*.”

What is God now doing? Is He occupied with our blessing, our comfort? Or is it not rather with the glory of the One He delights to honour — with Christ, whom He will set as the centre of all things and Head over all? God seeks praise for Him; and this because of<sup>2</sup> what we now are *morally*, as in spirit and behaviour, like Christ, adorned with His virtues; and in another day because of<sup>2</sup> what we shall be when like Him, and with Him in bodies of glory like unto His own glorious body — when we shall be manifested as “the sons of God,” as the fellows of Christ, and endless glory will be our happy portion. The Lord by His Spirit keep His dear Son before each of our hearts, that we may have the sense that He is ever near and with us. May we walk with Him, and ever remember “He is thy Lord, and worship thou him.”

An edited version of a chapter in W.T.P.Wolston, *Handfuls of Purpose*, Part 3. (Edinburgh, 3rd edn., 1922).

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<sup>1</sup> In my view Psalm 45:10 is best interpreted in the light of Ezekiel 16:3ff and Jerusalem’s heathen origins. Similarly as applied to us. [Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> I.e., (I think), “through”. [Ed.]

# All Thy garments

David Taylor

*This arresting contemplation originated as an address given in 2011, here much abridged.*

My desire in this article is to bring the Person of Christ before us, that we might be moved in our walk and our ways, and affections for Him. I wish to do this by considering the garments of the Lord Jesus. And I think that they will teach us something of the glories that attach to Himself in His various offices, and the perfections that we see coming out in Him. “*All thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia...*” (Psalm 45:8, KJV).

## The train of His robe

We’ll start in Isaiah chapter 6.

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple...And one [seraph] cried to another and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory’” (vv.1,3, NKJV).

This was a significant time in the history of Israel. Uzziah had died. In the earlier years of his long reign he had been a good king, diligently pursuing the safety and prosperity of his people (2 Chronicles 26:4-15). But he transgressed in presuming to offer incense in the temple; and God smote Him so that he became a leper (vv.16-20). As a result, he no longer really had a throne (v.21). You could say that from that point onwards, it was *Ichabod*: the glory departing. The history of Judah from then on was downward.

In these dispiriting circumstances Isaiah received this vision. There might be no worthy king on the throne – no point, as it were, of looking at man any longer. But there is a King, and *He* sits on the throne! Isaiah sees Him in this vision, the sovereign Lord, Adon.<sup>1</sup>

*The train of His robe filled the temple.* This glorious robe conveys an impression of His sovereignty, His absolute supremacy. Think of those lovely names in Isaiah 9:6, “Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace.” This is the One whom Isaiah saw. It’s very likely (see 6:8ff) that this was Isaiah’s commissioning vision. He was being commissioned by none other than the sovereign Lord of all.

And the “Lord” whom Isaiah saw was the Lord Jesus in His pre-incarnate glory. Notice the words, “...high and lifted up” (6:1). The same two words occur at the commencement of the “Song of the Suffering Servant” – in Isaiah 52:13. “He shall be exalted and extolled...” The exaltation of 52:13 is associated with the Lord’s

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<sup>1</sup> This is the name signified by “Lord” in v.1; “LORD” in v.3 signifies *Jehovah*.

risen glory consequent on His death as the suffering Servant. But what these two words tell is that the One who “shall be exalted and extolled” is the same Person who, before incarnation, was “high and lifted up.”

John expressly confirms this in his Gospel. Summing up the people’s refusal of our Lord’s earthly ministry (12:37ff), he quotes firstly from Isaiah 53:1 – “Lord who has believed our report...?” – and then from Isaiah 6:10 – “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts...” And regarding this second quotation he comments, “These things Isaiah said when he saw his glory, and spoke of him” (John 12:41) – obviously referring to Isaiah 6:1. The One whom the nation was rejecting was the One whom Isaiah had seen on His throne.

The same two words occur again in Isaiah 57:15, “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity.” “Inhabits eternity”! This gives us some idea of the pre-incarnate greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ! We need to get some idea of this, of the glory that ever attaches to Him who was Son from eternity, and who is “over all, God blessed for ever” (Romans 9:5, KJV)!

What an effect this vision must have had on Isaiah in *his* mission! What an effect it should have on *us*, *our* service, *our* behaviour, *our* lifestyle, to think of the greatness of the Person who “came from Godhead’s fullest glory, down to Calvary’s depths of woe” for us!

### Swaddling cloths

But let us pass on, more than seven hundred years, to Luke 2:7, 12, where we read these lovely words:

“And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger ... And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (NKJV).

The train of His robe filled the temple. Yet here He is, in swaddling bands. Think of this in relation to Micah 5:2,

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting.”

Here in the manger is the One from everlasting, wrapped in swaddling bands; and this was the sign to the shepherds. But why are these bands mentioned? Scripture doesn’t mention things haphazardly.

Constriction? Limitation? I think so. Yes, in His humanity, the Lord was restricted. We know that His glory was seen by some. You remember Simeon’s words on coming into the temple, “My eyes have seen Your salvation” (Luke 2:30). We shall see how the disciples saw something of his glory. But, largely speaking, His glory was withheld from the view of men.

I often align these thoughts with those wonderful verses in Philippians 2:5-11 which set forth essentially three phases in our Lord's coming down. These can be linked with what we might call the restrictions imposed upon Him in His Manhood.

Firstly, it says that He "made Himself of no reputation" (v.7), or "emptied Himself" (Darby Trans.). For the Lord, Deity was not something to be grasped at, because He ever was God (v.6). The Babe in the manger is as much God over all as the One in Isaiah 6 sitting upon His throne. Yet the evidences of divine glory were largely divested.

