

# Scripture Truth



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Infinity

I AM The True Vine

"As is the Heavenly"

"Consider your ways"

Alpha people: Elisabeth

The newness of resurrection

Paul's route to practical holiness

Creation Mega-Themes in O.T. History

October – December 2011

# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

**SCRIPTURE TRUTH** is published every three months to expound the teaching of the Scriptures so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

Annual Subscription 2011

£9.50 Post Free UK – £11.50 Post Free Overseas

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**SCRIPTURE TRUTH** is the imprint of the Central Bible Hammond Trust

Registered Charity No. 223327

All correspondence should be addressed to:

**SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications**

31-33 Glover Street, CREWE, Cheshire CW1 3LD

Tel: 01270 252274

Fax: 01477 587454

## Paul's route to practical holiness

The lives of Paul's Corinthian converts authenticated his ministry (2 Corinthians 3:1, 2). The change in them had been produced by what Paul described as a new-covenant ministry, in the sense that it was "not of the letter but of the spirit" (v.6). "The letter" means the code on stone tablets enforced externally on Israel, which ultimately condemned them all. By contrast "the spirit gives life." But how? For the thought of "life," compare Deuteronomy 30:19-20 with Romans 7:10. The "life" is one well-pleasing to God; the Law promised it, but could not deliver. What is "the spirit" in this verse? Note that I have now opted for "spirit" rather than "Spirit", in the belief that the answer commences in verse 17a, "The Lord is the spirit." But how is "the Lord" Himself "the spirit" of Paul's new-covenant ministry? It is as "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed..." (v.18, ESV). Paul's ministry declared "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (4:4). It proclaimed Christ crucified, risen and glorified, and directed the listener to Christ where He is now. By their beholding Him adoringly, Christ became the inner, transforming power in the Corinthians. This was effected within them "even as by the Lord the Spirit" (3:18). Paul had already interjected in v.17 that "Where the Spirit of the Lord is - liberty!" There was no external compulsion about the morally transforming force of Paul's gospel - it was the inward work of one divine Person, presenting the glory of another divine Person to the heart of the believer and transforming him or her through it.

But we still have an old nature which cannot be transformed by beholding the Lord. Therefore, whilst telling the Colossians to "have [their] mind on the things that are above..." Paul also added, "Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, etc." (3:2, 5, Darby Trans.). We must show resoluteness in this. We need both the positive (beholding the glory of the Lord) and the negative (putting to death our sinful members) in order to become "epistles of Christ."

**Theo Balderston**

# The newness of resurrection

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## John 20

David Taylor

*The fact of the resurrection is fundamental, but the interest of many Christians in it stops there. Similarly, in John 20: 8, 10 Peter and John inferred the fact of the resurrection – and went home. But Mary waited and met the Person who had risen, and thereby learned the new blessings of resurrection. This article, which originated in a Bible reading, expounds these blessings.*

The resurrection is amazing. Four absolutely basic things are confirmed by it. Firstly the truthfulness of the Word of God, since the Scriptures confirm that He would rise again from the dead (e.g. Psalm 16: 10; cp. 1 Corinthians 15:4). Secondly, in Romans 1:4 the Lord's Sonship is confirmed by His resurrection. He is "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (NKJV). ("From the dead" is, literally, "of dead persons" but the Lord's resurrection is undoubtedly foremost.) Thirdly, in Romans 10:9 salvation is based upon the blessed fact of the resurrection. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Darby Trans). And then, fourthly, the resurrection is confirmation of judgment to come. "[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31, NKJV).

And in John 20, four new things are emphasised that did not exist, we might say, until the resurrection. John 20:1 introduces a wonderful *new day*, the first day of the week. In verse 17 the Lord declares a *new relationship*, "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (Darby Trans.). In verse 22 He communicates a *new power*: "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (v.22). And fourthly in verse 29 He enunciates a *new principle*, the principle of faith in Himself as dead and risen, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (NKJV). The truth in John could be described as heavenly truth for heavenly citizens walking here on earth (cp. John 17:14); and we became heavenly citizens through the Lord's death and resurrection.

In following the chapter I'd like readers to try to put themselves into the situation of Mary Magdalene and of the disciples in the upper room, so as to feel the wonder of what it would mean to their souls to realise that the Lord had indeed risen from the dead, and of the glorious new things this had brought about.

### The new day

Until the resurrection "the first day of the week" is never expressly mentioned in Scripture. "The day after the Sabbath" is prescribed as the day for the feasts of firstfruits and Pentecost (Leviticus 23:11, 16); and the events at Bethany described in John 12:1ff certainly happened on that day. But the point at which the Holy Spirit first specifically mentions "the first day of the week" – in each of the four Gospels (also Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1) – is the day of the Lord's resurrection.

Just before it dawned, "in the end of the Sabbath" (Matthew 28:1), three women (Mark 16:1) were making their way to the sepulchre. To their consternation they found the stone taken away. They didn't expect this (Mark 16:3-4). Mary Magdalene came in haste to Simon Peter and John, telling them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him" (John 20:2).

The Lord had three times forewarned the disciples of His death and resurrection; and, shortly before, they had witnessed the raising of Lazarus. But the shock of His death had perhaps obliterated from their minds all possibility of resurrection. However, the three words translated "saw" in verses 5, 6 and 8 reveal some slowly dawning recognition of what had happened. When John "saw the linen cloths lying there" (v.5) that word is just the "saw" of observation. He "saw" the situation, without recognising its significance. When Simon Peter "saw" the linen cloths lying (v.6), the word means, further, that he was quizzical: "What *could* this mean?" But when John had entered the tomb and "saw and believed," this is the "saw" of recognition, of actually understanding what had taken place.

### The new relationship

But what happened next? They "went away again to their own homes" (v.10). They accepted the resurrection as a fact, but it didn't as yet have the deep impact on them that it had on Mary. For them it was a mental assent to the fact that He was risen. But for Mary it was a heart matter. "But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping" (v.11). And this is the challenge to us. Mary's *knowledge* was perhaps less than that of Peter and John at that point. But her heart was moved. Are our hearts moved? The motive for all service

must be love for the Lord. Not love for the brethren; not love for a job. Service may be onerous at times. But love for the Lord is what's important. Are our hearts moved by love?

Mark adds words which help to explain Mary's devotion: "Out of whom He had cast seven demons" (16:9; cp. Luke 8:2). Formerly her heart had been possessed by an enormity of evil; but, with the demons thrown out, love for the Lord had replaced it. The one who is forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47). Mary's devotion – I say it reverently – was to the dead body of her Lord. Her concern as to the body was her concern for *Him*. She would have Him, however He was, and for as long as she could. She had no home; her only home was where *He* was. She sees angels. If I saw an angel I would be quite taken up with the angel. But Mary's mind was not on angels.

