

# TRUTH

“. . . *Your word is truth*” (John 17:17)

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## THE COMPASSION OF GOD

No study of the Creator’s character is complete without considering His compassion. His compassion is His pity toward mankind, His mercy for those who face hardships, regardless of their cause.

Would you be surprised if I told you that in the English Bible, the word “compassion” is used about the same number of times in the Old Testament as it is in the New? Yes, the Lord is compassionate now, but He always has been that kind of being . . . His nature never changes (Malachi 3:6).

The Psalmist declared, “*But you, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth*” (Psalm 86:15). Another psalm states, “*The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy*” (Psalm 145:8).

Did you notice that each of the verses quoted above speak of the Lord God being “full” of compassion? Rather than being stingy with compassion, God’s cup of compassion is overflowing!

Another observation from the Psalms passages: we see the Lord’s compassion connected with *mercy*. That is true throughout the Bible. For instance, in Lamentations 3:22, we read, “. . . *For He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.*” The compassion-mercy connection is seen again in Romans 9:15: “*I will have mercy on whomsoever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomsoever I will have compassion.*” We see mercy and compassion linked together during Jesus’ earthly ministry. More than once, we read that a person asked Jesus to have *mercy* on him, and the Bible states that our Lord’s response was to show *compassion* on them (cf. a case in Matthew 20:30-34). Compassion was mercy, and mercy was compassion.

What are some Old Testament examples of the Lord showing compassion? When the Israelites in the wilderness were not faithful to God’s covenant in the days of Moses, “*But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away and did not stir up all His wrath*” (Psalm 78:37,38). What does this information indicate? God had compassion on Israel multiple times, and because of His compassion,

He forgave them. The idea of compassion providing forgiveness is restated in Micah 7:18,19, where it is written, “. . . *Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us . . . You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*” How amazing is that?!

If the Israelites chose to rebel against Jehovah, He said He would drive them to various nations. But, He also promised that if they later would return to Him with all their heart, He would bring them back from captivity and have compassion on them (Deuteronomy 30:3). After many Israelites were taken captive to Babylon, He kept His promise and showed His compassion by bringing them back to their homeland (Jeremiah 29:10; Ezra 1:1-4).

*Before* the Babylonians hauled multitudes of Jews into exile, Jehovah showed compassion to His people. How? Judah was steeped in idolatry and other forms of rebellious conduct. Despite that, what did God do? He “*sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place*” (2 Chronicles 36:15). Sadly, His people rejected His messengers and the mercy that the Lord offered.

In Jesus’ Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35), the king in that story showed compassion on a servant by forgiving that servant’s enormous debt to the king (18:27). The forgiving king represents God and how He, by His mercy, forgives men’s debt, which is their sin against Him.

Under the new covenant, how does the Lord God demonstrate His compassion? First, by giving ungodly sinners, who are His enemies, the opportunity to receive forgiveness through Jesus (Romans 5:6,8,10). Second, by giving His children the opportunity to have ongoing forgiveness as they walk in the light (1 John 1:7,9). Third, by being longsuffering with His children when they struggle. Finally, by giving His wayward children a way to come back to Him. And when they do, like the father of the prodigal son, He remembers their sins no more (Hebrews 8:12).

How should we respond to God’s compassion? Let us be *grateful* for it, *praise* Him for it, *imitate* it, *walk humbly* with Him, and *tell others* about it!

-- Roger D. Campbell

## TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 16-17

Having been delivered from Egyptian bondage and slavery by the power of God and His servant Moses (Exodus 1-15), Israel now begins their journey toward Mount Sinai, the place to which God told Moses to bring Israel when He commissioned Moses to lead the people out of bondage (Exodus 3:12).

Israel already dealt with the challenge of having no water and saw the power of God as He healed the waters of Marah (Exodus 15:22-25). What was next for Israel? The history continues in Exodus 16-17.

**16:1-3 – Israel complains about having no food.** Moving on from Elim, the Israelites came to the wilderness of Sin. The people complained to Moses and Aaron about the lack of food, even saying they were better off back in Egypt where they were slaves!

