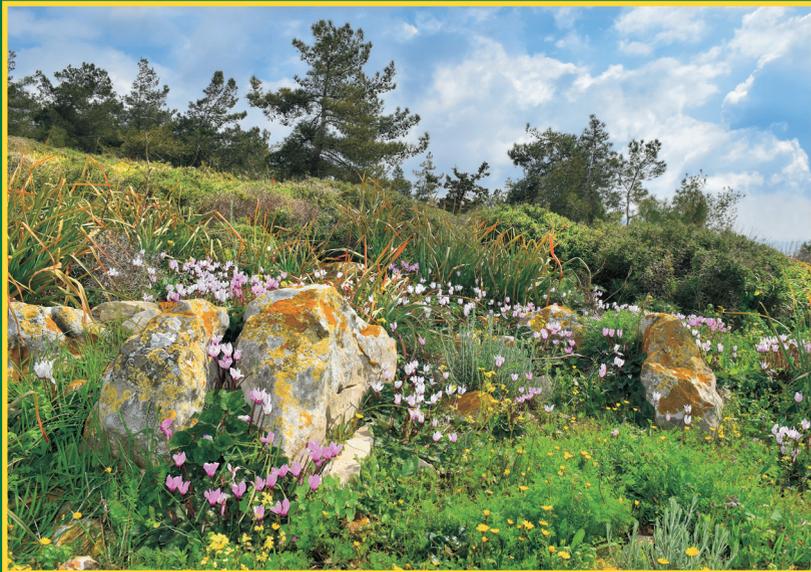


# Scripture Truth



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Trust during trial  
Genesis 18 & 19  
Heaven on earth?

The preparation of Elisha  
The thorny issue of predestination  
The lesson of the seven churches

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# SCRIPTURE TRUTH

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ERRATA: Volume 60 No. 5, page 114, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph — “jonah 2:1” should read “Jonah 4:2”

Front cover: Spring flowering in the Lower Galilee, Israel@iStock.com/irisphoto2

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## The lesson of the seven churches

Six of the seven churches of Revelation 2 & 3 are arranged in matching pairs. Whereas Ephesus had lost her first love, Laodicea was nauseously lukewarm, and ready to be spewed out of the Lord's mouth (2:4; 3:16). Philadelphia, like Smyrna, did not need to be rebuked for anything. But Philadelphia was weak where Smyrna was vigorous (2:9; 3:8). Pergamum had not denied the Lord's name or the faith of the gospel even under persecution. But Sardis, suffering no persecution, merely had a name for living faith; she was actually dead. Both included Christians who compromised with the world and its immorality, but whereas these were only a minority in Pergamum, they seem to have been the majority in Sardis (2:13-15; 3:1, 4).

These matching pairs impart a downward tilt to the whole seven, and this "tilt" contradicts the fond hopes still entertained by postmillennialist believers that the world will be Christian when the Lord comes. We should rejoice indeed at the buoyancy of gospel Christianity in Africa and its vigorous expansion throughout Latin America and parts of Asia. But the seven letters do not corroborate the hope that these gospel triumphs – wonderful as they are – will be the seedbed of a world ready to greet the Lord at His coming.

Rather, the pattern of matching pairs makes these seven letters centre on Thyatira, the church that tolerated a prophetess labelled "Jezebel", who seduced the servants of Christ into committing immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (2:20-21). This seems to say that, once the story of the church is complete, it will be stamped with the name "Thyatira". If humanism is the ultimate idolatry, then this tolerating spirit of Thyatira is surely already evident to a degree in the professing church today.

The letters to Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia include clear allusions to the Lord's coming (2:25; 3:3, 11). These were actual churches; the first readers of Revelation would read in them reminders that the Lord might come at any time. Twenty centuries later these allusions tell us that these churches, plus Laodicea for whom the Lord conspicuously does not come, exemplify the state of the church when He comes. We would like to be Philadelphia, but is Sardis nearer the mark?

T. BALDERSTON

# Heaven on earth?

## John 14 & 17

Theo Balderston

*An earlier article on the denial of the heavenly calling appeared in the April, 2015, issue, pp.275ff. The writer did not continue the series because he thought he had exaggerated the prevalence of the error. He now rather thinks the opposite.*

A denial of the heavenly calling is sweeping across the evangelical movement. This doctrine maintains that, even although “when we die we shall go to heaven”, heaven will be only our temporary “transit station” until the resurrection of the just, at which point we will receive our glorified bodies and accompany the Lord at His glorious appearing. At that time the throne of God will be, so to speak, transferred from heaven to earth, and we shall spend eternity on the renewed earth. Our new-creation task will be to perform in perfection the mandate that old-Adam’s race miserably failed in, i.e., “tending the garden” – except that in that day Eden will extend to cover the whole earth. For brevity I will refer to this doctrine as “terrestrialism”.

Central to this denial of the heavenly calling is the revival of an old interpretation of John 14:2-3,

“In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (NKJV).

The verb “I go” is in the aorist, and speaks of a single event. But the “I will come again”, is a present tense in the original, and could be understood as a present continuous – “I keep coming again.” In this case, the next phrase needs to be understood to mean, “... and will receive [each of] you to myself.” The context, however does not support this interpretation. For the Lord’s words began, “Let not your heart [not, “hearts”, as in numerous translations] be troubled.” He is addressing them as a unit, and so can regard their several “hearts” as one. And so, likewise, He is regarding them as a unit in respect of His coming again. Rather, the present tense of “I come again”, emphasises the constant imminence of the Lord’s coming.

Terrestrialists also argue that the word “abode” (translated “mansion” in the KJV tradition) means “temporary stopping-place”.

This cannot be. For the same word for “abode” (*monē*) recurs in 14:23, “...If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him” (Darby Tr.). “Keep my word” denotes a settled characteristic, to which corresponds a settled taking-up of “abode” with that person. There is not the thought here of a temporary presence, a presence that the disciple is always liable to lose. The definition of *monē* in the standard New-Testament Greek lexicon does not include the thought of temporariness, but only “state of remaining, tarrying”, and “a place in which one stays, dwelling-place”. The standard classical Greek lexicon does give “stopping place” as a secondary meaning, but its primary meaning as “abiding”, “tarrying”. Something very definite in the context of John 14:3 would be needed to assign to *monē* the meaning of “temporary stopping-place”; however there is nothing in the context to suggest the thought of our “moving on” *after* the Lord has “received [us] to Himself”.

More importantly, assigning a “temporary” sense to “abode” in John 14:2 involves a complete misunderstanding of the whole of John 13 – 17.

