

THE NEW COVENANT NEWS



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News

IT IS WRITTEN

by Ray Maxfield

For this talk I have taken the words of Jesus. He used them so often by quoting the Old Testament as He applied to Himself the words He quoted.

As we read in Isaiah 55:10-11; "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

These two verses first give an example, followed by the application. The comparison is between rain/snow and God's word. The point of the comparison is that both are effective in achieving God's purpose for them. In this way God assured His people in exile that His promises would be realised and that they would indeed return to Judah.

For us the example of the rain and the snow achieving God's purpose of providing food for us means that we can also trust that God's promises will also be fulfilled.

The comparison is that just as rain cannot fall on the earth without fulfilling the role God gave it, so God's words cannot fall from God's mouth in heaven without fulfilling the role God gave them on earth. God does not make empty promises; when He speaks people should listen because what He predicts is exactly what will happen.

As we read in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Paul speaking to Timothy; "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In verse fifteen Paul made the observation about the effect of Scripture in Timothy's life, that led him to make an assertion about the inspiration and usefulness of Scripture. Timothy had heard this truth since childhood. Paul was reminding Timothy that Scripture is profitable and that the basis of its profitableness lies in its inspired character.

Paul first commended the Scripture on account of its authority; and secondly, on account of what it achieves. In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declared that it is divinely inspired; for, if it be so, it is beyond all doubt that men ought to receive it with reverence.

We know that God has spoken to us, and we are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being servants of God, they uttered only what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare.

Peter also added that the prophets of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, as we see in 2 Peter 1:21; *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

The words that they wrote and spoke were not their own, but the words that God gave them.

How God inspired them we cannot say. It is like all the miracles in the Bible; they are without explanation, being supernatural. The appeal of the Word of God is to faith as we see in Hebrews 11:3; *“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”.*

The faith that accepts that fact accepts likewise the claims and evidences of Scripture that it is divinely inspired.

The most important of Scripture evidences is the testimony of our Lord as given in the Gospels. His first recorded reference to it was in His conflict with Satan in the wilderness. He met the attack of Satan by three times repeating the words ***“It is written”***, each time quoting from the book of Deuteronomy.

The account is recorded for us by both Matthew and Luke. We will look at the Matthew account where we read in Matthew 4:1-2; *“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered”.*

The stage was set by Jesus being hungry from fasting. Satan took advantage of our Lord’s hunger and used it to tempt Jesus to satisfy His hunger. He started the temptation by raising a cloud of doubt, as we see in Matthew 4:3; *“And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread”.*

Satan didn't doubt that Jesus had the power to satisfy His hunger by turning the stones to bread. Nevertheless, he questioned the fact. Satan said 'if'; *"If thou be the Son of God"*. The 'if' really questions the fact, for Satan demanded that Jesus furnish the proof that He is the Son of God.

Jesus did not give Satan the satisfaction of doing as he asked, nor did He challenge Satan Himself. He turned to the authority of the scriptures to provide an irrefutable reply to the challenge.

Jesus answered by referring to the written word. As we read in Matthew, Jesus told Satan, ***"it is written"*** and then He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. It is recorded in Matthew 4:4; *"But he answered and said, **It is written**, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"*.

Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, which reads; *"And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live"*.

Satan did not challenge the quotation. He knew very well that the words that Jesus quoted to him were words given by God to Moses to be written down, and had the power of God behind them.

For the second test Satan took Jesus to the Temple. As we read in Matthew 4:5-6; *"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for **it is written**, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."*

Once again Satan cast doubt on Jesus being the Son of God by once again using the word 'if'. Satan, knowing the power of the scriptures, also chose to reinforce his challenge of Jesus by quoting scripture himself. He chose to quote Psalm 91:11-12; *"For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone"*.

Jesus had no doubt that He would be protected, so He didn't need to put it to the test. He was in no danger.

Again, Jesus answered Satan by saying “**it is written**”, and then quoted Deuteronomy. It is recorded for us in Matthew 4:7; “*Jesus said unto him, **It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God***”.

And in Deuteronomy 6:16, from where the quotation was taken, it reads; “*Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah*”.

