

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1477

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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The Promised Seed

If you listen carefully to other peoples' conversations, you can sometimes deduce things from just a passing word or two.

Writers of detective fiction deliberately plant such phrases, to give readers a clue, here and there, but it happens in real life too. For the things that really matter to people can slip out in casual conversation, even when they don't mean them to.

Deliberate Pointers

There is nothing casual or unplanned in God's Word, the Bible. It is the product of Divine thought and revelation and, as such, contains information which really matters. So, even a passing mention of something can turn out to be very important. That's why the Bible needs to be read carefully. Here is an example. During the Creation account, the record says this:

"God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth'; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:11,12).

Then, when Adam was given guidance about what he could and couldn't do, he was told: *"I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree*

whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food" (1:29).

Remember that nothing is ever unnecessary or superfluous in the Bible. If a point is being made, there is a purpose behind it, and a careful reader will notice it. For the two passages might have been written like this, and it would seem that nothing would have been lost:

"God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, on the earth' ... And it was so. And God saw that it was good ... 'See, I have given you every herb which is on the face of all the earth, and the fruit of every tree; to you it shall be for food'".

So why are we given the extra information? Why does the record tell us four times that the vegetation God created was seed-bearing, that its: *"seed is in itself"?*

Seed-Bearing

The explanation is not long coming within the Genesis account. For the very word "seed", which gets its four-fold introduction in the very first chapter of the Bible, turns out to be the key to the unfolding purpose of God. God made vegetation with the capacity to continue, indeed to abound. One tree could spawn many replacement trees and, in a fertile world, that would certainly have happened. so it was with humankind.

When Cain killed Abel, Eve gave birth to Seth, saying *"God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel,*



whom Cain killed” (Genesis 4:25). Unless this capacity had been inbuilt, mankind would have perished long ago. But God made a world that is designedly self-perpetuating. Things are meant to continue, because there is a pattern and a purpose behind everything. We are living in a world that has been designed by the great Designer of heaven and earth.

Seeds, like those on this month’s front cover, have the prototype of new life within them. Plant them in the right environment, give them the right growing conditions and they will produce new growth of the same “kind” as the parent plant. And, in much the same way, humans have the God-given capacity to bring new life into the world which reflects a unique blend of the characteristics of both parents. But the Genesis account was saying even more than this – that God wanted His world to continue, until His purpose was complete. It was pointing towards a remarkable promise: the very first mention of the gospel in the whole Bible, and that within its first three chapters.

Rescue Mission

It took just that long – less than three full chapters – for the Creation to go wrong. Given the choice of obedience or disobedience, Eve and then Adam chose disobedience and accepted the inevitable outcome. But there was still hope of recovery and restitution, for God said that he would send a Saviour:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

These words were addressed to the serpent who had deceived Eve, and who thus becomes a symbol of all

those who oppose and challenge the will of God. There would be many such in successive generations – people who were at enmity with God, and who opposed those who were trying to please Him. But, if you are now reading the Bible more carefully, you will notice something else about this promise. One special descendant is mentioned, and that a descendant of a woman (“her Seed”), not of a man. That one special descendant – who would be virgin-born – would tackle the root problem of human rebellion and disobedience. He would be bruised in the process, but not fatally. Yet the effect of his mission would be to utterly destroy the power of sin, and to remove all enmity towards, and all opposition against, the will of God. He would bruise it in the head, another way of saying that he will stamp it out altogether.

Coming Conqueror

Some 4000 years later the Lord Jesus was born to the virgin Mary, with no human involvement. He was the promised seed of the woman, and by this time much more had been revealed about the role he was to fulfil.

It might only have been a passing mention in Genesis – that the earth would “bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself”. But, under the guiding hand of the Designer, that mention of life going on and on, points unerringly to a purpose which we can become part of. We need to let God’s Word lodge in us, so that its thought patterns can change the way we think and act, if we are to become people “after His kind”.

Editor

What Kind of a World?

