

# Scripture Truth



## Inside:

Don't worry!  
Jesus in the midst  
Abraham and Lot

A tale of three assemblies  
Barnabas – Serving in the Shadow!  
The epistle to the Romans: A thumbnail sketch

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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## Contents

A tale of three assemblies .....	Grant Steidl .....	57
Don't worry! .....	David Anderson .....	58
Jesus in the midst – Part 2 .....	George Stevens .....	64
Abraham and Lot.....	F. B. Hole .....	68
Barnabas – Serving in the Shadow! .....	David Pulman .....	73
The epistle to the Romans: A thumbnail sketch .....	Ernest Bartlett .....	79
.....	and Theo Balderston .....	79
The Lord who heals (poem) .....	William Cowper .....	Back cover

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## A tale of three assemblies

Assembly A has no real problems, at least according to the more smug among its number. All meetings continue as usual. The Word is preached. However, because any decline in spiritual vigour is denied or ignored, disparity between principle and practice begins to widen. This is also ignored, except by the young people [many of whom pack up and leave]. Many assemblies quite similar to this one “continued on well”... until they died.

Assembly B will probably grow and flourish. Committed to numerical growth, it will do what is necessary to accomplish this. Anything new or different is automatically good, while that which has been long practiced is suspected of being obstructive and obsolete. Among the many things happening it will perhaps not be noticed that certain unpopular truths are being neglected and even rejected... that approval and recognition by the “in crowd” is increasingly sought... that the emphasis is on methods and gimmicks rather than maturity in Christ. Such assemblies don’t die like dogs – they change like chameleons.

Assembly C measures itself by the Word of God and repents. It looks at God’s pattern for His Assembly and confesses how far it has fallen. It recognizes its failure in preaching the gospel, teaching the Word, and caring for the sheep, and it cries out to God for help. It sees neither smug self-satisfaction nor continual change as the answer to its problems, but Christ. Opening its heart afresh to Him whom God has made “Head over all things to the Church,” it finds Him all-sufficient. Such assemblies may or may not be successful in the eyes of people, but they will enjoy His presence and approval.

Grant Steidl, *My Musings* (Believer’s Bookshelf Canada, Beamsville, Ontario, 2009), p. 295.

# Don't worry!

## A word for today

**David Anderson**

Before you start this article, please read Luke 12:22-34 in either the NKJV or the ESV translations. If you, like me, have been accustomed to reading the King James Bible, then – like me – you may have missed the full impact of the Lord's words, "Do not worry about your life" (v.22, NKJV) or "Do not be anxious..." (ESV). This instruction is very challenging, especially to us in today's materialistic world!

### Background

In verse 15 of the same chapter the Lord urged the crowds, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (ESV). He illustrated His admonition with the parable of the rich fool (vv.16-21), and concluded, "So is the [person] who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (v.21). Realising that His disciples could be influenced by the prevailing attitude of the world (cp. Matthew 19:16-30), He explained to them how they could store up for themselves "a treasure in the heavens" (Luke 12:33). In other words, He told them how they could live on earth with eternal, lasting values in mind. He spelled it out very clearly in simple and straightforward terms. We won't have any difficulty with the concepts He presented: our problem is practising them!

### Don't worry!

The Lord said, "Don't worry!" (12:22, 25, 26),<sup>1</sup> because there's more to life than riches (v.15 cp. v.21). The Christian way of life doesn't major on food and clothing (v.23). It's about faith in God (v.28). Previously the Lord had warned His disciples,

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25, ESV).

Such a total surrender to Christ is only possible by trust in God.

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<sup>1</sup> The verb "to be anxious about" means "to have distracting care", and occurs in Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34 & 10:19; Luke 10:41; 12:11, 22, 25, 26; 1 Corinthians 7:32, 33, 34 & 12:25; Philippians 2:20 & 4:6. The corresponding noun "anxiety", or "care", occurs in Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14 & 21:34; 2 Corinthians 11:28; 1 Peter 5:7.

*Jesus told them how they could live on earth  
with eternal, lasting values in mind.*

### Consider: God cares

The Lord asked the disciples to consider the providence of the Creator, and how much God values them (12:7, 24, 28). The ravens are fed by God (v.24), and the gorgeous lilies are sustained by Him (v.27). Both the animal and plant creation depend upon His provision:

“O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. ... These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. ... You satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 104:24-25 & 27-28 with Psalm 145:16, ESV).

Yes, our Creator provides for the necessities of life. An easy statement to make but one that's difficult always to apply to my life!

### Faith

We certainly live in an uncertain world! For unbelievers this naturally causes all kinds of anxiety and worry. (Not to mention the problems that “fake news” adds to these!) But although believers have an altogether different outlook on life, they too might worry. However, the Lord stated in Luke 12: 28 that at the root of our anxiety is a lack of faith! Trust in God is the antidote to worrying. Not only true faith in God for salvation, but also the amount of genuine faith that we have in Him for everyday living. Would the Lord also say of us, “O you of little faith”? (cp. Matthew 14:24-32) Therefore, we must heed His teaching on discipleship:

- There is more to life than just food and clothing (Luke 12:23).
- We cannot even add one hour to the length of our allotted life span (v.25, ESV), even with all modern-day advances in medicine!
- the extreme brevity of life on earth – here today, gone tomorrow – just like the grass in the land of Israel (v.28).

And we must not “trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17, NKJV). Our aim should be to be

*Do not be anxious about tomorrow,  
for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.*

godly, for “godliness with contentment is great gain. ...and having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (6:6, 8).

### **Anxiety**

It's only natural to worry, because sin has introduced all kinds of difficulties into our world. However, in the parable of the Sower,<sup>2</sup> the Lord identified the anxieties of life as an issue which chokes the effectiveness of the word of God and stifles spiritual life. Other issues He identified are the deceitfulness of riches, pleasures, and lust, which means desires for the things of the world (see Luke 8:14). The very things we are also warned about in Luke 12:21! Furthermore, the Lord warned that our hearts can become weighed down with care, such that we forget that He is coming again (Luke 21:34-36).

