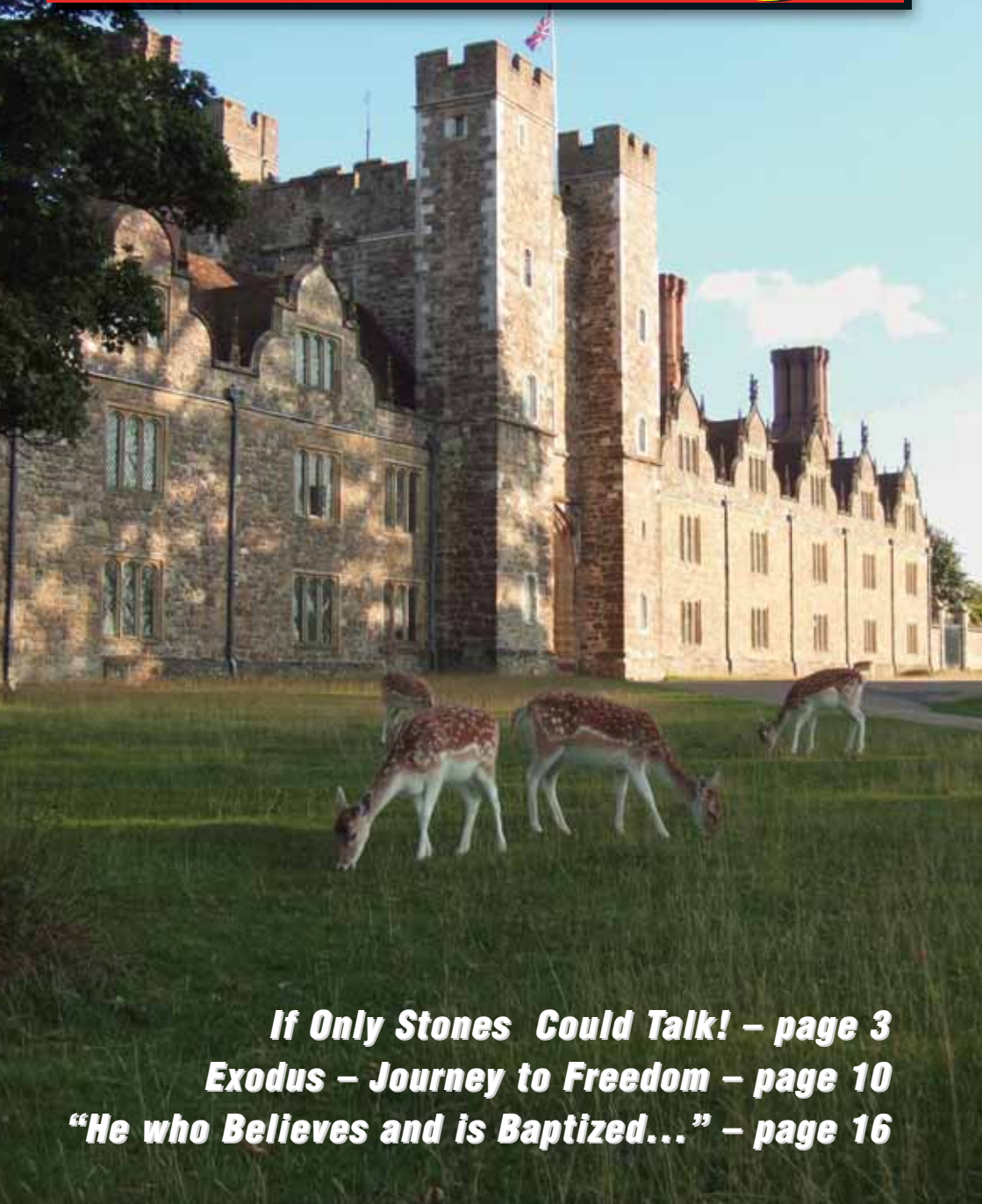


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1521



If Only Stones Could Talk! – page 3
Exodus – Journey to Freedom – page 10
“He who Believes and is Baptized...” – page 16

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the 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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If Only Stones Could Talk!

Old buildings are not just interesting because they have survived. People visit them to admire their architecture and to see the way things have changed over the years. They are intrigued by the associations such buildings have. Who lived there? What were they like? What happened to them?

Knole House

Situated in the town of Sevenoaks in Kent, Knole House is a huge house. It is said to have 365 rooms, 52 staircases, 12 entrances and 7 courtyards – like a calendar! But what makes it really special is the fact



that its early 17th century appearance has been preserved, especially in the staterooms and the surrounding deer park. If you want to step back into the past and see what it was like to live in the 1600s, this is the place to go as the house is now in the care of the National Trust. But who lived there, what were they like and what happened to them? If the house could talk what tale would it tell?

