

Scripture Truth



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Caught Up
Obeying the truth
The miracle of Philippi

Creation in the Psalms
The importance of Ephesus
Appreciating the road works

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Appreciating the road works

“He who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ’s day” (Philippians 1:6, Darby Trans.).

My favourite highway sign is the one that reads, “END OF CONSTRUCTION.” Especially after driving several miles at a snail’s pace with frequent stops, my frazzled nerves delight to see open highway again. I settle back with a sigh of relief – that is, until the next sign that reads, “CONSTRUCTION ZONE – NEXT 8 MILES”!

The Word of God abounds with passages that describe the “END OF CONSTRUCTION” for believers; for although the word of Christ has perfectly fitted us for heaven from the moment we believe, the work of the Spirit is to increasingly conform us to Christ while we live on earth. There are potholes to be filled, rough surfaces to be refinished, and sometimes even a temporary detour indicated. At times, some of the “lanes” of our lives may become so worthless that they must be marked off as unusable.

But of this we can be sure. The One working in our lives with absolute skill will never make any unnecessary repairs, nor will He ever do any work at the wrong time. Further, He will not stop constructing until the work is complete. Then this corruptible will put on incorruption, and this mortal will put on immortality.

Standing before Him in all the perfections provided by His infinite grace, we shall know that we have come to the “END OF CONSTRUCTION,” and exclaim, “All thy works shall praise Thee, Jehovah, and Thy saints shall bless Thee” (Psalm 145:10).

From Grant W. Steidl, *My Musings* (Beamsville, Ontario, 2009), p.253.

Caught up

Theo Balderston

Does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 teach a rapture to heaven prior to the saints' public appearing with Christ in glory? Earlier parts of this series appeared in the January and April issues.

Summary of some key points

To grasp the force of what 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 says concerning the “rapture,” one needs to start with 1 Thessalonians 3:13. Here Paul affirms that the Lord will come *with all His saints* – if indeed by “saints” Paul means believers and not angels. However, since in every other place where Paul writes “saints” he demonstrably means “believers”, he must mean believers in this verse too. The verse displays verbal similarities with Zechariah 14:5, and the word for “saints” in that verse is used in the OT for both angels and human beings.

Secondly, it is vital to recognise that the “even so” of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 is the hinge on which the verse turns. It either means (i) that, just as Jesus died and rose, God will bring back those who sleep as dead *and risen* saints; or (ii) that *our believing* that Jesus died and rose requires us also to believe that God will bring those who have fallen asleep with Him. As argued in the first article, this can only mean that they will be brought with Christ as risen saints.¹

In other words, according to both these interpretations of the “even so,” verse 14 describes the *result* of the rapture of vv.15-17, not its precursor. It refers to the same event as 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

Thirdly, the “bring with him” of v.14 can only mean that the resurrected saints accompany Christ *from heaven*. Some post-tribulationists envisage the Lord descending from heaven to rapture the saints, and interpret 4:14 as saying that the Lord who has just descended from heaven will continue His descent to the earth, but now joined by the resurrected saints. But such a descent from the “air” to the earth would not constitute a “being brought with him,” seeing that He will have come from heaven (v.16). So this cannot be the meaning of 4:14.

Fourthly, “the word of the Lord” to which Paul appeals as the source of what he writes in vv.15-17, is a fresh revelation from the ascended Lord (cp. 1 Kings 20:35). Paul is not referring to Matthew 24:30-31 // Mark 13:26-27 // Luke 21:27, texts which say nothing at all about dead saints, nothing about their resurrection, nothing about their rapture.

¹ See “With all His saints” in the January 2012 issue of *Scripture Truth*

It is also helpful to notice that when Paul said that “the dead in Christ will rise first” (NKJV) he had a very matter-of-fact reason in mind. They *have to* rise first, so as to be ready to be raptured at exactly the same moment as the living, for it is of the essence of the rapture that “we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them” (v.17). Paul was envisaging a very matter-of-fact event. It is about real bodies being really changed and really caught up.

Raptured

“Caught up” in verse 17 means “be seized.” Our wills will have no part in it. Nothing can stop it. It is the ultimate answer to the enemy’s attempt to pluck believers out of God’s hand (John 10:28, 29, where “pluck” is the same verb as “catch up” here). There seem to be no relevant instances of this verb in the Greek Old Testament and Apocrypha. Of the three other occurrences of the verb in the NT to signify an exertion of divine power, two concern a rapture to heaven: Paul’s rapture to hear inexpressible things (2 Corinthians 12:2-4), and the snatching up of the Manchild out of the world before disaster in Revelation 12:5. The third place is Acts 8:39, when Philip was rapt away, seemingly from before the eunuch’s eyes, because his task on the Gaza road was completed. All these have an interesting bearing on 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

The word “together” in v.17 is strictly speaking redundant. Omit it, and the “with” on its own makes the same point. The “together” emphasises that those who are Christ’s are indivisible in the wonderful “things to come.” By writing “we... together with them,” rather than “they... together with us,” Paul implies that raising His dead saints is the primary purpose of the Lord’s coming, the primary fruit and display of the utterness of His conquest of death. So it is impossible that they should be forgotten, as the Thessalonians feared!



*“Caught up”
means “be
seized.”*



*Nothing can
stop it.*





*“Caught up
in clouds”
symbolises
the
ascension of
the saints,
somewhat
as the Lord
Himself
ascended.*



In clouds

“In the clouds” (v. 17) should be read as “caught up in clouds.” Clouds often indicate the terrifying glory of God made visible; for example in Daniel 7:13 and Matthew 24:30. Three other such allusions are Joel 2:2, which speaks of the day of the LORD as “a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,” and the similar language of Ezekiel 30:3; Zephaniah 1:15. But it would be odd if Paul intended to say, effectively, that believers will be caught up in gloomy darkness, given that he is so emphatic in 5:5 that believers are not of the night or the darkness but rather “sons of light and sons of the day.”

And, differently from all of these references, the “clouds” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 are connected to believers *ascending*, not to the Lord *descending*. Two other NT comparisons shed a much clearer light: “A cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9), and “they ascended to heaven in a cloud” (Revelation 11:12). Both concern ascent, not descent. Thus “caught up *in clouds*” most likely symbolises the ascension together of the living and resurrected saints, somewhat as the Lord Himself ascended. “It was thus that the Lord Himself ascended; for in all things we are to be like Him – an important circumstance here.”²

The “shout”, the archangel’s voice, the trump of God raise the question of the secrecy of the rapture. The fact that we shall be “caught up in clouds” might suggest that our rapture will be concealed from profane eyes. (A naive inference? Those who think so should bear in mind the matter-of-factness of the previous description of the dead in Christ rising first.) When the Lord ascended “a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9); and Paul’s phrase, “the manifestation

² J.N. Darby, *A Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* (Kingston on Thames, 5 vols., 1943; 1st edn. London, 1857ff.), vol.5, p. 66.

of his coming,” in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 might imply that there is an unmanifested side to His coming as well.³ True, the similarly worded Revelation 11:12 describes a very public rapture in a cloud. But the phrase “and their enemies saw them” might be added to affirm what the verse would otherwise seem to deny, and to distinguish this rapture from that of Acts 1:9 (and 1 Thessalonians 4?). For reasons given below I doubt that the Lord Himself will be visible to the world at the rapture.

