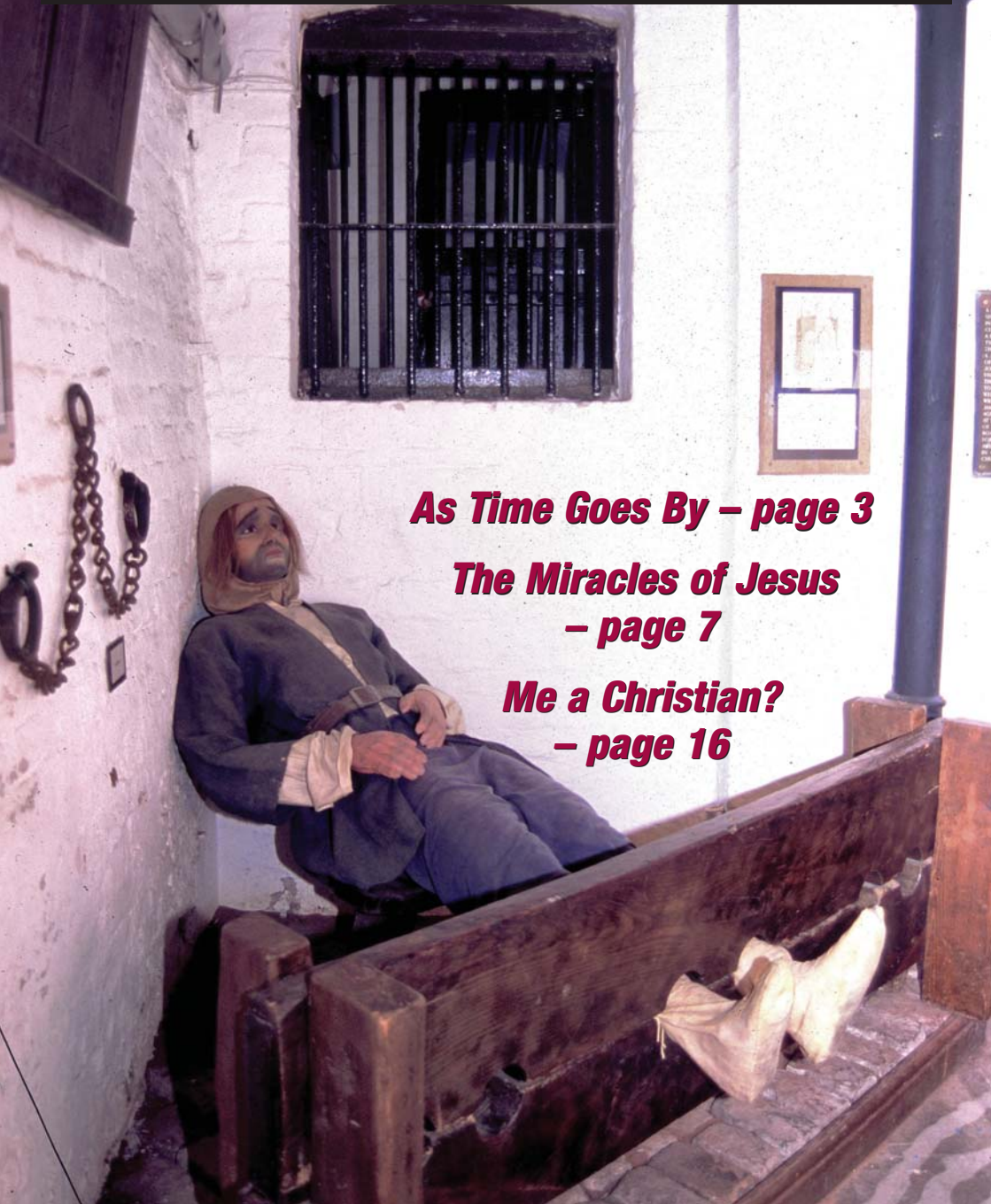


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1463



As Time Goes By – page 3

***The Miracles of Jesus
– page 7***

***Me a Christian?
– page 16***

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

122nd Year

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1463

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters 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 (24 hrs & 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

Local information is also available from:

Fiji – Bible Mission, Box 1012, G.P.O., Suva, Indonesia
– Bible Mission, Gereja Saudara Dalam Kristus, Kerten Rt 01/RW10, Jalan Mundu 3/40, Solo 57143, Indonesia.

Philippines – Mr Albert Cruz, PO Box 991, Manila, Philippines 1099

Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Pacific Islands, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea – Bible Mission, PO Box 42, Wallacia, NSW 2745, Australia

India – T. Galbraith, G.P.O. Box 159, Hyderabad 500001, India

Bangladesh – Christadelphian Bible Students, PO Box 9052, Banani, Dhaka 1213

Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan

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

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Contents

As Time Goes By.....3

Salvation from Sin and Death.....5

The Miracles of Jesus7

Zacchaeus.....10

The First Missionary Journey.....11

God's New Society...14

Me a Christian?16

Have you read? About Aaron the High Priest18

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As Time Goes By...

