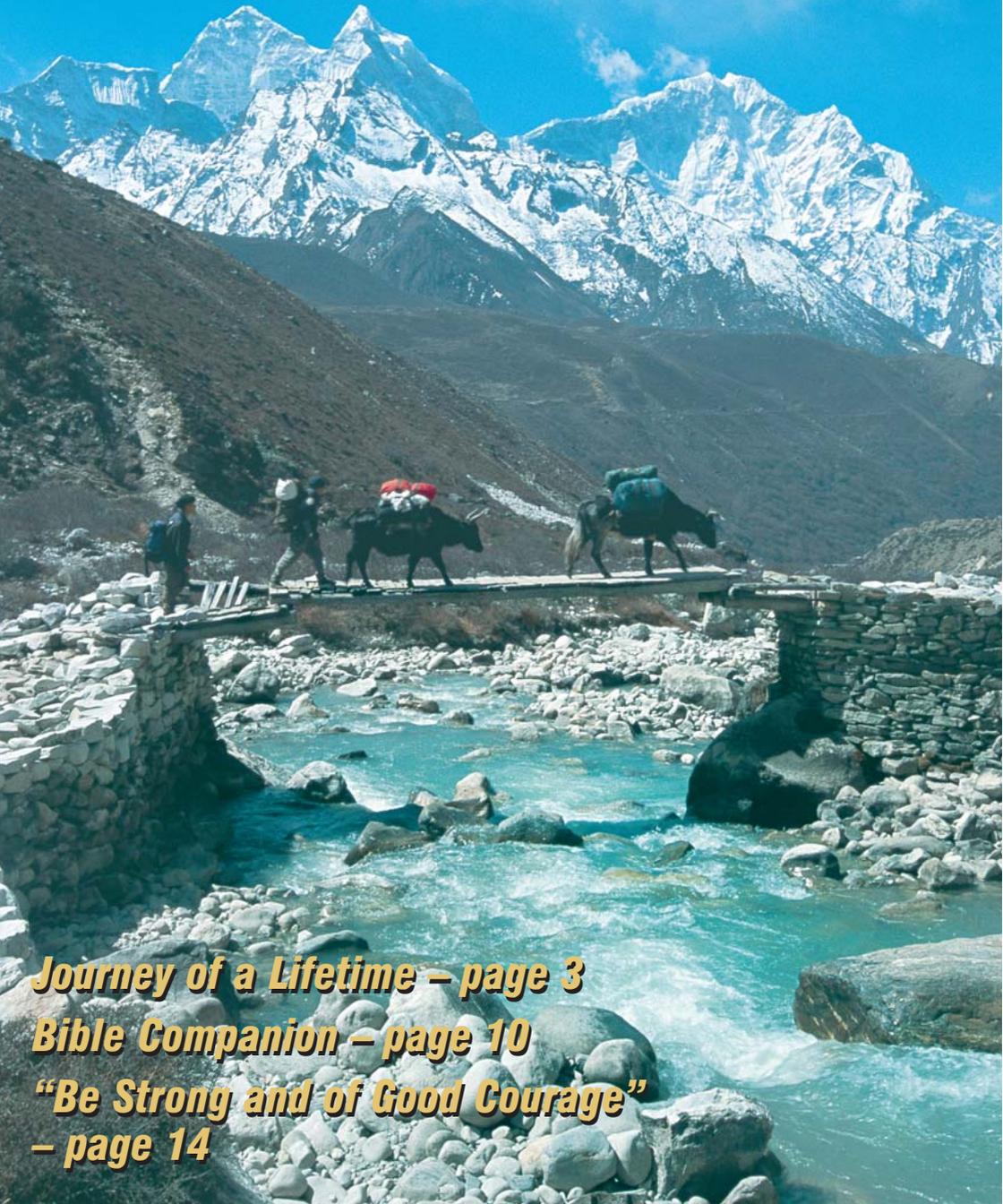


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1448



Journey of a Lifetime – page 3

Bible Companion – page 10

***“Be Strong and of Good Courage”
– page 14***

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

121st Year

A05

1448

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (Brethren in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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United Kingdom – Cilla Palmer (Mrs), "Highlands", 78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs, England CB7 5NR Tel: (01638) 723959 (24hrs & Fax) cilla@gladtidings.fsnet.co.uk

Australia – K.G. Quixley, 22 Narallah Grove, Box Hill North, Victoria, Australia, 3129 gladtidings@optusnet.com.au

Canada – Vivian Thorp (Mrs), 5377 Birdcage Walk, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, L7L 3K5

New Zealand – Christadelphian Witness, P.O. Box 15-457, New Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand

South Africa – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O. Box 50357, Musgrave Road, Durban 4062, South Africa antoost@mweb.co.za

U.S.A. – Pat Hemingray (Mrs), 3079 Kilburn West, Rochester Hills, MI 48306, USA.

Other Countries – Geoff Maycock, 8 Hale End, Bracknell, Berks., England, RG12 9YH gmaycock@fish.co.uk

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Fiji – Bible Mission, Box 1012, G.P.O., Suva, Indonesia
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Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan

26 The Crescent, Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, B92 0BP, England, UK (glad.tidings@virgin.net)

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Journey of a Lifetime

Have you ever had an unfulfilled ambition to do something extraordinary? Perhaps you want to hang-glide off a volcano, cycle across Africa or climb Everest?