But will the Lord’s coming be unheard? What about the shout, the voice, the trumpet? In my view points can be made on both sides of this question, and we had perhaps better wait to find out the answer to it.

The “welcome committee” theory

“To meet the Lord,” or, literally, “for a meeting with the Lord.” It has frequently been stated that the word for “meeting,” is confined to what happens when a “welcome committee” of civic dignitaries go out of a town to meet an approaching monarch and to escort him back into the town with pomp. Hence, it is said, this verse can only mean a post-tribulational rapture followed by the Lord’s immediate return to earth with his saints. It is true that this is what happened in Acts 28:15, but this does not prove that the word in question, *apantēsis*, can only apply to such a situation. Of the 76 occurrences of this noun in the Greek Old Testament and Apocrypha, seventeen describe the situation of someone meeting another person and conducting them back to their own place. This is quite a common reason for going to meet someone, so this evidence certainly does not prove that the word for “meeting” can only signify this kind of welcome. (And only nine of these might have carried overtones of a formal welcome.) In a recent scholarly commentary Prof. Gordon Fee⁴ regards the “welcome committee” theory of the meaning of *apantēsis* as disproved by recent research. It seems that a theory used for nearly a century to discredit the idea of a rapture before the Lord’s appearing in public glory is now itself discredited. And the passage itself simply says, “And so shall we ever be with the Lord” – nothing about welcoming Him to the earth.

Why a meeting in the air?

“In [lit., “into”] the air.” Why the air? Whilst perhaps such a venue will display the Lord’s triumphant “occupation” of the devil’s “home territory” (cp.

³ W. Kelly, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* (London, 1893, 3rd edn., 1953), p.163.

⁴ Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*. (Grand Rapids, 2009), p.180.

Ephesians 2:2), the more obvious way of answering the question is to first ask, “Where did Paul think the destination of this ‘catching up’ to be?” We don’t have to speculate, because Paul himself clearly informs us. He was pressing onwards towards the goal for the prize of the *upward* calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). It would be banal to interpret “upward calling” to mean a rapture to the air followed by an immediate U-turn back to the earth. And in the same passage (v.20) Paul spoke of his “heavenly citizenship.” His true home was heaven; and God was calling him there in Christ Jesus. He wrote to the Colossians of the hope laid up for them in heaven (1:5), and that accordingly they were to set their mind on things above (3:1). And if we compare Hebrews 2:10 with 3:1; 6:20; 10:34; 11:16; 12:1-2 there can be no doubt where the believer’s destiny is according to the writer of that epistle!

There is therefore no need to make 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 contradict John 14:3, where the Lord Himself says that He is coming again “to receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” Indeed, these seem like the very words that Paul is alluding to with his, “So shall we ever be with the Lord.” The Lord asks the Father concerning those whom the Father had given Him, that “that they also... may be with me where I am, to see my glory...” (17:24, ESV). This accumulation of Scriptural evidence leaves no doubt that *the destination of the rapture is heaven*. And see too 1 Peter 1:4! Paul assumed rather than stated this in 1 Thessalonians 4, because his focus was on allaying the Thessalonians’ worry about their sleeping friends possibly not coming *with* Christ in glory. The question of how soon this glorious appearing would happen after the rapture was not an issue.

The reason for the aerial interruption of our ascent is that He *Himself* is coming for us. The force is illustrated by Isaiah 63:9 in the Greek OT. “It was no angel or ambassador but the Lord Himself that saved them, because he loved them and spared them; he himself spared them, and took them and lifted them all the days of old.” And, recollecting that the clouds recall the Lord’s own ascension, might we not say that He will, as it were, recapitulate His own ascension to heaven, so that we who are His can share in it too, and then in His coming in glory?

But why will our Lord not come to *earth* for us? Because He cannot come again to earth except as its Judge. We have to remember that no unbeliever saw the Lord in resurrection, except for Paul who was saved by seeing Him (1 Corinthians 15:8). Peter makes this quite clear in Acts 10:41. The modern mind is embarrassed by this; surely the unprejudiced evidence of witnesses who had seen Christ risen, yet had not been converted thereby, would have

greatly strengthened the credibility of the resurrection? But this is not the reasoning of Scripture. For unrepentant unbelievers, seeing the Lord in resurrection will mean judgment (Mark 14:62; Acts 17:31). Therefore He will come unseen right to its gateway – the air, and by His “cry of command” snatch our bodies up out of it before it is overwhelmed by judgment.

With the Lord

“And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (NKJV). As already stated these words seem to echo John 14:3. Similarly, Paul concludes the entire section of his Letter concerning the Lord’s coming with the words, “Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him” (5:10). It is our present absence from Him that is, so to speak, the abnormality, albeit one necessitated by the gospel of grace. But Paul’s proclamation of the gospel, with all the perplexities that accompanied it, had in view God raising us up with Jesus and presenting us to Himself (2 Corinthians 4:14). The immediate result of the resurrection of dead saints and changing of living saints is that we are presented to God. But the aim of the gospel is also “the hope of glory,” i.e., that we should appear with Christ in glory (Colossians 1:27; 3:4).

Study of the Lord’s coming for His saints makes the heart rejoice.

“How will our eyes to see His face delight
whose love has cheered us through the darksome night;
how will our ears drink in His well-known voice,
whose faintest whispers make our soul rejoice?”

“We are but strangers here; we do not crave
a home on earth, which gave Thee but a grave;
Thy death has severed ties which bound us here;
Thyself our treasure in a brighter sphere.”⁵

⁵ Stanzas of different poems by J.G. Deck (1807-84).



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The importance of Ephesus in the New Testament

Part I: Gospel work, Christian doctrine, discipleship

David Anderson

The church in Ephesus occupies a central place in the unfolding of the New-Testament story – in Acts, in the Pauline letters, and in the first part of Revelation. This article explains historically how it came to have its pivotal role.

Stating the obvious

Recently, I realised the obvious – that the city of Ephesus has a prominent place in the Acts of the Apostles:

- It is the focus of Luke’s account of Paul’s third missionary journey (Acts 18:19-20; 19:1 – 21:17). Little is said of his activities elsewhere, other than how they fit into his travels to and from Ephesus.
- Therefore the book of Acts lays much emphasis on Paul’s gospel preaching in and around the city.
- Paul spent three years completely dedicated to establishing this church, compared to a period covering only three weekends spent with the Thessalonians (cp.17:2).
- It brought to a climactic end Paul’s missionary efforts. Acts 21:26 onwards sees him arrested and a prisoner of Rome for the remainder of the book. (The Lord still used him, but from then on

for what we would call his ministry from prison.)

