

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1545



Coping with Change – page 3
Israel's National Repentance – page 10
Why Does God Allow It? – page 18

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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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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Contents

Coping with Change...3
The Right Foundation 5
What I Believe and Why7
Israel's National Repen- tance.....10
Cornelius the Centurion12
Habakkuk and Zephaniah.....14
Out of Sight, Out of Mind17
Why Does God Allow It?18

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Coping with Change

This is the time of year in Britain when it might snow. It might or it might not.

The weather has been so unpredictable of late – 2012 being almost the wettest year since records began – that anything might happen. Some years it snows heavily; occasionally we get a very severe winter; but it could remain mild. It's that unpredictability that makes it difficult to plan ahead so that everything carries on much as before, snow or no snow.

Gridlock!

It is well known that a light snowfall can bring the UK to a halt as cars slip and slide, power lines go down, schools are shut and children get an unexpected holiday, until it thaws! Countries which experience regular deep snow have all the equipment they need and are practised at clearing snow away. But when snow is irregular and occasional, people are less well prepared.

Yet what is unwelcome to some people – like the Highways Authority – is hugely welcome to others, especially the children who get extra days off school. Look at the youngsters on this month's front cover who are evidently enjoying the opportunity to go slipping and sliding down the road. Others, of course, will be fearful of venturing out in case they fall over, get hypothermia, or worse. For them, the new arrival will be a threat.

All Change!

It's not just snow, of course, which causes such different reactions. Things change all the time and some people

welcome it, whilst others resist it or fear it. As we get older, it may be that we get less able to cope which might be why some older people look longingly backwards, to what they perceive to be "the good old days". It is worth noting, however, that change is a vital part of God's unfolding purpose, as the Bible makes clear.

When God wanted to choose a people for Himself, through whom He would reveal His gracious purpose for mankind, He chose one man – Abraham – and invited him to journey with Him, in faith (Isaiah 51:2). Abraham responded magnificently and eventually he and his family arrived in Canaan (the land we now know as Israel). Through his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, Abraham's family grew. Invited down to Egypt, over a period of time the seventy members of that family became a nation, albeit one in slavery. But change was to come, and very welcome that change was, to some. God had a plan to rescue His people from slavery and to bring them back to the land in which Abraham had once lived. How would they react to the opportunity? How would you have reacted?

Into the Unknown

Egypt might have been a place of bondage and servitude, but as slaves they were quite well fed and housed for the Egyptians needed them to be healthy and able-bodied for the work they were to do! Leaving all that – their homes and belongings, their accustomed diet, their regular hours and their employment – was a challenge. But God so arranged matters, by bringing a series of devastating plagues

upon Egypt, that in the end they had no choice: they were told to leave! Thus the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt began and they set off into the wilderness, guided by God towards a new land.

If you are at all familiar with the Books of Exodus and Numbers, you will know that many of the people left unwillingly and very few of them really believed that God had a viable escape plan. On the brink of their promised inheritance – at a place named Kadesh Barnea – most of them doubted that God could deliver what He had promised and without that belief and trust they were turned back and left to wander aimlessly around the Sinai peninsula.

It was the next generation who entered the land, another series of miraculous events making that possible. Now they could settle down and begin to be a nation among nations. That was another change they had to get used to.

God's Kingdom

Yet this was only the beginning of a long process recorded in the Old Testament. The infant nation had to fight to survive, with God's help. He appointed saviours, called Judges, who rescued them, and when they demanded a King like the other nations, God provided one. King after king reigned over His people, for it was God's Kingdom on earth – with God's appointed king reigning on God's throne, over God's people (1 Chronicles 29:23).

But it didn't last as long as 500 years, because the nation did not believe that God would do what He promised to do for them. First they went into captivity; then they had a series of overlords, as one world empire succeeded another. All the

time they were waiting for a king, but when God sent them one – His Son, the Lord Jesus, born of the virgin Mary – they weren't ready for that sort of king.