A break in John’s Gospel occurs at the end of chapter 12. The first twelve chapters of John’s Gospel are about the Only-One who eternally *is* in the bosom of the Father revealing God in this world (see 1:18). But chapter 13 commences with the words, “Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end” (Darby Tr.). The period of His sojourn with the disciples, in which He had “come as a light into the world”, was ending, and another period, during which He would have “depart[ed] out of the world to the Father”, was imminent. He loved them “to the uttermost”, as proved by the cross, but He would be leaving them in the world without Him. “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek me, and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you” (13:33, NKJV).

This word appalled Peter, who, when many so-called disciples had defected from the Lord, had asked, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” (John 6:68-9). Peter had been the disciple who, in principle at least, had preferred to be outside the boat in rough seas with Jesus, than inside the boat without Him. Even his eagerness to enter the high priest’s courtyard after the Lord’s arrest, however misconceived, would demonstrate the same desire. But here He was being told that shortly this would not be possible anymore!

The disciples' dismay led to the Lord's words at the start of chapter 14: "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me." Peter and the other ten had long trusted in the invisible God. But now they were going to have to similarly trust in an unseen, ascended Lord. The rest of chapter 14 through to the end of chapter 16 are really about that great change. I think this makes the best sense of the verse.<sup>1</sup>

Then the Lord went on to utter the words already considered, "In my Father's house there are many abodes" (Darby). There is an allusion here to 1 Kings 6:5 concerning the building of Solomon's temple, "Against the wall of the temple he built chambers all around, etc." And David expressed a thought resembling John 14:2 when he said, "And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:6).

Then the Lord added, "I go to prepare a place for you." The parting announced in 13:33 would be temporary: they were going to join Him there And it was His very going there that prepared the place, so the temporary parting was necessary even for their sakes.

Then come the critical words "And if I go... I come again to receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (14:3). There are two main "places" in John's Gospel: "this world", and "heaven", and heaven is where the Father's house is. See John 1:32; 3:27; 6:33; 8:23; 12:28, 31, etc. In order to go to the Father, the Lord had to depart out of this world (13:1). And in order to prepare a place for them He had to depart out of the world.

This matter of changed location is central to the "upper-room discourse". The key text is the verse with which the Lord in effect concluded that discourse before turning to prayer. "I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father (John 16:28). The light dawned, so to speak, on the disciples when He said these words. They said, "See now You are speaking plainly" (16:29). At last they understood the whole dynamic, if one may so say, of His mission. In one, single downstooping – unique in the whole history of eternity – He had "come forth from the Father" and descended to this dark world (1:5) for the purpose of revealing God to it, and of both judging and saving it through His death (3:16; 12:31-32, 47ff). But in 16:28 the Lord looks beyond the cross towards His return to the Father: "again I leave the world and go to the Father". And at that point, when He is at the Father's side again, the whole dynamic ceases, as far as John teaches us.

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<sup>1</sup> An equally possible translation of the text is, "Believe in God, believe also in me." See, e.g., ESV, but not NIV<sup>2011</sup>.

John 16:28 stretches from eternity to eternity. Therefore when the Lord receives His own “to Himself” this does not mean, that He receives them to a temporary sojourn in heaven pending a future relocation back to this world as their eternal home. Rather, for them the dynamic of salvation will cease there too. His home will eternally be theirs too.

Therefore, anyone who maintains that our Lord’s ascension in John is only temporary, pending a relocation of the divine presence to the new earth, has missed the central flow and force of John’s Gospel. The eternal conclusion of the Lord’s “missionary journey of love” into the world is the same as its eternal starting point. Certainly the same inspired writer tells us that the Lord will return to this world in manifest glory so that every eye shall see Him (Revelation 1:7). But the “again I leave the world and go to the Father” tells us that, His coming glorious appearing notwithstanding, this earth will never again be His dwelling-place.

The Lord reinforces His purpose with the phrase, “that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). This word of the Lord is the final, eternal opposite to the “Where I go you cannot come” of 13:33. It is also the answer to the brief experience of the two disciples in chapter 1:36-39, who, on hearing John the Baptist’s word, “Behold the Lamb of God,” detached themselves from John and followed the Lord, asking Him, “Rabbi, where are You staying?” They went and stayed with Him, but only till the tenth hour. The period spent with the Lord Jesus could only be finite in this world; but in 14:3 the Lord speaks of a dwelling with Him that will be eternal. The great goal for the believer in John’s Gospel is therefore being with Him, where He is. Contrary to the terrestrialists, there is not a goal beyond that.

The Lord repeats the phrase, “that where I am there you may be also” towards the end of the great prayer with which He concluded His upper-room discourse. He said

“Father, I will that that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (17:24, KJV).

There are thus two occurrences of “be with me, where I am”, one close to the commencement, and the other close to the conclusion, of the “upper-room discourse and prayer”. This phrase, so to speak, brackets this great section of John’s Gospel. The hope of being with the Lord where He is would be the hope that would propel them forward throughout the entire period of their

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separation from Him. It is a hope whose certainty of fulfilment rests on its being the will of the eternal Son, co-equal with the Father.<sup>2</sup>

John 17:24 also harks back to 17:5, where the Lord asks the Father to restore Him to the glory that He had shared with Him before all creation. The glory requested could only be *identical* to that pre-creational glory if shared *in the place where* it had originally been shared. And before all creation there was nowhere else to share it but heaven!

And similarly with the “given glory” that the disciples are to behold according to 17:24. What they will glimpse will be a reflection of the glory of 17:5, one that will tell of the Father’s love for the Son. More they cannot see (cp. Matthew 11:27). But they have to be “with Him, where He is” to glimpse it. And where will He be? At the Father’s side, in the very place where He had shared eternal Godhead-glory with the Father before time began.

Putting this another way, John 14:3 does not mean, “... that *wherever* I am, there you may be also”. The location where He is preparing a place for them is specific, “in my Father’s house” (14:2). Likewise, John 17:24 does not mean, “Father I will that they also... be with me *wherever* I am...” The location is precisely defined by v.13, “But now I come to You...” It was the – rarely expressed – will of the eternal, co-equal Son of the Father that four ill-educated fishermen, an ex-Jihadist (i.e., ex-Zealot), two tax-collectors, six other nobodies, Mary Magdalene, the woman of Luke 7, three beggars, a former violent criminal, and a motley assortment of others such as you (I hope!) and I, should dwell with Him eternally in His Father’s house, witnessing a glory that reveals the eternal love of God the Father for God the Son! And it needed Him to die on a cross for that to happen! What more could grace do? And some, in their anxiety to be doing eternally the things the world counts worthy, disbelieve it.

