

SCRIPTURE TRUTH



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SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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Lessons from Ezra

Part 1

Ted Murray

The book of Ezra is a powerful reminder of the fact that God’s sovereign will is carried out even by the rulers of this world. “There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1). It also demonstrates God’s faithful provision for His people whatever their need.

Introduction

There are important lessons for today to be learned from the book of Ezra. The book can conveniently be divided into two sections: Ezra the Book (chs. 1-6); Ezra the Man (chs. 7-10). The book is in the historical section of the Bible and is often dismissed as Jewish history with little relevance for today. On further examination we find, however, that it has many lessons from which we, at the beginning of the 21st century can benefit.

The book deals with that period at the end of Judah’s captivity in Babylon. Together with Nehemiah and Esther, it gives the historical details of the time. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are the prophetic books of the period. Daniel stands alone, being both historical and prophetic.

The circumstances (ch.1)

The fulfilment of God’s promise

It is profitable to look into the circumstances prevailing at the time. The Jewish nation had experienced seventy years of captivity. On the throne was a new king, who had been named by Isaiah even before the captivity began. Now God fulfils Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding the duration of the captivity. The new king, Cyrus, proclaims a decree that the Jewish remnant be allowed to return to the land of Israel. God’s sovereign will was being

carried out even by this powerful monarch. What encouragement this must have been to those captives who, like Daniel, were waiting for the fulfilment of God’s promise through the prophets. We today can also be encouraged as we read of this historic event, realising that Israel’s God is ours and that His purposes are still being carried out!

Obedience to God’s word

Ch.1 gives us Cyrus’s decree and the preparations made by the remnant to leave Babylon. In v.2, we read the title ‘The LORD God of heaven’, which Cyrus used to describe God and to ascribe to Him that rightful sovereignty. This is the title which God took when His throne was removed from the earth and His people given into the hands of the Gentiles. Although heaven is the domain where God exercises His full authority, Cyrus acknowledges that God had given him authority over the Persian empire and had delegated him to build a house for God at Jerusalem.

He did what God
laid on his heart

Here we have a lesson in obedience to the prompting of God. Cyrus was stirred in

spirit and immediately issued his remarkable decree. He did not wait for a more convenient time; he did not assemble his advisors. He did what God laid on his heart! There are times when the Lord stirs our spirits to do some service for Himself. How often we fail when we look for the approval of others before getting on with it.

Volunteers for God

Cyrus's decree is quite remarkable. We do not read of coercion, but rather a request was made for volunteers. The volunteers were to separate themselves from the comforts of Babylon to endure hardship in a land which was desolate. Jerusalem was in ruins, burned out, and from Nehemiah's account, it consisted of a heap of stones. The broken-down condition of Jerusalem is a picture of Christendom today. But there were those who were prepared to endure hardship, to make that unknown journey back to what had been the place of worship and testimony. One of the lessons we learn from this chapter is that the path of separation cannot be forced upon a company. It is the response of individuals, not a company, to the prompting of the Lord to walk the path which He has revealed.

Separation unto God

We see this principle established in Cyrus's decree. As an absolute monarch, he could have rounded up as many Jews as he thought necessary to build the house in Jerusalem. He did not do this. He made a request and issued a challenge: "Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem" (v.3). In this verse we see: (a) the call for separation; (b) the blessing of

separation; (c) the place of separation and (d) the reason for separation.

The Christian is called to leave the things of this world: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15). This is the negative side of separation. The fact that the Christian is called to go outside the camp where Christ is (Hebrews 13:13) is the positive side of separation. The blessing is the Lord's own promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20) and "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). The place is where His name is honoured and where He is given the pre-eminence. The reason is for a testimony in this world.

God's provision for worship

We find that those who took up the challenge were immediately strengthened (v.6) and, no doubt, encouraged by the resources given to them. Cyrus separated out the vessels which had been taken from the Temple and gave them to Sheshbazzar (his Chaldean name. In ch.2, he is given his Hebrew name, Zerubbabel, prince of Judah). We should note that it was Mithredath, the Medo-Persian treasurer, who formally and with due solemnity handed over the vessels to Zerubbabel, who was of David's line. The act is an initial fulfilment of Jeremiah 27:22 and foreshadows that future day when the Lord Jesus Christ receives tribute from the nations. The vessels numbered 5,400 pieces; the details of 2,499 pieces are given. This teaches us the importance which God gives to detail. Even the knives are noted in God's record! In this day of casualness, it is a reminder that we should be careful in our

stewardship for the Lord. In a future day, we shall have to give account to Him of all that we do.

These utensils, which had formerly been used by the priests in Jerusalem in the daily worship, were restored so that the revival of that divinely appointed form of worship could once more take place. God does not leave His people destitute; He provides what is needed so that He may be worshipped. Can we see in this act some parallel in what takes place when we meet in simplicity for the remembrance of the Lord?

Zerubbabel means 'a stranger in Babel'. No lordliness was found in him; he was a meek man. He did not appear to have any pomp in his make-up. There was no outward show of gift, but he was a faithful man who had the confidence of the ruler and the people. We need today to show these same characteristics and we should seek the Lord's help that this be so. It is wonderful to see that, in the day of breakdown, God has a man who is able to lead. "We follow Thee, our Guide, who didst salvation bring:

We follow Thee, through grace supplied from heaven's eternal spring."

The people (ch.2)

God takes note

If in ch.1 we had the circumstances, in ch.2 we have the people and another list from God's record. It appears that this is an important record. It is duplicated in

God does not leave
His people destitute

Nehemiah 7 and is used as a basis in Nehemiah 3 which records the details of the work which each accomplished. It is not a long list but it does contain the names of all those who went back to Jerusalem, God's centre at that time. The people numbered 42,360 besides servants and 200 choristers, giving a total of 49,897 persons. They appear to have gone back in family units. We see here the importance which God places on the family, and the influence of its head (see 1 Timothy 3:4,5).

Yet even this crowd is few compared to those who originally came out of Egypt – perhaps 1-2 million. This little company turned their backs on the comforts of Babylon where they had been unable to sing the Lord's songs in that strange land (see Psalm 137). This may speak of the relative few in Christendom who are prepared faithfully to follow the path of separation unto the Lord.

The men of Anathoth are an encouraging reminder of the fact that God's word stands sure. Anathoth was the place purchased by Jeremiah as a sign that the land would be restored (Jeremiah 32). These men of Anathoth were able to benefit from the title deeds and see the fulfilment of God's faithfulness.

Responsibility for the service of God

From vv.36-39, we learn that there were 4,289 priests. Approximately one tenth, then, of the remnant who returned were able to serve in the Temple. These men, along with the Levites, had no inheritance to go back to but they were able to serve the Lord in the way and in the place He had appointed.

Only a few Levites returned. In the time of Solomon, the Levites numbered 38,000 and had an important part to play in the functioning of the Temple worship. Theirs was the responsibility of administering the stores, the tithes, the work of the house of God, the safety of the Temple, the teaching of the Law, and the leading of the praise. But now there are only 74 of them!

Today, there is a similar dearth of those willing to take up responsibility for the upkeep of the testimony of the Lord and maintenance of the fabric. The story is the same throughout Christendom. Surely we should be asking ourselves whether we are amongst the doers or amongst those who stand to one side and criticise. There is still a great need for those who can take their full part in the life of the local church. In Zerubbabel's day, the Levites had nothing to which to look forward, when they returned to the land, other than their individual desire to serve and to please the Lord in His divinely appointed way. They went back in faith, counting on the blessing of the Lord.