How do you think you would feel when you were there actually doing it? Imagine that you were, at this very moment, walking in the Solu Khumbu – in the foothills of Mount Everest – with that magnificent mountain scenery as your backdrop, just as on this month's front cover.

Walking Together

You look up and see yaks heavily-laden with your gear, and that of the party you are travelling with, crossing over a mountain stream. Behind them are the Sherpas who are guiding and supporting you. You are struggling against altitude sickness, adjusting to the new experience and trying to take it all in. And all the time the mountain which has been your aim in life is drawing nearer and nearer.

If you pause to think about it for a moment, this journey has only been made possible due to a whole range of different things. Nobody could set out without a lot of forethought. You had to work some things out – which travel company to choose, how you were going to pay for it, whether you were fit enough, and such-like. The company arranging the trip had

to sort out things with airlines, hotels, lodges, suppliers and with Sherpas. The Sherpas, in turn, had to make their own arrangements and have had to acquire the skills that would be needed when the going got tough.

Mountain Guides

Only a fool would venture into dangerous conditions without a trusty guide or guides and they would need to be reliable or the

climber's life would be put at risk. You would want to go with someone who had been there before and who knew the way; preferably with someone who had climbed that path several times before and in a variety of different weather conditions.

It would be vital to know when it was safe to proceed and when you just had to turn back. And if you were unable, for whatever reason, to continue you

would want to be sure there was adequate help and support to get you out of there safely. Nobody would want their journey of a lifetime to end in death.

Yet that is what happens to many climbers and not only to the unprepared. High mountains are dangerous places and nobody can be sure about changing weather conditions, or treacherous conditions underfoot. Accidents happen even to the strongest and seemingly best-prepared people. It's part of the challenge, of course, to push yourself to the limits of human endurance and to learn something more about yourself in the process.



Life's Journey

That's true of life as well and the way we ought to live it. We should all want to get somewhere, make progress in the right direction, and learn something important about ourselves on the journey.

But it doesn't happen of itself, not unless we make it happen. There are people who seem to be satisfied with mere existence and there are others who really seem to have got somewhere in life. They "made something of themselves" we sometimes say. Perhaps that means they advanced materially or academically, or just that they developed well in one way or another.

Progress Check

The journey of life is a challenge given us by God. He made us by giving us life and, at the end, He takes that life-force away. We are all given the chance to find out about Him and the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Lord himself said that life eternal depended upon our knowledge of them both and our understanding of God's gracious purpose (John 17:2).

In a way the higher you climb in life along the path of understanding, the closer you get to understanding the way of God and seeing how you can be a part of it. It was the prophet Isaiah who once said that God's ways are high above us and, by implication, he urged us to drink of mountain streams if we are to find true refreshment:

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat ... Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you – the sure mercies of

David ... For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven ... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth" (Isaiah 55:1-11).

Helps along the Way

There is someone who has gone before us along this upward path and he is both tried and tested. The Lord Jesus Christ has climbed the steep and rugged way that leads to God's kingdom and sits now in heaven helping and guiding fellow travellers. You will find no surer guide in life whatever the conditions might be or however arduous the journey might sometimes seem. He is a burden-bearer and a guide of supreme quality; he can take you safely to your journey's end.

There are many travel aids too that will keep you safe and free from danger. Life's journey is an everyday affair – it is "the trip of a lifetime!" Every day we need guidance and counsel to point us in the right direction. This issue contains a "Bible Companion" set of reading tables which will help you read through the Bible every day. Or you can send for a Bible Reading Planner, which is advertised on the back cover, if you prefer something which will introduce you to a journey of discovery in a slightly gentler fashion. In the company of other like-minded people you too can then embark on the "way of holiness" that leads to everlasting life in God's perfect world.

Editor



Signs of the Times

THE BIBLE teaches clearly that God will set up an everlasting kingdom which will destroy and replace all others. In a prophetic vision which explained to an ancient monarch that his political kingdom would be replaced by other mighty empires, the prophet Daniel saw the end of this process as follows:

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

It is not difficult to see this as the time of which God’s prophet wrote when he said this: *“... when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9).*

Earthly Inheritance

Notice what the prophet said: *“when (God’s) judgments are in the earth”*. That is due to happen when God’s kingdom is established here, and when God’s people are rewarded on earth. Thus King David advised his people to be patient and to trust in God, who will set all things right, giving them this assurance:

“For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the

wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look diligently for his place, But it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:9-11).

These prospects link up in Scripture with God’s promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David of a coming descendant through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The identity of that descendant was made clear by the angel

to Mary, the mother of Jesus, for she was told:

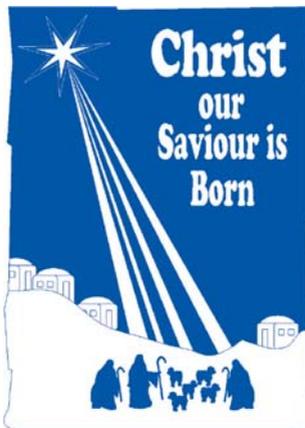
“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33).