And despite the glory of His resurrection the Lord came to her in so lowly a way that she supposed Him to be the gardener! (John 20:15) His first, gentle, words in resurrection, as far as we are aware, were, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" And here was the only One who was worth seeking, the only One who can take the tears away! But she didn't pause to identify the One who spoke to her. She didn't even question how she would take that body away (v.15). Her only concern was *Himself*. "My Lord... I don't know where they've laid Him."

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'" (v.16) Mary heard in her name the Lord's personal word of relationship to her. The disciples had accepted the fact of resurrection; but she waited, and met the Person risen from the dead. It's not knowing about Him; it's knowing Him. The apostle Paul said, "That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10). And then she was granted the tremendous privilege of transmitting the news of a *new relationship*. We have already heard in this Gospel of "my sheep," "my disciples," and "my friends" (John 10:27; 13:35; 15:8, 14). But here we get what surely is the top-stone of it all, when the Lord says, "Go to my brethren" (v.17; see too Matthew 28:10). In the garden of Eden a creatorial relationship had been broken. But to a woman whose love for the Lord and sense of His death had kept her in this other garden, this new relationship is revealed. Mary's love for the Lord, and now her sense of His death and resurrection and of the new relationship founded on them, encapsulate what "the new day" should mean to us.

Mary was to bring to those whom He now called "His brethren" a new relationship with God expressed in a phrase never before spoken, "My Father and your Father" (v.17). The wonderful family relationship thus expressed

could only be consequent on His death and resurrection. The Name of “Father” occurs in the Old Testament, carrying the thought of the One who is superior and sovereign. The Lord had already brought the disciples into the more intimate knowledge of “your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, etc.) during His earthly ministry. But the way that now we can call God our Father is beyond even this.

Mary wanted to retain the Lord in the old relationship she had known before the cross. This is why He said to her, “Do not cling to me” (v.17). The prohibition does not so much concern Mary’s action in itself, for we read in Matthew that the other women held Him by the feet (28:9). It concerns what she was trying to cling to: her old relationship with the Lord. The Lord Jesus now is on the other side of death, and is now linking her with Himself in His resurrection life as Man, connecting her with His Father as her Father, and with His God as her God. He calls the disciples “My brethren,” and they would stand in this relation to Him *as ascended*. It is a relationship forged on earth, but relative to heaven. With the old relationship, Mary would have lost it again at the ascension; but not this new relationship.

There remains an absolute distinction. Whilst in wonderful grace He calls us “My brethren,” we do not have the licence to call Him “our Brother.” Similarly, the Lord never uses the phrases “our Father”, or “our God” to include Himself with us. It is “My Father and your Father... my God and your God.” Nonetheless, it is in this new relationship to Him, the risen Man, that as “His brethren” we come to the Father.

### The new power

In the next little section we get events in the evening of the same day (verses 19-21). At the end of this “first day of the week” the disciples were gathered together. They were fearful, and perhaps still confused as to what really had happened. They were frightened of



*The Lord  
Jesus is  
now  
linking her  
with  
Himself in  
His  
resurrection  
life,  
connecting  
her with  
His Father  
as her  
Father.*





the Jews too. But Jesus came, and stood in the midst and said, “Peace be with you.” This was the first of three occasions in this chapter when the Lord said “Peace” to them (vv.19, 21, 26); and here it quieted their fears.

But the second “Peace” concerned their service. “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (v.21). The two “sends” are different words. The first “sent” indicates that the Lord came with all the authority of heaven at His disposal. But the “send” of “I also send you” denotes their being sent forth under His authority. The disciples might have reacted, “Look, Lord, how you had to suffer, and all the things that were against you prior to your death.” But the Lord gives them His peace (John 14:27) in saying, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” And linked with the peace is the power given in verse 22.

Just what was imparted in verse 22? The word “breathe” occurs in one other place: “[God] breathed into [man’s] nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). There the “breathing” relates to the imparting of natural life. See also Ezekiel 37: 9-10, where Ezekiel prophesies to the wind, and breath came into the “dry bones” so that they lived. So it seems to me that the “breathing” here is the imparting of resurrection life. The Spirit had not been yet given (John 7:39; 16:7), but the Lord is giving a particular commission to these eleven men, and with it the power of resurrection life for their service, as a prelude, you might say, to that great event of Pentecost.

And in verse 23 He commissioned them with the glorious message of the gospel, which says, “Jesus died – your sins are forgiven you if you trust in Him. If you don’t, your sins are retained.”

### **A great confession and a new principle**

Thomas wasn’t there on the first “first day of the week,” but the Lord made a second visit “after eight days” – i.e., on the next “first day of the week” – just to meet Thomas’s doubts (vv. 25-26). He has an individual interest in each disciple. Don’t let Satan persuade us otherwise! We often think of our love for the Lord, but I think we have no conception of what the Lord’s love is for us. If we did we’d be very different. He goes “after the one which is lost until he finds it” (Luke 15:4).

And, though we always call him “doubting Thomas,” here he rises perhaps higher than the other disciples. No-one else ever personally said to the Lord, “My Lord and my God.” And what made Him say it? So far as John tells us, it was seeing those death wounds, yet in resurrection life, that caused this response. This One could not be any Other than his Lord and



his God. And how much are we moved by the sight of what He has done – this glorious Man, now risen from the dead and ascended? Does it evoke a response from my heart, an acknowledgement that He really is God, and that He truly is my Lord?

In answer, the Lord pronounces a blessing on those “who have not seen and yet have believed” (v.29). Thomas could have been the first to exemplify that faith if he had believed his fellow-disciples’ testimony (vv.25-26). We now have the opportunity of exercising this faith in a world which openly mocks it.

### Conclusion

Thomas’s response aptly belongs to the “new day”, the “first day of the week.” This was the day when the disciples gathered together. It’s the day that is peculiarly related to *Him* in view of His death and resurrection. It is certainly “the Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10. The Sabbath is past as far as this dispensation is concerned. A dead Christ in a grave was on the Sabbath. But on “the first day” we have a living Lord in resurrection life. This was the day on which the disciples met Him, and learned about a new relationship with God as His Father and our Father, a new power of resurrection life, and a new principle on which blessing is based today – i.e., on faith in Christ having died, but now risen and ascended. Do we value this day? Sometimes I wonder how much “the first day of the week” really means to us.