That's the negative side. But then He took "the form of a bondservant... coming in the likeness of men." The One who created water asked for a drink, wearied with His journey (John 4:7); the Possessor of the cattle on a thousand hills had to be shown a penny (Matthew 22:18; Psalm 50:10). Thirdly, "being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself" (v.8) to the point of death. "You have brought me to the dust of death" (Psalm 22:15). These were His "swaddling bands." We cannot imagine what they meant for Him.

### Clothes white as light

Yet we do also see His glories. In Matthew 17:2 we read,

"...And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as the light."

If we think of the light from the sun in terms of the sevenfold colours of the prism, it seems to me that in this passage we have something of the glories of Deity. We see truth; life; righteousness; holiness; indeed, absolute perfection in the Person of the Lord Jesus, in this majestic scene. Peter and the favoured disciples "were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). They were allowed to see in this blessed Man on earth something of the glories that were hidden from the eyes of others.



*Here in the  
manger is the  
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swaddling bands*



*Constriction?  
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I think so*





*When we see  
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*But there's no  
comparison  
with the  
spotless Christ  
of God in all  
His sinlessness.*



Somewhat similarly, in Luke we read that, "His robe became white, and glistening" (9:29); just as Paul, recalling a later event, said, "I could not see for the glory of that light" (Acts 22:11). In Mark's Gospel however we read that His clothes "became shining, exceedingly white, like snow..." (9:3). When we see the snow coming down, we think, "That's wonderfully white." But there's no comparison with the spotless, peerless Christ of God in all His sinlessness.

### The towel

Let's pass to John 13.

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel, and girded Himself" (vv.3f).

The Lord takes the dirty feet of the disciples, perhaps weary and footsore, into His hands and washes them. He takes the towel and girds Himself for service for His own. He Himself said, "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). We've already thought from Philippians 2 of His becoming a bondservant. I think of the lovely picture in Exodus 21 of the servant who *could* go out free; but he's been given a wife by his master and he has children. He "plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children. I will not go out free'" (v.5). And ever after, as his wife and children looked at him they would see what love had done. It had caused his ear to be pierced by the awl, making him a servant for ever for their sakes (v.6).

Yes, The Lord Jesus takes the towel and girds Himself. We need His service for every necessity of life. We need it, above all, that communion might be maintained. Very shortly after this event Peter would be "washed all over", i.e., be made clean by the Lord's death. But he needed this constant "washing" in order to "have part" with the Lord Jesus (John 13:8-10). We, too, constantly need the "washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26) to remove the nasty things of

the world that fasten on to us and defile us, if we are to share in the sweetness and joy of communion with the One who loved us unto death. This is His constant service toward us.

But in Luke 12 we read something even more remarkable. “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them to sit down to eat, and will come and serve them” (v.37). It was once truly said, “His service never ends, because His love never ends.” Think of it! The Lord of glory serving us! But are we *watching* for Him? “Watching” is the word that is associated here with His girding Himself and serving them.

The spring of this action of girding is found in John 13:1, “... having loved His own who were in the world...” He “loved His own” – We’re “His own”; I’m “His own”! He loved us.

“To the end.” That means “through everything” – even the cross. And that’s the spring of the action of His continuing service toward us. And the measure of that service is not just our *need*, but the glory of His Father and the eternal throne. That’s something that is for ever far and away beyond us.

### The seamless tunic

We must hurry on.

“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece” [or, “woven through the whole from the top”] (John 19:23; NKJV, also Darby Trans.).

The profane and callous soldiers gambled for His seamless tunic, so as not to spoil it. And if the enemy deprives us of part of the Lord’s moral perfections and glories, he deprives us of all. There was no sin in Him, and all His moral glories merged perfectly into each other. We might say of someone, “He’s a very gracious person.” But he might not be very faithful. Or, “He’s a loving person.” But he might not be very charitable insofar as finance is concerned. But in Christ every moral aspect was in perfect blend.

How different from ourselves! One day, perhaps, we’re pleasant; the next day, not so. But “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, KJV).

And they took the tunic off Him, and left Him naked. Beloved brethren! It moves our hearts, surely, when we think of what men did to Him!

### The robes of mockery

“And they... put a scarlet robe on him” (Matthew 27:28, NKJV).

This passage goes on to speak of a crown of thorns and a reed. Scarlet is the royal colour. They mocked Him with the accoutrements of royalty. Mark gives the

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colour as purple (15:17).<sup>2</sup> Purple speaks of imperial supremacy. Luke, describing the Lord's abuse at the hands of Herod and his soldiers, describes the robe they put on Him with a word that really means, "bright", "shining" (23:11). Amazingly, the same word is used in Revelation 19: 8 to describe the fine linen, clean and *bright* that represents the righteous acts of the saints.

Scarlet for kingship; purple for supremacy; and the purity of the blessed Saviour. How amazing His grace as He silently let them mock Him as to these attributes! How dreadful (unless they afterwards repented) for them to see what they had mocked displayed in glory on the day when every eye shall see Him!

### The grave clothes

"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury... Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb, and he saw the linen cloths lying there" (John 19:40; 20:6).

The Lord Jesus was bound in those grave clothes. He most truly *died*. But then He came forth out of death. "He arose, a victor, from the dark domain!" Regarding Lazarus, the Lord had to command the bystanders, "Loose him, and let him go!" (John 11:44) But there was nothing of that here! This was "the *power* of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). The grave clothes were still there. The past was still there. But He was gone!