Coming Judgement

Jesus himself taught about his return to the earth as

Judge and King in several of his parables. Here is part of one of them:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:31-34).



That was the consistent teaching of Jesus. So when Pilate, for example, the Roman Governor Pilate, asked Jesus if he was indeed a king, he replied:

"... You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:37).

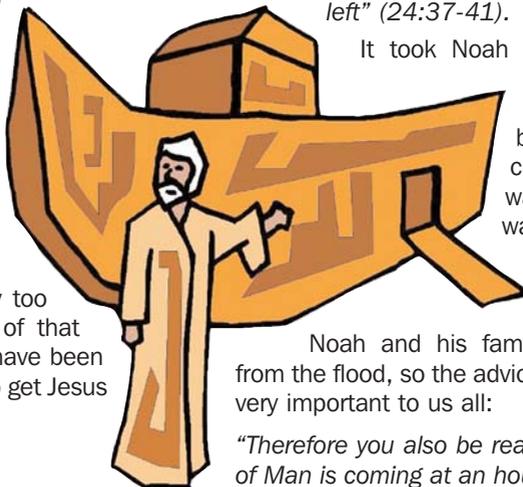
Pilate understood only too clearly the implications of that statement which might have been why he was so anxious to get Jesus released.

Coming King

WHEN Jesus will return is of tremendous importance to us but it is not precisely stated. Jesus said: *"But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36).* Then he proceeded to give a general sign which indicates that people will be taken by surprise. He said that they will be carrying on life as if it will always be so and then will come a sudden and unexpected interruption to it all. For this is how the Matthew 24 passage continues:

"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took

them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left" (24:37-41).



It took Noah something like 120 years to build the ark but this practical and visible warning of what was to come was not heeded and was to no avail. Only

Noah and his family were saved from the flood, so the advice Jesus gave is very important to us all:

"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him" (24:44).

Signs of the Times

There are many signs given in the Bible to indicate that the return of Jesus is near but it is well to ponder this lack of expectation, for now, as in the case of Noah's day, the warnings of coming judgements seem to be generally ignored. That in itself is a sign of the times. Paul wrote to believers in these terms about the unexpected nature of Jesus' return to the earth:

"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape"



(1 Thessalonians 5: 2,3).

Peter also in colourful language refers to the great changes which are coming in earth's affairs when the rule of man will be brought to an end, and he too shows that it will take people by surprise:

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

Watch and be Ready!

The message is always the same. The coming of Jesus will catch out the unwary and will come as a surprise to the heedless and the unbelieving. Thus it was that in his final message Jesus said:

"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you" (Revelation 3:3).

It can be fairly said that the world does not expect and is in no way making ready for Jesus' return. The world is full of its own affairs. How rarely do we meet anyone who even believes that Jesus will return, let alone thinks that Jesus will be coming back very soon. How few people there are who tell us that believers have any hope of a reward in the earth, or that their promised reward depends upon Jesus' return to the earth. The aspirations of the religious are mainly focused on some place other than the earth, which is to ignore the authentic and authoritative promise of the Lord:

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

Derrick Banyard

Listen to God

The Scriptures are the Word of God,
That holy men of old
By inspiration spoke and wrote,
As spirit power told.

God's Word is able to make wise,
The one with hearing ears:
The one who strives to understand,
Believing what he hears.

All preconceived ideas must go,
So leave them all behind;
Imagination's of the flesh
'Twill only dull the mind.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
To heed the Bible pays;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
He'll guide your paths always.

Learn how to pray as did the Lord,
Our need is very great;
His wise example shows the way,
Upon it meditate.

Gwen Marley

Regular readers will be sorry to hear that Pat Pearce recently fell asleep in Jesus. Pat was "Glad Tidings" UK Distribution Secretary for over 30 years and did a great job. Only recently she handed that responsibility on to her daughter Cilla. We send our love to her family and grieve with them. She was a treasure.



12. Books of the Bible

Jesus Christ – The Promised Saviour

In this series **Dudley Fifield** has traced the message of the Bible through its 66 books, and has shown that although they were written over a period of about 1000 years they have one message, because they are books from God. Now he shows that the message of this wonderful collection centres upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Man Apart

It was not only the birth of the Lord Jesus that set him apart from the rest of mankind. That was remarkable in itself – that he was born of the Holy Spirit to the virgin Mary. What also set him apart was his ability to combat sin in all its various guises. The gospels record the manner in which the Lord Jesus was tempted for forty days (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12, 13 and Luke 4:1-13).

In this dramatic way, when he underwent severe mental and physical trial but was wholly successful in resisting the temptation to misuse his God-given powers, the truth was emphasised that the Lord Jesus was susceptible to temptation in the same way that we are subject to it. In every sense he was seen to be a man who shared our experiences and emotions; in that sense he was 'one of us', except that never once did he fail.

Triumphantly the Scripture can say of him that he was "without sin". This is how the writer to the Hebrews describes the



Jesus was tempted to change stones into bread – but refused

nature and achievements of the Lord Jesus, in his struggle against sin:

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage ... in all things he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is

able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:14-18).