Other truths originate in the resurrection: our standing as dead and risen in Christ (Romans 6:4-5), for example. We know, too, that He is Lord of both the dead and the living as a consequence of death and resurrection (Romans 14:9). Profound truths. But my prayer is that the readers’ hearts might be moved by what transpired in John 20, and, in consequence, our feet be moved in service for Him.



*On “the  
first day”  
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# “Consider your ways”

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## The message of Haggai

Ted Murray

*Eighteen years of “getting nowhere” had made the Jewish returnees from Babylon “give up.” They could maintain the morning and evening sacrifice on the rebuilt (brazen) altar. Otherwise they looked after themselves, claiming that it wasn’t yet time to build the temple. Concern about similar attitudes in our day was much on Ted’s heart. The Lord called him home before he could complete this sequel to his studies of Ezra and Nehemiah, but we are extremely grateful to his widow, Rosemary, for letting Scripture Truth publish it, and for preparing the last part from notes he made in hospital. The final twenty lines or so are the editor’s attempt to complete Ted’s comments on the second prophecy.*

### Introduction

Haggai is the tenth of the minor prophets, and he was the first prophet to speak on God’s behalf after the captivity. A prophet’s task is not only to “foretell” but to “tell forth,” and in this book Haggai carries out both tasks. There does not appear to be any direct evidence as to his parentage, and so Haggai cannot be linked to any of the families of returning exiles listed in Ezra 2. But he was probably amongst their number. One tradition suggests that Haggai may also have been among the few survivors who had seen Solomon’s temple in all its splendour; another that he was born in Babylon and came to Jerusalem as a young man; yet another that he was of priestly rank. Jewish writers claim that he, along with Zechariah and Malachi, was a member of the 120-strong Great Synagogue. But much of this seems to be conjecture as we have no scriptural evidence to verify these claims. In the Septuagint, the names of Haggai and Zechariah are associated with the titles of Psalms 137, 145-148. Other manuscripts include Psalm 111, 125 and 126. Haggai’s recorded prophecies were delivered in the short period from the first day of the sixth month to the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of the second year of Darius I, son of Hystaspes (520 B.C.). The circumstances were gloomy: Ezra 4:1-5, 24 give a very vivid picture of this. The remnant that had returned to Jerusalem about eighteen years earlier, full of hope and resolve to rebuild the temple, had soon become discouraged by the opposition of non-Jewish people in the land. Due to this and to opposition at the Persian court the rebuilding of the house of God had ceased for about seventeen years.

A fuller picture of the situation can be gleaned from reading all of the six Old Testament books which describe it in detail, and it would prove beneficial to us all to become acquainted with their contents. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are historical, whereas Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are spiritual, and in them the Lord admonishes, enlightens and encourages His people in a path of separation to Himself.

It is in the situation described in these books that Haggai (as also Zechariah) is commissioned by God to speak (Ezra 5:1). Jerusalem, God’s centre, was a blackened ruin. The walls of separation and protection were in a state of disrepair. The altar has been rebuilt and was functioning, but the task of rebuilding the temple had come to a stop. The people who had returned from the captivity full of enthusiasm were now discouraged, inward-looking, and selfish. The political and religious leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, were no longer able to restore the lost enthusiasm of the people, or their sense of well-being. This picture has a familiar ring to us in the twenty-first century. The testimony is fragmented; the path of separation has been almost forgotten; the ministry of the word by able men is no longer cherished; but thankfully the altar still functions. The work of Christ on the cross of Calvary is still as effective today as it was in the days of the apostles. Our God has not changed (cp. Malachi 3:6), His power and glory have not diminished, and neither has His ability to revive downcast souls. There are still servants of God who are being introduced into the church for the purpose of reinvigorating the downcast, rekindling affection for Christ, re-energising our zeal, and restoring the testimony.

It took Haggai, with all his zeal, four occasions, or four prophecies, to rouse the people of Jerusalem to re-commence building the Temple. His messages were not in elegant language – they were short, sim-



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and Joshua,  
were no  
longer able  
to restore  
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enthusiasm  
of the  
people.  
This picture  
has a  
familiar  
ring to us  
in the  
twenty-  
first  
century.*



ple and to the point; in fact rather blunt. The four prophecies, with the dates of their delivery during the second year of Darius’s reign, are:

- First prophecy 1:2-11 (first day of sixth month)
- Second prophecy 2:1-9 (twenty-first day of seventh month)
- Third prophecy 2:10-19 (twenty-fourth day of ninth month)
- Fourth prophecy 2:20-23 (twenty-fourth day of [ninth] month)

It is only from the first message that the effects are recorded (1:12-15).

It seems, as some commentators have suggested, that what we have before us are the headings or notes of the messages that Haggai delivered to the people of his day. But, whatever they were, they have been, and are still being, used by God to bring about the restoration of worship and testimony by His people. We can thank God that in His acts of grace He does not leave His people without conscience-stirring ministry. The messages that were given by the prophet to the returned remnant led to self-judgement and a re-invigorating of their lives. As already suggested, the three post-exilic prophets ought to be studied together, as they were the means that God used to bring about the change of attitude, the renewed desire to serve, and the awareness that God cannot be short-changed, amongst the returned remnant.

We also live in day of failing testimony, a day where God’s order has been replaced with man’s ideas, and a day in which there is a departure from the authority of the word of God. It can be said, then, that the messages of the post-exilic prophets are applicable for the church today.

### **Chapter 1. The prophet’s challenge: what are your priorities?**

The first verse of chapter 1 sets the scene, and backs up what is stated in Ezra 4:24 regarding the state of affairs existing at the time. Haggai addresses the two rulers, Zerubbabel, who was not only the governor but also a descendant of king David (1 Chronicles 3:16-19), and Joshua the High Priest.

These two in particular were responsible to discharge the commission from Cyrus to rebuild the temple. It is the task of those who are called to leadership to be constantly aware of what God’s will is for the local church, or assembly, in which they find themselves. It is so easy to carry on as usual, keeping to the traditional line, not introducing anything that may cause an eyebrow to be raised amongst those who regularly attend. Like the people of Zerubbabel’s day, we too can readily see problems that are not really there. Verse 2 of the chapter says it all. “The time has not come, the time

that the house of the Lord should be built”(NKJV). For us “the house of the Lord” signifies the testimony. The testimony to Jehovah, the God of heaven, (as Cyrus had called Him – Ezra 1:2), should have been visible to others who resided around Jerusalem. This testimony appears not to have been a priority for the returned Jews of that time; but as we examine our own lives in this twenty-first century we find that we have similar tendencies to them. We are satisfied with “the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10). They had the rebuilt altar, and no doubt faithfully carried out the ritual of the morning and evening sacrifices. We in our day have our normal weekly services, which many of us faithfully attend, but do not expend our energies on other spheres of the testimony. Like them, we too have our “ceiled [or, panelled] houses” (Haggai 1:4) – and in our case carpeted floors and upholstered furniture – for our ease and comfort! We have the daily newspaper, the television or the internet to occupy our attention and give us other priorities that sadly displace the claims of the Lord.