It is no coincidence that many public buildings have clocks on them, so that passers-by can check their watches or take note of the passing of time. It's no coincidence because, very often, those very buildings are time-pieces. Places like Town Halls, Market Halls, Churches, Cathedrals or Public Memorials have often outlived the buildings which surround them, which have been the subject of development and redevelopment at quite frequent intervals.

Living with the Past

People in the United Kingdom take for granted the fact that their past has survived in this way and that they are living alongside it, sometimes without much thought for what that means.

Visitors from abroad, in those countries where there is less of a settled tradition displayed in buildings or artefacts, often marvel at the survival of buildings, some of which date back to the time of Queen Elizabeth I, who lived in the 16th century. And because it is thought that we need to remember the past, many such buildings have now become museums, sometimes displaying a little of what some aspects of life were like long ago.

This month's photograph was taken in such a building – the Guildhall in Lichfield, Staffordshire, England. There has been a public building on this site, where local officials could meet to administer the affairs of the city, for about 600 years and part of it was in use as a jail from the time of Queen Mary (about 1553) until 1866, over 300 years in all. Prisoners held in the stocks were destined for the gallows or to be burned at the stake, a sober reminder of how

things have changed in some countries, though not in all.

Not everyone thinks that we should look back. Indeed some thinkers have denounced the past as being misleading and discouraging. Henry Ford, whose life was devoted to moving forward at speed, famously said that "*History is more or less bunk*" and George Bernard Shaw equally famously declared: "*We learn from history that we learn nothing from history*".

That may well be so. Unless we put our minds to it, and make a positive effort to learn from the past, there is every chance that we will learn nothing from all the past experiences of people and nations, and will just repeat the same mistakes endlessly.

Learning from the Past

The Bible is a history book which accurately records God's dealings with His people. That communication ended nearly 2000 years ago. Unless we take note of what God said then, and of what He did, we shall never understand what God is doing now, or what He will shortly accomplish in the earth. We have to look back if we want to look forward to better things. Elsewhere in this issue, Cyril Tennant will take another look into the



prison cell and demonstrate how a spiritual lesson can be learned from the events of long ago. For now, we need to pause and think about the time that is racing by, as we are all getting older and the clock keeps ticking away remorselessly. What are we doing, if anything, to prepare for our future life with God?

Israel's Experience

The infant nation of Israel was about to take possession of the land that God had promised their ancestors when God slowed the pace of their journey right down. It was only a few days forced march from Egypt to the land of Canaan – which we now know as Israel (see Deuteronomy 1:2,3). But it took them 40 years to make that journey as they prepared for citizenship and nationhood and, more especially, to be the people of God. All through that time their leader Moses – who was a good deal wiser than either Henry Ford or G B Shaw – kept reminding them about the past and encouraging them to learn from their past experiences. Here are some of his words:

“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15);

“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’ – you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the won-

ders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm ...” (7:17-19);

“You shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not” (8:2).

All together he tells Israel to “remember” 14 times, and bids them “not forget” another 9 times, so it was something that he evidently felt strongly about, and he was God’s prophet who was also communicating with us.

For Us

You may wonder about that last statement: that all these things were also meant to be part of our spiritual education, but that’s how the Bible operates. It accurately records the past so that we can take advantage of all that happened then, and learn from it. Here’s the confirmation of that. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul said this:

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea ... But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted ... all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

Editor

Salvation from Sin and Death

In this article **Cyril Tennant** demonstrates how we can learn vital spiritual lessons by looking back at the past and then thinking about our situation before God. He lives in Lichfield, where the cover photograph was taken, so he is well placed to draw some helpful conclusions.

Criminal Convictions

The original Guildhall at Lichfield probably goes back even further than 1421, the first recorded date. It was known to be the meeting place of the guild of St Mary and St John which was founded in 1387, hence its name the “Guildhall.” And the later use of part of the building as a prison is enough to send a chill down one’s spine. For in the times in question there was little mercy shown to suspected criminals; the only protection from the weather was the bars which prevented their escape!

The church also had little tolerance for any who deviated from their rigid and unbiblical dogma, a relic of which times stands in the Lichfield Market Place – it is a statue of the last ‘Christian’ to be burned at the stake for his non conformity. The whole picture is one of the dominance of human nature, man’s cruelty, intolerance and projection of self. But it is also a picture of man’s imprisonment to sin.

Prisoners All

Here the picture is even more striking. In those far off days, only those who were suspected of criminal charges were imprisoned. In fact, then as now, every one of us is imprisoned by sin at birth. Here are some Scriptures that make that very point:

“The wicked are estranged from the

womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3);

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5);

The apostle Paul confirms this when, after reviewing Old Testament teaching, he concludes:

As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12), and

“You ... were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world ... among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Convicted and Condemned

At the Guildhall there was a court of kinds at which offenders were tried before being pronounced either “guilty” or “not guilty.” But what about the man or woman who is captivated by sin from birth? Is he or she to be condemned to death with no hope of deliverance? Is it to be a life in the stocks for them, or for us?

