

January - March 2018

# The Link

**NORTH ROAD CHAPEL**

---

**BIDEFORD**

# THE LORD'S DAY

## Part 6

*“A Song or Psalm for the Sabbath Day. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High: To shew forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night, Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound. For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands. O Lord, how great are Thy works! and Thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever: But Thou, Lord, art most high for evermore. For, lo, Thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, Thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. But my horn shalt Thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil. Mine eye also shall see my desire on mine enemies, and mine ears shall hear my desire of the wicked that rise up against me. The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; To shew that the Lord is upright: He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”* (Psalm 92:1-15)

As the Old Testament economy continued, so too did the observance of the Sabbath, which can be traced through the Psalms and the Prophets. Here, as at Sinai, it will be seen that the Sabbath stood on a different level from the Ceremonial Law, and was ever regarded as a **moral obligation**. For whilst this was the era when the rites and rituals of the Levitical system were in force, there is little or no connection made in Scripture between those things, and the observance of the Sabbath Day. In the Psalms it is found rather to be characterised by praise to God, with special reference to His glory, majesty, providence and redemption.

The 92<sup>nd</sup> Psalm bears the inspired title: “*for the Sabbath Day*”, and gives an indication of the manner in which it was kept by godly characters like David. In the opening verses he enjoins the people in the regular and recurrent worship of God, described here as “*a good thing*” (v. 1) – that is, morally right, and spiritually beneficial. This included their sung praise; not with worldly levity, but a “*solemn sound*” (v. 3). This continues to be the business of the Sabbath Day; as it was then, so now.

In verses 4 and 5, the Psalmist makes reference to Creation – the wonderful works of God – of which the Sabbath is an integral part. ‘I will triumph in it’, he says, ‘for it makes me glad’. There follows in verses 6 – 11 a description of the dealings of Divine Providence toward both the wicked and the righteous. God is over all. The Elect and the Reprobate are equally in His sovereign hands. He is the Almighty Potter, of Whom it is said: “*Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*” (Romans 9:21). The prosperity of the wicked is short. Let the Lord’s people not forget that all things are geared, in the purposes of God, toward His Elect, for their good (cf Romans 8:28). This must be kept in focus during Sabbath worship: the high sovereignty of God. “*Thou, Lord, art most high for evermore*” (Psalm 92:8).

Verses 12 – 15 concern the operation of grace within the hearts of His own: flourishing like palm trees; growing like cedars; planted in the house of the Lord; members of His glorious Church; established in the courts of God; fruitful even unto old age. Wonderful subject matter is here for the Sabbath – indeed, this is what the Sabbath is all about. This Psalm is a perfect example of how the Christian’s mind is to be occupied on that day. To be thus engaged is to truly ‘hallow’ it.

This is the way in which the Sabbath was observed at that time in Old Testament history, and other of the Psalms bear this out: “*One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the*

*Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple” (Psalm 27:4); “How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1-2); “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1).*

Turning to the Prophets, further detail is found. The Lord is heard reproving the people by Isaiah: *“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them” (Isaiah 1:11-14).* At this point in time, ritualism and superstition had crept in to the Ceremonial Law, and had also besmirched the Sabbath. The proper worship of God became empty and devoid of meaning – a mere formality.

God’s commandment was very different: *“Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:2-5).* These verses clearly show that the Moral Law was distinct from the Ceremonial Law. Eunuchs and strangers were amongst those prohibited from the camp of Israel, for whom the Ceremonial Law held little relevance. But here they are

exhorted to keep the Sabbath, and promised great blessings in so doing. These are precious words indeed, which have application beyond the Old Testament economy, to a time when such exclusions would be permanently abolished: *“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace”* (Ephesians 2:13-15) – Jew and Gentile, Israelite and stranger, all baptised into one body.

The words of Isaiah 56 evidence God-given faith being imparted to strangers and foreigners. Their understanding was enlightened to see something of the meaning of the Everlasting Covenant, and they ‘laid hold’ of it. Though not party to the ceremonial and earthly covenants, they were numbered in the Covenant of Grace, and thus are promised an eternal inheritance; an ‘everlasting name’. So, in these verses, both the Old and New Testament economies are in focus – but the ordinance of the Sabbath pertains to them **both**. The Sabbath began with time itself, and will not end until time ends. Even then, it will not cease, but only give place to the eternal rest. The Sabbath is a moral obligation upon **all men, for all time**.