**16:4-12 – God provides food for Israel.** God told Moses He would provide bread from heaven and that the bread would test Israel's obedience to Him. Moses and Aaron rebuked the people for complaining, telling them that such was ultimately against God; they then told the congregation, "*Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your complaints*" (Exodus 16:9), and the glory of the Lord appeared to them in the cloud that went with them (compare Exodus 13:21,22). God then told Moses to inform the people that they would have meat to eat in the evening and bread the next morning. God further told the people, "*You shall know that I am the LORD your God*" (Exodus 16:12)!

**16:13-21 – God provides meat and bread.** As God promised, quails came at evening all throughout Israel's camp, and in the morning, "*a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground*" (Exodus 16:14). The people did not know what the substance was, so they called it "manna," from a Hebrew word meaning, "What is it?" Moses relayed God's instruction to gather daily a portion of manna for each person in their tent, but no more. Moses also told them not to leave any manna until morning. Some did not obey, however, and kept some manna overnight, but it bred worms and stank the next morning.

**16:22-36 – God's special instructions for manna.** On the sixth day of the week only, Israel was to gather enough manna for two days. On the seventh day only, the leftover manna did not stink or breed worms. Just as God said, there was no manna on the seventh day. Some went out seeking to gather, however, and God rebuked them for failing this test of faith (see 16:4). Moses instructed them to keep a portion of manna as a memorial of God's care for them in the wilderness. This section ends with a historical note informing us that Israel ate manna forty years, until their entrance into the promised land (see also Joshua 5:10-12).

**17:1-7 – God provides water for Israel.** At Rephidim, Israel had no water. The people complained to Moses (again!), even accusing him of having brought them out of Egypt only to kill them with thirst. Moses cried to God for help, and God told Moses to strike "*the rock in Horeb*" (Exodus 17:6 – an unspecified rock, though obviously known to Moses, who was quite familiar with this area near Sinai) with his staff. Moses did so, and Israel was supplied with water. The names given to the place indicate the rotten attitude displayed by Israel: "*Massah*" ("temptation") and "*Meribah*" ("strife"). Verse 7 reminds us that, again, their complaining was ultimately against God, as they doubted God's presence and provision.

**17:8-16 – Amalek attacks Israel and is defeated.** Amalek attacked Israel, and Moses told Joshua to choose men to go fight for Israel. Moses (along with Aaron and Hur) went to the top of a hill, where he held up his hands, holding the rod of God. While he did so, Israel prevailed; when his hands went down, however, Amalek prevailed. As Moses grew weary, Aaron and Hur stood on either side and held up his hands until Israel won the battle. God told Moses to write as a memorial that Amalek would be destroyed (fulfilled by King Saul/Samuel – 1 Samuel 15:1-33). Moses built an altar and called it "*The-LORD-Is-My-Banner*," crediting God for the victory He gave them.

Having considered the text, what are some takeaways for us from this section of Scripture?

- ✓ Complaining against God-appointed leadership is, ultimately, complaining against God (see 16:2,7,8; 17:2,3,7).
- ✓ God sometimes tests our faith, not to cause us to fail, but to give us the freedom to choose right and show our faith in Him (see 16:4).
- ✓ We can know Jehovah is **the** one true God and is **always** with His people (see 16:6,12; 17:7)!
- ✓ Though it is easy to forget, God sees and hears all we say and do (see 16:7-9,12).
- ✓ Although some commands of God may not make sense to us (like not leaving any manna until morning or gathering none on the seventh day), true faith means doing what God says, how He says, simply because He says it (see 16:19,20,27,28).
- ✓ God's people ought to help and support one another (see 17:10-12).
- ✓ We need to trust in the time-tested truth that God will provide for His people's needs!
- ✓ God is still the victorious banner of His faithful children; He alone gives us victory!

-- Chad Dollahite

## Overcoming Fear

The fear we have in mind is not a phobia such as the fear of water, snakes, or being in a tiny, enclosed place. In our study, we are talking about fear in our spiritual lives/choices in our daily walk with the Lord.