As we consider the first of Haggai’s messages (1:2-11) we find other similarities. We too are not forbidden to gather together with each other for prayer, the study of God’s word, fellowship, and worship. In fact we have all the privileges mentioned in Acts 2:42-47 with the exception that we no longer have favour with all people. In his first message Haggai also paints a vivid picture of an *unsatisfied* community. He lists many things that they do and have, but they still want more. When we look at society today we see the same tendencies – “Have it now, pay for it tomorrow” – and sadly these tendencies are also prevalent in Christian circles. So the challenge issued by Haggai comes to us today.

It is amazing, when we consider what the Lord has done for us, how everyday things like work, feeding



*We can  
thank God  
that He  
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stirring  
ministry.*



the family, relaxation, our own appearance, and money, somehow take priority over the things of God. There are a number of areas where the call to “consider our ways” (Haggai 1:5) applies: our business life, our home life, our leisure life, as well as our assembly life. Somehow we have managed to compartmentalise our lives into distinct areas of activity and assign differing priorities to each. If we are honest, we find in some cases that service for the Lord and His people comes a good way down the list. The call of Haggai’s first prophecy comes to us today with regard to these priorities. How often do we review our priorities? How many other things in our lives take practical precedence over the One who must have pre eminence in all things (Colossians 1:18)? When we do get round to taking stock of our lives, we find out just how much time and effort have been spent in worthless pursuits. Fellowship with the Lord’s people, gathering together to remember the Lord, the weekly Bible study and prayer meeting – are often sacrificed in order to make room for these other things.

## Chapter 2: one comparison and two promises

Almost one month had passed since the Lord had used Haggai and Zechariah to stir up Zerubbabel, Joshua and the returned remnant to restart the rebuilding of the temple. Haggai’s definiteness about the dates of his prophecies probably has a lesson for some of us who are rather casual about our attitude to time. His second message, delivered not quite two months after the first (cp. 1:1 and 2:1), is rather pointed. “Who among you can remember the former glory of the temple?” (cp. 2:3) He is not satisfied with one question, but follows it with a challenge to appraise the situation that now exists. Much has been written about “the day of small things” (2:3; cp. Zechariah 4:10), but here the Lord seems to use the contrast between former glory and the current situation to motivate the people to expect the greater things foretold at the end of this particular word from the Lord (2:6-9).

This reminder would suggest a number of things to those who were discouraged. Firstly: be satisfied with your lot. Secondly: even though the glory of Solomon’s temple has gone and the grandeur that accompanied it has been trashed, God is still requiring worship from His people. The facilities, though somewhat meagre, are in no way to halt daily praise. But God has another day in mind, and as we read this chapter He introduces His purpose. Verses 6-9 speak of a day yet to come; but meanwhile God reiterates His promise, “Work, for I am with you” (2:4). This was a promise *for the moment*. Haggai reminds the discouraged remnant, who had turned away

from God’s interests to their own interests, that they had the presence of God’s Spirit in their midst. “My Spirit remains among you; do not fear” (2:5). One may say it is all very well to hear exhortations and platitudes, but we need something concrete. By reminding the people of the LORD’s already-fulfilled promise to their forefathers in redeeming them by power from the bondage of Egypt, God used Haggai to encourage them to expect a greater “shaking” than when the mountains quaked at the drying-up of the Red Sea and the Jordan (2:5-6; cp. Psalm 114:4-7). This will be the day when He shakes all things, in order that His house may be filled with greater glory than Solomon’s temple (2:6-8).

The natural mind might have argued: if God is going to do all this by means not at our disposal, why should we bother about rebuilding God’s house now? But through Haggai God gave them a preview of His purposes in order to stimulate them to “be strong” (2:4). So with us. A time is coming when Christ will come “to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:10, KJV). Even the self-doubting Thessalonians will be in that number (“because our testimony to you was believed”). Did this warrant them wringing their hands, and saying that in their day of discouragement there was nothing more they could do? No: Paul prayed for them in the light of that glorious day, “that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him” (1:11-12).

“And in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:9).



*Haggai  
reminds the  
discouraged  
remnant,  
“My Spirit  
remains  
among you;  
do not  
fear”.*





# I AM the True Vine

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## What the Lord is to His people

Tom Albiston



*This final “I AM” of John’s Gospel teaches that in the period of the Lord’s absence continuous dependence on Him is the sine qua non of the believer’s life and fruitfulness. Obvious? Yet forgotten daily.*



In John 15:1-6 the Lord uses the symbol of the vine to teach the truth of the believer’s entire dependence on Himself, and His absolute sufficiency. “Without me ye can do nothing” (15:5, KJV). “Abiding” is “believing,” viewed not merely as a single act in the past, but as something that continues. We live spiritually by first “hearing the voice of the Son of God,” (John 5:25); and then believing is the normal and constant characteristic of those who *live*. “He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me” (John 6:57). Believing signifies constant appropriation by faith.



How fitting that with this – the last of His “I Am’s” in John’s Gospel – the Lord should so definitely assert His All-sufficiency for His people. This is well expressed by the figure of the vine and its branches. Any branch is worthless except it be in vital connection with the stem and root from whence the vine-life flows. “Fruit” and “life” are co-relative terms. Fruit is found because there is life. Life is known to be there because fruit is found. Life dwells in and flows from Him, the true Vine. He is the Root, and Source of it. This precludes all other means of producing fruit for God. Throughout chapters 13-17 of John’s Gospel the Lord has in view the life and blessing of His people while they are still in the world and He is with the Father, the Holy Spirit being with and in them. The Lord makes known to the disciples the principles which are to govern them during this time – dependence and obedience.

The Father is the Husbandman (or “Vine-dresser”), and cares for the branches. He purges them that they may bear *much fruit* (15:1-2). He deals with whatever hinders the blessedness of abiding in the Vine, for only in this way will fruit be produced. In His affection the Father so

deals with the branches that “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” may be produced (cp. Hebrews 12:11). Notice that the Lord says, “My Father”. The Father’s care has for its object the bringing forth of the greatest possible fruitfulness, for this will all the more show forth the glory of His Son, while also contributing to the Father’s own glory (John 15:8).



