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# **STUDIES**

## **IN THE**

# **SCRIPTURES**

*“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39*

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*Studies in the Scriptures* appeared without interruption from 1922 to 1953, each issue including six to eight articles addressing a different topic in a series. While virtually unknown to the Christian world when he died, his writings continue to grow in their influence upon God's people around the world, through their clarity, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.

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## HURRY!

When man fell, sin disjointed the balance and moral poise of his being; and consequently, he is now prone to go to extremes. The depravity of human nature evinces itself in many ways, causing us to act tardily when speed is called for, and to rush recklessly ahead when consideration and circumspection are required. Some are constitutionally impulsive and rash, and need to be reminded of the old adage, "Look before you leap"; others are ultra-cautious, and require to be told that one may look so long—yet he may never leap at all. Some are naturally sluggish and indolent, and have to be prodded into activity; others are so vigorous and zealous as to need a brake on their energies. But spiritually speaking, all are by nature ready unto sin: "Their feet *run* to evil" (Isa 59:7), they "make haste to shed blood" (Pro 1:16; Rom 3:15); but unto that which is good, they are averse—hating God (Joh 15:23), they abhor holiness. We have to be divinely drawn before we come to Christ, powerfully wrought upon by the Spirit ere we "flee from the wrath to come." Here are seven things where hurry is called for:

1. To hearken unto God: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jam 1:19). Nature itself inculcates that lesson, for we hear before we learn to talk. Moreover, the Creator has given us two ears, but only one tongue—and that, behind two rows of teeth; and they, protected by the lips. Alas, most of us have but one ear, yet half a dozen tongues. God has spoken, and it becomes us to hearken to what He says. His Word is not for our amusement, but instruction and submission; and woe be unto us if we disregard the same. Nowhere but in the Holy Scriptures can we learn the true source of our being, the purpose for which we are made, the destiny awaiting us, and how to be saved. Then how attentive we should be to its counsels, admonitions, and warnings! God also speaks loudly to us by His providences, and we are greatly the losers if we ignore its messages. He speaks also through our consciences, and to slight His voice is perilous. "*To day* if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart" (Psa 95:7-8). None are nearer destruction than those who promise themselves a long time in sin.

2. To escape the eternal burnings. God's Word to the careless is, "Haste thee, escape thither" (Gen 19:22). That injunction was originally given to Lot by a divine messenger when the cities of the plain were on the point of being destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven. The matter was an urgent one, calling for prompt action: his very life was in imminent danger, and therefore, to procrastinate would be madness. In precisely the same situation were his sons-in-law, and to them he said, "Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city" (Gen 19:14). Instead of appreciating the warning and responding promptly, we are told, "But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law." Such is the case with the vast majority of our fellows: beneath the condemnation of a holy God, with their faces hellward, yet so bewitched by sin as to be unconcerned about their peril. Even if momentarily aroused, as was Felix when Paul preached of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, yet—like that Roman governor—they avoid the issue and postpone the decision until "a [more] convenient season" (Act 24:25).

3. To respond to the call of Christ, who says, "Make haste, and come down" (Luk 19:5). Descend from your perch of self-love and self-esteem, and take your place in the dust as a self-condemned sinner. Climb down from the branch of self-righteousness, and present yourself before Me as a penitent pauper. Linger not, for "*now* is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2Co 6:2). You need no other warrant than the free offer of the Gospel: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1Ti 1:15); and He will save *you* this very moment—even though you be the chief of sinners—if you surrender to His lordship, and cast yourself upon His grace as a drowning man upon a floating spar. Then *flee* "for refuge" unto Him, and "lay hold upon the hope set before us" in the Gospel (Heb 6:18). Perform this supreme business of your soul's eternal interests with dispatch. The wings of time are flying with the utmost speed. Your day of opportunity will soon be over. Death is already on the way to seize you. Of Zaccheus we are told, "And he made haste, and came down, and received him [Christ] joyfully" (Luk 19:6). Do thou the same.

4. To offer unto God His dues. "Thou shalt *not delay* to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me" (Exo 22:29). The claims of God are paramount, and He requires that they be recognized by us. But there is something which takes precedence of bringing to God our substance: first and foremost is His clamant call, "My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26). We fully agree with Thomas Scott (1747-1821): "The Law demands love to God with the whole heart and soul, but sin and the world have possession of it in fallen creatures. The express design of the Gospel is to bring

us—by faith and repentance—to give our hearts to the Saviour, and to God through Him, that He may there set up His kingdom, write His Law, and reign the undisputed LORD of all our affections. And unless this call be obeyed, all else will be decidedly rejected.” Nothing else that we offer Him will be accepted till we give Him our hearts—no, not even our worship. Then delay not, but “yield yourselves unto the LORD” (2Ch 30:8).

5. To render obedience unto God. Thereby we supply proof that we *have* given our hearts unto the LORD: Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (Joh 14:23). “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (Psa 119:60). This readiness in the work of obedience is doubly expressed—affirmatively and negatively. Such doubling of terms is used for the purpose of emphasis, as in “I shall not die, but live” (Psa 118:17). It signifies, “I hesitated not a moment.” Where there is only slight conviction, we stand debating the matter, and resort to reasoning instead of acting. When the path of duty is clear, it should be instantly followed: “Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16). Let no time be lost between forming and performing a good resolution. Tardiness in obedience is a sure sign that the heart has grown cold. Let promptness mark every response to your apprehension of God’s will. By yielding to the Spirit’s motions, work which is hard today becomes easy tomorrow.

“I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Psa 119:32). David was not content simply to *walk* in the path of obedience, but desired to *run* therein; but he realized that in order thereto, the LORD must deepen His work of grace in him. Enlargement of heart consists of its being freed from the straits of legality, fear, unbelief, and the things which sap our strength and dampen our joy in God’s service. If we be sincere in praying thus, we shall diligently seek to avoid those things which cramp the heart—such as ignorance, love of the world, pride, etc. The language of Psalm 119:60 expresses the longing of one whose heart has been won by Christ and is in fellowship with Him. It is the urge of love, which desires to follow Him more closely and swiftly. “Running” expresses the readiness and cheerfulness of our obedience, its vigour and earnestness. When the affections are aroused and eagerly set upon things, our actions are swift and full of delight. Alas, how many need to bewail their *lameness*.

6. To avoid temptation. All inducements unto evil should be feared and shunned like a deadly plague. To trifle with that which invites unto sin is to play with fire. How emphatic is the repetition in the dehortation, “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Pro 4:14-15). There is still that in the Christian which responds to evil from without; and therefore, it is the part of wisdom to give it a wide berth, so far as that lies in our power. To pray unto God, “Lead [me] not into temptation” (Mat 6:13; Luk 11:4), and then—deliberately—to enter those places where such abounds, is to mock Him. Even the minister of the Gospel is exhorted, “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness,” etc. (1Ti 6:11). And again, “Flee also youthful lusts” (2Ti 2:22). Earnestly seek grace to emulate Joseph, who, when he was solicited by Potiphar’s wife, “*fled*” the temptress (Gen 39:13).

7. To fly to God for protection. “Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me” (Psa 143:9). Our foes are both numerous and powerful; and we can neither evade, nor vanquish them: but God will protect us if we take shelter in Him. When sorely beset by those who seek to destroy our spiritual life, we should—as the man-slayer fled to the city of refuge—seek asylum in God by prayer, in faith and hope of deliverance. Such flight is not cowardice, but wisdom; and the sooner we betake ourselves to God, the better for us. In verse 7, David had prayed, “Hear me speedily, O LORD”; now he declares, “I flee unto thee to hide me”—there he made request, “Hide not thy face from me”; here, “hide me.” A sense of urgency possessed him. Jacob fled to Laban, Saul to the witch, and Asa to the physicians; but the hard-pressed believer, unto his God. “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous *runneth* into it, and is safe” (Pro 18:10). So the saints, of all generations, have proved.



## THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLES

### 69. Jude: 24-25

The prayer which is now to engage our attention is a particularly arresting one, but its beauty and blessedness appear even more conspicuously if it be examined in connection with its somber *background*. It concludes the most solemn epistle in the New Testament, one which is to be put down with thanksgiving and praise. It contains a most awful description of graceless professors, of those who appeared to give much promise of fruit to God's glory, but whose leaves soon dropped off and whose trees quickly withered away. Its theme is apostasy—or, more specifically, the corrupting and corruption of Christendom. It presents a picture which all-too-tragically depicts things as they now are in the religious realm—in the “churches” at large. It informs us how the process of declension began, how the evil leaven was introduced into the three measures of meal (the Roman church, the Greek church, and Protestantism), and will work until the whole thereof is corrupted. It delineates the characters of those who should be engaged in this vile work. It makes known the sure doom awaiting both leaders and those who are led. It closes with a glorious contrast.

The Lord Jesus gave warning that the sowing of the good seed by Himself and His apostles would be followed with the sowing of tares in the same field by Satan and his agents. Paul also announced that—notwithstanding the widespread successes of the Gospel during his lifetime—there would be “a falling away” before the man of sin was revealed (2Th 2:3). That “falling away”—or the apostasy of Christendom corporately considered—is depicted by the Spirit in some detail through the pen of Jude. As Christ Himself had intimated, the initial work of corruption would be done stealthily, “while men slept” (Mat 13:25); and Jude represents the evil-doers as having “crept in unawares” (Jude :4). They are spoken of as men who were “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is to say, while pretending to *magnify* “free grace,” they *perverted* it by failing to enforce the balancing truth of holiness; and while professing to believe in Christ as a *Saviour*, they refused to surrender to His *Lordship*. Thus, they were lustful and lawless. In view of this horrible menace, the saints were exhorted to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (verse 3)—i.e. all the counsel of God.

That exhortation is enforced by a reminder of three fearful and solemn examples of the punishment visited by God upon those who had apostatized. The first was that of the children of Israel, whom the LORD saved out of Egypt, but who still lusted after its fleshpots; and because of their unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea, were destroyed in the wilderness (Jude :5). The second was the case of the angels, who apostatized from their privileged position, and are now “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (verse 6). The third was Sodom and Gomorrah, which, because of gross lasciviousness, were destroyed by fire from heaven (verse 7). To which the apostle added that the corruptors of Christendom “defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities,” being less respectful to their superiors than the archangel was to his inferior (verse 8). He solemnly pronounced the divine “Woe unto them!”; and likened them and their works unto three characters of evil notoriety: By “the way of Cain,” we are to understand a natural religion which is acceptable to the unregenerate; by “the error of Baalam for reward,” a mercenary ministry; and by “the gainsaying of Core [Korah],” despising of authority and discipline (verse 11)—an effort to obliterate the distinctions which God has made (Num 16:3-7).

Other characteristics of these religious evil-doers are given in figurative terms in Jude, verses 12 and 13; and it should be particularly noted that they are said to “feast *with you*” (the saints), which supplies further evidence that they are *inside* the churches. In the second half of verse 13 to that of 15, their doom is pronounced: for backsliders, there is a way of recovery; but for apostates, none. Verse 16 details other features, which are sadly conspicuous in our own day. Then Jude bade God's people to remember that the apostles of Christ had predicted there should be “scoffers [or ‘mockers’—Jude :18]” (2Pe 3:3) “in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts” (verses 17 and 18). By “the last time,” this Christian or final dispensation is meant (see 1Pe 4:7; 1Jo 2:18), with possibly a reference to the climacteric culmination of evil at its end. Next, Jude appeals to those unto whom he was writing, addressing to them a number of needful and salutary exhortations (verses 21 and 23). He ends with the prayer which we are now to ponder, concluding the most solemn of all the epistles with a more glorious outburst of praise than is elsewhere to be found in them.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (verses 24 and 25). We propose to attend to five things in our study of this prayer: First, its general *background*. Second, its more immediate *connection*. Third, its *nature*—a doxology. Fourth, its *Object*—“God our Saviour.” Fifth, its *reasons* or motives—who is able to preserve, and who presents His people faultless before the Throne. We have already said something above, in a general way, upon the background of this prayer, and shall now add something more to the point.

It seems to us that, in view of what had been engaging the mind of the apostle in the previous verses, he could not restrain himself from giving vent to this *paean*<sup>1</sup> of praise. After viewing the solemn case of a whole generation of Israel perishing in the wilderness because of their unbelief, he was moved to cry out in gladness, “Now unto him that is able to keep *you*” (verse 24). As he contemplated the experience of the sinless angels who fell from their first estate, he could not but tremble; but when he thought of the Saviour and Protector of His Church, he burst forth into a strain of adoration. Jude found great comfort and assurance in the blessed fact that the One who begins a work of grace within those given unto Him by the Father will never cease it till He has perfected the same (compare Phi 1:6). He knew that were it not for everlasting love and infinite power, *our case* would yet be the same as that of the angels who fell: that but for an Almighty Redeemer, we too must enter everlasting darkness and endure the suffering of eternal fire; and, realizing that, the apostle could not but bless the One whose protecting hand covers each of His blood-bought ones.

After making mention of those fearful examples of falling, it is highly probable that the thoughts of the penman of this epistle turned to another one much more recent, and which had come beneath his own immediate notice. It is surely of deep significance that, when our Lord sent forth the twelve, “Judas [Jude] the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor,” were paired together (Luk 6:16)—the arch-apostate with the one who was to write at length upon the great apostasy! It scarcely admits of doubt that as Jude’s mind reverted to the traitor, it made him exclaim with added emphasis: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, . . . be glory . . . both now and ever” (Jude :24-25). Jude had probably respected Iscariot as his fellow apostles had done, and heard him, as he sat at the table with them, say, “Master, is it I?” (Mat 26:25). Jude must have been very surprised when he saw him take the sop and dip it in the dish with the Saviour; and then when he [Judas Iscariot] went out, would scarcely believe his own ears when Christ announced that the one who should betray Him had gone forth. He could not but be aware that, in remorse, the traitor had hanged himself; and we believe that the shadow of his awful doom fell upon Jude as he penned this epistle.

But Jude did not suffer these sad contemplations to sink him into a state of dejection. He knew that his omniscient Master had foretold that a rising tide of evil would spread over the whole of Christendom, and that however mysterious such a phenomenon might be, there was a wise reason for it in the divine economy. He knew that however fiercely the storm might rage, there was no occasion to fear, for Christ Himself was in the ship, and had declared, “Lo, I am with you alway” (Mat 28:20). He knew that the gates of hell could not and would not prevail against the Church; and therefore, he lifted up his eyes above this scene, and gazed by faith upon its enthroned Head and Preserver, and offered worship unto Him. *That* is the all-important lesson to be drawn from the background of this prayer, and why we have dwelt the longer upon the same. Fellow Christians, let us duly *heed* it. Instead of being so much occupied with conditions in the world, with the menace of the atom bomb, and with the deepening apostasy, let our hearts be increasingly engaged with our beloved Lord, and find our peace and joy in Him.

A word next upon the more immediate *connection* of our prayer. On former occasions, we have seen how helpful it was to attend closely unto the context. It is necessary to do so here, if the balance of truth is to be maintained, and a proneness to antinomianism is to be checked. It is not honest to lay hold of this verse—“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling” (verse 24)—unless we have first given heed to the “*Keep yourselves*” of verse 21! The precepts and promises may be distinguished, yet they are not to be separated. The former make known our duty; the latter are for encouragement, while genuinely and earnestly seeking to perform the same; but one who neglects his duty is entitled to no comfort. After describing at length the beginning, the course, and the end of the apostasy of Christendom, the apostle added seven brief exhortations to the saints in verses 20 to 23—which call for the exercise of faith, prayer, love, hope, com-

<sup>1</sup> *paean* – a fervent expression of joy or praise.

passion, fear, and godly hatred. Those exhortations are *means* to preserve from apostasy. John Calvin (1509-1564) began his comments on them by saying, "He shows the way in which they could overcome all the devices of Satan: that is, by having love connected with faith, and by standing on their guard as it were in the watch-tower, until the coming of Christ."