The Bible says, “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear . . .*” (2 Timothy 1:7). The word “fear” comes from a Greek word (“*δειλία/deilia*”) which means “timidity, fearfulness, cowardice” [Thayer, no. 1167, via e-Sword]. Our God does not want us to be timid or cowardly about doing what is right and being the kind of person He wants us to be.

Tom is afraid to go speak to a brother who sinned against him (like Jesus instructs, Matthew 18:15) because that brother has a quick temper. Tim is afraid to teach the gospel to a friend because he fears he would not do a good job. Tammy is afraid to put God first in her life because that might cause her to lose her job. Yes, fear can be a real issue in the lives of saints.

Jesus taught that we can know activities and people by their fruits (Matthew 7:16). From the three cases noted above, we see that the fruit of fear is rotten. Fear paralyzes us. It hinders us from doing what is right. It causes us to be silent when we ought to speak (Acts 18:9). Fear is contagious, too, as we see when unfaithful spies influenced Israel to complain and shrink from their duty (Numbers 13:30-14:2).

If we want to face and overcome fear, we need to:

(1) “Buy into” the Lord’s promise to bless us and be with us as we do His will (Matthew 28:20).

(2) Remember this about God’s expectations: because He is fair and just, He never instructs us to do anything that we are not capable of doing.

(3) Do the best we can in any given situation and let God’s peace rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15).

(4) Lack of faith causes worry (Matthew 6:30,31). Instead of worrying about life’s affairs, we need to put God first (6:33) and cast our cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7). Let us learn to trust in Him at all times (Psalm 62:8)

(5) Experience in doing something (like leading a prayer or trying to set up a Bible study with someone) produces confidence. In general, the more we engage in an activity, the more confidence we gain (and fear is diminished). Seek opportunities to gain experience.

(6) If thoughts of the future have your stomach tied up in knots, try to take things one day at a time. In fact, the only time we have is today (James 4:14,15).

Courage is not the absence of fear. Rather, courage is what causes us to do or say what we need to despite any anxiety or fear we might have inside us. Faith is the key to overcoming fear (Mark 4:39-41).

-- Roger D. Campbell

## What is the meaning of “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16?

The full message of Galatians 6:16 reads, “*And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*” To what or whom does the term “the Israel of God” refer?

**Context** – This letter was written to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:2). Those who received it had liberty in Jesus (2:4; 5:1) because they were children of God by faith, having been baptized into the Christ (3:26,27).

In the closer context of chapter six, we read about “*the household of faith*” (6:10). In the statement that precedes the words “*the Israel of God,*” we read, “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation*” (6:15). “The Israel of God” and those who are “a new creation” in the Christ are the same people — the same ones who are God’s freed children (3:26). Thus, in the new-covenant setting of Galatians 6:16, “*the Israel of God*” refers to Christians, that is, the church.

**Comparison** – Consider the Old Testament background to Paul’s message about “the Israel of God.” During the Old Testament era, the Israelites were identified as the *people of God* (Hebrews 11:25). Under the new covenant, Christians are God’s people (1 Peter 2:9,10).

Under the old covenant, Israelites/Jews were known as *God’s chosen people* (Deuteronomy 7:6). According to Ephesians 1:3,4, today the chosen of God are in the Christ.

Under the old law, Jewish males received fleshly *circumcision* (Leviticus 12:1-3), while under the new covenant, Jesus’ disciples receive “*the circumcision made without hands*” (Colossians 2:11). Christians are called “*the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit*” (Philippians 3:3). In Bible language, members of God’s church are spiritual *Jews*, having been circumcised in the heart (Romans 2:28,29).