What of the fruitless branch? (15:6). Not to abide is the evidence of there being no vital connection. The vine-life is not flowing in such a branch. There can be merely outward relation to the Vine; however, the lack of fruit will prove that there is no inward connection. Such a branch is dead. Judas is one such example. We must be aware of false professors. The principle of obedience is also important.

Two precious and holy prerogatives arise from the obedience of which the Lord speaks (John 15:10-11). First, His *love* – love which is as the Father’s love for Him. We *abide* in it by keeping His commandments according to the manner of His own life of obedience to the Father. Secondly, and also as obedient to His commandments, His disciples have the prerogative of His joy in them. This means that their joy will be full. He would draw the believer into all that characterized His life of fellowship with the Father, in order that its prerogatives might be the believer’s present portion while waiting for the Son to come from heaven to take us into the Father’s house.

What a blessed portion awaits all those who love His appearing!



*Fruit is  
found  
because  
there is life.*



*Life is  
known to  
be there  
because  
fruit is  
found.*



# “As is the Heavenly”

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J.N.Darby

*The Christian's relationship with God now is entirely determined by our position in Christ glorified. And we must judge ourselves, as to the thoughts and deeds of the “old man,” by that standard. What is evidently a verbatim transcript of an address given in 1858 has been edited here for length (it had to be severely abridged) and clarity.<sup>1</sup>*

## The cross and our sins

There are two great things that the Scriptures present to us as effectual for salvation. One is the full vindicating of God's moral character in grace towards us, which the atonement does. It answers both to the righteousness in God against sin, and to his love to the sinner; for God's character is not only vindicated in the atonement, but he is glorified in it. But besides this, there is another and a distinct thing, and that is the coming in of power to bring us out of all the misery and wretchedness that are the effects of sin, and to set us in a new place. Both these things form part of this great salvation.

The first was absolutely necessary if sinners were to be reconciled to God at all. If God had brought us to himself without his righteousness having been perfectly vindicated, he could not have been the holy and blessed One that he is. If God had let every one off in mercy, that would not have been love; it would have been indifference to sin. But maintaining righteousness without the cross must necessarily have shut out all sinners. And this is what the cross of Christ is for us, the full bringing out and vindicating of all that God is, not only in love, but in holiness. When in peace I can reflect upon the cross, I see how perfectly God is glorified in it. Creation may show God's power, but it cannot bring out God's love and truth as the cross does, and therefore the cross remains everlastingly the wonderful and blessed place of learning what could be learnt nowhere else: all that God is.

## The new nature and our disappointment

But there is also the second point – the coming in of a Deliverer to take us out of the condition in which we were by nature, struggling in the ditch, and no way of getting out of it. This required that God should come down to us, take us out of the condition of sin and misery, and put us in another condition altogether; and that needs the coming in of divine power.

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<sup>1</sup> The original address may be read in *The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby* ed. William Kelly, vol.16 (Stow Hill edition, pp. 348-59).

Supposing I simply get the new nature, with its *desires* after holiness, what is the effect? It gives me the consciousness of all the sin that is in me. I bow under the power of sin and of the knowledge of the holiness I have learnt to desire, only to find out that I have not got that holiness. I have got the cravings of the new nature – all its holy and righteous desires; but the thing craved for I have not got. I want a righteousness fit for his presence, and I have not got it. It is thus God meets us in the cross. He not only gives the nature that we want, but he gives us the thing that we want.

### Our position in Christ and our righteousness

We get, as an expression of this, something remarkable in 1 Corinthians 15:48. “As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly” (KJV). It is not there what we *shall be* in the glory to come; for afterwards he adds, “And as we *have borne* the image of the earthy, we *shall also bear* the image of the heavenly” (v.49). It is what we are *now*. In this text I find what my heart, as quickened of God, wants; and I learn what blessedness is in Christ. God has given us a righteousness in Christ, who is the accepted, blessed Man in the presence of God. “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” God puts us into a new condition before himself. Then, besides that, power is given to judge practically, from a position which we have got, all that is inconsistent with it. There will be that in myself which has to be judged, but I shall judge it in the consciousness of what God has given me in Christ.

### Two men, two races, two places

In 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 there are two men, so to speak. There is the first Adam, of the earth, with those that pertain to him, earthy; and there is the second Man, the Lord from heaven (KJV). I get in both the pattern and model of all other men that are after their image – the first Adam, fallen, wretched, and corrupt; then I get the other Adam that becomes in a spiritual sense the Head of a race after he has taken that place in God’s counsels in glory. He has become the Pattern, and Model, and Head of that race. It is not



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*I want  
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and holiness,  
and that is  
what I have  
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God, and I  
am in it,  
because I am  
in Christ.*



merely the truth that the atonement has been made for us in respect of what we were as belonging to the first Adam, and that God has been glorified in respect of our sins. Certainly: the more we get into the presence of God, the more we shall learn the value of the cross. But 1 Corinthians 15, in speaking of the resurrection, speaks of the intervention of power. We see how the Lord first deals with Christ in power of resurrection, and then, at the same time, how we are objects of this very same power.

Looking at Christ upon earth, I find *God* in this lowly Man. Christ was upon earth, coming down to all my need, and I have met God in him, and I know him. But far more: I find Christ not merely as a living Christ upon earth, kind towards my miseries, showing all goodness to me, but as taking my place under the suffering of the wrath and judgment of God, “made sin” for me. And I was not there at all. Indeed, he was there just that I might never be there. And now I also see power coming in. I do not merely get God glorified in the cross of Christ, but I see the power of God taking that very Christ when he was down in the depths of death – in my place taking my judgment – and setting him at his own right hand in heaven.

Here, then, I have found a positive, actual deliverance. He had had to say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” but God puts his seal upon him by raising him from the dead. We get, in the resurrection of Christ, the coming in of divine power in the very place where we were lying in ruin and helplessness. Christ was there in grace for us, but the power of God took him entirely out of it. Now, after atonement has been made and after the question of sin has been settled in virtue of his having glorified God about it, I have got the Man Christ Jesus in heaven. I get him in the place of power as the object of God’s counsels.

The whole question of sin is thus settled in the resurrection of Christ. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins... But now is Christ risen from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:17, 20). And the apostle desires that we may know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:19-20). Exactly the same power that wrought when God took Christ from the dead and set him at his own right hand has already wrought in you that believe, and you have got a place with him there (cp. 2:6). And, therefore, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” We are in Christ in the presence of God; and now I get not desires only, but the answer to them. I have got not merely a new nature, but I have got what the new nature wants, because I have got Christ. I have got not merely cravings after something, but the thing I crave. I want righteousness and holiness, and that is what I have got, because I am in Christ. I want to be without fear in the presence of God, and *I am in it*, because I am in Christ.