What kind of a world do we find ourselves in? It is one of huge contrasts and inequalities. On the one side there is much that is beautiful, fair and lovely. On the other side, many things are ugly, unfair and hateful. Some people enjoy life; some would rather be dead!

We learn to live with these contrasting circumstances every day.

- ❖ We might have been moved to the depths of our being by the sight of captivating scenery, a beautiful garden or a starlit sky. On the contrary, we might feel disgust and anger at the sight of a litter-filled street, a landscape blighted by industrial waste, or the prospect of increasing damage to our environment by global warming.
- ❖ Our sense of injustice might have been aroused by the thought of the wealth enjoyed by a few in comparison to the desperate poverty suffered by millions in the Third World.
- ❖ We hear of much love amongst human beings – family love, love amongst friends and neighbours; the selfless love of those who work with the sick, the underprivileged and the deprived. But we hear far more about the hatred all around us. Greed, crime, violence, wars, terrorism, rape and corruption dominate our news and could make us conclude that the human race is doomed to self destruction.



the sand and just enjoy the life we have now? Certainly we can pretend that we are not affected by the ugliness, the poverty and the hatred in the world. But sooner or later there is one thing we all have to face – Death. However much we live life to the full, are cushioned by material prosperity and blessed with good health, this comes eventually to us all. Death is the end of life. When we die, we cease to exist, until God recreates us by resurrection from the dead.

What would we like?

We all know the kind of world we would like to live in – one where:

- we could always see beauty, where we never had to look at the ugly, the obscene, the polluted;
- we all enjoyed a fair share of the good things with no inequality;
- everyone could live securely, with no fear of our fellow human beings;
- our bodies were not subject to fatal diseases and increasing decrepitude, followed finally and inevitably by death.

Tomorrow's World.

Would it surprise you to know that all these good things have already been promised by Almighty God? Throughout His Word, the Bible, we have

Forget it?

Would it be better to bury our heads in

wonderful word pictures of what this world will be like when it is governed by His chosen ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ.

↘ **Beauty**

When Jesus reigns as king of the world, the earth will become once more a place of beauty, unspoiled by man's mismanagement.

"The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God" (Isaiah 35:1,2)



"Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness" (35:6-8);

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 55:13).

"Behold, the days are coming," says

the LORD, "When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it" (Amos 9:13).

↘ **Fairness**

The World that is coming will be a place where equity will be the key to peace and prosperity for all.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:7).

"In mercy the throne will be established; and one will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness" (Isaiah 16:5).

"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his loins, and faithfulness the belt of his waist" (Isaiah 11:1-5).

"He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they

shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4).

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14).

“... because he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained (Jesus). He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead”(Acts 17:31).

↘ Love

This new world will be one where the love of God and of his Son will transform human behaviour. Love will be the ruling principle of this new age:

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:6-9).

“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee

away” (Isaiah 35:10).

↘ Life

The result will be life as it has never been experienced before: eternal life for people who have been transformed to be like their ruler – the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Bible promises for all those who live in that new age – the Kingdom of God, when it is established upon earth:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then he who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:4,5).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

“... (God) will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality” (Romans 2:6,7).

The Question to Ask

These Scriptures just give us glimpses into the glorious world which God has prepared for those who seek Him and His righteousness. To obtain a fuller picture of the future world, why not read more of the Bible and find out how you could be included in these promises of a perfect world? Ask yourself this question: “What kind of a world would I like to live in for evermore?”

Marion Buckler

Part One

A History of Christianity

By its very nature, history is a developing subject. Today's events are tomorrow's history. Some days go by and there is little change in human affairs. But, looking back, there are certain dates which are turning points in the development of human affairs.

Think about the last time Great Britain was successfully invaded by an enemy country in 1066. Consider 1492, when Christopher Columbus set sail for what he thought would be India, by sailing westward. Or what about 1945 when the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in Japan.

