

# Scripture Truth



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Trust during trial  
Heaven on earth?  
Ishmael and Isaac

A need for secrecy  
A tale of two tempests  
Communion and the counsels of God

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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## Heaven on earth?

From the Lord's great prayer at the end of His "upper-room discourse" the disciples could at last learn why *their* hope was a heavenly one. The Lord will indeed establish His kingdom in this world, and there His glory "shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14, NKJV). But what the Lord prayed at the end of His great prayer went beyond that:

"Father, I will that they also, whom You gave Me, may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which You have given me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

In this verse the Son, Co-equal and Co-eternal with the Father, expresses His will that we should be permitted to behold Him in His glory. In order to see it, we have to be with Him *where He is*. This is not the glory in which He will be manifested to the world, but "a secret glory which none but His own are permitted to contemplate" (W. Kelly), not the glory of His uncreated Sonship to which the Father has restored Him (17:5), but a given glory in answer to His humiliation. *Where He is* refers to His place with the Father, to which He has returned, as He had just indicated: "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (16:28). The return to the Father spoken of here is not temporary (that would trivialise the verse) but eternal. This downward-followed-by-upward movement governs the whole of John's Gospel.

Only "with Him, where He is" can we truly behold the secrets of the glory that the Father has bestowed on His eternally beloved Son on account of His atoning sacrifice. A wave of opinion is sweeping evangelical Christianity to the effect that the Lord's ascension is temporary and His eternal dwelling-place will be this earth. John 17:24 tells us if we are to "behold His glory" it must be in another place than here. Do we not wish to behold it?

T. BALDERSTON

# A tale of two tempests

## Jonah and Paul

T. Balderston

Israelites were not a maritime people, and (the Flood apart!) Jonah 1 and Acts 27 are the two great sea disasters of the Bible. They happened for opposite reasons.

### Jonah

Jonah did not relish judgmental missions to foreign cities, because, if they repented, he knew that God would relent (Jonah 4:2). And so he recoiled from God's command to go to Nineveh, metropolis of the Assyrian empire, and "cry out against it" (Jonah 1:2, NKJV). Indeed, he sought to put himself as far from Nineveh as possible, by sailing to Tarshish. So low can the child of God sink.

But God, in grace, refused to let him have his way. How much we should give thanks for episodes in our own experience where God obstructed our own way! God's method was far from gentle. "The LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up" (1:4). The mariners were terrified, but the one thing Jonah should have been doing, he was not doing – he was sleeping, not praying! How quickly a backslider becomes oblivious of *God's voice* in their life! But in the mercy of God the alarmed master of the vessel roused Jonah from sleep: a pagan told him to pray!

The superstitious crew cast lots to discover on whose account the storm had come. God in this case honoured their inquiry and identified Jonah. They crowded round him as he told them of his disobedience to his God. And he also explained why his God was able to send this storm: it was He who had *made* the sea (1:19)! The sailors were by now "exceedingly afraid." The weather was worsening (1:10, 11).

How quickly a believer rebelling against God can begin to think like an unbeliever! The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was definitely *not* a God of human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21 ESV, Darby footnote). Why on earth, then, did Jonah think that throwing him into the sea would appease the living God? *Because he had adopted the mindset of "the nations round about"*. He had ceased, in any active sense, to know God. Backsliding believers can quickly sink into a similar frame of mind.

*How quickly a backslider  
becomes oblivious of God's voice in their life!*

*We also may be able recall unpleasant events in our own lives which God sent to save us from ourselves.*

The pagan mariners were kind (Jonah 1:13). But when their efforts to row back to land failed, they threw Jonah into the raging sea. God allowed them to do this, because He had deep lessons to teach. Firstly, Jehovah glorified Himself in the mariners' sight by immediately stilling the storm. They were careful to placate Him with offerings and vows! (1:16)

And then we see the kindness of God. "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah" (1:17). There are credible accounts of whales swallowing large objects, but this is not how God arranged Jonah's deliverance from the sea. He specially prepared a large fish, all for the sake of this wilfully disobedient minor prophet. We also may be able recall unpleasant events in our own lives which, as we retrospectively realise, God sent to save us from ourselves.

It was in the belly of the great fish that Jonah repented (chapter 2). He was in a prison from which death seemed to be the only possible escape, yet it was here that he realised that God had heard him, so that he could even cry out, "Salvation is of the LORD" before the fish had spat him out. Therefore his cry was a cry of *faith*, and God could answer it (2:6-10). Then the great fish, that had seemed to be the awful culmination of God's punishment of Jonah, was revealed as actually the means of Jonah's deliverance from a watery grave.

And then come some words that are among the sweetest in the Bible: "Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.'" Our God gives second chances to His repentant servants! Of this Peter on the day of Pentecost is the outstanding example (Acts 2:14ff). There was mighty power in Peter's message, a power that surely there would never have been but for his harrowing recollection of having so many times denied His Lord.

The message Jonah had to deliver was the same as at His first commissioning, only stronger. Now it was to declaim that in forty days Nineveh would be overthrown (3:4). But now that Jonah had himself spent three terrifying days and nights, so to speak, at the very door of hell and with no means of retreat, and now that in that dreadful place he had exercised saving faith, he was a prepared vessel to proclaim judgment. When Jonah 3:3 says that the city was "three days' journey", I think this must be understood in terms of Jonah's newfound resolve to fully proclaim his message. Though Nineveh's archaeological remains show it to have been a great city for its time, it was nothing like, say, sixty miles across. But Jonah's miles tell us of the inner compulsion he now felt to proclaim the

word God had laid upon him. I think that in the power of his deliverance he visited every boulevard, every square, every lane, every back alley, every courtyard, and proclaimed the dire message committed to him. Persons who have posted gospel leaflets door-to-door will well understand why this took three days!

These three days actually expressed the causeless grace of God towards Nineveh, the city which was so existentially menacing His chosen people . The (to Jonah) entirely unwelcome result was that the people of Nineveh believed the word of God and repented, so that He “relented from the disaster that He said He would bring upon them” (3:10; cp. Matthew 12:41). True, it put Jonah in a dreadful sulk when he realised he had been a reluctant messenger of grace (4:1). But he had at last delivered the message God had given him, in God’s way. True, too, Nineveh’s repentance was rather temporary. Jonah 3:3 implies that the city was already derelict by the time of writing (see too Nahum). But in grace Nineveh had had its chance.



## Paul

If we have conscientiously maintained our communion with the Lord and sought in faith to obey His voice, then we are not in Jonah’s tempest. But we might be in Paul’s.