"There is a one-sided and unscriptural forgetfulness of the actual position of the believer (or professing believer) as a man who is still on the road, in the battle; who has still the responsibility of trading with the talent entrusted, of watching for the return of the Master. Now there are many by-paths, dangers, precipices on the road; and we must persevere to the end. Only they who overcome and are faithful to death shall be crowned. It is not spiritual, but carnal, to take the blessed and solemn doctrines of our election in Christ and of the perseverance of the saints—given us as a cordial for fainting hours, and as the inmost and ultimate secret of the soul in its dealings with God—and place them on the common and daily road of our duties and trials, *instead* of the precepts and warnings of the divine Word. It is not merely that God keeps us through these warnings and commandments, but the attitude of soul which neglects and hurries over these portions of Scripture is not childlike, humble, and sincere. The attempts to explain away the fearful warnings of Scripture against apostasy are rooted in a very morbid and dangerous state of mind. A precipice is a precipice, and it is folly to deny it. 'If [we] live after the flesh,' says the apostle, '[we] shall die' (Rom 8:13). Now, to keep people from falling over a precipice, we do not put up a slender and graceful hedge of flowers, but the strongest barrier we can; and piercing spikes on cutting pieces of glass to prevent calamities. But even this is only the surface of the matter. Our walk with God and our perseverance to the end are great and solemn realities. We are dealing with the living God, and only life with God, and in God, and unto God, can be of any avail here. He who brought us out of Egypt is now guiding us; and if we follow Him, and follow Him to the end, we shall enter into the final rest"—Adolph Saphir (1831-1891).

It is outside our present scope to give here a full exposition of the precepts found in Jude :20-23, yet a few remarks are needed if we are to be faithful in observing the inseparable link between them and our text. Duty and privilege must not be divorced, nor the latter allowed to oust the former. If it be the Christian's privilege to have his heart engaged with Christ in glory, it must be while treading the path He has appointed, and while engaged in those tasks He has assigned him. Though Christ be the One who keeps him from making shipwreck of the faith, it is not apart from his own earnest endeavours that He does so. Christ deals with His redeemed as responsible creatures, and requires them to conduct themselves as moral agents, putting forth every effort to overcome the evils which menace them. Though entirely dependent upon Him, they are not to remain passive. Man is of an active nature, and therefore, must grow either better or worse. Before regeneration, he is indeed spiritually dead; but at the new birth, he receives divine life; and motion and exercise follow life—and those motions are to be *directed* by the divine precepts.

"But ye, beloved [in contrast with the apostates of the previous verse], building up yourselves on your most holy faith" (verse 20). The foundation of God indeed stands sure; nevertheless, we are called upon to the concurrence of our own endeavours. We are to be solicitous about our growth, and exercise care both over ourselves and our fellow believers. It is not sufficient to be grounded in the faith; we must daily increase therein more and more. To grow in faith is one of the appointed *means* of our preservation. We "[build] up [ourselves] on [our] most holy faith" by a deepened knowledge thereof: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning" (Pro 1:5). We "[build] up [ourselves] on [our] most holy faith" by meditating upon its substance or contents (Psa 1:2; Luk 2:19), by believing and appropriating it, by applying it unto ourselves, by being governed by it. Observe that it is a "most holy faith," for it both requires and promotes personal holiness; and thereby do we distinguish ourselves from carnal professors and apostates. "Praying in the Holy Ghost" (verse 20)—fervently and constantly seeking His assistance for and in complying with these precepts.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God" (verse 21). See to it that your love for Him be preserved in a pure, healthy, and vigorous condition. See to it that your love to Christ be in constant exercise, by rendering obedience to Him: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Joh 14:15). "Keep thy *heart* with all diligence" (Pro 4:23), for if your affections wane, your communion with Him will deteriorate, and your witness for Him be marred. Only as you keep yourselves in the love of God will you be distinguished from the carnal professors all around you. This exhortation is no needless one. The Christian is living in a world whose icy blasts will soon chill his love for God, unless he guards it as the apple of his eye. A malicious devil will do all he can to pour cold water upon it. Remember the solemn warning of Revelation 2:4. Oh that Christ may never have to complain of you, of me, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, be-

cause thou hast *left* thy first love.” Rather, may our love “abound yet more and more” (Phi 1:9). In order thereto, *hope* must be in exercise “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (verse 21). Verses 22 and 23 make known our duty and attitude unto those of our brethren who have fallen by the way: some we must pity; others deliver with fear, “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.”



## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSHUA

### 49. Mount Ebal

“And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day. Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal...an altar of whole stones” (Jos 8:29-31). It can scarcely be doubted that there is a designed contrast between those two events. In the former, we see the ignominy of Ai’s king; here, we behold the worship of the King of kings. The one marked the grave of a malefactor; the other recognized the claims of the Holy One. Great indeed is the contrast between the dead body *under* the stones, and the accepted sacrifice *upon* the altar of stones. That bore witness to the carrying out of the curse of the Law; on this was inscribed its precepts. The former was at “the gate” of Ai (the place of judgment—Amo 5:10); the latter was in a mount. That was intended as a solemn warning unto evil-doers; this was for the instruction of those who desired to do well.

“Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal.” Everything connected with the incident prefaced by that statement is of deep importance and interest, calling for our closest attention. A further word upon the Spirit’s time-mark: This act of worship followed immediately upon the destruction of Ai and all its inhabitants. We should naturally expect that after Israel’s capturing of Jericho and Ai, they had continued to advance, proceeding to the further occupying of Canaan. Now that they had made themselves masters of its frontier towns, it would appear the only sound policy is to forge ahead, while their terror was upon the foe, and penetrate into the very heart of his country. Instead, a long and difficult journey was taken unto mount Ebal, that a solemn religious ordinance might be observed. In the midst of their military campaign, a lengthy pause was made in order that Jehovah might be honoured: “The camp of Israel was drawn out into the land not to engage the enemy, but to offer sacrifice, to hear the Law read, and to say Amen to the blessings and curses. It is a remarkable instance of the zeal of Israel for the service of God and for His glory”—Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

The offering of burnt offerings and peace offerings to Jehovah upon this occasion was an acknowledgment of His blessing upon their arms, and a rejoicing before Him in the successes which His power and goodness had vouchsafed them. At Rephidim, Israel had been taught that victory over Amalek was obtained by the hands of Moses being lifted up toward the Throne of heaven, and as a monument thereto, he erected an altar, naming it “Jehovahnissi” (Exo 17:15), which signifies “the LORD my banner.” So here, as the captain of their salvation, Joshua had not only “stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city” (Jos 8:18), but had kept it raised and extended until victory was complete (verse 26); and now he expressed his gratitude by erecting this altar to mark the same. That is clearly evident from the opening “Then” of verse 30. Yet his act on this occasion imported something more. As yet, Israel had conquered but a very small section of Canaan; and here, they journeyed upwards of another hundred miles; then upon reaching mount Ebal, Joshua built this altar. It was therefore a remarkable act of *faith*, a claiming of the whole land for the Lord—men only *build* on land which is their own! Thus, instead of waiting until Israel’s victory was complete, Joshua anticipated the same in a sure and certain hope!

This is the first time that any “altar” is mentioned in the book of Joshua; and there are some very striking parallels between it and the one mentioned in Exodus 20:24. Both were erected upon a mount; both of them at the express command of the LORD, and not merely by the spiritual impulses and promptings of Moses and Joshua. Both of them were designed to magnify the divine Law, and to exemplify the grand fact that grace reigns through righteousness. On both of them were sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings (Exo 24:5). The one was shortly after Israel’s supernatural exodus from the house of bondage and crossing of the Red Sea; the other, soon after their miraculous crossing of the Jordan and entrance into the Promised Land. In the course of these articles, we have frequently emphasized the fact that in his actions, Joshua (as one of the outstanding types of Christ) was constantly regulated by the written Word of God. That had again received illustration in Joshua 8:29, for the taking down of the carcase of the king of Ai was required in Deuteronomy 21:23. Equally so was that principle exemplified here in Joshua 8:30, for the building of this altar was in compliance with the injunctions given through Moses.

In the book of Deuteronomy, many instructions were given the children of Israel near the close of their sojourn in the wilderness as to how they must conduct themselves upon their entrance into the Land of

Promise. Therein we find that which explains the incident recorded in the closing verses of Joshua 8. It had been said unto them, "Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God: And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God...These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people...And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse" (Deu 27:4-7, 12-13).

