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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.” (John 10:11-17)

“The Good Shepherd” – the Greek word here translated ‘good’ is a very comprehensive one. It means fair, honest, worthy and deserving of honour. When Christ said “*I am the Good Shepherd*”, He was making it clear that He was pre-eminently an honest and worthy shepherd, infinitely above all shepherds who had gone before. For, as Dr John Gill points out: “He was the Shepherd of the Father’s appointing, to whom care of all His chosen sheep was committed”. He alone was worthy of such a charge; He alone could be entrusted with them. ‘I am that One’, says Christ, ‘the honest, trustworthy Shepherd appointed by God; the true Shepherd; the good and the unfailing’.

Then our Lord goes on to say, “*the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep*”. This is a most important statement. It has tremendous doctrinal significance. Sad to say, it is misunderstood and misinterpreted by very many. The doctrine of the atonement is contained in this verse. Christ speaks of ‘giving’, and elsewhere of ‘laying down’ His life “*for the sheep*”. This immediately signifies ‘substitution’. His life is laid down in the place of, and on the behalf of, others. The Good Shepherd gave His life freely, voluntarily and in the stead of sinners, as a ransom price, that they might be delivered from wrath to come. The death of Christ was not a

moral example of self-sacrifice; neither did He die as a martyr for the sake of truth. No! His death was vicarious; He laid down His life and died for the sheep.

This immediately brings out another vital point of doctrine: those **for whom** Christ died are identified in this verse. It was not for all men in general; rather was it for a people in particular: “*the sheep*”, not the goats. Numerous are the Scriptures which support this. “*For the transgression of My people was He stricken*” (Isaiah 53:8). “*Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21). “*The Son of Man came...to give His life a ransom for many*” (not ‘all’) (Mark 10:45); it was the Flock of God, the Church which Christ “*hath purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28). “*My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many*” (Matthew 26:28). Thus in John 10:11 is seen the **nature** of the atonement – it was a substitutionary work; and also its **extent** – it was a work on behalf of His sheep (theologically called ‘particular redemption’).

“*I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine*” (John 10:14). “*Know My sheep*” – very blessed is this. This was spoken before Calvary, remember. Christ had just said in verse 11: “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep*”; now He says, I “*know My sheep*”. Yes, every individual given to Him by the Father was before Him as He approached the cross to atone for sin. Peter did not have to remind the Lord and say, ‘Remember me, Lord, when Thou hangest upon the cross’. John did not say, ‘Lord, don’t forget me in Thy work of atonement’. No indeed – just as the High Priest of old carried the names of the twelve tribes of Israel upon the breastplate which he wore (cf Exodus 28:22-30), so ever upon the breast of our blessed Lord was your name and mine, fellow believer. Oh, the wonder of it! As the Good Shepherd was upon this earth as a man, perfectly fulfilling the Law of God, living a spotless, flawless life which would be imputed to all His people; as He went at length to the cross to endure the sinner’s penalty

and suffer the wrath of God, laying down His life for the sheep; He says: 'It is alright, I know them all; all for whom I have become surety are before Me'. Oh, I say again, the wonder of it! Christ, the Mediator, the One who had come to stand in the breach between God and men, and accomplish reconciliation, He says in effect to you, believer: 'Be at peace, you are included, your name is upon My heart; I shall not forget or overlook you; I am keeping the law in all its minute detail for you'. When on the cross, in effect He was saying to divine justice: 'Heap all their sins, each one by name, upon Me; inflict all their punishment upon Me; I am standing surety for them'. This is what is meant when He, the Good Shepherd, facing Calvary said, "*I know My sheep*". Of all whom the Father gave Him, He lost none. Each was personally atoned for and redeemed by His precious blood.

Then, of course, that knowledge is ongoing. Never is His eye taken off a single one of His people, nor does He forget. "*Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine*" (Isaiah 43:1). "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me*" (Isaiah 49:15-16). Blessedly true is this: the Shepherd knows His sheep.