When the Lord had sent Paul and Silas to Macedonia on behalf of the gospel, the voyage had gone perfectly (Acts 16:11-12). The ship that took them could pursue a straight course from Troas to Neapolis (the port for Philippi), anchoring overnight in the lee of the island of Samothrace. But when the Lord sent Paul from Caesarea to Rome to testify before Caesar himself (Acts 23:11; 27:24), the journey was a disaster, and ended in shipwreck. This teaches us the important truth that circumstances are not of themselves guidance, without the corroboration of God’s word. I remember the late Tom Tyson making this point many years ago, citing the ease with which the disobedient Jonah found a vessel bound for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3).

During Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem (so far as the divine record informs us), and while he was in the temple complex, a group of overseas Jews publicly accused him of intruding gentiles into parts of the complex reserved to Jews (Acts 21:27ff). This started a riot, and that sent a platoon of Roman soldiers rushing down to restore order and rescue Paul. Baffled as to the rights and wrongs of the

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matter, they took Paul into custody. Then they learned that he was a Roman citizen (22:25ff), and this news seems to have impaled them on the horns of a dilemma. To release Paul risked triggering an insurrection in Jerusalem, a hazard that the Roman authorities would gladly avoid in so turbulent a city. But to hand Paul over to the Jews risked the lynching of a Roman citizen, and this could trigger very awkward questions in Rome. These opposing considerations probably explain why both Felix and his successor as procurator of Judaea, Porcius Festus, dragged their feet, leaving Paul a prisoner in Caesarea for something over two years (24:27). But once Paul had appealed to Caesar (25:9-12), Festus promptly sent him to Rome, an action which doubtless also neatly solved his dilemma. (In this writer's view Paul probably made the appeal because he had come to see in it a means of discharging his commission to testify before kings – 9:15).

And so Paul found himself among a group of prisoners bound for Rome under the charge of a Roman centurion named Julius (27:1-2). After their first stopover in Sidon their journey was dogged by adverse weather, compelling them initially to hug the coast of the Levant and southern Asia minor (i.e., modern Turkey). Along this coast they changed ships at Myra, but their new vessel continued the same, slow, coastal course to its western tip at Cnidus (vv.4-8). Their onward journey from there across the Mediterranean to the harbour at Fair Havens on the southern coast of Crete was also difficult, but Paul's advice to winter at Fair Havens was disregarded. Attempting to make it to another harbour, they were caught by the tempestuous Euraquilōn, or "north-easter" (27:14, ESV), i.e. a gale blowing from the very direction they needed to travel in. This gale threatened to blow them on to the treacherous Syrtis sands off north Africa. This was averted; however, lacking "sun or stars" (v.20), they lost all sense of where they were.

At this point Paul could assemble all on board to tell them about a word from God that he had received via an angel the previous night.

The first thing that God had told him was not to be afraid. Apparently this is the most frequent word from God to individuals throughout the entire Scriptures. In times of adversity God starts with the reassurance our fraught spirits need to hear. Then the angel told him why: because it was the will of God that he stand before Caesar (v.24). ( This is how we know Paul did stand before Caesar; we have no actual report of it.) Given the adversities of the journey, Paul may have been thinking that God's mind was to *prevent* him from standing before Caesar! But faith finds God's will from God's word, not from circumstances. And to know we are in the will of God itself gives peace.

Then the angel told Paul how this would happen. All on board would be rescued from the storm. Because Paul was "the apple of God's eye" in this matter, everyone with him would be safe too. One is reminded of what David could say to



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not from circumstances.  
And to know we are in the will of God itself gives peace.*

Abiathar (1 Samuel 22:23). Their rescue would however involve a shipwreck (Acts 27:26). God told them this much, because they needed to prepare for it; more than that, e.g. which island they would be cast up on, was not disclosed. God only tells us what we need to know to comply with His will.<sup>1</sup>

And Paul did. No doubt his speech alerted the sailors to the possibility that they were nearing shore; and shortly they found proof of this (vv. 27-28). At this point they devised their own escape plan, which Paul forbade; everyone on board had to owe their escape entirely to God (vv. 30-32) – or none would be saved. Then the centurion for Paul's sake prevented his men from slaughtering the prisoners; the soldiers were doubtless afraid of being executed if the prisoners escaped.

Then Paul instructed all on board to make sensible preparation for the shock of the cold sea-water and the strenuous swimming they would have to do – eat a hearty breakfast from the remaining provisions on board. He took care to give thanks to the Maker of heaven on earth before all the pagans on board. There is a lesson for us here, too, not just to be passive in the face of adversity, but to take sensible steps that are in line with God's will.

Shortly after, the ship began to break up under the force of the waves. They all had to jump into the sea. “And so it was that they all escaped safely to land” (v.44).

Why, then, had Paul's journey to Rome been such a disaster? Firstly, 273 people saw for themselves that Paul's God, who had spoken to him through an angel, was indeed Maker of heaven and earth and that all things were in His hand. Secondly it fortified Paul for the task ahead. How much his deliverance – in line with what God had said would happen – must have reinforced his conviction that God truly intended him to testify before Caesar! He would need this divinely given conviction to embolden him on that unnerving day! Furthermore, the seemingly pointless two years plus in Caesarea (24:27), and the further two years plus in Rome when seemingly nothing happened to bring him before Caesar (28:30), could now be viewed in the knowledge “that God was in it all”. We may need the encouragement of Paul's shipwreck to help us make sense of our own adversities.

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<sup>1</sup> See J.N. Darby, *Meditations on the Acts of the Apostles. Translated from the Italian* (London, Morrish, n.d.) on this chapter, for this point.



# Trust during trial

## Psalm 57, Part I

**George Stevens**

*Do you find the detail of many psalms puzzling? The writer sheds a flood of light on this one by correlating it with the emergency in David's life that most likely gave rise to it. The study will be concluded, God willing, in the next issue.*

This psalm of David is awe-inspiring for Christians oppressed by troubles. We will examine it under four main headings:

1. The title;
2. Calamities and confidence (vv.1-3);
3. Pressures and praise (vv. 4-6); and,
4. Trust and tributes (vv.7-11).

Points 3 & 4 will be considered in a separate article.

### **I. The title**

The titles of the psalms are not to be skipped as unimportant or uninspired! The Lord Jesus Himself relied on the title to psalm 110 for obtaining the Pharisees' agreement that David wrote it (Matthew 22:41ff). And according to its title, David wrote psalm 57 too. We read that, just after Samuel had fulfilled his divinely-given commission of anointing David king, "...the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13, KJV). And in 2 Samuel 23:1-2, that "...the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." And, as so often in his psalms, the feelings of Christ may be found in some of the expressions used in this one.

About fifty-five psalms bear the inscription, "To the Chief Musician". Psalm 57 is one of them. In David's tabernacle, Chenaniah ("Yah has planted") was the Chief Musician (1 Chronicles 15:16, 22, 27). He was the overseer, the music conductor, the master of the song, and the choir-leader. His responsibility was to determine the overall direction of music and song. And in Hebrews 2:9-12 (echoing Psalm 22:22) we see that the Lord Jesus sings in the midst of the

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for Christians oppressed by troubles.*

*“I will declare thy name unto my brethren,  
in the midst of the church  
will I sing praise unto thee.”*

assembly. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” The Lord Jesus Christ is our “Chief Musician”.