The statement in Revelation 21:3, that the eternal dwelling-place of God will be with man, does not mean that God will, if one may so say, abandon heaven, any more than the dwelling-place of God with Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 25:8, etc.) meant this. But this subject demands an article on its own.

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<sup>2</sup> “It is to be interpreted *I will*; for *I would desire* is too weak a rendering. Jesus asks with the right of a claim, and demands with confidence, as the Son, not a servant” (J.A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1866), vol. ii, p. 467; a translation of an original of 1742).

# The preparation of Elisha

Yannick Ford

*Scriptures:* 1 Kings 19:14-21; 2 Kings 2:1-3, 9-18

Elisha is a remarkably Christ-like character. Indeed, I found it almost unnerving, when first reading in 2 Kings 4, how he fed one hundred men with twenty barley loaves. It seemed as if such things belonged to the Gospels, only to be performed by the hands of Christ. God willing, I intend to write further on this miracle and other aspects of Elisha's life in subsequent articles, but what we can see from the Scriptures is that the Holy Spirit moves men and women to display the grace and the glory of God.

Some of them are faithful exponents of His character, like Elisha, whereas others also display the working of the flesh, such as Samson. And so we observe, more or less clearly, aspects of God's character revealed in men and women. We thus learn to understand what God is like. As we read through the Old Testament, and then into the Gospels, we come to the only true, perfect and exact representation of God, our Lord Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3), the Son of Man conceived by the Spirit, and on whom the Holy Spirit could truly rest (John 1:29-34).

In 1 Kings 19 we see that the great prophet Elijah had been deeply discouraged, but God had given him new commissions, including that of anointing his successor, Elisha. Elijah acted in faith and obedience and did as he was instructed. Why was Elisha selected as his successor? It was the sovereign choice of God, as we read in 1 Kings 19:16 – “And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place” (NKJV). We are not told whether or not Elisha had been forewarned or prepared for this role; certainly verses 20-21 of 1 Kings 19 suggest that it was a great surprise to him. The Scriptures show us that others have been similarly sovereignly chosen for special roles, for instance Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-5) and Paul (Galatians 1:15-16).

It would be true to say, however, that Elisha had certainly been prepared, although he had probably no consciousness of it. He was working hard, ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen (1 Kings 19:19). He resembles Moses in Exodus 3:1, who was looking after Jethro's flock, or Gideon, who was threshing

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wheat in a winepress (Judges 6:11-12), or David, who was keeping his father's sheep (1 Samuel 16:11), all of whom were called to important roles. When once reading a commentary on Judges, I was struck by the account of Gideon who was employed in providing food for his family during a time when all food was being destroyed by the enemy. It was at that time that the Angel of the Lord appeared to him. It seems that those selected by God in the Scriptures were those who had already applied themselves to feeding and caring for others.

Perhaps there are times when we wonder what our calling might be. Maybe we feel that time is passing and that we are not sure of our task, or how we should best use the talents that have been entrusted to us. Elisha, along with Moses, Gideon, and David, are an encouragement to us – we can apply ourselves to caring for, and feeding those in our present circumstances, and this will prepare us for whatever the Lord may have for us.

If Elisha was surprised by Elijah's actions in 1 Kings 19:19, we can see from verse 21 that he nevertheless enthusiastically embraced his new calling. As one commentary put it, the use of the yokes and of the oxen to prepare a feast showed that he was saying goodbye to his former occupation. He resembles Matthew the tax collector, who gave a great feast for his former associates after his calling by the Lord Jesus, as recorded in Luke 5:27-29.

The end of 1 Kings 19:21 simply states, "Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant." Elisha did not immediately take over from Elijah, but rather learned from him during a period of training. It is very rare for us to immediately become very good at something, much as we might like it to be that way! Most things in life require practice and patience.

*Most things in life require practice and patience.  
It is no different with spiritual training.*

*God waited until Paul and Barnabas had worked together  
for some time before the Holy Spirit  
made His choice explicit to the assembly at Antioch.*

It is no different with spiritual training. Consider Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 13:2, we read, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” If we compare that passage to Galatians 1:15 that I referred to earlier, we see that God had already planned at a much earlier stage to separate Paul for this work – “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace...” But God waited until Paul and Barnabas had worked together for some time before the Holy Spirit made His choice explicit to the assembly at Antioch.

Eventually the time came for Elisha to fully take over from Elijah, as we read in 2 Kings 2:1-18. In this chapter we see how Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire. Elisha and the sons of the prophets had some awareness that this was going to happen, but Elisha only kept close to Elijah, and he made an interesting request when asked by Elijah as to what might be done for him: “And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?’ Elisha said, ‘Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.’ So he said, ‘You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so’” (2 Kings 2:9-10).

Commentators point out that the request of the double portion of the spirit referred back to Deuteronomy 21:17, in which the first born had a double portion of the inheritance, “and therefore Elisha’s request was, simply, to be heir to the prophetic office and gifts of his master.”<sup>1</sup> This was the role for Elisha that the Lord had indicated to Elijah, but once again, we do not see that Elisha remained passive, simply expecting this to happen as a matter of course. Instead, he was told that he would receive this blessing if he *saw* the translation of Elijah. It was not in Elijah’s power to give this, but he could advise Elisha on what would be required to receive it from the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Jamieson, Fausset and Brown. Freely available online from a variety of sources, for instance Blue Letter Bible, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/jfb/2Ki/2Ki\\_002.cfm?a=315009](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/jfb/2Ki/2Ki_002.cfm?a=315009)

*The first action of Elisha was one of faith.  
He struck the waters with Elijah's mantle.*

Rossier points out that this condition suggests that *watchfulness* was the key.<sup>2</sup> Elisha clearly was watchful, as the next events in the account prove to us, and verse 15 shows that the sons of the prophets recognised the results of his watchfulness: “Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him.”

The first action of Elisha was one of faith. He struck the waters with Elijah's mantle, and was able to cross over. This is in contrast to the sons of the prophets, who seem to have only half-believed what God had done for Elijah. In 2 Kings 2:3 they said, “Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?” However, in verses 16-18, they persuaded Elisha to allow them to go and search for Elijah, in case he had been dropped into some valley! It is easy to criticise them, but we can rather learn from Elisha, and many others in the Scriptures, that faith is the way to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

*Elisha was a man with our nature,  
who started off working to feed his family,  
and ended as a great man of faith and grace.*

We are told in the Scriptures that “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours” as an encouragement to persist in prayer (James 5:17). Elisha too was a man with our nature, who started off working to feed his family, and ended as a great man of faith and grace. We can imitate him in his good example, and let ourselves be encouraged by the words of our Lord to Peter, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17).