The “anxious mind” referred to in 12:29 (NKJV) is that mental torment which on the one hand finds it humanly difficult to cope with the present situations of difficulty and distress, whilst on the other hand trusting in God for eternal life.<sup>3</sup> Faith in God makes us understand the truth that He'll always provide, whatever happens. As Creator, He is called the Preserver of all people, especially of believers (1 Timothy 4:10). But verses 3-5 of the same chapter explain the practical application of such faith in God: all provisions are to be received with thanksgiving. Then they will be sanctified – that is, made to serve their God-given purpose for us – by the word of God and prayer.

In Matthew 6:34 an additional reason is given for not worrying: “Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (ESV). There are enough problems to deal with today by God's all-sufficient grace, and we “do not know what tomorrow will bring” (James 4:14).

### **Seek**

Please read Luke 12:30-32. To be free from anxiety, we must give the things of God the first priority in our lives. If we do, our heavenly Father will grant us everything else (v.31): do we really believe it? Notice the emphasis in Matthew

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19

<sup>3</sup> See “Doubtful, A.5”, in W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, MacDonald, Virginia.

*Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

6:33: “Seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men” (Romans 14:17-18, ESV). Most certainly, we should accept God’s rule over our lives now, as those who belong to the kingdom of heaven. But the actual public manifestation of the kingdom upon earth will not come until the close of this age. Therefore, we should diligently seek to be fruitful in the things of God to obtain a rich entrance into that everlasting kingdom (cp. 2 Peter 1:1-11).

In Luke 12 the Lord outlined ways in which His disciples were to “seek first the kingdom of God”:

- By investing their treasures in the heavens (vv.33-34).
- By living for, and witnessing to, Him (v.35).
- By waiting and watching out for His coming again, which includes working for Him during His absence (vv.36-48 with 19:13-27).

### **Fear not**

Isn't it good that everything is in God's hands, and that we need not fear? Despite all of the world's “hype” (that things will get better as technology, etc., advances) uncertainty lurks in the hearts of unbelievers. That breeds fear – fear of what tomorrow will bring, accompanied by anxiety over how they themselves will cope. And, as the world rapidly approaches the end of the age, people are “fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:26). But such fear can so easily overtake believers (21:34). Therefore, how comforting and reassuring the Lord's words are to us, His disciples, “Fear not, little flock!” (Luke 12:32; cp. John 16:33).

### **To avoid anxiety, pray!**

Paul's advice to the Philippians believers was:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true,

*We can cast all our anxieties on God,  
knowing that He cares for us*

whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:6-9, ESV).

By prayerful trust in God, His peace will surround us and guard us from stress and anxiety. We can cast all our anxieties on God, knowing that He cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7).

### **Legitimate anxiety**

There are some things in the New Testament which believers are right in being anxious about. These are where the word ‘anxious’ is used, but with the nuanced meaning of “genuine concern”.

First, Paul used it to express Timothy’s true desires for the spiritual well-being of other believers. “For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare” (Philippians 2:20). In this respect both Paul and Timothy were “seeking first the kingdom of God”; their own interests were subservient to those of Jesus Christ (contrast Philippians 2:21).

Second, in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 7 Paul repeated what the Lord had taught in Luke 12. In vv.25-40 he identified worries as being part of the lot of fallen mankind. His own consuming desire for “the things of the Lord” (v.34) caused him to wish that believers be free of worldly troubles, especially as the form of the present age is so transient, and time here on earth is short (v.29). However he recognised that some of these concerns are unavoidable, such as:

- the proper concern that a Christian husband has for his wife (and their family) that causes him to interact with the world in which he lives (v.33). This results in him being “anxious about worldly things” and his loyalties being divided between family and the Lord (vv.33-34).
- the equally proper concern that a Christian wife has for her husband (and children), with similar results. But a Christian woman who is single can be concerned about pleasing the Lord – how to be holy in body and in spirit (v.34).

## *I have learned the secret ...*

Again, Paul was “seeking first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33), aiming to secure the undivided devotion of believers to the Lord; he was not placing any unnatural restraints upon them (1 Corinthians 7:35). But, as to himself, he also bore daily the cares of the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28).

### Practical experiences and challenges

All of us can testify to the Lord's sufficient grace (cp. 2 Corinthians 12:9), which is towards us despite the many occasions when we fail, and succumb to the many cares and anxieties of modern-day living. I remember a very stressful time during my professional career when I found immense help and comfort from Psalm 94:17-19: “If Jehovah had not been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth, thy loving-kindness, O Jehovah, held me up. In the multitude of my anxious thoughts<sup>4</sup> within me thy comforts have delighted my soul” (Darby Tr.). I also found comfort in the Lord's words, “Take heart; it is I.<sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid” (Matthew 14:27, ESV). Let us pray, like David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!<sup>4</sup> And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24)

Paul said that he had “learned the secret” of overcoming anxiety:

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13).

Experience had taught him that there is a direct correlation between one's contentment and one's expectation. Remember what he stated in 1 Timothy 6:6 & 8? Personally, I find this to be a very challenging issue!

<sup>4</sup> In both psalms the same word (meaning ‘anxious or conflicting thoughts’) is used – see Darby's footnote, Psalm 139:23.

<sup>5</sup> Literally, “I AM”!

# Jesus in the midst

## Part 2

**George Stevens**

When here on earth the Lord was central to every group of people He was ever amongst. In a previous article (in the last issue) we considered lessons from two examples of this during “the days of His flesh” – when He was in the midst of the “doctors” at the temple aged twelve years; and when He was crucified between two robbers. Now we consider lessons from two examples of our Lord risen from the dead, and in the midst of “His own”.

### 3. In the midst of the disciples

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:19-23, KJV).

The Spirit is careful to tell us that it was the first day of the week when Jesus thus came and stood in the midst. It was in fact the very day of His resurrection. Although they were not yet formed into the “church” by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the disciples’ position and privilege on that momentous evening – of having the presence of the Lord in the midst – foreshadowed meetings of the church gathered to His name in a time shortly to commence.

The Lord thus puts His sanction, as it were, upon the assembling of His saints on that day. The first of the week does not speak to us of man’s work at all, but of a totally new order of things, brought in by God, founded upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Hence, Christians generally keep that day as special to meet together in activities for the Lord.

The presence of Jesus in the midst of His saints is as real today, though He is glorified in heaven. We still have His word, “Where two or three are gathered together in [unto] My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20)! He has not changed towards His own.