Jesus had come to rule over sin by his perfect obedience to his Father's will, and he accomplished that brilliantly. Because he triumphed in that way, God raised him from the dead and exalted him to sit at His right hand in heaven. It was all part of God's gracious purpose, just as the psalmist had predicted:

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool." The Lord shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (Psalm 110:1-2).

Coming Change

Jesus has been in heaven for nearly 2000 years, working for the good of mankind, to save us from sin and death. Soon he will come, as promised, to establish God's kingdom on earth once again and this time he will be the one to rule, as the psalmist says, "out of Zion". For Jerusalem is to be the future capital of a worldwide kingdom that will usher in a marvellous time for mankind – well, for all those who are privileged to be a part of that coming age.

This is our time of opportunity. We need to change our ways and prepare for the great things that are coming, by getting to know God's purpose and developing a relationship with Jesus, so that we will be ready to meet him when he comes.

Editor

The Right Foundation

It was another earthquake – this time in Turkey – leaving many buildings damaged and many people homeless.

One block of flats had been completely demolished but, astonishingly, the adjoining block wasn't even cracked. We were told that one had been built on a solid foundation, but the other had apparently not complied with the Building Regulations.

Sand or Rock?

Immediately the words of the Lord came home with added force. For Jesus gave a very telling story about the difference between a wise man and a foolish one. This is what he said:

Whoever comes to me, and hears my sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house

on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:47–49).

We feel sure that there was a

rhythm to the words when spoken, with our Saviour emphasising the growing storm, with a great pressure on the house – but it did not fall! His whole purpose was to emphasise that any building has to have



a sure foundation, or under stress it will collapse. Digging out the foundation will mean heavy work, but in the end it will prove to have been worth it.

Easy Option

The man who dug no foundations was in peril from the start. It was so easy to level off the earth and build on it straight away. The resultant storm showed his folly as the whole building collapsed.



Where is the lesson for us? The Lord said that any man who listened to his words and carried them out was building on a very sure foundation. It is essential therefore that we learn the way of salvation, so that whatever opposition comes our way we will not waver, knowing that we are fulfilling the Master's words. It means, of course that we have to read the Bible, and carry out its instructions to the letter.

After the Lord's resurrection the apostles, despite much opposition, went forward to teach the people what God requires of us all. It was Paul who said that he was helping to build the church of Christ and gave this warning:

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Firm Basis

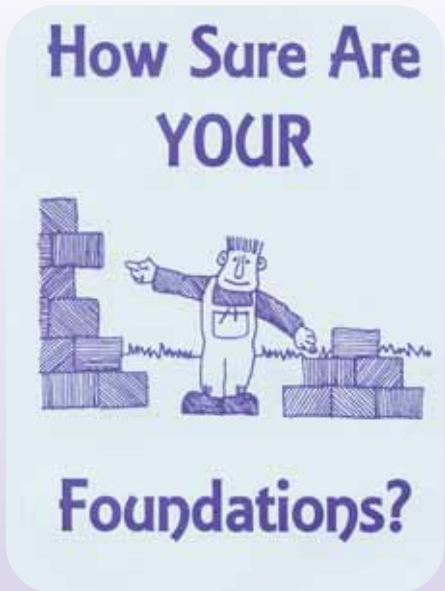
What did Paul and the other apostles ask us to do? We must build upon a sure foundation, and that foundation is the saving work of God, in Christ. How do we do that? Let the Scriptures explain:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

We must believe in the all powerful One who is worshipped by every true Christian. The apostle Peter added:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

To repent means to "have another mind." When we see what is required for our salvation we will recognise that we need to have a change of mind and wholeheartedly decide to give our lives in service to God. Baptism will then



follow. You may say that you were baptised as a child, but Scripture asks for total immersion in water by understanding adults. When we do that we are told that angels rejoice! What an honour.