Sing unto the Lord

Next come the singers, the sons of Asaph. They were the leaders of praise; 128 are recorded. Here we find that singing is not the exclusive right of men in the praise of God. Towards the end of the chapter, the choir grows to 200 by the inclusion of the singing women. Both are needed to make up the harmony and thus enhance the note of praise. It is good to realise that some can use the natural gift of a pleasant voice, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to praise the Lord and make a harmonious sound which brings pleasure to God and the church.

Labour for God

The Nethinim and Solomon's servants were a group of people who had nothing whatsoever to which to go back. In Solomon's day they were servants. The former may have been descendants of the wily Gibeonites imported by Solomon for the work of building the Temple and his houses, hewers of wood and drawers of water. But here is a group of people, however skilled or lowly in origin, who were prepared to leave their place of leisure for the place of labour for God.

True to God

Vv. 59-61 records those who could not show their genealogy. These people of uncertain origin formed a significant part of the company – 652 persons who could not give a satisfactory account of their history. There are those today who show a zeal for the Lord but are unable to give a clear scriptural answer as to what drives them or how they became Christians. It is good to know that "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

The chapter continues in the same vein, listing the priests who could not fully establish their title to serve in the Temple. These men and their families took the name of Barzillai, the friend of David. Barzillai had sustained David when he was in trouble but refused to avail himself of David's provisions (2 Samuel 19:32-34). He was blessed by David (v.39), who later instructed Solomon to provide for Barzillai's sons (1 Kings 2:7). Here we find people showing allegiance to God but wanting to fulfil a service for which they had neither the credentials nor the qualifications. The outcome was that they were barred by the Tirshatha (the gover-

nor) from eating of the holy things until there was a priest who could decide the matter with the Urim and Thummin. This could correspond today with those who want to take a place of leadership but cannot fulfil the scriptural requirements (see 1 Timothy 3). There are also those who claim to be saved and apparently know the Lord but have a lifestyle which is contrary to biblical teaching. Though we do not have apostles to give their judgment, as in the early Church, we do have the scriptures to guide us and we should abide by them.

Giving to God

At the end of the chapter, we are given the number of those who left Babylon. It is interesting to note the smaller number of servants. This implies that there were a great number of people of substance in the material sense who were no longer prepared to invest their substance and time in the affairs of Babylon but who wanted to throw in their lot with the small remnant and share in the restoration of the testimony in Jerusalem.

Another point of interest is that only beasts of burden are listed: horses, mules, camels and asses. All these animals would help the progress of the return journey. Cattle, sheep and goats tend by their nature to impede progress and would have to be left behind. From this we learn that some hard decisions may have to be made when we take up service for the Lord.

At the end of the chapter, there are gems of encouragement for us today. What did the remnant see when they came to the house of the Lord (v.68)? Only ruins! But they had a God-given vision and, from

their abundance, gave more. This was not a tenth, the tithe according to the Law, but 'after their ability'. Surely the Lord loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Here the Lord takes note of those who were moved when they saw what had to be done and who provided some of the means to do it.

All the people of God

The chapter closes with God seeing this weak remnant, a company occupying the ground of all Israel. It is not possible today to gather the whole Church of God in one visible unity. It is possible, however, for even a feeble few to meet on the ground of the Church of God, without sectarian tags and traditions, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

It should be noted that this unity of the Spirit is broken by discord and cannot be legally enforced. It is our responsibility to act on this with those who seek peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). The truth of the One Body (1 Corinthians 10:16) indicates that there is only one, comprising all true believers. Are we to recognise another body, or a narrower circle, than that which we are brought into by the Lord? In principle, we should recognise all believers. Christian fellowship must, if scripturally sound, embrace all believers. In the profession of Christendom there are sadly those, as in Ezra's day, whose records do not stand up. Our fellowship is with those who follow righteousness, faith, love, peace and who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:19-22).

Jesus' Farewell Words

Part 4. John 15:1-27

Ernie Brown

"How can I live to please God?" is a question which continually challenges the Christian. What better than to have the Lord's own words on the subject! This article is the fourth in a series originally broadcast on London's Premier Radio.

Introduction

About 15 years ago, I visited a friend in the Channel Isles. In his greenhouse were two vines. One was really flourishing. Great clusters of choice grapes were forming on all its branches. The other vine was, relatively, a poor specimen in both the quality and quantity of its grapes. He then led me to a covered well just inside the boundary of his land. He removed the cover and, looking down, I could see some strong roots. They had broken through the stone retaining wall of the well, several feet below ground level, and then plunged downwards into the water which was quite a distance below. Here, then, was the secret. The vine that was thriving had been successful in its search for water. It was drawing constantly from that hidden supply.

I am the true Vine

In John 15, the Lord Jesus used such an analogy to remind His disciples how much they needed Him. Furthermore, they could never live in a way that pleased God apart from their links with Him. He was indispensable to their spiritual well-being and progress. In v.1, we get the last of the seven "I am" statements of the Lord Jesus in John's Gospel: "I am the true vine". How graphic is the picture! The only channel

for the transmission and promotion of health giving life in the vine is the flow of that life through the main stem into and through the branches. Any branch not in constant and living touch with the main stem will dry up and wither away. No fruit would be produced! The only proper action would be to cut off the dead branch and dispose of it. Since the wood of the vine is useless for any practical or decorative purpose, the only right course would be to burn it. All this is described in vv. 1-8. As we go through a few of the details, let us bear in the mind the major lesson for us: this is the way real Christianity works.

My Father is the husbandman

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). In keeping with this, v.1 of our chapter says, "My Father is the husbandman". He is the originator of the process. It is only right that He should have something in return for all His goodness toward us. That is why the figure of fruitfulness is introduced. Vv. 2,4,5 and 8 confirm this.

But our Father in heaven has not only originated the process. He has taken every necessary step, and provided

every necessary means, to ensure that He will be fully satisfied with the final result. Romans 11:36 puts it this way: "...of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things". To this end, any unproductive dead wood must be removed. Those branches which are productive must be purged i.e. scrubbed clean, so that harmful bacteria which inhibit proper development are removed.

The application of the figure, and the agent which God uses for this cleansing process, is made plain by the Lord Jesus. He said to His disciples, "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you". The necessity of regular cleansing had already been emphasised to the disciples in the feet washing episode described in John 13. There, too, it was with a view to their having what the Lord described as 'part with Me'. In ch.15, the same concept is termed 'abiding', abiding in His love', 'abiding in Him'.

The feet washing was literal for the disciples. In addition, they had the spoken word of the Lord. For us, the cleansing and purifying action of His word comes to us via Holy Scripture: "Christ...loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the

washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:25,26).

As the Father has loved Me

From v.9 onwards, the Lord Jesus leaves aside metaphorical language and speaks plainly to His disciples. The words are addressed to us also. Vv.9-17 tell us that the only way really to please the Lord, and indeed God, is by being completely obedient to Him and to what He says. The Lord summed it up in this way: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (vv.9-12).