The guidebook says that the house was built between 1456 and 1486 by Thomas Bouchier who was then the Archbishop of Canterbury. Four more archbishops lived there before it was seized by King Henry VIII in 1538, when he took possession of all church property. He further enlarged it though he never actually lived there. In 1566 Queen Elizabeth I gifted the house to her cousin Thomas Sackville, the First

Earl of Dorset, and he made extensive alterations to the house between the years 1603 and 1608, the year in which he died.

Time Travel

The house remains much the same as it was in 1608, so a visit there takes you back over 400 years to a time when life was very different. Queen Elizabeth had died five years earlier

and left no heir. She was succeeded by the son of Mary Queen of Scots, James VI of Scotland who became James I of England. His was a troubled upbringing as he had succeeded to the Scottish throne when he was just 13

months old, his Father having been murdered and his mother exiled in England, before her execution there for her religious views. Perhaps not surprisingly, the education of the young James had a strong Presbyterian and Calvinistic flavour.

Four hundred years ago religion was a very important topic and one of the first things the new king did was to gather the Bishops together for a three day meeting which led to him ordering a new translation of the Bible in English. All through this year, God willing, we will survey the way in which it became possible for English speaking people to read the Bible for themselves when the King James (or Authorised) Version of the Bible was published in 1611. Now we take access to the Bible for granted, but in those times things were very different.

Dangerous Times

Ever since King Henry VIII nationalised religion in England, by becoming the Defender of the Faith in place of the Pope, there was only one acceptable way by which you could worship God – the way the Church prescribed! If you thought for yourself and decided to believe something different you were in serious danger. If *Glad Tidings* had existed in those days – we have only been going for 127 years – the Editor, the Publishers and all its readers would have been in serious danger.

People who just translated the Bible into English were executed for doing that, for Churchmen fiercely guarded their monopoly of the Scriptures. They didn't want ordinary people challenging them, so they tried to ensure they couldn't get access to a Bible. They just had to believe what they were told, for there was no way of checking up.

So if the stones of Knole House were able to speak about those far-off times they would be likely to advise you to say nothing about any religious beliefs you might have, because it was far too dangerous. It wasn't just the deer in the park that would be hunted; you would be hunted down by the religious police if you stepped out of line.

Different Times

There was a similar monopoly of religious views in the days of Jesus although the people who controlled others were different and their views were radically different. In his days the religious authorities were either Pharisees or Sadducees and they were just as protective of their position as the self-appointed guardians of Israel's religion and of their own standing and business interests. So when a young man from Galilee began to teach the

people, they challenged him at once. Who was he? What did he know? What right had he to teach? For more than three years they watched him and plotted his downfall and at last it seemed to them that he had gone much too far. For at Passover time he rode into Jerusalem on an ass, accompanied by his closest followers and surrounded by a crowd of cheering supporters. They shouted out the most amazing things including:

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! ... Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.

The Pharisees intervened to ask Jesus to restrain his disciples but Jesus, who had been so careful to control public expectations for many years, now spoke quite differently. This is what he said:

"I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40).

What he meant was that his kingship was so well established by God's promises contained in the Scriptures, it was self-evident. And if his disciples did not declare it, the very walls of Jerusalem would do so, for they had waited a thousand years for the King who had then been promised to his ancestor David. Now that King had come and it was time to declare the fact from the rooftops.

Jesus is coming back to earth to rule as king over God's Kingdom on earth. Will it just be the stones that cry out to welcome him, or will your voice be heard among the company of believers who have looked for his return?

Editor



John Wycliffe and the Lollards

A Yorkshire man born in 1324, John Wycliffe made an important contribution to the cause of improving access to the Bible in English. He was a man of great intellect and integrity, educated at Queen's and Merton Colleges, Oxford. In 1372 he became a lecturer in theology and later Rector at Balliol College, Oxford.

Reformer

Wycliffe is often regarded as the forerunner of the sixteenth century Reformation. He believed that all people, without distinction, had the right to read the Scriptures and then to obey God. He spoke against Papal claims of infallibility, attacking the excesses of the clergy and the practices of mendicant Friars. This led to his impeachment by Pope Gregory XI in 1377. The Pope sought, unsuccessfully, to prevent translations of the Bible and even the reading and reciting of Scripture by laymen. The Latin Bible (later known as the Vulgate) was the only translation permitted by the Church. In contrast, on the Day of Pentecost the Apostles preached to the assembled company in Jerusalem and by His Holy Spirit power God caused the gospel to be translated from the tongue of the Apostles so that each listener heard the wonderful gospel message in their own language (Acts 2:8-11).

