

Scripture Truth

Far and Near
The Gospel in Job
The Great Robbery
Lessons from James
Power for Christian Living
A Look at Nehemiah for Today

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Lessons From James

Part I – Chapter I

David Pulman

Christians rejoice in the fact that their eternal salvation does not depend on their works but on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. The epistle of James is an important reminder that saving faith needs to be evidenced by the works that follow it. We have been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). This article is based on a talk broadcast on London’s Premier Radio.

Introduction



The epistle of James has been surrounded in controversy. At one time, some theologians thought it had little value. This view was expressed by Martin Luther, who described the letter as an epistle of straw. The teaching in this epistle is, however, very practical and important. It is based soundly on Scripture as found in the Old Testament and which would later be found in the writings of the New Testament.

James, the writer of this letter, was not the brother of John the apostle – he had already been martyred (Acts 12:2). Biblical commentators vary in their conclusions as to whether the writer was the son of Joseph and Mary and, therefore, in purely human terms, the half brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some believe the writer is James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). James, in his letter, does not describe himself as an apostle nor as one related to the Lord Jesus. He prefers to call himself “a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (v.1). In this way, James takes away any thought of self, preferring to give both God and the Lord Jesus Christ the authority for what he is writing. So Paul writes, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

The letter may have been written early in the Church period because of lack of reference to Gentiles, probably before A.D.50. It is important in terms of dealing with practical issues in relation to the Christian faith. It highlights the necessity for Christians to have a God-honouring lifestyle in a world that is contrary to God. Practical issues dealt with include times of testing, the avoidance of prejudice, the balance between faith and works, the need to control what we say, worldliness, the value of patience, and the power of prayer. These things were proving to be issues in the early years of the church of God. If important then, how much more today when we experience the same difficulties! It would appear that each successive generation of believers needs to learn the same lessons from Scripture in order to live acceptable lives for God.

Opening greeting



James opens with the statement that he is a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He claims no place of authority. There is nothing lower than a servant, or slave (as the Greek word implies). Even so, the writer is probably the same James who seems to be of some prominence in the early church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18).

James writes to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad. This is an unusual expression but probably means that James wrote to those early Christians saved out of the Jewish system of worshipping God. There would be a remnant from each of the twelve tribes preserved by God in His grace (see 2 Chronicles 10:17; 11:3). Many of those saved would have been visitors to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (see Acts 2). They would eventually return to their own homes scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

How do we respond to difficulties?



James was obviously concerned that their Christian behaviour and their response to the difficulties facing them should be according to their new faith and not according the former ways of their old nature prior to salvation. The Jew was no different to the Gentile in that all were sinners in need of salvation.

The expression, ‘my brethren’, was not nationalistic but Christian as James tackles this difficulty of persecution. Throughout history, then and now, the Jews had been used to persecution (consider the book of Esther as an example). However, they were also used to resisting, if feasible, so that they might overcome their enemies. Sometimes, however, they took the alternative view that persecution was a punishment from a God known for His severity; consider Mount Sinai burning with the fire of judgment.

James teaches a new way to respond to persecution and difficulty: “Count it all joy” (v.2). This is so different, so alien to human nature. What? No fighting back! When our faith is tested, God wants to produce in us the characteristics of patience, or endurance, a passive response to the situation in which we find ourselves. However, this is not to produce depression or a defeatist outlook, but rather a stronger reliance on our faith which is centred in a God who only desires the best for His people. Both Peter (1 Peter 1:7) and Paul (Romans 5:3-5) emphasise this same lesson.

So in v.4, James states, “Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”. A right response to difficulties will result in spiritual growth. A maturing effect will move the Christian from depending on the natural things of this world to realising that all our needs are supplied at the appropriate time from the hand of a bountiful and loving God.

*Count
it all
joy*

The need for wisdom



James then tackles the need for wisdom in the difficult circumstances of life. He points the troubled believer to God, saying, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (v.5). However, James emphasises that we need faith and the Christian must “ask in faith” (v.6). Although James is often accused of an over-emphasis on works, he also recognises the importance of faith. James challenges the believer to a real, living faith. When praying, we are to “ask in faith”. Is our faith weak or strong?

Vv.6-8 pose a very real challenge: don’t doubt when praying because that is not faith in action. A person who doubts is like a wave of the sea moved by the power of the wind. Such a person is in two minds. A double minded Christian is basically unstable, insecure in his God-given faith. An unstable person is immature and not growing spiritually. God cannot give to such a believer!

V.9 shows us that the believer who has been brought low because of trial can look forward to the day of glory when he will receive a “crown of life” (v.12). That crown is given because of continued faithfulness during times of trial. This contrasts with those who experience trouble but whose resources are in the riches of this world. In ch.2, James will remind the Christians to whom he is writing that the rich people were their persecutors. And the rich man with his riches will fade away, just as grass withers under the intense heat of the sun during drought. The rich person without Christ has no future day of glory.

At the end of v.12, James reminds us that it is not only faith but also love that is connected to the crown of life. This crown is promised to the faithful and “to those who love [the Lord]”. The Christian’s faith is centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One whom we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Does God tempt Christians?



In vv.13-16, James wants to remove the impression of a vindictive God. When temptation comes to a Christian, it is our response to the situation which either enables us to avoid the temptation or to succumb and thereby to fall into sin. We are not to blame God for our own failures but to act responsibly in faith and dependence upon a faithful God. “Do not be deceived”, says James, “Satan is the one who seeks to deceive, not God.”

*Satan is
the one
who
seeks to
deceive,
not God*

In today's culture, the tendency is to blame someone else when failure occurs. In business, there is a drive to empower people, to give them responsibility and, by implication, to make them responsible for their actions. People like being empowered to take control, but are not so keen when made to take responsibility for actions which have failed! In every sphere of life, privileges are willingly grasped but their associated responsibilities are shunned. All this, of course, started in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed Eve who, in turn, blamed the serpent; finger pointing has continued ever since! Christians are expected to be responsible for their actions in all areas of life.

Christians are not sinless (1 John 1:8). We do fail and fall into sin, but there is provision for the Christian to seek forgiveness through the Lord Jesus as our Advocate (1 John 2:1). In that situation, we are expected to learn and to be strengthened in our faith so that, in a future situation, we will not repeat our failure but turn away from temptation.

What then is God's intention?