The title of psalm 57 also includes the word “Altaschith” (KJV), which can be translated, “You must not destroy” (Strong’s Concordance). The titles of psalms 58, 59, and 75 also carry this inscription. This word probably was the name of a well-known piece of music or song to whose tune this psalm was to be sung.

The psalm itself is called “a Michtam of David”. All the psalms 56 – 60 bear this title, as well as psalm 16. “Michtam” means “engraving” according to Strong’s, and its use here may suggest words so precious that they needed to be preserved by being engraved upon a durable tablet. “Michtam” is rendered in the Septuagint by a word meaning a “tablet inscription”. However, some translate by the word, “golden”, i.e., precious.

The psalm was composed when David was in a cave. Although David took refuge in the cave of Adullam when he first fled from Saul, and became captain over the many distressed and afflicted who joined him there (1Samuel 22:1-2), it seems more likely that the psalm was composed in the cave in the wilderness of Engedi, the hiding-place that was betrayed to Saul (24:1-3). How this reminds us of the betrayal of the Lord Jesus by Judas, who led the band of temple guards and chief priests to the garden of Gethsemane!

However in the narrative of 1 Samuel 24:3-22 Saul sought rest in the very cave where his prey, i.e., David, was hiding. Despite the urging of his men to slay him, David refused because the king was the Lord’s anointed. Instead, as Saul slept, David cut off part of his skirt and hid again. The restraint of David was a sure evidence of his faith in God. He would wait for God’s time to give him the kingdom.

## **2. Calamities and confidence (vv. 1-3)**

Having considered the title, we now turn to the text of the psalm itself. It commences with a cry for mercy, “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me.” David addresses God as “Elohim”. This Name, the plural of Eloah, emphasizes the Supreme God in His creatorial power. “In the beginning

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was a sure evidence of his faith.  
He would wait for God's time to give him the kingdom.*

Elohim created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Here the name is plural, but the verb is singular. The Hebrew language has three numbers – singular, dual – meaning two, and plural – meaning three or more. “Elohim” is in the plural and may hint at plurality in the Godhead. In the New Testament the Godhead is revealed as being in Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each in their essence God, yet in their Persons distinct.

In Hebrew, however, the plural may alternatively simply represent an expression of majesty. This usage may occur in Deuteronomy 6:4 where we read, “Hear O Israel: the LORD [Jehovah, singular] our God [Elohim, plural] is one LORD [Jehovah, singular].”

The verb “be merciful” means to “bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior” (Strong). David is asking God to show him grace, or favour. He asks twice, showing the urgency of his need.

The words: “...for my soul trusteth in thee” reveal the attitude of David under trial. The word for “trust” is literally, “flee to for protection.” The enemies of David were prevalent, but David had full confidence in God as His protector.

The word translated “make my refuge” in the parallel part of the verse 1 is the same as the word just translated “trusteth” (see *Young's Literal Translation*). What is added is the location of safety: “in the shadow of Thy wings.” To be in someone’s shadow a person must be close to him. This shows that we must maintain close communion with God. The wings portray the security to be found in God. How well chicks exemplify this! When the least thing alarms them, or rain comes pattering down, they run quickly to their mother’s wings for shelter and safety. And of course, by nestling up against her, the chicks are kept warm under her wings. In another place we read, “Hide me under the shadow of your wings” (Psalm 17:8, NKJV). The hen effectively conceals her brood from any passing predator; similarly God is an impenetrable hiding-place for His people. Surely this is what the psalmist means when he says, “I will trust in the covert of thy wings” (Psalm. 61.4).

David is a great example of someone who knew God as his refuge. At different points in his life he was on the run from people who literally wanted to kill him,

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*David is a great example  
of someone who knew God as his refuge.*

but he always found safety in God. He could write, “My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:7–8, NIV [2011]).

The word translated “skirt” in Ruth 3:9 (KJV) is the same as “wing” (see Strong). Ruth was asking Boaz to take her under his protection. In that case “wing” also involves the idea of possession and relationship.

In Matthew 23:37 we read, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” Jesus would have gathered the children of Jerusalem to Himself for shelter and safety despite her unfaithfulness.

However the calamities (or, “trials that brought destruction”; psalm 57:1) in which David found himself would have a termination; and here in verse 1 he recognizes this fact. 1 Corinthians 10:13 states, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” God ensures that the trials which come upon His own are always limited.

This was also true of the Lord Jesus, who said in Luke 22:37, “For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.”

David’s crying to God shows that he was totally dependent upon Him. And the God whom David addresses is “Most High” (“Elohim Elyon”, psalm 57:2), the God who is above all others, superior to all. There is none like Him: His government, power, and resources are without measure. The God whom David trusted and to whom He cried (or, “called”) out in his need was well able to set

*God will with the temptation [trial]  
also make a way to escape.*

*God is working His purpose out  
for us, in us, and through us.*

things right. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1).

In saying, “Unto God that performeth all things for me” (57:2), David is acknowledging the wisdom and power of the God who can and will perfect all things in regard to him. In New-Testament language, the same is said in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” God is working His purpose out for us, in us, and through us.

In verse 3a David confidently announces in advance the result of God’s intervention on his behalf, where we read, “He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up.” “Swallow me up” translates a verb that is elsewhere translated “pant” (see Amos 2:7, KJV); and *Young’s Literal Translation* of psalm 57:3 gives, “He sendeth from the heaven, and saveth me, He reproached – who is panting after me...” “Panting” conveys the idea of “hounding” a person.<sup>1</sup>

This part of verse 3 is followed by a “Selah!” There are two main thoughts concerning this word. Some think it represents a direction to listen to a musical interlude in the psalm. Others think it is a call to pause and consider. The literal meaning of the word is to “hang up” or “weigh up”. A clause in the New Testament that fits the latter meaning is “Think on these things!” (Philippians 4.8)

For the next part of verse 3 the KJV margin is to be followed, rather than the text. “He reproacheth him that would follow me up” (cp. Darby Trans., ESV, NIV). God actually covers with shame those who are hounding David. Thereby God “shall send forth his mercy and truth” – truth from heaven to David. Mercy deals with personal needs, and truth speaks of God dealing with unrighteousness. Regarding “truth”, in Deuteronomy 32:4 we read, “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

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<sup>1</sup> NIV [2011] has, similarly, “hotly pursue”. [Ed.]