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<sup>2</sup> H.L. Rossier, *Meditations on 2 Kings* (Sunbury, PA, Believers Bookshelf, 1988), p.24. Available at <https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/rossier/2KINGS.html#a02>

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## Our children

Lord, for our children do we plead,  
the children You have given:  
where should we go in time of need  
but to the God of heaven?

Small children did You glad embrace,  
while dwelling here below,  
oh! on our children, God of grace,  
the same compassion show!

We ask for them not wealth or fame,  
to win in worldly strife,  
but, in Your all-prevailing Name,  
we ask eternal life.

Oh, make them constant to resist  
the worldly snares, we pray;  
and make them to the end persist  
in every righteous way.

We crave the Spirit's quickening grace,  
to turn their hearts to prayer,  
to walk each day before Your face,  
and please you everywhere.

*After Thomas Hastings, 1784-1872 [?].*

# The thorny issue of predestination

## Part I

**Ken Wood**

*This excellent article originated as a part of a “Truth for Today” talk broadcast on Premier Radio and other outlets. It should be read together with the second part (to follow).*

My aim in this article and (God willing) its sequel is to try to explain what the Bible teaches about “election” and “predestination”.

We’d better begin this article by defining these two words. Let’s deal with election first. It’s the more common thought in the Scriptures, and it’s a word we’re all familiar with. The meaning of an *election*, in the political sense, is a *choice*. Voters choose between competing candidates or political parties. And the meaning of the word in the Bible is the same. It means “choice”.

But when we talk about election as a biblical doctrine, we mean that *God* has made the choice, in particular that He has chosen, or picked out, certain people to receive His blessing.

So what is the meaning of “predestination”? Predestination is God putting into effect the results of election. If God has, for example, chosen in advance who is going to go to heaven, then we could say that their destiny is already decided. They have been “predestined” to that end.

And now, although this article is barely started, I think it must already be obvious that the biblical doctrines of election and predestination present difficulties to the minds of most people. I could of course dodge that issue by simply highlighting the Bible passages on this matter, and leaving the reader to sort out the difficulties. But I don’t intend to do that. The Bible needs to be explained, and I would not be doing justice to this topic if I didn’t address those questions and difficulties. Hopefully, by the conclusion of this article and its sequel I will leave the reader with a resolution of these issues, one that brings

*Election means that God  
has chosen certain people to receive His blessing.  
Predestination is  
God putting into effect the results of election.*

glory to God, and peace to our hearts. I must urge the reader, however, to read both articles. The first is incomplete without the second.

This is not going to be an easy ride, but what I plan to do is firstly to set out what I believe the Bible really does teach about these subjects; then (in the second article) to recognise that the Bible also says other things, things which seem, to our minds at any rate, to be incompatible with them; and then, finally, to put to you, the reader, a way of looking at this entire question which, to me at any rate, makes the difficulty evaporate and leaves us giving glory to God.



Firstly, then, what *does* the Bible actually say? Election is mentioned quite a lot in the Bible, but I'm going to base this article on just one passage, Romans 9:10b-24. However before doing that I wish to draw attention to Ephesians 1:3-6, because that passage specifically mentions both election (God having chosen us) and predestination.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved” (ESV).

But now we must attend to Romans 9:10b-24, which to my mind is *the* passage where the guts of the doctrine of election are gone into. Whilst the word “predestination” is not mentioned, the idea of it is clearly present:

“<sup>10b</sup>...when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup>though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad – in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls – <sup>12</sup>she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger’.<sup>13</sup> As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’

<sup>14</sup> What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!

<sup>15</sup>For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ <sup>16</sup>So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’

<sup>18</sup>So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ <sup>20</sup>But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ <sup>21</sup>Has the

potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use? <sup>22</sup>What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath [fitted] for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – <sup>24</sup>even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?”

I doubt that you could find, anywhere in the Bible, a clearer statement of the absolute sovereignty of God. God has the absolute right (we are being told here) like the potter moulding the clay, to make of each of us whatever He chooses.

On some He chooses to have mercy, and yet on others He does not, and if we burst out in protest and say, “But, but, but ... that’s not fair!”, then the response is, “Who are you to answer back to God?” (9:20).

We’re going to look in a moment at what we might call “the fine print” of this passage – at what precisely it does say and what it doesn’t say – but before we do that, we should just reflect for a moment as to why the assertion of God’s absolute right to do whatever He sees fit provokes such indignation.

I suggest to you the following reason. Modern man has long since lost sight of how horrific sin is, and of how far away from God we (that is, as members of present-day society) really are. Although we may be believers, all too often our own thinking is moulded by the climate of thought around us.

Perhaps the first step along the road to understanding the subject before us is to face up to a terrible reality – a devastating reality, but reality nonetheless. It is that for God to condemn anyone to hell is not in the least degree unfair. He has every justification for doing just that. So then for anyone to escape His wrath can only be by an act of astonishing mercy on His part.

With that as our starting point, let’s now look at the precise wording of Romans 9:22-23. I quoted this passage in the *English Standard Version*, and some readers may possibly have spotted something. They may have noticed that I changed a word.

The *English Standard Version* says that the vessels of wrath in Romans 9:22 were “prepared” for destruction, and that the vessels of mercy in 9:23 were “prepared” for glory. But I changed the first of these “prepareds” to “fitted”, and I believe there is very good reason to do so.

The two words translated “prepared” are two entirely different words in the Greek original, so, for a start, translating them by the same English word obscures that distinction. More importantly, to say that the vessels of wrath

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were “prepared” for destruction links that statement with what is said immediately afterwards about the vessels of mercy, that is, that God prepared *them* for glory; and so can easily leave the reader with the impression that God has similarly prepared the vessels of wrath for destruction. But this is what the scripture is careful *not* to say. It says they are fitted for it, that is, completely ready and suitable for that end (ripe for judgment, we might say), but it does *not* say that *God* prepared or fitted them for it.<sup>1</sup> They were fitted for destruction by their own rebellion against God.

The absolute precision of the inspired word of God should constantly call forth our wonder and admiration. I believe that Scripture never actually says that God has predestined anyone to hell. Predestination is always spoken of in connection with blessing. It is therefore sound biblical exegesis (“rightly handling the word of truth”, to quote 2 Timothy 2:15) to make the following two statements:

- 1 If we end up in hell it is because we deserve it, not because God has predestined us to it; and
- 2 If we end up in heaven it is because God has exercised His great sovereign prerogative and has chosen to have mercy upon us.

Now this still leaves us with the basic mystery of why God has chosen to have mercy only on some, and not on all. Answering that belongs to the second article in this series. For the present, I suspect that I may need to deal with objections to the claim I’ve just made, namely, that Scripture never actually says that God has predestined anyone for judgment.