This is the argument He developed. When He lived here on earth, He lived in the constant enjoyment of His Father's love. In the joy of that, He was fully obedient to what the Father asked Him to do. The knowledge that living in this way really pleased His Father led to a deeper, fuller enjoyment of that same love. The process was on-going and ever deepening. As a Man living on earth, He lived in the Father's love. He obeyed what the Father said. He enjoyed ever deepening communion with his Father in heaven.

Continue in My love

The Lord invited His disciples to have the same kind of relationship with Him that He had with His Father. He would say to them, "As the Father in heaven has loved Me on earth, so is My love for

Abiding in
His love

you. When I go back to heaven, even more so. My love for you will be on the same pattern as My Father's love for Me while I have lived on the earth. I, in heaven, will really love you, on earth. By faith, it will be open to you to enjoy that love. My enjoyment of My Father's love led Me to be obedient to everything He said to Me. Similarly, if you really enjoy My love, you will be anxious to do exactly what I say. That will lead to an ever increasing sense of the reality of My love for You, even as in My case it led Me to enjoy My Father's love, more and more."

The Lord Jesus takes the process one stage further. "My enjoyment of My Father's love was the springboard of My love for You. Similarly, your enjoyment of My love for you will become the springboard for your love for one another." Of course, there is this difference. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, gave His Father very good cause for loving Him. He was perfect in all His ways. In contrast, the Lord's love for us is causeless. We don't deserve it at all. However, we show our appreciation of His causeless love for us in at least two ways. Firstly, we are to love one another in the same causeless way that He loves us. That is, not because others deserve our love, but because we want to follow the example set by the Lord Jesus, who loved us when we least deserved it. Secondly, we show our appreciation of the Lord's love for us by being obedient to what He says. We become aware of what He wants us to do by reading our Bibles day by day, and praying for help

in understanding what we read and in putting it into practice.

Fruit...more fruit...much fruit

Ah, there it is, the link between the first part of the chapter and the second! The Christian life is intended to be one of growth, development and fruit bearing, morally and spiritually speaking. This is described in these verses as fruit, more fruit, and much fruit.

What did the Lord mean when He was speaking about fruit, particularly in relation to His own life upon earth? First of all, fruit is the end product, the whole purpose in cultivating the vine. Grapes are very pleasing to the palate. The Lord's application of this is very plain to see. When He lived on earth, there was fruit for His Father in heaven. "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). There could be nothing more pleasing to God the Father at that time than seeing the wonderful life on earth of His beloved Son, every step of which brought glory to God and blessing to mankind.

The Lord Jesus has now gone back to heaven. Is it possible that God can now see anything on earth that will please Him in the same way as when His Son lived on earth? That is certainly His intention! But how, and through whom? Clearly, what Jesus is saying in this

I do always
those things that
please Him

chapter is this: we are so to live now, in the enjoyment of the love of Christ, and in obedience to His instructions in His word, that Christ-like living will be the result. That will be observed and noted by God in heaven, and will be for His present joy. It will be like God looking down from heaven and seeing lots of Jesus-like behaviour happening all over the world, all the time! Surely, that will really please Him.

That is put as the end product, that is, the fruit, of our enjoyment of the love of Jesus for us. And this does not only refer to our actions, to the things we do. Our motives, our intentions, our thoughts, our ambitions, our manner of speaking, are all to be little pictures, illustrations and examples of the way the Lord Jesus lived when He was here on earth.

The Lord grants an added bonus to those who obey His teaching in this way. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth 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" (vv.14,15).

Power for fruit bearing

What a marvellous thing! If we obey Him (as we should and must), He will take us into His confidence and reveal His will unto us. Can it be done? Once we are committed Christians, can we automatically switch on miraculous power to live Christ-like lives which will please God in everything we think, say and do? Sadly, no. One of the most difficult lessons for us to learn is that in

ourselves, we are no better, and we are no more able to please God, than before we trusted Christ as Saviour. Yes, we Christians are completely changed from what we were before. But, and it is a big BUT, in the mercy of God, we are not cut adrift, and left to ourselves to get through this world, which is just as hostile to God as when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ.

The third part of our chapter takes up this very point (vv.18-25). When Jesus lived on earth, the world, that is, the rulers of the world, all hated Him. 'The rulers of the social world, the cultural world, the political world, the military world, the religious world, all hated Him. The more pure and holy He demonstrated Himself to be, the more they hated Him. Ultimately, they showed how extreme that hate was when they crucified Him at Calvary.'

The Lord warns His disciples here, "Don't imagine for a moment that the world will like you, if you live lives which remind them of Me. When I was on earth, they hated Me without a cause. Don't expect any better treatment than I got. In fact, the more like Me you are, the more the world will hate you. It's inevitable."

But don't be disheartened! Oh, yes, the Bible means what it says when we read, "We are more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). But we must finish the verse – a part quotation will not do! "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." That's it! "Through Him that loved us." We shall never be able to be like Him, and live like Him, in our

Power to live like Christ

own strength. But He is able and willing to help us to do what we will never be able to do in our own strength.

When the Comforter is come

How does He do it? Vv.26,27 let us into the secret. "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning."

As in so many things, indeed in all spiritual things, in all aspects of Christian life and service, there is only one power available. That power is the Holy Spirit. Power to live like Christ. Power to please God. Power to witness for Him in this wicked world. Power to worship God. All such power is found and is available in the power of the Holy Spirit! The Lord Jesus would say to His disciples, "I have to go away. I have to go back to heaven. But don't be too upset. I promise you that I will send God the Holy Spirit to take My place. He will give you the spiritual power to please God and serve Him until I come back again. You won't be any worse off. In fact, spiritually you will be better off." No wonder the Scripture says not only are we conquerors, but "we are MORE

than conquerors, through him that loved us".

The same promise is ours. In ourselves, we are incredibly weak and feeble, unreliable and inconsistent. But the Lord has promised to make power available for whatever we need, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like Jesus

Let us take courage, then, and seek to live Christ-like lives. Let us live for Him and our God, without distraction, till Jesus comes. Let us make the words of Ida S. Taylor our prayer.

In truth and grace I want to grow
Like Jesus, day by day,
And scatter sunshine where I go,
Along my pilgrim way.
I want to live a life of love,
Like Jesus, day by day;
And point some soul to heaven above.
Along my pilgrim way.
I want to do some kindly deed
Like Jesus day by day;
And for His kingdom sow the seed.
Along my pilgrim way.
Like Jesus, like Jesus,
I want to be like Jesus;
I love Him so, I want to grow
Like Jesus, day by day.



The Eternal Son

Part 3

George Stevens

This is the concluding article in this series on this important subject. It will repay careful study. Read it and worship Him!

His eternal Sonship in Colossians

In Colossians 1:13,16, we read, "...the Son of his love...for by him were all things created...all things were created by him and for him". Here we find that the Creator, whom we have already seen to be both God and the Word, is also *the Son of the Father's love*. (V.13 in the A.V. reads "...his dear Son" where 'his' clearly refers to the Father. 'His dear Son' may be translated 'the Son of his (the Father's) love'.) As the Maker of all things is none other than God and the *eternal* Word, then it must follow that the Creator in Colossians 1 – the Son of His love – must also be eternal.

In v.19, we read that all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in this same Son. This shows that there was no inferiority in the Son as to the Godhead because it had a permanent dwelling place in Him. Later in the epistle (2:9),

The Son
of the
Father's love

we find that the same fullness dwelt in Him bodily, that is, as a Man.

