

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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News and Notes

GOD'S CHOSEN MESSIAH

by Linton Roe

Since the fall of man through Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, sin and death have reigned over all of mankind. For thousands of years many have looked for, and longed for, a blessed servant, a specially anointed one, who would come and free them individually and collectively from their slavery to sin, and rescue them from their state of alienation from God.

The nation of Israel was especially blessed to have received a knowledge of this long-hoped-for Saviour. Their forefathers passed on the oral tradition of an anointed one, their Scriptures prophesied that he would bring them peace, prosperity and a right standing with their maker, and they believed in their hearts that the Lord would, one day, provide deliverance for their people. They held as precious the promises that a sinless servant would one day come and provide a ransom for all mankind.

So where did these prophecies and promises come from? Are they accurate, believable and verifiable, or are they just the product of wishful thinking, born in the minds of dissatisfied men? If there was to be a chosen one, what would he be like? Would he truly be able to bring about the salvation that the people hoped for? Would he live up to their expectations? And if so, what would this mean for those who hoped in him, and for all mankind? These are some of the questions that I would like to address in coming to a better understanding of the nature and work of God's Messiah.

The Meaning of the Word 'Messiah'

The English word messiah is a rendering of the Greek *messias*, which is, in turn, derived from the Hebrew word *mashiyach* (Strong's 4899), having the meaning of 'anointed' or 'an anointed one'. The word was originally used to indicate an anointing with oil to signify a holy or special task or position, as is seen with the kings (e.g. Saul in 1 Samuel 10:1), the Jewish high priest (e.g. Leviticus 21:10), the patriarchs (e.g. 2 Samuel 2:4) and prophets in the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Kings 19:16). Occasionally it is also used to indicate the dedication of special objects, such as items in the Jewish tabernacle (e.g. Leviticus 8:10-11). The word is sometimes given a capital first letter to indicate God's special servant, as in Psalm 2:2 (NIV); "*The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against His Anointed One.*"

We need to be aware that there have been many messiahs in history, primarily, but not exclusively, in the Jewish and Christian cultures, and that many individuals have claimed to be the Messiah. The key to our understanding of God's true Messiah, though, must be through New

Testament confirmation of Old Testament prophecy. The Greek word *christos* (Strong's 5547), christ, is equivalent to the Hebrew *mashiyach*, and it was thus significant that Jesus identified himself through the use of this name, as was evident in the account of his meeting with the woman at the well in Samaria; *The woman said, 'I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us'. Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he'.*" (John 4:25-26; NIV).

The First Mention of God's Anointed

According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the Hebrew word *mashiyach* is found 39 times in the Scriptures. Of these 39, most are translated "anointed"; only two are translated "Messiah" in the King James Version, and these are both from a prophetic passage in Daniel Chapter 9. We need to realise that the concept of a central servant of God is slowly developed through the Old Testament and fully expanded in the New, and that the Old Testament references serve to pre-figure and illustrate the tasks and characteristics of the true Messiah.

Wood's New Bible Dictionary gives the example of how Cyrus, a Gentile king, was considered to be God's anointed for a time, in that he was appointed by God, accomplished a redemptive purpose, exercised judgment, was given dominion, and was an agent of Yahweh. To locate Scriptures that refer exclusively to God's chosen Saviour of all mankind, we need to look at contextual clues; indeed, sometimes it is only through the revelation of the New Testament writers that past prophecies are revealed to us. 'In the light of this,' says the New Bible Dictionary, 'the best and simplest plan for study is to apply the word 'Messianic' to all those prophecies that place a person in the limelight as the focal point of salvation'.

The relative paucity of verses referring directly to the Messiah in the Old Testament is in stark contrast to the extensive use of the New Testament Greek word Christos, which is found 569 times, and is almost exclusively translated as Christ, or 'The Anointed', possible exceptions being Hebrews 11:26, 1 Corinthians 12:12 and some instances of 'false christs', such as Matthew 24:5.

In order to find the earliest mention of God's chosen Messiah, we therefore have to look at the subtler hints given to us throughout the Old Testament. If we accept that we are looking for verses that speak of this 'focal point of salvation', as mentioned earlier, then we can go right back to Genesis, where, even in the defining moment of man's disobedience, a vague ray of light is offered for his redemption; *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Genesis 3:15). So, we learn that Eve's offspring, her seed (KJV), would crush the serpent's head.

Some time later, in Genesis Chapter 12, Abraham was promised an inheritance because of his faith, and was told that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. This was in spite of the fact that, at that time, he had no heir. This promise was re-iterated a little later in Genesis 15:4. Although the immediate fulfilment of this promise was the birth of Isaac, Paul clarified the concept in Galatians 3:16: *“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say, ‘and to seeds’, meaning many, but ‘to your seed’, meaning one person, who is Christ.”*

So, we see that from very early on mankind had been given hints that the current evil system would not last forever. Many other Scriptures gradually painted a portrait of the one who was to come, but these were revealed *“... at many times and in various ways ...”* (Hebrews 1:1) through the writings of other anointed servants of the LORD.