There are indeed several statements in this very passage which come very close to saying that. It likens God to the potter making one vessel to honour and

<sup>1</sup> This understanding of the two words is supported by the scholarly commentators. [Ed.]

*If we end up in hell  
it is because we deserve it.  
If we end up in heaven  
it is because God  
has chosen to have mercy upon us.*

another to dishonour (v.21). Isn't it saying that He has the right to do the same with us?

Yes, it *does* say He has the right to do this. It *does not* say He has ever exercised this right! In fact, in the very verse we have been discussing – 9:22 – it says that God “has endured with much patience those vessels of wrath which have been fitted for destruction.” That seems to suggest that it was far from God’s purpose or intention that they should be destroyed. They were fitted by their own rebellion for wrath, but God is, so to speak, bending over backwards to leave every possible opportunity for them to repent and escape His wrath.

Secondly, what do we make of what Paul says about Pharaoh in Romans 9:17? The reference is to Exodus 9:16, to what God said to Pharaoh between the sixth and seventh of the ten plagues. By this time in the history of the Exodus Pharaoh has already made abundantly clear his implacable opposition to God, and his fixed intention never to obey Him. What I believe we see here is an example of a very solemn thing. It is what is sometimes called “judicial hardening”. It is not that God purposed *from the beginning* for Pharaoh to be swept away in divine judgment, and thereby “to show His power in [Pharaoh]... that [His] name might be proclaimed in all the earth” – as Romans 9:17 says. It is rather that, sadly, someone might take a stance so immovably opposed to God that God, as it were, abandons hope (if that is the right way to put it) that they will ever repent. What God is saying to Pharaoh, through Moses, in Exodus 9:16, is, “All right then, seeing that you are determined never to obey Me, I will allow you to go on to even greater lengths in your opposition to Me, in order that I may demonstrate in your final downfall that My purposes cannot be frustrated by even the most determined of men”.

And then, what about “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”? (Romans 9:13) Here Paul is quoting from Malachi 1:2-3. If instead it read, “Jacob I chose but Esau I rejected,” we would simply see it as a confirmation, from a much later stage in biblical history, of God’s original sovereign choice to bless Jacob rather than his older brother. The difficulty lies in the word, “hated.”

What I suspect is that we have to understand the word “hated” in terms of this particular context. It is akin to what the Lord meant in Luke 14:26, when He said that no one could be His disciple who didn’t hate their closest relatives. No one suggests that He was actually advocating hatred in the normal sense of the word. What He was saying was that if you wish to be His disciple, you must give Him absolute and unquestioning priority over every other love and every other loyalty in your life, so much so that your affections for everyone else will appear as hatred in comparison with your love for Him.

So here, I believe, the phrase is just an extreme way of stating that God chose Jacob and not Esau.

So much, then, for the undoubted truth of divine election, But there is another side of the coin. The most famous verse in the Bible states that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). *Whoever!* That’s as wide as mankind. Yet we believe that the one mind of God runs through the entire Bible. Both sides – God’s election, and God’s free and genuine offer of salvation to *all* – therefore must be true. But how can this be? A second article, God willing, will try to show that there are things we cannot explain, but are right to accept.

*Pharaoh is an example of “judicial hardening”.*



*It is not that God purposed from the beginning  
for Pharaoh to be swept away in divine judgment.*

# Trust during trial

## Psalm 57, Part 2

George Stevens

*This first part of this study appeared in the January issue. There is much blessing in pondering the detailed imagery and abrupt changes of tone in this psalm, and above all the parallels between David and the Lord Jesus.*

Psalm 57 is a “michtam”, like five others, most likely meaning that it was to be engraved on durable material. Its contents were to be *preserved*, and so we should study it too! It preserves David’s feelings when he “fled from Saul in the cave” (title) – most likely when Saul had him trapped in the wilderness of Engedi (1 Samuel 24). Here, amazingly, Saul entered that very cave alone, and David was able, without Saul knowing it, to slice off a corner of his robe. Afterwards David could use this corner to prove his respect for Saul’s life, as the Lord’s Anointed.

The psalm reveals the inner rationale in David’s godly mind for his remarkable action. He was “in a jam” and his mind, naturally speaking, in a turmoil. but he found shelter under God’s “wings” in the certainty of faith that He would deliver him – a certainty doubtless based on his having been divinely anointed king through the agency of Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1, 13). In all this we can see David foreshadowing the Lord Jesus Himself, the “Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, KJV). And in Him we, too, are recipients of a greater hope than any earthly kingdom, of an incorruptible inheritance through resurrection (1 Peter 1:4). And “our times are in [God’s] hand. Why should we doubt or fear?” Easy to say; very hard to practise. This study should help us to deal with our anxieties.

### 3. Pressures and praise (vv.4-6)

Verse 4 focusses on David’s enemies. “My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men...”

David had been betrayed. Saul knew the area in which he was hiding, and with three thousand of his men he surrounded “the rocks of the wild goats” (1 Samuel 24:2). David describes Saul’s men as “lions set on fire” – unequalled hunters, and keen for prey after so long a hunt. No doubt they would scour every hiding place in the area to root him out. The “teeth”, used to snatch and tear, were their spears and arrows. The “tongues”, used for licking and eating, were their swords - weapons for conflict at close quarters.

*“Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens...”  
God was David’s refuge.*

These analogies remind us of features common to the natural man: “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness...” (Romans 3:13-14).

But in the first part of verse 5 we encounter, not an escape plan or strategy for defeating Saul, but praise. “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens...” *God* was David’s refuge, and God would turn defeat into victory. This is what would exalt God above the heavens. In this victory, the celestial beings would see His wisdom and power.

We then find the prayer continuing: “...Let thy glory be above all the earth.” Often in ancient times men would seek to do courageous things in battle in order that their names would be honoured down the ages. Here David desires the outshining of the excellence of God to exceed any glory given to men. He was asking God to save him wonderfully for the glory of His own name. Men would see this and give praise to God. How often do we pray in such a way that the answer will be to the glory of God’s name?

The Lord Jesus always sought to glorify God. If we pray in His name, then we should pray according to that Name, and identify ourselves with His will. Then we can do what He directs and what is stamped with His authority – in order that God be glorified.

Verse 6 begins with the words, “They have prepared a net for my steps...” The three thousand soldiers combing the area for David were Saul’s snare, just like a fowler catching birds. In a similar way the Pharisees consulted together how they might entangle Christ in His words (Matthew 22:15). And in plotting His arrest, “[they] consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” (Matthew 26:4).