"*And am known of Mine*" – Yes! This is a statement of equal veracity. With full assurance of faith, the Lord's people say: "*I know whom I have believed*" (2 Timothy 1:12); "*I know that my Redeemer liveth*" (Job 19:25); "*We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:1); "*we know that all things work together for good to them that love God*" (Romans 8:28). How could it be possible for any of the Lord's true sheep to mistrust their Shepherd?

"*As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep*" (John 10:15). The first half of this verse is a part of the

latter half of verse 14. Linking these two clauses gives a complete and very wonderful sentence: I *“know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father”*. The word ‘knoweth’ or ‘knowledge’ here signifies a knowledge of approbation. It is the equivalent of ‘loveth’. This mutual knowledge of Christ and His sheep in verse 14 is akin to that which exists between the Father and the Son. The fulness of meaning here is vast; finite minds break down at the magnitude of it. It is knowledge and affection so profound, so spiritual, so heavenly, so intimate, that no other analogy can do justice to it. As the Father knows the Son, and as the Son knows the Father, even so Christ knows His sheep and the sheep know Him. Is not this a deep mystery? *“truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:3); *“them also which shall believe on Me ... that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me ... that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one”* (John 17:20-23).

Is it possible that the saints’ communion with Christ is of such an order that the Saviour could only analogise it in this way? Even so it is, but all because of His mediatorial work – as the latter part of verse 15 immediately makes clear: *“I lay down My life for the sheep”*. This can refer to nothing other than His propitiatory death; it is only through His blood that believers are made priests unto God; a royal priesthood having access and communion with the Eternal, only by virtue of the Good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep. This glorious truth is further amplified in Romans 5:6-8: *“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”*. Christ died for **us**, He laid down His life for the **sheep**. This is not universal atonement. To preach that Christ endured the wrath of God for every sinner that has ever lived is a terrible thing. It

makes a holy God unjust to suggest that He inflicted the penalty of every man's sin upon His Son, and yet still assigns countless numbers to hell at the last – it is a blasphemous teaching; it is another gospel. “*I lay down My life for the sheep*” says Christ, which is unapologetically particular redemption. To speak of universal atonement is to make Christ a liar. Sovereign election of a remnant of Adam's race, and their redemption and effectual calling, is the wondrous truth that runs from Genesis to Revelation.

“*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*” (John 10:16). From this verse, it is clear that the Lord is speaking of Gentiles as well as Jews, but all alike are referred to as sheep. Yes, God's election of grace is from every nation, tribe and tongue. The Good Shepherd was to lay down His life for Gentile sheep as well as Jewish ones.

Another point should be made here: Christ does not say ‘other sheep I shall have’ – no – it is ‘other sheep **I have**’. They were His even then; His, because chosen for Him, and given to Him by the Father from all eternity (cf Ephesians 1:4-6). A similar word is spoken in Acts 18, where the Apostle Paul had just arrived in the city of Corinth – a vast cosmopolitan city, full of business and commerce; luxury and affluence permeated the place; worldly pleasure, sin, vice, immorality, false religions of almost every kind were right upon the surface for all to see; the most abominable practices were commonplace and socially acceptable. Paul had come into this situation to preach the message of Christ, and as He looked around He must have felt the prospects daunting. Surely it would be better for him to exert his forces in more favourable areas? But listen to Acts 18:9-10: “*Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: **for I have much people in this city.***” How positive and unequivocal are these statements!

The Lord did not say, ‘after you have preached a while in this place, Paul, I hope you will see some results, and that I shall have some people to call My own even in such a city as Corinth’. The God of heaven never speaks after this fashion! The salvation of His people is according to divine decree; the “*everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure*” (2 Samuel 23:5). The salvation of every sinner can be traced back to the eternal counsels of the Godhead. What nonsense are the theories of Arminianism! The notion that ‘man chooses God’ is a wicked and abominable perversion of sacred truth.