Then having built upon God's foundation as a sure basis, we will face all the varying trials of life, knowing that one day we will meet our Saviour who will grant us the blessing of eternal life. Hear then the Psalmist as he proclaims:

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (Psalm 18:2).

Seeing his enthusiasm, we have each to ask how sure are OUR foundations?

Ken Clark

What I Believe and Why

*This series was first written by **John Woodall** as weekly messages to interested people in Turkey. The articles will explain the main beliefs and hopes of Christadelphians and John is now sharing them with a wider readership. All his beliefs are learned from the Bible, and he firmly believes that this is God's message to us.*

A Message to the Reader

The beliefs I shall be outlining in this series unite together a world-wide family of people called Christadelphians, a name which simply means “brothers and sisters in Christ” and is taken from the Letter to the Colossians (chapter 1, verse 2), in the New Testament.

The studies take us on a short journey through the Bible, and we will notice in passing just a little of the evidence that shows how reliable the Bible is. We pick out its main teachings about God Himself and the wonderful plans that He has to fill this Earth with peace and praise, to His glory.

The series will examine the basic reasons for human failure at all levels, and will help us come to understand how Jesus Christ is at the centre of God's purpose to “*make all things new*”. We will think about Jesus' life and death, and about the strong evidence that he was raised to life again by God. We will look at a few of the many promises in the Bible that he will return at a time of dreadful chaos and warfare, to become world-wide King.

We will learn how ordinary people – including you and me – can be reconciled to God by accepting Jesus as our Saviour now. Then by God's grace when Jesus returns – which we believe will be soon – we can be granted eternal life, like that now experienced

by the angels, free of all human weaknesses, and have a real part in assisting Jesus to make “*the Kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ*”.

If we die in the meantime, that will not be a problem: the Resurrection that will happen at the Return of Christ will take care of that. Jesus himself is alive again and he said:

I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:18).

Jesus also said:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

The choice is ours. Let's not waste the opportunity, and die for ever.

A Few Helpful Points

- 1 The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew (and a few chapters in a related language, Aramaic). The New Testament was written in Greek. Most of us need a translation into our own language, and the Bible quotations used in “*Glad Tidings*” are from the New King James version of the Bible. This is a modern version that tries to keep close to the original wording and does not

let the translator's personal opinions show too much.

- 2 Please read the Bible prayerfully every day. A lot of Bible verses will be included in full, sufficient (I hope) to make them understandable on a straight reading. Much more benefit will be gained, however, if you open your Bible and read the verses before and after the ones quoted. Please also read the other chapters which are referred to. The Bible is God's message to us, so our attitude to it shows our attitude to God Himself.
- 3 The Bible was written for ordinary people because faith is personal. Our beliefs and the way we live are our own responsibility; we cannot pass our responsibility over to someone else, whether a Priest, a Rabbi, a Pastor or an Imam.

This series comes with Christian concern, and the prayer that Jesus will soon be here as our world-wide King,

1. There is One God, the Father, who is the Creator of all. He is All-powerful

The wonders of the natural world convince me that there must be a great Designer. The Bible simply tells us that the Creator of all things is God – the God who revealed Himself to people such as Abraham and Moses in Old Testament times. If you doubt that, please reserve judgment until you have read these few pages, with their brief sketch of the developing programme revealed in the Bible.

The created world does not tell us whether God has any interest in us, or any plans for us. If He has such plans, we have to depend on Him telling us about them. The Bible claims to do that – to be God's Message to mankind.

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

There are many reasons for believing that this is true, and we will look at some of these reasons later in the series. The Bible says that *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1).

It tells us that God then created the millions of living things, and finally He created man and woman. Because God made us, He knows what is best for us, and He has the right to tell us what to do. At the end of the Old Testament the prophet Malachi says *"Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?"* (Malachi 2:10).