*“Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers... But if ye will not hearken unto Me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched”* (Jeremiah 17:21-22, 27). The whole success and prosperity of the nation of Israel depended on their obedience in respect of the Sabbath; for this was a constituent part of the Moral Law. To

reduce it to a mere ceremony saps at the very foundation of faith and obedience. Connect the foregoing verses with these: “*For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you*” (Jeremiah 7:22-23) – and it is again seen that the Moral Law, which predates Sinai and the Levitical system, is **supreme**. The Ceremonial Law was passing, but the Sabbath is part of Creation itself.

Ezekiel lived after Jeremiah, and experienced the captivity in Babylon. The Jews were deported into exile on account of their sin and waywardness. There, Jehovah poured out His complaint: “*Moreover also I gave them My sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness: they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and My sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out My fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for My name’s sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out ... Because they despised My judgments, and walked not in My statutes, but polluted My sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols*” (Ezekiel 20:12-14, 16). The neglect of the Sabbath was ever a forerunner, and major cause, of departure from God. **It still is.**

Moving on further to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, two great reformers who led a small remnant of Jews back from captivity, the end of Old Testament revelation is reached. This is also the period of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The men who directed the little band of returnees to the ruins of Jerusalem had one principal concern: it was the restoration of the proper worship of God; His house, and His Sabbath day. When Nehemiah returned, this is what he found: “*In those days saw*

*I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem”* (Nehemiah 13:15-16). Over three-and-a-half millennia had elapsed since the first Sabbath away back in Eden, but here, as the Old Testament canon is about to close, it stands out as visibly and forcefully as at Creation. It was still to be enforced: *“Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day”* (Nehemiah 13:21-22). The sacred institution is brought right into focus, at the threshold of the New Testament era.

This review of the Sabbath through the Old Covenant age is by no means exhaustive; but in conclusion, let it be noted that the authority of the Sabbath was **not** derived from the Levitical Law. Consequently, when the Levitical economy was abrogated, the sanctity of the Sabbath was **not** diminished. What the Sabbath had ever been **prior** to the giving of the Ceremonial Law, it continued to be **after** the Ceremonial Law was repealed. The cessation of the system of burnt offerings, etc, no more releases modern man from the Sabbath, than it does from the commands relating to theft, murder, adultery, false witness, and the rest. Those who teach that the Law of God in its entirety has been abolished, need only to look around in the world and the church to see the disastrous results of their theory; and should desist from it immediately! For a person to claim to love God, yet undervalue God’s day, is an anomaly. To throw off the Lord’s Day is to throw off the Lord of that day. But if the God of the Bible is truly our God, then the Holy Sabbath, which is His day, will be honoured and sanctified by us. May it ever be so.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

# TO THE CHIEF MUSICIAN

The Book of Psalms is a most remarkable volume – a divinely inspired anthology of praise and worship. Within its verses we find prayer, praise, lamentation and penitence, the history and future of God’s people, great depths of doctrine, and prophecies concerning Christ – all penned by a variety of human authors. While the majority are attributed to David, also included in the collection are those written by Moses, Asaph, Solomon, and others. These Psalms have been read and sung by the Lord’s people throughout all of church history to the present day, to their great blessing and edification.

We learn about the background and context of many individual Psalms from the title or inscription which precedes them. Such titles form part of the inspired Word of God, and are not to be overlooked. Some of these headings give what seem to be musical directions regarding melody or instrumentation; others elucidate the circumstances of their composition; whilst many more simply give the name of the author or dedicatee.

*“To the Chief Musician”* is a common dedication, appearing as the heading to 55 distinct Psalms. There is a direct reference here to an office occupied by the Levites in the service of the tabernacle and temple. Music and worship are mentioned many times in the early books of Scripture. We read of the songs of thanksgiving sung by Moses and Miriam, after the deliverance from Egypt on the shores of the Red Sea (cf Exodus 15:1-21). Years later, a similar victory hymn is recorded as being sung by Deborah and Barak (cf Judges 5:1-3). However, it is not until the days of David that Scripture makes mention of a more regulated system of worship being ordained by God. We read in 1 Chronicles of those, *“whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after that the ark had rest. And they ministered before the dwelling place of the*