The "altar" was the *meeting-place* between God and men. In its construction, it was of the most simple and unpretending character, no place being allowed for the exercise of human art. This may appear strange when we remember that both rich materials and elaborate skill *were* expended upon the tabernacle and its internal furnishings—the outer-court vessels alone excepted. But when we call to mind the purpose of the altar and its leading object, the difficulty vanishes, and the propriety of its extreme plainness at once appears. It was there the Holy One and the fallen creature transacted concerning sin and salvation: that the alien might be reconciled, the guilty pardoned, and the cleansed one have fellowship with the LORD. Therefore did He appoint that man should there be reminded of his utter unworthiness and impotency as he came before the One who deigned to meet with him. His curse rested on the ground for man's sake (Gen 3:17), and by no effort of his can man remove it. For the altar to be made of ornamented plates of costly metal would have misrepresented the object for which it was designed, and disposed man to forget his vile condition. So, in the general direction for the formation of altars, God ordained it should be a rude mound of earth, or of unpolished stones (Exo 20:24-25; and compare 1Ki 18:31-32).

The altar, then, must be of *God's* workmanship—unbeautified by man's skill, so that he could not glory in his own production. That chosen meeting place of God with man as a sinner must be such as would convey the impression of a direct contact between the God of heaven and the earth which He had made—on a "mount," but the altar naked, simple, unadorned; thereby emphasizing His own condescension and the poverty of the sinner. The leading idea designed to be set forth by the materials of the altar was confirmed by its *name*. Departing from the common usage of antiquity, Scripture employs a term which vividly enunciates both the humbling element on man's side and the grace on God's side. That name is *misbeach*, which means *place of slaughter*, for it was thither the victim was brought and slain. And thus, from the beginning, God taught His people the solemn fact that there could be no communion between Himself and fallen creatures save by the shedding of blood; that the sentence of death must be executed upon the guilty. Later, when a stationary altar was appointed for the sanctuary, it was ordered to be made not of gold and silver, but of wood overlaid with brass.

"Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal, As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings" (Jos 8:30-31). In addition to what has been said above, it should be pointed out that the "altar" prefigured our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the sole meeting place between the thrice holy God and guilty sinners. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Act 4:12). None comes unto the Father but by Him (Joh 14:6). They who look to the merits of the apostles or the mediation of Mary to give them access to God, and their prayers and works acceptance before Him, are miserably deluded—and it is but charity to tell them so. Christ Himself is at once the antitypical Altar, Sacrifice for sin, and acceptable Offerer. While those three things may be distinguished, both in shadow and substance, they must not be separated, for they all meet in Him. As it is "the altar that sanctifieth the gift" (Mat 23:19), so the dignity of Christ's person gives infinite value to His offering. Furthermore, He is our "Altar" (Heb 13:10) to whom we bring our sacrifices of praise (Heb 13:15), and presents the same, perfumed by His merits, unto God (Rev 8:3-4).

The pile of stones on mount Ebal was not gathered to be thrown in judgment *at* sinners, but for an altar on which was to be offered a sacrifice *for* sinners. Very express was the prohibition concerning the stones of the altar: "Thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them. Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones" (Deu 27:5-6). Those unpolished but whole stones set forth both the humiliation and perfection of the Saviour, as He appeared respectively to men and to God. To the natural eyes of Israel, He possessed "no form nor comeliness" (Isa 53:2); and when they saw Him, they perceived no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. But in the sight of the Father, He was "a precious corner stone" (Isa 28:16);

and in Him, He delighted. Nothing was to be hewn off the life of Christ, for it was perfect. None of His actions needed any modification. Yea, as Exodus 20:25, declared, "For if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast *polluted it*." Not a single deed of Christ's could be bettered; and if one had been missing from His entire life, the whole had been spoilt. Much the same thing was borne witness to here, as was symbolically shadowed forth in our Lord's coat, which was "*without seam, woven from the top throughout*" (Joh 19:23).

More noteworthy than either the time when the altar was erected, or the materials of which it was composed, was the place where it was set up—namely mount Ebal. There were two mountains to which Israel were now brought—Gerizim and Ebal—and we should naturally have expected to find the altar on the former, for it was there the blessings of the Law upon the obedient were pronounced (Deu 11:29); whereas it was on the latter that its curses were published. But "as for God, his way is perfect" (2Sa 22:31), and everything was ordered here so as to foreshadow the most terrible yet most blessed event of all history. The vicarious offering sacrificed on Ebal prefigured the Head of the Church entering the place of the curse, yea, being made a curse for His members. So that what we have here is very similar to—and equally unexpected and precious as—the altar on mount Sinai (Exo 24:4) (see our "Glorious Sinai" article in the April issue). A reference to Deuteronomy 27:4-7 shows the analogy between the two is yet more complete: the LORD gave orders that after the offering of sacrifice, they should "*eat there* [of the peace offering], and *rejoice* before the LORD thy God," as their fathers before them had done on Sinai (Exo 24:11). How remarkably did divine grace shine forth there! Who had thought of *rejoicing* on the mount of the curse!

"And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel" (Jos 8:32). That also was in obedience to Deuteronomy 27:8, and was equally remarkable. That altar was built as a monument of the divine mercy to Israel's victories, yet it was not an account of their triumphs, but a copy of the Ten Commandments that was inscribed upon it! The grand practical lesson for us therein is that the best way to remember God's mercies is not to forget His Law. As William Gurnall (1617-1679) well said, "God counts those mercies forgotten which are not written in legible characters in our lives." For Israel, that writing of the Decalogue upon the stones of the altar was a reminder to them that they were taking possession of Canaan not only on the ground of the promise to Abraham, but also according to the terms of that Law which they solemnly covenanted themselves to keep (Deu 11:29-32). The two things must not be separated: in presenting their offerings upon the altar, they spoke to God; in the writing of the Law upon its stones, He spoke to them, enforcing His holy claims upon them. Christ died to deliver His people from the penalty of the Law, but not from obedience to its precepts.

On Deuteronomy 27:8, John Gill (1697-1771) rightly said, "The Law being written on stones denotes *the duration* of it, which continued not only during the times of the Old Testament dispensation, and to the times of John, and had its fulfillment in Christ, but *still continues*; for though Christ has redeemed His people from the curse and condemnation of it, yet it is in His hands as a rule of direction to them, as to their walk and conversation. Nor is it made void by any doctrine of the Gospel; and nothing more strongly enforces obedience to it than the Gospel. The moral Law is immutable, invariable, and eternal in its nature, and it is in the matter of it." Alas, that so many of Mr. Gill's admirers have departed so far from his teaching thereon. Thomas Scott (1747-1821) also said, "We must rest our hope on the atonement of the great Redeemer, and keep the holy Law of God continually before us as the rule of our grateful obedience." We only deceive ourselves if we suppose that our praise unto God is sincere for the gift of His Son, unless we also delight in His Law and serve the same (Rom 7:22, 25). God will not be bribed by the worship of rebels (see 1Sa 15:22; Psa 106:12-13).

Ere giving a brief exposition of the verses that follow, let us further admire the striking and blessed prefiguration of Christ in what has been before us. No less than three times has the Holy Spirit recorded the divine prohibition that the altar must be built of unhewn and unadorned stones—in Exodus 20:25; Deuteronomy 27:5; Joshua 8:31—so carefully did He guard the glory of Christ. In sharp contrast with us—who, though "lively [living] stones" (1Pe 2:5), yet need much shaping—there were no rough or sharp edges in the character of Christ; no polishing of His life was required to render it well pleasing to the Father. So much did He resent anything which *marred* a type that when the sons of Aaron offered "strange fire" upon the altar, they were immediately consumed by fire from heaven (Lev 10), and when the ark was set upon a cart instead of on the shoulders of the priests, judgment fell upon Uzzah (2Sa 6). God was exceedingly jealous of the honour of His beloved Son, bidding Moses, again and again, to make all things in the tabernacle according to "the pattern" which He showed him (Exo 25:9, etc.)—for everything therein pointed to,

and set forth, the person and perfections of the Mediator. The writing of the Law on the stones of the altar tells of Christ's sustaining the honour of the Law, that in Him alone is it established (Rom 3:31).