The Lord is first in everything. He *must* be. Paul's testimony was, "That the Christ would suffer, and that He should be the first that would rise from the dead (Acts 26:23). He's the Firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18), and He was "the Firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20, KJV). I trust that as we look at the Lord Jesus in the glory of His resurrection, our hearts might be moved, our affections drawn out, after Him; and He wants our love. We can *do* a lot, but where is our heart? I trust these things will move us.

### "All thy garments"

We could look at Revelation 19:13, and there we would see the Lord with a robe dipped in blood (NKJV), but not His own: it's the blood of His enemies. A solemn, most sobering sight.

But I end with Psalm 45.

"All your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces... (v.8).

We've thought of Him in His glory, pre-incarnate, in Isaiah 6. We've thought of Him in the swaddling bands of His perfect humanity, His humility. We've thought of Him in relation to His kingdom glories; and to His perfect servanthood. We've

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<sup>2</sup> Maybe of a different garment. Two different words are used in the two gospels. ESV gives "cloak" in Mark. [Ed.]

thought of that seamless perfection set forth in His tunic; and the riches of grace and glory expressed in the clothes in which He was mocked. And we've seen, too, the glory connected with resurrection, and with judgment. And here the sons of Korah say, "All your garments are scented..."

The sons of Korah had received amazing grace. By rights they should have perished with their father and Dathan and Abiram. But they were spared (Numbers 16, with 26:11). And we, too, if we think of what we deserved – what "contemplation" (see psalm title) do we have of this blessed Person and all His lovely ways?

The myrrh speaks, surely, of suffering love. It was present at the Lord's birth, and at His death and resurrection (Matthew 2:11; John 19:39). The fragrance of the aloes is sweet, but to partake of them is bitter. And how sweet are the things that have come as a consequence of the bitterness of the sufferings of which the Saviour partook for us! The first mention of cassia is as an ingredient of the most holy anointing oil, made according to a recipe not to be replicated for any other purpose (Exodus 30:24). And there is in the Person of Christ something unknowable, which the Father alone fully appreciates (Matthew 11:27; Revelation 19:12). This, I believe, is what the cassia sets forth.

What are your contemplations? What are mine? If we had been close to the Lord Jesus as He went to the cross we might have still caught the scent of Mary's spikenard. That was her appreciation – what an appreciation she had! But, in a typical sense, we too should catch the scent of the myrrh, the aloes, and the cassia of the perfect Man who went obediently, willingly, into death, on our behalf.

I trust that these thoughts might encourage us, and help to make us more devoted to the One who gave His all for us.



*The sons of Korah say, "All your garments are scented..."*

*The sons of Korah had received amazing grace*



*In a typical sense, we too should catch the scent of the myrrh, the aloes, and the cassia of the perfect Man who went obediently, willingly, into death, on our behalf*



# How do we know that we have a revelation from God?

**Yannick Ford**

In my article in the previous issue, I considered why we need a revelation from God. We looked at the message of Ecclesiastes, and we saw there that unaided human reason can only lead us to a few divine truths – that there is a God, that we should fear Him, and that there will be a day of reckoning. The truth concerning God’s love, His grace, and His plan of redemption have all come to us by revelation – we would not have worked these out by ourselves.

If we accept that we *need* a revelation, then we may well ask ourselves, how can we know that we *have* a revelation from God? In particular, how can we be sure that the Bible is indeed God’s word to us? This is a big question, and I cannot do justice to it in one article. Instead, I will simply outline some key points, and then focus on what I believe is a very important concept, namely that the Bible claims to transform us, and it reveals the Lord Jesus to us. When we come to Him, we find that He is exactly like He is revealed to be in His word. We can therefore say, “It was a true report which I heard”, just as the queen of Sheba said to Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:5, NKJV).

Firstly then, some key points. There are many valuable resources that can strengthen our faith in our conviction that the Bible is the word of God. *Theopneustia*, by Louis Gaussen, is a magnificent exposition of the internal evidence for the inspiration of the Bible. It is freely available on-line.<sup>1</sup> This book shows clearly the many instances within the Bible where it clearly claims to be the word of God. This reminds me of C.S. Lewis’ well-known comment that we should not foolishly state that the Lord Jesus was simply a good man. As he says, a merely good man would never have made the claims that the Lord made concerning His deity and purpose. Such claims, from the lips of an ordinary man, would have been the claims of a liar or a lunatic, not a good man. But if they were true – as they are for the Lord Jesus – then He is infinitely more than a good man. Similarly, we could adapt C.S. Lewis’ quote to the Bible. It is not simply a “good book”. It claims far more than that for itself. If it were not true, it would actually be a very bad book, given its claims to be directly inspired by God. We cannot simply look at it as a good, moral book. It leaves us in no doubt as to what it claims to be.

The structure of the Bible is itself remarkable. The Bible was written over a time-period of approximately 1,600 years, by around forty different authors, most of whom would not have known each other personally. Yet, the underlying message

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Gaussen (1790 - 1863), *Theopneustia: The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* [1840]. [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book\\_theopneustia.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_theopneustia.html)

in the whole of Scripture forms one, consistent whole – a story that develops and leads up to the revelation of Jesus Christ and His work. It would be exceedingly unlikely to be able to select documents from such a wide range in history and then find that when placed together they formed one grand story.