Ephesus was located on the western coast of Asia Minor, that part of the world we now call Turkey. In those days it was a commercial metropolis. From it roads radiated in every direction, giving it a commanding position as a centre of trade. But it was also renowned as a religious centre, and its temple to Diana [or Artemis] was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (19:35). The idolatrous devotees of Diana were renowned for their magical arts and trade in them (cp.19:19).

Ephesus, the climax of the history of the gospel in Acts

Paul first preached the gospel at Ephesus whilst on his second missionary journey. He couldn’t stay very long, but he left Aquila and Priscilla there (18:19-21, 26). During his absence Apollos arrived in the city and powerfully preached about Jesus although he only knew Christ from the perspective of the baptism of John



(vv.24-25). On hearing him Aquila and Priscilla explained to him “the way of God more accurately” (v.26, ESV) – a phrase which perhaps hints at the work of God which was to follow. However, Apollos left for Corinth shortly afterwards (v.27), leaving behind some converts who had only been baptised with John the Baptist’s “baptism of repentance.” Paul encountered these disciples when he returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey (19:1-3). When Paul explained to them “the way of God more accurately,” they immediately believed on, and were baptised in, the name of the Lord Jesus. With other converts, these twelve men formed the nucleus of the

Christian church in Ephesus, for the Holy Spirit came upon them (19:3-7).

This is significant in the Acts’ narrative, for they were the last recorded group to receive the Spirit in a special way (cp. 2:3-4; 8:14-17; and 10:44-48 with 11:15-17). From then onwards believers would receive the Holy Spirit immediately upon believing the gospel (cp. Ephesians 1:13). At Ephesus, any transitional state of Christianity seems to have passed by the time we reach Paul’s meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.¹

The conversion of these disciples of John kick-started Paul’s gospel campaign in the city and the region round about. As was his custom, he first took the gospel message to the Jews in

¹ On this subject see the writer’s article, “Baptism in the Spirit: promised and realised”, in *Scripture Truth*, January 2012.

their synagogue. But after three months Jewish opposition caused him to withdraw to the hall of Tyrannus, where he continued to present the gospel on a daily basis for two years (19:8-9). During this time “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (v.10) – Asia being the province comprising modern western Turkey. God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul to verify the truth of the gospel in a city where there was such gross idolatry. It appeals to me that the Lord took Saul, the Devil’s chief agent against Jewish Christians (9:1-16), and made him His chief preacher amongst Gentiles in an area of Satan’s greatest stronghold!

The bonfire

The effects of the gospel were felt throughout the whole city: “fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled” (19:17). The fear of the Lord also caused the Christian converts, at great personal cost, to get rid of all their books of magic by burning them in public. The outcome is concisely stated in v.20, “So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” By comparing this verse with 6:7 & 12:24, where similar words are used about the word of God, we can conclude that Luke identifies Ephesus as a significant milestone in the ever-widening spread of the gospel throughout the world. Such was the

practical effect of the gospel in the lives of these believers that it began to adversely impact the local economy. This resulted in riots and persecutions (19:23-41) which brought Paul’s three-year gospel campaign to an abrupt end. Acts 20 opens with him gathering the disciples together to say farewell to them as he departed for Macedonia (though 19:21 tells us that he had already planned to leave before the troubles erupted).

Paul’s church-planting work in Ephesus

By the end of this third missionary journey the Lord had disclosed to Paul that he would never get back to Ephesus again (20:25). So, pausing on his journey to Jerusalem at the nearby island of Miletus, he sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him there in order to prepare the church for “life-after-Paul” (20:17-38). It was a meeting charged with emotion as Paul poured out what was in his mind by the Spirit of God. First of all, he recounted his preaching and establishing of the church in Ephesus. Through this we gain a wonderful insight into how he had responded to the “great and effectual door opened to” him in that city (1 Corinthians 16:8-9). The gospel truths, the practical truths, the doctrinal truths, and the pastoral truths that Paul referred to in Acts 20 are elaborated in his letter to the Ephesians.

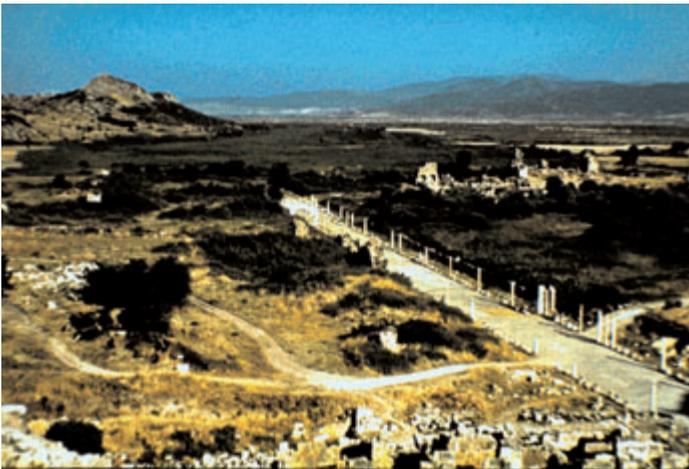
The *gospel truths* he had preached are summarised in Acts 20:24 as “the gospel of the grace of God.” Paul wonderfully expounds this gospel in Ephesians 2:7-9. In Acts 20:21 he focuses on what this gospel of grace demanded of them: “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”. Paul wrote about this side of the matter in Ephesians 1:13.

According to Acts 20:25 Paul had also proclaimed *the kingdom of God* to them. The kingdom of God is about the rule of God in our lives. It is about discipleship, and “disciples” is a frequent name for believers in the Acts narrative. The Ephesian believers are said to belong to “the Way” in 19:23, a phrase with similar connotations. In practical terms the rule of God in our lives means that we must be baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus and allow Him to be Lord of our lives.

Thus we can see that the kingdom of God is clearly taught in Ephesians chapters 4-6, the practical section of the epistle. For example, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:15-17). The recurrent expression “as to [or “in] the Lord” (5:8, 10, 19-20, 22; 6:1, 7, 10), similarly indicates acting within the will of the Lord.

Paul made disciples of these Ephesian believers by three means:

- He taught them by words: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).
- He taught them by example: “You yourselves know how I lived



Ephesus – The Arcadian Way from the Harbour to the Great Theatre

among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia” (v.18). “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak...” (vv.33-35).

- And, thirdly, he reminded them of “the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (v.35).

In his address to the elders Paul refers to the *doctrinal truths* he taught them as “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). This “whole counsel” is the theme of the first three chapters of Ephesians, which outline the highest and richest blessings for believers. God has made known to us the secret of His will (Ephesians 1:9) – that He is going to make Christ head of all things to the church by putting everything under His feet (1:22-23). The destiny of the church is to be Christ’s bride (5:25-32) in accordance with God’s eternal purpose which He has

realized in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11). “In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of [God] who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (1:11).