Much more recently, many of us remember 11 September 2001, when the World Trade Centre in New York was destroyed by planes, piloted by terrorists. All these dates, and many others besides, mark important events in human history.

Turning Points

Christianity is not exempt from these times of great change, although what is important may differ from one person to another. The preaching of the coming Kingdom of God began for the world at large with the work of Jesus Christ. All his teaching, however, was built upon the foundation laid in the Old Testament. The Jews of his day had to come to terms with the change – a big change for them – that the door of salvation was opened to the

Gentiles as well as to themselves. For too long they had seen God as someone who had only cared about them!

Jesus gathered about him a group of disciples who initially did not understand his purpose or his teaching. They expected him to become an all powerful king who would drive out the Roman army, as earlier revolutionaries had, if only for a while. They wanted him to re-establish the Kingdom of God in Jerusalem and to rule there as king. It took them a long time to realise that the cross had to come before the crown.

Vital Break Through

After that shameful death by crucifixion at the hands of envious Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities, there was a vital development – one that ensured the survival and enlargement of the Christian community. Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead on that Passover Sunday morning: something that is now celebrated worldwide at Easter time. This incontrovertible fact is the basis of the Christian hope of life after death. It transformed the followers of Jesus from a bunch of people who had lost all hope into people who were ready to take that message across the inhabited world, and who were willing to suffer and die for their beliefs. They were so sure that Jesus had triumphed over death and that he had *“brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (2 Timothy 1:10).

It took a few weeks before the apostles began to do what Jesus had



commanded and to start to share the good news about the saving death and wonderful bodily resurrection of Jesus. They had seen him and touched him, and knew that he was alive:

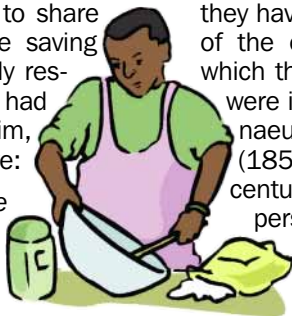
“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ... these things we write to you that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:1-4).

The rest of the New Testament tells the story of how the gospel was taught to the Jews by the apostle Peter and his companions and then to the Gentiles by the apostle Paul and his companions. It contains letters of instruction and encouragement and ends with an enigmatic prophecy about the future history of the world.

After New Testament Times

During the first two centuries A.D., the gospel spread throughout the Roman world. It was a good time for that to happen for the Empire provided for good communication with good roads, common languages – Greek and Latin – and a stable and peaceful political situation – the “*Pax Romana*”. Many of the first followers of Jesus were slaves or very poor folk. So, in order to attract the intellectual minds of the Hellenized world, some philosophical ideas began to be added to Christian teaching: ideas about the nature of God and of man, not found in the Bible.

It must have been thought that these extra ideas would make the gospel more acceptable to people and by now



Many wrong ideas got mixed up with the true gospel, causing much confusion

they have come to be regarded as part of the original Christian message – which they are not. Many wrong ideas were introduced by teachers like Irenaeus (late 2nd century), Origen (185-253) and Tertullian (late 2nd century), who have left their own personal imprint upon Christian doctrine.

The disciples of Christ spread the message of the gospel and met together for prayer and Scripture reading. By now their Scriptures came to include all of what we call the Bible – both Old and New Testaments.

The lives of the earliest disciples were simple and their belief in Christ's return was very real. But, as time went by, things changed out of all recognition. After a period of intense persecution in the 3rd century, Christianity became a respectable religion in the Roman world. By AD 312, it had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, under the Emperor Constantine.

This marriage of church and state brought some blessings – but not many! Above all, sadly, it opened the door to the corruption of its teaching and of its leaders. Some people were baptized as Christians because they now saw membership of the church as a stepping stone to personal or political advancement. And there was more confusion to come as Church leaders were put under pressure to define their beliefs in an attempt to make Christianity a unifying force in the Roman Empire. The confusion that had already begun, as Christian and pagan beliefs began to get mixed up, was now about to get much worse.