*When here on earth the Lord was central to every group of people He was ever amongst.*

### Peace

The Lord's first words to His disciples were, "Peace be unto you." He had just returned from the battle: sin had been judged, Satan was overthrown, and the world system that rejected Him was overcome. The work of redemption was finished to the glory of God. Therefore He returns to those for whom He suffered, and announces the happy result. He also "showed unto them His hands and His side" in order to assure them that peace had been made by the blood of His cross.

In verse 21 we find a little more about peace, because Jesus said to them, "Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." He is now *commissioning* them to do the same kind of work as He Himself had done for the Father. They were to preach and teach to the glory of God. They were to serve Him with "peace" in their souls. Even if the circumstances of service and testimony were discouraging the heart would be sustained by His peace.

More details of the commission are found in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

### Breath

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). We read the words of the Lord in Acts 1:5, "... ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." "Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39; cp. John 17:5), and so the Spirit was not yet given, but the Lord's breathing on them in this passage anticipated the Spirit's baptism. It symbolised a new life of spiritual power.

We could say that here the Lord (as risen from the dead) breathes His own risen life by the Holy Ghost into His beloved disciples, as natural life had been breathed into Adam by the LORD God (Genesis 2:7). They were unquestionably converted men already, but now the Lord empowered them to participate with Himself in life more abundantly (cp. John 10:10).

Following Pentecost, the indwelling Spirit now promotes this risen life of peace-through-righteousness within believers. He also identifies with them

personally, bearing witness with our spirit, sympathising with us in our groans and sorrows, and making intercession for us according to God (Romans 8:23-27). Those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God know that they have eternal life. 1 John 5:13 states, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

### Retention and Remission

The words which follow should be carefully considered, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Here the Lord is giving the disciples authority in the exercise of reception or discipline. Therefore, when a person is received back following the Lord’s chastening, the assembly “remit” or “looses” (cp. Matthew 18:18). On the other hand, if one is put away from amongst the saints in discipline, the assembly “retains” or “binds”. The epistles to the Corinthians furnish us with an illustration. In the first Letter, the apostle calls upon the assembly to put away from among themselves a certain wicked person (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). When he was put away, his sin was “bound” upon him. In the second epistle, once the man had repented and had been received back into the church, those sins were remitted (2 Corinthians 2:6ff).

On such solemn occasions the honour of the Lord, the purity of the assembly, and the blessing of the offender must all be borne in mind (cp. 2 Corinthians 7:7-12).

### 4. Jesus, the disciples, and Thomas

Finally, we see Jesus again in the midst of His disciples a week later.

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:26-29).

In John 20 we find Thomas at different stages: *absent*, *adamant*, *abased*, and *affiliated*.

Thomas had been *absent* when the gathered disciples first saw the risen Lord (v.24). We are not told the reason for his absence; but the passage shows that at this time following the death of Jesus his faith was shattered. The other ten disciples bore witness to him concerning what had happened, but he refused

*Is Christ, then, truly central to our gatherings?  
And is He truly central in our lives?*

their testimony concerning the Lord's resurrection. "But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (v.25). His unbelief is manifested in these words. He was *adamant* in refusing their witness.

But Jesus appeared to them again eight days later when Thomas was present, and again stood "in the midst." He was "in the midst" for Thomas as He had been for all the others. Knowing all, He invited Thomas to put His finger in the wounds of His hands and then to put his hand into the tear in His side. The Lord challenged this doubting disciple using his own words. He said to Thomas, "Be not faithless but believing!" (v.27).

Thomas was *abased*. He was humbled. He simply bowed before Christ and declared Him to be his Lord and his God. In a day to come, the faithful remnant of Israel will look upon Him whom they pierced, and mourn (Zechariah 12:10ff). Today, we can bow before Him in faith, acknowledging Him as our supreme Master and our God.

It is then we find those wonderful words of Christ, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (verse 20:29). From then on Christ was central for Thomas. Some of those who had "not seen, yet believed" were saved through the subsequent witness of Thomas. He was with other disciples in the upper room as they waited for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and His power (Acts 1:8, 12-14). He was one of those who stood with Peter as he boldly proclaimed the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord to the great crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:14). He was one of those fully employed in proclaiming and teaching the word of God in Jerusalem in the early days of the church (Acts 6:2). He was restored to full *affiliation* with the Lord Himself, with the twelve, with the Lord's people, and with the gospel.

Is Christ, then, truly central to our gatherings? Have we truly gathered in His name so that He is there, in the midst of us? (Cp. Matthew 18:20) And is He truly central in our lives, as He came to be in the life of Thomas?

# Abraham and Lot

## Genesis 13 & 14

**F.B. Hole**

*Continuing a series commenced in July 2017. This is a most instructive article.*

Abram had been called by God to leave Ur, then leave Haran and go to the land God would show him; and he had done it. He was pre-eminently the man of faith, yet the Scripture does not hide from us his occasional weakness and failure. God had called him to Canaan and not to Egypt. But when famine arose he does not appear to have sought counsel from God. Despite that, down to Egypt he went. By so doing he doubtless escaped the famine, but he ran into difficulties that he had not the faith to meet. Have we not often had to discover that a way which to worldly wisdom seems eminently wise, leads us into a position of spiritual danger? In Abram's case this dawned upon him as he neared the borders of Egypt. With all its splendour and affluence the morals of Egypt were deplorably low, and he sensed danger.

The simple ruse that Abram suggested to Sarai was not a downright lie, since Sarai was his half-sister (Genesis 20:12), yet it worked disastrously. It was just that kind of half-truth, or half-lie, which so often has been a snare to true saints of God. Men of the world may do that kind of thing and apparently be gainers, but if saints of God descend to that level they are always ultimately the losers. Abram's first thought was for his own life, and then for Sarai's virtue. The situation developed very much as he expected, but the outcome was not at all what he expected, inasmuch as God intervened. His mistake lay just there. In this move he had left God out of his calculations.

Thus it often is with us. We may trust God in the big things, yet forget to refer to Him in the smaller things. The Lord intervened so drastically in the plaguing of Pharaoh's house that even that heathen monarch woke up to the facts of the situation, and acted rightly. And not only so, but he also rebuked Abram. Now it is a sorry situation when a man of the world can rightly rebuke a man of faith. But so it was here, and so, alas, it has too often been since. Let us all be concerned that we do not find ourselves in such a situation.