“‘Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me;
Thou from the sin that stained me,
Hast cleansed and set me free,
Of old Thou hast ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.” (Josiah Conder)

Look yet closer into these words of verse 16: “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice*”. How positive! How definite is this! There is no uncertainty about it whatsoever. It is not ‘if they are willing to listen’, it is not ‘if they will respond’. Vast numbers of preachers and so-called evangelists distort and mutilate God’s sacred truth in this respect. Why do they do it? It is simply because they do not understand God’s sovereign election and eternal predestination; they leave it out, explain it away and in consequence – although they would not admit it – they are preaching ‘another gospel, which is not another’ (cf Galatians 1:6-7). Christ must bring in every sheep given to Him by the Father. He had covenanted to do this; to redeem them. The work which the Father gave the Son to do, He, the Son cannot fail in accomplishing. In the Mediator, Almighty God has: “*laid help upon One that is mighty*” (Psalm 89:19). “*He shall not fail*” is the word spoken of Him in Isaiah 42:4. Neither the rebellion of

man, nor the malice of the Devil, can hinder Christ in the bringing of His sheep. Not a single one of the favoured company shall perish. Each one will hear His voice at the appointed time because they are predestined so to do. In consequence, Philip was sent into the desert of Gaza to meet a passing Ethiopian traveller; Peter to Caesarea; Paul to Corinth; and countless thousands since unto the uttermost parts of the earth. God's believing people have witnessed and borne testimony to the truth in every nation at some time, and as the Gospel has been, and still is carried abroad, Acts 13:48 is fulfilled: "*as many as were **ordained to eternal life believed***". To the masses, the preaching of the Gospel is foolishness; it is a 'savour of death unto death'. But to the elect sheep, it is a 'savour of life unto life' (cf 2 Corinthians 2:16) for "*they shall hear My voice*". These words are both a **prophecy** and a **promise**.

"And there shall be one fold (or 'one flock'), and one shepherd". This simple statement completely destroys Dispensational theories, and the false distinction made between Israel and the Church. Under the covenant of grace, the middle wall of partition is broken down, and that wall which Almighty God has removed will never be erected again. Of twain (that is, Jew and Gentile) God has made one new man; both are reconciled unto God in one body, and both now have access by one Spirit unto the Father – that is the plain teaching of Ephesians 2. This is the 'one flock' and 'one shepherd' of which Christ is speaking in John 10. Indeed, it goes back even before the nation of Israel had existence. This one flock is the Elect, the family of God of all ages from the beginning of human history right through to the end of time. There is only one company of people who enter an eternal state of blessedness: it is those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God; the blood of the Everlasting Covenant. It is back to that covenant, that foundational deed, that all things must be traced.

"Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again" (John 10:17). As with all verses that pertain to the Trinity, these statements are deep and mysterious. Before going further,

consider the words of Proverbs 8. In this chapter, the co-eternity and co-equality of the Son with the Father is brought out, and the eternal Son speaks of that existence which He ever had with the Father as eternal Spirit. So He says in verse 22 and 23: "*The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was*"; and verse 30: "*Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him*". Ever was there a perfect delight and intrinsic love within the Godhead; but in the fulness of time, the eternal Son took human form and was made in the likeness of men, in fashion as a man, the Incarnate Word, the Mediator. There was also a love, yea, a unique love here, contingent and consequent upon the incarnation – and it was in this sense that Christ spoke the words of John 10:17.

When the Lord went down into the waters of Jordan to be baptised, it was as 'the Man Christ Jesus', and the voice of God the Father was heard from Heaven saying: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matthew 3:17). The incarnate Son of God was about to commence His public ministry; the work assigned to Him from all eternity He was now taking in hand. 'I am well pleased', said the Father. Just as the Son in a past eternity had been 'daily the delight of the Father', so He continued to be as He came to earth; for He, in His humanity, never deviated from His Father's business. What were His words in John 4:34? "*Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work*" – His was an absolute dedication to the Father's will. Speaking of Calvary, He said on one occasion, "*I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*" (Luke 12:50). 'Therefore, doth my Father love Me – for this reason'; 'because of My absolute devotion as mediator to His will, doth my Father love Me'. 'In this unique situation of being the mediator between God and men, I will not flinch one iota from doing the Father's will; I am even going to lay down My life; My life I am giving as a sacrifice; My blood I am shedding to make atonement for those sheep; this has been My Father's will from all

eternity, I have always known this; in it I have concurred even from everlasting; now I am here upon earth for this very purpose, and though the cross be now immediately ahead of Me, I do not hesitate’.