His eternal Sonship in Hebrews

In the epistle to the Hebrews, the glories of the Son are clearly set forth. It is the epistle of 'better things', all of which are connected with our incomparable Lord. His superiority is clearly demonstrated:

- chs. 1,2 – He is superior to *prophets* and *angels*.
- chs. 3,4 – He is superior to *Adam*, *Moses*, and *Joshua*.
- ch. 5 – He is superior to *Aaron*.
- ch. 9 – His *sacrifice* is superior to, and the fulfilment of, all other sacrifices.
- ch. 12 – He is superior to *all those listed in ch.11*, being the Author and Finisher of faith.

1. The Son in relationship to revelation

In Hebrews 1:1, the writer describes the accurate, though incomplete, methods by which God had spoken in the past. In v.2, God speaks fully in (His) Son. The article before 'Son' is omitted to show the *quality* of His relationship to God. Grammatically, the definite article identifies and its absence qualifies. How true the rule is here! The Spirit is speaking of One who ever stands in relation to God

in the quality and essence of eternal Sonship.

2. The Son in relationship to all things

In 1:2, we are told that He is the heir of all things and that He has made the worlds (ages). Sonship must precede heirship (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7). Christ must have existed, then, as Son before creation. Note the order here: first His Sonship, second His heirship, and third His creative work. He is the Son eternally.

3. The Son in relationship to angels

In an article on the eternal Sonship of Christ, Maxwell writes that Hebrews 1:5 reminds us that He is greater than angels because of His eternal relationship to God. “Thou art my Son” is timeless; it is before and beyond time. “This day have I begotten thee” does not refer to the *commencement* of His Sonship, but to the *communication* of it by the Father.

In v.8, we see that He is greater than angels. They are servants; He is Son. He is addressed by God in sovereignty and deity. The use of the definite article in v.8, and its omission in v.2, require us to understand that this is *the* Son identified by the Holy Spirit. He is the One who is related to eternity in v.2. It is unto the Son that God says, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever...” The Son is God! As such, He must be eternal and unchanging in His being.

4. The Son in relationship to the house of God

In 3:1, Christ is called both Apostle and High Priest. As the Apostle, He was the One sent forth from the Father; as the High Priest, He has returned to the Father. As the Apostle, He is the Revealer of God’s will to men; as the High Priest, He is the Representative of men before God.

In the same chapter, the Lord Jesus is seen as superior to Moses (vv.2-6). “Moses was faithful in God’s house”, but the Lord Jesus is “Son over” the house of God. Hence, “this man hath been counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (v.3). The authority of the Lord Jesus over the house is not because He became Son, but because He is the Son (1:1).

5. The Son in relationship to suffering

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (5:8). “Being Son” again refers to the fullness of that eternal relationship He had with God (1:1). As a result, the obedience described in the above verse can only refer to that which He experienced in the path of suffering while doing the Father’s will as a Man on earth. As Son in the glory, “though being a Son”, He could never have experienced suffering. The verse emphasises, therefore, the fact that He is Son eternally.

If we relate 5:8 with 4:14 of this epistle, we see that Jesus the Son of God has passed through the heavens as our Great

High Priest. The Son of God can now be touched with the feeling of our infirmities because He (as Jesus) passed through temptation and suffering as a man. Yes! There is a Man in the glory who has learned the cost of obedience through experiencing suffering and death. That Man is the Son of God.

6. The Son in relationship to Melchisedec

In 7:3, we are told that Melchisedec was “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God...” This could be written of Melchisedec in so far as he simply appears on the pages of Scripture without any of these details being given (Genesis 14:18-20). He appeared as a king who blessed Abraham and nothing more is heard of him. However, the Holy Spirit indicates those criteria which made him like the Son of God.

The list includes items which could not be applied to Christ in His humanity. For example: Christ as a Man had a mother, had a genealogy, had beginning of days (for He was born in Bethlehem) and had an end of life (for He died on Calvary’s cross). It is evident, then, that Melchisedec was made like the Son of God in quite a different sense, namely,

No man
knows the Son,
but the Father

that the Son of God never had beginning of days and never had a mother, because He was Son before He was born of Mary; nor was His Sonship terminated by His death. The words speak, therefore, of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God from eternity.

There are two statements related to His priesthood in ch.5 which are important. V.5 says, “Thou art my Son”, and v.6 says, “Thou art a priest for ever”. The latter statement is consequent on the former. The latter salutation is repeated in 7:21 and is a quotation from Psalm 110:4. In this psalm, the deity of Christ is emphasised. V.1 begins, “The LORD said unto my Lord...” In Matthew 22:41-46, the Lord Jesus challenged the Pharisees, “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” They replied, “The Son of David”. Christ uses this scripture to show that Christ was called Lord by David. How, then, could He be David’s son? The whole passage indicates that Christ is the Son of God. Furthermore, it reminds us that Christ is both the root and the offspring of David. In order to be the latter, He had to become Man.

In conclusion, the One who became Man never ceased to be what He ever was and is, the Son from eternity. Even after our consideration of His Sonship, we have to confess that no man knows the Son, but the Father (Matthew 11:27). Well might we sing in worship:

“But the high mysteries of His Name
An angel’s grasp transcend.
The Father only (glorious claim)
The Son can comprehend.”

What Does the Bible Say About...?

1.Fasting

John Keable

We welcome this personal view from a new contributor, the editor of 'Alive!' Gospel magazine. "Fasting detaches from the world; prayer attaches to God." With these words, we often spiritualise away the practical aspects of fasting. It is hoped that this article will be the first in a series dealing with practical issues.

Fasting is something we may or may not do. If we do, we may fast regularly, or just now and again. In some Christian circles, it is expected to be a normal part of worship. In others, it is left to individuals as to what they believe and do about the issue.

Does the Bible give us any definite instructions, or guidelines, about fasting? In this article, I put together some of the relevant scriptures for consideration.

1. Not just a ritual

The first thing we must be clear about is this: if fasting is just a ritual, it is wrong! In Isaiah 58:3-5, God has some harsh things to say to those who have reduced the idea of fasting to 'just something we do'. Although the Jews were fasting, they were also

involved in injustices, quarrels, and even physical violence. In this case, fasting had no value whatsoever. In Zechariah 7:5, "Did you really fast for Me – for Me?" If we are going to fast, we must have a good reason for it.

When Jesus was asked about fasting, He also indicated that fasting, as a ritual, is a waste of time (Matthew 9:14,15). The Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting, but evidently Jesus' disciples did not. Jesus indicated that there are times when fasting might be appropriate.

2. Not for show

If we do decide to fast, we have definite instructions as to how we should go about it. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus makes clear that it should be something done in private between God and ourselves. We are not to boast or draw attention to ourselves; in fact, God is the only Person who needs to know about it. In Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Pharisee boasted about his

spirituality, including how often he fasted, but it did him no good so far as being justified before God was concerned (Luke 18:9-14).

3. Not just about starving yourself!

When we talk about fasting, we normally associate it with going without food. It is true that in most of the cases mentioned in the Bible, this is what was involved, but not exclusively. In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul writes about married couples abstaining from intimate relations for a time in order to work on their personal relationship with the Lord. It follows, then, fasting can include abstaining from any normal pleasure or necessity: food, sleep, sex, TV.