And Paul also urged the Ephesian elders regarding *pastoral truths*. He was upfront about the difficulties this new church would have to face. He had appointed elders for this very reason. They were to shepherd the flock. He was particularly concerned that these elders understand their important role in the continuing health of the church. And, to this end, he was also concerned that they appreciate the value of the church to God and to Christ (Acts 20:28). Most importantly, he reminded them of the constant admonition he had given regarding false shepherds who would come amongst them and cause much havoc and disruption (vv.29-31). So concerned was Paul about this matter that he arranged for Timothy to remain in Ephesus after his departure to counter these false doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3-7). With hindsight, we can look back over two millennia of church history to see what Paul meant by “speaking twisted things” (Acts 20:30). Sadly, there is a tendency to fall asleep rather than to stay awake, so Paul gives another exhortation for them to wake up in Ephesians 5:14; and see also 6:10-12.

Does the gospel we preach contain those necessary elements of repentance and faith?

How true is our discipleship?

Paul's departing blessing

Paul finished his talk to the Ephesian elders with stirring words (Acts 20:32),

- that God was able to keep them from falling by His all-sufficient grace.
- that His word would edify them.
- that it would give them assurance of eternal life.

The same God and His word can do the same for us in the twenty-first century! Luke records that this special meeting finished with prayer, embrace, kissing, and weeping (20:36-38). Then at the ship Paul's entire group had to tear themselves away from the elders (21:1).

What about us?

I'm thrilled every time I read these accounts of gospel missions in Acts. But I'm equally thrilled and give God thanks when I learn of success in the gospel today, for example, when reports reach us from other parts of the world where people are similarly saved from idolatry. Sadly, conversions don't happen on the scale they used to here in the UK. Is that because so-called Christian Britain has now itself become idolatrous? If it is, then we need to remind ourselves that we

have the same gospel to preach that Paul preached; and that it is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4). We may not have idol temples like Diana's at Ephesus, but we certainly have their equivalents, whether they're to do with science, business, the arts, culture, sports, leisure. It also emanated from the changed lives of those who believed – they became true Christian disciples. Questions for us to answer are:

- Does the gospel we preach contain those necessary elements of repentance towards God (over sins) and of faith in Christ for salvation?
- How true is our discipleship?
 - ◆ Are there things residual in our lives from our unconverted days, which are incompatible with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?
 - ◆ What do we need to put on the "bonfire" (Acts 19:19)?
- Are our doctrine and shepherd-care compatible with those detailed in Acts 20?

Are our doctrine and shepherd-care compatible with those detailed in Acts 20?

Obeying the truth

F.B. Hole

We are saved by simply believing the gospel, but we also have to obey it in the way we live. Paul opens and closes Romans with the phrase, “the obedience of faith” (1:5; 16:26). The article, first published in Scripture Truth 1924 (and slightly edited for reprinting) demonstrates the imperative of New-Testament obedience, mainly from (of all epistles!) Galatians.

The obedience of faith

In the Old Testament, obedience necessarily has a very prominent place.¹ The law of Moses had been presented to Israel as the basis of their relationship with God, and obedience was what it demanded. Life was conditioned upon obedience, since the word was, “This do, and thou shalt live.” The New Testament records the introduction of grace and truth by Jesus Christ, and the establishment of a new order of things on that basis.

This does not, however, mean that obedience is superseded as being no longer necessary: we find, on the contrary, that obedience is prominent just as before. What it does mean is that obedience changes its character. Legal obedience is one thing; the obedience which grace enjoins and produces is quite another. The former means carrying out the obligation imposed in order that one might thereby live and continue in the favour of God. The latter means a deliverance effected by God, a new relationship established, a new nature produced, with obedience as the happy fruit of this; and that obedience, not as of a servant with a master merely, but as a son with a father, taking its character from the obedience of Christ. We are “elect ... unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1Peter 1:2, KJV), that is, to obey as Christ obeyed.

Obedience lies right at the beginning of the Christian’s history. He believes the gospel; but faith, if it is real, eventuates in obedience, and hence Scripture also speaks of “obeying” the Gospel. The apostle Paul tells us he “received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His Name” (Romans 1:5); and in the Acts we read of those who were “obedient to the faith” (6:7). “The faith” is that whole body of truth which has been revealed in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is “the truth,” but inasmuch as at present it can only be apprehended by faith it is “the faith.” That faith is now being heralded among the nations; and from amongst them a people for His

¹ An article by the same writer in the last issue, “Trembling at God’s Word,” drew lessons for us about obedience from Old-Testament case-studies.

Name is being gathered out, who are manifested by yielding the obedience of faith to “the faith” when they hear it.

The gospel is, of course, the foundation. The epistle to the Romans does not, however, close without a mention of that which was, in Paul’s ministry, the top-stone. He desired that the saints should be established not only “according to my gospel” but also “according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (16:25, 26). Thus, whether it be the foundation or the top-stone of that which the apostle Paul was called to minister, all was presented to faith, and further, all that was so presented to, and received by, faith was to be expressed in obedience.

In the epistle to the Galatians, the apostle twice uses an expression which we must note. He says, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not *obey the truth?*” (3:1); and again, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not *obey the truth?*” (5:7) In the former passage the words, “that ye should not obey the truth,” are by many omitted as lacking in authority, but there is no question about the latter passage. Evidently, then, truth is made known to us not merely that we may be sure as to what is reality and be able to distinguish this from what is merely outward appearance and vain show, but *also* so that the realities which the truth presents may govern our lives in actual present practice, and that we may give some actual expression to them, while as yet the world is imposed upon by unrealities.

Have we given sufficient weight to this? Many Christians are quite aware that in the New Testament, as in the Old, there are numerous plain injunctions, commands, and clearly formulated statements of the will of God for His saints, disobedience to which can only involve them in spiritual loss and confusion. Yet they hardly recognize that *all* the truth revealed in the New Testament, whether it concerns the individual saint, his privileges and the relationships in which he is set, or whether it concerns the church of God as a corporate body, – all this truth makes its demand upon their obedience. It makes its demand indeed upon each saint individually in either case, for in the latter each saint is an integral part of the church, a stone in the building, a member of Christ’s body, and no amount of failure or break-up in the visible body of Christians absolves the individual member of the body from walking in obedience to the whole truth that concerns the church.

A worked example of obedience

Turn again, however, to the two passages in Galatians, and observe more particularly the context of the former. This may help us to see more clearly just what the apostle meant in that instance by “obeying the truth.” The outburst, “O foolish Galatians,” (3:1) sprang from the depth of his love and concern on their behalf, but it was prompted by the inspired restatement of the truth of the cross of Christ in its practical bearings that he had just penned in the closing verses of chapter 2.

In these verses (2:11-21) we are given a little bit of history concerning Peter’s visit to Antioch. Owing to the fear of man, in the persons of certain brethren of strong Jewish tendencies from Jerusalem, Peter separated himself from the Gentile believers. This was “not according to the truth of the gospel” (2:14), and hence was strongly resisted by Paul.

The uninstructed onlookers of those days might have asked with surprise, “What has the gospel got to do with such a question as whether or not Jewish believers should eat with Gentile believers?” It had, indeed, everything to do with it, as Paul proceeded to show with unanswerable logic. He simply expounded afresh, step by step, what the truth of the gospel really is.