Another fascinating book is *Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings Both of the Old and New Testament*, by J.J. Blunt. This is also available on-line.<sup>2</sup> Blunt shows how many seemingly small, incidental points in one book of the Bible confirm the truth of another part. These incidental points provide good evidence that what has been recorded is an accurate representation of what actually happened, rather than a fabrication. If one is inventing circumstances it is difficult to make sure that all loose ends tie up! For example, if I were to write a novel, I would have to be careful to maintain an internal consistency throughout my story. To give one example from Blunt's book: only Luke tells us that the feeding of the five thousand took place near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). We find out from John that Philip came from Bethsaida (John 1:44). We can therefore understand why the Lord asked Philip in John's account of the feeding of the five thousand where they should buy the bread (John 6:5-7). Philip was not normally singled out among the disciples, but, as a resident of Bethsaida, he would have been well placed to point out that it was not possible to buy enough bread! We would not have known simply from John's account that the feeding took place near Bethsaida, but when we read Luke's account it fits in exactly. It is small coincidences like this that emphasise that we are reading a true account of history. Many such coincidences are brought out in Blunt's book. They strengthen the argument mentioned earlier that the books of the Bible, although written by many authors over a long period of time, form a seamless whole.

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<sup>2</sup> J.J. Blunt (1794 - 1855), *Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings Both of the Old and New Testament* [1832]. <https://archive.org/details/undesignedcoinci1851blun>

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Other points that could be made in support of the Bible are (i) the many prophecies fulfilled to the letter, (ii) archaeological support, and (iii) the existence of manuscripts of at least parts of the Scriptures, close in date to the original documents. Many helpful books have been written on these subjects.<sup>3</sup>

I would now like to focus on the second main argument of this article, which is this: the Bible claims to transform us, and it reveals the Lord Jesus to us. When we accept its message, we find that its claims are true. For instance, consider the following five verses:

- “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).
- “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18).
- “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).
- “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35).
- “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

From these five verses we see that the word of God claims to be living and powerful, and able to penetrate our inmost being and to discover our thoughts. The word of God is that which causes us to be born again. It works in us, and it is eternal – it will continue even when the present earth and heavens no longer exist. It will be used to judge us on the last day. These are all far-reaching claims! If we believe and take hold of the Bible’s message, we will find in our experience that the first three verses quoted above are indeed true, and so we will have every reason to believe the other two. It is like finding a key that unlocks a door. Once we have the right key, we do not need another, nor do we doubt the key that we are using. It works! It produces the desired effect – opening the door. In the same way, we find

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<sup>3</sup> Books that I have found helpful include:

*Nothing but the Truth*, by Brian H Edwards; *Making Sense of the Bible*, by Wayne Grudem; *From God to Us: How we got our Bible*, by Norman Geisler and William Nix; *The Books of the Old and New Testaments Canonical and Inspired; with Remarks on the Apocrypha*, by Robert Haldane (1764 - 1842), which is available online: [http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/haldane\\_booksotnt.html](http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/haldane_booksotnt.html).

*When we consider the far-reaching claims of the Bible, and see them to be fulfilled in our experience, we need not doubt*

that the Bible does as it says. This, more than any other argument, convinces me that we have a revelation from God.

This is important, because there is no shortage of claims and allegations that the Bible is full of contradictions, is not in its original form, and so on. We may not always have the knowledge or wisdom to refute some of these arguments. But when we consider the far-reaching claims of the Bible, and see them to be fulfilled in our experience, we need not doubt. The Bible does not disappoint!

Furthermore, the Bible also introduces us to the Lord Jesus. Elsewhere I have written about the marvel of this revelation itself<sup>4</sup> – how seemingly impossible it would have been to have invented an account of Jesus the perfect Man. The Russian author Dostoevsky recognised this:

“The basic idea is the representation of a truly perfect and noble man. And this is more difficult than anything else in the world, – particularly nowadays. All writers, not ours alone but foreigners also, who have sought to represent Absolute Beauty, were unequal to the task, for it is an infinitely difficult one. The beautiful is the ideal; but ideals, with us as in civilized Europe, have long been wavering. There is in the world only one figure of absolute beauty: Christ. That infinitely lovely figure is, as a matter of course, an infinite marvel (the whole Gospel of St. John is full of this thought ...”<sup>5</sup>

The Lord Jesus is not simply an “infinitely lovely figure” in literature. He is revealed in the Bible so that we may *know* Him. John tells us that “these [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:31). As we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), we find that He is truly just as He is revealed in the Scriptures. In John 8:25, the unbelieving question, “Who are You?” was put to Him. But to the believer, His reply, “Just what

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<sup>4</sup> For the following in greater detail, see Yannick Ford, *Why I am a Christian*, available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/100026827/Why-I-Am-a-Christian-revised-corrected>. [Ed.]

<sup>5</sup> Letter No 39 in *Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends*, translated by Ethel Colburn Mayne. (New York, The Macmillan Company, 2nd edn., 1917). Public domain material available on <https://archive.org/details/lettersfyodormi00eliagoog>.

*As we grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”,  
we find that He is truly  
as He is revealed in the Scriptures.  
When we have met the Person  
described to us in the Bible,  
we have no doubt that the Record we have is true*

I have been saying to you from the beginning”, rings true. When we have met the Person described to us in the Bible, we have no doubt that the Record we have is true.

In summary, then, the Bible is indeed God’s revelation to us. It has been written down, so that we will not be dependent on fluctuating feelings, but rather that we may rely on the unchanging truths of Scripture.