Wycliffe dedicated himself to giving his countryman the whole Bible in their native English. His pupil and friend, John Purvey and Nicolas of Hereford, a

fellow of Queen's College, Oxford assisted in the translation of the Latin Vulgate. They used the same strategy of translation that the King James translators were to use over 200 years later, so between 1380 and 1384 they worked diligently to produce a word-for-word translation of the Latin text.

Wycliffe went about his translation work unharmed because of considerable support from colleagues at Oxford, his congregation at Lutterworth in Leicestershire and from his aristocratic champion, John of Gaunt. His translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible into the Anglo-Saxon tongue was also motivated by a desire to improve the understanding of the parish priests and monks of the Latin language used in Church services. Many had little idea of the meaning of the words they were using! How much less the Anglo-Saxon speaking congregations!

What does the Bible say?

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the freedom that all should have to read God's Word.

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price ... Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you – the sure mercies of David (Isaiah 55:1-3).

Jesus also invites us to drink of the water of life contained in the Scriptures.

“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

Wycliffe and others with his encouragement finished the first handwritten complete English Bible in 1384. As the books of the Bible were completed they were painstakingly copied by hand by Wycliffe’s supporters in Oxford and Leicester and distributed around the land. This was 70 years before the invention of moveable type printing in 1454. A revision of Wycliffe’s Bible was carried out by John Purvey around 1388 to replace some of the stiff literal Latin-based construction with native English idiom.

Opposition from the Church

The Church forbade anyone to possess the Wycliffe Bible and copies when found were destroyed. For the Church considered Wycliffe’s writings, sermons and translation work to be acts of heresy. On the nineteenth of February 1377 he was summoned to appear in Old St Paul’s, London, before Simon Sudbury Archbishop of Canterbury and William Courtenay, Bishop of London to answer the charges made against him. However Wycliffe had powerful friends. He duly appeared to answer the summons, flanked by two of them – John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (a son of King Edward III) and Lord Percy, the Earl Marshall of England, and they were accompanied by several barons and other supporters. After a brief exchange between his protectors and the diocesan dignitaries the court

broke up in confusion. Wycliffe departed without having been asked a single question or the need to utter a word!

On receipt of letters from the Pope, the prelates issued a further summons. This time the trial was to be conducted before a secret tribunal. When news of Wycliffe’s impending trial became known there was widespread alarm for his safety. Many first citizens of London and the populace stormed into the building and Sir Lewis Clifford spoke forbidding any sentence to be passed by the court. Therefore, Wycliffe was preserved to continue his work of translation of the Latin Bible to English.

The Church continued their pursuit of Wycliffe, Pope Gregory XI sent to the King, the Oxford authorities and the University accusing them of “idleness and sloth” in permitting Wycliffe to continue to “vomit” heresies.

Fortunate Turmoil

Then a turn of events in Church and State preserved Wycliffe from excommunication and a martyr’s death. Within a year Pope Gregory was dead and the Papacy in turmoil. In 1378 the Papacy was split by the election of two Popes, Urban VI and Clement VII by the same group of Cardinals! In May 1378 the Peasants Revolt broke out in London as a revolt against the imposition of a poll tax. Wycliffe was blamed in part because of his radical preaching and for championing the cause of the poor. The rioting that followed resulted in the beheading of Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Wycliffe was hounded by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, William Courtney, who condemned his writing and criticisms of the Church as heretical. Wycliffe was forbidden to teach at Oxford and retired to Lutterworth where

he continued to preach sermons against the clergy for their accumulation of wealth and riches at the expense of the poor. He spurned the use of Latin, describing it as the language of Church oppression. Wycliffe died a natural death in 1384 and was buried in St Mary's Church, Lutterworth. Forty-four years later, on 14th December 1428, in accordance with the instructions of Pope Martin V, Wycliffe's body was exhumed and burnt as a heretic in a field on the bank of the river Swift and his ashes thrown in the river.

Who were the Lollards?

They were supporters of Wycliffe whom he sent out preaching armed with religious tracts and sheets of the New Testament translated into English. They were scornfully called "Lollards" a word which is thought to be derived from the Dutch word "lollen" which means 'to mutter'. Lollards were very active in preaching in England and many met painful deaths by burning as heretics.

Thomas Arundel who succeeded Courtney as Archbishop of Canterbury persecuted the Lollards. First he lobbied the King and Parliament in 1401 for powers to execute Lollards. Then, in 1408, Arundel drew up the "Constitutions of Oxford" to deal with translations of the Bible. It enacted that: "... no one henceforth on his own authority translate any text of Holy Scripture into English or other languages ... and that no book, pamphlet or tract of this kind be read, either recently composed in the time of the said John Wycliffe or since then".