Biblical Prophecies of the Messiah

How many prophecies of the Messiah are there in the Bible? No doubt this question is debatable because some are quite obscure. According to the reference collection I have, however, the Old Testament contains no fewer than 40 verses or passages that allude to different aspects of the Messiah's character. These encompass over 53 specific verses, all of which are supported or fulfilled through some 70 or so New Testament verses. These prophecies, of course, would be a large study on their own, but we will look at a few instances which reveal some of the qualities and tasks of God's special anointed servant.

The Scriptures Reveal Details of the Messiah

We have seen that the Messiah was to be the seed, or descendant of Eve and of Abraham. Further Scriptures reveal that he was also to be of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), a descendant of Jacob (Numbers 24:17 and 19) and of the line of David (Psalm 132:11; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Isaiah 11:10). The New Testament writers are careful to establish the earthly lineage of Jesus so as to show the immutability of God's prophecies and to demonstrate that these promises were fulfilled by him (Luke 3:23-38, Matthew 1:2-16 and Galatians 3:16).

Why did God Choose Jesus of Nazareth?

Matthew quoted Isaiah when he wrote, *“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight;”* (Matthew 12:18 quoting Isaiah 42:1). Some might ask ‘Why did God choose Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah?’. This question is difficult to answer directly, although we can be assured by Scripture that the Messiah would have to exhibit all the characteristics which his Heavenly Father required for the tasks he was to accomplish. We know, through Peter, that *“He was chosen [fore-ordained] before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your*

sake.” (1 Peter 1:20; NIV). Yet what were the qualities of Jesus that enabled him to perfectly fulfil all the tasks which God, from the very beginning, had known he would have to undertake, and, more than that, would be able to complete? One way to answer this question would be to look at what the prophesied Messiah had to accomplish, and examine whether these things were, in fact, actually completed by Jesus of Nazareth.

The Messiah to be a Prophet

Moses predicted that God would “... *raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers.*” (Deuteronomy 18:15; NIV). Matthew 21:11, John 6:14 and Acts 3:22 all confirm that Jesus was recognised as a prophet by the people, and there were many occasions on which Jesus prophesied events still future from his time, such as the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35; Luke 19:41-44; 21:20; 23:28-30), which history verifies as having occurred (in AD 70) after his death.

The Messiah to be a King

“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’” (Psalm 2:6,7). Thus wrote the psalmist long before Jesus’ first advent, yet these words are applied to him at various times throughout the New Testament, such as in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5, and have their conclusion in one of the many stunning visions of the Revelation; *“Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron sceptre. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”* (Revelation 19:15-16).

The Messiah to be a Priest

As we have seen, Jesus was God’s appointed prophet and king. He was also a priest, chosen by God, and not just any priest, but the ultimate and everlasting high priest. A good place to start in demonstrating this is in David’s prediction of our Lord’s priestly office: *“The LORD has sworn, and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”* (Psalm 110:4). Hebrews expands on this prophecy, showing that Jesus Christ was an obedient Son (Hebrews 5:8) and that he did not take this priestly office upon himself but that it was granted to him by his Father (Hebrews 5:4 and 6:20).

Hebrews further clarifies the importance of Jesus’ position: *“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”* (Hebrews 9:11,12). So, we see that

Jesus has done far more than any other human priest of the past was ever capable of, having obtained eternal redemption for us; our sins can now really be forgiven when we believe in and accept Jesus' sacrifice. And yet there is still much more to his character.

The Messiah to Preach Good News

Isaiah declared that the Messiah would bring a message of hope to the people. *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn; ..."* (Isaiah 61:1-2; NIV). We can demonstrate from many other Scriptures that this good news was the message of God's coming Kingdom, a time of peace, joy and righteousness, which would be opened to mankind because of Jesus' willingness to offer his sinless life as a ransom for all mankind.

This wonderful prophecy in Isaiah was powerfully fulfilled by Jesus in front of his people, as Luke recorded: *"The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"* (Luke 4:17-21; NIV).

The Messiah to be a Mediator

Another of Isaiah's many predictions was that the Messiah would act as a mediator or 'go-between' for the people. *"... He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him."* (Isaiah 59:16). Hebrews clarifies how Jesus intercedes for us, thus demystifying the Isaiah prophecy: *"For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."* (Hebrews 9:15; NIV).