As Genesis 13 opens we find Abram returning to the southern parts of Canaan, and making his way back to the spot between Bethel and Ai where he had first raised an altar when he came into the land of promise. This was the spot where he had been in touch with God and where he should have stayed instead of going down into Egypt. Back at the old spot, we read, "There Abram called on

the name of the LORD” (Genesis 13:4, KJV). The interrupted communion was restored, since he had got back, so to speak, to his first love (cp. Revelation 2:4). Here is a record which is intended to make us “wise unto salvation” and avoid backsliding of a similar kind.

Now that we have Abram back in his right place, let us sum up the situation. The world-system after the Flood started by men realizing that they could achieve as a community what they could not as mere individuals. They aimed at glorifying themselves by building a city as a permanent centre of influence, and a mighty tower which would be used ultimately – if not immediately – for idolatrous purposes and for getting into touch with the demon powers which lay behind the idols. Abram is called by God out of that world-system. Instead of a city of bricks and bitumen he had but a flimsy tent which could be taken down in an hour. Instead of a lofty and imposing tower he had a lowly altar, whereon were offered the sacrifices that were according to God’s thoughts. And there he called on the name of the LORD, and entered into communion with Him instead of falling a prey to the deceits instigated by demons. The world-system has developed, but it has not changed its essential features. Let us see to it that we pursue a path through it in keeping with the way pursued by Abram.

But then another crisis erupts in the life of Abram, as we find at the end of Genesis 13. Abram’s had been the faith that had led to the migration from Ur. Lot had shared in his pilgrimage up to a certain point, but evidently, though a righteous man (2 Peter 2:8), he had not fully shared in the faith that prompted the pilgrimage. A point had now been reached when the increase in their possessions under divine blessing was so great that strife broke out among their servants; and they could no longer dwell peaceably together. Formerly they had together separated from Ur; now they must separate from each other, and put sufficient distance between their cattle and herdsmen to avoid conflict.

Abram, the man of faith, is content to yield the first choice to Lot, the younger man. Lot’s choice reveals him at once to be one who walked by sight rather than by faith. From the central heights of the land Lot could look down on the warmer and much more fruitful plains of Jericho stretching down to the Dead Sea and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. With a keen eye to his own profit, Lot made choice of that alluring district, and journeyed east, coming down to the plains. He left the less fruitful heights to Abram.

In this episode we see Abram back at the moral elevation that had marked his outset. Then he had given up Ur with its civilized amenities; now he yields up the choicest part of the land of promise, content to be still a pilgrim if in

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*Lot's choice reveals him to be one who walked by sight rather than by faith.*

communion with God. His altar indicated that he was in touch with God; his tent that he still remained a pilgrim, though in the land of promise. What lay behind it all is indicated in Hebrews 11, where we read (vv.9-10, KJV),

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] ... for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

We also read in the same chapter, “They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly” (v.16). Abram had been called by “the God of glory” – as Stephen made known in his final address (Acts 7:2) – and to that call Abram remained true.

In contrast to this, Lot had seen that the plain stretching towards Sodom and Gomorrah was “as the garden of the Lord” (i.e., Eden); and when he embraced it, he also “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Genesis 13:10,12). The men of Sodom, however, excelled in wickedness – as verse 13 tells us – so they were really a playground of the devil. Towards that evil spot Lot gravitated.

From verse 14 to the end of chapter 13 we get God’s response to Abram’s faithfulness. The gift of the whole land to him and to his posterity is confirmed, and a promise is given that his seed shall be very numerous, as the dust of the earth. He is bidden to survey the land, walking through the length and breadth of it. This led him to move his tent to Mamre, or Hebron (v.18), but there also he maintained his altar to the LORD.



We can have little doubt that the confusion of tongues at Babel, and the consequent division of mankind into nations, must soon have given rise to wars, but we have no record of a battle in the Scriptures until we reach chapter 14. Here we read how four kings from Mesopotamia made an expedition towards the Dead Sea, ravaging cities as they marched, and ultimately defeating five kings headed by the king of Sodom. These five kings were really just petty chiefs, and Chedorlaomer was apparently their overlord, against whom they had evidently rebelled. It is an interesting fact that at this point in the Scripture narrative we come to names of persons that the archaeologists believe they can identify. Amraphel and Chedorlaomer have left their mark on very ancient

records, whereas no mark of that nature would be left by Abram the pilgrim who, years before, had severed himself from their cities and their whole way of life. In Genesis 14, however, all the interest is centred upon Abram, with Lot in the background.

In verse 12 we are permitted to see another step in the downward course of Lot. Not content with pitching his tent toward Sodom, he had now abandoned tent-life altogether and taken up permanent residence in the wicked city – a spot worse than Ur, the town he had originally he had left under Abram’s guidance. He now suffered the fate of the people of Sodom and was carried captive with all his house.

Abram acted with great decision directly the news of this disaster reached him. Arming his servants, he pursued the victorious kings and, overtaking them by night, utterly defeated them. We are told the small size of Abram’s own forces – 318 beside himself (14:14) – in order, I believe, to indicate that Abram’s action was prompted by extraordinary faith. The army he attacked must have been immensely stronger than his, and one which was flushed with victory all along the line up to that point. Yet Abram hesitated not, and God was with him. His victory was as remarkable as the victory of Gideon over the Midianites, recorded in the book of Judges. In result Abram recovered everything, including Lot, his household, and possessions (14:16). How striking the picture, and how important its lesson for us! The man who, even though he was “righteous”, grasped at the world with its outward prosperity and pleasures, lost everything and found himself a captive. The man who gave up the world and walked with God, was the only one in the whole region who could act in faith and have the power of God answering his faith and giving him the victory.