"And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel" (Jos 8:33). A most solemn and auspicious assembly was this, when the whole nation, with their responsible heads, were gathered before the LORD. The "*ark of the covenant*"—mentioned here for the last time in Joshua—was brought out of the tabernacle on this momentous occasion. The original tables of the Law were preserved therein, and now its statutes had been written on the stones of the altar. That which here took place is to be regarded as a solemn ratification—by the *new generation* of Israel—of the covenant entered into by their fathers at Sinai. The sanctions of the Law were now proclaimed in the hearing of the whole congregation, and by their repeated "Amen" (Deu 27:15-26, etc.), all Israel consented to the terms of the covenant. The mention of "the stranger" (verse 19) here anticipated the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church.

It must have been an exceedingly impressive sight as the entire congregation of Israel assembled in the valley between those two mountains. There had been nothing like it since their solemn gathering on Sinai forty years previously: in fact, what took place here was virtually a repetition of what had occurred there—Israel solemnly *covenanting* to keep God's Law. As the former had been preceded by wondrous displays of God's grace and power on their behalf, so it had been here; and thus, in each instance, submission and obedience to Him was to be an expression of their love to Him and gratitude for His favours. Such is precisely the place which the Law is to have with the Christian. Because the Lord Jesus has borne his sins and reconciled him to God, he is to express his thankfulness by receiving God's Law at His hand, and thereby respond to His injunction: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Joh 14:15).



## THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

### 33. *In Glory, Part 6*

The glorification of the saint commences upon his departure from this world; but it is not consummated until the morning of the Resurrection, when his body shall be “raised in glory” (1Co 15:43). Then will he be fully “conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). It is observable that in the process of conforming, the members of Christ’s mystical body partake of the experiences of their Head. As He suffered on this earth before He entered into His glory, so do they, for the rule holds good here that the servant is not above his Master, who purchased all that the servant is to enjoy. As His glorification was in distinct stages, so is theirs. His glorification began in His victory over sin and death, when He came forth triumphant from the grave. It was greatly advanced when He ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Yet that did not complete it, for He is awaiting a more thorough conquest of His enemies (Heb 10:13) and the completion of the Church, which is His “fullness” or “complement” (Eph 1:23): “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2Th 1:10). Ours begins at regeneration, when we receive “the spirit of glory” as an earnest of our inheritance. It will be greatly augmented at death, for the soul is then purged of all defilement, and enters the Father’s House. But our complete glorification will not be until our bodies are raised, reunited to our souls, and “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phi 3:21).

As Christ Himself is not in every way complete (Eph 1:23) until the entire company of His redeemed are about Him and fully conformed to Him—for not till then shall He fully “see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:11)—neither is the glorification of Christians complete until their souls and bodies are united together again, for Christ redeemed the body as well as the soul (Rom 8:23); and if the Old Testament saints were not perfect without New Testament believers (Heb 11:40), then by the same reason, the soul will be imperfect without the body. The charge God gave to Christ was not only to lose none of “them” given to Him by the Father (Joh 18:9), but also that He should lose “none” of them; but should “raise *it* up again at the last day” (Joh 6:39). As Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) pointed out: “God hath the soul of Abraham with Him above, yet still He reckons to have not Abraham, that is the whole of him, until the Resurrection; from thence, Christ argued that Abraham must rise, because God is called ‘the God of Abraham’ (Mat 22:32).” The hope of Christ Himself, while His body lay in the grave—although His soul was in paradise (Luk 23:43)—was fixed upon the resurrection of His body. “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Sheol—the unseen world]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life” (Psa 16:9, 11).

That expectation of the Saviour’s was also shared by the Old Testament saints. This is evident from the language of Job: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:26-27). And again from the words of David: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15). As the death of the body is likened unto “sleep,” so the figure of “awaking” is used of its resurrection. Not until then will entire satisfaction (of spirit and soul and body) be the saint’s, for only then will the eternal purpose of God concerning him be fully realized. Note how comprehensive and sublime was this expectation—to “behold *thy face*”—which proves that Old Testament believers possessed as much light on the subject as we are now favoured with, for the New Testament contains nothing higher than “they shall see his face” (Rev 22:4). Not only so, but they turned it to practical use, and lived in the blessed power and enjoyment of the same. In the preceding verse, David makes mention of the “men of the world” who flourished like a green bay tree and had all their carnal hearts could desire of natural things. But so far was he from envying them or being discontented with his lot that he realized they had “*their* portion in this life,” and said, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness” (Psa 17:14-15)—*he* anticipated the joy of the life to come!

To behold God’s face by faith is both our duty and comfort in this life, yet that can only be as we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and as we maintain practical righteousness by obedience to God’s revealed will. To behold the LORD by open vision will be our occupation and enjoyment in the next life. But what is meant by “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15)? Not a few have experienced a difficulty in supplying answer. Their spiritual instincts told them those words cannot mean

that the soul will find its contentment in God's image then being perfectly stamped upon itself; yet at first glance, that is what they seem to signify. Thomas Manton (1620-1677) appears to have given the true interpretation when he said: "In heaven we look for such a vision as makes way for assimilation, and such assimilation to God as maketh for complete satisfaction and blessedness." There will be no *self*-satisfaction there, but rather entire absorption with and satisfaction in Christ. "That blessedness consists of three things: 1. The open vision of God and His glory: the knowledge of God will then be perfect, and the enlarged intellect filled with it. 2. The participation of His likeness: our holiness will there be perfect: this results from the former—'we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (1Jo 3:2). 3. A complete and full satisfaction resulting from all this. There is no satisfaction for a soul but in God: in His face and likeness, His good will toward us, and His good work in us"—Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

It is solemnly true that the wicked will also yet behold the face of God in Christ, for it is written, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him" (Rev 1:7): yet how vastly different will be their case! They will look upon Him but briefly, and not perpetually; with shame and sorrow, and not with confidence and joy; upon their Judge, and not their Saviour. So far from such a sight filling them with satisfaction, "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him"; yea, they shall say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev 6:16-17). None—be he king or subject, rich or poor—save those who "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14). These latter are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more... For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters" (Rev 7:15-17), finding His joy in ministering to them, as theirs will be in such ministry.

"At the resurrection, there will be a glory upon the body as well as upon the soul: a glory equal to that of the sun, moon, and stars. The body which is sown in the earth in corruption—a vile body, corrupted by sin, and now by death—shall be raised in incorruption, no more to be corrupted by sin, disease or death. What is sown in dishonor, and has lost all its beauty and glory, and become nauseous and fit only to be the companion of worms, shall be raised in glory—in the utmost perfection and comeliness, fashioned like to the glorious body of Christ—and shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven. What is sown in weakness, having lost all its strength, and carried by others to the grave, shall be raised in power—strong and hale, able to move itself from place to place—and will attend the service of God and the Lamb without weakness and weariness—there will be no more complaint of this kind: 'the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Mat 26:41). What is sown a natural body—or an animal one, which while it lived was supported with animal food—shall be raised a spiritual body: not turned into a spirit, for then it would not have flesh and bones, as it will have; but it will subsist as spirits do, without food, and no more die; then it will be no incumbrance to the soul, as now, in spiritual services, but assisting to it; and befitted for spiritual employments, and to converse with spiritual objects"—John Gill (1697-1771).

When the glorified soul and the glorified body are united, there will then be a full accession of glory to the whole man; and his enjoyments will then be entered into in a larger and more sensible manner. Let us now consider the various features of a saint's glorification, or those things which constitute his eternal bliss. First, a perfection of *knowledge*. This is clear from "now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1Co 13:12). This does not mean we shall become omniscient, or possessed of infinite knowledge, but that our knowledge will be free from all doubt and error, and as full as our finite faculties will permit. We shall not only enjoy a greater means of knowledge, but our capacity to take in will be immeasurably increased. That sight of God in Christ which will be ours will not only irradiate our minds, but enlarge our understandings. We shall perceive the glory of God with the eyes of our mind fully enlightened. The rays of that glory will shine into our souls so that they will be filled with the knowledge of God, and with the whole good pleasure of His will, in all His vast designs of grace unto us. That which is revealed in Scripture—and upon which we now exercise faith and hope—shall then be fully experienced by us.