*“Let thy glory be above all the earth.”  
How often do we pray in such a way  
that the answer will be to the glory of God’s name?*

*“They have prepared a net for my steps...”  
In a similar way the Pharisees consulted together  
how they might entangle Christ in His words.*

In the rest of verse 6 David expresses his feelings as these “lions” were out to catch him: “...My soul is bowed down.” After all, he was hunted without cause (cp. Psalm 69:4). Quoting this last verse Jesus said, “But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause” (John 15:25). The soul of Christ was sorrowful unto death as He was being pursued to death by religious leaders (Matthew 26:38). Their “greater sin” (John 19:11) must have grieved Him greatly.

Elijah, for whom queen Jezebel had issued a death-warrant, fled into the wilderness, sat beneath a juniper tree, and there, “requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life” (1 Kings 19:4). Just previously he had gained a mighty victory at Carmel! But now, fearing he was the only God-fearing person left, he was in the depths of despair. When circumstances deeply discourage us, it helps us if we recollect that saints of old who felt discouraged found that God was still with them.

But then David’s mood suddenly changes. He continues: “...They have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves” (v.6). The picture is of a trap dug to capture walking animals and usually disguised with branches or other materials.

But Proverbs 26:27 states, “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.” Penned in by his enemies, David had hid in a large cave. However God arranged the circumstances in such a way that king Saul came into that very cave to rest. And what could have indeed become the very calamity that David feared turned into deliverance, due to his own godly respect for the man who was still the Lord’s Anointed (see 1 Samuel 24:6). While Saul snoozed, David crept up and cut off part of his skirt (“robe”, NKJV). Upon leaving the cave Saul was hailed by David, who revealed that he could have slain Saul if he had so wished. David showed the piece of clothing to prove his words. Saul was humbled, and acknowledged that David was more righteous than he, and that the kingdom would be David’s (1 Samuel 24:8-20).  
*Selah!*

*Recognizing the presence, power,  
and sovereignty of God,  
David's heart overflows with confidence in Him.*

#### 4. Trust and tributes (vv.7-11)

David begins this concluding section of the psalm with the words, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed...” He emphasizes his established trust in God by repeating the clause. Recognizing the presence, power, and sovereignty of God, his heart overflows with confidence in Him.

He then proceeds to praise, “I will sing and give praise.” There are a number of words for “praise” in the Old Testament. They include “to hymn”, “to celebrate”, “to adulate”, and, quite commonly, “to use the hand”, this last showing how the hands were raised towards the Lord in heaven. However the particular word for “praise” in Psalm 57:7 is, literally, “to touch a musical instrument” (Strong). Therefore David here seems to mean “singing praise with a musical accompaniment” (see v.8).

In the New Testament “praise” has meanings similar to “commend”.<sup>1</sup> It is to give honour to God in respect of His Person and His works. The worship of the Father in the New Testament is “in spirit...” (John 4:23-24). This means that no artefacts or aids are needed: the worship comes from sincere hearts. We are encouraged to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16). We may do this with “psalms” (which are generally founded on experience), “hymns” (which address worship and praise directly to God), and “spiritual songs” (by which the Spirit teaches us about the things of God).

The use of musical instruments today depends upon the circumstances. For example, if we are in a gathering presided over by the Spirit of God, instruments would be completely inappropriate. If they are used in the gospel meeting to aid the singing (especially if unbelievers are present and may not know the hymns) there may be limited objection.

*“Praise” is to give honour to God  
in respect of His Person and His works.*

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<sup>1</sup> See W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London, 1939), under “Commend” and “Praise”. [Ed.]

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However when music is used to make services more attractive, or as a bait to draw in people, it becomes, as Darby has stated, “an unholy and evil practice.” It is deceitful. This attitude inevitably leads to worldliness invading the gatherings, which are then in danger of becoming places of entertainment rather than places of Christian testimony and worship.

Let us take Ephesians 5:19 to heart, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Here “making melody in your heart” takes the place of instrumental music.



Wake up! David then speaks to his own soul, saying, “Awake up, my glory” (Psalm 57:8). In Genesis 49:6 we read of Jacob saying, “O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united...” The word “honour”, here is that usually translated “glory”. Jacob considered his soul to be his glory. And similarly David here in Psalm 57:8.

David’s soul must have been sorrowful indeed when he commanded his glory to “awake”! He is telling his soul to put sorrow aside and rejoice in the Lord. And the Lord Jesus Himself said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death” (Mark 14:34). Yet it was because of the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2).

In the middle of verse 8 we find, “Awake, psaltery and harp.” Both psaltery (or, lyre) and harp often accompanied praise in song. See for example Psalms 33:2 and 71:22.

Verse 8 ends with, “I myself will awake early.” The words may be translated, “I will awake the dawn” (Young’s Literal Translation). Just as the birds announce the dawn with their singing, David would announce it with praise for the Lord. David, no doubt exhausted through much running from Saul, was ready for sleep; but he was prepared to wake up early to have communion with the Lord. It is written prophetically of Christ in Isaiah 50:4-5, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear

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but he was prepared to wake up early  
to have communion with the Lord.*

to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.” This “waking” is a mark of the attitude of the True Disciple.

“I will praise Thee among the people” (Psalm 57:9). The word for “people” here refers to people as gathered together, in this instance, the people of Israel. Today, we may assemble to address God, the Father or the Son, in song. Indeed, we are required not to forsake the gathering of ourselves together (cp. Hebrews 10:25).

David continues, “I will sing unto thee among the nations.” He also intends to praise the Lord among the nations. It seems clear that David, through the Scriptures he had to hand, knew that God would gain people of faith from among the nations. Also, this may portray the time of the millennial rule of Christ, when God will be revered by the nations as well as by Israel.

Verse 10 reads, “For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds.” The kindness of God extends to the heavens, in the sense that David had shown mercy to Saul in sparing his life. The truth that reaches the sky refers to David’s words to Saul after the latter had left the cave – the true, or faithful, words in which he declared his intention never to harm Saul, and upon which Saul himself bore witness that David was righteous (1 Samuel 24:17, 19). By his faithful actions, David had glorified God. David was indeed a man after God’s heart.

And the Lord Jesus could say to His Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

The psalmist continues, in verse 11, “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens.” David is saying to God, “Show thyself to be God, above all the inhabitants of the heavens.” God is supreme – above every principality and power. He alone is the object of honour.

The psalm concludes with, “[Let] thy glory [be] above all the earth.” It could be paraphrased, “Let the glory of God in my deliverance be seen by all that dwell upon the earth.” And may we too, in this day of grace, have a sincere desire to praise the Lord with the same zeal and faithfulness as David.

*Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens.  
Show thyself to be God,  
above all the inhabitants of the heavens.*

# Genesis 18 & 19

F.B.Hole

*Continuing a series commenced in July 2017.*

In Genesis 17 the LORD had appeared to Abraham in order to confirm His covenant regarding Abraham's seed, and, specifically, the fulfilment, at last, of His promise to Abraham of an heir. Abraham's response to God's sevenfold "I will" in this passage was to be the circumcision of all his household (Genesis 17:10).<sup>1</sup> Abraham's prompt compliance with this (v.23) evidently invited another manifestation of the LORD to him very soon after, and, with this, chapter 18 opens.

This manifestation was unusual in character, and differed from any preceding appearance, inasmuch as "three men" approached, and "in the heat of the day" (18:1, KJV), just when no one would pay a visit in the ordinary way. Abraham's hospitality rose to the occasion, and angels were entertained unawares, as Hebrews 13:2 puts it – indeed more than this, for one of the Three was a manifestation of Jehovah Himself. The picture presented of patriarchal simplicity is striking and beautiful, and the heavenly Visitors partook of the refreshment provided.

Sarah herself was now to be tested, when in her hearing the LORD made the announcement of the imminent birth of a son to her. Her response was also a laugh, like Abraham's earlier response to the same news (see 17:17). She thought her laugh was hidden from others: unlike Abraham's, it evidently had an element of unbelief in it.<sup>2</sup> It was known to the Lord however, and she tried to deny it (18:12,15). Sarah's unbelieving question only drew from Him the great question, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (v.14) Nothing was too hard, for He had just recently revealed Himself to her husband as "the Almighty God" (17:1). But she had not yet grasped this truth. Jeremiah grasped it in his day (Jeremiah 32:17), and eventually Sarah did indeed grasp it, or we should not have the statement, "*Through faith* also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed" (Hebrews 11:11).

But the heavenly Visitors had not only come to confirm the wavering faith of Sarah. The LORD had other purposes in view. The Three set their faces toward Sodom (Genesis 18:16), and Abraham went with them for some distance. This gave occasion to the incident in which we see Abraham as the friend of God. A

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<sup>1</sup> See "Ishmael and Isaac", *Scripture Truth*, January 2020, pp. 124ff .

<sup>2</sup> For Hole's view that Abraham's laugh was one of faith, see the January, 2020, issue, pp.128f. [Ed.]

mere servant does not know what his lord does – as the Lord said in John 15:15 – whereas a friend has access to things kept secret from others. Hence Abraham is not to have hid from him that which the LORD was about to do in the judgment of the cities of the plain (Genesis 18:17). He was to be told about this, not only as a sheer privilege, but also because of his moral character and worth. He was privileged not only to become a great nation, but also to be the progenitor of the Messiah in whom all the nations would be blessed (cp. 22:18). Abraham’s character was such that the LORD could say, “I know him” – in the sense that He knew that Abraham would maintain what was right, not only personally, but also in his family and household. So later Isaiah, speaking on God’s behalf, could say, “Abraham my friend.” (Isaiah. 41:8; also 2 Chronicles 20:7).

Thus it was, that when two of the Three had proceeded on their way to Sodom, Abraham was permitted to speak to the Third, even to the LORD Himself, and even in order to reason with Him. Of all the cases recorded in the Old Testament where men were brought face to face with God, this instance stands alone, we think, in the intimacy and liberty enjoyed, coupled with absence of fear.

Abraham, secure in his own standing before the LORD, took the place of an intercessor. He reasoned before the LORD in the assurance that the Judge of all the earth would do right (Genesis 18:25). Abraham’s pleadings without doubt had Lot and his family in view. In the next chapter we read of Lot’s sons-in-law, so probably Abraham reckoned that Lot, together with his wife, unmarried daughters, and married daughters and their husbands, could add up to as many as ten persons in Sodom who could be accounted righteous. Hence, starting at fifty, and descending to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, Abraham concluded his intercession, satisfied, at ten. Chapter 19 shows that even ten were not to be found.

Even though Abraham knew such liberty in the LORD’s presence we find him, like all others who really have to do with God, deeply aware of his own sin and nothingness. We hear Job saying, “Behold, I am vile” (Job 40:3); Isaiah saying, “I am undone” (Isaiah 6:5); Peter saying, “I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8); Paul saying, “I am chief” [of sinners]” (1 Timothy 1:15). And Abraham says, “[I] am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27), and, as far as the Scripture record goes, he heads the list, the first to condemn himself in the presence of God. And he who thus condemned himself is the man called the friend of God. In both these respects, are we following in his train?

Abraham had remained in intercession before the LORD, not so much for the guilty cities of the plain as for the ten righteous that, as he hoped, were to be found in Sodom. In the evening of the same day the two “men” of Abraham’s Guests who had turned their faces toward Sodom arrived at Sodom’s gate (19:1). Now they are plainly disclosed as “two angels.” As they approached, Lot “was sitting in the gate of Sodom”, which signifies, of course, that he had accepted magisterial office in that “exceedingly wicked” city (cp. 13:13). This enables us to understand more fully how he “vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds,” as recorded in 2 Peter 2:7, 8. He not only saw and heard fearful evils as a private person, but came into contact with it all as a magistrate.

Bearing this in mind, our chapter is full of the most solemn warning for us all. He may have regarded his election to the judicial bench as an elevation, but it was in truth a sad fall, entailing dire consequences. We saw him at first pitching his tent toward Sodom (13:12). Then he dwelt in it and shared in its defeat (14:8-12). Now he has become a leader in it.

And with what effect? Has he prevailed to clean up its degraded morals, to improve its ethical standards? Not in the least! He has, as we shall see, only involved himself and his family in its evils. He had, however, preserved patriarchal politeness and hospitality, as we see in 19:1-3. Like Abraham, he, too, entertained angels unawares, but with totally different result from Abraham’s hospitality of the previous chapter. As night came on, his house was besieged by godless men, bent on monstrous evil (vv. 4-8). Lot’s attempt to pacify them by the sacrifice of his two unmarried daughters shows how low in his own mind he himself had sunk by reason of Sodom’s contamination. Lot’s position as judge now counted for nothing; indeed they flung it back at him as though he had been a mere usurper of the office (19:9). If he had flattered himself that he could exercise an influence for good, he was now undeceived.

As the contest reached a climax the angels intervened and took charge of the situation. Blinded by angelic power, the evildoers were baffled for that night, preliminary to their destruction on the morrow. Having disposed of them, the angels plainly told Lot that Sodom was to be destroyed, and he was given opportunity to get out, together with his family and all that he had (vv.10-13). In giving Lot this opportunity a full answer was supplied to the intercession of Abraham earlier that day. The contrast between Abraham interceding as a friend with God on the heights, and Lot, defiled and impotent in the worldly cities of the plain, may well be thoughtfully considered, and sink into all our hearts.