“*Therefore doth my Father love Me*”. Here an unparalleled, incomparable love is revealed; love of the same order and magnitude as is eternally fixed upon certain poor sinners of Adam’s race, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. May the wonder of it never grow dim in our souls!

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“Is it not a grievous fall that, where I might have said, ‘The Lord is my Creator and hath made me after His own image’, I am now glad to say “*The Lord is my Shepherd*” (Psalm 23:1) as though I were but a sheep? And yet, perhaps, no fall in this at all – for what was I when I was at best but the Lord’s sheep, depending wholly upon Him for all I had? No clothes to cover my nakedness but of His making; no food to satisfy my hunger but of His providing. And oh, that I had continued as His sheep still! For then, though weak, I should have been innocent; though feeble, I should have been harmless. Whereas by taking (oh miserable mistaking!) the serpent for a shepherd, I became [instead] of an innocent sheep, a ravening wolf; and should have so continued at least a perpetual strayer, if my true Shepherd (oh the wonderful bowels of compassion!) had not left the ninety-nine in the wilderness to seek after me, and had not found me out, and brought me back again into His fold (cf Luke 15:4-5). If there be joy in heaven that the lost sheep is found (Luke 15:7) there ought to be much more joy on earth, that the lost sheep can say: “*the Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want*”.

Richard Baker (1568 – 1645)

from *Meditations and Disquisitions upon Seven Consolatory Psalms*

THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

In Scripture I find these properties of a good shepherd:

I. One is [**Knowledge**]. “*I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep*” saith Christ (John 10:14). The shepherd must have a double knowledge of sheep. One is a **distinguishing** knowledge, by which he must discern sheep from goats, and his own sheep from the flocks of others. Another is a **skilful** knowledge, by which he must understand how to handle them or deal with them. In both these respects, God is a Shepherd: for He knows who are His and separates them from all the world, not only in the work of election, but also in that of vocation and sanctification; and there is none who knows better how to order and handle His people than He, for He is the ‘God of all wisdom’, and the ‘Father of mercies’; He can skilfully guide and rule them.

II. A second is **Providence**. The good shepherd provideth pasture and water for the sheep, and always that which is **wholesome**, lest the sheep rot and die: and he is not negligent that the sheep want feeding, so he is diligent that they have wholesome feeding. Such a shepherd is the Lord over His people: “*I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers ... I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their folds be*” (Ezekiel 34:13-14). The best feeding for the sheep is on the mountains, and the best drinking for the sheep is at the running river: marshy valleys and dirty puddles quickly rot them. The Lord will provide **sufficient** pasture, and the best too: mountains and rivers are sufficient and best. God will feed His people with the most sacred ordinances, purest truth and divinest comforts; with sound doctrine, sincere milk, wholesome words.

III. A third is **Guidance**. The good shepherd goes in and out before his flock; the sheep are simple things, apt to wander away and to err, and therefore the shepherd guides them by his whistle, by his crook, by his

dog, and sometimes leads the way himself: such a shepherd is God to His people. He shows them the way in which they should go: “*this is the way, walk ye in it*” (Isaiah 30:21); and directs their paths and leads them by His counsel, by His Spirit, by His Word, by His Rod. He doth not leave them to the misguidance of sin, or Satan, or the world, or their own hearts, but by His mighty Spirit both lays out their way, and leads them therein too; He is their God and Guide to death (cf Psalm 48:14).

IV. The fourth is **Vigilance**. The sheep are weaponless, weak, unarmed creatures, and they have many and strong enemies as the lion and the wolf and the dog, they may [soon] become a prey unto any of these, if the shepherd doth not watch and hearken, and look to them. Jacob watched night and day (cf Genesis 31:40). Such a shepherd is God over His people, ‘His eye is ever over them’ (cf 1 Peter 3:12). And, “*He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep*” (Psalm 121:4). He is the pillar of fire, He is at hand and near, He hath a constant care and regard unto them lest any evil befall them (cf Psalm 91:10, 121:7), or that they run into any evil.