Saviour from Sin

In fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies that had been made, God provided a saviour from sin and death in the Lord Jesus Christ and all four gospel records describe the manner of his death by crucifixion. The fact that he shared our nature is important. He was 'one of us'; thus he could represent all human-kind upon the cross. There he publicly displayed how

God regards sin and acknowledged that God was righteous. In the words of Paul:-

“He (God) made him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us (Revised Version: “on our behalf”), that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is the predominant message of the New Testament; that the Lord Jesus “died for us”; yet here was a man, the only man ever, who did not deserve to die. For never once did the Lord Jesus sin. So, says the apostle Peter, it was not possible for the grave to hold him (Acts 2:24).

On the third day God raised him from the dead and Christ, triumphant over all opposition, had conquered sin and death and had opened the way for those who acknowledge his sacrifice and recognise their need to share his victory by their own resurrection from the dead. That was exactly what Jesus had promised when he earlier declared:

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).

Ruler Over All

By demonstrating that he was able to destroy sin in himself – that he could rule all the natural desires that others succumb to – the Lord Jesus showed that he is able and qualified to rule the world when, as the seed of Abraham and the son of David (Matthew 1:1), he will sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem exercising world-wide dominion on God’s behalf.

Thus it was that forty days after his resurrection, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven to sit on his Father’s right hand. For his work to be brought to a conclusion he must return to the earth. So it was that, as the disciples watched him ascend into heaven, angelic voices proclaimed the message:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The message was repeated by the apostle Peter preaching to the Jews, when he said that God will:

“send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20,21).

There are over two hundred such references to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, for his coming to earth is vitally important

Dudley Fifield



Bible Line

Telephone message for
UK readers
Ring **08457-660668**

Bible Reading

Old Testament Once - New Testament twice each year - Reading Plan

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g Tables



and God's Word every day and prosper

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5	...20, 21	15	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22, 23	...	16	...	3, 4
7	...	24, 25	...	17	...	5, 6
8	...	26	...	18	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	27	...	19	...	3, 4
10	...	28	...	20	John	1
11	...29, 30	21	...	2, 3
12	...	31	...	22	...	4
13	...	32	...	23	...	5
14	...	33	...	24	...	6
15	...	34	...	25	...	7
16	...	35	...	26	...	8
17	...	36	...	27	...	9, 10
18	Deut.	1	...	28	...	11
19	...	2	...	29	...	12
20	...	3	...	30	...	13, 14
21	...	4	...	31	...	15, 16
22	...	5	Eccl.	1	...	17, 18
23	...	6, 7	...	2	...	19
24	...	8, 9	...	3	...	20, 21
25	...	10, 11	...	4	Acts	1
26	...	12	...	5	...	2
27	...	13, 14	...	6	...	3, 4
28	...	15	...	7	...	5, 6
29	...	16	...	8	...	7
30	...	17	...	9	...	8

MAY

1	Deut.	18	Eccl.	10	Acts	9
2	...	19	...	11	...	10
3	...	20	...	12	...	11, 12
4	...	21	Song	1	...	13
5	...	22	...	2	...	14, 15
6	...	23	...	3	...	16, 17
7	...	24	...	4	...	18, 19
8	...	25	...	5	...	20
9	...	26	...	6	...	21, 22
10	...	27	...	7	...	23, 24
11	...	28	...	8	...	25, 27
12	...	29	Isaiah	1	...	27
13	...	30	...	2	...	28
14	...	31	...	3, 4	Col.	1
15	...	32	...	5	...	2
16	...	33, 34	...	6	...	3, 4
17	Joshua	1	...	7	1 Thes.	1, 2
18	...	2	...	8	...	3, 4
19	...	3, 4	...	9	...	5
20	...	5, 6	...	10	2 Thes.	1, 2
21	...	7	...	11	...	3
22	...	8	...	12	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
23	...	9	...	13	...	4, 5
24	...	10	...	14	...	6
25	...	11	...	15	2 Tim.	1
26	...	12	...	16	...	2
27	...	13	...	17, 18	...	3, 4
28	...	14	...	19	Titus	1, 2, 3
29	...	15	...	20, 21	Philemon	1, 2
30	...	16	...	22	Heb.	1, 2
31	...	17	...	23	...	3, 4, 5

JUNE

1	Joshua	18	Isaiah	24	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	19	...	25	...	8, 9
3	...	20, 21	...	26, 27	...	10
4	...	22	...	28	...	11
5	...	23, 24	...	29	...	12
6	Judges	1	...	30	...	13
7	...	2, 3	...	31	James	1
8	...	4, 5	...	32	...	2
9	...	6	...	33	...	3, 4
10	...	7, 8	...	34	...	5
11	...	9	...	35	1 Peter	1
12	...	10, 11	...	36	...	2
13	...	12, 13	...	37	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	14, 15	...	38	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	16	...	39	...	3, 4
16	...	17, 18	...	40	1 John	1, 2
17	...	19	...	41	...	3, 4
18	...	20	...	42	...	5
19	...	21	...	43	2 & 3 John	1, 2
20	Ruth	1, 2	...	44	Jude	1, 2
21	...	3, 4	...	45	Rev.	3, 4
22	1 Sam.	1	...	46, 47	...	5, 6
23	...	2	...	48	...	7, 8, 9
24	...	3	...	49	...	10, 11
25	...	4	...	50	...	12, 13
26	...	5, 6	...	51	...	14
27	...	7, 8	...	52	...	15
28	...	9	...	53	...	16, 17
29	...	10	...	54	...	17, 18
30	...	11, 12	...	55	...	19, 20