Other Prophecies of the Messiah

We could spend many hours discussing the fulfilment of numerous other, very specific references to events and places of importance in the life of the Messiah. For example, he was to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) in the town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and wise men would pay him homage (Psalm 72:10,11). He would be meek and mild (Isaiah 42:2,3), would be

called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1) and would take up his ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1). He would perform miracles (Isaiah 35:5,6), be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6;49:6) and enter the Jewish temple with authority (Malachi 3:1).

He would be called the Son of God (Psalm 2:7) and would be *“The stone that the builders rejected ...”* (Psalm 118:22) but would become the *“chief cornerstone”* (Isaiah 28:16). He was to enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9), be betrayed (Psalm 41:9), forsaken by His friends (Zechariah 13:7), pierced (Zechariah 12:10), suffer cruelly (Psalm 22) and subsequently be raised from the dead (Psalm 16:10). Having conquered death, he would ascend into heaven (Psalm 68:18), be placed at God’s right hand (Psalm 110:1) and the Gentiles would seek Him (Isaiah 11:10).

Each of these predictions can be shown to have been fulfilled through many New Testament verses, and yet the people of Jesus’ day did not, as a whole, accept that he fulfilled the criteria of God’s Anointed Saviour. Some did, but many, having heard or seen him, left him, bewildered or disappointed. At times, even his closest followers found his message difficult to accept. One such case was when he told his disciples that they needed to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to obtain life. John records that, *“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”* (John 6:66; NIV).

The People’s Expectations of the Messiah

Despite all the evidence that we have just examined to show that Jesus of Nazareth did fulfil all the characteristics of the prophesied Messiah, it is equally evident, from prophecy, history and from the New Testament writings, that his own people, the Jews, were not only disappointed with him, but actively and persistently sought to destroy Him.

Both David and Isaiah had predicted that the nation of Israel would reject the Messiah, and Jesus himself quoted those prophets in the marvellous words recorded for us by Matthew; *“Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed’.”* (Matthew 21:42-44; NIV).

Reasons for the Jews’ Rejection of Jesus

In reading commentaries on the political and religious scene at the time of Jesus, for example in the works of Josephus and Bible Dictionaries, it seems that the people were longing for a Messiah who would be a mighty warrior and politician, like the patriarch David, and would thus release them from the

persecution and oppression of the Romans, and return the Jewish people to a Davidic state of power and pre-eminence in the world. To have a meek and mild rabbi, who criticised many strongly held traditions, and who was, according to their understanding, a nobody, claiming to be their king, was hardly what was expected, or indeed acceptable.

From Scripture it is evident that God had foreseen the Jews' rejection of his Son and had made it an integral part of his overall plan of salvation. Paul vividly reveals to us God's grand design to accept all who would believe in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles eventually, and to bless the Gentiles through the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel: *"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone'."* (Romans 9:30-32; NIV).

Reasons for the Cruel Execution of Jesus

One might well enquire why God's own Son should have to suffer the most cruel death known to man, that of crucifixion. Today we have from the same base word the term 'excruciating', to indicate an unbearable or agonising level of pain, a word that comes directly from this barbaric practice. David had written of the suffering caused by this form of execution hundreds of years before it was even known to the world, as is recorded in Psalm 22:14: *"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels"*. If anyone doubts the physical intensity of crucifixion leading to these symptoms described by David, they are graphically and medically detailed in the book 'The Case for Christ' by Lee Strobel. Surely, if Jesus had to die, God could have allowed him to die a far quicker and less painful death?

The reasons for the crucifixion possibly lie in three key requirements of God: obedience, witness and reassurance. Firstly, it was essential that the Messiah be proven to be totally obedient to the Heavenly Father, and what stronger proof could there be than in a willingness to undergo such an intense trial? Hebrews tells us that, *"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ..."* (Hebrews 5:8; NIV).

Secondly, God desired that Jesus be a witness to the world of the depth of his love and to therefore set the pattern of loving self-sacrifice which future Christians would need to learn. A crucifixion was a public spectacle, observed by Roman and Jewish officials and by the general populace. Many would have observed his intense suffering, his death and the miraculous events at and after his death. This meant that a large number of people were able to provide eyewitness evidence that Jesus was who he said he was and give proof that, despite his cruel death, God did raise him on the third day as

the Scriptures had foretold. This sequence of events was powerfully presented to the Jews of many nations by Peter on the day of Pentecost, as Acts 2 records for us, thus providing the crucial evidence that would establish the fledgling Christian church.

Finally, what a reassurance it is to us, as followers of Jesus, to know that we have a Lord and master who has experienced the very worst of man's cruelty, has been subject to all manner of temptation, has overcome all and is now able to sympathise with us, as Hebrews 4:15 tells us. Because of this, we too should show patience and trust in the face of suffering and do our best, with God's aid, to develop perseverance. The words of James reassure us: *"... because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (James 1:3,4); or, as Helen Keller once put it, 'Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved'.