The penalty was excommunication and death as a heretic. Arundel wrote in scathing terms to the Pope about

Wycliffe and his teachings, identifying 267 heresies and errors worthy of fire. Pressure from the Papacy continued, the Council of Constance in 1414 condemned Wycliffe's books, doctrine and memory.

Wycliffe's influence abroad

Queen Anne of Bohemia, wife of King Richard I, came to know of Wycliffe's writings and by this means they reached Prague. Wycliffe's work influenced John Huss of Prague University and his supporter Jerome. The spirit of change brought the reformation to the people of Bohemia and in 1400 the Scriptures were translated into Bohemian. The Papacy persecuted them as they did Wycliffe and his followers. Huss was charged with heresy and burnt at the stake on 6 July 1415 on the banks of the Rhine and his ashes were also thrown into the river.

Many men have laboured, suffered and died to make it possible for us to read the Word of God in our own language. Now is the time for us to learn what God has done for us through the work of His son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wycliffe is reported to have said that "*The Bible is the sole authority for the Christian way of life*". The Bible shows how right this statement is.

"Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides me" (Isaiah 45:21).

Peter Moore

Next: Erasmus and Tyndale

Part Two

Who or What is a Saint?

In the first part of this article **Hamilton Wilson** showed that the Bible talks about saints as those who are still alive and active in the service of the Lord, not people who have died and are unconscious in the sleep of death. He traced Old Testament usage of the Hebrew words translated “saint” and now completes that study and looks at what the New Testament has to say.

Old Testament Saints

Perhaps the most exciting of all Old Testament passages, and there are many of them, are the references in the Prophecy of Daniel, one of which gives a splendid picture in vision of the Lord Jesus Christ being given the rulership of the earth by God:

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed ... But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever ... until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom ... Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him (Daniel 7:13–14,18,22,27).

So God, “the Ancient of Days” – because He is the Eternal One – gives the kingdom to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has proved himself worthy to rule because he has conquered sin and death. But Jesus will not be content to take the honour and responsibility of rulership for himself alone, for he offers a share of assisting in the rulership of the Kingdom of God on earth to his “saints”, those who –

- ✓ *have chosen good rather than evil,*
- ✓ *are loyal and faithful to him,*
- ✓ *have made a covenant with God by the sacrifice of His Son,*
- ✓ *have dedicated their lives to His service,*
- ✓ *who have regarded themselves, and have been regarded by God, as separate and holy to Him.*

So you see, it is perfectly possible for ordinary people like you and me to become saints, if we choose to do so.

New Testament Saints

In the New Testament, there is only one word which is used in the original Greek and translated “saint”. It is the word *hagios* which means “that which is consecrated, holy or set apart”. Here is the first time that word appears, referring to the time of the death of the Lord Jesus.

❖ The Resurrection of Jesus

Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many (Matthew 27:51–53).

Note in passing the way the death of believers is described – as a sleep – and notice something else. These saints who rose were not in heaven, were in no way conscious, but were in their graves in the sleep of death, awaiting their own resurrection.

❖ Saul of Tarsus

Another example is from the time when Saul of Tarsus – later the apostle Paul – was persecuting the believers in Jerusalem. When asked to go and baptize him, Ananias at first protested in these terms:

Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem (Acts 9:13).

Once again we see that saints are the ordinary members of the church,

who regard themselves as dedicated to Jesus and his service. Thus in most of his letters to different churches, Paul addresses himself to “the saints” whether located in Rome, Colossae, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi or Thessalonica. In other words, the letters were for all the ordinary members of the church in these various places, and they were called “saints”.

Saints?

In an interesting passage in Romans 8:27, the apostle Paul says that Jesus, through the Spirit, makes intercession for the saints. As there are no immortal saints in heaven to intercede for us, Jesus promised to intercede on behalf of believers – “the saints”. Paul goes on in verse 28 to describe such people as “those who love God ... those who are the called according to his purpose.” That could be us, if we respond to God’s call to make us His holy ones.

Make that your aim now, and learn in the Bible how through baptism into Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can become like him. If we dedicate our lives to him and become his saints, his holy ones, we can one day be like him!

Hamilton Wilson

Useful Website

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible there are new features on the Christadelphian website www.thisisyourbible.com. The aim of the website is to promote personal Bible reading and the new features will allow you to:

Read a chapter of the Bible – The chapter offered will be based on a simplified introductory reading plan;

Listen to that chapter being read;

Read a short comment on the chapter;

Follow a link to a more detailed set of comments on the chapter, if you want to examine the subject in more detail.



Exodus - Journey to Freedom

This series by **David Pearce** reviews some of the key books in the Bible and describes what they have to say and what lessons we can learn. It is designed to encourage you to read the Bible for yourself. If you do that each month in a structured way, you will have read a large part of the Bible by the end of the year.