**Conclusion** – In Galatians 6:16, “*the Israel of God*” does not refer to the biological descendants of Jacob/Israel, nor is it a reference to the modern-day Middle Eastern country of Israel. The church is the body of Jesus (Ephesians 1:22,23) — not His physical body, but *spiritual* body. The church is the Lord’s temple (1 Corinthians 3:16) — not a physical temple, but *spiritual* one. Christians are Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:29) — not his physical offspring, but *spiritual*. In the same way, the church is “*the Israel of God*” — not physical Israel, but *spiritual* Israel . . . the spiritual, chosen, covenant people of the living God.

-- Roger D. Campbell

## THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE FEAST

Beginning in Matthew 21:28, Jesus tells three parables that are all connected. The connections are the Jewish leaders, their rejection of Jesus, and their treatment of those who were God's spokesmen. We want to examine the third of these three parables in this article.

The parable of the marriage feast involves a king who arranges a marriage for his son and invites many people to the marriage feast. There were many of those invited who had no interest in coming to the feast and others who said they were too busy. And yet even others who, not only had no interest in attending, but also treated the king's servants in a terrible manner, even killing them.

The king takes vengeance on those who killed his servants and then sends out more servants to find other guests to invite. When the king arrives for the feast, he finds a man who did not have on a wedding garment. The king sends him away with instructions to cast him into outer darkness.

First, let us identify the main people in this parable and whom they represent. The king represents God, the Father. The first group of people who were invited and turned down the invitation represent the Jewish people. The second group of people who were invited and accepted the invitation represent the Gentile world. And the man who was not properly dressed at the feast represents a person who is not properly prepared for an event.

Secondly, let us understand what some of the other ideas, items, and events represent in this parable. Time and space will not permit us to examine every part in great detail, but we can see some important things for us to understand. The **marriage feast** (verse 1) represents the blessings that would come with the kingdom of heaven or the church; privileges that would be available to those who are a part of the Christian system. The **first invitation of guests** (verses 3,4) represents the opportunity the Jews had to enter into the kingdom or the church. The **rejection of the invitation** (verse 5) represents the Jews' rejection of that invitation and the Son, Jesus Christ. The **mistreatment of the king's servants** (verse 6) represents the hostility that the Jews and the Jewish leaders showed towards God's prophets and messengers.

The **second invitation** that goes forth (verse 9) points toward the invitation of the Gentiles to come into the kingdom. This call of the Gentiles would come later in the history of the world (Acts 10,11).

The **king coming into the feast** (verse 11) represents the day of judgment that will occur when final judgment will be made upon all men. This includes the **judgment and punishment** upon the improperly dressed man who was cast into outer darkness (verse 13).

Finally, after understanding all the people and all the events in this parable, Jesus gives us the main application, "*For many are called, but few chosen*" (Matthew 22:14). This parable shows God's plan for the redemption of mankind in 13 short verses. The kingdom of heaven, or the church, would be preached first to the Jewish people. It would then be opened unto the Gentiles, or in other words, to the whole world. And yet sadly, as the final man in the parable indicates, not everyone will be found prepared. Jesus had previously taught that there are those people who *claim* to be followers of Him but do not do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21-23).

Entrance into the kingdom truly is for all mankind (Galatians 3:28). As Jesus says here, "*For many are called...*" (Matthew 22:14). Anyone who hears the gospel, believes it, and submits to its commands can be saved. But the message from this parable, and from all of Scripture, is also clear that the number who will be saved is few. Even, again, as Jesus had said previously in His ministry (Matthew 7:13,14).

Not only will the chosen be few, but only the chosen will be saved. This does not indicate that a person is "elected" or "chosen" in a way that overrides a person's free will to choose. The chosen are those who are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27) and thus enjoy the spiritual blessings that are found in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

In one sense, it is very comforting to believe that all people will be accepted by God. When a person believes that false doctrine, it allows a person to live their earthly life in relative ease because they do not have to submit to anyone or anything. But, while that belief can cause some ease in this life, the parable of the wedding feast confirms for us that to believe such a doctrine will cause much suffering in eternity.

Jesus wanted His hearers to understand that there are great blessings when a person is a part of the church that belongs to Christ and when a person is faithful to the end.

-- Joel Danley

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