Let us formulate a few items of that truth which lie on the surface of this section of Scripture (2:15-20):

- That whether “Jews by nature” or “sinners of the Gentiles,” none of us has any standing before God on the ground of “the works of the law,” for we all alike are sinners, coming short of God’s glory. There is really no difference.
- That whether we are Jew or Gentile, having believed in Jesus Christ we are justified by the faith of Christ.
- That justification has a righteous basis inasmuch as the believing sinner, be he Jew or Gentile, has died – “crucified with Christ.”
- That he has died under the law’s sentence, but, as dying “through the law,” he has died “to the law” – i.e., from under the whole legal system – that he might “live unto God.”
- That he lives to God not in the life of the first Adam but in the life of Christ, which is so really his that Christ lives in him and shines before his soul as the object of his faith.

Here, then, we have “the truth of the gospel” to which Paul alludes in verse 5 of our chapter. It was that which had cost him so much conflict. It led to his journey to Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15, that he might boldly face the men

whose teachings imperilled it. And it also it led to his conflict with Peter at Antioch as recorded here.

With this truth of the gospel Peter's conduct at Antioch was plainly inconsistent. He does not appear to have at all denied it in his *teaching*. Theoretically he admitted its truth, but his action in withdrawing from the Gentile believers and no longer eating with them, was disobedience to the truth. It practically erected again the "middle wall of partition" which the cross had demolished ; it implied that believing Jews still lived in the life of Judaism, and believing Gentiles in the life of Gentiledom, instead of both now being in the life of Christ risen.

Peter's deviation from the truth of the gospel in this practical way might seem on the surface to be but a small thing; it had nevertheless a very serious side, as Paul makes manifest in the last verse of the chapter. Having defined his own position, which was in strict accord with the truth of the gospel, he wrote, "I do not frustrate the grace of God." The emphasis is evidently to be laid on the "I" – "It is not I who am frustrating the grace of God" – the implication being that it was Peter and those influenced by him who were committing themselves to this sorry work. The grace of God had brought both Jews and Gentiles together in this new and exalted privilege and they were frustrating this in practice by separating them! Moreover, they were in principle going back to law, and if one goes back to it at all, one goes back to it for all: to go back to it for righteousness means that Christ has died "in vain" [or "for nothing" (Darby Trans.)].

"Christ has died for nothing"! His toil, His sorrows, His death under judgment as a sacrifice for sin, all for nothing, inasmuch as, after all, righteousness can come by the law! *God* takes a most toilsome and expensive way to accomplish a certain result, and, lo! *man* can achieve the same result in a much simpler way. Then the death of Christ is simply a tragic blunder!

What a fearful conclusion to reach! But Paul is simply carrying the meaning of Peter's action to its logical end. No wonder he turns to the Galatians with such an appeal as in 3:1. Jesus Christ crucified, had been most evidently set forth, as before their very eyes, and yet they, too, were disobeying the truth – accepting the truth of the cross in theory, and denying it in practice.

The Galatian error is not extinct: rather it flourishes exceedingly. We need not be of those who boast the cross, lift it high as a symbol in their services, and wear it upon their persons, while maintaining as a principle a Jewish order of things and alliance with the world, to be involved in this error. It creeps in far more subtly. Easier still is it to be inconsistent in practice with the truth of the cross even though avoiding the exact form of inconsistency seen in the



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Galatians. How easy to maintain theologically the cross as the moral judgment of men after the flesh, and of man's world, and yet in practice to allow and foster in large measure both the one and the other!

A far-reaching principle

But we have referred to this passage in Galatians 2 and 3 firstly to establish the principle that *truth*, *all* truth, demands *obedience*, just as surely as definitely formulated commandments or instructions do; and secondly, to illustrate *how* obedience is yielded to the truth of God, and *the way* in which it can be rendered. Once let us grasp these two things and we shall see how *all* that which is presented to us in Scripture as truth in the abstract, is to be obeyed, by being translated into concrete form and shape in the lives of Christians, whether individually or collectively.

As to what is individual in its nature, no great difficulty exists. The path of obedience is comparatively simple. All that hinders us is lack of exercise as to what is the will of the Lord as revealed in Scripture, and lack of that spirit of devotion and love and simple-hearted subjection which sets aside our own wills in favour of the will of the Lord.

That which concerns us collectively as belonging to the church of God, as members of the body of Christ, is not so simple, inasmuch as here we are each but a part of a whole, and that whole, viewed as a public body, is in a state of failure and consequent ruin, shattered externally into hundreds of fragments. As a result a very complicated situation exists. The truth as to the church of God in its corporate capacity as revealed in Scripture shines as clearly as it did in the first century when the Pauline epistles were written. But the present state of affairs, in the midst of which we Christians of to-day are responsible to act in obedience to that truth as found in Scripture, renders much prayerful exercise upon our part necessary, lest we fail in its application; lest in translating one part of

the truth into practice we miss by reason of modern complications the proper translation of another part of the truth which is of equal importance.

Many of our readers, we fear, have given but little consideration, if any, to this side of things. Some have never yet sat down, Bible in hand, to discover what is the truth as to the church of God, its calling, character, privileges, responsibilities, and destiny.

Others, again, may have some idea of these things, but they relegate what they know to the realm of impractical region, a region of pure theory as far as the present is concerned, by speaking of the “invisible church,” or the “mystical body.” The Scriptural truth of the church is to them of this mystical and invisible order, to be turned to account doubtless in the coming age, but of no practical use to-day. Hence no question of obedience to it arises in their minds. They keep it, so to speak, pigeon-holed in one compartment of their minds whilst many other compartments are occupied with the details of the troubles and struggles occasioned by the broken and unscriptural disorder of the so-called “churches,” and the rapid progress of the apostasy in their systems. With all the evil and drift and apostasy they perhaps manfully struggle, doing their best to stem the tide and maintain the truths of the gospel.

We rejoice in every faithful effort on behalf of the truth and heartily give thanks unto God. Yet we should ourselves be lacking in faithfulness to the light of the Word of God, if we did not point out once again that contending against error and evil is at best but negative, and that what is far more potent and specially approved of God is obedience to His Word. To-day, as ever, in the confusion which marks the church, simple obedience to the truth concerning the church as unfolded in Scripture, is what will please Him. It is more really efficacious in its practical results than performing great exploits could ever be, especially if those exploits are in any way divorced from the knowledge of and obedience to the Word.

As to all this we can adopt the words of the wise in Proverbs 4:25 26 and say, “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee” – at the truth of God as we have it in Scripture. Then, “Ponder the path of thy feet” – that it may be in accordance with that truth – “and let all thy ways be established.”

The miracle of Philippi

Ian Mears

False starts can have great consequences if we wait on the Lord's guidance. The entry of the gospel into Europe resulted from false starts. Paul was on his second missionary journey from Antioch (15:36-41). He and Silas had visited churches which Paul had established on his first journey through today's Turkey, and Timothy had joined them at a city called Lystra. They then tried to go to other places to preach but the Holy Spirit forbade them. The Bible does not tell us how they knew but, whatever the means the Holy Spirit used, they knew they were not to go (Acts 16:6-10).