Trevor Pritchard

Should We Pay Tithes?

There are some churches that insist their members hand over one-tenth of their earnings to church funds. The Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists both adopt this rule and, as a consequence, their organisations have become very wealthy. They claim that paying tithes is based on the teaching of Scripture. You may have been wondering if you should pay tithes, too. In this article **David Pearce** examines the background to tithing in the Bible, to see whether it was a feature of the first century church.

Precedents in Genesis

Although we associate tithing with the Law of Moses, the first two mentions of it in the Bible are actually found in the book of Genesis. The first was when Abraham returned victorious from battle, having rescued his nephew Lot from the armies of the Eastern kings. He came to the priest of the Lord in Jerusalem, and gave him a tithe of the spoils of victory.

“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tithe of all” (Genesis 14:18-20).

Although it does not say here in Genesis that the tithe was one-tenth, the writer to the Hebrews confirms this as the amount he gave (Hebrews 7:2). It is reasonable to speculate that Abraham may have made a vow to God before he went into battle, promising to give Him back one-tenth if he was successful.

Jacob’s Vow

The second occasion was when Jacob left home to escape the wrath of his brother Esau. Fearful of the dangers and uncertainties that lay ahead, he

promised God at Bethel that if He would take care of him and bring him safely home again, he would give God one-tenth of all his possessions.

“Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will surely give a tenth to you’” (Genesis 28:20-22)

Twenty years later God reminded him of this promise (Genesis 31:13), and he made the journey to Bethel to pay what he owed, presumably to a priest of the Lord.

The Law of Moses

It is noteworthy that these examples of paying a tithe are ‘one-off’ cases, thanking God for His help. The next time we read about tithes, however, the situation is different. This time the offering of the tithe is part of the Law of Moses. It is compulsory, and to be repeated year after year. Leviticus 27:30-32 states that one tenth of all crops and animals in Israel were to be given to God, and Numbers 18:24 suggests that giving to God meant giving to the Levites, His servants.

However, there is a complication. Deuteronomy ch 14:23 says that the

tithes were to be taken to the holy place which God would choose, identified in later years as Jerusalem. However, it says the tithes were to be eaten there by the Israelite and his family. Presumably they would only eat a token amount of the tithes, because there would be many cartloads of produce from the average farm.

It seems likely that the major portion would be handed over to the Levites to be stored in the sanctuary – we have an example of this in the time of Hezekiah, in 2 Chronicles 31:6,7, and also in the promise of God’s blessing in Malachi 3:10. In Deuteronomy 14:28 we discover that every third year, instead of taking the tithes up to Jerusalem, people handed them over to the Levites and the poor in their own cities, scattered through the country.

Overall, it is clear that the one-tenth handed over by the other eleven tribes was the main source of income for the Levites, leaving them free to teach the Law and enforce it without having to worry about money. If the people failed to keep up their obligations, the Levites would be forced to go back to cultivating the land, and the Law would fall into disuse. This actually happened in the time of Nehemiah – see Nehemiah 13:10-12.

Thus far we have shown that a tithe could be a single offering as a thanksgiving for benefits received, or a regular and compulsory national tax paid over to the Levites.

The First Century Church

What happens when we turn over to



the New Testament? When Gentiles were baptized and became Christians, were they required to pay one-tenth of their annual income to God? Early on in the preaching of the gospel there was a fierce argument between Jewish Christians from Jerusalem and the Apostle Paul and Barnabus over whether Gentiles needed to keep the Law of Moses. The issue was resolved in an important Conference held in Jerusalem, described in Acts chapter 15. After much discussion, it was agreed to send a letter to the Gentile Christians in which they were told they need not be burdened by keeping the Law. It read as follows:

“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell!” (Acts 15:28,29).

Later the apostle would write his letters to the Romans and to the Hebrews, explaining that the Law was temporary, and only intended to teach people about the coming of Christ as the perfect sacrifice. Keeping the Law, he said, would not save anyone, only faith in Jesus, the one God had sent. Here is a clear statement he made in one of his other letters:

“Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16,17).