For his third test Satan took Jesus up into a very high mountain, as we read in Matthew 4:8–9; “*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*” Satan hoped that his dominion over all the world, implied here and explicit in Luke 4:6, would be enough to tempt Jesus.

Jesus was not about to worship Satan on any account. He knew to whom He owed His allegiance, so again quoted from Deuteronomy with the words “**it is written**”. The account is in Matthew 4:10; “*Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for **it is written**, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*”.

The words He quoted are from Deuteronomy 6:13; “*Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name*”. Satan realised that he could not corrupt Jesus, and left Him.

Each time Jesus said “**it is written**” He confirmed that the scripture in the Old Testament was indeed inspired by God; that those who wrote the words down were writing as God inspired them to do. Even Satan’s “**it is written**” shows that he, Satan, also recognised the inspired origin of the scripture.

Jesus began His ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth. The roll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. As we read in Luke 4:17-19; “*And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where **it was written**, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord’.*”

The passage He was reading from is Isaiah 61:1-2; “*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD*”.

Jesus began reading, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me”*. These words inform us that Christ had been sent by God to bring about the salvation of the human race. Having read the passage, He closed the roll and gave it to the attendant, as we read in Luke 4:20-21; *“And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, ‘This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears’.”*

Having given the book to the minister, Jesus sat down and began His discourse to the congregation with the words, *“This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears”*.

This is the first illustration of the way that Jesus used the Old Testament throughout His ministry, that is, He represented Himself as fulfilling in His own Person the prophecies of the Old Testament.

The prophecies of the Old Testament all point forward to the coming of Christ and the work that He would do in bringing about salvation.

In His public discourses He applied the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 to John the Baptist as being the messenger who was to prepare His way. The passage in which it is recorded is Matthew 11:9-10 and that reads; *“But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom **it is written**, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee”*.

The quotation is from Malachi 3:1; *“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts”*.

Again, He made Jonah’s experiences a prefiguration of His burial and resurrection. We see that in Matthew 12:39–40, which reads; *“But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”*.

The original report is in Jonah 1:17; *“Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights”*.

He claimed that His method of teaching the people was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. The quotation is found in Matthew 13:13-14; *“Therefore*

speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive”.

The quotation is from Isaiah 6:9; “*And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not”.*

He told the Jews who opposed Him that whereas they searched the Scriptures, thinking that therein they had eternal life, the Scriptures really bear witness to Himself and that eternal life is only to be obtained by coming to Him for it, as we see in John 5:39; “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”.*

As the living bread from Heaven, He is the reality of which the manna given by God to their fathers under the leadership of Moses was a figure as we see in John 6:31–33, the people speaking; “*Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as **it is written**, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world”.*

The Jews responded by murmuring against Jesus, as recorded in John 6:41-42; “*The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?”.*

Jesus’ response to them is recorded in John 6:43-47; “*Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. **It is written** in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life”.*

Jesus continued, and explained how those who believe will have everlasting life in the following verses. “*I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall*

live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:48-51).

In John 10:33 the Jews claimed that Jesus was making Himself out to be God, and so they charged Him with blasphemy. It reads; *“The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God”.*

Jesus answered their charge of blasphemy in John 10:34-38; *“Jesus answered them, **Is it not written** in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him”.*

Jesus appealed to Psalm 82:6; *“I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High”.*

As He drove the money changers and dove vendors from the temple, He gave as the authority for His action the words of Isaiah 56:7. The account is in Matthew 21:12-13; *“And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, **It is written**, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves”.*

Jesus was quoting Isaiah 56:7; *“Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people”.*

The chief priests and scribes protested against the adoration that was given to Jesus by the children in the temple, as recorded in Matthew 21:15; *“And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased”.*

The priests and scribes were not pleased that even the children worshiped Jesus. In response Jesus quoted Psalm 8. We read that in Matthew 21:16; *“And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?”.*

What a significance is attached to His *“have ye never read”*. The words are there in the Scripture for them to accept. Both for His hearers, as well as for Himself, they were the absolute and final court of appeal. The quotation is from Psalm 8:2, which reads; *“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger”*.

Again, Psalm 118, which speaks of the stone which the builders rejected as having become the head of the corner, He applied this to the rejection of Himself by the chief priests and elders and to God’s vindication of His claims. We see that in Matthew 21:42; *“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?”*.