V. To which as a part may be added **Defence**. Hence it is that the shepherd hath his **fold** to keep the sheep in the night, and his **staff**, which is for defence as well as restraint ... And you read how David rescued his sheep out of the mouth of the lion and out of the paw of the bear. In this regard also is the Lord a shepherd to His people, He is the defence of His people, therefore in Scripture called the ‘shield and buckler’, the ‘strong tower’, a ‘rock’ and ‘munitions of rocks’. “*God is my defence*” saith David (Psalm 59:9). The prophet Zechariah calls Him “*a wall of fire round about [His people]*” (Zechariah 2:5). Not a wall of earth or stone that will moulder away and may be beaten down; but who will set upon a wall of fire? Indeed through a few sticks of fire some may haply venture, but through a wall of fire, none can. “*The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms*” (Deuteronomy 33:27). The Church hath an eternal God, and that God hath everlasting arms.

‘Arms’ import His strength, and ‘everlasting’ imports the perpetuity of His defending and upholding care. ‘Tis true that the Church hath many enemies, and as the sheep are too weak for the lion and bear, so is the Church for her enemies; but then the shepherd is strong and can rescue and deliver. There ye read in Ezekiel 34:14 that as God would feed His people in a good pasture, so He would have a care also that they might lie down in a good fold: not only mercy but custody is theirs.

VI. The good shepherd does not only provide pasture but **Coverture** also for the sheep: he hath his shady places from the sun, and retiring places from the storms, to refresh as well as to flesh the sheep. Even such a shepherd is the Lord to His people. “*The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand*” saith David (Psalm 121:5). He is not only a God of graces, but also of consolations unto them. He shades them with many testimonies of His love and so gives rest to their souls.

VII. A seventh property of a good shepherd is **Tender Prudence**. For in a flock of sheep there is great diversity; one part may be strong sheep, and they are driven; another part may be weak lambs, and they are sometimes carried by the shepherd. Some of the sheep may be sound and well, others may be diseased; some keep in better; others are more apt to stray. Now the good shepherd prudently orders them all, he sends his dog after the wandering sheep, if the whistle fetcheth it not in; and he separates the sound from the unsound, taking care to heal them, etc. After this manner doth God deal with His people who are of several ages, abilities and dispositions. Weak and beginning and tender Christians He gently leads, as it were, and carries them in His bosom (cf Isaiah 40:11). Straying Christians, He calls upon them by His voice in the Word, which if it serves not, he pursues them by His rod, by afflictions. Diseased and fallen Christians He heals by His Spirit; and if their fall be scandalous, it is His will they be separated a while from the rest of the flock by excommunication, to prevent infection of others, and to work recovery in them.

VIII. Lastly, **Diligence** and care lest any one sheep be lost and perish. The good shepherd would not lose any of the least of all the flock. In this regard also is God the shepherd of His people, whose care extends even to an immortal perseverance of every one of His people, that 'none of them shall be lost'. None of them shall perish, and therefore gives them not only antecedent and preventing, but subsequent and assisting and establishing grace.

And thus ye have the analogies 'twixt God and a shepherd, yet I must premise two things before I come to the application, viz: (1.) That God is 'pastor summus', the Chief Shepherd: if any other be shepherds they are but deputed, therefore let them take heed how they deal with the flock. (2.) That God is not an hireling who feeds the flock of another, but a shepherd who feeds His own flock alone ...

Doth David, though in his kingdom, though abounding, though strengthened on all sides, yet raise up his heart above all with this, that 'the Lord is his shepherd'? This was it which he accounted above all. Then let us carefully try in what relation God stands to us, or we to Him. Can we say with David 'the Lord is **my** shepherd', that we are the sheep of His pasture?

All the cattle in the world are not sheep. There are subtle foxes, and there are ravening wolves, and there are fierce dogs, and there are filthy swine and goats. Satan hath his herd, as God hath His flock; the sheep of God are called a little flock; in comparison to the rest of people, very little. If the Lord be not thy shepherd, ah, how miserable and forlorn art thou! What wilt thou do? On whom dost thou rely? How canst thou expect any mercy from Him, or defence from Him, if He is none of thy shepherd?