Vv.17,18 show us that God's intention is to bring us into blessing with good and perfect gifts from the Father of lights. They stand in marked contrast to vv.13-16. There is no darkness with the Father of lights. Darkness would speak of sin and Satan. It is the Father's intention to bless and to enable the believer to live a positive life for the glory of God. To emphasise the constant character of the Father of lights, James adds, "With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning". Everything is true and open with the Father. There is no deceit, no lie, not even a 'white lie'.

The Father acts consistently with His own divine, eternal standards. Because of this, it is expected that Christians, as His children, should act in the same way. Why should Christians act differently from non-Christians? The reason is that we have a new nature which came to us at new birth when we accepted the Lord Jesus as Saviour. As a result, we have the Holy Spirit of God indwelling us. We are not to grieve Him by wrong actions.

We have been born anew by God's will through the "word of truth" (v.18) to be a demonstration in this world of what God expects to see more fully in the glory of the coming kingdom.

What then is Christian behaviour?



James now brings out some practical teaching to highlight those features that should mark the believer. James is noted for his deep concern that faith, by its appropriate works, should be blazed abroad for all the world to see. If faith is not seen in such a practical way, then James makes the solemn pronouncement that such faith is dead (2:17).

The first matter that is drawn to our attention is to be careful as to what we say. We have some very wise teaching in the book of Proverbs: “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (10:19). James teaches that everyone should be slow to speak. In other words, do not speak in the heat of the moment; weigh your response and, if the opportunity is available, pray about a matter before replying. We should always be quick to listen to a matter, but we should beware of making hasty decisions. A quick response is how unfounded rumours spread and so cause discord among Christians.

Proverbs continues, “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver” (10:20). At all times, a righteous person would seek to do and say what is right and what God would honour. The expression, ‘choice silver’, would indicate a refining of thought, so being absolutely sure that what is said is right and true. James has a lot more to say about the tongue (3:1-12). He points out how such a small member in the human body can be so destructive, unless controlled by the wisdom which comes from above.

In parallel with being careful how we speak is the need to have control over anger. Very often, the same lack of control that allows the tongue to speak unwisely also allows the emotions to boil over into a display of anger or violence. So James writes, “For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (v.20). Again in Proverbs, we have the statement, “A quick tempered man acts foolishly” (14:17), but in contrast, “He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit” (17:27). In this way, James draws upon the wisdom of God’s word as found in the Old Testament. James’ teaching is consistent with what has always been taught. The people to whom James wrote would be well aware of the wise sayings found in Proverbs.

James moves on in v.21 to address the problems of moral defilement and excessive wickedness. Believers need to put away such conduct. People who professed a strict religious code of conduct had sunk to the same level of behaviour as the heathen among whom they lived. James reminds them that there must be a change of lifestyle, as such behaviour is abhorrent to God. The exhortation is to “receive with meekness”, that is, to humble themselves and put into practice the truth of the Gospel, so living out changed lives.

When James writes about “the implanted word which is able to save your souls”, he refers to the practical, liberating effect that the word of God should have on each

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God*

believer. The Scriptures are living and need to take root in our souls, so developing character which gives testimony to the life changing power of the Gospel.

To emphasise the fact that the word of God should have some practical effect in our lives, James goes on to say, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (v.22). The only way by which a Christian can be seen to have accepted God’s word is by the behaviour that results. It is not enough to listen to the Scriptures being taught or to read the Bible. There must be an outflow of consistent action corresponding to the teaching received. If there is no practical result, James states that you are deceived, deceiving yourself and seeking to deceive others. This particular theme is also further developed in the following chapters.

James likens hearing but not doing the word of God to a person who looks in a mirror and, as soon as he turns away, forgets what he looks like. By contrast, we are told what should happen, “He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (v.25). ‘The perfect law of liberty’ is a description of the word of God. It is in God’s word that true liberty can be found – freedom from the shackles of Satan and the world system which he has established that is contrary to God.

In v.26, James goes back to the tongue and those who make an outward show of being religious. Lack of control of the tongue was a clear indication that such a person’s religion was useless, an empty façade with nothing that is true to support the profession. This is like the Pharisees who made a great show before the people, despising others. The Lord Jesus likened them to white-washed tombs, the houses of the dead (Matthew 23:27)!

By contrast, James goes on to write about “pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father” (v.27). Such had the Father’s approval as it was a life that honoured Him. Its characteristics were demonstrated in two particular ways. Firstly, to visit and care for orphans and widows in their trouble. Here was a very practical work that showed Christian love towards those who would be unable to respond in return. Giving and expecting nothing in return is the basis of true love. The second demonstration of religion was of a moral nature – to keep oneself undefiled from the things that characterise the world.

Remember Lot who was dragged out of Sodom before God rained down the fire of judgment on that and surrounding cities (Genesis 19:16). Today, some of those features of Sodom are being carried into the heart of the Christian profession. Jude also writes of those who seek to turn the word of God upside down for their own devices: “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.4).

The Great Robbery

Donald Hill

Satan is described in Scripture in a variety of ways: a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8); an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); a murderer and the father of lies (John 8:44); the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). This article looks at his damaging work as the robber of our spiritual enjoyment. Many of us are careful to guard our homes against material robbery. How careful are we to guard against Satan's cunning spiritual robbery?

Some years ago, the nation awakened to news of "The Great Train Robbery". Planned with meticulous care, the robbers escaped with millions of pounds. Robbery is not something new but has been in evidence down the long centuries of time. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Lord Jesus referred to the traveller who "fell among thieves" (Luke 10:25-37). How many robberies will continue to take place today? Satan is behind them all, as he is behind all the evil in our world.

Not only are people across the world robbed of their earthly possessions, but Satan, the enemy of our souls, robs believers of spiritual food and refreshment. It is this far more serious matter of the robbery of our spiritual blessings in Christ that concerns us in this article. In the Old Testament, we can find several situations which provide valuable lessons for us today on this important theme.

Abraham and Isaac



Please read Genesis 21:25-32; 26:17-23.

Water was essential to Abraham and his family together with his servants. Large flocks and herds would consume gallons of water. The livelihood of Abraham depended on his animals. Furthermore, water was necessary for the growing of crops. Today, we have water piped to our homes and farms, but in biblical times, wells had to be dug. This meant much physical activity.

In the above scriptures, we have the thought firstly of contention for the wells, and then the problem of the wells being filled with earth. Abraham had to reprove Abimelech, the Philistine king, because his servants had commandeered one of Abraham's wells: "And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away" (Genesis 21:25). As believers, we need to "contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude v.3). We are in a scene of conflict in which Satan would seek to rob us of the wealth of our Christian inheritance.