### The implications for practical holiness

I have got now, in a word, full salvation – not merely a new nature, but salvation. God has come down to me, and he has saved me. He has come, and by his own power has taken me out of the place in which I was lying in misery and helplessness in the first Adam, and has put me in the place of the second Adam, before himself, without a sin upon me, because all was judged in the person of Christ. I shall still feel the workings of the old nature as a believer, and have to judge it; but I see that Christ has taken the judgment for me; and that now he is out of it all, alive again for evermore. That life is wholly gone in which he laid it down; and the old nature *in us*, to which sin and judgment applied, is gone (Romans 6:9-10).

And therefore the apostle always addresses the believer as *dead* to sin. “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:11). Now that Christ has died unto sin once for me, let me reckon myself to be dead to sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ. This is the principle of the Christian’s place. While as a fact the believer is alive, yet, just as Christ has died, so in Him the very nature that God dealt with as to the question of sin in the first Adam is done with; and now a power has come in that has made me alive with Christ. The very nature that had to be dealt with is looked at as a judged and dead thing, and I am brought into the position of Christ, as risen and in the presence of



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God. When we actually sit *with* him [in a future day], we shall be like him (8:29); but as to our real condition before God even now, we are sitting in heavenly places *in Christ* (Ephesians 2:6). It is divine love that has reached down to the place of sin and death in which we were, and divine righteousness that has taken us up and set us in the place of light, where Christ is.

We shall not thoroughly bear the image of Christ till the time of glory. But even now as to our standing before God, “as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” This gives me “boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). It is the same truth. The realization of it is another thing, and may be hindered through failure or infirmity. You begin to search, perhaps, in yourself, and find such and such a thought contrary to Christ. If you contemplate yourself by yourself, you will not find righteousness for God, and in yourself you still could not stand an instant in God’s sight. It is not that Paul was always in the third heaven, or that we shall be in the full enjoyment always of our position; but it *is* true that the Christ in whom we are is in heaven. I must look at Christ to see what I am, and I say, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.”

The moment I have got Christ, I can say, I know a man *in Christ*. “Yet of myself,” Paul says, “I will not glory, but in mine infirmities” (2 Corinthians 12:2, 5). Here I get to the true reality of what my condition as a poor feeble creature down here below is. But then God has put me in Christ, and now whatever passes in my mind must be judged according to him. The standard of the judgment of the working of my flesh, and of everything else, is according to this love and grace that put me in Christ. “He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). I may come short, but this is the only standard. We get the principle of all holiness of walk from the fact of our position being in Christ. I must know that this is my



place before God, if my walk is to be according to Christ. “For their sakes,” said our blessed Lord, “I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth” (John 17:19). He is set apart to God as this pattern-Man in heavenly places, that the Holy Ghost may take and apply it to us here. I see this perfect Christ set apart for me in heaven, and I must walk according to that pattern. I will walk in love, because Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us. “Be ye imitators of God” (Ephesians 5:1,2). And in another place, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). He sets before us, as walking through this world, the kindness of God even to his enemies. The starting-point of all my standard of conduct is the place in which I am already set in Christ.

#### The starting-point of our witness

If my heart is full of Christ, the things that are contrary to him do not attract me. I may feel my failure and weakness all the more; but the God that, by power, has brought us into this place in Christ, can sustain us in it. The whole of our relationship with God upon the ground of the old man is closed in the cross, and then, in a risen Christ, all is begun afresh in perfect blessing, in the power of the deliverance in which we have been brought in Christ. And therefore it is that the apostle can say such a thing as “*when we were in the flesh*” (Romans 7:5), evidently implying that we are not in the flesh now. Being “in the flesh” is what we were in the first Adam (cp. 8:8,9). The standard of our walk gets its real power and blessedness when once we see that we are no longer in the flesh, but are set in Christ before God. The government of God comes in [to discipline us], and that is another thing, but we are brought into that blessed place of being in Christ in the light, in perfectness of grace. And, as we deal even with the world, we ought to be able to say, “What we have to talk to you about is a salvation that we have *got*. I have found God, and I am come to tell you of a salvation that I have got through the delivering power of God.”



*We get  
the  
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# Alpha people

## Elisabeth

George Stevens



*Elisabeth  
realised  
that Mary  
had been  
chosen to  
bear the  
Messiah.  
Already she  
could call  
Him her  
Lord!*



“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:5-6, KJV).

The name “Elisabeth” means, “oath of God” or “worshipper of God.” From what follows, we shall see that she was indeed a devout woman. Like Anna (Luke 2:36ff), she was one of the faithful remnant of Israel living in an evil day.

### A priestly family

A priest could marry into any tribe of Israel (cp. Leviticus 21:7; Ezekiel 44:22), but it was highly commendable that he should marry one of Aaron’s line. The marriage of Zacharias and Elisabeth was therefore a good one. Today, we are reminded that we should not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). A Christian should marry a Christian. This is because the Christian has a new nature that desires to honour God and the unbeliever has a nature that blocks out God.

### Righteous...

Elisabeth and her husband walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. They had a fervent love for God. “Walking in the commandments” means that their lives were righteous and blameless morally. “Walking in the ordinances” means that they blamelessly observed the ceremonial aspects of their duties towards God. Translating this into what applies to us today, we would say that such a believer was both personally obedient to God’s will and also faithful in responsibilities in the local church.

### But barren

But though Elisabeth's life was blameless, in the Jewish culture she suffered reproach from others because she was barren. How she and her husband must have prayed for children throughout their lives! But none had been forthcoming. This could have destroyed the faith of a lesser woman. Yet, even though suffering embarrassment and scorn, Elisabeth remained faithful to her God. How commendable!

### And aged

However Elisabeth was now "well stricken in years," and she would have thought that child-bearing was impossible. She must have been amazed to discover from her husband how an angel of the Lord had prophesied that their prayer had been heard and that she would bear a son. But not just any son – a son who would turn many of Israel back to the Lord their God and make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:16, 17).

### Grateful.

Elisabeth must have rejoiced that she would give birth to the one who would prepare the way of the Lord. And how grateful she was that the Lord was taking away the reproach she suffered and making her a blessing instead.

### A prophetess

When Elisabeth was visited by her cousin Mary, she knew that her cousin spoke the truth, because the baby to be called John leapt in her womb when she heard Mary's voice. (The fact that the baby leapt for joy (1:44) showed that it had emotions after only six months of development! Cp. 1:26, 36.)

Then Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost and said with a loud voice,

"Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (1:42-45).