*tabernacle of the congregation with singing, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem: and then they waited on their office according to their order” (1 Chronicles 6:31-32). When Solomon dedicated the temple, and the priests praised the Lord with singers, trumpets, cymbals, psalteries and harps, the glory of the Lord descended and filled the house in a cloud (cf 2 Chronicles 5:11-14). This marked the beginning of a ‘golden age’ of worship, under the peaceful and prosperous reign of Solomon. Subsequent idolatry and departure in Solomon’s latter days, and in those of his successors, meant that worship suffered and declined, although it did enjoy some revivals under such godly monarchs as Hezekiah. It was suspended altogether during the Babylonian captivity, where the Jews hanged their harps on the willows, and wept as they remembered Zion (cf Psalm 137:1-6). Upon the return from exile, the temple worship enjoyed a restoration after the Davidic order: “So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God... And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off... And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God” (Nehemiah 12:40, 42-43, 45-46).*

Several individuals throughout these records are referred to as having particular responsibility over those who served in worship. Chenaniah is one example: “*And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song: he instructed about the song, because he was skilful*” (1 Chronicles 15:22). Jezrahiah is referred to as an “*overseer of singers*” in Nehemiah 12:42. Others particularly mentioned by name in this connection include Heman, Jeduthun, Asaph and Ethan. These were evidently individuals with a particular aptitude for music, who faithfully used their gifts in the service of God, and to His glory.

Music was just one of many areas and capacities in which the Levitical families served in the tabernacle and temple. While fulfilling a very real and practical role in that dispensation, there was a greater spiritual significance to all of these practices and offices, in that they each pointed to their fulfilment in Christ. They were but a ‘shadow of good things to come’ (cf Hebrews 10:1) and ‘written for our learning’ (cf Romans 15:4). Christ is present in all the Scriptures, as He Himself made plain to the two on the road to Emmaus, where, *“beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself”* (Luke 24:27).

Most plainly evident is Christ’s work as high priest in offering sacrifices for sin (cf Hebrews 7 – 9); but let us consider how this office of Chief Musician may also apply to the second person of the Godhead.

## **CREATOR OF PRAISE**

Firstly, He is the **Creator** of music itself. This is a justified and fitting appellation to be given to the one, *“by Whom also [God] made the worlds”* (Hebrews 1:2). *“All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made”* (John 1:3). When the foundations of the world were laid, and this physical and material realm brought into being, *“the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”* (Job 38:7). Sound and light are both forms of energetic waves, perceived by the ear and eye, giving their respective variation of pitch and spectrum of colours. At God’s creating word, light sprang forth, filling the worlds with glory, and so too did sound. The natural world abounds with both of these phenomena, to delight and inspire the senses of sight and hearing.

What wondrous and majestic harmony of colour, shape and contrast our eyes can behold in all that is around us, both in God’s creation itself, and those artifices of man, who, made in the image of the Creator, has been endowed with the gift of creativity. The same is true in the realm of

sound. What music there is in the singing of birds, in the roar of the sea-breakers, and in the wind which blows through the lofty pines! Herein also man creates within Creation, and expresses himself in the language of music, with its power to create such beauty and stir such powerful emotions within us, all made possible by those natural laws of frequency and harmony, instituted by God.

Music, then, is principally not the invention of man, but part of God's glorious Creation. The 18th century composer Johann Sebastian Bach recognised this when he declared that "the chief end and purpose of all music is nothing other than God's glory, and the recreation of the mind". A biographer writes of Bach: "For him, invention was an uncovering of possibilities that are already there, rather than something truly original... God is still the only true creator" (Gardiner, J.E., *Music in the Castle of Heaven – A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach*, 2013, p. 209).

Though such vast quantities of beautiful music have been written and performed throughout the ages, to the child of God there is nothing sweeter or more pleasing than that which is used in direct praise and worship of Him. Bach firmly believed this too, and defined his life's professional and artistic goal to be: "the development of a well-regulated or orderly church music, to the honour of God". He thus placed Christ at the centre of his entire oeuvre, and his beautiful musical settings and arrangements of psalms and German chorales or hymns are still sung by congregations to this day.