Then they came to Troas, a port on the Aegean Sea near the site of the ancient city of Troy. Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia in northern Greece, who stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." He and his party concluded that this dream was the Lord's method of calling them to preach the gospel in Macedonia, and they immediately set sail from Troas to Neapolis (today's Kavalla), a port on the coast of Macedonia (v.11).

At this point there is a significant change in the way the account is written. Before they arrived at Troas, Paul's party is referred to as "they," but from then until Paul leaves Philippi the party is referred to as "we." This shows that Luke, the author of Acts, had joined the party for a while and was an actual eyewitness of much of what we

read in this chapter. There are several other "we" passages in Acts. Their presence testifies to the reliability of the book. The events in it are true; they are not myths, legends, or fiction. The places and people mentioned existed as described.

From Neapolis they travelled the ten miles or so to Philippi, the foremost city in the area, and a Roman colony, that is, a special jurisdiction where Roman army veterans had been settled (v.12). Usually when Paul first came to a city he would attend the synagogue and preach there, but it seems that at Philippi there were not enough Jewish men to form a synagogue (ten being the required number apparently). So instead a group of women met on the riverbank to pray. This is where Paul and his companions went on their first Sabbath in Philippi.

"They spoke to the women" (v.13), and their words were effective. Are ours? The results were not startling. The apostle had not run a well-publicised and elaborately-organised campaign. It was not human efforts and planning he relied on but rather the power of God. We read of only one person who responded, although there were doubtless others. She was Lydia, from the city of Thyatira in the province of Asia. She sold "purple", a very expensive dye made from shellfish, so she was probably a woman of means and very likely independent, the head of a house. Of her we read the wonderful

expression, “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (v.14, NKJV). The change that had occurred in her was immediately apparent as she begged the party to stay in her house. How much of a change for the better has becoming a Christian made to us? If there is no improvement in our behaviour, consistent with what is set out in the Bible, how real is our conversion?

But one day, as they (actually “we” – see verse 16: Luke was there) were going to pray, a slave girl with a spirit of divination met them and called out, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”

What the girl said was correct. But Paul did not agree with the modern motto, “All publicity is good publicity.” Would-be support from wrong sources is not welcome assistance for the gospel. After many days of this unwelcome attention, Paul, greatly annoyed, commanded the spirit in the Name of Jesus Christ to come out of the slave girl (v.18). This, too, was effective, and the spirit left her immediately. Her owners had made a lot of profit out of her, and now saw their profit gone. They seized Paul and Silas, dragged them into the market place and put them before the magistrates.

A feature of the Book of Acts is that Luke is very accurate in his use of official names and terms. His term for what our translations call “the magistrates” is the correct name for such officials in a city such a Philippi, thus

demonstrating yet again the complete accuracy and reliability of the Bible.

The slave girl’s owners made wild and inaccurate accusations against Paul and Silas (vv. 20-21). But there was something else they said: Paul and Silas were Jews. It is one of the unfortunate facts of history that Jews down the ages have not been popular, and frequently have been the target of persecution. It is rare that there has ever been any justification for anti-semitism. The fact that this persecution is inspired by Satan in his hatred against Jews only makes it worse. So the mention that Paul and Silas were Jews doubtless aroused the antagonism of both the crowd and the magistrates. Without their being able to say any word in self-defence, or to reach the relevant persons with the information that they were Roman citizens, their clothes were torn off and they were flogged. This was a very serious miscarriage of justice because Roman citizens could not be flogged, not even if found guilty, and certainly not punished without a proper trial.

Paul and Silas found themselves thrown into prison with their feet fastened in stocks, probably in a most uncomfortable position. However, their reaction was, at midnight, to pray and sing hymns. There was no brooding over the gross unfairness of their treatment. They turned to God, but we do not read of vindictive prayers. The word for “hymns” means “hymns of praise.” Now it is virtually impossible to praise when you are in great distress, yet that is what they were doing.

That is surely a great lesson and example to us, but it is easier said than done. We cannot just switch on this sort of response. Surely it can only come from the kind of close walk with the Lord that Paul and Silas had. Experiences of “being hard done by” are the testing grounds of the closeness of our walk with the Lord.

Then the totally unexpected happened. There was a great earthquake (v.26). Even a minor tremor can be quite unnerving, but for the gaoler, it was worse than this. The earthquake had opened the prison doors; and a reasonable supposition in the pitch black was that the prisoners had all made their escape. In the Roman Empire, the authorities sought to ensure that gaolers and soldiers took their duties seriously by imposing on them the penalty due to any escaped prisoners in their charge. Not surprisingly, the gaoler in Philippi thought he’d had it. People then were far more likely to commit suicide than we are today. In publicly embarrassing situations where an official had failed or earned the displeasure of the emperor, it was felt that taking your own life was the decent thing to do; and it was certainly the expected thing (v.27).

The ancient view of the next life was hopelessly inaccurate and shadowy. How very much better our own position, through God’s grace, of having the knowledge that the Lord Jesus has entered into death, risen again and ascended into heaven, with the promise that we shall be raised from death too. But the gaoler had only the vague

prospect painted by his culture’s pathetic myths, plus the near certainty, he thought, of a miserable fate close at hand. He had actually drawn his sword to kill himself when Paul called out loudly to him to do himself no harm because all the prisoners were there (v.28). He obviously knew of the reputation of Paul and Silas, and probably something of their message too, because he fell down on his knees in front of them and asked, “What must I do to be saved?” (v.30)

This surely is the most important question anyone can ask. People are actually seeking some kind of salvation from their present situation in all manner of ways, through money, various New Age beliefs and techniques, entertainment, alcohol, drugs, or better government or careers, but there is still the gap in our lives and, in any case, none of these will put us right with God. If we are not right with God, then there is only God’s wrath to look forward to, and that means an eternity in hell.

So the answer Paul and Silas gave the gaoler that night so many centuries ago in Philippi, “Believe on the Lord



Philippi – the Theatre

Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (v.31), holds true for us all today. Jesus Christ is the universal answer to all the deepest needs of every one of us. Note that the gaoler did not ask to be saved from any particular problem nor did Paul say what the gaoler would be saved from, because the salvation Jesus brings us encompasses all our requirements. The gaoler needed to be saved from the intention of killing himself, from the extreme punishment that he anticipated, from God’s righteous judgment and from the pagan way of life with all its wrong and harmful beliefs and practices and its utter hopelessness in the face of death. Not only could the gaoler be saved by faith in Christ, but also his family if they believed.