The Law and the Levitical priesthood were redundant, said the apostle, and

the Jewish state with all its institutions was about to pass away.

Corrupt Christianity

Sadly, Paul's words were soon forgotten. After the apostles had fallen asleep, men brought back into Christianity all the things he mentioned in this list – special diets, holy days and Sabbath-keeping. They did not stop there. They also re-introduced from the Law of Moses altars, and incense, and priests in special clothes – and, yes, tithes, because tithes were a useful way to increase the income of the Church.

In the village where I used to live there is a housing estate called *'Tithe Barn Close'*, because on that spot there once stood a huge wooden barn. For hundreds of years the farmers of our district were obliged to hand over one-tenth of their crops to the portly abbots of the Church of Rome. These were practices brought in by an apostate church, long after the first century.

Giving in the Early Church

So far, we have seen that the early church made no provision for giving regular tithes to God. What do the apostles say, then, about giving money for the work of the Lord? It is clear that Paul himself benefited from financial contributions sent by his fellow brothers and sisters. In his letter to the Philippians he says that the ecclesia there had on two occasions helped him in this way – see chapter 4:15,16.

In 1 Corinthians Paul also encourages the Christian brothers and sisters in Greece to make a special collection for the poor brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. He suggests they put money aside for this purpose every Sunday. When he next visits them, he will pick it up and take it to Jerusalem.

“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters, I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem” (1 Corinthians 16:2,3).

Notice he did not say each should give one-tenth of his income. Rather that each one should give *“as he may prosper”*. It was their decision, how much to give. In his second letter he returns to the same topic, warning the Corinthians he was on the way to collect the money. Again, he emphasizes that how much they chose to give was their own decision, but he promised that God will reward those who are generous.

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6,7).

Conclusion

It is clear that the New Testament does not require a disciple to give a regular one-tenth of his or her income. He is expected to give as often as a situation arises where he can see a need, and as generously as he can. As we come across a need for our money, let us put our hands in our pockets. If we are rich, we may well give more than one-tenth, and many have been grateful for the willing generosity of those God has blessed with wealth. But on the other hand, no one should feel pressurized to hand over more than he or she can afford.

David M Pearce

This is Your Life



There used to be a television programme in Britain when a presenter would spring a surprise upon an unsuspecting person and declare “*This is Your Life*”.

He carried a red book which would later contain photographs of all the people who were about to be invited to come and share their knowledge of the person in question. It would thus be a record of things that had happened so far and not, of course, about what was still to happen.

The truly wonderful thing about the record of the life of Jesus, written in God's Book, is that the events that would happen to Jesus were written down beforehand in the Old Testament.

This was done so that we would be assured of the fact that Jesus is indeed a very special person. The one whom God had promised to send had at last come. As a real, historical figure, he was there to do everything that God asked of him, and everything that had been foretold about him. We can therefore place our utmost confidence in Jesus.

One remarkable fact stands out above all others. Although Jesus died upon the cross, he came back to life again and is alive for evermore. By his resurrection he was proved to be none other than the Son of God.

All Things Fulfilled

After he had been raised from the dead Jesus said this to his disciples:

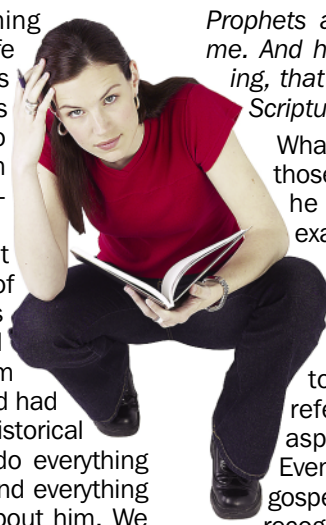
“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the

Prophets and the Psalms concerning me. And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44,45).