OCTOBER

1	1 Chron.	15	Ezek.	27	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	28	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17	...	29	...	3, 4
4	...	18, 19	...	30	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	31	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22	...	32	...	3, 4
7	...	23	...	33	...	5, 6
8	...	24, 25	...	34	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	26	...	35	...	3, 4
10	...	27	...	36	John	1
11	...	28	...	37	...	2, 3
12	...	29	...	38	...	4
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	...	39	...	5
14	...	3, 4	...	40	...	6
15	...	5	...	41	...	7
16	...	7	...	42	...	8
17	...	8	...	43	...	9, 10
18	...	9	...	44	...	11
19	...	10, 11	...	45	...	12
20	...	12, 13	...	46	...	13, 14
21	...	14, 15	...	47	...	15, 16
22	...	16, 17	...	48	...	17, 18
23	...	18, 19	Daniel	1	...	19
24	...	20	...	2	...	20, 21
25	...	21, 22	...	3	Acts	1
26	...	23	...	4	...	2
27	...	24	...	5	...	3, 4
28	...	25	...	6	...	5, 6
29	...	26, 27	...	7	...	7
30	...	28	...	8	...	8
31	...	29	...	9	...	9

NOVEMBER

1	2 Chron.	30	Dan.	10	Acts	10
2	...	31	...	11	...	11, 12
3	...	32	...	12	...	13
4	...	33	Hosea	1	...	14, 15
5	...	34	...	2	...	16, 17
6	...	35	...	3	...	18, 19
7	...	36	...	4	...	20
8	Exra	1, 2	...	5	...	21, 22
9	...	3, 4	...	6	...	23, 24
10	...	5, 6	...	7	...	25, 26
11	...	7	...	8	...	27
12	...	8	...	9	...	28
13	...	9	...	10	Colos.	1
14	...	10	...	11	...	2
15	Neh.	1, 2	...	12	...	3, 4
16	...	3	...	13	1 Thes.	1, 2
17	...	4	...	14	...	3, 4
18	...	5, 6	Joel	1	...	5
19	...	7	...	2	2 Thes.	1, 2
20	...	8	...	3	...	3
21	...	9	Amos.	1	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
22	...	10	...	2	...	4, 5
23	...	11	...	3	...	6
24	...	12	...	4	2 Tim.	1
25	...	13	...	5	...	2
26	Esther	1	...	6	...	3, 4
27	...	2	...	7	Titus	1, 2, 3
28	...	3, 4	...	8	Philemon	1, 2
29	...	5, 6	...	9	Heb.	1, 2
30	...	7, 8	Obadiah	3, 4, 5

DECEMBER

1	Esth.	9, 10	Jonah	1	Heb.	6, 7
2	Job	1, 2	...	2, 3	...	8, 9
3	...	3, 4	...	4	...	10
4	...	5	Micah	1	...	11
5	...	6, 7	...	2	...	12
6	...	8	...	3, 4	...	13
7	...	9	...	5	James	1
8	...	10	...	6	...	2
9	...	11	...	7	...	3, 4
10	...	12	Nahum	1, 2	...	5
11	...	13	...	3	1 Peter	1
12	...	14	Hab.	1	...	2
13	...	15	...	2	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	16, 17	...	3	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	18, 19	Zeph.	1	...	3
16	...	20	...	2	1 John	1, 2
17	...	21	...	3	...	3, 4
18	...	22	Hag.	1, 2	...	5
19	...	23, 24	Zech.	1	2 & 3 John	1, 2
20	...	25, 27	...	2, 3	Jude	1, 2
21	...	28	...	4, 5	Rev.	3, 4
22	...	29, 30	...	6, 7	...	5, 6
23	...	31, 32	...	8	...	7, 8, 9
24	...	33	...	9	...	10, 11
25	...	34	...	10	...	12, 13
26	...	35, 36	...	11	...	14
27	...	37	...	12	...	15, 16
28	...	38	...	13, 14	Malachi	1
29	...	39	...	15	...	17, 18
30	...	40	...	16	...	19, 20
31	...	41, 42	...	17	...	21, 22

By courtesy of The Christadelphian

The Growth of the Gospel 8

Stephen Continues his Defence

*Defending himself against the charge of blasphemy, the apostle Stephen offered a devastating analysis of how Israel had gone badly wrong in the past by refusing the saviour Moses that God had sent them. The inference was only too clear. In the first century many Jews were in danger of refusing to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their God-given saviour and Messiah. Now **John Hellawell** traces the final part of Stephen's defence, which turned out to be his famous last words.*

At the Burning Bush

It was to be another forty years (Acts 7:30), Stephen said to the assembled company, before Moses was called by God to make a second attempt to release his people from slavery and lead them to the Land of Promise. His audience would have been fully aware of Moses' reluctance; quite understandable given his past experience, and also the difficulty which he would encounter before his people finally accepted deliverance.