Believing in One God

God, says Malachi, is the 'Father'. The Bible says that He is God *"in heaven above and in the earth beneath"* and then adds **"there is no other"** (Deuteronomy 4:39).

All other 'gods' are inventions of the human mind:

*I am the LORD, and **there is no other**; there is **no God besides Me**. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that **there is none besides Me**. I am the LORD, and **there is no other** (Isaiah 45:5-6).*

This was an absolute fundamental truth for the Jewish people, part of the greatest commandment in the law:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! (Deuteronomy 6:4).

The New Testament also confirms this understanding when the apostle Paul says:

...for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things (1 Corinthians 8:6);

...one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:6);

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

Son of God

Jesus is the Son of God, and all God`s plans for the earth depend upon him. We shall think carefully about Jesus and who he is later on, but the Bible never calls him ‘God the Son’, always the Son of God.

Unfortunately from ancient times right through to the present, people have not accepted that God is One. Instead of worshipping the One God in truth, they worshipped stars, animals, imaginary gods, and idols that they made for themselves. Also, many nations who worshipped one chief god, believed that he existed in three forms. We find this belief in ancient Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and in some countries even today. As time passed, even people who wanted to worship the One God were influenced by these ideas.

About two centuries after Jesus, many Christians who had studied the Greek philosophers brought their ideas into Christianity. One of these was that

the True God is also three-in-one. This is the doctrine of the Trinity, which was imposed on the church by the Roman Emperor Constantine about 325 AD – nearly three hundred years after the ministry of Jesus. In 380 AD the Emperor Theodosius went further and made a law saying that every Christian must believe in the Trinity. His law threatened punishment to anyone who disagreed, but Jews, Muslims and a few brave true Christians have consistently opposed this idea that God is three-in-one (a Trinity).

They believe – rightly in our view – what the Bible taught from the beginning, namely that God is One.

Serving One God

This belief that God is One is not only something that needs to be believed. It is meant to have a big effect on the way we live. We should worship Him only, of course: but also because He is One – undivided in Himself – we should be undivided in our service to Him. This was the commandment given to Israel which the Lord Jesus described as the first of all commandments:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4–5, quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:29-30).

In the next article in this series we will see how the One God has revealed Himself and His purpose for the earth in ways that we humans can understand, for He tells us all that He wants us to know about Himself and His purpose, in the Bible.

John Woodall

Israel's National Repentance

Today, Israel is in a very precarious position. Its survival as a nation is in grave doubt as many of the nations round about want to see it destroyed and removed from the land. We have already briefly considered the promise that was given to Abraham whereby other nations would be blessed or cursed in accordance with how they deal with God's people. The nations are also told this through His prophet Zechariah:



This is a key verse of Scripture. As we considered earlier in this series, it is God who is in control, not the governments of this world, and everything is working out according to His plan and purpose. It is He who will also bring about the repentance of His people. As we saw when considering the valley of dry bones prophecy (Ezekiel 37), God said that He would breathe

into the resurrected corpses and put His Spirit in them and they would become an exceeding great army.

When considering prophecies of the return of the Jewish people, we looked at Ezekiel 36:22-24. The passage of Scripture continues like this:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My

For thus says the Lord of hosts: "He sent me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake my hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me" (Zechariah 2:8–9).

Israel's Surety

Israel will survive any attack by other nations because their God is with them to save them, as other prophets have made clear:

'For I am with you,' says the Lord, 'to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished' (Jeremiah 30:11).

people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:24–28).

Changed Nation

Similar words to these appear in Ezekiel 11:17-21 and they signal a great change in the attitude of the nation. There is to be a change in thinking which turns the nation back to God. What is it that will bring about this national repentance from a nation which at present trusts in its own strength and prowess, so they become a nation which once again humbly seeks after God and His ways?

An earlier article examined the portions of Zechariah's prophecy, chapters 12 to 14, relating to the time of the end and in particular the phrase "on that day". This is what we read in Zechariah 12:9-10:

It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zechariah 12:9–10).