The quotation is from Psalm 118:22-23; *“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes”*.

In His discussion with the Pharisees concerning The Christ, though He did not state directly that He was Himself both David’s Son and David’s Lord, yet He did so by implication, applying to Himself the words of Psalm 110:1. The account is in Matthew 22:41-45; *“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?”*

The quotation is from Psalm 110:1; *“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”*

On the night of His betrayal, He told His disciples that the hatred of the Jews was a fulfilment of the words recorded in Psalm 69:4; *“They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away”*.

He also told them that the words of Psalm 41:9 were to be fulfilled in the case of the traitor, as we see in John 13:18; *“I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me”*.

The quotation is from Psalm 41:9; *“Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me”*.

Again, He told them that the words of Isaiah 53:12, *“And He was reckoned with the transgressors”* were to be fulfilled in Himself as we see in Luke 22:37; *For I say unto you, that this that **is written** must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end”*.

Jesus was quoting Isaiah 53:12; *“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”*.

His death, and that the disciples would desert Him, are the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7. The account is in Matthew 26:31; *“Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: **for it is written**, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad”*.

Jesus was quoting Zechariah 13:7; *“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones”*.

The words that Jesus uttered from the cross about God forsaking Him were prophesied in the Psalms. Jesus uttering them on the cross is recorded in Matthew 27:46; *“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*.

The quotation is from Psalm 22:1; *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”*.

In the hours of His crucifixion His *“I thirst”*, was spoken *“that the Scriptures might be fulfilled”* as we see in John 19:28-29; *“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth”*.

The scripture that was fulfilled was Psalm 69:21; *“They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink”*.

The very last words that Jesus said as a human were prophesied in Psalms. The record of Jesus saying them is in Luke 23:46; *“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost”*.

The words are recorded in Psalm 31:5; *“Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth”*.

This outstanding characteristic of His teaching of using the Old Testament to show that He was the fulfillment of the prophecies was first illustrated in the Gospel narratives in Luke’s record of the discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth. It finds its most comprehensive instance at the close of that Gospel, where, reminding the disciples of what He had previously taught them, He said, *“All things must needs be fulfilled, which **are written** in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms concerning me”* as we see in Luke 24:44; *“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which **were written** in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me”*.

This use of the Old Testament is more fully illustrated than ever after His resurrection. Now more than previously He showed Himself to be the great theme of the Scriptures. As we see in Luke 24:25-26; *“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”*

In His conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, *“beginning from Moses and from all the prophets”* He interpreted to them *“in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself”*, as we see in Luke 24:27; *“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”*.

He then opened their mind that they might understand the Scriptures, as we see in the following verses, *“And said unto them, Thus **it is written**, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:46-49).

*“Thus **it is written**”* carries with it the tacit understanding that His hearers, alike with Himself, regard the words as of divine authority.

In thus representing Himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture, Christ not only established its divine authority, He also indicated its relationship with the new age of grace which He came to introduce. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is His statement in the Sermon on the Mount, as we see in Matthew 5:17-18; *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled”*.

He used the same language to assert the permanency of His own teaching. He said in Matthew 24:35; *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”*.

[All quotations are from the King James Version.]



GRATEFULNESS WITH THANKSGIVING

Devotion by Sylvia Giles

(written in August 2021 during Melbourne’s 6th COVID lockdown)

I originally wrote this short devotion last year during one of our early lockdowns due to the Coronavirus.

Lockdown seemed like a novelty at first. Everyone was in the same situation. It didn’t matter what position you held, whether you were rich or poor, a teacher, a lawyer or a labourer, or what rank or social status you had. We were all in this together. We were equal (perhaps something like what the Kingdom could be like). When we went for our daily walk or exercise everyone was friendly and appreciated being outside. We were able to travel further than 5 km and have a picnic in the park, if we wanted to. It was like being on holiday. Neighbours wanted to help you if you needed it. It seemed to be bringing people together and brought out the best in people. There were many acts of kindness. We were grateful for having this communication.

Sadly, by this year this attitude has changed to anger and frustration, as many people have lost their jobs and businesses. People are tired of the many increased restrictions, which is quite understandable.