Once again the issue is quite clear when we let the Bible speak for itself. Here's the apostle Paul again, not now analysing the problem but outlining the solution:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Somehow the sinner – and that expression includes everybody, since there is nobody who is righteous in the sight of God – must meet God's terms of deliverance to receive the gift of everlasting life. Note that everlasting life is not something earned, it is a gift. It is not in the first instance a matter of good works, though they will come in later. It is a result of the initiative God has taken to rescue mankind from the prison house of sin:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

It is a matter that requires our understanding and belief that Jesus was given by God to be our Saviour and that he died to save us from our sins! Provided we believe we can be saved from sin and be set free from its power. The apostle John explains the two sides to this:

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

If we do not accept God's gift of His Son, and do not believe in him, the anger of God will be directed towards us. But when we believe we can escape

those consequences and be set free, for God is offering us eternal life.

Pardoned and Released

The Bible has some very comforting words for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah tells us of one who was to come who would:

"Open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house" (Isaiah 42:7).

Again he writes prophetically of one who would say this to the prisoners:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the

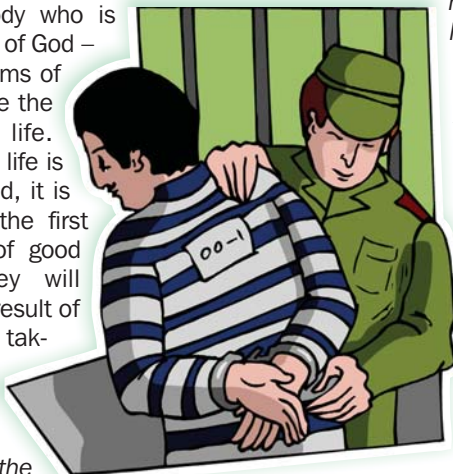
opening of the prison to those who are bound" (61:1).

Although salvation is the gift of God to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is not without cost. Jesus had first to suffer for the sins of men, and it is said of him:

"He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people he was stricken" (53:8).

That's the wonderful message of the gospel. Jesus bore our sins to the cross so that we might be released from the prison house of sin and enjoy the freedom which leads to everlasting life.

Cyril Tennant



Part One

The Miracles of Jesus

During his ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ performed many miracles that no one else could ever do by their own natural ability.

He was able to do these because he had been invested with Divine power. On this point the Gospel writer, John, tells us that a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him”* (John 3:2)

The main purpose for which Jesus performed miracles was to impress those that witnessed them about two things:

- 1 That his power was of Divine origin, and
- 2 that his teaching was from God.

People who believed in his miracles should therefore accept and obey what he had to say.

Empowered by God

Before we examine a specific miracle let us first become acquainted with the way Jesus came to receive this wonderful power. An account of this is given in Matthew’s gospel. It was on the occasion when He went to be baptised by John the Baptist. This is the record.

“Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent

Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed him. Then Jesus, when he had been baptized, came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:13-17).

Here was God’s public announcement from heaven to the effect that the one John had just baptised was indeed the Son of God. This was a truth that no one who had heard the voice could deny. This announcement was accompanied by a visible descent of the Spirit of God, in the form of a dove, being bestowed upon Him. It was this Spirit that enabled Jesus to perform the wonderful miracles that we are to consider in John’s gospel.

Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

The first miracle, or “sign” as John sometimes called them, was the well-known one of turning water into wine. It occurred during a wedding celebration in the Galilean town of Cana. Although the names of the bride and bridegroom are not given, we can assume that one of them was a relative of Jesus because Mary, the



mother of Jesus, was there. Additionally, Jesus, Mary's eldest son, and His disciples had also been invited (See John 2:2).

Mary was the mother of at least seven children and when, a little later, Jesus paid a visit to his hometown Nazareth, his family connections were talked about:

"Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55-56).

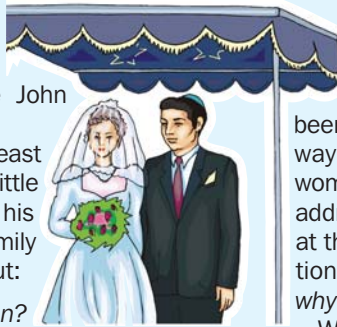
It would appear from this remark that the sisters were already married in Nazareth when the wedding in Cana took place, which leaves us with the probability that one of Mary's sons was the bridegroom.

On this occasion we are able to identify the disciples who were invited. We know their names – Andrew, Peter, John, Philip and Nathaniel – because the calling of these disciples is described in the previous chapter (John 1:40,43,47).

Reason For The Miracle

The Miracle that Jesus performed came about because, in the course of the festivities, the company ran out of wine. The mother of Jesus seemed to have been responsible for this embarrassing situation because she immediately turned to Jesus, assuming that he would be able to help, saying, "They have no wine!" (John 2:3). Jesus responded in a way that suggests he did not think it was his fault.

"Woman, what does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (2:4).