At the end of the chapter we find Abram winning a victory of another kind, but before we reach it we have the episode of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is introduced to us in Genesis 14:18 without any details as to his ancestry – an unusual feature, seeing that otherwise the ancestry of the godly is always recorded in Genesis. This omission is part of the Divine design, as pointed out in Hebrews 7, where much is made of Melchizedek because he was a striking type of Christ in the power and grace of His eternal priesthood. As far as the record in Genesis goes, Melchizedek is without father or mother, without pedigree, and without mention of either his birth or his death. He appears suddenly at verse 18 of our chapter, and after verse 20 he disappears. The Son of God, too, has “neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Hebrews 7:3), and,

*If we are in the enjoyment of the spiritual blessings,  
we have neither need nor desire for the gifts or  
patronage of the world.*

in the sense of being a “type”, Melchizedek was made to resemble Him in this. Note carefully that in Hebrews 7:3 Melchizedek was made like the Son of God, already existing from eternity; not the Son of God made like to *him*.

Melchizedek, then, was raised up as a “type” of the eternal order of priesthood which is consummated in Christ. His name means, “King of righteousness” and, since Salem means “peace”, he was also “King of peace” (Hebrews 7:2). The argument of Hebrews 7 is that the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, is Priest after this eternal order, and in this character Melchizedek invokes on Abraham the blessing of the Most High God, Maker of heaven and earth. This is the millennial name of God, used here for the first time in Scripture. To be blessed by the One who is Possessor of heaven and earth must have been no small thing to Abram. He received the blessing, and gave tithes of all...



That the king of Sodom had gone forth to meet the victorious Abram is mentioned in Genesis 14:17, but he does not really come into the picture till verse 21. Wishing to recompense Abram he offered to him all the goods of Sodom that he had recovered. The way Abram declined the offer is very striking (v.22). Through the ministrations of Melchizedek he now knew God in a new way. Put into touch with the Possessor of heaven and earth, he saw no value in the goods of Sodom, however attractive they might have seemed to others. Moreover they were all stained with the enormous sins of that city and brought defilement with them. Hence, in verse 23, we find language of great decision. The young men had eaten certain things, and Abram’s confederates and helpers might take their portion, but as for himself he would take nothing, not even the smallest item. He had been so fully enriched, both spiritually and materially, by God Himself, that he needed nothing more. His testimony to that would have been marred, if he had given opportunity to the king of Sodom to say he had made Abram rich. It is the same in principle for us today. If we are in the enjoyment of the spiritual blessings that are ours, we have neither need nor desire for the gifts or patronage of the world.

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# Barnabas – Serving in the Shadow!

David G. Pulman

*There are few more uplifting characters in the Bible than Barnabas.*

## Background

In the early days after the descent of the Holy Spirit forming the church of God, initially with the apostles and disciples in the upper room, Peter and others preached the gospel in the open air to large crowds and many were saved having trusted Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Towards the end of Acts chapter 4 we find this large group of believers were in heart and soul sharing their possessions. Property was sold, and the proceeds used to provide the necessary care for this large company of people.

There was opposition to the preaching of Jesus Christ, and it is reasonable to suggest that the believers would be suffering. Shunned maybe by family and friends and possibly the loss of employment would mean hardship all round. Therefore, the unselfish sharing and caring for those in need became a hallmark of the early believers and, in many ways, this has been true up to the present day.

## A new arrival

In Acts 4:36-37 we are introduced to Joses. “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (NKJV). Joses was obviously well known to the apostles because he is “nicknamed” Barnabas – “The son of consolation”. Barnabas, which means consolation, comfort or exhortation, describes the character of the man. Barnabas lived up to his new name. He was interested in people – a people person, we would say today. Barnabas was also one of the believers who sold land and gave the money to the apostles to help support the converts in Jerusalem. Additionally, we learn that his home was the island of Cyprus and that he was a Levite. Although we are not told, Barnabas probably stayed in Jerusalem and no doubt he was a useful brother in the assembly.

## Helping a religious bigot

We next meet Barnabas in Acts 9 when Saul of Tarsus comes to Jerusalem. Saul, after his dramatic conversion on the road outside Damascus, later had to flee from Damascus when his life was threatened. However, his previous reputation hindered his ability to meet the apostles, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple” (verse 26). It is Barnabas who takes him

in hand and acts as a mediator so that Saul's conversion and his subsequent preaching can be made known, "But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus" (verse 27). This resulted in Saul being accepted into the fellowship of the believers at Jerusalem. It is Barnabas, using his ability as a people person, who sees the difficulty and brings about a resolution through mediation. However, Saul's boldness in preaching soon brings him into conflict in Jerusalem which results in his departure to his home town of Tarsus.

### **Barnabas the ambassador**

News reaches the apostles in Jerusalem of a gospel campaign at Antioch. Barnabas is selected to go and investigate what was happening. Acts 11:23-24, "When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith..."

"... And a great many people were added to the Lord." These two verses give further insight into the character of Barnabas. He was genuinely delighted with the godly work being done at Antioch, so much so that he involved himself with further teaching to encourage these new converts. At Antioch additional godly characteristics come to light about Barnabas, "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith". Barnabas was a great positive influence in this fledgling assembly. We need saints of God today who have the same attributes. It would also seem to be that Barnabas was active in gospel preaching as a great many more are added to the Lord. Let us notice that Barnabas was not gathering people to himself or the local assembly, it was to the Lord. The emphasis is that believers were added to the Lord. The new converts were saved because of trusting the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and they also knew who was to be first in their lives. Although we have many responsibilities in life, we face the challenge as to whether we always put the Lord first.

### **The unselfish character of Barnabas**

Acts 11:25-26 highlights another feature of the character of Barnabas. "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." I think at this point Barnabas realised that there was a need for additional help that the assembly at Antioch be further encouraged and built up in the faith. Barnabas had witnessed the ability of Saul in his preaching at Jerusalem and so sets out for Tarsus to bring him into the work at

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Antioch. This resulted in Barnabas, Saul and others teaching for a whole year these new converts. The impact was so great that believers were given the “nickname” of Christians. Here for the first time there was a name which identified believers very simply with their Saviour – the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Honest and reliable**

At the end of Acts 11 news came to the assembly at Antioch by Agabus a prophet that there was going to be a great famine which would cause hardship to fellow Christians in Judea. This moved the hearts of the believers at Antioch to make a collection and send a gift to help their brothers and sisters in Christ. “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Verses 29-30). Barnabas and Saul are selected to take the gift. What we have seen so far regarding Barnabas and his character are the features that are required in every Christian. Why? Because such attributes give honour to Christ. The reality of Salvation is that a person is changed from old pre-conversion ways to what is new and expected of a believer, projecting the image of representing Jesus Christ. This change highlights the work of God in a soul.