The Importance of The Messiah's Ministry for Us

The subject of God's chosen Messiah is the main message of the Scriptures and the hope of all of God's faithful servants, past, present and future. As Halley's Bible Handbook puts it, if we were to summarise the message of the Bible in two words, they would be 'Jesus Christ'. There are numerous other references with which we could demonstrate the blessings to the church and to the world of mankind, which are now assured through Jesus Christ's obedience and sacrifice. But to conclude, I have chosen just a few well-known passages.

Regarding the World

"He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4).

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and **he will reign** for ever and ever."* (Revelation 11:15b).

"No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34).

Regarding the Church

"Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:6).

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’” (Matthew 25:34; NIV).

With these wonderful words of promise, let us all be encouraged to *“press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14; NIV), giving thanks always to our Heavenly Father for the amazing promises he has offered us through the redemptive work of his Son, his chosen Messiah, Jesus Christ.



GENTLENESS

Devotion presented by Sylvia Giles

I have been thinking recently about the fruit of the spirit, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”* (Galatians 5:22,23), and was interested in learning more about the meaning of ‘gentleness’. I wish to share some thoughts with you gleaned from a devotional book.

The dictionary definition of gentleness is ‘kindness’ and some translations of the scriptures use ‘kindness’ instead of ‘gentleness’. There is a place for both words.

The Hebrew word for gentleness is ‘anah’, meaning ‘to stoop down, to depress, to humble oneself’. We learn gentleness at the hand of those who are gentle with us. Gentleness comes as we humble ourselves and do to others as we would have them do to us. Gentleness can be looking past the harshness of a face and seeing the delicate spirit on the inside.

Following are a couple of short Biblical models about gentleness.

1. A Shepherd Caring for his Sheep

The very life and health of the sheep depends on the gentleness of the shepherd. The understanding of a gentle shepherd is expressed in Jacob’s reply to his brother, who wanted the sheep to travel with his four hundred men. In Genesis 33, verses 13 and 14, we read, *“And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and that the flocks and herds with young are with me; and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flocks will die. Let the lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant; and I will lead on softly (i.e. gently). According as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure.”*

The Lord compared Himself to a gentle shepherd in Isaiah 40:10,11; *“Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”* The Hebrew word for ‘gently lead’ in this passage is ‘nahal’. It means ‘to lead with care; to cause to rest; to bring to a place of rest; to guide; to refresh, protect and sustain’.

Jesus described Himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep in John 10:11; *“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”*

2. A Mother with Her Infant

Paul used the concept of gentleness when describing his love and care for those whom he led to Christ in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, which reads, *“We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children”*.

The word Paul used for ‘gentle’ means ‘to be kind, mild, affable’.

The Greek word for ‘cherisheth’ is ‘thalpo’. It means ‘to keep warm, to foster with tender care’. It carries with it the picture of a mother hen covering her young with her feathers.

A nursing mother knows that her infants are very vulnerable, and easily damaged by harsh treatment or neglect. She knows that they are dependent on her for loving care, nourishment and protection.

The concept of gentleness through humbling oneself was taught by Jesus to his disciples when he said, in Matthew 16:24, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me”*. And in Matthew 11:28,29, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls”*. The word ‘lowly’ means ‘low lying, humiliated’, and denotes being ‘of low degree, brought low, humble, cast down’.

In describing wisdom, James included gentleness. *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”* (James 3:19).

A practical expression of wisdom and gentleness is to speak evil of no one, and to speak peace and harmony with everyone; "... to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." (Titus 3:2). "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men ..." (2 Timothy 2:24).

Accepting God's comfort and grace during trials develops an attitude of kindness and gentleness towards others.

Finally, Brethren, be kindly affectionate one towards another.



FORGET NOT ALL HIS BENEFITS

Psalm 103

by Russell Collins

This psalm is the third in a trilogy of psalms 101, 102 and 103. Psalm 101 is a song of mercy and judgment, Psalm 102 is a cry to the Lord for deliverance from trouble and distress, while Psalm 103 resolves these issues in adoration and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Psalm 103 is a deeply moving psalm that touches both heart and mind. It tells us that God's people are accepted and forgiven by him. The words used and the comparisons made go to our very hearts and fill us with emotions of thankfulness for our acceptance by the Lord God and of hope for his blessings that will certainly be realised.

It is a psalm of adoration and thanksgiving. In it there are no rebukes, no confessions of failure or inadequacy, and no exhortations. The psalm contains many memorable and deeply satisfying similes. It begins and ends with adoration (adoration meaning regarding with the utmost respect), reverence and affection.

Psalm 103:1,2

- 1. Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.**
- 2. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:**

"Bless the LORD, O my soul" appears in verses 1 and 2, and again in verse 22, reminding us of the three-fold blessing of Numbers 6:24-26; "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace".

"*Bless*" in the Hebrew means 'to kneel, by implication to adore and regard with the utmost respect and reverence' (Strong 1288).