To address his mother as "Woman" might seem to us rather crude, but it may well have been in those days the normal way of addressing any woman. For example, when addressing Mary Magdalene at the tomb after his resurrection, Jesus said, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

Why did Mary think that Jesus might be able to help when she said, "They have no wine?" Some remarkable events had recently taken place. She would almost certainly have known about the baptism of her son six weeks before when the Spirit of God descended upon him. This would have given Jesus unlimited power to perform miracles. Mary would have heard, too, about the wonderful voice from heaven that her eldest son was God's beloved Son, with whom God was well pleased. How encouraged she must have been when she heard about that!

Wilderness Experience

Another piece of news she would, no doubt, have been told was that Jesus had spent forty days in the wilderness, fasting and resisting temptations to do wrong. She must have thought how hungry he would have been and although he now had great power, he had declined to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger (Matthew 4:3,4).

Jesus had refused to do that because he would not use his God-given power to satisfy his own fleshly desires. He was to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29); he was to be 'without spot' (1 Peter 1:19) and blameless, he had to be completely sinless if he was to be our Saviour.



The fact that Jesus had said, *“My hour has not yet come,”* infers that his hour would eventually come and that he would do something about it. Mary, therefore, had some good grounds for thinking that Jesus might, on this special occasion, perform a miracle! It would not be for himself, but for others; and it would answer her need at this difficult time. So, in hopeful anticipation she said to the servants, *“Whatever he says to you, do it”* (John 2:5).

Six Waterpots

“Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:6-10).

Here was a remarkable miracle that saved the day for the wedding celebrations! It is common knowledge that anyone can make wine, but in order to do that it is necessary to do a lot of work. It is necessary to start with a lot of squeezed grape juice, allow it to ferment for a good number of days, and then

allow it to clear for the resulting liquid to be called wine. But here Jesus provided wine from water instantaneously. The miracle had the effect upon the guests that Jesus had hoped for; that they would believe he was the Son of God. The next verse says:



“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him” (v. 11).

To believe in the Lord Jesus because we have seen a miracle done by him is a first step towards giving greater heed to what he has said. His teaching was from God and belief in it is

essential if we wish to gain eternal life. This principle was clearly stated by the Lord himself:

“This is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

Let us then be wise and believe and follow the Lord Jesus in our lives. We may then have confidence that when Jesus comes again, as he soon will, he will remember us and grant us eternal life in his kingdom.

Ralph Green

Bible Line



Telephone message
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Days that changed my life

Zacchaeus

I was just curious about him. As a Jew I knew we had to keep the Law of Moses and that God would send our Messiah, but I'd heard a lot about this extraordinary man, his healing, teaching and that he said the Kingdom of God was coming. Was this man the Messiah?

As the chief Tax Collector for the district I'd heard stories about him, mostly from people grumbling at the amount of tax they had to pay. People always seem to do that. In the process of paying, they told me about parables that challenged their thinking and of the way he had healed folk, blind Bartimaeus and the lame man by the Sheep Pool.

Not that I needed him of course. I was rich and in with the Romans, but I was curious. Why did crowds follow this man everywhere? Why did some people love him so much? I could understand why others hated him so much. We had that in common, at least. Our religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, hated him as much, if not more, than they hated me. No one likes the tax man. We are accused of overcharging people or of not handing over to the authorities all the collected money; which is a

bit unfair, if only a bit!

How to See?

My problem was that I'm short, "vertically challenged" some might term it! I'd heard that this Jesus of Nazareth was coming through Jericho. We don't often get important visitors and here was a chance to satisfy my curiosity. I had been unable to get the ideas I'd heard about him out of my head, and I had been feeling a bit guilty about the growth in my profits lately. (The Romans know that the only way to make a living from tax is to make people pay a handling charge.)

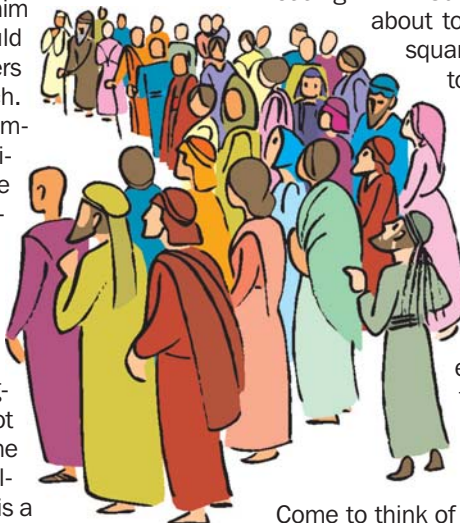
I decided I would have to see him for myself. It would be no good just hearing him; tax collectors know a good storyline when they hear one, and so I needed to see his face.

I was one face in a thousand watching from my vantage point in the sycamore tree. I had had to climb it (so undignified for a tax collector) to get any chance of seeing him. Suddenly, there he was, about to walk past towards the square where he was meant to be speaking.

My House!

Imagine my confusion when suddenly he stopped under my tree, looked up and called my name. I will never live it down! Scrambling dishevelled, down the tree trunk. It's only a wonder the branch did not break and deposit me in a heap at his feet.