# Ishmael and Isaac

## Genesis 16 & 17

F.B.Hole

*“If we are faithless, He remains faithful...” (2 Timothy 2:13).*

Genesis chapter 16 introduces us to the episode in the life of Abram that has an allegorical significance, as the apostle Paul shows in Galatians 4. Hagar was a bondwoman, and she came from Egypt, a type of the world. Her son was born “after the flesh” (see Galatians 4:23, KJV), and her name is said to mean “Wandering.”<sup>1</sup>

Law and the flesh, and the world and bondage, are closely connected all through Scripture, and here first we have them all brought together. In chapter 12 we saw Abram’s lapse in going down into Egypt, and, though both he and Sarai came out safely owing to God’s intervention, it appears that they brought with them out of Egypt, in the person of this handmaid of Sarai, something that became a snare before long,<sup>2</sup> and a source of trouble that has persisted over thousands of years. The hostility between Ishmael and Isaac is visible in their descendants today. In the same way many a trouble in our lives as Christians may be traced to some lapse into worldliness of which we have been guilty.

The standards that prevailed in patriarchal times as to matrimonial relationships were much below those established in the light of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> In those days no law had been given, and even when it was given through Moses it did not express the perfect thought of God, as the Lord Himself said in Matthew 19:[4-]8. This accounts for the action in this matter of both Sarai and Abram. What they did was done without any sense of wrong. The promise of a seed had been given to Abram: Sarai was barren, and this was just an attempt to secure its fulfilment after the flesh. We have to learn that everything achieved after the flesh ends in failure and trouble.

The trouble started before Ishmael was born, as soon as the bondwoman effectively took the place of the freewoman (Genesis 16:3-4). The bondwoman then despised the free woman, just as later the child of the former persecuted the child of the latter. The immediate result was that the free woman asserted

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<sup>1</sup> Or “fugitive”. See *A List of Proper Names Occurring in the Old Testament, with their Interpretations. Principally compiled from Simonis and Gesenius* (London, 1850, many times reprinted), p.36. [Ed.]

<sup>2</sup> Though it must be said that the trouble started with Sarah’s lapse of faith, not with Hagar herself. [Ed.]

<sup>3</sup> And indeed at creation! [Ed.]

*Abraham and Sarai brought with them out of Egypt,  
something that became a snare before long.  
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her place and dealt harshly with the other so that she fled. At this point the Angel of the Lord intervened. According to the customs of that time Hagar had evidently had no option in the matter, and God is a God of pity, and of judgment. Even if she had been impertinent to her mistress, she was not to be left in the wilderness in her need; only, in returning she was to be subject and submit to her mistress (16:7-9). Viewing her personally, and apart from her typical significance, she was as much sinned against as sinning, and by God's intervention the scales of justice were evenly held.

And not only this, but the future of the coming son was foretold: his name was given, his character indicated. His name means , "God hears" (v.11). Hagar spoke of God as, "Thou God seest me," or "Thou art the God who reveals Himself" (Darby Trans.). The well by which the angel appeared to her became known as " The well of the Living who was seen" (vv.13-15). Thus even poor Hagar derived blessing from this trying episode, though the son, when born, became a trial to Abram himself, as well as to Sarai and the future Isaac.

The name "Ishmael" was given to the boy by God to commemorate the fact that He heard the affliction of Hagar. It had reference to her rather than to him, As for Ishmael, he was to be a "wild man" – the word really means a " wild-ass" (vv.11-12). In the light of Galatians 4:23 this is significant, since " he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh." Now Romans 8:7 tells us that the mind of the flesh " is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Man after the flesh has lawlessness stamped upon him, and he is aptly typified by a wild ass.

*We have to learn that everything  
achieved after the flesh ends in failure and trouble.*



Here too we see in figure what accounts for the state of the world today. Man in the flesh is not only lawless in regard to God but antagonistic in regard to his fellows. The one characteristic springs out of the other. There could be no peace where Ishmael was. And, to make matters worse there was to be no shutting him out or getting rid of him; for the decree was, “he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Genesis 16:12). Hagar typified the covenant of the law given at Sinai (Galatians 4:25). Now the law did not abolish the man after the flesh. It only laid restraint upon him: as 4:24 says, “Mount Sinai... gendereth [gives birth] unto bondage.” The restraint was immediately broken,<sup>4</sup> and the “wild ass” character more fully revealed.



This Hagar episode took place when Abram was eighty-six years old, and we hear nothing further about him for thirteen more years. When ninety-nine years old another great revelation was made to him, and a further covenant was established. We find this at the start of chapter 17. Here for the first time do we get the name, “Almighty God” (El-Shaddai). From this time on Abram was to know Him according to this Name – the God who can raise the dead, and to whom nothing is impossible – as is made clear in Exodus 6:3. Abram knew the name “Jehovah”, for we have the record of his using it, but what that great name signified did not come to light until the time of the Exodus and the subsequent giving of the law, for it was relevant to that (see Exodus 3). God Almighty was the name relevant to the unconditional covenant made with Abram. That covenant altogether depended upon God, and His “almighty-ness” ensured its ultimate fulfilment.

The closing words of Genesis 17:1 show the responsibility imposed on Abram due to the revelation. His ways were to be regulated by his knowledge of God. “Walk before me, and be thou perfect”. His perfection lay in his complete conformity to the revelation that had been given. In Matthew 5:48 we find the word “perfect” used in just the same sense, only there according to the revelation of God to the disciples as their Father who is in heaven. Today we should be perfect according to a revelation of God which is even higher than that.

This revelation, “I am the Almighty God,” was followed in verses 2-8 by a covenant of promise, in which no less than seven times God states what He will do. “I will” is the characteristic phrase; beginning, “I will make My covenant,” and ending, “I will be their God.” The little word “if” is only conspicuous by its absence, for this was a covenant without condition on Abram’s part. He had

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<sup>4</sup> See Genesis 21:9. [Ed.]

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sought to obtain a seed by natural means through Hagar, but God intended to multiply him abundantly, making him a father of many nations, and securing to his seed the land of promise, being in a special sense "their God". In confirmation of this covenant God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning, "Father of a multitude," and from this point onwards the new name is used, though as yet the promise involved in the name had received no fulfilment.

Thus God pledged Himself to bring this covenant to pass in His own way. Though its fulfilment depended upon God and not upon Abraham, there was a sign given in connection with it, and Abraham was to keep the covenant in the sense of observing the sign. Of this verses 9~14 speak. The sign was circumcision, and it was to be observed by Abraham and his descendants and all his household; the latter term including all born in his house, and bondslaves obtained by purchase (17:12-13). The casual type of servant, who was only hired for a set period, was evidently excluded. Here for the first time in Scripture we find a household recognized, as identified with him who is the head of it. They are those over whom the head has authority, so that he can command them, as we see in verse 19 of the next chapter.