"And Isaac digged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham" (Genesis 26:18). Today, we are faced with "the things of earth" with which Satan

would seek to engage our hearts and lives, so hindering our spiritual progress. Just as Isaac required energy to remove the earth from the wells filled by the Philistines, so we, too, need spiritual energy to be overcomers in a world where the things of earth would attract our hearts. So the apostle John could write to the young men, i.e. to those characterised by spiritual energy, “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14).

The words of the children’s chorus have a message for each one of us:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.



Gideon

Please read Judges 6 and 7.

The Midianites were just one of several enemies of Israel recorded for us in the book of Judges. “The Midianites...encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth... and left no sustenance for Israel...And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD” (6:3,4,6). Food supplies for the Israelites were in jeopardy. Moreover, the Israelites were hiding in dens, caves and strongholds (v.2). What a sad state for the people of God to be in! In such a situation, there could be no testimony to the power of Israel’s God. There was little response toward God from Israel. Physically and spiritually they were starving!

However, there was one man who had food – Gideon. He threshed wheat by a winepress (in Scripture, wine is a picture of joy (Psalm 104:15)) when he was approached by an angel of the LORD (6:11). Gideon learned that he was the man chosen by God to deliver Israel from the Midianite hosts. His army had to be reduced from 32,000 to just 300. In this way, Gideon would learn that the battle was not so much his but Israel’s God who, through Gideon and the 300, would gain the victory. Today, Satan would seek to keep us spiritually impoverished. He would try to keep us from the word of God and prayer, and from assembling together with fellow believers. He is too strong for us if we rely only on our human strength but, equipped with the armour of God, we can be overcomers. So Paul writes, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-18).



David

Please read 1 Samuel 23.

“Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshing floors” (v.1). Today, combine

harvesters separate stalks, husks and chaff from the golden grains of wheat at harvest time. But in the times recorded in 1 Samuel, sheaves of corn would be brought home to be threshed. The Philistines robbed the threshing floors and the people were impoverished. In Scripture, the planting of seed and the growth of harvest is a picture of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (see John 12:23,24). Let us beware in our day that the enemy does not rob us of all that the Lord Jesus has brought to us by His death and His glorious rising again!

On this occasion, David was on hand to deal yet again with the Philistines. As a young lad, David had already defeated the Philistine representative, Goliath (see ch.17). This was now the time of David's rejection when King Saul sought to kill him. But there were 600 men devoted to David and ready to share his rejection. Twice David enquired of God whether he should fight the Philistines and the answer was, "I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand" (v.4). The battle was won and the spoils of victory brought back.

Today, we identify with a rejected Lord but, in His name and in His strength, we can be overcomers. Let us, like David, "enquire of the Lord" and move at His bidding.

Shammah



Please read 2 Samuel 23:11,12.

"The Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentils...But [Shammah] stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory."

Shammah was amongst David's mighty men – men who in their day did exploits. On this occasion, the Philistines are yet again on the scene. This time they endeavour to rob the Israelites of a harvest of lentils. This may not seem a great loss, but it was God's provision from His land for His people. So when the other Israelites fled, Shammah stood his ground. He defended the patch, slew the Philistines and "the LORD wrought a great victory". God has seen to it that Shammah's exploits are left on record in His word. Was Shammah one of those who "waxed valiant in fight" (Hebrews 11:34)?

Today, we need to stand in, and maintain, the Christian truths which God has committed to us. We are again reminded of Paul's words: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13).

Satan's robbery today



Satan, our great spiritual enemy, is extremely busy today. His time is short; in due course, he will be bound for 1,000 years being finally cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (see Revelation 20). In recent times, he has gained an advantage by his persistent efforts to weaken Christian fellowship and testimony. As a result, sadly all are the poorer.

Specific areas that are under attack and in which Satan would seek to rob God's people of His blessings for them include:

1. The Scriptures of truth - the Bible as the inspired Word of God.
2. The Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Our Christian heritage as a nation. The truth of God was brought to our shores centuries ago. The work began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and, from that day onwards, Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles have been brought into the light of God's salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In turn, our nation heard, received and believed the message. Men and women hazarded and gave their lives so that we might have an open Bible in our own language.

Sadly, it has to be confessed that Satan has had some success in each of these areas. To use the words of James, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10). So, today, the Lord is looking for those who will stand and defend what He has committed to them:

- (a) The likes of Isaac who exercise spiritual energy in order to be rid of the things of earth which hinder spiritual progress and would rob us of our joy in Christ. The early Church was marked by great joy! "They... did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). The apostles "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41). When Philip preached in Samaria, "there was great joy in that city"; when he preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, the Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:8,39). The Philippian gaoler, having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (Acts 16:34).
- (b) Those who, like Gideon, in an evil day, gather up food (for us today, spiritual food – the word of God), for themselves. In turn, they can then be a help and encouragement to others. So Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos "and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26).
- (c) Those who, like David, are aware of the enemy's tactics, who seek the Lord's mind and take action at His bidding, so gaining the victory and returning with the spoils.
- (d) Those who, like Shammah, take a stand for God when others avoid the conflict, seeking an easier path. Through Shammah's stand, food was preserved. We need to take note of the Lord's warning to Philadelphia, "Behold, I come quickly: hold fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11).

A Look At Nehemiah For Today

Part 4 The repairers (3:1-32)

Ted Murray

“The LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him” (Malachi 3:16). In the same way, God has carefully recorded the names of the faithful few who, under Nehemiah, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. How many of the things that you do does He note as being done for Himself?

Introduction

Nehemiah had seen the destruction of Jerusalem at firsthand, but had encouraged its inhabitants by his personal testimony of the good hand of God upon him. Ignoring the mockery of the opposition, Nehemiah had obtained agreement that the city walls should be rebuilt. Now he puts the citizens of Jerusalem to the test. Word goes out for volunteers to repair the city wall!



The people who worked

Nehemiah did not ask for a c.v. from any of these volunteers, nor did he appear to want to interview them to assess their suitability for the work. If he had, many of those listed in this chapter would have been deemed quite unsuitable! What a mixture of professions! Goldsmiths, perfumers, priests, Levites, agricultural workers and women



are listed amongst those who took on the task. The church today is a similar mixture of people, with differing skills and temperaments, all of which, when freely offered, can be used by God for the rebuilding of the Christian testimony and the furtherance of the Gospel.