As Christians we are grateful that we can see God’s bigger plan and promises for the future. We don’t get discouraged – we have hope. I heard a news commentator say just last week, “We need hope ... without hope we are finished”. Some people cannot see a way out of this situation. We are so blessed that we do have hope. We know that God is in control and we are grateful that we have this knowledge and are thankful.

Job, too, knew that ultimately God was in control. Job was clearly a good and upright man. *“And the LORD said unto Satan ‘Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and shunneth evil?’”* (Job 1:8; 2:3). Yet Job experienced the most appalling tragedy. He lost everything through the attacks of Satan.

Job was also a wise man. He searched for wisdom. *“Where can wisdom be found and where is the place of understanding?”* he asked (Job 28:12). The answer is found in 28:28; *“The fear of the Lord, this is wisdom and to depart from evil, that is understanding.”* And if we lack wisdom we can ask of God, who *“giveth to all men liberally”* (James 1:5). Job, through his wisdom, knew that ultimately the sufferings actually came from God, as we read in Job 1:21; *“The LORD gave and the LORD taketh away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”*

Satan argued with God and asked, *“Doth Job fear God for nothing?”* (Job 1:9). God replied that Job loved him and his love was not because of any blessings he had received. The Lord said further to Satan, *“Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life”* (Job 2:6). Job felt that he had lost touch with God and his sufferings were compounded by feeling that God was far away and no longer cared. Job eventually came back in touch with God and did not reproach him for his dealings with him. Job was eventually rewarded for his gratefulness by God giving him back double what he had lost.

What does it mean to be grateful? The Greek word is 'eucharistos', which is translated as 'thankful', or being 'mindful of favours'. In being grateful we appreciate what we have. We give thanks every day, as in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, as this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Being thankful in every situation that we may therewith be content (Philippians 4:11). This could be difficult. How easy it is for us to thank God when things are going well and benefit us, but to be thankful and be grateful for trials and tribulations requires something more. We need faith and obedience, knowing that ultimately it will be for our good. As we read in James 1:17, *“Every good and perfect gift comes from above”*, and Romans 8:28 tells us that *“all things work together for good to those who love God”*.

When the messenger of Satan came to *“buffet”* the apostle Paul he had the same discernment as Job. When Paul was given *“a thorn in the flesh”* he prayed three times that it should depart from him, *“lest”*, he said, *“I should be exalted above measure”*. The Lord said to him *“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore”* Paul said, *“will I rather glory in my infirmities”*, and Paul was rewarded with the power of Christ and the glory of eternal riches (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

We are not to resent trials and tribulations; some would even say we should welcome them as a friend, as they are given to us to develop our characters. These are the times that we should be rejoicing and counting *“it all joy when [we] fall into various trials; knowing this, that the testing of [our] faith is working patience”* (James 1:2–3). *“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”* (James 1:4). Suffering in the world is small compared to the life that will be enjoyed in the kingdom.

Trials can bring us closer to God as we can tend to forget God when things are going well. David forgot the Lord and it was only in the day of his trouble that he sought God (Psalm 77:2). And in Psalm 119:67 he said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word”* (verse 67), and *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes”* (verse 71) and *“I know, Oh LORD, that thy judgements are right and that thou in faithfulness has afflicted me”* (verse 75).

Daniel knew when the decree had been signed that he needed the Lord, and so he went into his house and, with his windows wide open, in his chamber looked toward Jerusalem, and kneeled upon his knees and prayed three times a day and gave thanks before his God (Daniel 6:10).

When the ten lepers were healed only one returned to thank the Lord (Luke 17:11-19).

Paul was able to say *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). Possibly we can say that no believer has the true picture when it comes to understanding the reasons for suffering but we know that God will never let any believer be tempted above what they can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We can glory in tribulations *“knowing that tribulation worketh patience”* and we thank God and rejoice, because *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us”* (Romans 5:2-5).

Paul frequently began his letters by thanking God for the believers to whom he wrote, always remembering and making mention of them in his prayers. We are told to continue in prayer. *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and *“in everything give thanks”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18), thanking God and being content with gratefulness for such things as we have, for he hath said, *“I will never leave thee or forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5).