Come to think of it that would have been



a really suitable place to land. I barely heard him say he was coming to my house for the day as I dusted myself off.

My curiosity got more than it bargained for. In the time that it took me to get to the base of that tree a lot of things had sorted themselves out in my mind. One look at his face told me that all I had heard about his compassion for people and his insistence that we must repent of our mistakes, was true. I am a materially poorer man now, but the rest of

that day I spent with Jesus made me richer in many other ways. I learned that he is our Saviour and Messiah and that I must be more honest and caring. He helped me to see that by repenting of my greed (and other mistakes) I can be in the Kingdom of God. He said salvation had come to my house and that I too was a son of Abraham.

It's amazing what happens when you get curious!

Cynthia Miles

Growth of the Gospel - 15

The First Missionary Journey

*The conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus marks an important turning point in the spread of the gospel, which had been gradually moving out from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria. Now it was about to move into Asia, as Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey into Asia, as **John Hellawell** explains.*

A Change in Direction

There is a change in the direction of the Acts account from chapter 13 onwards. The first part of Acts could reasonably be called the "Acts of Peter", and it ends as Peter "bows out" at 12:17. We hear no more of him in Acts, but we know from elsewhere in the New Testament that he continued to be active (see Galatians 2:11). From now on we find that the scene is increasingly dominated by the apostle Paul and this section could almost be regarded as the "Acts of Paul".

From chapter 13 the main location also changes, from Jerusalem to Antioch (in Syria), where there was a thriving Christian community amongst whom were "*prophets and teachers*". Prominent amongst these were:

- ❖ **Barnabas** (Acts 11:22)
- ❖ **Symeon Niger**; his 'surname' suggests that he may have been from Africa, possibly Ethiopia or Sudan. He may well have been the same person as Simon of Cyrene (Mk 15:21) the father of Alexander and Rufus (Romans 16:13).
- ❖ **Lucius of Cyrene** – (11:20) located in N. Africa on the coast of west Libya
- ❖ **Menaen**, the foster-brother of Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee (who beheaded John the Baptist) son of Mena-hem [Menachem] of Antipas, an influential Essene. Josephus [Ant.xv.10.5] relates that when Herod was a boy, Menahem assured

him that he would be king. When the prediction was fulfilled, Menahem was favoured by Herod.

Saul of Tarsus (Paul, the apostle).

New Testament Prophets

We tend to think of prophets in the context of the Old Testament but there are also many prophets recorded in the New Testament. While they *“ministered and fasted”*, the Holy Spirit, no doubt through one of the prophets, indicated that Barnabas and Saul were to be set apart for a particular work for which they had been called. After they had fasted and prayed, the rest laid their hands on them as a token of their blessing and support and said their farewells as Barnabas and Saul set off on their missionary journey.

They sailed from the port of Seleucia to the island of Cyprus. Barnabas came from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and so he would be keen to bring the Gospel to his relatives and friends. In Salamis they preached in several of the Jewish synagogues. They had taken with them John Mark (12: 25) as their attendant or helper, a subservient position which John Mark may have disliked. His role may have been to give first-principle instruction on the faith or administer the baptisms.

Preaching in Cyprus

The trio travelled westwards through the island towards the capital, Paphos, where they encountered Elymas Bar-Jesus. He was a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet; comparable with Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:9. This man

attended upon the Roman proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus. It appears from other sources that quite a few Jews had acquired positions of influence and authority in the Roman world.

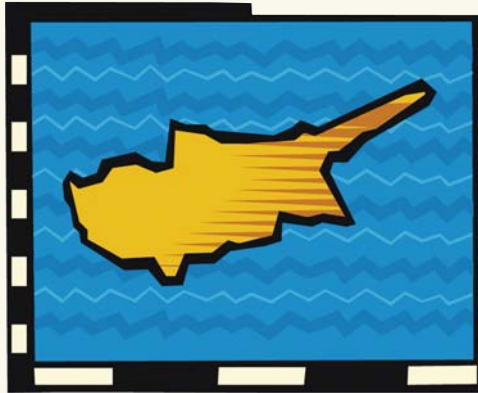
Since Sergius Paulus called for Barnabas and Saul in order to hear the word, he may have been a “God-fearer”. Many prominent Romans were sympathetic to the Jewish faith, the teachings and morality of which stood in marked contrast to the contemporary polytheistic idolatry of the Roman Empire. This man was *“prudent”*, that is “intelligent”, and so it is quite likely that he was curious to

hear what these visitors were teaching.

Elymas resented his patron’s interest, probably from concern that his own position was under threat, for if his benefactor was converted he would have no further use for sorcery and false prophecies. Since

we are told that Elymas withstood the apostles and tried to turn the proconsul *“from the faith”* it is evident that Sergius Paulus was sympathetic to the apostles’ teaching. Clearly something had to be done in order to prevent this opposition. So, Saul *“who is also called Paul”*, being filled with the Holy Spirit, pronounced judgment on Elymas:

“O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” (Acts 13:10,11)



The infliction of blindness may seem harsh to us but it was evidently divinely approved. We are told that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit; Paul said that the hand of the Lord was about to descend upon Elymas and a punishment of this sort could only be inflicted by divine power. Paul seems to be quoting from, or alluding to, two Old Testament passages in the Minor Prophets Hosea and Micah:

“Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them” (Hosea 14:9 – KJV); and

“Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and Rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity” (Micah 3:9 – NKJV).