As far as Abraham was concerned circumcision was just a rite to be observed, since there is nothing to show that he was instructed in its spiritual significance. Twice in Deuteronomy (10:16; 30:6) does Moses mention the circumcising of the heart in contrast with that accomplished in the flesh, but it looks as if its full significance did not come to light until the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11) became an accomplished fact. Abraham and his descendants had the rite, for it was the sign of the covenant of promise, just as

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*The meaning of circumcision is reserved for us Christians, who do not observe the outward rite at all.*

the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic covenant of law – but the meaning of circumcision is reserved for us Christians, who, if Gentiles, do not observe the outward rite at all. According to Colossians 2:11 the true circumcision is that done without hands in the Christian’s “putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ” (Darby Trans.). As the next verse shows, the allusion here is to His death. He, the Messiah, was cut off as predicted (Psalm 102: 24; Daniel 9: 26). He was actually severed from His life down here in flesh and blood, in order that He might take up life again in resurrection. As identified with Him, we put the sentence of death on the old fleshly life that once we lived, and thus put off the body of the flesh.

Thus the significance of the rite was the putting of the death-sentence on the flesh and all its works. God’s unconditional covenant of promise is not to be made good on a fleshly basis. In relation to the rite that betokened this covenant with Abraham, if the flesh was spared, the covenant was broken, as Genesis 17:14 indicates.

In connection with this, God also changed the name of Sarai to Sarah, which means “princess”. She too was to be blessed, and become the mother of a son, though she was now nearly ninety years of age. Abraham’s response to this surprising announcement was remarkable. He fell upon his face and laughed, raising in his heart the question as to his own great age, and Sarah’s also. At first sight we might be inclined to regard both the laughter and the language as indicating a spirit of scepticism, but in the light of Romans 4:18-22, we must regard it rather as expressive of joyful wonder. Verse 18 of our chapter points to the same conclusion. Abraham recognized that the supernatural birth of the one who was to be the heir of promise involved the supplanting of him born after the flesh. Hence his request that Ishmael might yet live before God. In response to this the promise of a son is confirmed and his name is given by God. Now Isaac means “Laughter”. This further confirms what we have just

*As identified with Christ, we put the sentence of death on the old fleshly life that once we lived.*

*The closing paragraph of the chapter shows how the faith of Abraham promptly expressed itself in works. The thing was accomplished “in the selfsame day.”*

stated, for Abraham’s laughter would hardly have been thus commemorated by God if it had signified doubt and not faith. The covenant of promise was to run in the line of Isaac, yet God answered the request as to Ishmael and promised to bless him in natural things, making him a great nation under twelve princes. The fulfilment of this is recorded in chapter 25:12-16.

The closing paragraph of the chapter shows how the faith of Abraham promptly expressed itself in works. He accepted the outward sign of circumcision for himself and for his house. No time was lost: the thing was accomplished “in the selfsame day.” The operation itself was not a pleasant one, running contrary to natural feelings, and in each the flesh would have cried out to be spared. How suitably therefore does it typify that death to the flesh, of which the New Testament speaks; only in the NT it is not the material body of man that is in question but the fallen nature characterizing that body, with its appetites and lusts.

*From Scripture Truth, vol 26 (1948-50), pp.156-159, edited for length and clarity.*

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## Book Review

**God and the transgender debate. What does the Bible actually say about gender identity? By Andrew T. Walker. (The Good News Company, 2017. £7.99)**

The question of gender change was rather marginal to most people’s consciousness until a few years ago when suddenly it stormed the centre stage of what one might call moral politics and public moral discourse. It is a further weapon in the hands of those who want to expunge the Christian basis of western ethics. But recognising this does not really tell us how we should respond if a transgender person comes to one of our meetings, or a transgender neighbour moves in; or we have a transgender colleague; or (not so much “if”

as) when young children come home and tell us that it's OK for a man to become a woman, because the teacher says it is; or when our older children say nothing, but are certainly exposed to it.

Mr Walker starts from "first principles". We did not make ourselves: God made us to glorify Him. And so we cannot remake ourselves as we please, either; nor can we acquiesce in the attempts of others to remake themselves. The likeness of God in us was, of course, soon spoiled, and every Christian wrestles with things in his or her own desires that contradict the "likeness" in which our first parents were created. In these bodies we groan, desiring God's deliverance (2 Corinthians 5:2-4). "Gender dysphoria" – i.e., the feeling that one wants to be "the opposite sex", is a – rather extreme – example of this.

This should be the starting-point of our approach to the "transgender" issue, says the author.

But, granting the foregoing, he also urges that the love with which the Lord Jesus met sinners is to be our standard in this connection also. We are all sinners, and whilst "transgenderism" (in common with the entire LGBT agenda) defies the Creator-ship of God, we should not treat those who follow (or, maybe, "are enslaved by") the lifestyles of that agenda, as lepers. See 1 Corinthians 5:10. This will not be easily achieved with people fully "bought into" that agenda; and if we seek to show them the Lord's love whilst making clear that what they have done, or intend to do, is wrong in God's sight, then we are likely to be rebuffed. However, this in no way justifies us in not trying, and many who live according to that "ethic" may to some extent have been pressurised into it by others. Seeking to change genders by medical means does not increase the subject's happiness, according to statistics cited by Mr Walker.

Further chapters give much practical advice on dealing with our children on this issue. The book is light on the matter of interacting with neighbours and colleagues of this persuasion, something that also involves the nerve-wracking issue of use of pronouns corresponding to the gender they wish to be recognised in. Also on the matter of helping Christians troubled in this respect. But in general I would thoroughly recommend this Biblical, unpanicked treatment of the issue. We really need to be prepared regarding it. But the greatest need when confronted by a situation like this is *much prayer*.

# Communion and the counsels of God

## Notes on Genesis 18

“Having made known to us the mystery of his will” (Ephesians 1:9).

The position in which Abraham is presented in this chapter well describes the ground of closeness of communion with the Lord in which He Himself has set His people. Many kinds of blessing arise from being brought into association with the Lord, as the life of Abraham teaches us. However Abraham is here presented, not as the recipient of promises and of covenanted blessings, but as enjoying *closeness of communion* with the LORD. Obedience to the promise made to him concerning the land (see Genesis 12:1) had separated him from natural associations and earthly ties, and made him a stranger and pilgrim in the world (see Hebrews 11:8-13). And this is what put him in this place of close communion.

And so the testimony to *us* is, that in virtue of God’s dealings with us in Christ, we also are brought into this place of confidence and closeness, though in a much higher sense. Abraham stood on the earth, the place of judgment, but God’s call in grace puts us in direct association with the blessing (see Ephesians 1:3), so that we personally, and as risen with Christ, are altogether apart from even the venue of judgment. And in this place of close communion God brings us into the secret of His counsels. This is what we read in Ephesians 1:9, “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself”, etc. (KJV).