This change will be brought about by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is coming to save his people from destruction. When they see the marks in his hands they will recognise him as their Messiah, the one whom their forefathers had insisted be crucified, millennia before. This will trigger a national repentance such as has never been seen before. It will affect the people to the core and their hearts will be changed when they realise the enormity of what has happened.

New Testament

The apostle Paul, speaking about the fortunes of his people in Romans chapters 9 to 11, says this of the repentance of Israel in the latter days:

I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins" (Romans 11:25–27).

Here the apostle is quoting Isaiah 59:20-21. No longer will the people of Israel have hearts of stone which are impervious to the ways of God, but rather hearts which will be open to instruction about the God of their fathers and the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This spiritual repentance will also signal a change of fortune for Israel with the rest of the nations. Isaiah goes on to record these words:

Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Isaiah 60:1–3).

These verses foretell the beginning of the blessings that will flow to Israel in that day. Many other portions of Scripture detail the blessings that will come upon the nation when their King is finally among them.

John Shepley

Cornelius the Centurion

The Ethiopian eunuch who met Philip on the road between Jerusalem and Gaza was probably the first person who was not a Jew to become a follower of the Lord Jesus. He had almost certainly become a Jewish proselyte, hence his visit to Jerusalem, and he was baptized as a Christian on his way back home. Next we read about a Gentile who had not converted to Judaism and he too became a follower of the Lord Jesus.

Under Orders

Acts chapter 10 records that the man in question was a centurion of the Italian cohort. A cohort was a regiment of the Roman army whose members had all probably been born in Rome. In the pages of the New Testament all centurions are well spoken of, even the one who was in charge at the crucifixion of Jesus. This man, named Cornelius, is described as *“a devout man and one who feared God with all his household”* (Acts 10:2).

Cornelius was given instructions to send from his home in Caesarea to Joppa and to ask the apostle Peter to visit him. While the messengers were on their way, Peter was prepared for the request by God who caused him to see a vision. Having been brought up as a Jew to very precisely follow the law given by Moses, Peter now saw something like a large sheet let down by its four corners, which contained animals, reptiles and birds – all of which were forbidden for Jews to eat. Nevertheless he was told to kill and eat, which brought from him the response you would have expected from a practising Jew:

Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean (Acts 10:14).

There was an immediate reply:

What God has cleansed you must not call common (Acts 10:15).

This happened three times, just before the messengers from Cornelius arrived at the house where Peter was staying. The message was relayed, and the following day Peter went with them as they returned to Caesarea.

All Welcome!

When the visitors arrived Cornelius fell down at Peter’s feet in worship, but Peter could not allow this. His simple comment was *“Stand up, I too am a man”* showing clearly that worship was to be reserved for the Lord God and His son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter began by telling Cornelius about his vision.

You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean (Acts 10:28).



Then Peter told the whole of Cornelius' household about the Lord Jesus, of the fact that God had given him the power of the Holy Spirit, that he had done good and performed miracles of healing. Peter and the others of the twelve had been witnesses of all that he had done, and of the fact that Jesus had been crucified by the Jewish authorities working in conjunction with the Romans. Then, having perhaps been reminded of those dreadful hours, Peter moved on to the fact that the Lord God had not allowed his Son Jesus to remain in the grave.

Him God raised up on the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead (Acts 10:40–41).

Apostolic Teaching

Peter continued talking about the way this fulfilled what the Old Testament prophets had said and that this Jesus is the one appointed to be the judge of both living and dead. Then he explained that, in the name of Jesus, those who believe can receive forgiveness of sins. This is exactly the message which Philip had preached in Samaria when *“he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).* In years to come the apostle Paul would deliver a very similar message in Athens. Different members of the early church might use different words, but there was a remarkable consistency about their message.