Old in the New

When a quotation occurs in the New Testament it is often the case that the verse cited is only a “shorthand” guide to the relevant passage, for the division of the sacred text into chapters and verses is a relatively recent device. When the original Old Testament passage is examined in its context the whole section is often seen to be equally appropriate and relevant.

Further investigation reveals how remarkably appropriate is this selection of quotations than might at first be appreciated. This was, no doubt, also influenced by God’s Holy Spirit. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament – the Septuagint – that was widely used at that time, verse 2 of the Hosea passage reads:

“...turn to the Lord your God...that you may not receive the reward of unrighteousness ...”

This is a particularly apt comment for the circumstances. Even more interesting is the prelude to the Micah quotation:

“Therefore you shall not have night without vision, and you shall have darkness without divination; the sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them. So the seers be ashamed, and the diviners abashed; indeed they shall all cover their lips; For there is no answer from God. But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice, and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:6-8)

Verses 6 and 7 relate to the false claims of Elymas and his punishment, while verse 8 is appropriate for Paul. A following verse reads:

“Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money.....” (Micah 3:11).

As a Jew, Elymas should have been familiar with these passages. So the punishment of blindness, probably only a temporary condition, came upon Elymas. The choice of retribution is probably significant and symbolic, emphasising the spiritual blindness of the Jews with regard to the Gospel. Elymas’ spiritual blindness is expressed in his physical blindness.

The effect on the proconsul was also significant – *“he believed”*. One hopes that Elymas would also now *“see”* sense and amend his ways. If his patron embraced the faith he could not continue with his former life, even with normal sight. Although the record does not indicate the outcome, one hopes that Elymas recognised that here was power indeed and that he also became a convert to the faith.

John Hellowell

Part Four

God's New Society

In this series Tom Barling has been examining what it was that made first century Christianity so dynamic and vigorous. It introduced a new style and quality of life – one which was dominated by love and fellow feeling among the believers – and they had a real and living hope in what the Bible promised.

That lifestyle could be ours as well, as this article explains.

The Future under Control

In these studies we have seen evidence of the Lord's foreknowledge. He had foreseen, and foretold, his death upon the cross. But more than once (see Matthew 16:21; 20:18-19), he had also foretold very clearly that he would rise from the dead. It was the experience of finding that their Lord had indeed risen from the dead which transformed the dejected apostles into completely different men.

But though they now saw their Master alive, they were still clinging to their conviction that he was the Messiah, the king of Israel. They were right about that, but there was much to be done before the Lord would become king. At the end of forty days (see Acts 1:3) Jesus led them out of Jerusalem, to the mount of Olives.

When they asked him whether he would then restore the kingdom to Israel, he did not say they were mistaken in this matter, but rather that it was not for them to know when this would happen. God alone knew this (v.7).

Work to Do

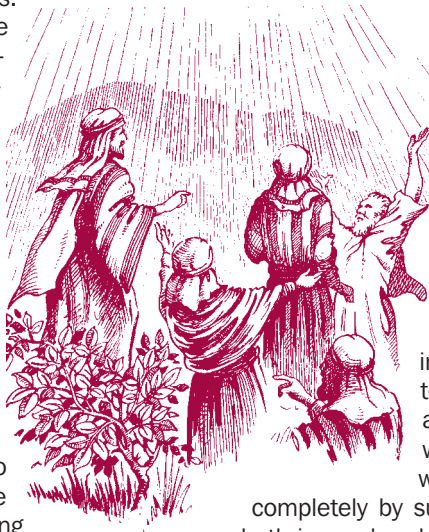
Jesus then told them they were to

receive power when they were given the Holy Spirit and they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (v.8).

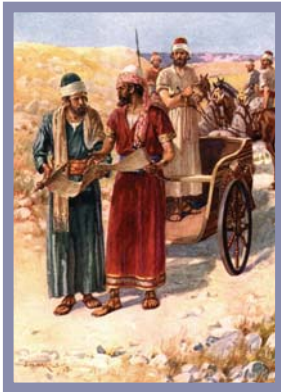
This was some programme, and the apostles must have been astonished when they first heard the Lord's words; but so it was to be. The way this statement of the Lord Jesus became true is yet another evidence of the amazing manner in which he could foretell the future. Indeed, as we shall see, there was one development which took the apostles

completely by surprise. It was to bring both joy and problems.

But before we come to consider that event, described for us in Acts 10, we must see how the gospel came to be launched. After the apostles had recovered from their surprise and disappointment at seeing the Lord Jesus ascend to heaven, they had to think about the task the Lord had given them. They were not to carry this out in their own strength, for some fifty days after the Lord's resurrection, on what is known as the day of Pentecost, the assembled twelve apostles received the Holy Spirit.