What did Jesus actually say to those disciples? Almost certainly he would have given them examples of what the Old Testament Scriptures had said, and of what he accomplished. Let's see if we can find some of the passages to which he might have referred, about different aspects of his saving work. Even if you know little about the gospels, you should be able to recognise Jesus in the Old Testament as we weave a number of Old Testament passages together.

✓ His Origins

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears” (Isaiah 11:1-3)



✓ His Service

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, my Elect One in whom my soul delights! I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise his voice, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench; he will bring forth justice for truth” (Isaiah 42:1-3).

✓ Reproach and Rejection

“Because for your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother’s children; because zeal for your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me” (Psalm 69:7-9).

“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has magnified himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng” (Psalm 55:12-14).

✓ Hatred

“I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are

mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully...” (Psalm 69:2-4).

✓ Suffering & Death

“He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-5).

✓ Resurrection and Ascension

“I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:8-11)

Crowning Proof

So by looking through the prophets and Psalms we have been taken through the experience of Jesus, from his birth, his life, his betrayal by a close disciple, his death – which is clearly presented as not simply being for himself – through to his final victory over the grave



to his new and resurrected life. Finally we have seen that Jesus is now in heaven in the presence of God Himself.

The resurrection of Jesus is the key in all of this. The crowning proof that Jesus is the special King and Saviour spoken of in the Old Testament is the fact that he died, experienced a bodily resurrection and is still alive now and will be for ever. This fulfils one of the great expectations about Jesus, made even before he was born.

Earlier in this issue we looked at the words of the angel Gabriel predicting that Jesus will one day sit on David's throne as King over God's Kingdom (Luke 1:31-33).

Packed into these verses are the predictions that:

- ✓ *Jesus will be great.*
- ✓ *He will be the Son of God.*
- ✓ *He will be a king in the line of David.*
- ✓ *He will reign from Jerusalem (where King David had his throne)*
- ✓ *He will rule over Israel (the house of Jacob)*
- ✓ *His kingdom will last for ever.*

If they were to come true, these words demanded that Jesus be raised from the dead, to live for ever. As we have noted he is now in heaven, so they also need him to return and to take over the government of Israel. And there are clear implications for the rest of the world too. How will the world governments react when King Jesus comes to reign in Jerusalem? Already the Middle East gives a great deal of concern to the rulers of this world. More to the point though – how will YOU react when this stupendous event occurs?

Jesus is to come again and that is perhaps the most important reason why you should be willing to listen to all that he has to say. It certainly colours everything he has said as recorded in the gospels. We dare not neglect what his words. His life in heaven gives everything an added authority.

Watching and Waiting

Simeon was a devout old man by the time Jesus was born. The gospel tells us that he had been allowed by God to live in order to see the Lord Jesus Christ. Meeting the parents of Jesus as they brought him into the temple in Jerusalem for the first time, Simeon took the baby in his arms and said:

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

What an amazing faith this man had! He already knew who Jesus was. He understood that Jesus would be the saviour of all people, both Jew and Gentile, and that he was the Christ, the Messiah – God's anointed king who would save the world. As this is so, just as Simeon said, we really had better start listening to what Jesus has to tell us.

David Nightingale



Bible Line

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God, the Lord Jesus and You

*In this article **Ken Clark** says what God and the Lord Jesus mean to him. He invites you to find out what they could mean to you and how a living relationship with both Father and Son could change your life.*

To me God is real. He is magnificent. He created this earth and all that surrounds it. I cannot understand His greatness, but He understands me. He knows my need, and He knows yours too. His knowledge is awe-inspiring. We are told that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without Him knowing about it (Matthew 10:29); yet we are not aware when one has fallen in the next street.

So when we come to worship God we cannot do so with any flippancy, but only with the greatest of wonder. Likewise, when we read His message it can only be with the deepest reverence. From somewhere in this vast universe God has made His will known to frail, puny men and women. Let us appreciate such goodness with all our hearts.