There are a number of interesting lessons for us today in this list of names and places in ch.3. At first sight, the chapter may appear to be simply a list of words, which many of us have difficulty in pronouncing and, consequently, tend to give them a miss! However, Paul reminds Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (1 Timothy 3:16,17). We do well, then, to look into the meanings of these names. Certainly, in Old Testament times, babies were given names whose meanings reflected an immediate significance e.g. Samuel: heard of God, or highlighted some future significant event e.g. Gideon: the cutter down.

The list in this chapter contains some 39 names of those directly involved in the rebuilding of the wall, as well as 31 of their fathers and 3 of their grandfathers. Also named are 8 groups of people who were collectively involved in the repairs to the wall. Amongst the repairers are listed 8 individual names with no apparent family backing. This surely tells us that in the work of God today there similarly is room for individuals, room for those with family backing and room for groups of believers.

Of the names listed, 11 include the name of Jehovah in their meanings. In these 11, a progression can be seen, commencing with Jehoida (v.6), meaning ‘Jehovah has adorned’, through to Shemaiah (v.29), meaning ‘Jehovah has heard’. So we see in these names how the Lord provides for us in all our needs and circumstances – from the moment when, by grace, we were given that new robe of righteousness, to the end of our life here on earth, recognising His answering grace to all our needs.

Another point of note is the meaning of the first and last names in this list. The first name, Eliashib, means ‘God will restore’. What comfort can be obtained from that promise, as much in our day as it would have been in Nehemiah’s day! How encouraging this promise is to our faith as we look at the breakdown that surrounds the church today. We can have the assurance that our Lord God has the ability to restore! The last name mentioned in the list, Malchijah, means ‘The LORD is King’. This ought to remind us that our Saviour is the King of kings. He is the Sovereign Lord at whose name every knee must bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10,11).

Other names give what appear to be characteristic details of those involved in the work e.g. Rephaiah means ‘healed of Jehovah’. One name, Bavai, meaning ‘my goings’, is of Persian origin. Its inclusion shows how even those of independent tendencies can be accommodated in the repairs of the walls.



Several names have some form of commendation attached. A similar feature is found in Romans 16 where the apostle Paul mentions those who worked earnestly or diligently for the Lord. So we read in this chapter: “Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece...” (v.20).



In this chapter, we see those who worked as individuals – Meshullam worked by his lodgings (v.30). Here we see one who was concerned about the security of his home. Are we today concerned about the security of our homes from worldly influences? We may spend large sums of money ensuring the physical security of our homes but are we equally concerned about their spiritual security?

Several worked together as groups: “And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain” (v.22). Manual work may not have been to their liking; they may have had differing concepts as to how to carry out the work – but they worked together for the furtherance of the cause.

Sadly, there are also those who were not prepared to put their backs into the work: “...the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord” (v.5). The Lord solemnly notes what is not done for Himself: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me” (Matthew 25:45). But equally, the Lord misses nothing that is done for Himself: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matthew 25:40). So it is recorded here that, although their nobles might refuse to work, the common people of Tekoa rebuilt two sections (vv.5,27).

Today, there is a tendency to think that, because numbers are small, we should go and join up with a larger group. Invariably this means that principles, which were once held dear, are compromised or given up altogether. If this had been the case in Nehemiah’s day, then the walls would have remained derelict and the means of protection and separation would have been totally ineffective – only 39 repairers, together with the daughters of one of them, are mentioned in this chapter. What were so few faced with such great need?

Separated unto God

Moses claimed a special place for himself and the children of Israel before God: “For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth” (Exodus 33:16). The church today should occupy a similar position. In Nehemiah 3, this forgotten truth was about to be reclaimed. Through the grace of God, the people were once more to be set apart for God. The rebuilt walls and gates would be a physical reminder of that fact.



In Christendom today, we see, and feel the effects of, the ruin brought in by this lack of separation. The desire to occupy the place where God would have us be needs to be

stimulated. There is a great need today for men like Nehemiah, whose name means ‘consolation of Jehovah’. We need men who have the God-given ability to console, stimulate, encourage and maintain the momentum of the church today.

The work that was done

As well as the names of those who were involved in the work of rebuilding, the chapter provides some interesting details regarding the work of rebuilding, with mention of the various sections of the wall completed. There are some interesting lessons for our Christian testimony to be learned from these details.



In v.1, we read that Eliashib, the high priest, together with his brethren the priests, built up the Sheep Gate. It was important for them in their position to have easy access for the sacrificial sheep. They cleared the route, built the gate, consecrated it, and hung the doors – but omitted to fit the bolts and bars (see v.3 for contrast). It looked as if they had done a good job; they even extended their task to the continuation of the wall as far as the Tower of Hananeel. But here was a man, apparently a religious man, who was not fully committed to the cause. In keeping with this, we later find him making an allegiance with Tobiah, one of the enemies of God’s people, even to the extent of giving him a large room in the storerooms of the Temple (13:4-9). Moreover, his grandson was married to the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, another enemy of God’s people (Nehemiah 13:28).

In Eliashib, we see a man who valued his position and, probably more so, the benefits that went with the post of high priest in Israel, but who had political connections with the enemies of the people of God. We see similar situations in the professing Church today where, not only men of high office or status, but people in general want to have their feet in both camps. We have to examine our own consciences to see whether we, too, fall into this failure. The solemn warning of James is still relevant for today: “The friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4).

It is also worth noting that Eliashib did not do the repairs opposite his house (see vv.20,21; contrast Benjamin and Hashub, v.23). Paul writes to Timothy about the importance of order in the church and emphasises that this order must begin in the home: “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, given to hospitality, apt to teach...one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity...” (1 Timothy 3:1-5). What a challenge for us today is this aspect of Christian testimony, the need to rule well in our homes! The home is the place where we relax, and rightly so. But that same relaxation may lead us to cultivate relationships, habits and practices which cause us to compromise the truth we claim to hold.



One particular feature should be noted: “Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall” (v.8). Here we have two professions totally unsuitable for repairing walls! The goldsmith’s skill brought

added attraction to ordinary objects and made things of beauty. The perfumer's skill was to attract the attention of the senses and, consequently, to enhance the wearer or the object on which the product was put. These skills were hardly suitable for working on the ruin and rubble of the walls!