## **DIRECTOR OF PRAISE**

Secondly, Christ **directs** our praise. The chief musicians in the temple, to whom the Psalms were addressed, had the oversight and direction of the worshippers in their sung praise, and also taught and instructed them therein. There is a spiritual analogy here, too. Christ, in His redeeming love for His people, has given us the faculties to praise God, by "*putting a new song in our mouths, even praise to our God*" (Psalm 40:3). The

believer has been given ‘a heart to praise his God, a heart from sin set free’. Christ’s atoning work on Calvary has banished the discords of sin and separation, and has restored the harmony between a holy God and sinful man. Christ is that fount of every blessing, who tunes our hearts to sing His praise, as another hymn has it; and He has sent His Spirit, to teach us and guide us in the truth, and to aid and assist us in the worship we render unto God.

When a choir or other large musical group is performing a piece of music, it is imperative that their eyes are fixed upon the director to avoid each going astray in the performance of their own part. Thus many diverse voices blend together into one glorious whole. Here too there is an example of the Christian church. When our worship is directed by Christ’s spirit, and He is the focus of each member, there is a unity and harmony which is pleasing to God. *“Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that He have mercy upon us”* (Psalm 123:2).

In today’s churches, there is a proliferation of self-styled ‘worship leaders’. While such a title applied under the Old Covenant era, in this New Testament age, that office is fulfilled and held by Christ alone. Though many mortal men may be skilled musicians, Christ is the ‘chiefest among ten thousand’. In all things, He has the pre-eminence. He is not only the master of our song, but the Head of the Church. His position and glory are His own, and will not be shared with another (cf Colossians 1:18, Isaiah 42:8).

## EXAMPLE OF PRAISE

Thirdly, we have Christ’s **example** of praise. Christ’s life on earth was a pattern for His people in all things, *“leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps”* (1 Peter 2:21). In the gospels, we read of several occasions upon which Christ is to be found actively giving praise to God.

*“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight”* (Luke 10:21).

Furthermore, we read of Christ and His disciples prior to His Passion, singing a hymn together before going out to the Mount of Olives. (cf Matthew 26:30). Again, the writer to the Hebrews quotes from Psalm 22, that great Messianic Psalm, where Christ Himself is heard to say: *“I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee”* (Hebrews 2:12).

## **SUBJECT OF PRAISE**

Fourthly, Christ is the **subject** of our praise. John Stocker wrote the hymn which begins with these lines:

“Thy mercy, my God, is the theme of my song,  
The joy of my heart and the boast of my tongue;  
Thy free grace alone, from the first to the last,  
Hath won my affections and bound my soul fast.”

God’s mercy made manifest to us in salvation, and Christ’s accomplishment of that redemption, is that which inspires us to praise Him. There is an echo here of the words of Paul to the Romans, where God’s mercy in salvation is declared to be the subject of His people’s songs: *“And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name”* (Romans 15:9).

Christ must be at the centre of our entire lives as Christians. Our praise of Him is to expressed not only as we sing psalms and hymns, but our entire lives are to be praise. Paul, when he came to the Corinthians, determined not to know anything among them, save Christ and Him crucified. Likewise should Christ and His gospel be at the centre of all

preaching. Preaching will of course cover many topics and doctrines, and so will the hymns we sing – but both would do well never to stray far from this glorious central theme. Considering the book of Psalms as our divinely inspired pattern, we see references and allusions to the Saviour on almost every page. This is a right example to follow in all our sung praise. When Paul exhorted the church on this matter, he said: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”* (Colossians 3:16).

## OBJECT OF PRAISE

Lastly, Christ is the **object** of our praise. He is the “object of our first desire”, and all other sanctified desires and emotions of our hearts are to be directed towards Him in our worship. Christ has always been the object of the praise of Creation. He is praised by the hosts of heaven: *“And again, when He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him”* (Hebrews 1:6). He is also to be praised by mankind: *“That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him”* (John 5:23).

We have already considered how Christ is to be placed at the centre of worship in the corporate gatherings of the Lord’s people. But that day is coming when every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf Philippians 2:9-11). The work of salvation and redemption is Christ’s great masterpiece, and it will be fully revealed in the last day when He, the Captain of their Salvation, brings many sons to glory. Then will He sing the praises of God in the midst of the great congregation. Thus, the song of praise begun at Creation, renewed in salvation, and continued throughout time’s course, will reach its great recapitulation above, and shall continue in its fullness, world without end, as the blood-bought throng sings: *“unto Him that loved us and washed*

*us from our sins*” (Revelation 1:5). We can scarcely imagine what that chorus of praise will be like. Indeed, “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2:9); but this much we know – Christ will be the eternal object of praise in Heaven. In the words of the hymn-writer:

“All for Jesus, All for Jesus,  
This the Church’s song must be;  
‘Til, at last, her sons are gathered,  
One in love, and one in Thee.” (Sparrow-Simpson)

May we ever see Christ set forth in all the typology of Scripture, and direct our praise and worship unto Him, the Chief Musician.