Second, a perfection of *union and communion*—both with Christ and fellow believers. Henceforth, there will be no more differences of opinion, cooling of affections, or breaches between Christians. Then will be fully realized that prayer: "That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (Joh 17:22-23). The very reading of those words should fill our hearts with holy amazement, and the actualization of them will fill us with adoration. The oneness between the

Father and the Son is such that they partake of the same ineffable blessedness, each enjoying it equally with the other. And *that* is the likeness, by way of similitude, of the final union between the Redeemer and the redeemed—ours will be like theirs! As the union between the Father and the Son is a real, spiritual, holy, indestructible, and inexpressibly glorious one, such will be that between Christ and His Church in heaven. There is a *grace union* between them here, but it is the *glory union* which is referred to in the above verses. “He will be theirs, and will bless them for ever. He will be all around them and within them; the light of their understandings, the joy of their hearts, the object of their perpetual praise”—Professor John Dick (1764-1833). Christ will remain the everlasting bond of union between God and the saints.

Third, a perfection of *love*. Even now, Christ has the first place in their hearts (otherwise they would not be real Christians); yet how often their affection toward Him wanes. Real need has each of us to pray, “O may no earth-born cloud arise, to hide Thee from Thy servant’s eyes.” But, blessed be God, such a thing will be unknown there. It will be impossible constantly to contemplate the excellencies of God without continually loving Him. “In this world, the saints prefer Him to their chief joy; and there are seasons when their hearts go out to Him with an ardour which no created object can excite, with desire for the closest union and the most intimate fellowship. But this flame will glow more ardently in the pure atmosphere of heaven.... The fervor of his affection will never abate, nor will anything occur to suspend it, or turn it into a different channel. God will always maintain the pre-eminence and appear infinitely greater and better than all other beings”—Professor J. Dick. There will be a perpetual cleaving of heart to Him without change or weariness, a love that never ceases working communion with God.

Fourth, a perfection of *holiness*. “Now they are in part made ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2Pe 1:4), but then they shall perfectly partake of it. That is to say, God will communicate to them His own image, making all His goodness not only pass before them, but pass into them, and stamp the image of all His own perfections upon them, so far as the creature is capable of receiving the same; from whence shall result a perfect likeness to Him, in all things in and about them”—Thomas Boston (1676-1732). “If our view of the glory of Christ by faith is assimilating now, and ‘[changes] into the same image from glory to glory’ (2Co 3:18), what will a full view—a clear sight—of Him do? Then will the great end of predestination—to be conformed to the image of the Son of God—be completely answered. The soul, with all its powers and faculties, will bear a resemblance to Christ. Its understanding will have a clear and unclouded discernment of Him, the bias of the mind will be wholly toward Him, the will will be entirely subject to Him, the affections will be in the strongest manner set upon Him, and the memory will be fully stored with spiritual and heavenly things”—J. Gill.

Fifth, a perfection of *glory*. Of old, it was promised that “the LORD will give grace and glory” (Psa 84:11): as surely as He has given us the one, so will He the other. “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of *the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2Th 2:13-14). *That* was what God had in mind for His people in eternity past: nothing less would satisfy His heart. Observe well that it is “the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Our glory cannot be independent of Him, but the glory which the Father hath given Him, He gives us (Joh 17:22), so that we share His very Throne (Rev 3:21)! As He is the Head of grace, ministering to our every need, so He is the Head of glory and will communicate the same to us in heaven. He will shine forth in all His glory so that His bride will reflect the splendour of it. Angels will be spectators of it, but not the sharers. It will be a glory revealed in the saints, which is beyond all comparison (Rom 8:18; 2Th 1:10); and a glory put *upon* them, which is inconceivable (Psa 45:13; Rev 21:11); so that “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col 3:4), in shining robes of ineffable purity and beauty.

Sixth, a perfection of *joy*. “Joy sometimes enters into us now, but it has much to do to get access while we are encompassed with sorrows; but then, joy shall not only enter into us, but we shall enter into it, and swim for ever in an ocean of joy; where we shall see nothing but joy wherever we turn our eyes”—Thomas Boston (1676-1732). Our joy will be pure and unmixed, without any dregs of sorrow. “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11). The object of our happiness will not be a creature, but God Himself. The presence and communion of the Lamb will afford us everlasting delight. All that the spouse is represented in the Son as longing for she will then have, and a thousand times more. Christ will then say, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat 25:21), sharing with us His own joy. Perfect serenity of mind, complete satisfaction of heart, will be ours, without interruption for ever. As

we are told that in that day, the "LORD thy God...will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zep 3:17), so will it be with His people.

Seventh, a perfection of *praise*. In Revelation 15:2, the heavenly saints are seen "having the harps of God"—the emblem of praise. At present, our best worship is faulty—for both our knowledge of God and our love to Him are sadly defective—but when we come into His presence and are "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19), we shall render to Him that which is His due. Then shall we fully realize our infinite indebtedness to His grace, and our hearts will overflow with gratitude. A glorified soul will be far better capacitated to estimate and appreciate the wondrous riches of His grace, than it can be in its present state; and therefore, our adoring homage will be immeasurably more fervent and raised to a higher pitch. The infinite perfections of the Triune Jehovah, His love unto the Church collectively and to each of its members individually, the revelation and manifestation of His glory in Christ, and the salvation which He provided for them at such fearful cost to Himself, contain an all-sufficiency for perpetual praise and thanksgiving throughout the endless ages. His praises can never be exhausted: for all eternity, we shall find fresh matter in Him for thanksgiving.

"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:3-4). That is not only the final, but the ultimate, word on this glorious subject. In the beatific vision, it is not upon His "back parts" we shall look, as did Moses upon the mount (Exo 33:23), but we shall "see *his face*"! We shall not be limited to touching the hem of His garment, nor to embracing His feet, but shall actually and personally feast our eyes upon His peerless countenance. That sacred head which once was crowned with thorns is now adorned with diadem resplendent; and that blessed face which was covered with the vile spittle of men will for ever beam with love upon His own. Oh, what an ineffable sight! No longer will our eyes be clouded by sin or dimmed by old age. Nor will such bliss be ours for a brief season only, but for ever more. There will be a perfect and perpetual influx of delight as we view Him in the inconceivable radiance of His manifested glory.

"And they shall see *his face*" (verse 4). There will be many other objects to behold, but nothing in comparison with Him! Those mansions which Christ has gone to prepare for His beloved must be indescribably lovely. The holy angels—the cherubim and seraphim—will be present to our sight. The patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs, and some of our own dear kindred who were washed in the blood of the Lamb. But chief and foremost, claiming our notice and absorbing our attention will be our best Beloved. Then it is we shall receive the fullest and grandest answer to our oft-repeated prayer, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to *shine upon us*" (Psa 67:1). To see the King's face is to enjoy His favour (2Sa 14:24, 32). But it also signifies to have the most intimate and immediate communion with Him, that we shall then be the recipients of the fullest and most lavish discoveries of His love, beholding Him with both the eyes of our understandings and of our glorified bodies. All distance will then be removed. Every veil will then be done away. All we longed for perfectly realized.

Nothing will then be lacking to the absolute completeness of our happiness; and, what is far better, nothing will be lacking to complete the happiness of *Christ*. That "joy" which He "set before him" or held in view, as He "endured the cross" (Heb 12:2), will then be fully His; for we shall not only be with Him, but like Him, conformed to His image. "His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:4). Then will it openly appear to all beholders that they belong to Him and bear His holy image, since they shall perfectly reflect Him. As the "name" represents the *person*, so we shall bear His likeness, giving expression to those who see us *who* and *what* He is. We shall be publicly acknowledged as His (compare Rev 14:1).