4. So, what is fasting for, then?

From my studies of the Bible, I have found two main reasons for fasting, and one or two possible additional reasons. The main reasons for fasting are:

(A) Repentance of sins (either personal or national)

The prophet Joel called the Israelite nation to repent of their waywardness and rebellion against God. He called upon them to fast as a mark of their sorrow (1:14; 2:12).

In 1 Samuel 7:6, Samuel led the Israelites in fasting and confessing their sins.

In 1 Kings 21:27, we find King Ahab, probably one of the most wicked

kings of Israel, fasting and humbling himself before God.

Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel all took part in fasts in order to pray for forgiveness for the sins of the Jewish nation (Ezra 10:6; Nehemiah 9:1; Daniel 10:3).

Perhaps we, too, feel that we have let God down, either on a personal level or as an assembly. If so, it may be appropriate to include fasting in our prayers of repentance and appeals for revival.

(B) Preparation for a work of God

Most of the references I found, and especially those in the New Testament, connect fasting to preparation for a work of God, either by individuals or by groups of believers. Listed below are a few examples:

Exodus 34:28 – before receiving the Ten Commandments, Moses spent forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. (Note: this was a miraculous work of God. I do not recommend going without water for forty days!)

1 Kings 19:8 – Elijah had a good meal and then went forty days and forty nights with no food before receiving a special word from the Lord.

Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:1,2 – after being baptised, Jesus went into the desert and spent forty days and forty nights fasting and praying. He was then tested by the Devil and prepared for His three years of ministry which

Did you really fast for Me – for Me?

would culminate in His death and resurrection on our behalf.

Acts 9:9 – having been blinded on the road to Damascus, Saul of Tarsus spent three days neither eating nor drinking. It was a preparation for what was in store for him: a complete change of lifestyle and a life devoted to preaching the Gospel.

Acts 13:1-3 – the assembly at Antioch were worshipping the Lord and fasting. We are not told whether this was for a special purpose, or whether it was their normal practice. However, we are told that it was while they were fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke and commissioned Barnabas and Saul for a special work.

Acts 14:23 – Paul and Barnabas were responsible, under God, for planting churches in various places. When they appointed elders, they prayed and fasted with them before committing them to the work ahead.

(C) Other reasons for fasting

1. *Seeking God's will.* See again Acts 13:2-3. It seems that when the early Christians were unclear about the way forward, they prayed and fasted. There is also an Old Testament case in Judges 20:26 where fasting was included in seeking God's mind by the nation of Israel on a certain matter.
2. *Spiritual warfare.* In Matthew 17:14-21, Jesus deals with demon

possession and instructs His disciples, "This kind only goes out with prayer and fasting".

3. *Grieving for the lost.* In 2 Samuel 1:12, David was so grief stricken over the death of Saul and Jonathan that he refused to eat or drink.
4. *Awe of God's presence.* Daniel was so awed with the presence and power of God that he could not eat or drink (Daniel 10:3).

5. Conclusion

It would appear that there are times when prayer and fasting is an appropriate course of action either for the individual believer or for a group of believers. God does not command it of us, but those who have used it seem to find that it draws them closer to Him and helps in discovering His mind and will. There are times when the issues which burden us are so important, we simply find that eating or drinking detracts from the business of getting right with God.



A Look at David for Today

Donald Hill

"Time would fail me to tell of...David also" is the comment in the picture gallery of men and women of faith (Hebrews 11:32). These words imply that there was much could be said about, and learned from, the life of David. Some of these lessons are considered here.

"Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

The Old Testament gives us the historical facts relating to the life story of David. At the same time, David is a type, or picture, of the Lord Jesus as the above quotation would indicate.

David is anointed king (1 Samuel 16)

Saul, the first king of Israel, was man's choice. He failed in his responsibilities before God in relation to Amalek (see ch. 15). Consequently, Samuel was sent by God to Bethlehem to anoint a successor. David, the eighth son of Jesse, was God's choice, for God knew his heart. "The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (v.7). Indeed, David would be later acknowledged by God as "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). As he was anointed, he was surrounded by his brothers.

Lessons for us

1. The first man is rejected by God in favour of the second – so Cain and Abel; Esau and Jacob; Saul and David; but pre-eminently, Adam and Christ (1 Corinthians 15:47).

"A man after
Mine own heart"

2. The eighth son, like the eighth day, would indicate a new start, a new beginning. Nicodemus, the ruler of the Pharisees, was left in no doubt that he needed a new start – namely, new birth.
3. We recognise one another by the outward appearance. God looks on the heart.
4. David's family were the first to become aware that David was God's choice as king. Believers have the privilege today of recognising the claims of the Lord Jesus in a world where He is despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3).

The Valley of Elah (1 Samuel 17)

Israel and their arch enemies, the Philistines, faced each other across the valley. Goliath, the giant from Gath, challenged Israel to single combat. This challenge had gone on for forty days. (In Scripture, forty is God's testing time. There are many other 40s – can you name them?) King Saul, himself a giant, together with all his army, were fearful of the giant. Not so David the shepherd boy! He was sent by his father to the battlefield to seek the welfare of his brothers who were fighting alongside Saul. He heard Goliath's challenge and, in weakness armed only with a sling and five stones, went out to face the enemy. David could

challenge Goliath, “I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (v.45). He faced Goliath in the strength of the living God in whom he trusted. Victorious, David returned with the spoils of victory – the head of Goliath.

Lessons for us

1. The Lord Jesus has met the enemy, the devil, at Calvary. He met him in weakness – “brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). In resurrection, the Lord Jesus was seen to be the victor, conquering death and laying low Satan’s power – “that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (see Hebrews 2:14-16).
2. Believers are the spoils of Christ’s victory. They are delivered from eternal death and Satan’s power.
3. Like David, we can only face the enemy day by day in the strength of the Lord. We need to “put on the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11).

David – God’s anointed king in rejection (1 Samuel 19 - 27)

As Saul, David and the rest of the army returned from the battle in the valley of Elah, the womenfolk acclaimed the victors: “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (18:7). These words made Saul jealous of David who was forced to flee for his life as Saul and his men sought to kill him. For a number of years, David lived in the woods, the mountains, the wilderness and in caves.

During this time, there were those who were loyal to David and who shared in his rejection. Jonathan, Saul’s son, took sides

with David but did not share in his privations (20:42). The cave of Adullam (see ch.22) is one place where David took refuge together with his family and three groups of people – the distressed, the debtors, and the discontented. David became the captain of this motley group, some of whom were later numbered among his mighty men.

Although David had opportunities to kill Saul, he was content to leave God to deal with the matter.

Lessons for us

1. We live in a day when the Lord Jesus is despised by the world at large – “He is despised” (Isaiah 53:3).
2. There were those who identified with David in his rejection. Believers today are similarly given the opportunity to “stand up for Jesus” in the day when He is despised.
3. Those who took sides with David in his rejection were with him later on in his days of glory when he was publicly made king. “If we suffer [with Christ], we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12).

Experiences in Ziklag (1 Samuel 27 - 30)

During his years in exile, David and men spent over a year amongst the Philistines. Achish, a Philistine lord, gave David, his men, and their families the city of Ziklag in which to live. When the Philistines and Israel prepared for yet another battle, David and his men went along with Achish to the battlefield, leaving their families in Ziklag. The other Philistine lords did not trust David, so he and his men were sent from the battlefield. On returning to Ziklag, they found it burning.