"*Soul*" is the Hebrew word "nephesh" (Strong 5315), meaning a living, breathing creature, in the context signifying all human beings, in all their physical and mental aspects.

"*All that is within me*", the literal rendering of the Hebrew in verse 1 being 'all my inward parts', meaning everything of which my mind, heart and understanding are capable. Let me praise God, wrote David, with all my thought, all my feeling and all my strength. "*His holy name*", also in verse 1, being the name that is pure and righteous, far above all earthly titles and honours which have their origins in imperfection and unrighteousness.

"*Forget not all his benefits*" of verse 2 is a reminder not to do as the human heart often does, that is, forget goodness and kindness, and mercy from God. The Hebrew word for "*benefits*" generally means 'retribution' or 'reward' (Strong 1576), and signifies forgiveness and redemption, as well as provision of daily needs, perhaps even prosperity.

The psalmist, David, was writing while serving God under the Law Covenant. Perhaps he had this primarily in mind, for the Law provided forgiveness and providential care for God's people. But, it seems, his words go further. Perhaps David did not fully realise the full impact of his words, because the Law could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:6). It was holy and just and good (Romans 7:12), but all people were sinners and those under the Law could not keep it. Being sinners the Law was to remind the Israelites of their abject condition.

Thoughtful, faithful Israelites might have realised, indeed, they should have realised, that they needed deliverance. In the course of time God provided this deliverance in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, an arrangement that through faith can, and does, take away sin and offers eternal life to the believer in the Kingdom.

Psalm 103:3-6

- 3. *Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;***
- 4. *Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;***
- 5. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.***
- 6. *The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.***

Perhaps the psalmist under inspiration knew of the deliverance to come, for his words of promise in verses 3, 4, 5 and 6 will not really be fulfilled until the Kingdom of God is in full world-wide operation.

The benefits which come to the believer are entirely due to God's mercy and grace, and not to any merit or anything earned on the part of the believer. The main benefits to the believer now in this age are forgiveness, reconciliation with God, imputation of righteousness and the promise of eternal life in the heavenly places to assist with the blessing of all nations and all families of the earth.

The psalmist continued in verse 3, *"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases"*. As has been said, forgiveness was possible and available under the Law, but the Law could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:6). Only belief through Jesus Christ can and will do that. Some bodily diseases under the Law could be healed when certain procedures were followed, but not all illnesses could be cured. Earthly sufferings and bodily illnesses can be associated with spiritual sicknesses or iniquities, as in Exodus 15:26: *"And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee"*.

Christ came as the healer of both. By removing sin, the initial cause, He will finally remove all sickness and suffering, and finally death itself, which is the wages of sin (Romans 6:28). Jesus gave an earnest of this in combining his forgiveness of the paralytic man with his cure of the body in Mark 2:5,10; Matthew 9:2,6; and Matthew 8:17 quoting Isaiah 53:4 with some alteration.

The *"destruction"* of verse 4 is literally 'the pit', a symbol of the grave, the destiny of all the descendants of Adam. God, through Christ, will eventually raise all human beings from the captivity of the grave.

"Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things". The Hebrew word for *"mouth"* in verse 5 is rendered by Strong as 'finery, ornament' (5716). The Septuagint and other ancient versions render the word as 'desire', and the Syriac version renders it as 'body'. The usual meaning, as in Ezekiel 7:20, is 'beauty' or 'ornament'. It would seem that there may be two ways of understanding this clause, firstly in reference to the mind and heart which God will satisfy with spiritual blessings, and secondly in reference to the body *"so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's"*. The eagle is thought to symbolise youth and vigour, in keeping with the Greek proverb, 'The eagle's old age is as good as the lark's youth'. Henstenberg translated this clause as "Thy youth is renewed like (i.e. so as to be as strong as) the eagle". The understanding of

this thought seems to be that the believer under the Law, and the believer in Christ, will live a life of moderation in all things, and will continue in good health and strength, if God so permits.

"The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed". These words of verse 6 are mainly prospective, as the promise to all that are oppressed will not be fulfilled until God's kingdom is established in power and authority over all the earth. Certainly the Israelites were granted victories by God over their enemies from time to time, and He restored them again to their own land after their captivity in Babylon, but their idolatry and disobedience brought God's punishments upon them until their final rejection, after they themselves, as a nation, rejected their Messiah and the Gospel preached to them exclusively for three and a half years.

Similarly, the Christian believer is not promised freedom from oppression and from trial and persecution in this Gospel Age, and many Christians have suffered severe trials and furious persecution even unto death for their faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus. But the declaration of verse 6 will one day be a reality.