It is interesting in passing to note the importance that God places on words, both written and spoken. We have already considered Matthew 24:35, where the Lord states that His words will never pass away. Our own words are also important in God’s mind, since every idle word will need to be accounted for on the day of judgement (Matthew 12:36), which is a solemn thought. In the Old Testament, a vow was considered binding – see Numbers 30:2. Psalm 33:6 tells us that “by the word of the LORD the heavens were made”, and we have seen in James 1:18 that it is by the word of truth that we are born again. Perhaps the importance of words helps us to understand Psalm 138:2, namely, “You have magnified Your word above all Your name.” One of the best commentaries I have seen on this verse is by C.H. Spurgeon, with which I finish:

“Revelation excels creation in the clearness, definiteness, and fulness of its teaching. The name of the Lord in nature is not so easily read as in the Scriptures, which are a revelation in human language, specially adapted to the human mind, treating of human need, and of a Saviour who appeared in human nature to redeem humanity. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the divine word will not pass away, and in this respect especially it has a pre-eminence over every other form of manifestation.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Treasury of David* by C.H. Spurgeon. There are numerous full-text versions available on-line.

# The treasure in the field

Iain Martin

*A striking statement of the interpretation of the treasure as Israel.*

In Matthew 13 there are eight parables.<sup>1</sup> Jesus addressed the first four parables to the multitudes, and the second four to his disciples. Through the first four He revealed some things about God, His Kingdom, and the spread of the gospel. Within them are painted some reality-checks regarding the spreading of the gospel and Satan's opposition to it:

- The parable of the sower – ultimately, only one of the four places where seed was cast was productive; the other seed was eaten by the birds, shrivelled by the heat, or choked by the thorns.
- The wheat and the tares – Satan sows evil alongside what the Lord has planted, though, in the end, the redeemed are separated from the lost who are bound and burned.
- The mustard seed – the seed became a plant, then the plant became a tree, i.e., a monstrosity it wasn't supposed to be - the apostate, counterfeit church.
- The leaven – bad doctrine and compromise was mixed into the true worship of God.

“Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house” (Matthew 13:36, NKJV). Following these four parables, Jesus then takes the disciples aside privately and delivers to them firstly an exposition of the parable of the wheat and the tares, and then follows this with four more parables. But before directly examining the next of these, the parable of the treasure hid in the field, I want to turn firstly to some other Scriptures that help us to interpret both it and the parable of the pearl of great price.

“And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’ Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad” (John 11:49-52).

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

“Give no offence, either to the Jews or to the Greeks, or to the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32).

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<sup>1</sup> Counting Matthew 13:52 as an eighth parable. [Ed.]



*Israel is  
the  
treasure,  
and the  
earth is  
the field  
which  
belongs to  
the Lord*



Each of these passages speaks of distinct groups of people. In the passage from John, Caiaphas speaks not only of Christ's death for the nation of Israel, but also of the gathering in one of God's children who were scattered abroad. In Romans 1 we are given two distinct peoples – the Jews and the Greeks, to both of whom the gospel is proclaimed; while in the passage from Corinthians we are given three groups of people – the Jews, the Gentiles and the church of God.

Thus in these passages we have the human race described in three groups, two of them mutually exclusive (Jews and Gentiles); whilst the third, the church of God, draws its members from both of the first two groups – as we see from the book of Acts onwards.

The fifth and sixth parables of Matthew 13 show us what the Lord is doing on the earth in relation to these groups:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44-46).

I think it is important that we recognise the distinction between these two parables, and do not dismiss the second as merely a restating of the first. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we are instructed to study the Word, and “rightly divide” it; and that means recognising differences as well as similarities when we encounter them, and applying parables and prophecies to those to whom they apply rather than claiming that the whole testimony of Scripture is about us.

### **The hid treasure**

In this article I have to restrict myself to the first of these two parables – the parable of the treasure hid in the field. There are three elements to it:

- The field
- The man
- The treasure

In regard to the parable of the wheat and the tares Jesus has just explained to His disciples that “the field is the world”; and the man in that parable is Himself (13:37-38).

This leaves the “treasure”. We know from the passages cited from John, Romans, and Corinthians that there are separate classes of people. And the echoes of the Old Testament suggest that the “treasure” in this parable represents one of these distinctive groups. For there we read:

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure<sup>2</sup> above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:2).

“For the LORD hath chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for his peculiar treasure<sup>2</sup>” (Psalm 135:4).

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure<sup>2</sup> to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5).

This last verse in particular reminds me of the present parable, for in it the treasure is in the field. Israel is the treasure, and the earth is the field which belongs to the Lord. The parable shows God’s working with His chosen people – it was God’s sovereign choice to set them apart (Numbers 23:9) as His own peculiar treasure.

But, remembering the man is Christ: when Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago, what did He find?

Israel, a hidden treasure, lost in this world.

Israel was a failure, living through “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) as an unfree nation (cp. Nehemiah 9:36f) under the iron fist of the Roman Empire. Their leaders were corrupt, and many of the people were poor and oppressed. At one time they had been blessed by God and made a great nation (1 Kings 4:21 with Genesis 15:18); and in the time of Solomon they were the example of what the nation was meant to be under God. When the queen of Sheba visited she said, “I’ve heard about this magnificent place, but the half has not been told!” (cp. 1 Kings 10:6f) Those were the glory days, but over the years through disobedience to the covenant they lost most of what they were; and when Jesus came it was not like Solomon’s time at all. They had no power and seemed to have no purpose. They certainly didn’t look like God’s special treasure.

But, they *were* still a treasure, albeit a “buried” treasure. Israel had not only *been* God’s chosen people in past time. They remained (and remain) the covenant people of the God who cannot lie. Consider the Abrahamic promises:

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who

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<sup>2</sup> The ESV gives “treasured possession” for the first two of these, and “his own possession” for the third. The NIV [1984 & 2011] gives “treasured possession” for all three. [Ed.]