Then a most remarkable thing happened. Peter seems not to have finished all that he had to say, when Cornelius and those with him received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Jews

with Peter were amazed at this, *“because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also” (Acts 10:45).*

It was compelling evidence from on high that the message of the gospel was not just for Jews, but also for Gentiles, and Peter lost no time in *“commanding them to be baptized.”* Unlike Philip with the Ethiopian, Peter was able to remain for some time with the new converts, but when he returned to Jerusalem it was to face the hostility of those who thought the gospel was for Jews only.

Jew and Gentile

The first accusation from his fellow Jews was that he had eaten with *“uncircumcised men” (11:3),* so Peter had to explain all that had happened – his vision, his six companions, and the way in which *“the Holy Spirit fell upon them” (11:15).* He concluded by saying:

If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17).

The outcome was that the community of believers in Jerusalem accepted that the message of salvation which came through the Lord Jesus was not just for Jews but also for Gentiles. The Lord God offers this message of salvation for all people, for:

God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (Acts 11:18).

This was an important further step in the development and growth of the community of believers. The scene was now set for further witness well beyond the boundaries of the land of Israel.

Mark Sheppard

Habakkuk and Zephaniah

Habakkuk was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah – he lived before the Babylonian invasion of Judah (in 586 BC) and his short prophecy comprises a long conversation between himself and the Lord God, followed by an amazing prophetic psalm.

On the Watchtower

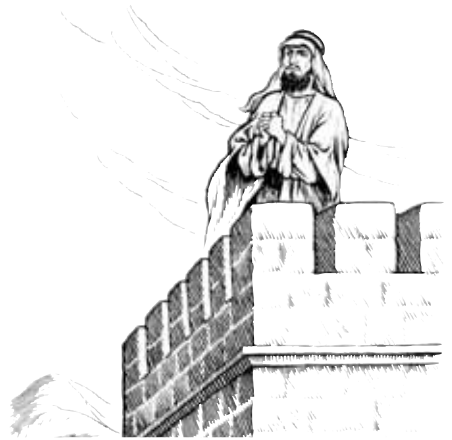
Habakkuk begins his prophecy by complaining to God that His people were a really bad lot, and He did not seem to be doing anything about it. “I am surrounded by violence, and the law is paralysed. Justice never prevails”, he moans. “I call for help, but you do not listen!” (See Habakkuk 1:2-4.)

God’s answer is precise, and most unwelcome to the prophet. “Just keep watching”, He says. “I am sending the Babylonians. They will bring a terrible judgment on my people!” (See Habakkuk 1:5-11.)

This really takes the prophet by surprise. Evidently he had not expected that sort of divine action, or anything so drastic. “Hold on, Lord!” he answers. “Surely the Babylonians are more wicked than the people of Judah. Where is the justice in that?” He decides to stand on his watchtower and wait for clarification (2:1).

The Answer!

For the third time God speaks. “Write down the answer”, He says, “so that it will be visible through the centuries” (see 2:2-4). What was the answer? It rings down the centuries, and is one of the most-quoted verses in the Old Testament.



Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:4).

“The righteous”, God said, “shall live by his faith!” That simple statement tells everything. We cannot hope to understand the way God carries out His plans. He operates on a plane far above our heads. But if we trust Him, and wait for His salvation, we shall live in the day when His Kingdom comes on earth.

We are not saved by heroic deeds or endless sacrifices, but by faith. It is as simple as that. To satisfy Habakkuk’s curiosity, the Lord went on to explain that in due course the proud Babylonians would be punished in their turn. His purpose would roll steadily on through the centuries, while human kingdoms would come and go, until the day when:

...the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him (2:20).

Habakkuk's Psalm

The Psalm which comprises Chapter 3 of the prophecy was obviously written to be sung, for it has a musical direction like the psalms of David. It mirrors the poetry of Deuteronomy chapter 33 and Psalm 68. It is based on Israel's wilderness journey from Sinai to the Promised Land, but it rises above that to portray a similar but grander event at the time of the end.