The revelation to us, in Ephesians 1:9-10, of the thoughts of God therefore does not concern our own direct blessing, but is the token of His confidence towards us whom He has set in such closeness of relationship with Himself. As Christ said to His disciples, “I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

Abraham’s position with the Lord was one of perfect peace and unquestioning confidence. He has no question to settle with the Lord, but is on the ground where he can enjoy, without any hindrance, communion with Him. Neither the presence of the very LORD God Himself before him,<sup>1</sup> nor the judgment that the LORD tells him He is about to execute, have any power to disturb the quiet with which Abraham maintained his communion with the LORD.

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<sup>1</sup> The writer wrote, “Neither the scene that was passing before him...”

*Who hath known the mind of the Lord...?  
But we have the mind of Christ.*

In the sixteenth verse of Genesis 18 it is said, “The men [i.e., the two angels who accompanied the LORD – see 18:16; 19:1] rose up from thence and looked towards Sodom, and Abraham went with them on their way.” The LORD directed the angels in judgment, and Abraham went with them to show them the way. He is here the companion of the LORD and confidant of His thoughts. Similarly, to us the Lord is not only the eternal Spring of blessing to our souls, but He also makes His saints His companions – not invariably,<sup>2</sup> it is true – but nevertheless He indeed does so. The communications which the Lord makes to us are of the kind that make us His companions; for certainly there is not a more happy or certain way in which anyone can show his love to another, than by communicating to him his thoughts and feelings. “...Who hath known the mind of the Lord...? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). [...].

“Abraham went with the men to bring them on their way.” That was all. He was entirely separated from the judgment that was about to be executed upon Sodom, as the church is also above the world’s judgment (though not above the Lord’s discipline for its good!) Lot, in his desires after the so-called “good” of this world, had looked toward Sodom, and found himself ensnared by it (Genesis 13:10-11); but Abraham was so entirely out of it as to be talking to the LORD about its fate. Whereas Lot had to be roused by the startling words of the angels, “Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou has in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place...” (19:12-13). But concerning the same catastrophe the LORD had *already* said about Abraham, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him,” etc. (18:17).

The LORD God had put Abraham into the place of covenant blessing, and on this ground He communicates to him His thoughts. He had, in a sense, bound Himself to be Abraham’s companion by the very terms of the revelation He had made to him, for He had said, “Get thee out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that *I will show thee*” (12:1). And the result is that Abraham is introduced to confidence and

<sup>2</sup> The writer may mean here that sin unconfessed and unrepented of causes us to lose our communion with the Lord. [Ed.]



intimacy of conversation with the LORD Himself, who speaks to him just as He spoke to David “of his house for a great while to come” (see 2 Samuel 7:19). God had spoken to David of matters far beyond his own salvation. And the ground of the LORD’s communication of His thoughts to us is, that having centred His love in us, He lets us into His confidence. He has united the church to Christ, and associated it with Christ, and hence He makes known to us “the mystery of his will.” This is the consequence and result of the place in which He has set us.

The Lord says of Abraham, “I know him”, etc. There is the greatest blessing in this; it is entirely the language of friendship, and so opposite to the way in which He speaks about judgment. He does not talk about “knowing” those He is going to judge, but, rather, says, “I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto me; and if not, I will know” (18:21). Until the LORD has fully investigated, He will not strike in judgment. But it is not thus with the saints. He has no need to go down to see about them, for He fully knows and acknowledges them – as He said concerning Abraham, “I know him.”

“The men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom; but *Abraham yet stood before the Lord*” (18:22). It is a blessed thing to so know our place and blessing with the Lord as to be able to do this. For if the LORD “knows Abraham”, so as to secure to him the blessings He had promised, this is answered by Abraham’s staying with the LORD Himself.

Similarly, God is going to bring judgment on the world; but He will not smite it until He cannot help it... But no judgment that was coming on the cities of the plain could separate Abraham from the LORD. The LORD’s eye so rests on Abraham as to enable him to rest quietly in Him. And so it is with us: whatever judgment is coming upon the world, our place is to abide with the Lord Himself; and then, like Abraham, the effect of having drunk into His grace is that we shall be calm, quiet, and happy. There will, alas! be Lots many in the well-watered plain; but let us be in the mountain with the Lord, abiding in

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perfect peace; not just in security from the judgment, but, in that which is far higher, *with* the Lord Himself.

Abraham, being thus with the LORD in perfect peace, has nothing to ask on his own behalf, but becomes the earnest *intercessor* for others. And, even subsequently, in the case of Abimelech, the LORD says, “Restore the man his wife, for he is a *prophet* and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live” (20:7). The force of this is, “If he be a prophet, if he has this closeness of communion with the mind of the Lord, and he can intercede for you: let him pray for you, and I will hear him.” So it is with us: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). The possession of the Lord’s mind gives us the power of intercession for others. This is not like the wrestling of Jacob, who had to get the blessing for himself (Genesis 32:24-29) – though it is possible indeed that we may have to wrestle for ourselves in order to get individual blessing: for we must not pretend that our actual state is better than it is.<sup>3</sup> However Abraham’s prayer here for Sodom is communion with the LORD about Sodom, and realised communion always produces peace and joy. It is not that reverence will be absent from the soul, for Abraham says, “I am but dust and ashes” (18:27) – in the profoundest sense of his own nothingness in the presence of God; still, there is the most perfect intimacy, as we witness in his advancing from point to point in his pleadings with the LORD for the sparing of Sodom. This whole wondrous scene closes with the simple words, “And the LORD went his way as soon as he had left communing with Abraham, and Abraham returned unto his place” (18:33).

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No-one can be in the presence of God without holy fear. And he who cannot reconcile this with confidence and joy, does not know what the presence of God is.

*“Intimacy with the Lord”. An unsigned article in The Girdle of Truth, ed. W.H. Dorman, 6 (1862), pp. 182-190, edited for intelligibility to the modern reader.*

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<sup>3</sup> The writer wrote, “... we must not be untrue to our state”, but this is surely his meaning. [Ed.]

# A need for secrecy

## Matthew 6:1-18

**T.Balderston**

*Many things need to be made public; but not these three.*

It may be thought improper to judge motives, but when St Simeon Stylites (c. 390 – 459 AD) chose to situate the tall pillar, atop of which he lived and performed his religious exercises for about 35 years, near a main road, his choice cannot have been altogether accidental. He may have sought the publicity he undoubtedly gained in order to influence people for good. But did he manage never to bask in the good opinions of the many tourists who came to view him? By contrast the malicious onlookers could say of the Lord, “Look, a glutton and a wine-bibber” (Luke 7:34, NKJV). Of course He was neither, but I suppose that few, if any, in the crowds knew of the days of hunger He endured with His disciples, or of the nights He spent in the mountains in prayer (6:12, 21).