Their wives, children and property had been carried off by the raiding band. David’s men were so distraught that they were even prepared to stone him. It is at this point that “David encouraged himself in the LORD his God” (30:6).

Asking guidance from God, David and his men pursued the Amalekite invaders. They came across a young man who was at death’s door. He was an Egyptian, a servant to the invaders. He had been abandoned on the way because he was ill. After being given food and water to revive him, he was able to direct David to the invaders. He begged David not to hand him back to his previous master. The marauders were overtaken by David and his men who, taking them by surprise, recovered everything – wives, children and property, together with much more plunder which the Amalekites had taken from other places. *David recovered all!*

Lessons for us

1. In the dark days of our lives, we can encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).
2. Like David, we need to ask guidance from God for every step along the journey of life. When David and his men met the young Egyptian who had been left to die, this was the first step towards recovering families and possessions.
3. The young Egyptian would have died but for David’s timely intervention. We too were dead in trespasses and sins but the true David, the Lord Jesus, came to our rescue.

4. David recovered all. Prophetically, the Lord Jesus could say, “Then I restored that which I took not away” (Psalm 69:4). Through His work on the cross, the Lord Jesus glorified God in a world where man had dishonoured Him. As a consequence, believers have been restored to the favour of a holy, righteous and sin-hating God.

David is recognised as king (2 Samuel 2 - 5)

Some years previously, Samuel had visited Bethlehem to anoint David as God’s chosen king. Following the death of Saul and Jonathan at the hands of the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, David asked the Lord if he should go up to the cities of Judah. When the answer was yes, David then asked to which city. It was in Hebron, therefore, that Judah recognised David as their king. Some years later, the northern tribes, Israel, came to David in Hebron where they, too, recognised him as king.

David reigned in Hebron for seven years and moved to Jerusalem, where he reigned over Israel and Judah for thirty three years. During his long reign, David subdued all of Israel’s enemies, the surrounding nations becoming tributary to him.

Lessons for us

1. David was specific in his requests to God. Not only did he ask if he ought to travel to Judah, but he also asked God to name the city. Are we specific when we pray?
2. Judah was quick to recognise David as king. Israel only followed some seven years later. How ready are we

to own that the true David, the Lord Jesus, has claim over our lives? Saul of Tarsus owned the authority of the Lord Jesus when he heard His voice on the Damascus road. There was no delay on his part.

3. In a coming day, the Lord Jesus, like David, will subdue every enemy. "For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25; see also Psalm 2:8,9). Then as the true Solomon, the Lord Jesus will establish His kingdom and reign in righteousness and peace. "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee (Israel) is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

Kindness shown to Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9)

The enduring friendship between David and Jonathan remained in the heart of David long after Jonathan's death. David wanted to show the kindness of God to the house of Saul for Jonathan's sake. Mephibosheth, lame from babyhood, became the object of that kindness. Brought from Lodebar (meaning 'no pasture'), Mephibosheth was a welcome guest at the table of King David where he feasted daily on royal dainties.

Lessons for us

1. David showed the kindness of God to Mephibosheth even though he was grandson to Saul who had hated David. "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but

according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:4,5).

2. Mephibosheth acknowledged before David his unworthiness of the favours which were to be bestowed on him. We, too, are unworthy of all the blessings which God has bestowed on us in Christ. It is all of grace.
3. Mephibosheth's blessings were four-fold:
 - (a) his fears were dismissed by David's words, "Fear not". The love of God expressed through the Lord Jesus and His sacrificial work at Calvary remove the fears of every believer.
 - (b) "I will surely show you kindness". This was Mephibosheth's assurance from David. God has similarly given us every assurance in His word.
 - (c) "I will restore to you all the land." All that was lost to mankind as a result of the entrance of sin has been restored to the believer – and more! Believers are brought into the family of God (see 1 John 3:1).
 - (d) "You will eat bread at my table continually." Believers can feed on and delight in all the spiritual blessings which are available through Christ. But do we?
4. Mephibosheth's lameness would not be evident as he sat at table. The sins of every believer have been removed from the sight of a holy God. To such He would say, "Your sins...I will remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). "He brought me to the banqueting

house, and His banner over me was love" (Song of Solomon 2:4).

The recovery of the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6)

The Philistines had earlier captured the ark (1 Samuel 4). News of this, and of the death of his two sons, caused Eli, the priest, to fall backwards and die. The ark was taken by the Philistines into the house of their god, Dagon. The next day, Dagon was broken in pieces. Moreover, God plagued them. The Philistines, therefore, were glad to be rid of the ark (1 Samuel 5). It arrived in Kirjathjearim where it remained for twenty years.

It was David's desire to recover the ark. He set out to bring it back. It was carried on a new cart drawn by oxen, contrary to God's instructions. When Uzzah placed his hand on the ark to steady it, he died instantly. For the next three months, the ark remained in the house of Obed-edom, during which time God blessed him and his family.

David once again returned to bring back the ark. This time it was carried on its journey to Zion where it was placed in the Tabernacle which had been prepared for it. Burnt offerings and peace offerings were offered according to the Levitical law.

Lessons for us

1. Israel lost the ark because of their sin of idolatry. The priesthood under Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phineas, had failed. The Lord Jesus, the true ark, is central to our Christian faith. Both individually and collectively, we should give Him His rightful place.

2. The heathen god, Dagon, could not stand in the presence of the ark. The Lord Jesus has no rivals. He stands unique; He stands alone.
3. David longed to have the ark in its rightful place (please read Psalm 132). Is it our desire to give the Lord Jesus His rightful place? He has promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).
4. There was a divine order for the moving of the ark. Man's new cart, drawn by oxen, ended in disaster. God set out a divine order for Israel in Old Testament times. He has set out His divine order for His Church in New Testament times. Am I in tune with God's order?
5. Blessing came to the house of Obed-edom when the ark was in his home. There are blessings for all who enshrine the true ark, the Lord Jesus, and give Him His rightful place.
6. David learned from his mistakes. When he recovered the ark the second time, it was carried to its destination according to divine ordering. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). Are we always ready to obey the Lord Jesus? He is central to all the thoughts, ways, and purposes of God. "That in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

To obey is better
than sacrifice

Remember

David Coleman

“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him” (Genesis 40:23) are amongst the most haunting words of Scripture. Yet with so much greater blessing, we are still prone to forget the Blesser. Enjoy this profitable meditation.

In the A.V., the word ‘remember’ is found on 137 occasions, ‘remembrance’ on 48, and ‘memorial’ some 31 times. One or the other word occurs in no fewer than 29 Old Testament and 20 New Testament books. With so many references, it is clear that it is a subject which requires our attention. It will be helpful to look at three special occasions.

The Remembrance Day

“And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever” (Exodus 12:14).

The first thing to note is that this remembrance day was to be ‘a memorial...for ever’. It was to be a day which was to act as a continual reminder. Moses had earlier asked God, “Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers has sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them?” God had replied, “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Exodus 3:13-15).

‘A memorial...
for ever’

The LORD God (Yahweh) was God’s covenant name. It was to be a ‘memorial name’, a reminder of God’s liberation of His people. The Remembrance Day was to serve as a similar reminder, a memorial to God’s wonderful salvation. That day marked God’s judgment on Egypt and His salvation of Israel. This Remembrance Day, the Passover, was to be kept every year as a remembrance of Israel’s salvation. It is, at the same time, an important type, or picture, of Christ’s work at Calvary (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Israel’s liberation from Egypt was not a reward for their righteousness, but the mercy gift of the God who had set them aside for Himself. “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:2).