Christ will everlastingly delight in the Church, and the Church will everlastingly delight in Him. There will be mutual intercourse, an unrestrained opening of the heart one to another. In communion, *communications* are made by *both* parties. One party bestows favour upon another, and the recipient reciprocates by giving back to the donor grateful acknowledgment, according to the benefit received; those communications, from both sides, flowing from love and union. Thus we read, "Now ye Philippians know also, that...no church *communicated* with me as concerning giving *and* receiving, but ye only" (Phi 4:15). Paul and the Philippian saints were united in heart and had spiritual fellowship together in the Gospel (Phi 1:5). Out of love to him, they communicated in a temporal way: they being the active givers, and he the passive receiver. Then, in return for their kindness, the apostle communicated by acknowledging their beneficence, thanking them for it. This may help us a little to form some idea of what our communion with Christ in heaven will be like. As the vine conveys sap to the branch, so the branch *responds* by bearing leaves and



fruit. Christ will continue to be *the Giver*, and we the receivers; yet this will issue in the overflowing of our love; and in *return*, we shall pour out praise and thanksgiving, adoration and worship.

“He and I in one bright glory  
Endless bliss shall share;  
Mine, to be for ever with Him;  
His, that I am there.”



## GLORIOUS SINAI

The fatal mistake of the Jews in looking to their imperfect obedience of the terms of the Sinaitic covenant lay in their regarding that august transaction as a thing apart, instead of as a wise and necessary supplement to the prior covenant with Abraham. This is evident from the line of Paul's reasoning in Galatians 3 and 4, where he was contending with those who trusted to their righteousness for acceptance with God, and as giving title to an eternal inheritance. First, he lays down the general principle in "Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto" (Gal 3:15). That is to say, where a definite agreement has been entered into by two parties and has been solemnly sworn to and ratified, it is held to be sacred and inviolable. How much more so must that obtain in regard to a divine compact! Next, Paul appealed to the covenant promises which God made unto Abraham: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (verse 16). Though those promises received an earthly and temporary accomplishment to his natural descendants, yet the ultimate fulfillment was to be a heavenly and eternal one unto his spiritual seed (see verses 7, 9, 29).

The force of the term "seed" is not to be sought in its dictionary meaning, but rather in the scriptural *idea* which it embodies; in the spiritual concept, and not merely its literal signification; in an individual person who should sum up in Himself the covenant people, as well as (for them) the covenant blessings—just as the term 'christ' means an anointed one, but is employed as the special title of the Saviour; and is given to Him not as a private, but as a public person, including both the Head and the members of His Church (see 1 Corinthians 12:12). Abraham had two entirely different "seeds"—one by human procreation, the other by divine regeneration—and the promises made to him respecting his "seed" (in the primary and ultimate reference) regarded the latter, namely the mystical "Christ"—the Redeemer—and all who were federally and vitally united to Him. Thus the antithesis drawn in Galatians 3:16 is between the *unity* of the "seed" and the diversity of the "seeds." This had been strikingly shadowed forth on the earth plane. Abraham had two sons, but Ishmael was excluded from the highest privileges: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen 21:12; Rom 9:7)—not all of *his* natural descendants, for Esau and his line were also debarred; but the Messiah Himself and all the Father had given Him in the everlasting covenant.

"To thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal 3:16)—i.e. Christ *mystical*, as in 1 Corinthians 12:12; and Colossians 1:24—Christ and all who are one with Him by faith. To them alone did the *spiritual* contents of the promises (recorded in Genesis 12:2-3, 7, etc.) pertain, the carnal seed being expressly excluded in the "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many." Then the apostle went on to point out, "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal 3:17). God's covenant with Abraham was permanent and immutable, and none of His subsequent acts set it aside, but rather subserved and promoted it; nor will that covenant ever expire through want of a "seed." Therefore, the Law given at Sinai must be regarded as subordinate to the Abrahamic promises and interpreted consistently therewith. The "four hundred and thirty years" preclude any reference to God's *eternal* covenant with Christ; and the *eis Christion* signifies "*concerning* Christ" as in Ephesians 5:32, and "*concerning him*" as the *eis auton* of Acts 2:25: a further proof that God's covenant with Abraham concerned Christ, that is, Christ *mystical*—Abraham's "seed."

The special point which the apostle was laboring in Galatians 3 was that the promises given by God to Abraham (solemnly "confirmed" by His covenant oath—Genesis 26:3) were made centuries before the Sinaitic economy was established; and that, inasmuch as God is faithful so that His Word cannot be broken (verse 15), there could not possibly be anything in connection with the Law which would in the least neutralize or set aside that which He had pledged Himself freely to bestow: "The law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (verse 17). Had the later generations of the Jews but clearly grasped that self-evident fact, they had not fallen into such grievous error; and had many Christian expositors apprehended the same, they too had not been guilty of such glaring mistakes when they sought the antitypical signification and application. It is to be noted that Paul changed from the plural number in verse 16 to the singular in verse 17, because he was about to confine himself to one particular "promise," namely that which respected the *Inheritance*.

“For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (verse 18). If due attention be paid to the whole of the context, there will be no difficulty in determining exactly what is here meant by “the inheritance,” though it may be expressed in more ways than one. In the foregoing verses, the apostle was treating of the grand truth of justification by faith (verses 6-9, 11-14), and concludes the chapter by saying, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (verse 29). Thus the “inheritance” here is the same as “the blessing of Abraham” in verse 14, namely the blessing of *justification*, promised in the covenant to Abraham and his spiritual seed, even the Gentiles, and which is inherited by them; that justification which consists of being pronounced righteous by God and entitled to the reward or the spiritual and heavenly blessings connected therewith, and of which Israel’s possession of Canaan was the type. The “covenant,” the “promise,” and the “inheritance” of verses 17 and 18 all point to substantially the same thing. It is termed “the inheritance,” because it is as the spiritual descendants or children of Abraham that believers come to enjoy it. It would be equally correct to say “the inheritance” is our everlasting bliss in heaven, of which Canaan was a figure, and was known to be such by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the heirs with him of the same promise (see Hebrews 11:8-11, 13-16).

“For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise” (verse 18). The Jews insisted that the favour of God was obtained by works of righteousness, and the Judaizers of the apostle’s day were contending that justification and salvation could only be attained by a strict observance of the Mosaic Law, telling the Gentiles, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Act 15:1); and let it not be overlooked that anyone thus circumcised became “a debtor to do the whole law” (Gal 5:3). Paul here shows how absurd and unscriptural such teaching was, being at complete variance with God’s dealings with their forebears from the beginning. The earthly Canaan was not conveyed to Israel in return for their law-keeping, but rather as a free donation from their gracious God; and so it is with the heavenly inheritance. Paul’s argument was irrefutable: if the inheritance was obtained on the ground of obedience to the Mosaic Law, then it could not become theirs by virtue of the Abrahamic promise; it could not be secured by two totally different methods—it could not be by merit and by mercy, or by works and by grace too. “But God *gave* it to Abraham by promise” (verse 18): that settled the matter—both the temporal and the eternal inheritance, the earthly and the heavenly Canaan, proceeded from God’s free favour and not as a bargain whose terms men must meet, as a gratuity and not as something earned by law-obedience.

“Wherefore then serveth the law?” (verse 19). The apostle now anticipated and answered an objection. “The law” here is to be limited to neither the moral nor the ceremonial, but understood as including the Sinaitic constitution as a whole, the entire order of things under which the nation of Israel was there placed. The objection amounts to this: If the Law could not be the means of admission into the favour and blessing of God, then why was it given—what purpose was it intended to serve? That question is not to be regarded as an inquiry into the designs and uses of the Mosaic Law generally, but (as the answer intimates) with particular reference to the ordination of God that justification was to be by faith through the Messiah, and especially that such justification was to be extended to the Gentiles. *History* itself supplied a clear and full answer to the question. God had announced in Eden that deliverance from the serpent was to be secured by the promised “seed” (Gen 3:15), and made known the way of a sinner’s acceptance by Him as far back as the days of Abel (Heb 11:4). But through the prevalence of human depravity, during the course of time, those divine revelations were almost entirely forgotten: “For all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen 6:12), and the deluge swept away all the inhabitants of the ancient world, with the exception of one family, among whom the knowledge of God was to be preserved.