Psalm 103:7-10

- 7. *He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.***
- 8. *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.***
- 9. *He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.***
- 10. *He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.***

"He made known his ways unto Moses" said the psalmist in verse 7. God did this in mighty deeds of guidance and deliverance, not merely in words but in actions, beginning with the wonderful and miraculous delivery of the nation from the cruel and oppressive bondage in Egypt.

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy". This deeply-moving and comforting truth in verse 8 ought to have kept the people from the worship of heathen gods of mythical terror and cruelty.

"He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever". *"Chide"* in verse 9 is better rendered 'chastise', which is stronger in meaning. The words *"his anger"* are supplied, but seem a reasonable insertion indicating that God is ready to forgive, and will not hold the repentant sinner's transgressions against him or her, but will remember them no more upon repentance and the asking of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

All believers are greatly and graciously blessed in that *"He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities"*. What a wonderful blessing is expressed in these words of verse 10. Believers do not get what they deserve, but on the contrary are blessed and promised *"great and precious promises"* (2 Peter 1:4), reconciliation with God, life and life more abundant, and a heavenly inheritance. Moreover, as the Apostle told us, *"... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Psalm 103:11-21

- 11. *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.***
- 12. *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.***
- 13. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.***
- 14. *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.***
- 15. *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.***
- 16. *For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.***
- 17. *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;***
- 18. *To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.***
- 19. *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.***
- 20. *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.***
- 21. *Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.***

Memorable Similes

A simile is a figure of speech in which two things are compared in respect of one quality or aspect in which they are alike, while being unlike in all other respects.

The first simile occurs in verse 11: *"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him"*. God's mercy is here memorably depicted as infinite.

The second is in the next verse, verse 12. *"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"*. This means that believers are entirely acquitted of their guilt and penalty.

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him". In conjunction with the next verse, verse 14, we gather that the misery and helplessness of our human condition, *"our frame ... we are dust"*, which might well keep us alienated from God, is the very inducement to God to show compassion towards us, as an earthly father might show compassion to his children in need.

"As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more" (verses 15 and 16).

The contrast here is between man's frailty and short duration of life and God's eternal mercy and righteousness. God's righteousness is shown in his faithfulness to his word and his promises to them who sincerely seek Him. *"To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them"*.

In verse 18, the psalmist probably had in mind the old Law, which would have brought blessings and prosperity to the nation of Israel while they were faithful and obedient. Believers in the Gospel Age should have in their minds and hearts the New Covenant which has superseded the Old Covenant. This new arrangement provides spiritual blessings through Jesus Christ.

Verses 19 to 21 are prospective. God *"hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all"*. The psalmist called upon the holy angels to *"bless the LORD"*, *"angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word"*. Then everyone is called upon: *"Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure"*. *"Bless the LORD, all his works - in all places of his dominion"*. This is a universal cry to be fulfilled only in the Kingdom of God.

Psalm 103:22

22. Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

The psalm closes as it began: *"Bless the LORD, O my soul"*.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 3:13-19

13. ***But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.***
14. ***For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;***
15. ***While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.***
16. ***For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.***
17. ***But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?***
18. ***And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?***
19. ***So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.***

The “today” of verses 13 and 15 can be applied to the time of the exodus, to David’s day and to our day during the gospel age. The “today” of verse 15, when applied to the Israelites, shows that they had an opportunity to affirm their faith, which they did by obeying God through Moses at the exodus, having been rescued from a life of slavery. The time in the wilderness was then their testing time, but during that time their faith failed so that the reward of their rest in Canaan was forfeited by the adults who left Egypt (except Joshua and Caleb).

According to Hebrews 4, verses 8 and 9, because Joshua did not lead the Israelites who were rescued out of Egypt into their rest, there is another day of rest for the people of God. Thus, for the believer there is the corresponding opportunity during the gospel age to establish faith upon belief into Jesus Christ, leaving the slavery of sin.

The time of testing is then a lifetime of maintaining faith in the wilderness of the sinful world; and the reward is the shared inheritance of the Kingdom, which is God’s rest for the faithful. Jesus has entered his rest because he remained faithful unto death, and the believer has to make an acceptable effort to enter that rest (chapter 4:11). Jesus said he would give rest for weary believers (Matthew 11:28-30). For us there is some rest every day when we should prove our obedience by our faith, and walk in God’s ways by faith and not by sight.

Hebrews 4:1-6

- 1 ***Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.***
- 2 ***For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.***
- 3 ***For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.***
- 4 ***For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.***
- 5 ***And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.***
- 6 ***Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:***

It was thought that there are two parts to gaining rest. For the Israelites the first part was their deliverance out of slavery in Egypt. The second part would have been their rest in Canaan, the promised land flowing with milk and honey, had they been faithful. For the believer the first part is their confidence of deliverance out of death because of their acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice, a spiritual peace from concern about earthly tribulation during this life, being forgiven for disobedience. The second part will be perfect peace in God's kingdom and forever after.