You may deceive yourselves. Perhaps you have but sheep's clothing, but are not sheep: you seem to be the people of God, come and flock together to hear His voice, but obey Him not; look and speak gravely

and demurely, but your hearts are rotten, full of all hypocrisy and filthiness. Or perhaps because you find some resemblances in you of the sheep – that you are harmless, live quietly, do nobody any wrong – therefore you conclude that you are sheep. Why? Even a lost sheep may be this. Negatives in religion are like negatives in law – of no force.

Do you not know that if you be not sheep, then at the last day you will be ranked among the goats? And you shall be for ever excommunicated from the presence of the Lord? You can infer no comfort from God unless He be your shepherd. David having groundedly affirmed ‘the Lord is my shepherd’ then concludes: ‘I shall not want’. All the excellency and goodness in God is of no comfort to thee, if the Lord be not thy shepherd...

For comfort and support unto those who upon ... good grounds do find that the Lord **is** their shepherd, the comforts appertaining to them are many, I shall mention some. In general, thus you have the **chiefest shepherd** to be yours, even the Lord of heaven and earth, and is the great governor of all things, and is the most excellent in all glorious perfections, to whom none of the gods may be compared. You are the choicest flock of the chiefest God ...

But more particularly, thus ... you have a most **good shepherd**: you shall have pasture enough all your days, He will withhold nothing that is good from you (cf Psalm 84:11): the shepherd will provide for His sheep, and see that nothing be lacking unto them. “*They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing*” saith David (Psalm 34:10). Jehovah is my shepherd. He Who is a most perfect being of Himself will accomplish all His promises.

Obadiah Sedgwick (c.1600 – 1658)
from *The Shepherd of Israel – or God’s Pastoral Care Over His People*

THE SELFSAME DAY

Book Review

We are pleased to advertise in the pages of this magazine, a new book written by Mr R. D. Boswell, a long-serving member of North Road Chapel, and published by the church. It is a detailed study of Old Testament history which determines the length of time for which the Hebrews were in bondage in Egypt, and reconciles different portions of Scripture concerning this subject, which might superficially appear to be at variance with one another.

The verses in contention are these:

*“And [God] said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them **four hundred years**; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance ... But in the **fourth generation** they shall come hither again”* (Genesis 15:13-14, 16)

*“Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, **was four hundred and thirty years**. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.”* (Exodus 12:40-41)

*“And God spake on this wise, that His seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil **four hundred years**.”* (Acts 7:6)

*“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was **four hundred and thirty years** after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.”* (Galatians 3:17)

A lazy reading of the Bible could give rise to the presumption that the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt for a period of approximately four centuries, and that the difference between these verses is merely a case

of the narrators ‘rounding down’ the time period for convenience. To form such a conclusion would be symptomatic of a general disregard for Divine Inspiration and Biblical Inerrancy. The author of all these words, in both Old Testament and New, is **God** – and He cannot deny, or contradict, Himself. More fundamentally, He is also the sovereign instigator of all the events described, and clearly acted according to a very precise timetable, causing the Exodus from Egypt to occur 430 years **to the day** from a preceding historic event (cf Exodus 12:41).

The ‘lazy’ interpretation actually creates more problems than it solves. The genealogies provided in various parts of Holy Scripture allow for an unbroken chronology to be traced. The lineage of Moses is given in Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59 – his mother being Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, fourth son of the patriarch Jacob. The Scripture states that Jochebed was herself born in Egypt, which, even allowing for the longevity of Levi (cf Exodus 6:16) must have occurred within 100 years of the family’s relocation there. Her son Moses was born just 80 years prior to the Exodus (cf Exodus 7:7). It does not require any complicated arithmetic to realise that the insertion of 400 years at this point in history is simply not possible.

