

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1551



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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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Finding the Time

It isn't easy to find time to think. Life is so busy and there is always such a lot to do. Even when on holiday there are places to go, things to see, shops to visit and meals to eat. It can be exhausting! Just sitting and thinking is seldom an option.

Stand Still

Sometimes we need to find time to take stock, especially when we are really stressed and times are hard. Fleeing refugees were once being pursued by their erstwhile slave masters when they came to an impassable barrier. What were they to do? Fortunately they listened to their leader and he gave them this startling advice:

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever" (Exodus 14:13).

As it happened the fleeing Israelites couldn't do much else. The sea was in front of them and the Egyptian army was behind them, so they had to stand still. Then it was that God opened a way across the sea which enabled them to escape. Thus it was that Israel moved forward as a nation and reached Mount Sinai where God declared them to be His special people, through whom He would communicate to all nations.

Kadesh Barnea

Less than two years later, the infant nation assembled on the edge of the

Promised Land and hesitated. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey and now they had to possess it, under His guidance. But they asked for a scouting party to be sent in first, so they could see what they were up against, and selected twelve men – one from each of their tribes – to go and spy out the land.

Their report was discouraging. Only two of the twelve recommended invading; the other ten said it could not be done. What was the nation to decide? Would they believe God and go forward in faith or would they falter and fail? They faltered, because they could not believe that God could do what He had promised and the result left them with a lot of time on their hands. Moses pleaded on behalf of the faithless nation and this is what God said:

I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord— because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it (Numbers 14:20–23).

Wilderness Wandering

The nation had been on the brink of entering the Land but because of their unbelief they were sent back into the wilderness for another 38 years until that entire generation died out. It was their children who eventually crossed

the Jordan with Joshua and proceeded to conquer and cultivate the Promised Land. The promises had always been in place, but the faith wasn't there to activate them. It was just as God had said at Kadesh Barnea. His promises would indeed be fulfilled, but only those who believed would see that fulfillment.

The people did not take the time to think things through when they had the opportunity but they now had a lifetime for reflection and regretful thought, and their experience is intended to teach us. For, in the New Testament, we read this inspired commentary on those far off happenings:

With most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted ... Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:5–11).

Time Out

Reflecting upon Israel's history many years later, King David urged his contemporaries to use their opportunity to believe in God, and he used a specific word, saying:

Today, if you will hear His voice: do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness (Psalm 95:7–8).

Israel had been hard-hearted in that they had not been willing to believe God but had made their own assessment of the situation and had followed their own reasoning. David was urging his subjects to think differently and was encouraging them to do that now

– today, not tomorrow.

A thousand years later an inspired apostle looked back at David's advice and repeated it for early Christian believers, for God's promises have not changed with the passing years: they remain sure and certain. What He promised David, God will most certainly fulfill, but we have to believe if we want to be part of that new age to be established when David's heir – the Lord Jesus Christ – returns to rule from Jerusalem. So what is the apostolic advice?

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... (Hebrews 3:12–14).

Today!

Every day we need to make some time for serious thought about our lives and the lives of those we love. There is no better way of doing this than regular Bible reading and prayer. Find out about the promises of God and you will learn that God has an escape plan for mankind from all the problems that now beset our world.

Things may be getting worse year-by-year, but that should come as no surprise to Bible readers. They have to get worse before they will get better. But make no mistake! There are better times ahead and if we want to be part of those good times with God, we need to find the time now to think seriously about God's offer of salvation.

Editor

God's Laws were Broken!

When God's work of creation was completed "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Only two of God's creatures were able to understand His intention in all this, and they were, of course, Man and Woman. At the beginning there was only Adam and his wife Eve, and they were placed in a fertile garden, eastward in Eden (Gen 2:8).

Although the created world was declared 'very good', they were given the responsibility to control it and to rule over it (Gen 1:28). Some animals for instance could be domesticated, and the ground itself needed cultivating (Gen 2:15).

Adam began this controlling process by giving names to the various creatures (Gen 2:20), and then when his wife was formed he chose her name too - 'Eve', which means 'Life' (Gen 3:20). Adam had the company of angels (which is one reason why God uses the word 'us' in these chapters). He also had the company of the animals, and now he was blessed by having a wife. So far, all was peace and co-operation.

The Coming of Sin

One restriction only was placed upon the man and his wife. They could eat any fruit or vegetable in the garden except one. The exception was "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". God had said "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall

not eat, for in the day you eat thereof you will surely die" (Gen 2:17). It was a simple law, but it tested their willingness to obey. We are not told how long they kept that law, but they did keep it until a different voice suggested that God did not mean what He said.

The serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

Worse than the lie itself, the serpent suggested that God had a hidden motive and that He was deliberately keeping something back that would be of benefit to them. Eve began to doubt: she saw the attractiveness of the fruit, and although there were many other fruits, she did so want the one that had been forbidden. She took the fruit and ate it. She gave one also to her husband and he ate it. Immediately they knew that a change had occurred: they were aware of their sexuality and aware of their sin. They made loincloths of leaves, and hid in the garden (Gen 3:7-13).

The Nature of Sin

Simple though this lawbreaking was, it happened through disbelief and defiance.

Disbelief and defiance cause much of the wickedness that has filled the earth ever since. Men and women convince themselves that "there is no God" (Psalm 14:1), or "the Lord does not see" (Psalm 94:7), or that He is

not the sort of God who is bothered about how humans behave (Ezekiel 8:12; 9:9). But even when people who do want to please God slip up and do the wrong thing (or fail to do the right thing), they too are guilty of sin.

Many people do not think of themselves as 'sinners' because they do not commit big crimes like murder or robbery. The Bible has many words for the different ways in which people disobey Him, but the most used is the word 'sin'. One meaning of this word in the Bible is 'to miss the mark'. This meaning is valid in the Hebrew Old Testament as well as in the Greek New Testament.



The 'mark' that we should aim at is complete obedience to God, and when we 'miss it', whether by much or little, that is 'sin' as the Bible defines it. It follows that we are all sinners. In different ways we all make the same mistake as Adam, and we all die.

The Tragedy of Sin

The sin in the Garden of Eden had dreadful results for all who were involved. The serpent was condemned to move around without legs and to crawl on the earth like a big earthworm. The woman would conceive children, and do so in sorrow, being

subject to her husband. Both of them would be banished from that lovely place in Eden and man would work hard to get a living from ground that would lose its fertility. Illness would afflict them and finally, sooner or later, they would die. You can read the sad story in Gen 3:14-23.

However, there were encouraging signs that God had not abandoned His purpose and that there was still hope. Adam and Eve did not die immediately: they were given time to repent. Although they made excuses (Gen 3:12-13), they did admit that they had disobeyed; and the fact that they were given clothing made from skins (Gen 3:21) suggests that God 'covered' their sin. The idea of 'covering sin' is one of the Bible's lovely picture-ways of describing forgiveness.

Key Promise

Further, there was a promise given that one of their descendants would crush the serpent's head, for to the serpent God said:

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

This was an assurance that the time would come when one of their descendants would abolish temptation and sin forever, although he would himself be wounded in the process. This descendant would be from the woman's line (having no human father) and he would triumph over sin in all its forms. Thus begins the pattern of divine promises that is such a key feature of the Bible.

John Woodall

What Has God Promised?

There are a lot of important promises in the Bible and in this article we intend to look at just some of them but first we should remember that there are two sorts of promise: Conditional and Unconditional.

Ice Cream!

We have these two types in our daily life. A mother might say to her little son 'Tommy, if you eat up your cabbage then you can have some ice cream.' This is a conditional promise, the ice cream being dependent upon Tommy eating his cabbage. No cabbage: no ice cream. Conversely Mother might say 'Tommy, as it is a nice day we will go swimming this afternoon.' This is an unconditional promise and expresses a firm intention to go swimming.



This distinction may not always be as simple as it seems, but it is a useful difference to think about for in the Bible we find that God makes both conditional and unconditional promises.

God's Promises

Let us examine two key New Testament passages about God's promises.

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 1:3–4).

Notice that these promises are described in superlative terms: they are '*exceedingly great and precious*' and moreover they promise eternal life, which is here defined as participation "*of the divine nature*", by comparison with our natural mortal nature, that is subject to death, and that is something that could last forever.

For all the promises of God in him (the Lord Jesus Christ) are Yes, and in him Amen, to the glory of God through us (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The language may seem to us a bit strange at first, but the meaning is very clear. All God's promises find their fulfilment in and through Jesus Christ. So promises that were first made to Adam and Eve; promises to Noah, and promises to King David are all fulfilled in Christ. This needs thinking about!