P. S. Clarke

---

“Live every day in the contemplation of this reward. Be in the altitudes. Think what God hath prepared for them that love Him! Oh, that our thoughts could ascend! The higher the bird flies, the sweeter it sings. Let us think how blessed they are, who are possessed of their heritage. If one could but look a while through the chinks of Heaven’s door, and see the beauty and bliss of Paradise; if he could but lay his ear to Heaven and hear the ravishing music of those seraphic spirits, and the anthems of praise which they sing; how would his soul be exhilarated and transported with joy. Oh Christians, meditate of this reward! Slight, transient thoughts do no good: they are like breath upon steel which is presently off again; but let your thoughts dwell upon Glory ‘til your hearts are deeply affected. What, Lord, is there such an incomprehensible reward to be bestowed upon me? Shall these eyes of mine be blessed with transforming sights of Thee? Oh, the love of God to sinners! Stand at this fire of meditation ‘til your hearts begin to warm.”

Thomas Watson (1620 – 1686)

# AMEN!

*“And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen’”* (Nehemiah 8:6)

It is a lawful and laudable practice for people, in the conclusion of public prayer or praising God, to pronounce an Amen. ... I will explain what is meant by ‘Amen’; show what warrant there is for the practice; [and] deduce some inference from all.

1. First, then, there is Amen **substantive**: and that is, God Himself, Who is what He is, Alpha and Omega, Truth itself. *“He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God [‘Amen’]”* or *“of Truth”* (Isaiah 65:16). Jesus Christ is God and, *“the Amen, the faithful and true witness”* (Revelation 3:14). He is that God in Whom we may bless ourselves; His being is of Himself as God, and He gives being to His word; *“all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen”* (2 Corinthians 1:20); whether Hebrew or Greek, Old Testament or New, promises in Him are completed, and by Him they are fulfilled.

2. There is Amen **affirmative**: a phrase used in the beginning of any momentous truth as an asseveration. What is *“Amen”* in Matthew 16:28 is ... *“verily”* in Luke 9:27 \*. Our Saviour hath this phrase peculiar to Himself: ‘Amen, Amen’, to give confirmation to the doctrine, and to raise our attention and faith; or to show that not only truth is spoken, but by Him Who is Truth itself. [\* It is unclear from which early English translation of the Bible the author might be quoting in this instance – Ed.]

3. There is [an] **optative** Amen: which is [equivalent to] ‘Let it be so’; blessed be God by us, and blessed be we of the Lord; or as in Jeremiah 28:6 it is expounded: *“Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied”*. This Amen was used when good was spoken; as when David commanded Solomon to be made king, Benaiah said, *“Amen: the Lord God of my lord the king say so too”* (1 Kings 1:36).



Now I am to give you some considerations and arguments for the use of this Amen, and the manner of it. And they are seven:

1. It is lawful and laudable publicly to use it, because it is **connatural to prayer and praise** ... There is no need for a rubric [of] men ... or a canon to command a man to blush, when it is only the natural passion that will command it: so when the heart is warm in prayer with serious and earnest affections, a double Amen doth ... naturally flow from us. Assent ... is essential unto prayer, and it is not signified publicly but by our Amen. Not that we are obliged to speak it always and with a loud voice... “What lungs had we need to have, if God heard us for our loudness!” (Tertullian). But when the heart is affected, we see here how “*the people stood up ... with lifting up their hands*” to heaven; naturally signifying, they would lift the name of God with all their might: but they cast down themselves, “*bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground*” (Nehemiah 8:5-6). Who can hold his breath from a groan or sigh, when matter and affection meet together? The Israelites here could not withhold their hands; nor Hannah hold still her eyes, when earnest in temple-prayer (cf 1 Samuel 1:10); nor can a zealous heart hold the tongue from moving to an Amen at the end of prayer and praise. There is no child of God that can say, ‘Our Father’, but, lower or louder, he must and will say, ‘Amen’.