There are many in the church today who consider that they lack the necessary skills for functioning in the Christian testimony. It is good to see that these two groups of workers, apparently unskilled in building practices, were ready to work and were used to good effect for the repairs and rebuilding of the walls. When we offer ourselves to the Lord for His work, it is His prerogative how He uses us. We may readily sing the words of the hymn:

There's a work for Jesus ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.
Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true!
There's a work for Jesus none but you can do.

And the refrain:

Work for Jesus day by day. Serve Him ever, falter never, Christ obey.
Yield Him service loyal, true; there's a work for Jesus none but you can do!

But we are not prepared to do some of the tasks that stare us in the face! How sad it is that the walls of Christian testimony are left in ruins when a helping hand could do the repair! The skills of these men, skills of attraction and enhancement, in a spiritual sense are just what is needed to complement the Christian testimony in the neighbourhoods where we are found.

The people in Nehemiah's day, by rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem, demonstrated to the nations around that they intended to re-establish the path of separation as instructed in Exodus 33:16. Today there is still a need for that path to be re-established. We see in Christendom today different denominations. If we examine the differences, we find that they have been caused, in the main, by prominent men's differing interpretations of Scripture, together with their failure to see another point of view. Because of the charisma of these men, others have followed them.

Separation for us today lies not just in being different from other denominations, but in our wholly realising our place in Christ and in our walking in accordance with that position. We are to acknowledge His headship and gather unto His name alone. We need to carry out His request to remember Him in the breaking of bread, to accept the Bible as the Word of God which contains the total revelation of God's purpose for mankind, and to wait for the moment when Christ calls His Church to meet Him in the air. With these before us, may we, in our day, get on with the repairs and once again enjoy the privilege and blessing of being separated unto Him!



Far and Near

Gordon Hughes

Often in Scripture pairs of opposites are set side by side e.g. death and life (1 John 3:14); darkness and light (Acts 26:18); lost and found (Luke 15:24); law and grace (John 1:17). In this way, they highlight each other and help us to appreciate in a fuller way what God has delivered us from and brought us into. This short study looks at the contrast between 'far' and 'near'.

The Lord Jesus taught the people in parables so that those who wanted to learn might the more readily appreciate His message. Some of these word pictures are so vivid that phrases from them have become part of our everyday English language. How glad we ought to be that God, in His word, has chosen to express profound and important truths in these simple word pictures. We shall look at some of these word pictures to help us appreciate the contrast between 'far' and 'near'.

The lost son (Luke 15:11-32)

“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to *a far country*, and there wasted his substance in riotous living” (v.13). Here is the inevitable conclusion of self-will! That far country mirrors the separation that Adam and Eve experienced when, because of their disobedience, God had to turn them out from the Garden of Eden and away from fellowship with Himself (see Genesis 3). So man's sinful disobedience down through the ages has left him in that far country, away from God.

That lost son might have been away from his father's house, but the story Jesus told makes abundantly clear that he was never away from his father's heart! “But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (v.20). For many days, for far too long, that father had been on the rooftop of his house, looking out for the return of his son.

Although the word 'near' is not used in this story, the details highlight the place of nearness into which that repentant son was brought. We can notice:

1. the kiss (v.20). Without a word being uttered, the son was assured of his welcome.
2. the best robe (v.22). This surely speaks of the son's acceptance and reminds us of the fact that we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).
3. the ring (v.22). Here is the symbol of an eternal relationship established.

*Never
away
from his
father's
heart*

4. the sandals (v.22). The father's love prevented the son from using his pre-determined words, "Make me like one of your hired servants". Sandals would remind all in the house that here was a son, not a servant!
5. the fatted calf (v.23). However great the son's joy in restoration, the father's joy in reception was even greater – "let *us* eat and be merry".

So Paul reminds us, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Jesus" (Ephesians 2:13).

The cleansed leper (Luke 17:12-19)

"There met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood *afar off*."

Excluded from the society of their fellow men, forced to keep away and cry, "Unclean, unclean!", these men were in a pitiful and deadly condition. What a vivid picture of our condition as sinners before God! And so, to begin with, they stand *afar off* from the Son of God. But they recognise in Him One who was able to help them as no one else could. They cry, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (v.13).

Obedying the command of the Lord Jesus, they find themselves cleansed. But only one of them returns. Where did he find himself? "Now one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face *at His feet*, giving Him thanks" (vv.15,16). This cleansed leper, in his joy and thankfulness, found himself in just the same place that Mary of Bethany had learned to treasure (John 12:3). Just as Jesus had appreciated Mary's spikenard offering, so He sets His high accolade of appreciation on this leper's act of thanksgiving: "...returned to give glory to God" (v.18). May we be as ready to turn to the Lord Jesus in thanksgiving and praise for what He has done for us! He will value our stuttering praises.

The Tabernacle and Temple

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh...*let us draw near* with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Throughout Israel's history as a nation, there was no more vivid and visible reminder of their being far off from God than the veil that separated between the holy place and

Returned
to give
glory to
God

the holy of holies, where God had chosen to dwell among His people. Even when God was ready to give Moses instructions for building the Tabernacle, “That I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8), God’s command to Moses was, “And Moses alone shall come near the LORD, *but they shall not come near*” (Exodus 24:2).

Throughout the days of the Tabernacle, and subsequently the Temple, that richly embroidered curtain proclaimed the stark fact to the people, “You cannot come in here”. Only the High Priest, and that only on the solemn Day of Atonement, and then not without the blood of the sacrifice, could go through the veil into the holy of holies. The people would stand outside and wonder, “Will he come out again? Will the sacrifice be accepted?” Oh, the relief of hearing those tinkling bells that adorned the bottom of the High Priest’s garment, and the relief of seeing him finally appear with the assurance that, for another year, God would pass over their sins.

But now, every believer is invited to “draw near”. What has made the difference? The blood of Jesus (v.19)! When the Lord Jesus died on Calvary, we read, “The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). No human hand, but the hand of God – “from top to bottom” – tore that curtain! In this vivid and visible way, God would declare to man, at the earliest possible opportunity, that, because of Christ’s sacrifice, He could now come out to man and man could go in to God!

But what a price was paid so that we might draw near! The Lord Jesus had to take that place of being far off so that we might be brought near. Prophetically, in Psalm 22, He had to cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me...?” (v.1). We know that the opening words of this verse were actually wrung from His lips, the central cry of His seven statements on the cross (Matthew 27:46).