Elisabeth realised that Mary had been chosen to bear the Messiah. Already she could call Him her Lord! She rejoiced that Mary had been chosen to be the virgin who would give birth to the child who would be called Emmanuel – "God with us" (cp. Isaiah 7:14). By her prophetic words Elisabeth confirmed the reality of the Lord's purpose.

What a remarkable woman!

# Creation Mega-Themes in Old Testament History

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David Anderson

*This article surveys what it meant to Old-Testament people to know and be in relationship with the God who created the universe. Job had little knowledge of God beyond the witness of creation, but this led him to repent and worship. God revealed to Isaiah and Jeremiah that the disasters that befell their nation were in the hand of the God of creation, whose power was the guarantee of new-covenant blessing.*

## Introduction

In my article of January this year, “What happened after the Creation?” I traced the history of man from creation through the three catastrophic events affecting the earth and mankind (the Fall, the Flood and the Dispersion), and up to the birth of Abram in 2008 A.H.<sup>1</sup> A further article in April traced the continued reference to God as Creator through the Old Testament, focussing on frequently recurring metaphors of His creatorial activity. Now we need to look in some more detail at the reasons why three men of God in particular, Job, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, refer to the greatness of God in creation.

## From Job

Job probably lived about the time of Abraham.<sup>2</sup> In those times the saints knew God as El Shaddai (God Almighty), the great Creator and Protector (cp. Genesis 17:1). This Name of God occurs more often in Job than any other OT book (5:17; 6:4, etc.). Job records how godly non-Israelites (1:1) viewed God and His creation. In fact the witness they had to God was mainly the witness of creation to “His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). Job and his friends glorified God as God, unlike the rest of mankind who had given up God (a similar worldview is prevalent today!). The LORD’s own words in Job 38-41 are a self-revelation of His three main attributes – His perfect wisdom, His perfect understanding, and His perfect power.<sup>3</sup> Job acknowledges God’s activity in His creation, as One doing great, unsearchable and marvellous things (5:9): controlling the rainfall (5:10) and commanding the sun and the stars (9:7). Elihu describes some of His wondrous works in nature in chapter 37: thunder and lightning, snow and ice, gentle and torrential rains, hurricanes, cold and hot winds, etc. And God Himself stated that He alone could tame great creatures extant in those days – Behemoth (40:15-24), Leviathan (ch.41) and Rahab (9:13 & 26:12).<sup>4</sup> Most significantly, Job recognised God had fashioned and made him (10:8-11 & 31:15). In addition to these great points, the book also reveals the

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<sup>1</sup> A.H. is *Anno Homini*s, “in the year of man”.

<sup>2</sup> *New and Concise Bible Dictionary* (London, G. Morrish, 1897-1900).

<sup>3</sup> On these see also “Creation teaching throughout the Old Testament”, *Scripture Truth*, April 2011.

healthy fear of God that arises from the knowledge of Him as the Creator – see, for example, chapter 9, where verses 14-34 follow on from 4-12. The crux of Job’s problem was whether even a just man, such as he, had any “rights” before his Creator God? The answer to that question, which, as we now know, is fully explained in the Gospel, Job discovered when God spoke directly to him (cp. 40:1-5 with 42:1-6).

## From Isaiah

### Background history

Isaiah wrote in times of national declension in Israel, when the northern power of Assyria (with the kingdom of Babylon a distant rumble on the horizon) began reasserting itself in the world. Chapters 1-39 deal with the immediate threat of Assyrian invasion and the promise of deliverance for Zion. In 721 B.C., the northern kingdom of Israel was deported by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria (2 Kings 17:1-23 & 18:9-12). Not very many years later, Sennacherib, the next-but-one king of Assyria, took all the fortified cities of Judah, as prophesied in Isaiah 8:5-8 & chapters 28-31. At this point in their history Hezekiah was told by Isaiah to rely solely upon God for deliverance (chapters 36-37), which came miraculously in one night (37:36-37).

After describing this deliverance, and to allay Judah’s fear both of Assyria and of future world superpowers, Isaiah reminded the people of Judah in chapter 40 of something far greater, something they had been told about from the beginning of time, that is, from the foundation of the earth (40:21).

### Comfort my people

The little kingdom of Judah was puny indeed relative to the superpowers; but the people were to remember the character of the Creator in all His wisdom, greatness, power, and ability (40:13-14, 22, 25-26, 28). Perhaps the most comforting message for them in this pivotal chapter was verse 17: “All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness” (ESV). Why? Because the Lord God is so great that He was able at creation to measure out the waters in the hollow of His hand and to mark off the heavens with the span of His hand. He enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance! (v.12) To Him, all nations are a mere drop from a bucket and totally insignificant – like the fine dust on the balances<sup>5</sup> – and the isles like an atom! (v.15, Darby Trans.) By God’s

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<sup>4</sup> Behemoth was a dinosaur, that is, a land reptile. Leviathan was a sea-dragon, mentioned again in Psalm 74:4 & 104:26 and Isaiah 27:1. Rahab was some kind of dragon, mentioned again in Psalm 87:4 & 89:10 and Isaiah 30:7 & 51:9.

<sup>5</sup> I started my professional career as an analytical chemist in the 1970s. In those days we used “balance brushes” to clean the pans in order to zero the analytical balances. So fine was the dust, it could not be seen with the naked eye. (Nowadays, self-adjusting electronic scales are in vogue.)

methods of computing, they are “less than nothing and emptiness” (v.17, ESV). He is so far above and beyond them that they appear as grasshoppers to Him (v.22). So, whether it be the mighty Assyrian or the mightier Babylonian king or any of his successors, “[He] reduces princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness” (v.23, NKJV with margin). No sooner would they rise, than they would disappear (v.24); and that at His command (41:2-4). And this was the God who would never forget Jacob (40:27-28).



*I, the  
Lord,  
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He.*



### I AM HE

For Israel’s Saviour is the enduring, everlasting God, who is ready, willing, and able to help everyone who relies on Him (40:28-31). Addressing the nations directly, God asks, “Who has performed and done this [with these world powers], calling the generations from the beginning?” Assertively He replies: “I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am He” (41:4, ESV). “I am He” can be translated, “I, THE SAME,” which is effectively a name of God (as Darby states in his footnote). In Isaiah it is a dominant Name of the unchanging Creator God (43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6, KJV). He is called “the God of the whole earth” (54:5) with sovereign rights because He created both heaven and earth (37:16; 40:22, 26 & 28; 42:5; 44:24; 45:7-8, 12 & 18; 48:13; 51:13).