There were Jews present from all over the Roman Empire, and beyond, who had come to Jerusalem for one of their great feasts. Attracted by what was happening, they provided Peter with his first opportunity to declare how God had raised Jesus from the dead, and he and his fellow apostles were there together to witness to the fact. (Acts 2:32). At the end, Peter called on his fellow Jews to repent. They were to recognise they were sinners who needed to change their ways. As an evidence of this, the apostle called on them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. What an encouragement it was to the Twelve when about three thousand were baptised (v. 41).



- *Philip (not Philip the apostle) was directed by God to contact an Ethiopian eunuch.*

This he did, finding him reading Isaiah 53 which foretells the sufferings of God's servant. When Philip had explained this referred to Jesus, and went on to show how salvation could be obtained through this same Lord Jesus, the eunuch asked to be baptised, and this

Philip did for him.

Now it is very possible the Ethiopian was a proselyte and had accepted the God of Israel. The fact he had made the long journey to Jerusalem, to worship there (see v.27) seems very much to support that conclusion. It is when we come to Acts 10 that the most important expansion of the Gospel takes place. Let us remind ourselves that up until the events described in Acts 10, the Christian church was made up exclusively of Jews and their proselytes, and by proselytes we must understand those who had accepted circumcision and the observance of the Law of Moses.

Growing Community

✪ Jews

Thus a new society was being born, with each member recognising that he or she was a sinner, and accepting the risen Jesus as the Saviour. We must note that while, as Jesus had told the apostles before his ascent to heaven, their witness was to start at Jerusalem (see Acts 1:8), Peter's first audience had come from as far as Rome, and beyond the Roman empire ((Acts 2:9). In this way the Gospel was to be carried over great distances, and we can be sure some at least of the new converts would not keep the good news to themselves.

✪ A Proselyte

- *The early programme of preaching by the Twelve was restricted to Jerusalem,*
- *Judea and Samaria (Acts chapters 3-8). The end of Acts 8 describes a fascinating incident.*

✪ Gentiles

In Acts chapter 10 we read about the conversion of a Roman officer called Cornelius. He is described, and his family, as "God-fearing" (v.2). It is important we understand this expression. Like others at this time, although he was not a Jew, and therefore had never been circumcised, he loved to go to the synagogue and hear about the God of Israel, who was holy and so different from the gods of the Roman and Greek worlds. These were not only many but their behaviour was sometimes disgraceful. Everything about Israel's God was different. However, fine man though he was (see v.2),

Cornelius was not, as we have seen, a Jew or a proselyte.

This is the background of the events described in Acts 10. First, Cornelius who is in Caesarea is told in a vision to send men to Joppa some 29 miles away, to contact a man called Peter. These men were to bring Peter back to Caesarea. As the men drew near to Joppa, Peter had a remarkable vision. He was hungry and three times he saw something like a large sheet let down from heaven. This sheet contained animals which orthodox Jews were strictly forbidden to eat, yet Peter was told to eat.

The apostle was at a loss to understand what all this could mean (see v.17). While he was in this state, the men sent by Cornelius arrived at the house where he was staying. Peter was told very clearly these men had been

sent by God and he was not to hesitate to contact them (v.20). By this time Peter was convinced God was instructing him to act, so he welcomed the men sent by Cornelius, lodged them for the night and the next day set out with them to Caesarea. Peter knew something momentous was going to happen, so he decided not to go alone. If we look at Acts 11:12 where the apostle is giving an account in Jerusalem of what had occurred, it is clear he had six witnesses!

This was a very intelligent move on his part. He realised that some might challenge his account of events but if in addition to him there were six others, the most sceptical would be silenced. So it was he arrived duly in Caesarea and in our next study we hope to see what happened there, in the household of the Roman officer.

Tom Barling

Me a Christian?

The apostle Paul was a prisoner, having appealed to Caesar, the Roman Emperor, and he was on his way to a hearing at Rome.

On the way his appeal was considered by a Roman Governor, who was advised by a specialist in Jewish affairs named Herod Agrippa. He listened intently to Paul's words (you can read the full account in Acts 26:1-27) and then he said: "*You almost persuade me to become a Christian*" (26:28).

This can be understood in two quite different ways. On the one hand it might suggest that Agrippa was on the verge of faith – that he was almost a believer. On the other hand he could have been sneering at the apostle's

appeal, in effect saying to him: "*Do you think you can make me a Christian so easily?*"

Agrippa was by no means ignorant about the prophets and in a general way he knew about the Jewish religion. He was also informed of the facts concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notice his use of the word "*Christian*". Disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26) and although the name had by no means come into general use, Agrippa knew it, and he would have known a good deal about those who were so called.

The Herod family made it their business to know: that was how they survived in positions of power and

influence. But did that knowledge make him any better? Not really. It probably dulled the edge of his curiosity. Perhaps he thought that he would have known all that Paul would have to say. His supposed knowledge stood in the way of him being able to understand the real truth. He thought he already knew everything he needed to know!