The "rest" of chapter 4 verse 1 was not taken up by the Israelites, as is shown by verse 6, so it must be available still. "... *entering his rest still stands ...*", according to the NIV. Rest was offered to them and was forfeited because of unbelief, that is, disobedience. That nation has suffered wars, captivities and dispersion from the time it rejected God (1 Samuel 8:7; 10:19) until the present day. A rest is now available to the believer of the gospel age, and he or she must strive not to lose it by the same example of unbelief, as in verse 11.

The present rest is a reprieve from anxiety about the consequences of disobedience. It is a gift from God and can be accepted only through belief into Jesus' sacrifice. It begins with belief and begins now, as shown by verse 3. Therefore, the effort to obtain that rest must be made at the present time, which is the today of chapter 3 verses 12 and 13. A comment was made that other religions are concerned about life after death and make many different demands to earn it. But only God has offered life freely through the merit of the sacrifice of his son, and that is the only source from which any man can accept it.

The rest referred to in this chapter is an extra, an addition to the salvation to come. References given in the previous study show that the believer experiences a respite from worldly concerns during this life; and that the rest will be perfected or completed upon resurrection to eternal life.

Paul compared God resting from his works of creation (Genesis 2:2) with the position of the Hebrews who should also rest from their works. Those works would be the works of the Law Covenant, and rest for the Hebrews became possible when the Law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and the Old Covenant was replaced by the New Covenant. For the Hebrews who had thus come out from the slavery of the law, and to the gentiles who were not subject to that law, the rest is rest in Jesus. He called all believers to him so that he could give them that rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

The “*gospel*” of verse 2 was defined as the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the word “*gospel*” means ‘good news’. For the Israelites the good news was of rescue from slavery and of rest in the promised land. For the believer of the gospel age, the good news includes the promise of the resurrection and rest in eternal life. There is only one gospel of Jesus Christ: other gospels are to be shunned, as shown by 2 Corinthians 11:3-7 and Galatians 1:6,7.

The Israelites also had the good news of the promise to Abraham of the blessing of all the families of the earth, although only very few of them may have understood that the blessing would come through a future Messiah.

Verse 5 states that God rested from his works of creation when they had been completed. Similarly, the believer will rest from his works when they have been completed. The rest begins upon belief that personal effort is insufficient for salvation, and that it is necessary to accept the gift which was sealed by the Jesus’ sacrifice. For God the completion of his rest will be when Jesus returns a perfected creation to him after the reconstitution of all things (1 Corinthians 15:28).

For the believer the completion will be eternal life after the work of the kingdom age. The writer of Hebrews seems to focus attention upon the future rest of the believer.

Hebrews 4:7-13

- 7 *Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.***
- 8 *For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.***

- 9** *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*
10 *For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.*
11 *Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*
12 *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
13 *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

Verse 7 indicates that David heard God's voice, and Matthew 22:43 and Acts 1:16 show that David was inspired to speak by the holy spirit. From this it was asked 'How does the holy spirit speak?'

Acts 28:25 shows that Isaiah was inspired by the holy spirit. It seems that in verse 7 the writer acknowledges the fact that the holy spirit inspired the writing of the Old and New Testaments, as is stated in 2 Timothy 3:16.

It was noted that in verse 8 it is Joshua who is referred to, not Jesus.

In verse 11 the writer calls the reader to labour to obtain rest through belief, thus it was suggested that belief is a work. This was supported by John 6:26-29. Just as God rested after the works of creation, but did not relapse into doing nothing, so the believer has to cease from worldly works to begin his rest, but continue with works that strengthen belief and demonstrate faith. Faith and appropriate works are required together, as shown by James 2:17,18. These works include displaying the fruits of the spirit (Ephesians 5:9 and Galatians 5:22,23) and fruits of repentance (Matthew 3:8 and Luke 3:8).

A new idea about the power of the word of God seems to be introduced in verses 12 and 13, but they are connected to the previous verses by the word "for". It was asked whether the "word" was the written word or Jesus Christ. In the Greek it is "logos" just as in John 1:1, although in John it begins with an upper case L, suggesting that the subject needs careful consideration. The thought was put forward that the word of God was the written word of the Old Testament that was available to the Hebrews, which would have pointed out their shortcomings, sharpened their conscience and provided principles for them to apply to every day of their lives.

[In the earliest manuscripts the Greek was all written in upper case letters without spaces between words, and probably without punctuation. Thus, the context of the word, rather than its capitalisation governs its meaning, and in this case governs the distinction between logos as the written word of God and Logos as Jesus Christ. References given in the previous study indicate that it is the written word that is meant in verse 12.]