### Cyrus

These sovereign rights are especially emphasized in the Salvation Oracle concerning Cyrus (44:24 - 45:13), written some two hundred years before the heathen Persian monarch existed! “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself...who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and he shall fulfill my purpose’” (44:24 & 28, cp. Ezra 1:1-4). Remarkably, God speaks directly to Cyrus, even though Cyrus does not personally know the LORD, and appoints him to office so that all peoples of the world should know that there is no other God besides the LORD (45:1-7). Verses 9 & 11-13 provide a stern warning to anyone who would resist God’s sovereign will with respect to Cyrus’s destiny.

“Woe to him who strives with his [i.e., Cyrus’s] Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ Or shall your handiwork say, ‘He has no hands?’ ... Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, ‘I have made the earth, and created man on it. I – My hands –

stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. I have raised him [Cyrus] up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways; he shall build My city [Jerusalem] and let My exiles [of Israel] go free, not for price nor reward,' says the LORD of hosts" (45: 9-13, NKJV).

### Israel as God's special creation

Salvation for Israel, then and in the future, is because the nation was created to belong to the LORD: "Thus says the LORD, He who created [*bara*, as in Genesis 1:1] you, O Jacob, He who formed [*ya'tsar*, as in Genesis 2:7] you, O Israel, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'" (43:1, ESV; see also vv.7 & 15 with 44:21 & 24). The future promised to the nation of Israel is a significant part of God's sovereign plan for the earth, and so in 45:18 Isaiah interprets Genesis 1:2, incidentally showing that it was indeed part of Day One of the Creation: "Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is God!), who formed the earth and made it (He established it; He did not create it empty, He formed it to be inhabited!), 'I am the LORD, and there is no other'" (45:17-18). Israel's calling is as sure as the created order of the universe (48:12-13 & 15). Her comfort and protection are directly from her Maker, who also made the heavens and the earth (51:12-13 & 15-16). She is in special relationship to her Maker – He is her Husband (54:5-10).

### The Day of the LORD

Israel's final and complete salvation is dependent upon the Creator intervening and changing His creation to create new heavens and a new earth (65:17-18 & 66:22). The blessed climax for Israel and the whole world will be when the Creator fully executes these judgments prophesied by Isaiah. He shall, in the Day of the LORD, "mightily shake the earth" by His majesty and power (2:19, NKJV). Whilst there is always symbolic meaning to such an expression, Isaiah makes many references to the Creator changing the established order of creation, especially the natural world, both in judgment and in subsequent millennial blessings.<sup>6</sup> For example:

- 11:6-9 describe a restored creation with Edenic conditions. Chapter 11 is literally true – there will be geographical/topographical changes to dry up the tongue of the Sea of Egypt and the River [Euphrates] and thus facilitate the recall of Israel and Judah (vv.12 & 15-16).
- In the oracle of Babylon's judgment, God announces that He will prevent the stars, sun and moon from giving light (13:10). "Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger" (13:13, NKJV).

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<sup>6</sup> These ideas occur in other prophecies. For example, Ezekiel 47:1-12; Joel 2: 10 & 30-31; Amos 9:13-14; Micah 4:1 and Zechariah 14:3-9.

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- The judgment will be so severe that “the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate, and He will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants...and the foundations of the earth tremble. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken” (24:1 & 18-19, ESV).

God’s creatorial power will therefore be in action to make the earth ready for Messiah’s kingdom in Israel: “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously” (24:23, RV).

### From Jeremiah

Jeremiah lived and prophesied during the very last days of the southern kingdom of Judah prior to its captivity (Jeremiah 1:1-3). He makes few, but extremely significant, references to the person and action of the Creator. In those times people in the nations regarded military success as coming from their gods. But Jeremiah is able to proclaim to apostate Judah that the true God ever continues to be the living God; and that “the Portion of Jacob” formed all things (10:10-16, especially v.12). Jeremiah repeats this message in 51:15-19 as part of the prophesy uttered against haughty Babylon (chs.50-51) and just before he records in chapter 52 the actual fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in 588 B.C. Perhaps Jeremiah is better known for his two famous prophecies, firstly, concerning the seventy-years’ captivity of Judah (25:1-14 & 29:1-23); and secondly concerning the new covenant for both Israel and Judah (chs.30-32). In relation to the captivity, the LORD told Jeremiah to tell the envoys who had come from surrounding nations to king Zedekiah (presumably about the possibility of forming a united front against Nebuchadnezzar), “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘This is what you shall say to your masters: “It is I who by My great power and My outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to Me”’” (27:4-5, ESV). In other words, through Jeremiah God proclaimed to the nations that the Babylonian conquest was only an expression of His sovereign creatorial will. But concerning His new covenant to Israel (31:31-34), God makes the vastness and fixed order of creation the surety of His promises (31:35-37, cp. 33:25-26; 51:12-15).

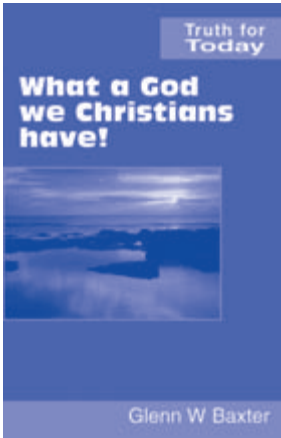


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# What a God we Christians have!



These words were the triumphant conclusion of the last talk which Glenn Baxter gave on the Truth for Today radio programme, broadcast on 10th January 2010. They are a fitting title for a brand new book from Scripture Truth Publications which contains edited transcripts of all seventeen of Glenn's broadcast talks.

Glenn's major concern was to build up the faith of young Christians with clear expositions, and his addresses were always intensely practical and challenging, and that is certainly so in this book. A wide variety of topics are covered, including Old Testament character studies, key Christian teachings, and studies in New Testament books.

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Containing a great mix of encouragement and challenge, these talks very much represent the character of Glenn's ministry, which so many have enjoyed over the years. They deserve to be read with care and thought but, as might be expected, in so many cases they demand action. Without doubt, what Glenn would have looked for as his greatest legacy was not a book, but a generation of Christians sharing his excitement at "what a God we Christians have!"

Published: 31 July 2011; ISBN: 978-0-901860-59-0;

Paperback; 208 pages;

R.R.P. £9.25; STP Retail Price: £7.00 plus p&p

# Infinity

Clever people made the car  
and invented the PC:  
Someone greater, greater far,  
made the universe, and me.

Could the car occur by chance?  
Or PCs by accident?  
Far, far less did happenstance  
this huge universe invent.

Stars and universe declare,  
in their vast immensity,  
that the God whose work they are,  
far, far greater is than they,

infinite in power and mind.  
Greater the infinity  
that for Christ a cross defined,  
One for one, God's Son for me.