The end of the Book of Genesis explains how the descendants of Jacob took refuge in Egypt during a great famine, but they stayed on long after the famine was over.

Slaves in Egypt

Joseph, their protector, died, and there was a change of government. Soon their growing numbers threatened the balance of population, and the Egyptian king decided on a primitive form of birth control, getting rid of all male children that were born. When this did not work, he enslaved the Israelites and used them on huge building projects as free labour.

All this had been predicted in a prophecy that God made to Abraham hundreds of years previously when he had been told:

Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions (Genesis 15:13,14).

God's Escape Plan

The last part of that prophecy was now about to come true for the Book of Exodus explains how God delivered Abraham's people from bondage and

began to take them back to the land their forefathers had come from. The early chapters describe the amazing story of Moses. This man, the chosen deliverer, was born in a slave camp,



yet was brought up as the son of a princess. Exiled for forty years in Midian where he became a shepherd, he was commissioned by the angel of God at the burning bush to go back to Egypt to

deliver the Israelites from the grip of the Egyptians. He was to shepherd them out, but how would he persuade the Egyptians to let God's people go?

God's solution was to bring Ten Plagues or disasters to persuade the Egyptian people to release their slaves. Those plagues grew in intensity as the stubborn Pharaoh refused to humble himself before Israel's God. The account makes gripping reading in Exodus chapters 7 to 12. The last plague has a significance that lasts until today. It involved the death of a firstborn child in each Egyptian family and the deliverance of the Israelites who were protected by the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb on their doors.

That historic event is still commemorated annually by Jews all over the world while the New Testament explains that Jesus is the Passover lamb and that he shed his blood on the cross to deliver all of us from the power of death, to which we are enslaved by sin.

Red Sea Crossing

Once out of Egypt and making a bid for freedom, God's people were still not out of trouble. Pharaoh changed his mind and tried to get his slaves back, charging after them with his army of charioteers. He caught up with them on the shores of the Red Sea where Moses urged the people to believe in God's salvation, and for once they did (Hebrews 11:29). The waters parted and the people crossed and their deliverance from slavery was complete. Exodus chapter 14 describes this amazing escape from death and the New Testament explains that when believers are baptised it is as if they cross the red Sea to begin a new life (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

On the other side of the Red Sea life was tough and the Israelites began a long journey that would slowly weld them into a nation. They spent a whole year at the foot of Mount Sinai in the Negev desert. Their food was provided each day in the form of manna, a complete diet in granular form that fell around the camp each night. In addition, abundant water came from a rock, which Moses was told to strike with his shepherd's rod.

Later, in the gospel of John, Jesus likened himself to this miraculous bread from heaven, and to the smitten rock, which gave the water of life (see John 6:32-35 and 7:37-38).

Ten Commandments

Two important things happened in this period. First, as recorded in Exodus chapters 19 to 24, the Israelites agreed to obey the laws and statutes summarised in the **Ten Commandments**. In return, God promised He would be their God. This solemn agreement, known in the Bible as a **Covenant**, was sealed after the custom of the times by the sprinkling of blood. Sadly, their early enthusiasm to serve their God was marred by a lapse into the worship of a Golden Calf (see chapter 32) while Moses was away. This was only one of their many rebellions against the God who had given them freedom and hope.

Second, Moses delivered to them very detailed instructions for constructing a portable Tabernacle (tent) fenced in by curtains, in which God would be worshipped through the chosen priests from the tribe of Levi. This was constructed from materials donated by the people themselves. The description is given in chapters 35 to 40.

At the heart of the Tabernacle were two rooms. The outer one had a golden lampstand, a table with bread and wine, and an altar for incense. The inner sanctuary contained only the Ark. This was a golden box containing the Ten Commandments. It was topped with a solid gold lid on which were fashioned cherubims (symbolic creatures with wings) over which the glory of God shone in a fiery cloud to indicate His presence in the midst of His people.

The record of the wilderness journey continues in the book of Numbers which we'll look at next.

David Pearce

Paul Confronts Herod Agrippa

*The Roman governor has asked King Herod Agrippa to hear the case against the apostle Paul so that he could be sent for trial in Rome with an accompanying set of charges. It had seemed to Festus that the issue was just about the resurrection of the dead, and he was at a loss to know how to present this to Caesar. In this further hearing his suspicions are confirmed as Paul begins at once to talk about the resurrection of Jesus. What sense would Herod make of this? How could the case be presented to Rome? **John Hellawell** now guides us through the proceedings.*

The Trial Proceeds

Paul had explained something about his background, as a Pharisee who had been schooled in Jerusalem, when he got straight to the point about resurrection. He asked Herod outright whether he could believe in resurrection, this being an issue which seriously divided opinion in Israel. The Pharisees accepted that such things had happened in the past; the Sadducees – the priestly party, who accepted only the Pentateuch as inspired – denied that possibility. Agrippa would have understood this distinction and would have known that it was the Sadducees who had taken the lead in the prosecution of Paul (Acts 25:2).