2. We have **the practice of the Old and New Testament believers for our example**. In Moses you have it in Numbers and Deuteronomy, and David oft useth it in the Psalms; yea this double Amen: “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen*” (Psalm 41:13). God was Israel’s God, accepting their praises, hearing prayers, fulfilling promises, and this for ever and ever; and be it eternally ratified, ‘Amen and Amen’, to all generations. In Psalm 106:48 the same words are repeated, with this exhortation: “*and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord*”. And they had the same praises and petitions to offer; therefore, the same conclusion is suitable.

So the prophet Jeremiah, speaking of God's oath to give Canaan to the Jews, says: "*So be it, [Amen] O Lord*" (Jeremiah 11:5). So Paul: 'How can the [unlearned], the private man who knows only his own private single language, say Amen to prayer or praise in another tongue? (cf 1 Corinthians 14:16). Which not only imports the custom, but the manner of saying Amen, to be with faith and understanding. "*Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen*" (Ephesians 3:21). Yea, Jesus Christ, a greater than Moses, prophets, and apostles, adds this conclusion to His perfect form of petitions, in Matthew 6:9-13. So, in His book of Revelation, the four beasts and the four and twenty elders, who represented the whole church of Jews and Gentiles together, cry 'Amen' (cf Revelation 5:14). Yea, that innumerable company of those triumphing souls, who had white robes and palms in their hands, as victors over temptations, with the elders and angels, "*fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen*" (Revelation 7:11-12). So at the fall of Babylon, as the voice of many thunders and waters, the church cries, 'Amen', 'Alleluia', 'for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and hath avenged the blood of His servants' (cf Revelation 19:1-6). Yea, it lasts unto the marriage of the Lamb; still, when the Bridegroom comes, the church cries, "*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Revelation 22:20).

**3. Amen, after prayer and praise, is the man's consent, judgment, and approbation** of what is offered unto God. It is the setting-to of our seal to all, and our putting our hands to bear a part in the praises, and to have a share in the petitions. It [conveys] the desire of our soul, which is the [purpose] of prayer. Now this is essential to these duties; and the pronunciation is but the publication of our inward sense, which is very significant in public worship. Hearing is but the formal sense in conceiving the petitions; but speech brings them forth, and is a more open profession and ... expression of devotion. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh' (cf Luke 6:45).

4. This vocal Amen is, as it were, **the epitome and sum of all our petitions and praises to God**. It is the centre which all those lines are drawn toward. It is all the duty, virtually reduced to one word and point. Yea, it is the repeating and echoing, or redoubling, of all over again. As the [silvering of a mirror, it reflects] the lively image of all preceding devotion... It is a 'stirring up of ourselves to take hold of God' (cf Isaiah 64:7). It is taking aim and directing our prayer to Him and looking up (cf Psalm 5:3), as if we would hand up God's praises to Him, and stand ready to receive His mercies with open hands and mouths. It winds up all together in one bundle. Many are willing to have God forgive their trespasses, but cannot so readily forgive others; we may be free for God to give us daily bounty and bread, but cannot make it our meat and drink to do His will. Such cannot roundly pray, nor say, 'Amen'. 'Ah, Lord!' and 'Amen' are two long prayers in few words, managed by the whole soul... When we seek God with all our hearts, then we find Him (cf Jeremiah 29:13).

5. Amen, rightly pronounced, is **an intense act of faith**, or it involves a strong faith. The Hebrew verb ... signifies 'to be firm, stable and strong'; and ... 'to believe and trust'; and indeed, we cannot believe or trust to anything but that which is stable, invariable and immutable. So there are two declarations made by this Amen: (i) That God is firm and immutably true in Himself and His word; (ii) That we will not only believe His truth, but trust to His veracity and build upon it. ... Amen hath three kernels: the one is of an oath, the second of faith, the third of confidence. When we have confessed our sins, we do by our Amen say that all is true, and we have deserved God's displeasure; we beg pardon of them, and so believe that God hath promised pardon to the penitent; we trust ourselves with God in Christ, and believe that He will pardon our sins, as for all others that cast themselves upon His promised grace.