Matthew 6:1-18 is about doing right things in secret. The Lord made this single point about three of the main personal religious obligations of “lay” Jews – almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

The first verse presupposes that Jews do charitable deeds: the point at issue is the spirit in which they are done. Doubtless those who made their almsgiving so public justified it as shaming others into doing likewise. And they got their reward: all men doubtless spoke well of them, as they do of large donors today. (Though in fact such ostentation would surely be as likely to deter poorer donors who could only give a little, as to encourage them.)

The Lord also spoke the words that have become proverbial, “Let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (6:3). This could just be a memorable way of saying, “Don’t let anyone know.” But might it not also mean that Christians should not dwell much on their giving in their own minds – not preen themselves inwardly on how much they give?

The implication must surely be that seeking the good opinion of others, or even of our own minds, is offensive to God. What do we have that is our own? Didn’t all come from His hand; didn’t He equip us with the capacity to earn the money in the first place? How dare we congratulate ourselves! I’ve known Christians who didn’t blow trumpets before they donated, but they certainly, if surreptitiously, let it be known.

But very few. Most Christians known to me honestly observe the Lord's rule. It raises the practical issue, however, that sometimes some co-ordination of giving might make the giving more beneficial. Just as the demand for prayer in the secret place in 6:6 cannot be held to rule out prayer meetings (cp. Acts 1:14), I think we have to treat the demand of 6:1-3 as not always ruling out some discreet co-operation, provided that the motivation is not in the least self-commendation.

Giving is an essential part of Christianity! Paul enjoined giving upon the Ephesians (Acts 20:35), citing a word of the Lord's during "the days of His flesh" that would not otherwise be known. See also, especially 2 Corinthians 8-9; Hebrews 13:16; 1 John 3:17.



Next, the Lord turns in Matthew 6:5 – 15 to the manner of personal prayer. Elsewhere He exhorted His disciples to pray more persistently (Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8); here (and in Luke 11:2ff) He exhorted them to pray *properly*.

As with almsgiving, those who loved "to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the street" may have justified their ostentation as setting a good example to the less committed Jewish populace. The Lord saw the heart, however, and that it was done to obtain a reputation for piety. Everyone who truly prays would, I believe, agree that personal prayer is best done in secret with God alone (6:6). The passage does not outlaw prayer meetings, or public praying during meetings. But public prayer will be an empty form if it is not the outworking of much secret prayer.

Similarly, the One who spent whole nights on the mountain-side (Matthew 14:23) was certainly not demanding that all prayer-times should be short! But He was condemning the mindless repetition of prayer-formulae, such as the pagans did.

Sadly, the word "patter" (as in "sales patter") tells us that even the Lord's prayer itself became just such a "vain repetition"! "Patter" is a corruption of the first word of the Lord's prayer in Latin, "Pater", a prayer repeated mindlessly by

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clergy and laity in medieval times – who no doubt knew it so well that their minds could range over all manner of other things as they repeated it!

It is far better to use the Lord's prayer as a framework for prayer than to repeat its words mindlessly. But it must be remembered that it was a framework specifically devised for the disciples called to make a proclamation of the kingdom that would be rejected and end in the crucifixion of the Messiah. Otherwise, the absence of a clause praying specially for families would be inexplicable. The Lord had called them out of their families whilst signalling that the needs of these families would remain His constant concern (Matthew 8:14-15). This gap in the subject-matter of "the Lord's prayer" is proof (if any were needed!) that it indeed came from the Lord's own lips in "the days of His flesh". It is inconceivable that if the early church had formulated this prayer to meet its own needs, the needs of family would not have found an express place in it. Yet in the twentieth century innumerable "modernists" of the "Bultmann" school told us that almost everything in the Gospels originated as stories invented to meet the pressing needs of the early church!

On the other hand, the Lord's prayer is framed in the plural, right from its opening words, "Our Father". Prayers based on this framework were to be prayed in solitude, but with all other eleven disciples in mind. This, too, is a reminder that even our private prayers are prayed with our brothers and sisters in Christ in mind, and certainly not against them!

The prayer opens, as all prayer should, by addressing by Name the One to whom prayer is made. Many understand "Our Father in heaven" to mean that whilst, on the one hand, we have earthly fathers, we also have, on a different plane, a heavenly Father. Whilst this is so, I do not think that this is the force of the opening address, (lit.), "Our Father in the heavens". This form of address, instead, acknowledged the vast gap between God and the disciples: their Father was in a place beyond their reach and outside their ken; yet they could pray to Him even in that place and know that their prayer would be heard!

*Even our private prayers  
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Secondly, this prayer is not framed as a prayer “in the Name of the Lord Jesus”. The Lord did not mention this matter until in “the upper room” (John 16:23-26). But now that the Lord has been crucified, has risen and ascended, it is basic to Christian prayer to the Father, that it is prayed in the Name of the now-ascended Lord Jesus. I believe that Christian prayers should normally conclude in the Lord’s Name. It means that our prayers all come to the Father, so to speak, as if from heaven; they all come to Him as prayers bearing the Name of One whom He has already exalted to His own right hand. The remoteness, the distance, that necessarily underlay the prayers of the disciples on earth, is now removed, because Christ is with the Father.

The prayer then proceeds, in its first petition, to pray for the hallowing of God’s Name (Matthew 6:9). One could say that the un-hallowing of God’s Name is the central characteristic of the world today, the characteristic from which all its other unholy characteristics stem. Unless that Name is truly “hallowed” in our hearts, no proper prayer can be made.

The next petition follows seamlessly on from this one: “Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The second part of this petition explains the first. God’s kingdom will come on earth when His will is done on earth. This shows us what the word “kingdom” means – not a geographical region, but the exercise of legitimate power – in this case, God’s own power. In the sense in which “kingdom” is used here it is not yet realised in this world. Some interpret this petition relatively: “May Your will be done on earth to a greater degree than it currently is”, and thus apply it to the spread of the gospel. But plainly this is not what it says; the standard is the unlimited fulfilment of God’s will in heaven. Only at Christ’s glorious coming will this petition be answered.

Verses 11ff proceed to personal requests, firstly to our daily bread. Here the force of the plural form of request first comes into sight. I should indeed bring to the Father all my own and my family’s material needs, and of course the disciples maintained a common purse, so that what one went without all went without. Nonetheless the plural form takes the petition beyond the purely self-

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centred. My material needs may be adequately supplied, but is this so for brothers and sisters in Christ known to me? “Our daily bread” challenges us on this point.

The Lord forgave the sins of the paralysed man, and assured the sinful woman that her sins were forgiven (Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:48). As to the twelve, the Lord said, “...and none of them is lost except the son of perdition” (John 17:12). This may be the key. The Lord could not treat all twelve as forgiven sinners, and He did not wish to single out Judas. In that sense this petition has grace in it, towards Judas. Nonetheless the forgiveness of the eleven disciples is implicit in their call. This may explain a form of words that falls short of the certainty of the Christian hope, a hope expressed by the Lord Himself concerning “His sheep” in John 10:27-30.