Amen.



THE HERDSMAN OF TEKOA

by Russell Collins

Introduction

Tekoa was a small village about sixteen kilometres south of Jerusalem in Judea, the southern kingdom of Israel, and the herdsman was Amos who was a breeder of sheep. He also cared for a sycamore-fig grove. Amos received a direct call from God to prophesy to Israel, the northern kingdom.

“The words of Amos who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.” (Amos 1:1).

Amos prophesied at a time close to the year 755 BC, when Uzziah, king of Judah (791-740 BC) reigned over a prosperous nation, but was under the influence of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-753 BC). Jeroboam's kingdom was then outwardly at the height of its power, but inwardly was idolatrous and corrupt, as we read in 2 Kings 14:24-25. Material prosperity and social evils characterised the times.

Amos travelled north to preach in Bethel, which was to him a foreign locality. Bethel was a centre of idol worship and the residence of the reigning king, Jeroboam. Amos's preaching in Bethel aroused such opposition that Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, told Jeroboam that Amos was raising a conspiracy. Amos was told to leave Israel, and he returned to Judah, where he committed his message to writing, showing that he was educated and not simply an unlearned shepherd.

“Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.” (Amos 7:10).

“Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.” (Amos 7:14-15).

THE MESSAGE OF AMOS

Amos attacked the social evils of the people as well as their paganised worship. He proclaimed an urgent call to repentance as the only escape from God's judgment. He also declared that Israel's privileged position should have been an incentive to righteous living and certainly not an excuse for sinning.

There are four aspects of the prophecies in the book of Amos.

Firstly, there is the denunciation of the sins of the nations bordering Israel and Judah. The first nation mentioned is Damascus.

“Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: But I will send a fire into the house of Hazeael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. I will break also the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD.” (Amos 1:3-5).

In the following verses, divine punishment on Gaza (Philistia), Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab is also prophesied.

Secondly, there is a detailed description of the transgressions and sins of the people of Israel and Judah, exhortations to repentance and warnings of God's judgments on his disobedient people. When Amos prophesied, Israel in particular was at the height of national wealth, power and security. But instead of being devoted to God and grateful for his promise to care for them, Israel offended in the sight of God.

The poor were oppressed, and the observances required under the Law Covenant were thought burdensome.

“Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?” (Amos 8:4-6).

Corruption from idleness, luxury and extravagance was general throughout society.

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of

the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.” (Amos 6:1-6.)

Immorality and irreligious behaviour were widespread across the land.

“Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek; and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name: And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.” (Amos 2:6-8).

The underlying cause of the evils prevalent in Israel and Judah was idolatry. Calf worship was practised at Bethel where there was a temple and summer palace for the king. Also at Gilgal, Dan and Beersheba in Judah there was idolatry. Idolatrous practices were even offensively united with the true worship of God.

“I hate, I despise your feast days, and take no pleasure in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun and your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.” (Amos 5:21-27).

Amos and his prophecies were rejected by the people.

Thirdly, Amos gave an account of his visit to Bethel and an outline of God’s impending punishment of Israel.

“For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land. Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; But prophesy not again any more at Bethel for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.” The captivity mentioned in verse 11 took place about 721 BC when the Assyrians took the Israelites captive. (Amos 7:10-13).

God's judgment on Israel was clearly prophesied.

“And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord.” (Amos 3:15).

“Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.” (Amos 5:27).

“But, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith the LORD the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hemath unto the river of the wilderness.” (Amos 6:14).

But God did show his people what they must do.

“Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.” (Amos 5:15,24).

Amos reminded the Israelites of their great privilege and responsibility. He also pointed out that their idolatrous way of living was contrary to God's way, and could not be tolerated.

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:2-3).

A Lesson for Us

We can see parallels to the situation in Israel in the time of Amos in the social order of today. There is on every hand indifference to the Lord God and to Jesus Christ, there is an upsurge of immorality and evil practices; there is unwillingness to listen to reproof; and there is luxury as well as extravagance everywhere, without gratitude or appreciation, or even the suggestion of some compensating measure of spirituality.