### **Recognising potential**

We are not told much about the Jerusalem visit but at the end of Acts 12 we are told, “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark” (verse 25). From this we learn that both Barnabas and Saul seem to be happy that John Mark accompanies them as they return to Antioch.

From Acts 13 we learn that Barnabas and Saul are two of five who minister God’s word to the assembly at Antioch. We may assume that this was a large company of believers. It is at this time that the Holy Spirit clearly identifies Barnabas and Saul as two who should extend the spread of the gospel and establish believers in the faith. As they set out on their first missionary journey, John Mark goes with them. It is interesting that the first port of call is Cyprus, the home of Barnabas. On this island Satan uses one of his agents, a certain sorcerer, a false prophet and Jewish by nationality, to oppose the gospel work.

Saul deals with the opposition from this false prophet and brings temporary judgment upon the man and he is struck with blindness. The Scriptures only record one person believing and it is the island's governor. After this Barnabas and Saul move back to the mainland and it is at this point that John Mark returns to Jerusalem, leaving Barnabas and Saul to continue their missionary journey. From this point Saul is referred to as Paul and the order of names now mainly becomes Paul and Barnabas. This change in roles does not seem to affect Barnabas. As the chapter progresses it is Paul who takes the lead in the gospel and teaching ministry. We do see, however, that in verse 46 they are equally bold in the ministry. These two servants of the Lord are both stalwarts in the faith and service.

### **Zealous for God**

Paul and Barnabas move on in their missionary journey and arrive at a city called Lystra. Here they preached the word of God and they heal a man who had been born without the ability to walk. This resulted in the pagan priest of Jupiter wanting to honour Paul and Barnabas and offer sacrifices to them as “gods” come down out of heaven. At this point Barnabas and Paul ran among the people to restrain them from behaving foolishly. It gave an opportunity to preach the living God the creator of heaven and earth (Acts 14:8-18). It is interesting to note that Barnabas takes the lead as being first zealous for God that His honour is not given to another. We see the zeal of Barnabas, a Levite, coming to the fore on this occasion. Are we zealous for our God?

### **Steadfast in resisting wrong doctrine**

Returning to Antioch from their first missionary journey we see them initially giving an account of how God had worked among the nations. Then they settle back into assembly life, no doubt resuming their role as teachers. At the commencement of chapter 15 we have false teachers arriving from Judaea insisting that circumcision was necessary for salvation, “And certain men came down from Judaea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (verse 1). The arrival of the false teachers with their false doctrine caused much discussion which resulted in the assembly at Antioch deciding to send a delegation to Jerusalem, to the apostles and others, to clarify whether this was right or not. They sent a delegation which included Paul and Barnabas.

### **Faithfully declaring what God had done**

On their journey to Jerusalem they used the opportunity to visit assemblies on the way and relate to them the work that had been done among the Gentiles

which resulted in great joy. This is another example of the work of God bringing joy to believers.

The conference at Jerusalem was no easy matter as there were two factions, one which was Pharisee-based and still adhering to the rituals. It is the apostle Peter who eventually settles the matter. Let us refer to verses 7-12,

“And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So, God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.’ Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.”

Thankfully, with Spirit-given wisdom, Peter was able to resolve the issue of the false teaching. After a little while, Paul, Barnabas and others returned to Antioch.

### **A difference of opinion**

We have already seen how things did not always go smoothly with the early church with false teachers causing problems. Down through the centuries this has been a recurring issue and with sad legacies. At the end of Acts 15 we come to a different kind of problem, that of a difference of opinion between the Lord’s servants.

“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (verses 36-41).

This issue broke up a fruitful partnership between two of the Lord’s servants. Paul’s goals as a minister of the Word were defined for him by the Lord as Acts 9:15 states, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” We have seen in our consideration of Barnabas that he is more “people focused” and was not

called to Christian service in the same way as Saul of Tarsus. Therefore, it is possible with different priorities before each there was no resolution to this difficulty. Who was right and who was wrong? They could be both wrong or indeed both right. There was no shortage of teachers as Acts 15:40 indicates. Paul, along with Silas, set off to revisit assemblies encouraging the believers. Barnabas, however, takes John Mark and they set off for Cyprus. Cyprus was the location where John Mark had been introduced to mission activity. Here we see Barnabas using wisdom to help John Mark retrace those early days of Christian service as outlined in Acts 13. Was this both the path to recovery and to establish John Mark on a life of Christian service? How easy it is to discourage fellow believers! It takes a lot more effort and wisdom to work at recovery.

### Renewing Christian fellowship

In 1 Corinthians 9 we have Paul referring to Barnabas in a way that seems to indicate that they both are on better terms. From Colossians 4 we find that Mark is with Paul. Paul is in prison writing his letter to the Colossian assembly. Paul now speaks well of Mark and commends him to the believers there. Also, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, Timothy is instructed to find and bring Mark to Paul because of Mark's profitable ministry.

What a change has occurred since the disagreement in Acts 15! Two brothers restored to practical fellowship with each other, and the object of the disagreement is now valued as a profitable servant of the Lord. I have referred to Barnabas as a "people person", a term that is in use today. The Scriptures would refer to Barnabas as a "pastor" or "shepherd" who cares for the flock of God.

People like Barnabas are much needed in the assemblies as a Paul is needed. However, as we finish this consideration of Barnabas, we should remind ourselves of the Chief Shepherd by a verse of a hymn:<sup>1</sup>

Our Shepherd is the Lord,  
The living Lord who died:  
With all His fulness can afford  
We are supplied.  
He richly feeds our souls  
With blessings from above;  
And leads us where the river rolls  
Of endless love.

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<sup>1</sup> From James Beaumont (d.1750).

# The epistle to the Romans

## A thumbnail sketch

Ernest Bartlett and Theo Balderston

*Following on from the “thumbnail sketch” of Hebrews in the April issue.*

### Introduction

The apostle Paul had long wanted to visit Rome, the capital of the empire, and to proclaim the gospel of Christ there, but circumstances had prevented. Now he was hoping to visit them *en route* to Spain (see 15:20-29). But in advance of his intended visit he sends this letter by the hand of Phoebe, a sister from Cenchreae near Corinth, who was going to Rome on business (16:1-2).