*Lot's sons-in-law thought he was joking.  
If I testify to the second Advent of Christ, will  
my manner of life lead my listeners to think I am joking?*

Lot now saw everything in a very different light from just the day before, and went forth to his sons-in-law to warn and deliver them (v.14). But to them he seemed “as one that mocked.” Notice, it does not say that they mocked him, but that they thought *he* was mocking, or making sport of, *them* – that really he was joking. Having come into Sodom and invested all he had in it, he could not now be taken seriously when he suddenly declared that the whole place was to be destroyed in a moment. His previous course of life wholly contradicted his present testimony. We shall do well if we each ask ourselves this question, “If I testify that the second Advent of Christ draws near, involving the judgment of the present world-system, will they take me seriously, or will my manner of life lead them to think that I am joking?”

The judgment was not going to slumber, so escape was urgent, and, leaving the married daughters and sons-in-law who had treated Lot’s warning as a joke, the angels constrained Lot, his wife, and the two unmarried daughters to flee. Such was the mercy of God to this true saint who nevertheless had fallen so low. Moreover his request to be allowed to shelter in the fifth and smallest city of the plain instead of fleeing to the mountain was granted (vv.17-20). Sodom would have been spared if only ten righteous persons had been in it. Zoar was spared because only one righteous man entered it. Such is the abounding mercy of our God, and His slowness to judge.

The word of the angel in verse 22 is worthy of note, “I cannot do anything till thou be come thither.” Why “cannot”? Not because power was lacking to act in judgment, but because it is a fixed principle of God’s ways that penal and eternal wrath is never to touch His people. The judgment of these cities was not merely a matter of governmental wrath, for penal wrath also was involved, as we see in Jude 7. The “vengeance of eternal fire” could not possibly touch Lot, since he was a “righteous man”, though a misguided one.

Lot having been dragged out (Genesis 19:16), the judgment fell from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah (v.24). Those who have examined that region in the light of modern discoveries as to oil and bitumen-bearing sites tell us it is quite easy to visualize what happened. Perhaps so, but the miracle consisted in fire from the LORD out of heaven starting the mighty conflagration and eruptions

that blasted these four cities out of existence and left their sites to this day “as an example to those that after should live ungodly” (2 Peter 2:6). The thought of the evil and its judgment has persisted, for the word, “sodomy” is found in our language as designating sin of a specially unnatural sort (cp. Romans 1:25-27). This judgment, moreover, was a sample of what is yet to come on a much greater scale in “the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

Four persons came out of Sodom – practically dragged out by the angels, as we saw in verse 16. But only three entered Zoar. Lot’s wife evidently left her heart in Sodom, and, her eyes following her heart, she looked back, became involved in the disaster, and perished under a deluge of salt. One of the shortest verses in the Bible records our Lord’s words, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). We may well “remember” her, and let the lessons of her end sink into our hearts. She was married to a true saint, she was prayed for by an eminent saint – Abraham – she came under the constraint of angels from heaven – yet she was lost. She had the unclean nature that loved the filthy garbage of Sodom. What vexed Lot evidently had attractions for her.

Verses 27-29 show us that Abraham was a man who watched unto prayer. He did not just express his desires and think no more about it. He resorted the next morning to the spot where he had prayed, and saw that God had fulfilled *His* word. Presently he was to learn that God had remembered his prayer, and that though ten righteous persons had not been found, Lot had been delivered.<sup>3</sup> The fervent prayer of a righteous man does indeed avail much (James 5:16), and Abraham’s prayer had been answered, though not in the way he had hoped and expected.

Lot’s faith was very feeble. Though Zoar had been spared for his sake, his fear was such that he forsook it for the mountain region that formerly he had dreaded. There he found a cave and in it, having lost all his substance, he dwelt with his two daughters. We take a sad farewell of him in the closing verses of our chapter. The two daughters were saved physically but were lost morally, for we are permitted to know that they had become infected with the immoral ways of Sodom. They brought dishonour on themselves and on their father, and brought into the world both Moab and Ammon, both of whom gave their names to peoples who in after days became opponents of the people of God.

An edited version of a study that first appeared in *Scripture Truth*, vol. 26 (1948-50), pp.159-60, 171-174.

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<sup>3</sup> Probably this is just the editor’s ignorance, but I couldn’t spot the verse that states that Abraham came to know of Lot’s deliverance.

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# Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs

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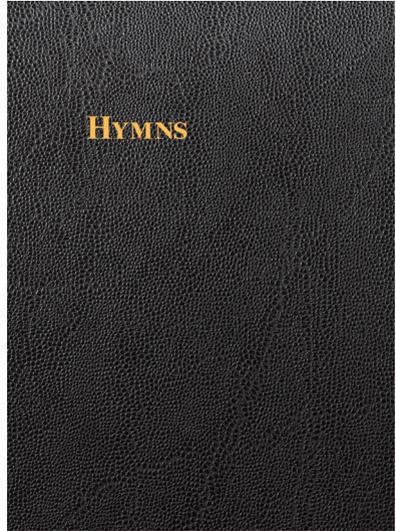
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- I    **O** LORD, we adore Thee,  
      For Thou art the slain One  
      That livest for ever,  
      Enthronèd in heaven;  
      O Lord, we adore Thee,  
      For Thou hast redeemed us;  
      Our title to glory  
      We read in Thy blood.
  
- 2    O God, we acknowledge  
      Thy greatness, Thy glory,  
      For of Thee are all things  
      On earth and in heaven;

How do you run, dear friend,  
in this long race of faith?  
Is your pace even-spread  
and in the state of grace?  
Do limbs, so weary, fail  
over the rugged ground?  
Does your stamina wane,  
or is it tough and sound?

What's that you're carrying—  
subjection to the law?  
Its burden put away  
and Christ alone adore.  
Does sin press in on you  
and seek to see you fall?  
Recall your Saviour dear  
who died—bearing it all.

The wind may wild assail,  
the waters swamp your soul,  
the mire may staunch your pow'r,  
but look you to the goal!  
The Christ who went before,  
His course of pain endured—  
now, see His glory bright,  
and let faith be assured!

Run light as feathers float;  
be hindered by no weight;  
look to the Christ in heav'n  
at life's eternal gate.  
You'll find a welcome there,  
accompanied by praise.  
the Lord, your Judge and Friend,  
your arm, with joy, shall raise.

**George Stevens, October 2019**