Such conditions cannot continue indefinitely. God's judgments on Israel, allowing the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom, came some twenty-five to thirty years after Amos's prophecy. How much longer he is prepared to allow the present order to continue must remain known to him in his infinite wisdom.

Fourthly, the vision given to Amos takes his message, and the lesson, beyond Israel and Judah of his day, beyond Assyria, and even beyond the Messiah and his coming to earth, with a prophecy of the Kingdom of God.

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.” (Amos 9:11-15).

The words of verses 11 and 12 are on record as quoted by James at the meeting of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, indicating that the fulfilment of Amos's prophetic words began very early in the Gospel Age with the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's rightful King on the throne of David. The words of James are recorded in Acts 15:13-17.

“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. [‘melt’ - soften, flow down - Strong 4127]”. (Amos 9:13).

The “days” to come mentioned in verses 11 to 15 must surely be a prophecy of the kingdom of God, the kingdom for which we pray continually, especially when we say the Lord's prayer in which the words *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:10) are to be found.

We, in our time, are privileged to understand and share Amos's vision, and to continue to pray for the establishment of God's kingdom. In the meantime, while we watch and pray, let us with heart and mind hate the evil and love the good, even as Amos exhorted the Israelites of old.

Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 6:13-20

- 13** *For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,*
- 14** *Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.*
- 15** *And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*
- 16** *For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.*
- 17** *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:*
- 18** *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*
- 19** *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;*
- 20** *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

In verses 13 to 20 Paul made the case for God's absolute truthfulness. Verse 16 shows that men accept the swearing of an oath to prove that they are trustworthy. Although he is absolutely trustworthy, to eliminate any possibility of doubt, God made an oath to Abraham, promising him that he would become the father of a great nation (Genesis 22:15-18). Then in Psalm 110:4 we read that God gave an oath to David that his descendant would be a high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

While Abraham rejoiced in his son Isaac, the promise of nationhood was fulfilled after his time, but the Hebrews were fully aware that the promise had been fulfilled, even though, through the centuries and the periods of captivity in Assyria and Babylonia they had become a less numerous and a scattered people. They should have been convinced by the fulfilment of that promise that Jesus would be their high priest and accepted him as such. And to do that they had to abandon the law completely in order to "... *lay hold upon the hope ...*" (verse 18) of salvation and eternal life.

It was suggested that the "*two immutable things*" of verse 18 are firstly that Jesus is the son of God, and secondly that he became a high priest after the order of Melchisedec, as given in chapter 5:5-6.

An alternative suggestion was that the “*two immutable things*” are God’s promise and his oath to Abraham.

From verse 17 it was thought that “*the heirs of promise*” were at first the Israelite nation according to the first promise to Abraham, and secondly the promise, through Jesus, of a new and everlasting priesthood, which would be composed of the “*holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling*” identified in chapter 3 verse 1.

It appears that in this passage Paul was trying to turn the attention of the Hebrews from God’s first promise and oath to make them a great nation, to the second promise and oath to make them a new priesthood under Jesus Christ.

It was suggested that the latter verses of chapter 6 are establishing the infallibility of God’s promises, and refer only to the promise and oath to Abraham. This is in harmony with the identity of the two immutable things of verse 18 being God’s promise and oath to Abraham.

However, the Hebrews knew also of the promise and oath to David, that Jesus was the son of God and that he became the high priest after the order of Melchisedec, as in Psalm 110:4. This is in harmony with the two immutable things being the above two facts about Christ as in Hebrews 5:5-6.

It was asked whether verse 20 is referring to Jesus’ ascension. It was then suggested that the answer depended upon defining the hope of verses 18 and 19. According to the last three verses of the chapter, “*the hope set before us ... which we have as an anchor of the soul ... which entereth into that within the veil (the holiest place) ... [is] ... the forerunner ... Jesus ...*”.

Whereas early chapters of Hebrews established Jesus’ pre-eminence over the angels, the prophets and all the individuals of the Old Testament times, Paul established here that Jesus entered the holy place at God’s right hand to become the high priest after the order of Melchisedec, and as such he embodies the hope of the faithful of reconciliation, salvation and eternal life. In this context “*forever*” means without end because his kingdom and priesthood will be everlasting (2 Peter 1:11).