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curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3).

And particularly on the covenant:

“<sup>4</sup>As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations... <sup>7</sup>And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup>Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God... <sup>10</sup>This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ... and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>13b</sup>...My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant...”

“<sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ <sup>19</sup>Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him...’” (from Genesis 17:4-19).

And, lastly, from Genesis 22, picking up the story after the LORD had intervened and presented Abraham with the ram caught in the thicket,

“Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice’” (Genesis 22:15-19).

While we see some of these promises – the blessing to all the nations – fulfilled to the church in the person of Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16, 29), I want to draw your attention to a word that is repeated four times in Genesis 17, namely, “everlasting”. We have three mentions of an everlasting covenant (verses 7, 13, 19) and one of the everlasting possession of the land (verse 8).

Remember, it is God who is declaring these everlasting promises, not man – this is God who knows everything that has ever happened, everything that is happening and everything that will ever happen – so He made these covenants with a perfect knowledge of the past, present and future; and God doesn’t lie (Titus 1:2). If God has made these promises, God is going to keep them.

For a period of time, Jesus uncovered the treasure, and reminded Israel of the everlasting covenants and their true destiny; but they rejected their King.

“For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

This verse makes it clear that they closed their eyes and ears to the truth: they wilfully chose not to believe! So what did Jesus do?

Just what the man did in the parable! He covered the treasure back up.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23:37-38)

They rejected Him, and He covered the treasure back up BEFORE he purchased the field. Israel’s favour is that they are God’s treasure, but Israel’s failure is that they became a buried treasure twice over.

The man not only wanted to buy the treasure, but he bought the whole field, and to purchase the treasure, He paid the price for the field.

This is the beautiful language of the cross. Jesus gave everything He had. He emptied Himself, and His death on Calvary’s cross was sufficient to pay the price for all. Christ “died for that nation” even as He also died “to gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

However, for the time being, the treasure remains buried – it is still a treasure; it has a future fulfilment and is still party to an everlasting covenant, and will be uncovered in the end times.

“If these ordinances depart from before me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before me for ever” (Jeremiah 31:36).



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## Changing the story

“This Face Changes the Human Story. But How? Scientists have discovered a new species of human ancestor deep in a South African cave, adding a baffling new branch to the family tree.”<sup>1</sup>

So ran the heading of an article on the National Geographic website in September. It reported how fifteen fossilized skeletons, discovered in a very inaccessible cave north of Johannesburg and possessing some human-like features but very tiny brains, might just represent a challenge to the idea, advanced as fact for many decades, that humanity originated in east Africa. Such a challenge cannot be mounted until the researchers have decided on the dating of the fossils. However the article seemed to hold out the likelihood that the fossils would rewrite human history.

But not for the first time. My own rather haphazard monitoring of such stories over the past forty years confirms that the claim to rewrite the story of human origins has been made many times before on behalf of fossil finds.

But what is never pointed out in these breathless accounts is that the very fact that claims to “change the story” are repeatedly advanced shows how rickety the “story” is in the first place. Even if not all these challenges succeed in changing the “consensus story” of human origins, the fact that scientists give them consideration suggests how poorly based all their conjectures are. In other natural sciences, “discoveries” often fulfil what the theory had already predicted to exist. In the “science” of human evolution new evidence seems generally to change the story.

The correct conclusion from all this is that “science” doesn’t know where mankind came from. Nor can it. We weren’t there! Only the living God can tell us – and He has!



*“Science”  
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<sup>1</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/09/150910-human-evolution-change/>

# Making the people's heart fat

Theo Balderston

*The story of a solemn dispensation – of grace!*

“Make the heart of this people fat [or, ‘dull’], and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:10, RV).

This was the grim commission that Isaiah received from the Lord whom he saw, “high and lifted up”, His train filling the temple, and His utter holiness being declared by the seraphim. As stated elsewhere in this issue,<sup>1</sup> the One whom Isaiah saw was the Lord Jesus Himself in His pre-incarnate glory (John 12:41). He is “the Lord” (lower case) of verse 1. But the seraphim’s triple ascription of holiness to “the LORD” (capitals, v.3) shows that *the Lord Jesus was revealed to him as very God*.

Isaiah was standing in the temple court at the time of his vision, overwhelmed with the sense of his own uncleanness and unfitness to prophesy. But one of those who cried, “Holy!” touched his lips with a burning coal from the altar of burnt offering (Isaiah 6:6). Only the righteousness of God as set forth in the cross of Christ was able to make him fit to be God’s messenger (Romans 3:25).

And indeed the Lord was seeking a messenger. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (v.8) With his lips touched and his sin purged, Isaiah is ready. “Here am I; send me.” But was he really expecting the commission, “Make the heart of this people fat...”? He was being commissioned to impose a grim sentence, rather than proclaim a deliverance as he had probably hoped! He was still willing to “go”; but worried. *How long* would this sentence lie upon the people of Judah? (v.11)

The answer was not encouraging (vv.11-13). It had three parts:

- “Until the city be waste without inhabitants...” Isaiah lived to see this happen due to the invasion of Sennacherib (see chs.1, 36f).
- “And the LORD have removed men far away...” This might refer to the deportation of the ten tribes only a few years later (see 2 Kings 17:6ff), but I think it more likely applies to “Judah and Jerusalem” (see Isaiah 1:1; 2:1); and refers to the carrying-away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25). The sentence would long outlast Isaiah’s lifetime! See too Jeremiah 5:21.
- “And if there be yet a tenth in it, it shall again be eaten up...” (or, “burnt”). This was still further into the future! In my view it refers to Judah after the return from captivity, and to the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem in 70-135 AD.