God's Communication

What is it that this marvellous God tells us in the Bible? Perhaps one of the most riveting Bible scenes is the one that depicts Adam and Eve being ejected from Paradise. They had sinned and therefore were not worthy to remain in that garden, eastward in Eden. The way was barred to them. They became outcasts, and yet deliverance was promised. It was predicted that One would come who would destroy the power of sin, and enable mankind to find the way of salvation.

The same promise – of a Deliverer and Redeemer – was repeated to

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and later to King David. Who was it to be? Slowly but surely the plan unfolded until we reach that solemn moment when an angel went with a message to a woman named Mary. She was told that she was to bear a child, a Son, and that his name would be “Jesus”. The name meant ‘Saviour’, and great things were foretold.

“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).

God's Son

Mary must have been astonished, for she was not married and the angel's message already looked to a day when she would bear the Son of God, and ultimately he, like David of old, would reign from Jerusalem. It must have seemed impossible to this young village girl, for at the time Rome ruled the world. Note, however, the future tenses. It was not to be at that time, but later, and unlike the Roman Empire his kingdom would last for ever. All the promises that had been made centuries before were to be fulfilled in him – the child who was to be born.

Mary was puzzled, for she was a virgin, and therefore questioned how it could occur. This was the amazing reply:

"You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus ...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31-35).

The Father who had brought life to this earth at Creation was to bring that same power to act upon Mary so that she might bear His Son, who would be a Saviour and a King.

Jesus the Man

What do we know of the Lord Jesus? He had a humble birth, and grew up in a godly home where he learnt the trade of a carpenter. When he was 30 years of age he began his public work and, for the next three years, taught us things we should never forget, for they have never been surpassed. He taught how we should live if we want to be right with God. He never meddled in politics. He lived a life totally unlike any other inasmuch as he was sinless. He was unique.

Our first glimpse of the Lord is when he reached Jewish manhood, aged twelve years old. He sat with all the learned teachers in the magnificent temple at Jerusalem, not only questioning them, but answering them too. They were astonished, but he had come from a home where the Word of God was revered. He had learnt it from his parents, and probably in the local Synagogue, as well as being richly blessed by God.

Jesus was expert at understanding the Scriptures, and at about thirty years of age he started out on a great crusade to bring people back to God. He began to impart good news, and to

show the true spirit of love. Great crowds listened to his teachings. His longest lesson was the one we have come to know as the Sermon on the Mount. It has never been surpassed in its beauty, its telling lessons, and its stirring exhortations to every class of society.

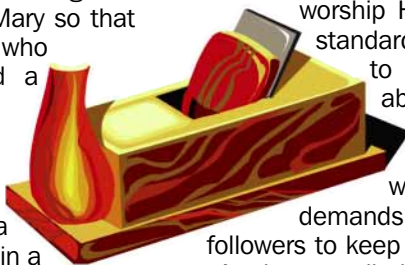
He showed that God requires good, honest and humble hearts if we are to worship Him acceptably. The standards were not lowered to suit what we feel able to achieve; Jesus said that these are the principles of worship that God demands and he urged his followers to keep them.

As he travelled throughout Israel, Jesus not only spoke with authority, but he used the power God had given him to perform miracles that could not be gainsaid. What ecstasy for the blind as their sight was restored and they saw the Master's face. What love poured into the ears of the deaf that they too might hear his superb message of salvation.

The cripples threw away their crutches and danced for joy before his smiling face. Five thousand men were fed miraculously and later four thousand more. What an impression! How the people talked!

Vanquisher of Death

If that was not enough, there were occasions when mankind's greatest enemy, death, confronted him. A synagogue ruler pleaded for help for his twelve year old daughter who was at the point of death. On the way the group was held up, as a woman sorely needed his help. It was given, just as messengers arrived to say that the child had died. The Saviour must have



seen the anguished look on the ruler's face, and immediately confronted him, "Do not be afraid; only believe" (Mark 5:36). They went to the man's house, heard the wailing and saw the weeping of the hired mourners. The father must have been distraught, and we can only wonder what he thought when he heard Jesus say: "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping" (5:39).