Relating Moses' experience at the Burning Bush, Stephen provides further key points in his defence:

- ✿ *The appearance of the angel at the bush was in Mt Sinai, not Jerusalem;*
- ✿ *Moses had to remove his shoes because the ground in the wilderness was holy, not intrinsically, but because the angel of God had appeared there;*
- ✿ *Moses' commission was directly from God (as was that of the Lord Jesus);*



- ✿ *The one they had rejected was the ruler and deliverer appointed by God;*
- ✿ *His redemption of the people was accompanied by signs and wonders (as was that of the Lord Jesus);*

Return to Egypt

Even though Moses had worked wonders in the plagues both before and during the Exodus, and although the people had witnessed the majestic power of God associated with the giving of the Law, it was not long before they decided that they preferred to return to Egypt and, in particular, to the worship of Egyptian and other heathen gods. For centuries, with a few exceptions, God's people persisted in turning to idolatry.

Stephen summarises the position by means of a quotation from the prophet Amos, which he modifies as he quotes it. The quotation is from Amos 5:25 -27 of which the last line reads:

"Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus" says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

Stephen amends the phrase “*beyond Damascus*” to “*beyond Babylon*”! In this way he reminds his audience that this was their actual final destination when they went into captivity. In other words, after all that God had done for his people, their repeated apostasy had brought them back to the very place from which Abraham had set out. Abraham had come in faith; they would be cast out of the land into captivity because of their unbelief.

God’s True Dwelling-Place

Having dealt with the first part of his defence – that Israel had failed to comply with the laws which God gave them and to accept his servants – Stephen now turns to the second accusation. This was that he had spoken blasphemy with respect to their “*holy place*”, that is, the Temple.

He begins by pointing out that the original place of worship was a mobile tent, that is the Tabernacle; constructed according to the pattern revealed to Moses at Sinai. This continued to be used when the people arrived at the Promised Land and was only superseded when Solomon built the first Temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians when they went into the captivity to which Stephen had already alluded.

Another Temple

The replacement Temple, still not quite completed, was built by Herod the Great, an Idumean not an Israelite! Furthermore the Most Holy Place within that temple no longer contained the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God’s presence with his people. At the time of the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Ezekiel had seen

the glory depart from the temple as an auspicious sign that God had disowned his people (Ezekiel 10:18).

In reality, no building could be an adequate dwelling place for God and, in support of this, Stephen cites a passage from Isaiah

Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the Lord (Isaiah 66:1,2).

Although he does not actually quote it, the latter part of verse 2 provides him with an extremely powerful argument, for it reads:

“But on this man will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word”.

Stephen’s Final Accusation

Stephen now ends his defence and begins to accuse his accusers! They were no better than their fathers who had always resisted God’s Holy Spirit. Their entire history had been a catalogue of rejected and often murdered prophets. The Lord Jesus had already made the same point to them:

“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, I will send them prophets



and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute” (Luke 11:47-49”.

Their worst crime of all was to put to death the very One of whom Moses spoke and the other prophets foretold. God had given them His law through an angelic ministry and they had failed to keep it.

Stephen is Murdered

It is possible that Stephen had much more to say by way of indictment but was prevented from saying it by the anger of his accusers. The message had struck right to their hearts and yet the Council members were about to do the very thing for which their forefathers had been condemned!

Stephen was privileged to be granted a vision of God’s glory and the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which he shared with his accusers:

“Look, I see the heavens opened and the

Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

The Council could not bear to listen to what they regarded as blasphemy, although, of course, it was not. So they dragged him out and stoned him. Those directly involved in the execution laid their outer garments at the feet of a young man who was to play a significant part in God’s purpose but who thought at the time that he was doing God’s will. He was Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle.

Stephen died calling upon the Lord to receive his spirit and, following his Lord’s example, pleaded that his executioners might be forgiven. Then he “fell asleep”; a very apt expression for the death of those who die in Christ. One day, and that probably quite soon, he will awake in the resurrection when the Lord Jesus returns.

John Hellawell

“Be Strong and of Good Courage”

*We are living in uncertain times and as we move into a New Year we need confidence that there is some plan and purpose behind the things that are happening. There have, of course, been dangerous and troubling times before, including some of the times when the Bible was being written and **Ken Quixley** now shows the way in which faithful people in those times were given the encouragement and confidence we too need, if we are to look ahead in faith.*

Take Heart!

In the chapters of the Bible we encounter some surprisingly faint-hearted men. For reasons of His own, God preferred to appoint leaders who were like that from others who might have been naturally self-confident and self-aware. Thus it was that to people like Moses or Joshua that God

could say: “Be strong and of good courage”. He was appealing to these believers to be faithful, so that they would resolve to do His will. They responded in a most wonderful way and thus became role models for us, living in later and sometimes more difficult times.