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 6.

And yet all God's declarations of judgment upon His disobedient people have at least the glimmer of promise in them too. This one is no exception:

"So the holy seed is the stock thereof" (v.13). God cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13), and that means He cannot revoke His promises of blessing to that holy seed. Isaiah would prophesy of that too. "For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall return" (Isaiah 10:22; 11; 60; cp. Romans 9:27).



*What sort of  
message  
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The  
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famous  
prophecy of  
Immanuel*



### The message

But what sort of message would make the people's heart fat? The completely unexpected answer comes in the next chapter, in the famous prophecy of 7:14. The circumstances were as follows.

"Ephraim" (standing here for the ten tribes that had split off from Judah under Jeroboam) had formed an alliance with Syria to unseat Ahaz, the Davidic king of Judah, and replace him by a puppet monarch, "the son of Tabeel" (7:1,2,5,6). In the process they would doubtless also exterminate the entire Davidic family to forestall any threat to their "puppet" (cp. 1 Kings 15:29; 16:11). Small wonder that not just king Ahaz's heart, but the hearts of the entire royal family "were moved as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind" by this news!

The Davidic dynasty had already enjoyed an unbroken succession from father to son for more than three hundred years, a most remarkable evidence of the blessing of God upon it (See 2 Chronicles 21:7, etc. By contrast the ten tribes had lived under nine separate dynasties in the same period.) In this plan of theirs the kings of Ephraim and Syria were undoubtedly, if unwittingly, the tools of Satan trying to nullify the promise of God to David concerning his house (2 Samuel 7:11-16). Athaliah was a previous case of this (2 Kings 11:1).

A siege being imminent, Ahaz went to inspect the security of Jerusalem's water supply. The LORD told Isaiah to go and meet him there with the words, "It shall

not stand neither shall it come to pass” (v. 7). The reassurance in these words was, however, prefaced by a specific condition, “Take heed, and be quiet” (v.4). “If ye will not believe,” said the LORD through Isaiah, “ye will not be established” (v.9). Note the plural: Ahaz *and the royal family* had to simply rest in God and His promise. The coalition’s plan could not stand: it contradicted the purposes of God regarding the seed of David! They must simply rest on that.

But they were in no mood for this. Knowing their precarious situation, the LORD graciously offers Ahaz a choice of sign to confirm His word (v.11). But Ahaz replies evasively. With pretend piety he appeals to Deuteronomy 6:16, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD” (v.12). This verse refers to the time when, soon after the victory of the Red Sea, Israel had tempted the LORD at Massah by casting doubt on whether He was among them or not (Exodus 17:1-7). But Ahaz’s situation was not one to which the prohibition of Deuteronomy 6:16 applied. God had *offered* him a sign! However, unlike mutinous Israel in the wilderness, Ahaz would rather *not* know whether the LORD was with them to help. He had defensive plans of his own in mind. He was courting the support of the mighty king of Assyria against Syria and Ephraim (2 Kings 16:7), and God was effectively requiring him to abandon that idea. Ahaz preferred the security of an idolatrous superpower to the word of God. The kindness of God caused him to harden his heart. Isaiah’s grim commission had begun to take effect!

Nevertheless God announced His sign, even though the house of David was wearying Him with its unbelief. “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” – meaning, “God with us” (7:13f). The very thing that Ahaz didn’t want to know about – that God was with them – was what the miraculous Sign would not only confirm but actually fulfill! The Sign itself would secure their safety! But did the announcement of the sign change the wider royal family’s attitude? Evidently not. Whereas verses 15-16 seem to speak of the Sign coming imminently, it was



*“The  
kindness of  
God caused  
Ahaz to  
harden his  
heart*





*However the  
Sign was  
fulfilled, to  
two humble  
but believing  
members of  
that royal  
house of  
David.  
It was  
fulfilled in  
both “the  
heights  
above” and in  
“the depths  
beneath”!*



not fulfilled there and then.<sup>2</sup> Instead there came the very naturally born Maher-shalal-hash-baz, whose name meant “Speed spoil, hasten prey” (8:1-4). We must conclude therefore that they had not believed, and so were not established. Isaiah must have been disappointed, but, given his commission, not surprised. God certainly still acted according to His promise to David, and the Syriac-Ephraimite coalition failed to unseat Ahaz; but the campaign cost Judah sore (2 Kings 16:5; 2 Chronicles 28:5f). And Assyria, on whose help Ahaz had counted, returned in Hezekiah’s reign to devastate Judah as well (Isaiah 7:17-25). The devastated land would still be Immanuel’s (8:8), but Isaiah was instructed to “Bind... up the testimony, seal the law [or ‘instruction’] among my disciples” (8:16). The Sign would not be fulfilled for a long time to come.

#### **The fulfilment**

However the Sign had been offered to “the house of David”, and not to Ahaz specifically (7:13f). And it was fulfilled, just over seven centuries later, to two very humble but believing members of that royal house (Matthew 1:16-23; cp. Romans 1:3). When it was fulfilled, it was truly in *both* “the heights above” *and* in “the depths beneath”!<sup>3</sup> (cp. Isaiah 7:11) The very “Lord”, whom Isaiah had seen in His transcendent, Godhead glory (6:1f), would plumb the depths of human life by being born in a stable, and cradled in a feeding trough. “God with us” was fulfilled to the uttermost limit.