God will march with His heavenly hosts from the south to Jerusalem to save His people, and bring destruction on His enemies in earthquake and fire. It is the same apocalyptic language we have already met in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. This is Habakkuk's version of Armageddon, the climactic battle that brings to an end the Kingdoms of Men and replaces them with the Kingdom of God.

Touchingly, the psalmist prophet accepts that trouble lies ahead for his people, but now, strengthened by this vision, he will be able to face the future with confidence, knowing that God is in charge.

Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labour of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there



be no herd in the stalls — yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3:17–18).

This is an attitude we can grow to share, as we read the Bible, chapter by chapter, and come to put our trust in Habakkuk's God.

Zephaniah

Our next prophet tells us that he lived in the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah, and therefore about thirty years before the Babylonian captivity. Zephaniah's message is directed to the people of Jerusalem, the capital city. He prophesies of a 'Day of the Lord' that will fall upon them for their irreligious ways.

We can see from chapter 1:5-6 how his people varied in their attitudes to God, and can recognise the same trends in our society. There were some (verse 5) who openly worshipped the stars. We also have people convinced that astrology can help them through the week. There were some who worshipped the Lord, but who also worshipped Molech, the god of the Ammonites – a pagan god whose followers demanded the sacrifice of children.

These worshippers were two-timers, trying to keep a foot in both camps. Nowadays there are still people who go to church at Christmas, but the rest of the year worship Mammon, the greedy god of money, often at the expense of spending time with their family. There were others (verse 6) who had turned from the Lord. They had once been enthusiastic believers, but had now given up believing altogether. There are plenty of such people today. And there was a large majority who had not even sought the Lord or enquired of Him.

Zephaniah painted a sad picture of a nation which had once been devoted

to God and the prophet's message was this to the money grabbers:

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land (Zephaniah 1:18).

We too have seen how flimsy stocks and shares and house prices can prove once the economy begins to slide. As Jesus says, the only accumulation that is future-proof is the treasure we accumulate in heaven, working for God.

Pure Speech

In his third chapter Zephaniah attacks the rulers. Princes, judges, prophets and priests, he said, had failed in their leadership (3:3-4). It is the same today. Without a clear moral example from those at the top, a country will slide into ruin. But God has determined that He will bring a day of judgment, not just on Israel but all nations. That will clean things up and establish a new morality on earth. And after that God will teach all the nations of the earth to worship Him together.

My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one accord (Zephaniah 3:8-9).

Verse 9 is intriguing. There are many other prophecies about the Kingdom of God in which all nations combine in the true worship of God, abandoning their false gods. But this verse suggests that a key factor in getting this to



work will be the adoption of a common language. The previous verse contains all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Is this a clue that the ancient language of the Bible may be taught again in schools all over the world, providing a common medium for worshipping the Lord?

The prophecy closes with a picture of a humbled Israel, restored and cleansed by a merciful God:

In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds In which you transgress against Me; for then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain. I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid (Zephaniah 3:11-13).

David M Pearce

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

This is a popular saying in our language and it is certainly true of our human memories. When we are in daily contact with a person – a member of the family, a friend or a colleague – it is so easy to remember their looks, words and ways, whether or not they are to our liking!

But what about that person we haven't seen for years, that friend we had in school, that colleague who emigrated, or that neighbour who moved many years ago? If we don't make a real effort to keep in touch, they don't very often enter into our consciousness do they?

What about God?

Does the same apply when we hear about God and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it a long time since we read or heard about them? How long is it since we got in touch with them through prayer? God and the Lord Jesus are invisible, out of sight, but they are still very much alive. So how can we find out about them and make contact?