Starting from the God-honouring position that all the statements of Scripture must be true (cf Romans 3:4), the more edifying and spiritually-discerning question becomes: ‘to what time periods do each of these verses refer?’ The end-point of each of the time periods is evidently the date of the exodus from Egypt, excepting Galatians 3:17, which reckons to the giving of the law at Sinai a few months later. But what of the commencement of these periods, and the seeming disparity of 30 years? Stephen (cf Acts 7:6) is quoting God’s words to Abraham (cf Genesis 15:13-16), which apply specifically to the suffering of Abraham’s seed – namely, **Isaac** and his descendants. Meanwhile Paul (cf Galatians 3:17) is citing Exodus 12:40, which has reference to the experience of ‘sojourning’, including that of Abraham. The difference of three decades is then readily accounted for – being the 25 years

between Abraham's departure from Haran and the birth of Isaac (cf Genesis 12:4, 21:5), plus an additional five years to the time of the 'weaning' of Isaac (cf Genesis 21:8) – not the point of progressing to solid food as in modern parlance, but the time of transition from infancy to a more independent childhood (as also in the case of Samuel, cf 1 Samuel 1:24) – and more importantly, when Isaac was recognised as Abraham's spiritual 'heir apparent', or 'seed', in preference to Ishmael.

Calculation of the timescales involved may be made as follows:

25 years from leaving Haran to the birth of Isaac (Genesis 12:4, 21:5)
60 years to the birth of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:26)
130 years to Jacob's relocation to Egypt (Genesis 47:9)
Total: 215 years

This represents the mid-point of the 430-year period described in Exodus 12:40, leaving a further 215 years between the time when Jacob's family came to Goshen, and the exodus.

Common objections to this shorter timescale are also addressed by Mr Boswell in his book. For example, the clause "*who dwelt in Egypt*" contained in Exodus 12:40 is shown to be parenthetical to the verse, and the 430-year period to apply to the state of 'sojourning' generally (chapter 4). Some argue that the former service of Joseph in the deliverance of Egypt would hardly have been forgotten so quickly. But the terminology contained in Exodus 1:8 "*Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph*" is examined, suggestive of a complete change in dynasty, and likely corresponding to the end of the Hyksos line of Pharaohs (chapter 7). Still others complain that the 'four generations' spoken of by God to Abraham (cf Genesis 15:16) is insufficient to allow for the growth of the Hebrew people from 70 souls (cf Genesis 46:27) to a populace containing over 603,550 men of fighting age (cf Numbers 1:46). But it is demonstrated that the 'covenant line' was exceptional for longevity and lateness of parenthood. Other branches of the family likely saw ten or more generations in the same period, which, coupled

with the miraculously rapid birth-rate amongst them (cf Exodus 1:7, 9, 19-20) is more than sufficient to account for the dramatic population expansion recorded in Scripture (chapter 8).

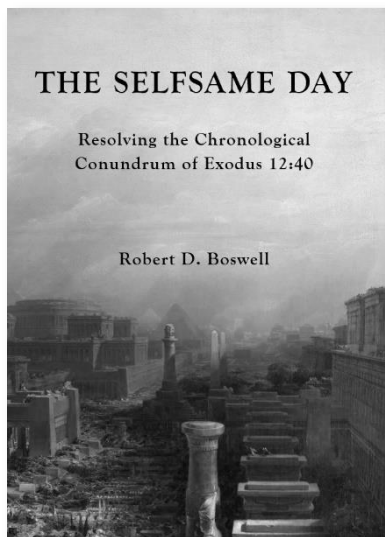
Of still greater significance are the spiritual implications when God's Word is thus rightly interpreted. The expressions found in the key verses – 'strangers', 'affliction', 'sojourning', 'being evil entreated' – are not narrowly confined to Hebrew servitude in Egypt, but apply to the experience of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from the time of God's call, and throughout their earthly lives. This accords with the report of the New Testament: "*these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (Hebrews 11:13), words which apply by extension to every true Christian. Writes Mr Boswell:

"...affliction was a prime facet of being a 'stranger and a sojourner', starting from the day Abraham departed from Haran. Do we not understand that the experiences of God's Old Testament nation are recorded to teach us, the New Testament people of God? "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition*" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Affliction of some sort is the expectation of believers in all generations, though it is manifested in countless ways, this is made clear in God's Word: "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*" (John 16:33)..." (Chapter 2)

While a parallel is to be drawn in relation to the trials of God's pilgrim nation, there are other aspects of the Lord's promises to be embraced too: "...*also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance*" (Genesis 15:14). These words found a literal fulfilment in the experience of the Hebrews, and to some degree in the lives of the patriarchs, but their ultimate outworking is yet to be enjoyed by the Lord's people: "*And I saw as it were a sea of glass*

mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory ... And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints” (Revelation 15:2-3). God be thanked for every glimpse of these glorious truths afforded by His Word.