And so we next read, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (v.32). The invitation, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household,” was not left by itself in mid-air, so to speak, but was filled out by Paul and Silas later that night. For ourselves, the lessons concern the importance of the message we preach. If people do not hear Jesus’ own words, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6), and Peter’s words, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12), then they have no way of experiencing God’s salvation. People can’t believe if they don’t hear the right message preached

to them. Of course, that right message can come to us by a whole variety of means; it does not have to be someone in a pulpit. But we have to make sure that our message to the lost is consistent with the centrality which the Bible gives our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the cross, to the sinfulness of humanity, to the fact that God will judge us for our sins, and to salvation from judgment through repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. That way our sins are forgiven, we become God’s children, we experience His love and there is the promise of heaven and not the threat of hell for the future.

The effect on the gaoler was both radical and immediate. Earlier, he had made life for Paul and Silas even more difficult and painful by putting their feet in the stocks, but now he washed the wounds on their backs and put food before them. He had been a pagan, but now he and his household were believers in Christ and, as proof of that, were baptised and rejoicing (v.34). We see from this the need for a person to be baptised once they are saved.

It would seem that the earthquake had damaged little more than the prison doors and the fixings for the prisoners’ shackles. None of the prisoners had escaped. The gaoler had therefore a lot less to worry about than he had first thought. In the morning the city’s magistrates sent along the lectors, their subordinate officers, to let Paul and Silas go, but it proved to be less straightforward than they had expected. They had wrongly treated Paul and

Silas as two wandering, trouble-making Jews who could be flogged to keep them out of Philippi in the future; and imagined there would be no comebacks on themselves. But in fact they had just flogged and imprisoned two Roman citizens without any trial, indeed, without any legal procedure at all. They had allowed and in effect supported mob rule. They were probably in as much potential trouble as the gaoler had thought he had been in. It was an awkward moment. Paul refused to do as asked. He refused to leave Philippi on the quiet. The magistrates had to come personally and plead with them to leave the city. So Paul and Silas left Philippi. Probably Paul insisted on this because he was anxious that the

citizens of Philippi should see the magistrates admit that the Christian church there was not a band of law-breakers and trouble makers.

We can thank God for this entry of Christianity into Europe. Because of what happened at Philippi, the good news of the gospel eventually found its way to our land with all the blessings that flow from it. Without the entry of the gospel, the history of Europe would have been totally different and considerably poorer. Let us also thank God for the manner of its entry, which teaches us such rich lessons about the message, the manner, and the follow-up of evangelism, and about the spirit in which it should be undertaken.

The everlasting God, my Creator

Creation in the Psalms, Part 2

David Anderson

“He who built all things is God” (Hebrews 3:4). Christians take this for granted – so much so that can make lamentably little impact on our thinking and lives. Not so for the writers of these four psalms, whose words, therefore, can be described as the most basic of “reality checks.”

Introduction

In my previous article,¹ I majored on the fact that psalms often celebrate that God is the only God and the sole Creator of all things. In this article I look at some psalms in which the thought of the immutable God personally impacted upon the psalmist.

Psalm 90: God eternal; man transient

Contemplation of God as Creator is closely linked to contemplation of His eternity. Moses composed this prayer for Israel to lament their wilderness wanderings after God’s judgement came upon them (cp. verse 9 with Numbers

¹ “Creation in the Psalms, Part 1,” in *Scripture Truth*, July 2012 issue.

14:20-35). As Moses contemplated the long years ahead for that generation of the nation, he was comforted by the fact that the disposition of every generation is in the hands of the Lord (v.1; “Adonai”, “the Sovereign, the Owner”). But the ultimate answer to their homelessness was that He had been the saints’ dwelling place [or “refuge”, Septuagint] from the very beginning of time. Unlike us, God is not limited by the time and space He created – from eternity to eternity He is God (v.2; “El”, “the Mighty One”).

However, Moses can only trace back to the first days of creation. God precedes the birth of the mountains on Day Three of creation (Genesis 1:9-10); as He also of course pre-dates Day One! Perhaps verse 3 alludes to Genesis 3:19 and is filled out in verses 7-12, where God’s wrath regarding man’s sins has determined our expected lifespan. Yes, man is soon swept [flooded] away – his life no more than a passing dream, or grass that quickly grows and soon withers away (vv.5-6). Biblically, a thousand years is a very long time on man’s timescale (cp. Revelation 20:2-4), but it merely registers with God as a day or a night watch (v.4; cp. 2 Peter 3:8). To God, time is nothing (v.2; cp. Isaiah 57:13). In these days, when men increasingly think that they are in control of the length their lives, we do well to pray, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (v.12, ESV).

Psalm 102: But Thou abidest for ever... art The Same

This theme also runs through Psalm 102. Here the psalmist’s own experience of human frailty sharpens his sense of God’s eternity. Verses 1-11 elaborate his distress, when the “one afflicted...is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD” (title). Just when his life is ebbing away (v.11), he turns from self-occupation to his God and exclaims, “But you, O LORD, are enthroned for ever; you are remembered throughout all generations” (v.12). His cry becomes more intense as death draws ever nearer: “[God] has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. ‘O my God,’ I say, ‘take me not away in the midst of my



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days’” (vv.23-24a). Mid-sentence, the psalmist changes to addressing God as Creator: “– you whose years endure throughout all generations!” (v.24b) He now sees his own transience from the perspective of God’s overall plan for the entire creation. “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end” (vv.25-27). The Darby translation renders verse 27b, “Thou art the Same”², a name of God meaning “The existing One, who does not change” (Darby footnote).

In contrasting the brevity of his own life with the unchangeability of God, the psalmist finds consolation in the fact that His purposes regarding Zion are unchangeable too (vv.12, 13). However Hebrews 1:10-12 applies vv.25-27 directly to Christ as one of the proof-texts of His essential deity “without even a comment being deemed necessary.”³ The whole psalm is Messianic and gives an insight into the Lord’s prayers in Gethsemane. The title, together with vv.1-11 and v.23, express the extremity of His grief (cp. Luke 22:44). Verse 10 gives the reason, “because of your indignation and anger.” His prayer in v.24 is interrupted by the Father’s ready response of verses 24b-27, reminding Him, “Thou art The Same.” “This contrast of the extreme humiliation and isolation of Christ, and His divine nature [i.e., as the Creator – DA] is incomparably striking.”⁴ But it is through this One, “the Afflicted” but now set at God’s right hand, the One who Himself is the unchangeable God, that the promises regarding Zion will be fulfilled (see Jeremiah 33:14-16).

Psalm 104: celebrating the Creator and His works

This celebration is the psalmist’s personal response as he considers his God manifest in His many acts both at creation and in His ongoing involvement with creation. In musing over the Genesis account of creation, the psalmist composes poetry by which his soul can bless the LORD.

The praise exhibits a striking, if general, correspondence to the days of the creation week.

- Verses 1-4 introduce the Creator in all His divine majesty and awesome power.
 - a. Verse 2a mentions light, which came on Day One (Genesis 1:3-5).

² In the Old Testament ‘The Same’ is sometimes translated ‘I am HE’ – see Deuteronomy 32:39.

³ H.L Ellison, *The Psalms*, (London, Scripture Union, 1968), p. 86.

⁴ J..N.Darby, *Synopsis of the Bible*, (Kingston on Thames, 5 vols; 1st edn., London, 1857ff), vol.2, p.161.