It was not long before the descendants of Noah—the inhabitants of the new world—became idolaters. In order to prevent the utter extinction among mankind of the knowledge of God and the way of reconciliation to Him, God called Abraham, and made to him a plain discovery of the divine designs of mercy; and his descendants by Isaac and Jacob were chosen to be the custodians of the revelation, until He should come to whom those discoveries of mercies chiefly referred. But after the descendants of Jacob had sojourned for some generations in Egypt, they so learned “the [ways] of the heathen” (Jer 10:2), and became so corrupted by their idolatries that such declension had soon issued in the complete loss of the revelation made to their fathers, and their own assimilation by the Gentiles. To obviate such a calamity, God called Moses, and the need for His doing so is made very evident in the early chapters of Exodus. So sadly had the Hebrews deteriorated religiously, that when Jehovah appeared unto Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him to return to Egypt and lead His people out from that land, he said, “Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and

they shall say to me, *What is his name?* what shall I say unto them?" (Exo 3:13)! And so low had they sunk socially, they were in abject slavery, groaning under the lash of their taskmasters.

The land of Canaan had been conferred upon Abraham by free grant and was secured by divine covenant to his seed, but while they toiled in the Egyptian brick-kilns, the realization of such a promise appeared a hopeless prospect. But their deliverance from the house of bondage and miraculous passage through the Red Sea were a great step forward; yet much more was still needed in order to fit them for their heritage and to occupy it unto the divine glory. They were still very ignorant of the One with whom they had to do and who had wrought so wondrously for them: ignorant of His character, of His claims upon them, and what became of them as His people. A recollection of *these things* should have made it quite unnecessary for the Jews of Paul's day to ask, "Wherefore then serveth the law?" (verse 19), which was only an abbreviated form of inquiring, What was the divine intent of the Sinaitic covenant? What ends were meant to be served by the whole revelation which Jehovah vouchsafed there, with the economy instituted? Nor should we have the slightest difficulty in perceiving what is signified by and included in the brief answer made by the apostle: "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."

Note well that "the law" was "added to" the previous covenant of promise, neither cancelling or neutralizing it. The Sinaitic constitution was not set up independently, but brought in to serve as a handmaid. Its design was not to render void or effect any alteration in the earlier revelation, but was an appendage to supplement the same. The revelation of justification by faith made to Abel and renewed to Abraham was to be preserved pure and entire by his descendants, till the appearing of Him who was to put away sin and bring in everlasting righteousness. But "because of transgressions" (verse 19), the Law of Sinai was necessary: First and immediately, because of the criminal conduct of Israel in Egypt; and second, because—though they had been divinely redeemed from the house of bondage—sin still indwelt them; and therefore, it was to curb their lusts, prevent the outbreaking of their corruptions, restrain them from idolatry and wickedness, and preserve the knowledge and worship of God among them, until the time when He should grant mankind a yet fuller and final revelation of Himself in the person of His incarnate Son. The moral Law was necessary to convince them of their sinfulness; the ceremonial to make known the way of acceptance and holiness, and to move unto a marveling at the gracious provisions God had made for His wayward people.

Had there been no Law, then Israel had not been accountable for their transgressions; but with a full revelation of the divine will, they were left without excuse. It produced no change in the way of salvation, but it intimated *how* the redeemed were required to walk. The Sinaitic covenant was the charter by which Israel was incorporated as a nation under the immediate and spiritual government of God, for it was at the holy mount that Jehovah took possession of His Throne in their midst (1Sa 8:7): God was revealed there both as the Redeemer and Ruler of His people. The design of the mission and *ministry* of Moses (see the whole book of Deuteronomy, where full instructions were given how they were to conduct themselves in Canaan) was not only to bring the heirs of promise into the actual possession of their blessings, but to equip them for occupying the same in a manner worthy of those who were to be Jehovah's witnesses before the surrounding nations. He therefore placed them under a special order of things which was admirably adapted to preserve them as a separate people and safeguard the revelation of His mercy in and through the coming Messiah until His actual appearing.

"It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (verse 19). That last clause was added in order to heighten the contrast between the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, and to evince the inferiority of the latter to the former. Though the Law was ordained or established by God as its Author—all its particular injunctions being prefaced with "And the LORD spake unto Moses"—yet it is clear from Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2 that the angels were in some way or other employed in the giving of the Law. That particular detail (see Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17) was seized by the apostle, and mentioned here to point a tacit antithesis as to the manner in which the promise was given. In like manner, he specifies the fact that the Law was also "in the hand of a mediator"—the allusion being to Deuteronomy 5:27. In contradistinction thereto, God conversed with Abraham as with a "Friend" (Jam 2:23). It was obviously the apostle's intent to exalt the promise above the Law—that being the principal transaction; the other, secondary and subservient. The promise was first, the Law came later. The one spoke of nothing but "blessing"; the other was

“added because of transgressions” and denounced transgressors. The promise was for ever; the Law, only “till the seed should come” (verse 19).

The Mosaic Law (in its entirety) was not given with hostile designs, but to minister in an inferior—but still necessary—place to the higher ends and purposes which the Abrahamic covenant had in view; and it being published in grace and mercy, not fury and wrath. Had it been expressly designed to curse and slay, it had *not* been “in the hand of a mediator” (verse 19); but rather, of an executioner! The “mediator” imported that God was *at peace* with Israel! Then the apostle added, “Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God *is one*” (verse 20)—immutable. Let both Antinomians and Dispensationalists weigh thoroughly that statement. God is “in one mind” (Job 23:13), and not like the fickle creature: “With whom is no variable-ness or shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17). He has precisely the same design in Law and Gospel, namely His own glory and the good of His people. His purpose was identical in both the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, the Law being proclaimed with a benevolent design. Hence the apostle brings his argument to a point by asking, “Is the law then against the promises of God?”—to which he returns the decisive reply, “God forbid” (verse 21). How radically different is *that* answer to the ideas of many today who boast of their light and orthodoxy!

Those who are at all acquainted with Paul’s mode of writing are aware that his “God forbid” is the language he always used to express a very strong negative: most emphatically, “the law then [*is not*] against the promises of God” (verse 21). On the contrary, it was subservient to the Abrahamic covenant, added to secure the fulfillment of its promised good, and proceeding from Him who is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb 13:8). But what a deplorable tendency is there in fallen human nature to misapprehend the design of God in His gifts and works, and to pervert to our destruction what was meant for our good! No more forcible and solemn example of this can be found than in the great error which the majority of the Jews fell into, and which the Judaizers of Paul’s day were seeking to perpetuate and enforce upon Christians. He therefore continued his expostulation and refutation by pointing out that, “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (verse 21). But this, he meant that if any law had been given which furnished all the means necessary for man’s real and eternal blessing, then in such a case, legal justification—or restoration to the divine favour on the ground of something done by the sinner—*was* possible. Yet in such a case, that had been at direct variance with the gratuitous method of justification by faith, as had been made known in the promises, and exemplified in the case of Abraham himself.

So far from any law being given that men might look to it for “life,” God had “concluded all under sin” (verse 22)—guilt or exposure to punishment—and this, in order that “the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Hence, “Before faith [Greek—‘the faith’] came [i.e. before the Christian revelation was given] we [Jews] were kept under the law, shut unto [i.e. until] the faith” (verse 23)—confined by its statutes, preserved as a separate people. “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (verse 24), which gives the positive answer to the question of verse 19. Judaism was designed to instruct, constrain and chasten; and thereby, prepare the Jews for a superior order of things. “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (verse 25): the Mosaic economy has served its purpose, and the middle wall of partition may be broken down.

A final word on verse 19. Note its qualifying “till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” Here, as everywhere, it was *Christ* whom God had before Him—primarily and ultimately—at Sinai! *He* is the grand Centre of all the divine counsels; and the divine providences are ever ordered for His glory. The Mosaic constitution was not only designed for Israel’s good, but there was another and higher end which God had in view therein, namely, that the appointed channel through which the Seed was to come should be *kept pure*. He was to be of the Abrahamic stock and of the tribe of Judah; and therefore, God put Israel under a dispensation by which they were compelled to dwell alone (Lev 20:26) with their tribal distinctions preserved (Num 36:7). Despite their sins and failures, God’s purpose was accomplished, for when the Messiah was born, Israel was still a holy or separate nation, and the tribe of Judah was distinguishable from the others. The Levitical economy had then served its purpose (Heb 8:13), and the “old covenant” gave way to the “new.”