“And Moses said unto the people, “Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage” ” (Exodus 13:3).

The Remembrance Day. What a day it was to be! It was a day when the family came together to remember, and to give thanks for, past blessings. The day when God’s deliverance of His chosen people from the judgment of Egypt, the death of the firstborn both of man and of beast, was to be remembered. Not just the death

of the firstborn would be remembered but also everything which led up to it.

It was the day in which they were to remember their deliverance from slavery through the love of God who had chosen them as a treasure for Himself. “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (Exodus 19:5).

They were to remember the deliverance which centred on obedience and unquestioning trust in the power and authority of God. “Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments” (Exodus 6:6).

They were to focus on the death of the lamb, the blood on the doorposts and the lintel, and the reality of their new lives preserved through their obedience. “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). The lamb, without spot or blemish, is a type of the Paschal Lamb who, in a future day would become the only acceptable sacrifice for sin. The Lord Jesus, God’s Lamb, “once for all... offered one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Hebrews 10:10,12).

In their remembrance, the Israelites were to reflect on their lives. Once enslaved by Pharaoh in Egypt (picture of Satan and his power in the world), they were now ransomed from death and consecrated to the service of God – not only themselves,

but also their children. Until they had presented their firstborn child to God, and acknowledged His title to the child, the parents were not to consider themselves as having any right to their firstborn. “For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself” (Numbers 8:17).

This Remembrance Day, this day of deliverance, this day of resurrection as it were, was to be observed every year throughout their generations forever. It was to be a continual remembrance. Is there a Remembrance Day in your life? Do you keep in mind all that God has done for you? Do you have in remembrance the greatness of your salvation? “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). “And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever” (Exodus 12:14).

The Remembrance Book

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16).

Here in Malachi, it is not a Remembrance Day but a Remembrance Book – ‘the world’s most wonderful diary’. In the

‘The world’s most
wonderful diary’

midst of Israel's spiritual decline, there was a remnant of people drawn together by obedience to the Lord. God not only listened to their worship but also wrote their names in His 'Book of Remembrance'. God always keeps before Himself the names of those who fellowship with Him.

They spoke together in the language of those who feared the Lord. What would they have spoken about?

- His holiness – “the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness” (Isaiah 5:16).
- His love – “I have loved you,” says the LORD” (Malachi 1:2).
- His goodness – “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (Nahum 1:7).
- His blessings – “The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it” (Proverbs 10:22).
- His promises – “Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise” (1 Kings 8:56).

As they had fellowship together, their spirits would have been lifted as they remembered their God. As they talked together, their words were good to hear and the heart of the Lord was touched. To record what they were saying, and as a memorial to their faithfulness, a Book of Remembrance was “written before him”. As it is being written, the God of love makes another promise: “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will

spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” (Malachi 3:17). “They shall be Mine” – what a promise! “The Lord's jewels – what a status! “Written before Him” – what a remembrance!

Are the things we say worthy of God's remembrance? In the same way that evil talk can corrupt good minds, so good communications can strengthen them. If ever there was a day for good communications amongst saints of God, surely it is today!

The Remembrance Feast

“The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The Remembrance Day, as we have seen, looked back to an event which changed a nation; the Remembrance Book was written in recognition of individual faithfulness. In the Remembrance Feast, both Day and Book are, as it were, brought together.

The Day is not now an event which changed a nation but one which changed the world! It is the Day on which God's ‘only begotten Son’ gave His life ‘a ransom for many’. On that Day, God's eternal plan for our salvation came to fruition: “He became the author of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9). That Day

remembers the One “who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). That Day is ours to remember ‘until He come’, for in it God has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

The Book is not now the faithfulness of godly men but the faithfulness of God's Man, “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). He is the One of whom it is written “Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5). He is the faithful One of whom God said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5). He is the One “who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil” (2 Thessalonians 3:3), and the One who makes those who are His “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

It is not enough to remember Christ by just thinking about what He did on the cross; we must remember Him by being involved in His Remembrance Feast. As He gathered His own around Him in the upper room, having considered the Remembrance Day, the Lord Jesus pointed them, and us, to a greater memorial – Himself. “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19,20).

At that time, the disciples did not fully understand what He meant, but it was not long after that the full reality hit them.

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46).

The Remembrance Feast is the Father's memorial to the Son. There the hearts of the saints of God are joined together to acknowledge before Him the wonder of His Son. They gather together to remember Him in His humility, in His steadfastness, in His obedience, and in His great love. To the early Christians, it brought “gladness and singleness of heart”. We may see the gladness amongst the Lord's people, but where is the singleness of heart in the church today?

Part of the parental responsibility regarding the Remembrance Day was to teach the children the significance of the Day and the reasons behind the remembrance. They were to remember that all their blessings came only through the shedding and sprinkling of blood. In like manner, saints of God who gladly partake of the remembrance of the Lord have the responsibility to instruct others, especially their children, in the Remembrance Feast.

In our Christian lives today, do we do and say those things which lead to a book of remembrance being written before God about us? Do we always have Him in remembrance? As long as we wait for our Lord's return, we must continue feeding upon Him, rejoicing in Him always, with thankful mention of the great things He has done for us.

This do in
remembrance of Me

The Divine Seal

John Weston

“Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:28). With these words, the Lord Jesus clearly establishes the eternal security of all who trust in Him. That security is foreshadowed in the Old Testament in the signets on the shoulder and breastplate of the High Priest, and the seal on the arm and heart of the Bridegroom. Enjoy this meditation on the latter.

Please read Song of Solomon 8:5-7; Numbers 24:5-7.

Introduction

Reading through the Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs as it is known, we cannot fail to appreciate this song as a treasury of love, revealing a precious intimacy between the Bridegroom and the Bride i.e. Christ and His Church.

In addition to our text, there are many other lovely examples in this book of this closeness of relationship. We shall look briefly at four of these.

The vineyards of En Gedi (1:14)

En Gedi is situated down alongside the Dead Sea. In earlier times, it was the centre of a perfume industry. Here, with the odour of death coming up from the waters of the Dead Sea, the bride is conscious of the sweet fragrance emanating from the vineyards. She likens this to her appreciation of her Lover.

We, too, in this world of death which is under the judgment of God, can now experience the fragrance of our Saviour.

The banqueting house (2:4)

The words might also be translated ‘the house of wine’. Martin Luther took this to mean ‘a wine cellar’. Perhaps he felt that, even when all is dark and possibly painful, the bride is not fearful, knowing

that His love is like a banner over her, and all will be well.

However dark our pathway becomes, we know that His banner over us is still love!

A garden inclosed (4:12)

The Bridegroom likens His bride to an enclosed garden – not a public park, but rather a private enclosure reserved for His exclusive enjoyment.

Our lives, too, should be for Him. Remember that even a rose in a vegetable garden, out of place as it is, is a weed. Legitimacy of action is not necessarily a valid excuse for inappropriate behaviour.

My Beloved’s (6:3)

“I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine.” Translating this into Hebrew, one can form an acronym spelling the word ‘ELUL’. Elul is the sixth month in the Jewish calendar. It is looked upon as the month of repentance and one in preparation for the blowing of the trumpet, the shofar, ushering in the seventh month – a month in which the

His banner over
us is still love!