Our place of nearness to God in Christ is now complete. The hymn writer expresses it so well:

So nigh, so very nigh to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.

But it has been purchased at such tremendous cost. In all our need, we are bidden to come: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). But let us come, too, in deep thanksgiving and true worship: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15).

The Gospel in Job

Part 7

Yannick Ford

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing”, writes Paul to the Christians at Rome (Romans 7:18). What a hard lesson to learn this was for Job, for Paul, and for us today. Yet learn it we must – if not from God’s word, then from the bitter experiences of life.

Bildad’s third speech (ch.25)

Bildad speaks to Job for the last time. His message is short and sharp – just six verses. The thrust of his argument is simple: Job had justified himself in his previous reply to Eliphaz, but Bildad asks how anyone could possibly be pure in God’s sight: “How can he be clean that is born of a woman...How much less man, that is a worm?” (vv.4,6). The question still challenges us today!

Job’s reply (chs.26-31)

Who can understand? (ch.26)

Job was clearly unimpressed with this argument (26:1-4). He then goes on to speak of the power of God in creation (vv.5-14). In passing, it is worth noticing Job’s reference to God “hanging the earth upon nothing” (v.7). Evidently men such as Job had a better understanding of the universe than is sometimes thought, even in patriarchal times. The Bible and

‘modern’ science are not incompatible, as some assert. The Creator is clearly the best Person to describe His creation!

*The Creator is
clearly the best
Person to describe
His creation!*

However, impressive as the natural world and the universe are, they do not give us a full revelation of God. Job acknowledges this: “Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?” (v.14). Creation speaks eloquently of the power of the Creator, but what is He like? How will He be disposed towards us? Are we important in His sight? Questions such as these need a further revelation of God if they are to be answered. Only if God is willing to reveal more of Himself to us can we know anything of His character and how He thinks about us. How wonderful, then, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, condescended to come to this earth in human flesh, so that we might be able to know God in a way that we could understand!

I am pure (ch.27)

Job did not yet fully understand the character of God – that He is holy and, at the same time, that He is love. In 27:1-6, Job again maintains that he is righteous, and that he has done nothing wrong. “God forbid that I should justify you”, he says to

his friends, but goes on to add, “till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live” (vv.5,6). The logical conclusion, then, in Job’s mind is that God “hath taken away my right, and...embittered my soul” (v.2, JND trans.).

Job has yet to learn, as we all need to learn, that whereas we may not be guilty of gross *outward* sins, as Job’s friends were accusing him of, yet nevertheless we are not pure in God’s sight. We do not have any ‘right’ before God; rather we come under the condemnation that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). But God does not wish us to receive this wage. He wants to justify us, not because of our own righteousness, but because the Lord Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins, and we can come into the good of *His* righteousness.

So Paul’s desire was to be found “not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). He realised that his own righteousness could only be tarnished, as it would depend upon having at all times fulfilled God’s law in every way. There has only ever been one Person who has done this, the Lord Jesus Christ. But through faith in Him, we can be considered as righteous in Him – an altogether far superior option!

Job then returns to one of his favourite themes (27:8-23): the wicked may appear to succeed, but they will eventually be judged. The wicked man has no future. Job emphasises these points to his friends: “Behold, all ye yourselves have seen it; why

then are ye thus altogether vain?” (v.12). He seems to be saying, “Look, you keep insisting that I must have committed some dreadful sin since God has brought me into this terrible condition. But as I keep trying to tell you, those who do commit terrible sins often appear to be successful, even though eventually they will be called into account. I, on the other hand, am pure.”

Whence then cometh wisdom? (ch.28)

In ch.28, Job becomes more philosophical and muses about wisdom. In vv.1-11, we have an interesting description of mining for precious ores and stones, but Job’s point is that this is not how wisdom is found (v.12). Wisdom is worth more than gold and precious stones (vv.15-19), and therefore the search and effort to mine these natural substances cannot compare with the need to find wisdom. But what is it, and where can it be found? Job continues, “Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me...Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?” (vv.13,14,20).

Where indeed? “Death and destruction say, We have heard its report with our ears” (v.22, JND trans.). At first sight, this is a somewhat obscure verse. But it suggests that death, with all that it entails, has something to say about the subject of wisdom? If this life is all there is, then to find a meaning for life, and an understanding of what true wisdom is, is an impossible task. Yet there is something within us that rebels against the thought that this life is pointless and devoid of

meaning, and that death abolishes everything. Why do we have this thirst for wisdom, and why does the forbidding presence of death leave so many unanswered questions?

The answers are found with God: “God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof” (v.23). God will make us know the truth about wisdom: “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (v.28). This important verse is also quoted in the book of wisdom, the Proverbs: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7). An acknowledgment of God, a desire to please Him and to be right with Him – here is the “beginning of wisdom”.

*Behold, the fear
of the Lord,
that is wisdom*

God will ensure that such a quest will not remain unanswered: “For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:12); “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psalm 86:5). Compare this with the symbolical description of the sin and fall of Satan, in Ezekiel 28:11-19, where he is represented as the ‘King of Tyre’. V.17 speaks of him as follows: “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast

corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness”. Here was no “fear of the Lord”, which is the beginning of wisdom, but a proud self-occupation and self-interest, with the result that his wisdom became corrupted.

I...I...I (ch.29)

Job continues his speech in ch.29. We have a description of his former days. Job gives the clear impression that he was a righteous man, who looked after the interests of the poor and needy, and who possessed and enjoyed great respect among his contemporaries. He had a place of honour that he clearly delighted in.

But now... (chs.30.31)

What a contrast we have in ch.30! That place of honour has disappeared, and Job is no longer respected. We may wonder whether Job, during his period of prosperity, had been somewhat proud: “But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock” (v.1). These outcasts, who are graphically described in vv.1-14, are now despising Job since, as they see it, God has cast him off: “They were children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. And now I am their song, yea, I am their byword. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face. Because he hath loosed my cord, and afflicted me, they have also let loose the bridle before me” (vv.8-11).

To be fair to Job, it is all too easy to be pleased with oneself when in prosperity, especially if we are recognised as those who do good and help others. It is pleasing to the natural heart to be sufficiently wealthy to be in comfortable circumstances, while

also to have the approbation of our own conscience and of our contemporaries as we help others out. Not that being rich or doing good are wrong in themselves! So Paul charges Timothy, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (1 Timothy 6:17,18).