Paul now confessed that he too had once been an enemy of the Truth. By reminding his audience of his past way of life, Paul was adding weight to his arguments. Once, he too had thought the way that they did. The fact that he had now completely changed his opinions was good grounds for considering his new position carefully. His persecution of

those who believed in Jesus was fanatical. Not only were they imprisoned for their faith but also when a death sentence was sought, Paul assented to it. His zeal knew no bounds: he punished them so severely, presumably by torture, that they were compelled to blaspheme. This would then automatically bring a death sentence. He admitted that his behaviour was obsessive and went beyond the bounds of Israel: he persecuted them in foreign cities (not just in Damascus).

Paul's Conversion

Paul then recounted the events that led to his own change of heart – the Damascus Road conversion. This is the third account of Paul's conversion in Acts (chapters 9, 22 and now 26).

He began by stressing that his journey was made on the authority of the Chief Priests in Jerusalem: this would reinforce his earlier point (vs. 4,5) that his background was impeccable.

His description of a noonday light, which exceeded the sun in its



brightness, would indicate to Agrippa that this was nothing less than the Shekinah Glory of God. The consequence was to cause each member of the party to fall to the ground. At this point, Paul provides additional information: that the voice which he heard spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic. Would this be significant for Agrippa?

The voice questioned him: why was he persecuting the speaker? It also observed that he was finding it hard to kick against the goads. Paul sought the identity of the speaker with a strong hint that he had already come to a conclusion. The reply was devastating – I am the one whom you are persecuting! The Lord identified himself with those who were suffering under Paul's persecution. This statement accords with something Jesus had said during His ministry:

Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Matthew 25:40).

It is quite humbling to consider that this principle, presumably, applies today and that the Lord still identifies with his followers in their afflictions.

Heavenly Commission

Paul recounted the command which he had received. He was to begin a new career in which he would:

- ❖ *be appointed a minister and witness of the things which he had just experienced;*
- ❖ *have further matters revealed to him in the future;*
- ❖ *be delivered from Gentiles to whom he would be sent;*
- ❖ *he was to preach to them in order to convert them from their present life to one which would be acceptable to God.*

How could he refuse such a heavenly commission? So, Paul said, he was not disobedient: rather, starting immediately at Damascus and on to Jerusalem, followed by Judea and finally to the Gentile regions. He had fulfilled his course. The result of his obedience to the Divine command was to elicit hostility from the Jews (of all people!) which was so severe that they had arrested him and had endeavoured to kill him. However, with God's help, he had managed to bear witness to all those who would hear. His message conformed with everything which the Old Testament prophets and the greatest of them, Moses, had revealed, namely that:

- ❖ *the Messiah (Christ) must suffer*
- ❖ *he would be the first to be raised from the dead*
- ❖ *he would enlighten his own people, the Jews,*
- ❖ *and also do the same for the Gentiles*

Herod's Intervention

Up to this point, Festus had listened and tried to follow the drift of what Paul had said but this last part of his speech was too much. There was only one explanation: Paul's intense academic career had unhinged his mind and driven him mad. Paul replied that he was not mad; he was sane and his words in no way extravagant.

Now Paul turned tables on his accusers by calling King Agrippa as a witness! So he reminded the audience that the king who had been called by Festus as an expert on Jewish matters in order to advise him was obviously the very person to confirm what Paul had said. The circumstances surrounding the arrest, execution and burial of Jesus of Nazareth followed by the per-

sistent claims of his resurrection and the subsequent spread of the new faith which, in turn, was accompanied by a series of attested miraculous events, were common knowledge. The King would be fully conversant with these incidents and, what is more, must realise their significance if only he would admit it.



Christian. (KJV)

With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian (RV)

In a short time you think to make me a Christian! (RSV)

Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian? (NRSV)

Much more of this Paul and you will be making me a Christian! (Phillips)

You think that it won't take long to make a Christian out of me (Barclay)

You think it will not take much to win me over and make a Christian of me (NEB)

Thou wouldest have me turn Christian with very little ado (Knox)

Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian? (NIV)

It is evident that the King James Version, which superficially appears to be a confession on Agrippa's part that he is almost persuaded by Paul's evidence, is misleading. Perhaps it is to be read ironically, that is, "You are almost [trying to] persuade me to be a Christian!" and so it fits the pattern of the more modern translations.