Luke 2: 34 and 35 indicate that the words spoken by the Lord himself would disclose the hidden thoughts of many. In several instances Jesus revealed the hypocritical thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees, thus defining the heart attitude that the Christian should not have. The Old Testament writings and the gospel message provide standards of belief and standards for personal conduct both for the Hebrews and for us.

In Ephesians 6:17 the sword of the spirit is described as part of the armour of God, and is identified as the word of God. In matters of belief and behaviour it acts like a two-edged sword used in physical battle, by cutting to the heart of the matter and giving significance to the written word. God's word is truth (John 17:17). Thus, a sword can symbolise battle and punishment, or the incisiveness of truth (Revelation 1:16), even to the effect of separating members of a family (Matthew 10:34,35), or proving to be too difficult for some hearers to accept, such as the rich young man in Mark 10:21,22.

Philippians 2:12,13 shows that when the written word is understood correctly it is the means by which God works in the believer, strengthening the conscience, improving discernment of the truth, building up faith, and preventing the deceitfulness of temptation from hardening the heart to unbelief or disobedience. God is able to perceive the thoughts and intentions of the believer, and by giving us the written word he has shown that he is working for our good. Peter made this point by exhorting us to "*Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you*" (1 Peter 5:7; NLB).

Hebrews 4:14-16

- 14** *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.*
- 15** *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*
- 16** *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

In verses 14 to 16 Jesus is named as High Priest to the believers, as he was also in chapter 2 verses 17 and 18, and chapter 3 verse 1. These are comforting verses because they show that he suffered as a human being as we do, and can therefore sympathise with us in our trials. Being comforted in this way helps the believer to maintain the profession of the Christian. Other versions have “*confession*” instead of “*profession*”, and it was thought that the confession was the confession of faith made by Peter (Matthew 16:16) that Jesus was the son of the living God. This confession, often referred to as ‘the rock confession of faith’, is re-affirmed by every believer upon baptism, confessing with the mouth and believing in the heart unto salvation (Romans 10:8-10).

The phrase “*into the heavens*” in verse 14 is given as “*through the heavens*” in other versions. It was thought that just as the Jewish High Priest had to pass through the curtain from the courtyard to the holy place of the tabernacle, and then through the curtain into the holiest place where God had his presence, so Jesus passed through the heavens to come to earth, and then returned through the heavens to be in God’s presence.

God told Moses exactly how to make the tabernacle, and thus it may represent some arrangement in heaven. In that case, Jesus could have made the same movements, as High Priest to the believer, as Aaron did for the Israelites.

Because Jesus was without sin (verse 15) the believer can be absolutely sure of him as High Priest. The responsibility of the High Priest was to mediate for believers (1 Timothy 2:5), to address God on behalf of the people. The Hebrews were fully aware of the importance of that appointment, so they should have understood the work that Jesus would do under the terms of the New Covenant. With a perfect High Priest the believer can go to God with confidence, which is a better word than “*boldly*”, to express the attitude of the believer to his creator, when approaching the throne of grace.

Just as Jesus went to God for everything, so believers must put their requests before him by prayer and supplication (Philippians 4:6), and those requests must be made in Jesus’ name (John 16:24). The means of communication is through Jesus, the way, the advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1).

The Hebrews may not have had full confidence in their earthly High Priest, remembering how Hannah was misjudged by Eli (1 Samuel 1:9-18), and also that those who held that position during the time of the Law Covenant were fallible. But Jesus is infallible; he did not sin. Thus, the writer tells the Hebrews to have confidence in him. Jesus resisted every temptation. Being

tempted is not sin, since temptation often comes by chance. Giving in to temptation is sin, that is, disobedience, and for disobedient people, temptation can come from within. Jesus may not have been tempted from within because he was sinless, but he was fully aware of human temptations because he was a human being while on earth. He may have had to resist the temptation to use his power un-necessarily, as shown by his rejection of Satan's temptation in the wilderness, a situation which is relevant in human affairs, although to a lesser degree, and is recognised in the saying 'power corrupts'. (To be continued.)



NEWS AND NOTES

Multilingual Resources

Coronavirus isolation measures have brought some advantages over the last few months with many people reaching out via the internet, looking for Christian materials. In response we have been working to develop basic resources for both adults and children in various languages. The Biblical Blessings series and children's activities are now available in English, Swahili and Tamil and can be downloaded from our website. We also have translations of some of our other publications available for download in French and Spanish (<http://www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au/resources/>).

We thank God for the blessings of time and resources to help others to hear the wonderful message of His coming Kingdom.

Sunday Meetings

Our Sunday meetings are still being conducted online via Zoom. We are currently studying the first letter to the Thessalonians and usually vary this with a presentation of some type every two or three weeks. All are welcome, so please contact info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au for the meeting link if you would like to join us.

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is compiled by an editor responsible to the New Covenant Fellowship. The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of all the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words: ***"Prove all things"*** (1 Thessalonians 5:21).



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