6. The unanimous pronounciation of Amen is **an assurance that God will accept our praises, and answer our prayers**. "*What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have*

them” (Mark 11:24). Nay, “*if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him*” (1 John 5:15). We ought to believe we shall have them, either in kind or value; and Infinite Wisdom and Goodness must be judge of that. “*If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 18:19). If any single soul pray in faith, it shall be heard; much more if two ‘have a symphony’ (as the word imports), they shall be answered. How much more, when the whole congregation is in harmony, and unanimously cries ‘Amen’; when the whole congregation meets ‘as one man’ (cf Ezra 3:1) and ‘the multitude of believers are of one heart and of one soul’ (cf Acts 4:32)! God will say ‘Amen’ to such Amens... God’s Spirit stirs up such prayers and they shall not be denied. Heaven’s gate is open to this united knock.

7. And lastly, this unanimous Amen of faith **strikes terror on the enemies of the church**, whether devils or men ... When the church of God, ‘terrible as an army with banners’, gives her unanimous voices of Amens ... this makes the hearts of their enemies to melt and tremble... Thus when the trumpet sounded the seventh time upon the seventh day, the walls of Jericho fell (cf Joshua 6:20); and so shall the gates and walls of Babylon by the preaching of the gospel on the Lord’s days, and the prayers of the saints. The united breath of God’s people sends a blast upon their enemies: the trumpet blew, and the people shouted, and Jericho fell down to the ground. Our Amens must not drop like a cold bullet of lead out of the mouth of a musket, bowing to the ground; but they must be fired by preparations of the heart and warm affections, they must be discharged and shot off with the utmost vehemency of the soul and fervency of the spirit. Samuel thundered in prayer and God thundered upon Israel’s enemies (1 Samuel 7:9-10) ... When God’s people can unite in one voice, God gives His voice with them, and for them.

– To be continued –

Thomas Woodcock (d. 1695)

# OBITUARY

**Mrs Sheila Haws (1935 – 2017)  
died 21<sup>st</sup> December, aged 82**

At the time of going to press, the church at North Road has sustained a great loss by the sudden death of Mrs Sheila Haws. An ardent supporter of the church, its stand, and its ministry, she was beloved of all the congregation. Whilst contending in a private and uncomplaining way with some chronic health problems and other seasonal ailments, Mrs Haws attended the morning service on Lord's Day 16<sup>th</sup> December, speaking afterwards to those present, and expressing her appreciation of the preached Word with characteristic enthusiasm. However, her condition deteriorated rapidly thereafter, and she passed peacefully into the presence of her Lord the following Thursday afternoon.

Resident throughout her life in the village of Kingscott, near Torrington, Mrs Haws and her late husband Roy (1933 – 1996) were associated for many years with the Baptist Chapel there. They resisted the rise of liberalism and charismania in the 1980s and were instrumental in seceding from the Baptist Union, and other ecumenical schemes of the day. Sadly, the work at Kingscott ultimately closed – but with the happy consequence that Mrs Haws, and the church's other remaining member Mr R. D. Boswell, were providentially brought into contact with North Road Chapel, being received into membership here in December 1997.

The funeral will be held at the Chapel, God willing, on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018 at 11 am, followed by interment in Kingscott graveyard.

May the Lord be pleased to raise up other believers of the spirit and calibre of our dear sister, for the benefit of His earthly church, and to 'heal the breaches thereof'.

## EDITORIAL

A sober reflection upon the past year, and our expectations twelve months ago, will serve to demonstrate our complete ignorance of future days, and inability to predict what they may hold. It is folly to ‘boast of the morrow’ (cf Proverbs 27:1), much less of a whole year. This is as true for the child of God, as for a man of the world. Who among the Lord’s people can rightly estimate their own capacity for sinfulness, or the magnitude of sovereign grace? Who can foretell what portion of blessing or affliction will be theirs? Who in advance ‘knoweth the way that they take’? Who, even, can say whether after the passage of another year, they will be the inhabitants of earth, or heaven?

A knowledge of the changefulness of human life should inspire a filial fear of God, Who alone ‘abideth of old’ (cf Psalm 55:19). Here is the saints’ great advantage and comfort: they have this God for their guide (cf Psalm 48:14). They are led through time by One Who is eternal; aided in all changes by One Who is immutable; supported in weakness by One Whose strength and grace are unlimited. Deity is their director; the Lord is their Shepherd. Better by far than a known way navigated alone, is the unknown path, in company with the God Who ordained it.

“Blest Three-in-One, to Thee we pray:  
Defend and guide us on our way;  
That we at last with joy may see  
The new year of eternity!” (Wordsworth)

*Preliminary Announcement*

**ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION**

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2018 D.V.**

*Preacher : Mr J. Munday*