*Ready to
distribute,
willing to
communicate*

But how difficult it is not to be ‘highminded’, not to have proud or self-satisfied thoughts about ourselves! How remarkable, then, to consider the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator and sovereign of the universe: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but *made himself of no reputation*, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:5-7).

Job, far from enjoying his former prosperity, was suffering much from his affliction: vv.15-19 describe the symptoms of his disease. Job charges God with having become cruel towards him (v.21), and that prayer is useless: “Indeed, no prayer availeth when he stretcheth out his hand:

though they cry when he destroyeth” (30:24, JND trans.).

From 30:25, and in all of ch.31, Job maintains his righteousness. He lists his good deeds which would, no doubt, put many of us to shame. He thus clearly rebuffs the accusations of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, who had tried to prove that Job must have been a wicked man to deserve all the trouble that had come upon him. Clearly, Job was not a wicked man. God Himself recognised this, as we saw in Part 1 of this study: “And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” (1:8).

Satan had thought that Job would curse God if God allowed evil circumstances to come upon Job. So God allowed Satan to afflict Job. As we saw, Satan wasted no time in his malicious work against Job. Yet not once did Job curse God. In fact, we have no record of Job complaining, until his three friends came to ‘comfort’ him. Their misguided efforts, and incorrect analyses, did nothing to help Job. In spite of all these circumstances, i.e. Satan’s wickedness and the insensitivity and incompetence of Job’s friends, God was using these events to teach Job a valuable lesson, as we shall see.

Job needed to learn not to trust in his own self-righteousness. The attacks of his friends only served further to confirm Job in his self-righteous thoughts. Something better was needed to bring Job to an understanding of things as they really were. We shall see this in the following chapters, D.V.

Power For Christian Living

2. The power of hope

George Stevens

“...having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12) is man’s natural lot. As Christians, we should be encouraged by the living and certain hope we have been given in Christ. This article is based on a talk broadcast on London’s Premier Radio.

Hope defined

In Romans 8:24,25, we have a simple definition of hope: “For we have been saved in hope; but hope seen is not hope; for what any one sees, why does he also hope? But if what we see not we hope, we expect in patience”. Christians are saved in hope. In other words, as those who are saved by grace, we look forward to the certainty of the glory promised by God. Our bodies are to be redeemed one day. The bodies we have now will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. Our new bodies will be immortal, heavenly, powerful, spiritual, incorruptible and glorious! The bodies of those who have already died will be raised. We patiently expect this to happen. We do not have any doubt that it will! *Our hope is sure and steadfast.* It is not a mere wish like today’s use of the word ‘hope’. It is a sure thing! The problem is that we do not know when we will be taken to glory. We must, therefore, expect the coming of the Lord daily.

The God of hope

In Romans 15:13 we read, “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that ye should abound in hope by [the] power of [the] Holy Spirit”. The Christians in Rome to whom Paul was writing were mostly Gentiles. Previously, they had not known the one and only living God as Israel had done. They had, therefore, been without God and without hope in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Upon believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, they came under the blessing of a God who is the source of all hope. He was able to give them joy and peace along with all the certainties of Christian hope – and those in abundance!

The hope of Israel

Upon his arrival at Rome, the apostle Paul called together the chief men of the Jewish community and explained to them that he had no wish to be an accuser of his nation, but that his supposed offence was in relation to the hope of Israel. He said to them, “For this cause therefore I have called you to [me] to see you and to speak to you; for on account of the hope of Israel I have this chain about me” (Acts 28:20).

The hope of Israel is none other than the Messiah, the Chosen One of God. The Jews believed that the Messiah would come and deliver them from their earthly enemies and set up an everlasting kingdom. The fact that He came first to deal with the

question of sin obscured the faith of the Jews. The One whom they expected to come as a mighty warrior came instead as the meek and lowly Nazarene who was executed as a criminal.

Nevertheless, the Messiah will set up a kingdom in the future. The resurrected Christ will one day appear as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He will put down His enemies. They will be made the footstool of His feet (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13). He is the stone cut out of the mountain without hands (Daniel 2:34). Every remnant of previous world empires will be completely destroyed. His kingdom will be extensive – from sea to sea. No other kingdom will supersede His! All nations will bow down to Him. Those who oppose Him will be judged immediately. Any oppressors will be put down. Yet the character of His rule is one of great blessing. It will be marked by peace among men and among the animals. Nature will cease her groaning and burst forth fruitfully. Even the desert will blossom as the rose (Isaiah 35:1). His rule will be righteous. Blessing will abound for the widow, the fatherless and the poor.

The hymn writer, J Montgomery, had this in mind when he wrote,

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
Great David's greater Son,
When to the time appointed
The rolling years have run.
He comes to break oppression,
To set the captive free,
To take away transgression
And rule in equity.

That hope of Israel is further outlined in Isaiah 62:1-5: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

The hope of righteousness

The Jew under the law was always going about to establish his own righteousness – an impossibility! Only Christ has successfully fulfilled the law. Our righteousness comes through Him. God made Him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). So Paul writes, "For we, by [the]

Spirit, on the principle of faith, await the hope of righteousness” (Galatians 5:5). That hope of righteousness is glory!

The hope of His calling

The hope of His calling is stated in Ephesians 1:18: “Being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, [and] what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”.

Paul had already set out some of the details of that calling in vv.3-7. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Furthermore, He has predestined (i.e. ‘marked out beforehand’) us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to Himself. God has made us accepted in the Beloved in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. We are therefore assured of heavenly glory. What a hope!

The hope of salvation

It is wonderful to know that we have been saved from sin and judgment. But there are three aspects – past, present and future – of that salvation. In the past, faith in Christ delivered us from sin and death and separated us to God. Through faith in Him now, taking God at His word, we are saved daily from harmful circumstances.

But we read of a future salvation in 1 Thessalonians 5:8,9: “But we being of [the] day, let us be sober, putting on [the] breastplate of faith and love, and as helmet [the] hope of salvation; because God has not set us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”. This is salvation completed – body, soul and spirit! It is the final deliverance, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, from all that connects us with this earth. We have an all-the-way-home Saviour who carries us on both His shoulders – the destination, His Father’s house on high!

The hope of eternal life

The hope of eternal life is mentioned in Titus 1:2: “...in [the] hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the ages of time”.