The knowledge that “our sins are forgiven for His Name’s sake” (1 John 2:12) is perhaps the believer’s most precious possession. But it does not eliminate the need for constant confession of sins, for daily “keeping short accounts with God.” See 1 John 1:8 – 2:2. Without that, the Christian life becomes hard and hypocritical. It is the vital present-day counterpart of Matthew 6:12.

The final petition of the Lord’s prayer – “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil [or, “the evil one”] – perhaps includes all kinds of trial and testing, but learned opinion tells us that the rendering, “the evil one”, is the more likely. The fact that this is the last petition in the Lord’s prayer does not mean that it is the least petition in the Prayer, but that it is the one most urgently needed when the Christian rises from prayer to re-enter the world of everyday, and from that point on will be a target of the devil’s suggestions.

Then in Matthew 6:14-15 the Lord added a solemn warning about the condition of being forgiven – that we forgive others too. The point is spelled out in graphic detail in Matthew 18:21ff. We have to turn this round now that Christ has died for our sins, has risen and ascended, to mean that if we are forgiven, then we will be forgiving; if we are people who harbour grudges, then this calls into question whether we were ever forgiven ourselves.



The boundaries of this have to be considered. What about wrongs not done to me but to persons dear to me, perhaps family members. Does my salvation entail my forgiving them?

Matthew 6:12 speaks about “our debtors”, and our “debtors” must be those who have sinned against us personally. These we are obligated to forgive, if we are forgiven. This meaning must surely carry over into 6:13-14 and does carry over into 18:21ff. Similarly Luke 17:3-4. Mark 11:25 should surely be interpreted in the light of these three cases. We need, however, to pray for deliverance from consuming hatred of anyone who has wronged a person near to us. We will never be able to lead them to Christ in this frame of mind. This may be exceedingly hard, and I personally have never been tested in this way. But God will surely give His earnest people the strength for even this if we ask Him.

A further question is whether we have to forgive those who have wronged us and never asked for forgiveness? We must firstly recollect that every time we forgive someone, we also judge them: to be forgiven, they have to acknowledge that they did wrong. And whatever we might intend, the wrongdoer is not forgiven if they do not accept this. In the parable of Matthew 18:23ff the offenders acknowledged they had done wrong. The forgiveness of God works like that, and Luke 23:34 is surely to be understood in this way. Nevertheless, God forgives us when we ask Him to because forgiveness is already in His heart because of the cross. So there must be a predisposition to forgive in our hearts if we are to fulfil Matthew 6:14.



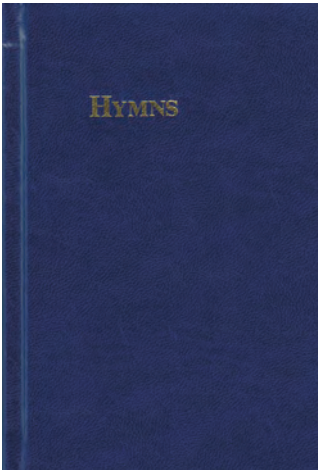
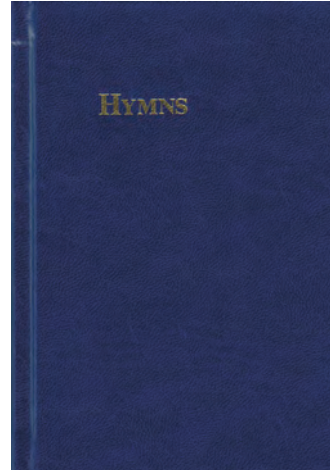
The Lord concludes this section of the Sermon on the mount with similar instruction regarding fasting (6:16-18). As the kingdom of Judah had increasingly experienced God’s chastening, so penitential fasts had sprung up in addition to the only fast that the Law had prescribed – that on the day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-29; cp. Isaiah 58:3ff; Zechariah 7). Religious Jews evidently made their fasting very public to put pressure on other Jews to do likewise. Contrariwise, our Lord said that He and His disciples did not fast (Matthew 9:15). But probably He meant that they didn’t observe the penitential, twice-weekly fasts of the Pharisees (Luke 18:12). By “privatising” fasting in Matthew 6:17f the Lord perhaps indicated that fasting should be done for other reasons. He had come in grace to a nation that could never fast enough to merit God’s salvation.

# Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs

A new edition of the 1978 words-only edition was published on 7th June 2018. It is attractively bound in hardback black or dark blue leather-effect vinyl boards and replaces the previous vinyl-bound edition.

The price remains the same as for the previous vinyl-bound edition.

Questions are asked from time to time as to the reasons why this particular selection of hymns was chosen. The 1978 preface gives some reasons, but tantalisingly refers to the prefaces in earlier editions for further explanations. Clearly few people today have access to these. Therefore, particularly for the benefit of newcomers to this hymn book, as well as the Preface to the 1978 edition, we have *included* statements by G. V. Wigram, J. N. Darby and T. H. Reynolds, the editors respectively of its predecessors published under the title of The Little Flock Hymn Book in 1856, 1881 and 1903, which, between them, provide an excellent explanation of the purpose of the hymn book and the reasons for the selection of hymns made.



The *capitalization errors* in hymns 370 (verse 2, line 5) and 478 (verse 1, line 2) and errors in the *metres* shown for some hymns have been corrected.

The *list of authors* has been updated following extensive research originally contributed by the late Edwin Cross, which we have supplemented from searches of the wealth of early hymn books now widely available on the internet.

A thorough review of the hymn metres has been conducted, and a *completely new metrical index* with useful comments has been provided.

*This edition is issued with the prayer that it may encourage greater use of the wide range of hymns in this book.*

# A home above

We have a home above  
from all defilement free;  
a mansion which eternal love  
prepared our rest to be.  
The Father's gracious hand  
has built this blest abode;  
from everlasting it was planned,  
the dwelling-place of God.

The Saviour's precious blood  
has made our entrance sure;  
He passed through death's dark, raging flood  
to make our rest secure.  
The Comforter has come,  
the Earnest has been given;  
He leads us onward to the home  
reserved for us in heaven.

And more than all, I long  
His glories to behold  
whose smile fills all the radiant throng  
with joyfulness untold.  
That undeservèd smile—  
my sweetest welcome there—  
shall cheer me through the "little while"  
I'm waiting for Him here.

Our joy and strength, dear Lord,  
are in Your gracious love,  
till You shall speak the gladdening word  
that bids us rise above.  
And there Your glories flame;  
we'll find exceeding grace;  
there, servants serve You, praise Your name,  
and saints shall see Your face.

*Henry Bennett (1813-1868), updated.*