This resolution to be strong in the Lord

and to act accordingly – becoming God-reliant and God-dependent in the process – is to be found in all the great men of God. The Lord Jesus bade his disciples “Lift up your heads” (Luke 21:28); and the apostle Paul’s pastoral advice to Timothy was:

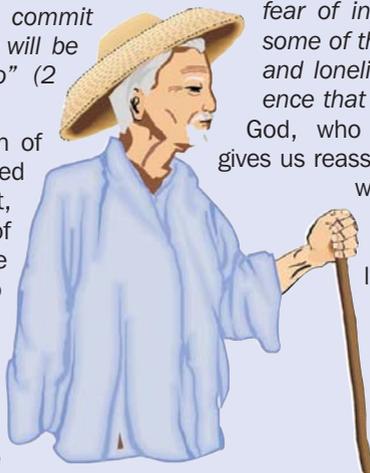
“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1,2).

Faithful men and women of all times are thus encouraged to be strong, to hold fast, not be afraid regardless of what faces us, to overcome their natural fears, and to do the right thing by God.

Frightening Things

We all have times when we are afraid. It is a fact of human experience, and we are not to be ashamed when it occurs, because we all have fears, worries, concerns, which change as we pass through life. Some are “secret”; there just for us, and some are evident for all to see.

- ☞ *As children we might fear the dark; being left alone by our parents; not being liked by other children; and a multitude of other small problems which loom very large in a child’s mind.*
- ☞ *As we grow up there is the typical fear of not succeeding at school, and of having “to stand up and be counted” when we are resolved to stand against the permissiveness and evil of our present world.*
- ☞ *Husbands have their particular worries concerning making a success of*



their work and looking after their children;

- ☞ *Wives might be concerned about family problems, and both partners might well be concerned about the children, their education, their friends, their faith or lack of it and the influence the present evil age might have upon them;*
- ☞ *The older we get, the more there is a fear of increasing ill-health and for some of the pain and suffering, trials and loneliness, or loss of independence that might come.*

God, who knows our weaknesses, gives us reassurance if we align our lives with His and seek to do His will, instead of our own. He says that he will never leave us or forsake us. In many different ways in Scripture, believers are given the assurance, in so many words: *“Don’t be afraid, be strong and of a good courage, hold fast in the faith and in that strength of God behave well”.*

World Events

Jesus was once asked by his disciples to forecast the events that would lead up to the Second Coming and the end of the age. He foretold precisely what has happened in the intervening years: a medley of wars, famines, earthquakes and illnesses, which would increase as things got progressively worse. Ultimately Jesus said people would be terrified for the future.

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be

shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:25-28).

Notice how two things are brought together. When people in general are distressed by the things that are coming: when they are saying among themselves "Whatever next?" – the believer need have no fear for the future. For the believer who has prepared his or her life for what is coming next – the return of the Lord Jesus to earth – knows that Christ is coming to redeem and rescue those who are his. No wonder Jesus bids them: "look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near".

Handover to Joshua

Every time God calls on one of His servants to "Be not afraid", He gives a positive message to us as well to be firm and resolute in His service. This was a message given several times towards the end of the Book of Deuteronomy as Moses was handing over the leadership of the nation of Israel to his divinely-appointed successor Joshua. Sadly, because of his sin at Kadesh, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. So, after leading Israel for forty years through great trials and tribulation, and by now an old man, Moses was debarred. But he meekly accepted God's will, and at His command directed Joshua to be Israel's new leader. And he passed on this critical piece of leadership advice:

"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, he is the One who goes with

you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, he will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:6-8).

There were two key points for Joshua to bear in mind. First, Joshua was to be strong and of good courage – he needed



to have faith and confidence in God. Second, that God would always be with him if he did that. If he was strong for God, God would be strong for him!

Joshua might not have been very confident in himself and it was certain that Moses was going to be a hard act to follow. For this advice is repeated several times in

the closing chapters of Deuteronomy and the opening of the Book of Joshua. We even find the people repeating this advice to their new leader and trying, in the process, to get both him and themselves focused on the important things of life:

"They answered Joshua, saying, "All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage" (Joshua 1:16-18).

Huge Task Ahead

Joshua needed that encouragement because he was about to take the nation across the Jordan into the Promised Land and that was not going to be easy. Humanly speaking it was an impossible task, as the ten spies had said nearly forty years before. There were giants in the land to which they were going and very strong nations already in possession, and there would be grave disappointments along the way as Israel failed God time after time.

So the call to be courageous was not because of Joshua's failures in courage, for he was valiant. He listened, he obeyed, he inspired God's people, and strengthened by God's promise of help which he then received, he performed his task, built the nation and made strong the people.

Men like Moses and Joshua were great men, valiant and true believers. They tower above us in spiritual terms, but they needed to be strengthened to do the right thing. We too have a journey to fulfil – our life's journey. We are pilgrims in this world who want to find our permanent dwelling place in the Kingdom of God.

So there is a huge task in front of us too and we need to be diligent and careful ourselves as we battle against sin in all its forms. So when we are timid and concerned about what people will say or think about us, or even what some people will do or try to do, our courage also needs strengthening. We need to be strong to fight the battles of life.