The Bible is given to make that contact possible: it is God's message to mankind which explains His purpose and thus gives us hope of establishing a relationship with Him, through His Son. Jesus lived, died and rose again to make that possible, unworthy though we are. So we need to prayerfully and regularly read God's message of hope to us in the Bible. If that seems a daunting prospect there are numerous reading plans to help, one of which is regularly printed in this magazine.

God wants Us

Reading God's Word will show us that God is a loving Father, who wants to reach out and have a relationship with His creation – and that includes you and me:

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11–12).

God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and death and thus He demonstrated the extent of His love and care for us. But we have to respond. All those letters and e-mails from a long-lost friend will achieve nothing if we do not read them and reply to them.

Similarly, all those messages from God which we can read in the Bible will be wasted on us if we don't read them and act on them.

Open your Bible now!

J. Michael Buckler



Why Does God Allow It?

People often ask why God allows certain things to happen in the world. We cannot know the answer to every individual situation, but there are some important Bible principles that allow us to think through this subject.



Things God Can't Do

It may seem very strange to state that there are things which God cannot do. However, we ought to be very thankful that – owing to His supreme divine nature – there are indeed some things that God cannot ever do. It would be impossible for God to:

- ❖ Lie (Titus 1:2);
- ❖ Deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13);
- ❖ Be tempted by evil (James 1:13),
- ❖ Die (1 Timothy 6:16).

What a helpless mess we would be in if God could do those things! It also follows that God cannot break His promises. If God has promised that something will happen, then neither He nor anyone or anything else can prevent that promise being fulfilled. So there will be things that God cannot do. For example, given that He promised that Israel will ultimately be saved, He cannot subsequently destroy Israel.

All Powerful

There is no-one greater than God (Hebrews 6:13) and, in Jeremiah 32:27, He says:

Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?

Similarly, in Genesis 18:14 we read *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”*

So God has power over all things. The fact that some things are impossible for God is a consequence of His character and certainly not a lack of His power.

God's Character

The Bible is very clear that God is very different from mankind. For example, He is always right, and His character defines the highest moral attributes:

- ❖ *God is love (1 John 4:8);*
- ❖ *As for God, His way is perfect (Psalm 18:30);*
- ❖ *The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether (Psalm 19:9);*
- ❖ *Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! (Romans 9:14).*

By contrast, we are, by nature, quite different from God. Of mankind it is said:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9);

...the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7,8);

The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile (Psalm 94:11);

'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:8-9).

It follows that cannot ever do wrong. He sets the moral standard for us all, and we cannot assess Him by our own inferior human standards. We need to try to understand His way and we should worship Him because he is the God who is revealed in the Bible, and not because we imagine that He shares some supposed virtues of humanity.

If we do not understand what God is doing that will be our lack of understanding and never any fault on His part. For God is always right in what he decides is best.

We Cannot Challenge God

It follows that we are in no position to argue with God; without Him we cannot live and by ourselves we cannot be saved. So whenever someone criticizes Him by saying 'Why doesn't God do this or that?', we need to remember that He will not do anything that is contrary to a promise He has made or that is not in accord with His plan and purpose. Nor will He do anything that is inconsistent with His perfect, divine nature. It is for us to try to please Him, not to discuss how He might best please us.

We should never ask why God does or does not do something, if we mean to challenge His fairness as God. However, we can ask in humility why such and such has happened, so that we can learn of His ways and try to become more like Him. For the Bible offers us the prospect, by the grace of God, of eventually sharing the divine nature ourselves. It was the apostle Peter who communicated this marvelous truth:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:2-4).

The Knowledge

It is by knowing God and the Lord Jesus Christ that we can find the way to eternal life (John 17:3). For God has called us to share in His glory and virtue and has given us the precious promises contained in His Word so that we might fill our minds with them.

The Bible is unlike any other book for it contains life-giving power and is capable of transforming the way we think and the way we behave. If we absorb its true message, it has the power to give us new life. As the apostle Peter expressed it, we can be:

... born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1 Peter 1:23).

Anna Hart

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