Out of Focus

It's one of those curiosities of life that the knowledge we already possess – right or wrong – can blind us to the real truth. There are many people today who are so sure that everything came about by sheer chance – without a Creator and Designer – that they cannot look objectively at the created world and marvel at what He has made. They know, or think they know, too much. Yet the first condition of knowing a thing is to know what we do not know. We are never too old to learn. Humble realisation of that fact can help us to read the Word of God and listen to its preaching intently, never casually always carefully.

Things that we think are right may only be partly right, or might even be quite wrong. Have you ever tried to look at something which is out of focus? Perhaps it's an image on a screen or, if you have poor sight, a view of the world without your glasses on. We can see something on those occasions but the blurred outline keeps us from seeing the sharp reality.

It can be like that with the gospel of salvation. We need to hold fast to the plain central facts of the Gospel – Bible teaching about our own sinfulness and helplessness and our need of a Saviour to deliver us from sin and death. Only then will we really appreciate the

perfect work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us and the power of simple faith followed by consecration and obedience.

Agrippa's Opportunity

That was why Paul appealed so earnestly to Agrippa:

"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:27-29).

This was more than Paul's opportunity to get a favourable decision. It was Agrippa's opportunity to respond to the gospel. We know nothing of what the king thought, but he resisted the truth.

There is one thing that often keeps an individual from surrender and that is indolence – heart indolence: the unwillingness to realise the call of Christ and see what it means.

God calls us to become free men and women – free from the bondage of sin and death. Even though Paul was in chains, he was free from that bondage and that was what really mattered. Now, his appeal comes to each of us, as we read his words. He bids us become Christians – followers of the true King, Christ's free men.

"I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am".

Claud Lamb

Have You Read?

About Aaron the High Priest

What is it about?



❖ Who was he?

Older brother to Moses and Miriam, from the tribe of Levi, born during the time when the Israelites were in Egypt.

❖ When?

Approx. 1570 B.C.

❖ Why is he important?

When God chose to bring the captive Israelites out of Egypt, He sent Aaron to speak for his brother Moses (Exodus 6:30, 7:1-2). Later, in the desert, God gave instructions for the religious and practical growth of His fledgling nation, including the appointment of a High Priest. Aaron was the first, (Leviticus 8 & 9) his sons carrying on this office that lasted for 1500 years.

Though chosen by God, Aaron showed all the bewildering and contradictory characteristics that we show. Sometimes he was bold and courageous, at others he was failing and faithless. His life as High Priest, though, was only a shadow of something greater to come: Jesus, God's last and eternal High Priest.

Where will I find it?





Most of Aaron's life appears in Exodus and Numbers: his priestly role comes mainly in Leviticus (Books 2, 4 & 3 of the Old Testament.)

Joan Lewis




What should I look out for?



He had good points –

-  Courageous when his brother Moses approached the powerful Pharaoh to ask for the Israelites freedom from slavery (Exodus 7-10)
-  Tireless supporter of Moses when the people first experienced war (Exodus 17:8-13)
-  Fearless when a rebellion occurred in the Israelite camp (Numbers 16:1-50)
-  Had a clear blessing (proving his God-given authority) when his rod miraculously budded (Numbers 17:1-13; Hebrews 9:4)

And some not so good ones –

-  While Moses was receiving God’s commandments on Sinai, Aaron gave in to the people and made a golden calf for them to worship (Exodus 32:4), for which he almost lost his life (Deut 9:20)
-  He failed (with Moses) to give God the glory when water miraculously poured out of the rock in the desert (Numbers 20:8-13)
-  Like Moses, he could not enter the land that the nation’s wanderings had led them to; he died instead, aged 123, on its borders. (Numbers 20:23-29; Deuteronomy 10:6, 32:50)

What was a High Priest? What has it to do with me?

It starts to make sense when we look at Jesus in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews shows how Jesus is ‘better than’ those things connected with Aaron:

Aaron as High Priest	Jesus as High Priest
Appointed by God, (Exodus 28:1 Heb 5:1) others could not be High Priest (Numbers 16:40, 2 Chron.26:16-21)	Appointed by God (Exodus 28:1 Heb 5:1), others could not be High Priest (Numbers 16:40, 2 Chron.26:16-21)
Year after year he entered into the presence of God to sacrifice animals for Israel’s sins. (Leviticus 16:15-16). Because they were only animals they could not permanently remove sin. (Heb.10:11)	Jesus offered himself as a complete sacrifice for sin once and for all (Hebrews 9:14,25,26)
Aaron, a mortal, had to pass on the High Priestly role to his descendants (Lev. 21:1, 21, Neh.10:38).	Jesus, now immortal, is High Priest for ever. (Heb 5:6; 10:21)
Aaron alone entered the holiest place through the veil of the temple, once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:2-4)	Through his own sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26) Jesus did away with the barrier that stood between God and man (Hebrews 10:19,20), to be a permanent and accessible mediator.

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