Spiritual Warriors

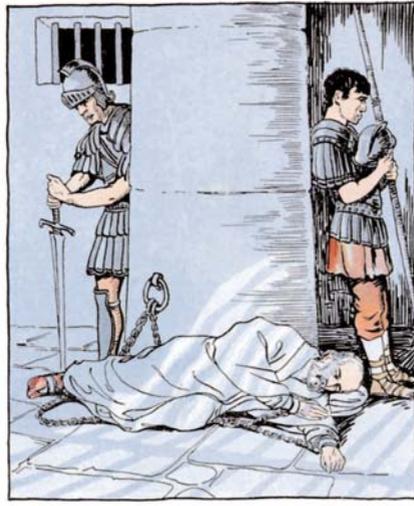
The apostle Paul was a valiant soldier for Christ and he had a clear view of the war that had to be waged, perhaps because he spent much of his later life in the company of soldiers, and sometimes chained to one of them. He often wrote about the spiritual warfare in which a believer must engage for Christ. We think of Paul as a courageous and valiant man, but there were times when he was apprehensive and afraid, just like us. What, the strong apostle Paul?

He wasn't afraid for himself; his was a different kind of fear. In the evil world of Corinth, for example, a decadent place full of evil, God sent Paul this message of encouragement:

"The Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and

do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9,10).

Even in this decadent and evil place, where the apostle needed to be encouraged to speak up and proclaim the gospel of salvation, God knew there were people who would respond and become believers, and he did so. The inspired record says: *"he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (18:11)* and the result was the establishment of a lively and Spirit-filled ecclesia, or congregation, of believers in that city. Some time later Paul wrote to the believers and told them how he had felt when he first came to their city:



“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Live by Faith

In applying all these lessons to ourselves, we have to learn to face our fears and not allow them to degenerate into nagging worries. Like true men and women of God, we are to be brave for God. There is a saying which is so very true, that: “Worry is a thin trickle of fear passing through the mind into which all other thoughts are drained”.

We all have fears and worries at different stages of life, even the most spiritual man or woman is affected this way, and it includes all the great men of God. Jesus

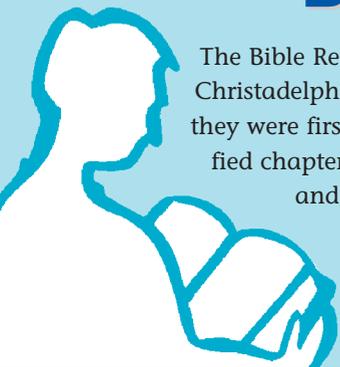
once said that “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18) and the Psalmist offers a concluding thought. King David was once in dire trouble when he had fallen into Philistine hands in one of their main cities – Gath. Things looked bad for him, until he lifted up his head to pray to God, and took courage. This is how he summed up that experience:

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise his word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? All day they twist my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather together, they hide, they mark my steps, when they lie in wait for my life ... When I cry out to you, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise his word), in the LORD (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Psalm 56:3-11).

Ken G Quixley

Bible Companion

The Bible Reading Tables on pages 10 and 11 are in daily use by Christadelphians all over the world, and have been for many years – since they were first compiled by Robert Roberts in about 1853. Read the specified chapters every day and you will have read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice during the course of this coming year. There is nothing more profitable and beneficial than exercising your mind in the Word of God. It will be a blessing to you every day and it will help you to “be strong and of good courage” in all that you do.



A Practical Book

It was a lecture on Russia and the meeting had been thrown open for general discussion on the subject. There followed the familiar dead silence, charged with expectancy: the chairman no doubt was eager for a contribution which would help to make the gathering a success; the audience already interested wanted to hear more, and the speaker would have waited with mixed feelings.

When the silence had reached the painful stage, a middle-aged man rose and asked a question:

“Does the speaker consider that the present threatening conduct of Russia is foretold by Old Testament prophets?”

The speaker, a university lecturer by the way, dismissed the question very quickly. He was a Christian, he said, and a Sunday School teacher as well, but he could never agree to using the Scriptures as helps in the study of politics. Then he added with a smile that he would be glad to deal with prophecy in his Sunday-School class. But no Bible and politics, please. No, no; that would never do.

A Book Apart

Such is the common attitude: to separate the Bible from practical issues; to divorce it, in other words, from everyday affairs, as though it has nothing to say about it. That way we divide our lives into departments and keep religion with its Bible study very separate and removed from the hurly-burly of daily work and household chores and especially from any survey of world problems. Is such an attitude a proper one?

A Bible incident gives us another, quite different, view. It illustrates someone far wiser than any university lectur-



er or professor, who adopted a vastly different attitude towards the Scriptures.

The man was the prophet Daniel. Read carefully through the 9th chapter of Daniel's prophecy and you will find there a model prayer of a man described in the same chapters as 'greatly beloved'.

A Praying Prophet

Daniel had been reading the writings of the prophet Jeremiah and had noted that the prophet decreed seventy years as the period of Jerusalem's desolations:

“I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes...” (Daniel 9:2,3).

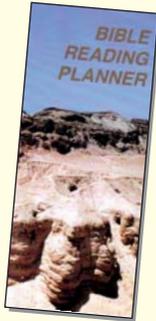
Daniel realised that those 70 years were come or were coming to their close, and now he prayed earnestly for promised intervention. A little knowledge of history will show how right he was. And isn't it significant that it is in this context of using the Scriptures as a practical Book from God that Daniel is called "greatly beloved"?

Harry Whittaker

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