Jews and proselytes from Rome had heard the gospel as early as on the day of Pentecost; and it seems that Aquila and Priscilla were already believers when Paul met them, fresh from Rome, in Corinth (Acts 2:10; 18:2). But Paul evidently detected some urgent need to expound the gospel more clearly to the Roman believers, and not to wait until he got there in person. The result was the epistle to the Romans.

### Sin and justification

He commences his exposition by explaining why everyone needs to be delivered from the penalty of sin, and how this can happen (1:16 – 5:21).

All of mankind are sinners. The Gentiles most clearly illustrated man’s total depravity, by the awful practices current at that time, including homosexuality. Their depravity came about because they had rejected God, as a result of which “God gave them up” (1:21-32, KJV). Even the more refined Gentiles, who condemned the more blatant sinners yet practised the same things, were hypocrites (2:1). Jews, too, were guilty of many of the sins of the Gentiles, and indeed were put to shame by some Gentiles who, though outside the Law of Moses, were doing things contained in the law (2:17-29).

What point, then, was there in being a Jew? Jews had one huge advantage: they had the very word of God in their hands. “To them were committed the oracles of God” (3:2). And Paul now assembles a collection of excerpts from these “oracles” (i.e., from the Old-Testament Scriptures) that abundantly demonstrates *God’s* verdict upon us all, namely, that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (3:10-18, 23). It is God’s verdict upon us, not our verdicts upon our fellow-creatures, or even on ourselves, that matters.

And now Paul introduces God’s marvellous answer to our sins – *justification*.

“Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...” (Romans 3:24-25, NKJV).

To “justify” is to pronounce an accused person righteous in a court of law. Can God honourably do such a thing in relation to us sinners? *He can*, for He has nothing more to prove about His own righteousness in relation to sin. No-one can accuse God of condoning sin, for He publicly judged all sins in the body and Person of Jesus Christ, His own Son, when He was crucified.

The result is that *all we have to do is believe*, and God will pronounce us righteous here and now, sinners though we are (3:26-28). Glorious truth of justification!

Not even Abraham, the revered forefather of all Jews, was pronounced righteous by God on account of his righteous conduct. Rather, it was simply because he “believed God” (4:3; see Genesis 15:6). Even Jews, therefore, can only be saved by faith; their attempts at law-keeping will never merit salvation. On the other hand, at the time when God pronounced Abraham righteous because of his faith, Abraham *was still uncircumcised*, i.e., still in the condition of a Gentile. So “justification by faith” extends to all non-Jews who believe as well! (4:10ff) As a result we can have peace with God, access to His very presence, and can rejoice in hope of entering His glory (5:1-2).

### **Deliverance from the power of sin (5:12 – 8:39)**

But there is a deeper matter to attend to. We are not sinners because we sin; rather, we sin because we are sinners. We have all inherited a sinning nature, ultimately from Adam himself. The death of Christ, however, liberates us in this respect also (5:12-21).

How? Firstly, once we have believed, we need to see ourselves from God’s perspective, not our own. The figure of baptism teaches us that, when we believed, our “old man” (the person we were without Christ) was crucified with Christ in God’s sight, and that God views us as new men, raised with Christ. So we are to conduct our lives “in newness of life” and not be slaves to sin (6:3,4). We must reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, and “yield ourselves alive unto God” (6:11). We are to realise that we who formerly were servants of sin now

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rather, we sin because we are sinners.*

*Christ's resurrection "according to the Spirit of holiness" is our power to live according to the Spirit.*

have a new master, and are to "produce fruit to holiness", which results in eternal life (6:16ff).

But once we start trying to do this, we discover a big problem. There is a battle between our two natures, the old man and the new man. Trying to keep the law even aggravates our difficulty (7:5-11). The remainder of chapter 7 expands upon the dispiriting conflict between the two natures, and ends in the exclamation of verse 24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The imagery is of a prisoner strapped to a dead body that cripples his movements. But then in verse 25 the problem is solved: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Chapter 8 shows how. It begins with the ringing affirmation, "No condemnation to those in Christ Jesus". The remainder of this first verse (KJV) is not in the original text, so we should continue straight from this affirmation to the second verse, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." Up to this point in the epistle there have been only two references to the Holy Spirit (1:4; 5:5), but in this chapter there are many references. God's verdict upon the sinful flesh was pronounced in the sinless body of Christ crucified, and now Christ's resurrection "according to the Spirit of holiness" (see 1:4) is our power to live according to the Spirit. When we do, the righteous objectives of the law are realised in us (8:2-14).

More than that, the Holy Spirit within us is also "the Spirit of adoption" into the family of God, so that we can call God, "Father" (8:15). And the indwelling Spirit is the guarantee of the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection (8:11, 17-25). The Holy Spirit also helps our infirmities, guiding us what we should pray for (8:26-27). All the problems that we face work together for blessing, and are to refine us as Christians. God's predestinating purpose for us cannot be frustrated (8:28-30).

Verses 31-39 form the magnificent climax to the whole epistle up to this point. "What shall we say to these things? If God be for us who can be against us?" We are on the winning side! God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; God justifies: no-one can condemn. Christ has died and risen for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

*What shall we say to these things?  
If God be for us who can be against us?*



**The unbelief of Israel: chapters 9 – 11**

Chapters 9–11 are a parenthesis. They leave the previous subject, which Paul will return to in chapters 12–15.

Despite the triumphant conclusion in 8:31-39 to chapters 1 – 8, Paul still carried one ineradicable pain in his heart. Many Jews had been saved, beginning with the three thousand at Pentecost, but the Jewish nation as such still rejected the gospel. This left Paul with the same pain in his heart as Moses had felt long before (9:1-3; cp. Exodus 32:32).

Nevertheless Paul affirms that the purposes of God were being carried out in it all. This is the sombre message of 9:6-24. God had said that only a remnant [of Israel] would be saved (9:27; cp. Isaiah 10:22). The reason for the unbelief of the great majority in Israel was that they were seeking salvation by works of the law, not faith (9:31-33).

And yet Paul's heart's desire and prayer was for the salvation of Israel as a nation (10:1). They had a zeal for God, and yet were ignorant of God's righteousness (10:2-3). His righteousness does not depend on our exertions or great exploits (10:5-8), but is very simple; it is just the word of faith that Paul and his co-workers preached:

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”  
(Romans 10:9).