- b. Verse 2b extends light to include the formation of the starry universe, created on Day Four (Genesis 1:16b).
- c. Verses 3-4 explain how God operates in the heavens He formed on Day Two (Genesis 1:6-8).
- Verse 5 introduces the earth which is the focus of the remainder of the psalm and indicates God's special interest in it.
 - a. Verses 6-9 recall how the Creator separated the land from the seas on Day Three (Genesis 1:9-10), so that the earth could be inhabited.
 - b. Verses 10-18 laud the provision of water for the earth to allow vegetation, plants and trees to spring forth, so that there is food and drink for all creatures including man. This also commenced on Day Three (Genesis 1:11-13).
 - c. Verses 19-23 recall the appointment and design of the sun and the moon to govern the seasons, days and nights, and years, as happened on Day Four (Genesis 1:14-19).
 - d. Verses 24-26 rejoice in the profusion of creatures on the land and in the seas, as created on Days Five and Six (Genesis 1:20-25). The description is prefaced by a special note of praise, "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all."
 - e. Verses 27-30 give poetic voice to Genesis 1:29-31, extolling the dependence of all creatures, terrestrial and aquatic, upon the Creator for life and death, for sustenance and safety.
- Verses 31-35 provide a fitting finale of glory and praise from the psalmist (and from us also!) to the Creator; and correspond to Day Seven, the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3).

Psalm 139:13-18: You made me!

For David, life in essence is "God and me." In verses 1-6, the *omniscient* God knows and sees everything in David's life; in verses 7-12, the *omnipresent* God is always there with him through all of life, and even in death (cp. Psalm 23:4); whilst verses 19-24 teach the *all-righteousness* of God. But in verses 13-18, David confesses that his God, the omnipotent One is the Creator who individually made him!

"You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb" (v.13). The design and begetting of a human life (i.e., of me!) is God's work alone, even though my parents were involved! God is intimately involved with every human being from the very start of his or her existence. Conception, the formation of the foetus of a baby, and its ultimate birth are profound mysteries, which science does not and cannot explain (either the How? or the Why?) – even

with a knowledge of DNA! In this verse, “formed my inward parts” is literally, “possessed my kidneys.” “Possessed” implies that God is Lord. The NIV [1984] translates v.13 as, “You created my inmost being,” on the grounds that the “kidneys” represent the seat of our desires and longings, our moral compass, our inner motives, the things which God tests (cp. Psalm 16:7 & Jeremiah 11:20; 12:2; 20:12). God is “Lord” of these. “Knitted” (v.13, ESV) means “intricately woven together” as a complex unity. “Your hands have fashioned and made me... You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews” (Job 10:8 & 11). “In my mother’s womb” means that a foetus is a real person from conception!

No wonder David says, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well” (v.14). “Fearfully” means “I am to be in awe of [hold in reverence]” the specialness of my body. “Wonderfully,” [or, “marvellously,”] is a comment upon the complexity of the human anatomy. Each person is made differently – is unique! “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth” (v.15). “My frame” means “my skeleton.” “In secret...in the depths of the earth” is a Hebrew idiom for the deepest concealment and intimacy of the process of procreation. “Intricately woven” (verse 15b) is “embroidered” (similar in meaning to v.13), showing that each part of the human anatomy is curiously fashioned by God; this “fashioning” is the secret behind what we now know is the human genome.

“Your eyes saw my unformed substance” (verse 16), confirms that the embryo is designed and known by God. (In Hebrew, ‘unformed body’ translates the word used for the human embryo, which, medically, is the first eight weeks from conception.) “Unformed” is translated ‘unperfect’ by RV and KJV, giving the idea of not fully developed, yet possessing life from God! Fundamentally, life is sacred because it comes from God!⁵

“In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (v.16). How blessed to understand that God has His special plan for the exact number of days for my life (as for the life of every other person) from conception to death (or to the Lord’s coming)!

And so, like David, we confess, “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with You” (vv.17-18).

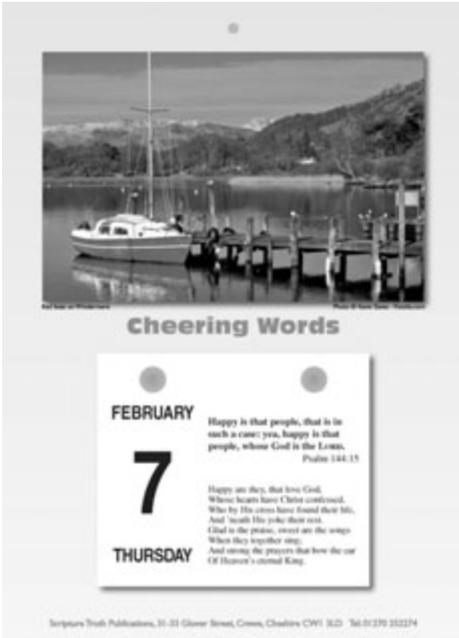
⁵ Christian ethical perspectives arising from these verses are detailed in John Wyatt, *Matters of Life and Death*, (Leicester, IVP, 2nd Edition, 2009).

Cheering Words Calendar 2013

The 2013 calendar is now available from STP, with two pictures (one on either side of the calendar back):

Red boat on Windermere

Cottage, St. Agnes, Isles of Scilly



Individual calendars are priced at **£6.00** plus postage. Postage and packing for a single calendar to one address costs **£2.50** to the UK, **£4.50** to Europe and **£5.00** to the rest of the world (by surface mail).

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from which a price list and order form may be downloaded.

Thee will I love

Thee will I love, my strength, my tower;
Thee will I love, my joy, my crown;
Thee will I love with all my power,
in all my works, and Thee alone!
Thee will I love, till Thy pure fire
fills my whole soul with chaste desire.

Ah! why did I so late Thee know,
Thee, lovelier than the sons of men?
Ah! why did I no sooner go
to Thee, the only ease in pain?
Ashamed I sigh, and inly mourn
that I so late to Thee did turn.

In darkness willingly I strayed;
I sought Thee, yet from Thee I roved,
for wide my wandering thoughts were spread,
Thy creatures more than Thee I loved:
and now, if more at length I see,
'tis through Thy light, and comes from Thee.

I thank Thee, Uncreated Sun,
that Thy bright beams on me have shined;
I thank Thee, who hast overthrown
my foes, and healed my wounded mind;
I thank Thee, whose enlivening voice
bids my freed heart in thee rejoice.

Give to my eyes refreshing tears;
give to my heart chaste, hallowed fires,
give to my soul, with filial fears,
the love that all heaven's host inspires;
"that all my powers with all their might
in Thy sole glory may unite."

Thee will I love, my joy, my crown!
Thee will I love, my Lord, my God!
Thee will I love, beneath thy frown
or smile, Thy sceptre or Thy rod.
What though my flesh and heart decay?
Thee shall I love in endless day!

Johann Scheffler (1624-77)
adapted by John Wesley (1703-91)