Thus, Paul introduced the promise and oath, two immutable things, given to David. By passing through the veil of death, just as Aaron passed through the veil of the temple, Jesus began his work as the mediator of the New Covenant, which had come into effect when he died on the cross, and the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom.

Hebrews 7:1-10

- 1 For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;**
- 2 To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;**
- 3 Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.**
- 4 Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.**
- 5 And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham:**
- 6 But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises.**
- 7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.**
- 8 And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.**
- 9 And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham.**
- 10 For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.**

These verses contain a comparison between the priesthood of Melchisedec and the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood. The lineage of Aaron was quite separate from that of Melchisedec.

Although verse 1 begins “*For this Melchisedec*” it was thought that because there is no record of another Melchisedec, nor was there any disparagement intended, the demonstrative pronoun “*this*” was used here for emphasis, focussing all attention on Melchisedec.

Some Bible students have thought that Melchisedec was a spirit being because of his status given in verse 3. As such he could have taken on human form as it is thought by some that angels did before the flood. But they were dealt with before or at the flood, and angels took on human form only for brief episodes after that; for example, Jacob’s wrestling match at Peniel, and the angels who opened Jesus’ grave at the resurrection. Verse 3 states that Melchisedec was like the son of god, that is, only like an angel, and therefore was not one.

Others consider verse 4 to show that Melchisedec was a man, although the Diaglott has “... *this person* ...” in place of “... *this man* ...”

Also it was suggested that Melchisedec was Noah’s son Shem. But we have the record of Shem’s origin and descendants (Genesis 6:10, 10:21-31), whereas we are not told of Melchisedec’s ancestry or descendants.

Although this passage gives more information about Melchisedec than any reference elsewhere, all that is given is that there is no record of his lineage or progeny, that he was appointed to be King of Salem (Jerusalem) and high priest by God, and that he was paid tithes by Abraham whom he blessed. Genesis 14 tells us that on returning from rescuing his nephew, Lot, from the four invading kings, Abraham met Melchisedec and gave him a tenth of the spoils of the battle.

Verses 6 and 7 point out that Melchisedec was superior to Abraham, because Abraham paid a tithe to Melchisedec and was blessed by him, although it was Abraham who received the promise and the oath (Hebrews 6:13,17). Since the Aaronic priesthood was quite distinct from that of Melchisedec, so it is distinct from that of Jesus.

In a similar manner to the appointment of Melchisedec, Jesus is king and high priest to the believer, who gives his or her allegiance to Jesus and receives blessings from him.

And as God inspired or arranged the meeting between Melchisedec and Abraham, so God has called many through the gospel message to meet or come to know Jesus. As Abraham was rewarded for his faith shown by acknowledging Melchisedec as his high priest, so the believer will be rewarded for his faith shown by acknowledging Jesus as his or her high priest.

Since the order of Melchisedec was a type of Jesus’ priesthood which was to abide continuously, the words “... *having neither beginning of days, nor end of life* ...” may refer to the nature of kingship and priesthood, rather than to the man himself. Thus, he was called the king of righteousness and the king of peace (verse 2) and a priest forever, titles which belong to the Lord Jesus. That position and those titles were in abeyance from the time of Melchisedec until the time of Jesus.



NEWS

Sunday Meetings

Our Sunday meetings will continue to be conducted via Zoom for the time being. We try to intersperse weekly Bible studies with talks and other presentations every few weeks. All interested persons are welcome, so please contact info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au for the meeting link if you would like to join us.

Memorial Supper

The memorial of the Lord's Supper will be on Friday 15th April 2022. The format of this service is yet to be determined so please see our website (www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au) or contact us for up-to-date information at info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au.

Autumn Conference

We have a booking for our annual autumn conference at the Foothills Conference Centre in Mooroolbark for Friday 22 to Sunday 24 April 2022. However, given the ever-changing nature of COVID-19 outbreaks, local restrictions and state border closures, we will need to review this closer to the proposed dates. Please see our website (www.newcovenantfellowship.org.au) or contact us for up-to-date information at info@newcovenantfellowship.org.au. If the conference does go ahead, our theme will be "Praise the Lord!", and the program will include talks, Bible studies, devotions and fellowship.



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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