The scorn of the mourners there turned to laughter, as they were turned away. Our Lord looked down at the little one, took her hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (5:41). Straight away she stood up and walked. What gratitude her parents must have felt, but the Lord Jesus simply said, 'Give her something to eat'. He wasn't simply concerned about raising her; he was concerned about her on-going life as well.

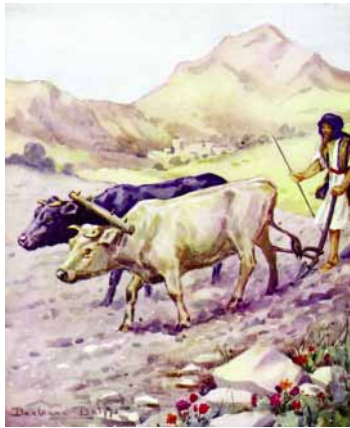
The Challenge of Christ

Thus far we have seen not only an historical character, but a man who cared more than any other, a man who wanted people to worship his Father, and to receive the gift of life. He didn't offer an easy life in return. He stressed that it would be difficult to be one of his followers and threw out this challenge: "Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

It was more than self-denial that Jesus was asking. He is asking us to say: "My life belongs to God," and it is essential that we mean it. Give Him

your all. Christ did just that on the cross. If we accept the challenge, it means that self is no longer to be put first but our lives are to be dedicated in the service to God and to others. As Jesus also said: "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). We can do nothing for ourselves in the grave. Therefore if we have neglected the great Christian principles, it will be too late to repent at his return.

If this sounds stem, look at the assurance that we are given:



"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

This is an invitation to share our load with our Lord, and we note that despite all his greatness and the power that he possesses, there is a humility that we all do well to emulate. How can we be proud when we know all that has been done for us? His invitation is to be yoked with him. It is a picture of at least two working together, well fitted for the work to be done.

It is an offer we can accept now, and it gives the prospect of a better life to come, when the Lord of Life reigns as King in the coming Kingdom of God, to be established on earth. God and the Lord Jesus want YOU to be involved in that new era, if you want to have a part in it.

Ken Clark

One Thing Only

There is an example of a man engaged in prayer about one thing, and one thing only. King Hezekiah of Judah had received an ultimatum from King Sennacherib, the great King of Assyria and the situation was totally beyond him and his power to influence events. So he took the King's note of demand into the Temple of God and spread it out before the Almighty.

Then he engaged in prayer:

"O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands – wood and stone. Therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are the LORD God, you alone"
(2 Kings 19:15-19).

His prayer has the same layout as "The Lord's Prayer".

- ✦ He began by acknowledging that all things are in God's hands.
- ✦ He presented his petition: that God would deliver His people from Sennacherib.

- ✦ Finally he brought his prayer to a close praying that all nations would acknowledge God's supremacy.

Just One Thing

Notice that Hezekiah prayed about one matter only – the threat. He did not go on at length mentioning many things in random order. His prayer was short, concise and concerned one matter only. And it was heard. For God delivered Jerusalem from the power of the Assyrians. They later boasted that they had trapped Hezekiah and his people like a bird in a cage but, boastful as they were in their battle inscriptions, they could say no more. For, in fact, God had laid them low. Scripture records that:

"It came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh" (2 Kings 19:35,36).

Perhaps our own personal prayers would be more effective if we confined ourselves to one matter, and one matter alone. On another occasion we might wish to present another petition to the Almighty.

So, if before we engaged in prayer, we thought about the content and confined ourselves to that, we would not overtax our powers of concentration and our prayers would be more effective.

David Budden

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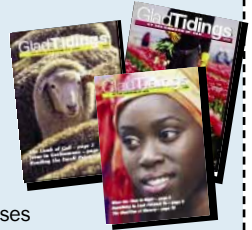
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