Review by R. J. Steward



The Selfsame Day by Mr R. D. Boswell is now available, free of charge, from North Road Chapel.

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EDITORIAL

The twelfth chapter of Luke's gospel records the public ministry of Christ in a passage similar to that commonly called 'the Sermon on the Mount'. But in this account, the Holy Spirit has inspired the writer to include an interjection or aside that the Lord made to His disciples – for they were His primary audience (cf Luke 12:1, 41). The Saviour speaks thus: "*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*" (Luke 12:32). This was no mere sentimental platitude, but a statement of great depth and preciousness – to every true believer.

Like a two-edged sword, the 'fear not' statements of Holy Scripture cut both ways. As well as an exhortation to cease from anxious care, there is also the clear implication that circumstances exist which are liable to induce fear. The preceding words of the Lord's address reveal the causes: there are hazards of a personal nature, from antagonistic foes and their persecutory actions, even imperilling life (cf Luke 12:1, 11, 4); such spiritual dangers as ungodly influence, sin, final judgment and divine wrath (cf vs. 1, 10, 8-9, 5); practical troubles in this present world (cf vs. 22-30); and the imminence of the world to come (cf vs. 20, 35-40). A list of this nature is sufficient to move the stoutest heart to fear!

All these things notwithstanding, "*fear not*" is the instruction of the Saviour – Who knowest our frame, rememberest that we are dust, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities (cf Psalm 103:14, Hebrews 4:15). Though His next words seem more inclined to inspire greater anxiety, than increased confidence: "*little flock*". The fewness of the people of God relative to the unbelieving world is a constant theme of Scripture (cf Deuteronomy 7:7, Matthew 22:14, Romans 11:5), and a central feature of God's plan of redemption (cf 1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Contrary to foolish, postmillennial notions, the church always has, and always will be, a tiny minority of Earth's population. The second part of the description is equally unflattering: "*flock*". As familiar as this

Biblical analogy may be, the characterisation as ‘sheep’ is somewhat disparaging. Of all the creatures ever domesticated for human agriculture, there is scarcely another species so defenceless, so vulnerable; endangered as much by their own waywardness as by the abundance of their predators. The contrast between the Lord’s few people and the greatness of their opposition is stark: “*them like two little flocks of kids*”, while their enemies “*filled the country*” (1 Kings 20:27).

The antidote to fear, in the face of these seemingly insurmountable odds, comes by virtue of a glorious, Holy-Spirit-inspired, ‘mixed metaphor’ in the text: “*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*”. Who ever heard sheep described as having a ‘Father’? But these sheep are also sons; they are the “*flock of God*” (1 Peter 5:2); “*For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand*” (Psalm 95:7, cf Psalm 78:52, 79:13, 100:3). It is this provenance that makes all the difference. Christ says, more truly than David, “*thy servant kept His father’s sheep*” (1 Samuel 17:34).

Who ever heard of sheep obtaining a kingdom? They have not might nor means; they can hardly cooperate to achieve a common goal, much less mount a military offensive to secure a territory. But their wants and weaknesses are no obstacle, because it is ‘their Father’s **good pleasure to give** them the kingdom’. The Psalmist prays: “*Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion*” (Psalm 51:18), and that prayer is answered. “*According to the good pleasure of His will*”, God has, “*predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself*”, and “*...made known unto us the mystery of His will ... that ... He might gather together in one all things in Christ ... in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance*” (Ephesians 1:5-11 part). The outworking of which Divine will is to be enjoyed in a coming day, when the King shall say to the sheep of His right hand: “*Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34). ‘Therefore will not we fear’.