Knox gives the following as a footnote to his translation:

Some commentators have thought that Agrippa said, whether sarcastically or in earnest, 'Thou dost almost persuade me to turn Christian'; but the Greek has rather the sense, 'Thou art trying to persuade me to be a Christian

The lawyer in Paul now surfaced. Like all good counsel he drew his witness step-by-step. First he asked a question to which the answer must be "Yes":

King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

No answer came, but everyone knew that he could not say "No!" So, Paul answers for him:

I know that you do believe!

The King now realised that, unless he extricated himself quickly, he was being driven into the inevitable conclusion that Christians are right. His answer seems to be an attempt to laugh off the question that Paul has posed and diffuse the situation. By making a facetious remark, implying that Paul has the audacity to actually try to make another instant convert, the audience will collapse into laughter and Agrippa will not appear to have lost the argument.

Ambiguous Reply

It is evident that translators have had difficulty with the Greek text here. The various renderings of Agrippa's answer are given below.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a

with very little effort (from thyself)' or perhaps 'at very short notice'.

These sentiments are evident in the modern translations above and are confirmed by Paul's reply:

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 26:29, NKJV).

Paul has had the last word, a final appeal to his audience, fulfilling the Lord's commission.

The Hearing Finished

In order to signal that the hearing was over Agrippa stood up and Festus, Bernice and the rest of their entourage followed his cue. No doubt, as in our courts today, everyone else rose to their feet as the official party left the room. Once they were out of earshot they all agreed that Paul really had no case to answer and certainly nothing that deserved the death penalty. Perhaps they felt that Festus had assessed the situation correctly, this fellow was out of his mind but otherwise harmless.

Agrippa concluded that Paul could have been released at that point, had he not exercised his right, as a Roman citizen, to have his case heard before Caesar.

It must be assumed, therefore, that once this right had been claimed, the case could not be dismissed. The hearing before Agrippa was not, of course, strictly a trial but a hearing intended to assist Festus in sending details of the case to Rome.

Wise or Unwise?

The possibility of Paul's release by Festus raises once more the question of whether Paul's action in exercising

his right of appeal was wise. Perhaps he might now be a free man had he not done so. Yet there are a number of features which suggest that Paul made a deliberate and informed choice while at the same time it is difficult to see what alternative was open to him. The following factors must have weighed heavily in his decision:

- ❖ *Local Roman justice had not served him well, for although he had been "rescued" from summary execution by the Jews he was treated as a criminal.*
- ❖ *In spite of the absence of a viable case against him, Felix had kept Paul in prison for two years and Festus had not improved the situation.*
- ❖ *It was important to gain formal, legal recognition for the Faith on the part of the Roman authorities and if this were obtained at the highest level – by Caesar – then the spread of Christian faith would be greatly facilitated.*

Most significant of all, the Lord himself had revealed that Paul was to witness in Rome (23:11): his appeal to Caesar would ensure this. Further confirmation is given in 27:24.

At last, Paul's journey to Rome was about to begin.

John Hellowell



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“He Who Believes and is Baptized...”

How would you like the following statement as a testimony about your life and that of your family?

“They were very devout, fearing God and working tirelessly for charities. They prayed about everything in their life.”

Many people would be very pleased to have this testimony. If the words came from God Himself, then it would be very special, and we might think that we could wish for no more.

Case Study

Actually, the words are based on a real testimony. The Book of Acts gives us God’s assessment of Cornelius, a centurion in the first century A.D., in the days when the Christian church was young and growing. He is described like this:

A devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

We do not know much about Cornelius, but the events that are recorded are very important for us.

God Asks More of Cornelius

The Bible tells us that an angel in bright clothing visited Cornelius while he was praying. Cornelius was understandably afraid, but the angel reassured him:



Peter has a vision in Joppa telling him to visit Cornelius

Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God (Acts 10:4).

The angel then instructed him to send for the apostle Peter, who would tell him what to do. Cornelius did not hesitate: once the angel had left, he sent two servants and

a soldier to fetch Peter.

In the meantime Peter himself had a vision which helped him to understand what God wanted of him. He went to the house of Cornelius and preached to him and to his companions.

The Message of Hope

We need to take special note of what Peter told Cornelius, because this is obviously what was missing from his life of apparent godliness. Peter’s speech was probably longer than what is recorded in Acts chapter 10, but we can trust that God has made sure that the main messages are presented in the inspired Scripture. The speech is in Acts 10:34-43, and the main points are:

- ❖ God accepts all who fear and seek to obey Him, irrespective of who they are (verses 34-35);
- ❖ The hope of peace is centred on Jesus Christ (verses 36-37);
- ❖ Jesus did nothing but good, but was crucified (verses 38-39);

- ❖ God raised Jesus from the dead, and many people can testify to this (verses 40-41);
- ❖ Jesus will be a judge of people who are alive and also the dead (verse 42);
- ❖ It is only through Jesus, and belief in his name, that anyone can have their sins forgiven, be saved and so have peace (verse 43).