Jewish people enter, as it were, into the palace of the King. This entering in is only made possible by the special relationship which exists between the Bridegroom and the bride. “I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine.” The Feast of Tabernacles is then celebrated with rejoicing.

We, too, look forward with eager expectation to the trumpet call (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and our entry into the Father’s house and the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

This relationship, this intimacy, has only become a reality through the great work of redemption. Never let us forget that it is a blood-bought relationship. So to our text and our theme: “Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm” (8:6). It will be helpful to consider this under three headings.

The communion of His love

It is important, first, to notice the desired placement of these two seals: the heart, the arm. This is an interesting variation with the placements of the ‘engraving as of a signet’ (Exodus 28:21) worn by the High Priest. (N.B. seal and signet are both translations of the same Hebrew word.) In the case of the High Priest, the emphasis was on the heart and the shoulder, speaking of the place of love and of strength. This is a beautiful picture of the way in which our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus, bears each of His own on His heart and carries them on His shoulders into the very presence of God.

However, in the Song of Songs, the bride seeks first that precious place of

love, close to the heart of her Beloved. Then, for the second seal, or signet, she desires a place on His arm.

On the Passover table in every Jewish home there is a shank bone of a lamb. This is a reminder that their deliverance from Egypt was due to the strong arm of the Lord. “Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people” (Psalm 77:15). “His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory” (Psalm 98:1). “The God of this people of Israel...with an high arm brought He them out” (Acts 13:17). The bride invokes that same strength as she pleads, “Set me as a seal upon Thine arm”.

The long sleeves worn by men in biblical times were all very well, but not when action was called for! Then the sleeves were tied in a knot behind the neck. The result was the baring of the arm. “The LORD hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations” (Isaiah 52:10). A further thought concerning those divine arms is brought out in Deuteronomy 33:27: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” Here we sense that wonderful feeling of the peace of God. “Perfect peace”, declares Isaiah (26:3 – in Hebrew, ‘shalom, shalom’; double peace, emphatic peace).

Peace with God, for Christ in heaven
Object is of faith to me;
Peace with God! The Lord is risen!
Righteousness now counts me free.

We are engulfed in a spiritual battle, one in which we can claim to be more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Romans 8:37). But victory in this war-

fare can only be achieved through the power and might of our Lord Jesus. We are weak, but He is strong!

Safe in the arms of Jesus

Fanny Crosby, the blind American poetess, composer of 8,000 hymns, was present at a frightening scene in New York. In the hubbub which ensued, a child cried out in terror. The mother was heard to say, "Hush, my little one. You are safe now in mother's arms." Later Fanny Crosby, with this episode in mind, wrote the beautiful hymn, "Safe in the arms of Jesus...there by His love o'ershaded, sweetly my soul shall rest". Comfort! Strength! Peace! All these are to be found in the arms of the Beloved. As a seal on His heart, and as a seal on His arm, we can abide safely in the communion of His love.

The commitment of His love

It is as we draw near to the heart of Jesus that we learn something of the beating of that heart and the commitment of that love. Turning our eyes to the hill top outside Jerusalem, we see that total commitment. There our blessed Redeemer gave His all that we might not only be cleansed from all sin, but that we might become His Body and His Bride.

This amazing love is not only beyond comparison, it is beyond conflict. Thus Paul writes, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or

famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:35,37). Battles may be lost, but the war is won!

His love is also beyond contradiction. A Christian lady, on her death bed, was visited by a sceptical friend who suggested to her that, despite her having been a Christian for many years, even now due to some sinful act or thought, she could slip through her Lord's fingers. "Impossible," came the forthright reply. "You see, I am one of His fingers." "For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30).

What a blessed assurance the believer has! "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Yes, indeed! "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"! A seal on His heart, how infinitely precious this is! We are so often conscious of weaknesses and failure in our daily walk, yet through His love, all will be well. "[We] know whom [we] have believed, and [are] persuaded that He is able to keep that which [we] have committed unto Him against that day" (1 Timothy 1:12).

The comprehensiveness of His love

His love is unquenchable: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (v.7).

His love is unstoppable. It will go beyond time into eternity.

His love is unmatched: "I sought Him whom my soul loveth" (3:1).

Love that no tongue can teach,
Love that no thought can reach,
No love like His!
God is its blessed source,
Nothing can stay its force,
Matchless it is.

The first mention of love in the Bible foreshadows the love of the Father for His Son (Genesis 22:2). The second mention foreshadows the love of the Bridegroom for His bride (Genesis 24:67).

Loved with love which knows no measure
Save the Father's love to Thee,
Blessed Lord, our hearts would treasure
All the Father's thoughts of Thee.

This climate of love and its comprehensiveness brings strength, joy, comfort and peace to the bride. We see her coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved (v.5). So too, our Beloved, the Lord Jesus, will Himself bring us out of our wilderness into His glorious light. Oh! The joy of experiencing His strength as we lean upon those everlasting arms!

In closing

We must turn briefly to Numbers 24 for our closing analogy: "Israel...shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters" (vv.5,7).

Immersed in this river of His love, we must not be selfish and inward looking. We are experiencing a love which surpasses knowledge. Let us shed abroad something of this love. Let us, as it were, dip our buckets into the river and shower those around us. We live in a world which experiences evil and depravity. It needs the message of God's love and forgiveness as never before.

Such an activity of communication and sharing can not be achieved in our own strength. We need the strength of the Lord's right arm and the motivation of His love for a lost world.

"Buckets of water." The biblical inspiration for the ceremonies associated with the Feast of Tabernacles may well have been the words of Isaiah 12:3, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (sukkot) is known as Hoshana Rabba – the great hosanna. On this day, water drawn from the pool of Siloam would be carried seven times round the altar in Jerusalem. Using it as a water libation, prayer was made for the badly needed rain.

It was on this day in the year, in a dry and thirsty Jerusalem, that the Messiah Jesus, standing in the midst of all this activity and against such a background, called out, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink" (John 7:37). To such, He promised 'living water'. The term 'living water' is one of the metaphors used by the rabbis of old for the torah (the books of Moses). The liturgical prayers surrounding hoshana rabba revolve around the coming of the Messiah and world redemption (cf. Isaiah 44:3; 55:1).

Nearly 2,000 years have now passed by. There is still a thirsty world with its urgent need for living water. It is in the place of love and strength that the bride is able to reach out and respond to these needs. May this response be ours so long as the Lord Jesus, our Bridegroom, leaves us here for Him.

His Love Will Not Fail

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth...and of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.”

John 1:14,16

All fullness resides in Jesus our Head,
And ever abides to answer all need:
The Father's good pleasure has laid up a store,
A plentiful treasure to give to the poor.

Whatever distress awaits us below,
Such plentiful grace the Lord will bestow
As still shall support us and silence our fear,
And nothing can hurt us while Jesus is near.

When sorrows assail us, or terrors draw nigh,
His love will not fail us, He'll guide with His eye;
And when we are fainting, and ready to fail,
He'll give what is wanting, and make us prevail.

We trust His protection; we'll lean on His might;
We're sure His direction will guide us aright;
We know who surrounds us, almighty to save,
And no one confounds us the Saviour who have.

W.W.Fereday

“I am persuaded that...[nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:38,39