But still the same condition applied. “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isaiah 7:9). Did the people to whom Immanuel came believe it?

Sadly not. This wonderful “Sign” from the heart of God served only to make the people’s heart fat. The triple reference to Isaiah 6:10 in the New Testament is the commentary upon this point.

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<sup>2</sup> This seems the best of way of explaining verses 15f. Another is to regard the “child” of v.16 as Shear-Jashub.

<sup>3</sup> The frequent translation, “as deep as Sheol”, is, it seems, an interpretation of the Hebrew, not its literal rendering. See J.A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah* (New York, 1867; reprinted 1992), pp.164f.

- In Matthew 13:14-15 (cp. Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10) the Lord was explaining to His disciples why He had just addressed the people in such an opaque parable (vv.10ff). He had done it so that the prophecy of Isaiah should be fulfilled. In each of the synoptic Gospels the parable of the sower follows a controversy with the Pharisees, i.e., it follows unbelief as to the Lord's person and works by His own people. The unbelieving multitudes had heard the very word of the kingdom from the lips of the Word of God Himself, a word proclaiming the kingdom's advent in a grace that no longer demanded (unlike the Sinaitic covenant) but instead simply offered a people, who could not make themselves ready, the forgiveness promised in Jeremiah 31:34; 50:20; Micah 7:19, etc. (cp. Matthew 9:1-7; Luke 7:37, 47, etc.). However only a small and isolated "remnant" had believed (Matthew 12:46-50). It was the lowly grace in which "the arm of the Lord [was] revealed" that stumbled them (Isaiah 53:1-3). The parable of the sower indeed explained how God was then working through Immanuel, but it was allowed to mystify, and not illuminate, those who in heart had rejected Him.
- In John 12:40 John cites the same passage in his summing up of the results of the Lord's public ministry among His own people. The Lord whom Isaiah had seen in His transcendent glory had come down to Israel, and Israel did not want Him. The fulness of grace and truth in which He came hardened their hearts, despite all the lovely signs that He had wrought in their midst (John 1:11, 14).
- In Acts 28:25ff Paul spoke "one word" to the departing Jews after they had listened to his words concerning the kingdom and Jesus (v.23). The "one word" was Isaiah 6:9ff. "For this people's heart is waxed gross." The Acts of the Apostles is the record not only of the spread of the gospel among the gentiles but also of its rejection by the Jewish nation. In no place where Paul preached did a synagogue as such receive the gospel and "come over" to Christ.



*The  
fulness of  
grace and  
truth in  
which  
Jesus  
came  
hardened  
their  
hearts*



  
*Harsh words  
were not  
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Isaiah to  
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heart; only  
a word  
of grace –  
“God with  
us”*

  
*Israel's  
stony heart  
will be taken  
away*



Everywhere those who believed had to exit the synagogue. The importance of this to Acts is underlined by the fact that Luke (virtually) starts his book with the preaching at Pentecost and (almost) ends it with the gospel rejected by the Jews of Rome.

And so we see through these three allusions to Isaiah 6:10 that the hardening (in part) of Israel (cp. Romans 11:25) by the revelation of *grace* is a thread running through the message of the Bible. Harsh words were not given to Isaiah to harden the people's heart; only a word of grace – “God with us” – a word realised in the One who, though “in the form of God... emptied Himself” (Philippians 2:6f). But they did not want such grace, because it meant that even though they deserved nothing God would fulfil all His promises (Romans 15:8). The heart of the natural man hates grace; the dispensational failure of Israel revealed this.

And yet there is the “holy seed”. God “cannot deny Himself.” One day, “when he seeth that their power is gone” (Deuteronomy 32:36), Immanuel will come again to Jerusalem, to “an afflicted and poor people” (Matthew 23:39; Zephaniah 3:12). “The LORD of hosts shall come down to fight upon mount Zion...” on behalf of those who have so deeply revolted (Isaiah 31:4-6). Israel's stony heart will be taken away (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26). They and the house of David will look on “me whom they have pierced”, and mourn (Zechariah 12:10-14); but in Christ the promise to David will be established for ever (Isaiah 11:1ff; Jeremiah 23:5f).

### **What about today?**

There is a clear analogy in the world today of the word that makes the heart fat. “For the word of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The last that God showed the world of His Son was as utterly humiliated and on a cross. And, to the unbelieving world, this is foolishness. Jew, gentile, atheist, ordinary secularist, Muslim, Buddhist – all are united in this opinion.

But the cross is what God has given us to preach. He has been pleased, by the foolishness of the thing preached, to save some (1:21).

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Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16.

The Bible is the Word of God;  
The book we hold most dear.  
It tells of our salvation, Lord,  
In words so true and clear.  
It tells us all of Jesus Christ,  
The Son of God on high.  
It tells us of the wondrous love  
That brought Him here to die.

The Bible is a picture book  
And full of history.  
Its science and its literature  
Are found in poetry.  
Its letters are so full of life  
And keep us in God's way.  
Its lessons tell us how to act,  
To trust and to obey.

The Bible is a book of songs  
That cheers our pathway here.  
It tells us that our God is love  
And we should never fear.  
We find that Jesus is our Lord  
As the Good News is taught.  
We know we're saved through Him alone  
And by Him we are bought.

We thank You for the Bible, Lord,  
And all we find therein.  
We thank You that Your precious blood  
Now cleanses from all sin.  
We thank You for the church You build;  
For daily cleansing too.  
We thank You for that day to come  
When we Your glory view.