But these two things were exactly what the Jewish nation as a whole refused to do. Preachers had indeed been sent to them, but “They [had] not all obeyed the gospel”. This also was foretold in the prophets: they were a disobedient and gainsaying people (10:14-21).

*Paul's heart's desire and prayer  
was for the salvation of Israel as a nation*

And yet, despite all appearances, God had not cast away His people. Paul, himself a saved Jew, was proof of this (11:1). And whilst God at the present time is only saving a remnant of Jewish people, His purpose stands, in spite of everything, to save them all (11:26). This purpose is irrevocable (11:29).

But this fixed purpose of God contains a warning to the Gentile nations. “Be not high-minded, but fear” (11:20). Just as the Jewish “branch” had been broken off the tree of God’s saving purposes in the history of this world, so too the Gentile nations could equally be broken off (11:17-24). (Might not this very thing be happening in our own time in Europe and north America?)

The chapter ends with a beautiful doxology, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God...” (11:33-36).



### Service and fellowship: chapters 12 – 16

Chapters 12 – 16 are the outcome of chapter 8, which declared that we have victory over sin through the Holy Spirit. Paul beseeches us, in response to this, to present our bodies “living sacrifices”. Before we can serve the Lord effectively there must be a commitment, a dedicating of our lives to the Lord’s service (12:1-2).

The Lord uses our natural abilities, as well as the spiritual gifts which He has given to us (12:4-8). Among the spiritual gifts is “prophecy” – which includes forth-telling of God’s mind from His word as well as exhortation, edification, and comfort (see 1 Corinthians 14:3). “Ministry” includes teaching – the ability to explain things in such a way that the hearers can understand. “Exhortation” means giving encouragement; see the example of Barnabas in Acts 11:23. “Ruling” means guiding the people of God in the local assembly (Hebrews 13:7,17).

In Romans 12:9-16 Paul passes from definite gifts to Christian graces. These are also the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to put others first (see too Philippians 2:4); be diligent in what we do; bless our persecutors; and, as far as it depends on us, live peaceably with all – though that doesn’t mean compromising.

Chapter 13:1-7 regulates our relationship with the political authorities. Verses 8-10 show that by proper and loving attitudes to others the “righteous requirement [or, result] of the law will be fulfilled in us...” (see 8:4). We are incentivised to do these things when we realise that “the night is far spent”, and the Lord’s coming is near (13:11-14). The chapter closes with the extremely

practical advice, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”

Chapter 14 considers the delicacy of conscience of others. We are not to judge another believer’s conscience. One may be a vegetarian, another freely eat meat; but for each, the rule is that, whether we live or die, we live unto the Lord (v.8). When we are inclined to criticise a fellow-believer, we should recollect that we all shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ. In such matters we can well leave the evaluation to the Lord (vv.10-13).

The first thirteen verses of chapter 15 pinpoint the underlying issue that caused Paul to dwell on issues such as food, namely, tense Jew-Gentile relations in the church. Paul’s concern is that they be able to sing the praises of God as a company united in heart and spirit (15:6-14).

From verse 14 of chapter 15 Paul begins to conclude his epistle by reminding the Roman believers of the authority he has for writing such a letter. He regrets the many things that have prevented his visiting them in Rome to date, and informs them of his intended travel plans – and of their risks – and asks for their prayers (15:22-33). He was right to request their prayers, for his plans did not work out. He was arrested in Jerusalem and only reached Rome as a prisoner (Acts 21:32ff; 28:16). But no doubt “God meant it for good”; no doubt by this means alone could Paul bear witness before Caesar himself (Acts 9:15; 27:24).

Chapter 16 is an epilogue; all that remains is for the apostle to send greetings. He commends Phoebe, and expresses appreciation for what various brothers and sisters known to him in Rome have done for him. We should remember to do similarly.

Before closing he tells them that “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” – echoing Genesis 3:15. He ends with a most important doxology, which identifies His gospel as central to the “mystery” of God’s purposes, never previously revealed, but now “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” through the spoken ministry and writings of men with prophetic gift. This very letter was doubtless one of those writings; and we read more about this “mystery” in Ephesians 3, and Colossians 1:26-27.

*The God of peace  
shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*

# Cheering Words Calendar 2020

The 2020 calendar may now be ordered from STP, with two pictures (one on either side of the calendar back):

Tarbert Harbour,  
Argyll & Bute, Scotland

Northern Ireland  
countryside sunrise



Tarbert Harbour, Argyll and Bute, Scotland

Photo © StockPhoto/raunold

## Cheering Words

MARCH

17

TUESDAY

Seek the Lord, and his strength; seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.

Psalm 105:4-5

Deep in unfathomable mines Of never-failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs, And works His sovereign will.

Scripture Truth Publications, 31-33 Glover Street, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 3LD Tel: 01270 252274



Northern Ireland countryside sunrise

Photo © StockPhoto/Phong

## Cheering Words

FEBRUARY

11

TUESDAY

When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.

Proverbs 16:7-8

Nothing but Christ, as on we tread, The Gift unpriced, God's living Bread; With staff in hand and feet well shod, Nothing but Christ — the Christ of God.

Scripture Truth Publications, 31-33 Glover Street, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 3LD Tel: 01270 252274

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# The Lord who heals

Heal us, EMMANUEL; here we are,  
waiting to feel thy touch;  
deep wounded souls to Thee repair,  
and, Saviour, we are such.

Our faith is feeble, we confess,  
we faintly trust Thy word;  
but wilt Thou pity us the less?  
be that far from Thee, Lord!

Remember him who once applied  
with trembling for relief;  
“Lord, I believe,” with tears he cried,  
“O help my unbelief.”

She too, who touched Thee in the press,  
and healing virtue stole;  
was answered, “Daughter, go in peace,  
thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Concealed amid the gath’ring throng,  
she would have shunned Thy view;  
and if her faith was firm and strong,  
had strong misgivings too.

Like her, with hopes and fears we come,  
to touch Thee if we may;  
oh! send us not despairing home,  
send none unhealed away.

William Cowper (1731 – 1800), from *Olney Hymns* [1779], no. 14.