Eternal life is both a quality of life and a duration of life. We see the quality of life in 1 John 5:20, where we find that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life. When we look at the life of Christ, then we see eternal life displayed – a life lived in the will of God; a life that displays God the Father. At the same time, He is also the Source of that life. As He Himself lives after the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16), then we know that eternal life is perpetual.

John, by the power of the Spirit, writes of eternal life as a present possession for the Christian: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). However, the enjoyment of that eternal life is limited for Christians while they await the full salvation that will accompany Christ at His coming. By contrast, Paul, in his teaching,

generally looks at eternal life as a future possession when it will blossom in the perfection of glory and when it will be enjoyed by believers as it should be.

The blessed hope

This hope is set out in Titus 2:13: "...awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ". This verse speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. His deity is confirmed in the words "our great God". The Lord Jesus is none other than God. This fact, denied by so many today, will be revealed when He is seen in the appearing of His glory (as it could be translated). The word 'blessed' is the Greek word 'makarios' which emphasises that His appearing will be "filled with richness, benefits and good things". The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ has two aspects. The first is that He comes to take away all those who have believed in Him (1 Thessalonians 4). The unbelievers of this world will not see Him at this point. The second is His coming *with* His saints to set up His kingdom on the earth. Here the population of the world will see Him. Our Christian hope is the coming of Christ to take us to be with Himself.

Both comings are set out in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort (or, encourage) one another with these words".

Further details are given in 1 Corinthians 15. First, we discover how Christians who have died are raised (vv.36-49): "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body".

The apostle then goes on to describe what happens to Christians who are alive at the time of the coming of Christ (vv.51-54): "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying, Death is swallowed up in victory".

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the coming of Christ is seen as a *strengthening* truth. Just think of it, we shall have completely new bodies! They will be heavenly bodies, designed for

*For this corruptible must put on
incorruption, and this mortal must
put on immortality*

a new environment. They will be incorruptible; they will never age or deteriorate in any way. They will be glorious! That is to say, they will be beautiful and honourable. In that day, our bodies will be like Christ's glorious body – bodies of glory, rather than bodies of humiliation. They will be powerful! Nothing will be able to harm them; they will have great strength. They will be immortal! Death will not be able to touch them. They will be spiritual – that is to say, they will be governed by the spirit and not the soul. No doubt, the Holy Spirit will still indwell these bodies and have full sway over them.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10, the coming of Christ is a *saving* truth. We read: "...ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come". Here "the wrath to come" refers to the whole wrath of God – including the wrath of God and the Lamb during the period of tribulation that will fall upon the earth (Revelation 6:16; 19:15). This will follow the coming of Christ for His saints.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19, His coming is a *stimulating* truth: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" The apostle Paul counted the fact that the Thessalonian Christians, who were some of those converted under his preaching, would be his reward and joy in heaven. This truth should motivate us, too, to go out boldly and witness for Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:12,13, His coming is a *stabilising* truth: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love toward one another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints". Here, the hope of His coming establishes our faith in such a way that love abounds and our lives are purified.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, His coming is a *sanctifying* truth: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". In sanctification, God sets us

apart to Himself for His possession, pleasure and purpose. So whether we are thinking about the spirit (God-consciousness), the soul (self-consciousness), or the body (earth-consciousness), all are kept by the grace of God until that day when we will be entirely His at the coming of our Lord Jesus. Then we will live perfectly in His will.

1 John 3:3 tells us that every one who has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure. So the coming of the Lord is also a *purifying* truth. May each day of our lives be lived in a way that glorifies God. If the coming of the Lord is expected at any moment, then we will be careful what we consciously look at, listen to and say. We will be careful to associate closely with fellow believers. We will be careful concerning the places we visit. But we will also be careful to do all things as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

The living hope

This living hope is set out in 1 Peter 1:3: “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through [the] resurrection of Jesus Christ from among [the] dead”.

F.B.Hole writes about this hope, “Verse 3 opens the apostle’s message in striking a note of praise to God, now revealed as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, since He has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As belonging to the commonwealth of Israel, they had formerly had national hopes which centred in a Messiah upon earth, but the light of these hopes was quenched in their hearts when He died rejected, crucified between two thieves. The story of the two going to Emmaus, as told in Luke 24, is a telling illustration of this; but, when those two had their eyes opened and beheld Him risen, a new hope dawned in their hearts which nothing on earth could quench. It was a living hope because centred in a Saviour living beyond the power of death. How aptly the very words of v.3 would have sprung from their lips as they entered the upper room in Jerusalem to tell the news to the rest after their return journey of three-score furlongs! They were like men who had been born again into a new world of hope and expectation, in the great mercy of God.”



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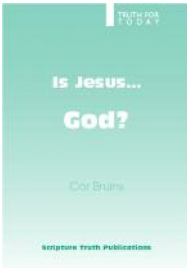
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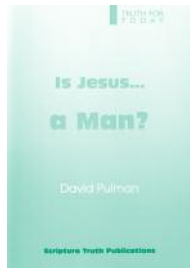
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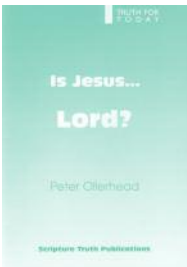
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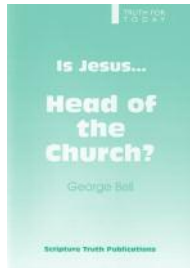
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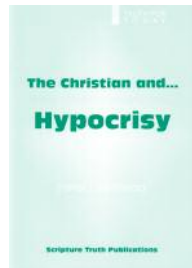
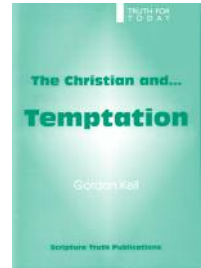
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Hope

*“We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand,
and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

Romans 5:2

The world is passing, soon it will be o'er;
The circumstances of this present life
Shall be forgotten, once the eternal door
Is reached, and man is done with selfish strife.

Therefore, let us be governed by the goal,
Not influenced by things that have an end;
Our faith be to the saving of our soul,
To God's decree our stubborn natures bend.

And let us, like our Master, be controlled
By our divine and heavenly Father's will,
Doing the things that we are told,
And, like the hireling, our short stay fulfil.

Thus shall we realise that rest of heart
Found by the Saviour in His pathway here,
With whom in heaven is our eternal part,
Where glory crowns that stainless, deathless sphere.

James Boyd

*“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been
poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

Romans 5:5