Even though Cornelius believed God and had lived a 'good life', in order to be saved he had to understand about Jesus Christ. He needed to appreciate the need for a saviour, and to accept that Jesus was the Saviour by whom he could be saved.

The Need for Baptism

The record leaves us in no doubt that Cornelius did accept Peter's message of 'glad tidings'. A remarkable thing happened. Even as Peter was speaking, before he had really finished, the power of the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and his companions, and they were miraculously able to speak in tongues. Peter interpreted this as evidence from God that this group of people did truly believe and could be saved. But even this was not enough. Peter then instructed them to be baptized:

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48).

So belief in God and good works were not enough: belief in Jesus and even the ability to speak in tongues was still not enough. Cornelius had to obey God's command to be baptized. This is exactly what Jesus told the apostles:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Lessons for Us

What does all this teach us? Most of us are non-Jews, so we are in a similar position to Cornelius. We may think that we are trying to live good lives. Other people may think we are very kind and generous, even godly, but it matters little what other people think. As the apostle Paul said:

It is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself ... He who judges me is the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

It is therefore important to find out what God requires of us. Here are some lessons from the example of Cornelius:

- ✓ *God is very merciful, and the hope of the gospel is open to all those who fear Him and genuinely seek Him;*
- ✓ *Charitable works, even when accompanied by belief in God and a life of prayerfulness, are not sufficient;*
- ✓ *It is essential to understand the work of Jesus Christ and what it means to believe in him;*
- ✓ *Baptism, based on belief, is also essential.*

We thank God for the inspired record of this man and what his experience teaches us.

Anna Hart

Why is it all about Money?

It's well over a year since the first financial crash of the 21st century. So what has been learnt? Is the financial crisis over? Why is the media still talking about the need to take steps to avoid a repetition? Have the lessons of the 1930's Wall Street crash been truly understood?



want can turn to greed and greed to excess. People never seem happy even if they have got all that their heart wants, so there are magazines that suggest ways to spend more. The global consumer market is a vast hungry machine that needs feeding by our purchases. It relies upon our basic instincts of "want it". Gone are the days when we

Any Money?

Why is it always about money? Of course we all need some if we are to live and eat. But why do many people seem to crave so much and do almost anything to obtain it and others appear content with what they have? Banks and bankers are still under investigation expecting more controls on their practices and excessive rewards, while the tax man is demanding a share to help manage the country's economy.

Some countries are practically bankrupt. It took all the EU countries to agree a bail-out plan for Greece, and then for Ireland, and the people there will be paying the price for quite some time. Just how bad it really is, is being hidden from our eyes.

Fuelled by Greed

Money is the one subject the whole world is interested in. It buys things that we need and, thanks to attractive advertising, it buys things we do not really need. Pick up any magazine, newspaper, browse the internet or watch the TV and count how many adverts you see in ten minutes. This

needed to save hard for that special purchase: just stick it on the plastic card or take out a loan. But when people or companies or banks hit hard times the money still has to be paid back. The inability to repay such debt caused the financial crash.

Better or Worse?

Somehow consumerism needs a jump start or the jobs and industries that make the products will crash even further creating a downward spiral to an even worse state of affairs. We have so little spare money, so what induces us to purchase other than the basic needs of life? People love bargains, discounts and special offers! They are just irresistible to some people!

Can the situation get any worse? Will we see a return to 2008 levels of spending and debt and, if so, at what cost to our world and environment? And how will nations protect their ways of life? These are tough questions! The Bible – God's road map for the future – describes the financial state of the world in what are described as "the last days".

The Bible lays out “markers” or signs of the times designed to help us see what the world will be like before He sends His perfectly balanced all-wise world leader to solve the world’s problems. This leader is Jesus Christ. His leadership qualities are expressed in the prophecy of Isaiah in these terms:

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 11:2-5).

No Safeguard

The Bible says that riches will be no safeguard when God intervenes to judge the world. Here are two examples:

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath (Zephaniah 1:18);

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded,



and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days ... You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury (James 5:1-3,5).

No Charge!

Money and the love of it are far away from God’s guiding principles for good living. In fact, the prophet Isaiah invites us to enjoy something for nothing:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance (Isaiah 55:1,2).

On God’s behalf the prophet is offering a relationship with the Almighty which will see us safely through these present evil times and into God’s kingdom, when Jesus returns.

That day is not far away. As our planet’s experts attempt to manage their way out of the global financial

crisis their actions are only likely to speed up the day when God sends Jesus back with a perfect solution.

The time is coming when the word “money” will disappear for ever from our vocabulary. For God’s kingdom is free for all. The only thing we really need is the earnest desire to be there, with the Lord Jesus Christ!

David Bilton

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