First Great Promise

The first of the great promises of God is unconditional and comes very early in the Bible, in fact in its third chapter. God said to the serpent that had deceived Eve:

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

These words were fulfilled in Jesus who was, in a very special way, the off-

spring of a woman (Mary). He had no human father and the promise said that he would receive a non-fatal wound (for a wound in the heel is non-fatal) but would fatally wound the offspring of the serpent (representing sin and all opposition to God).

The Lord Jesus, the offspring of the woman, did indeed receive wounds and was cruelly put to death – but his wounding was not fatal, for God raised him from the dead to eternal life on the third day. Through Jesus (the only sinless man) the power of sin and all opposition to God was broken (fatally wounded) and in God's own time all opposition to God and Jesus will be completely eliminated. If we think about it, this is a wonderful promise of hope, for the man and woman had sinned and were, like us in our turn, subject to toil and death. Yet so early in the scriptures there is this absolute assurance that the power of sin and death would be completely broken.

Noah's Promise

Noah and his family survived the great flood which swept an ungodly world away whereupon God promised:

I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease (Genesis 8:21–22).

This is another great unconditional promise: that the earth will remain inhabitable. It should be a great comfort to us at a time when scientists are warning about global warming and forecast great natural calamities which they think are to come on the earth.



God has promised that, despite man's natural sinfulness, He will remain true to His word, and the earth will always be inhabitable (Isaiah 45:18).

Promises to Abraham

Among the most important of all God's promises are those He made to Abraham, which were confirmed to his son Isaac and to his grandson Jacob. Here is the first of seven great promises:

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1–4).

This promise was made on condition that Abraham left:

- ❖ his land of birth
- ❖ his people, and
- ❖ his own family.

Abraham did all these, leaving first Ur of the Chaldees and then his father and his own people (in Haran in Syria)

and finally leaving his close family (Lot his nephew).

Because of this, the components of the promise are sure to be fulfilled:

- ❖ His descendants would become a great nation. This has already been fulfilled for the Jewish and Arab nations are all descendants of Abraham.
- ❖ A blessing would be conferred upon all who bless Abraham and a curse would fall on all those who curse him.
- ❖ Most astoundingly, all people on the earth would be blessed through Abraham. Has this been fulfilled? Yes: for Jesus is a descendant (a Seed) of Abraham and through Jesus we can receive the forgiveness of sins and the sure hope of eternal life.

This link between Abraham and Jesus explains why the very first verse of the New Testament begins: *“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham”* (Matthew 1:1). There are a lot more aspects to the promises made to Abraham in Genesis chapter 13:14-17; chapter 15; chapter 17:3-8 & chapter 22:15-18, and these are explained in articles in this magazine from time to time.

Promises to King David

You will recall that in the first verse of the New Testament the record mentions not only Abraham, but David. David was king in Jerusalem about 1000 BC and was a faithful servant of God. In 2 Samuel chapter 7 (vs. 12-16) we have a great promise made by God to David concerning a special descendant who would reign as king forever, on the throne of David which

was in Jerusalem. The descendant referred to is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. This is made clear in the words spoken to Mary by the angel:

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:30–33).

This promise has not yet been fulfilled, but Jesus was raised by God from the dead and is God’s anointed king. In due time (and we believe that time is near) Jesus will return from heaven to rule over the whole earth from Jerusalem (see Matthew chapter 23 vs. 37-39 & Acts chapter 17 vs. 30-31).

These are the things that God has promised and in His grace He offers to each of us a share in His promises and eternal life in His kingdom. All this is made possible in and through Jesus Christ, for in him all the promises of God are *“Yes, and in him Amen”*.

David Godfrey

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The Four Gospels: Matthew

Jesus is the most important person in the New Testament. It is not surprising, then, that it commences with his biography; in fact, we have four separate accounts of his life. Two of them are from men who were Jesus' disciples from the beginning (Matthew and John).

Both belonged to a group of twelve specially chosen disciples, later called apostles, who were to lead the infant Church. Luke's gospel was written by a gentile (non-Jew), who travelled with the Apostle Paul, and who also wrote a sequel to his gospel called the Acts of the Apostles. Mark, who wrote the shortest account, was the son of a believer called Mary who hosted gatherings of the early Church in her house. He was therefore in a strong position to find out the facts about Jesus from his friends.

Early Accounts

Even Bible sceptics accept that all four gospels were written in the First Century. They were not dredged up from people's memories years afterwards. There is a fragment of John's gospel in the Ryland's Library in Manchester, England, that has been dated to the beginning of the second century, and this was a copy, not an original. So we can be sure the gospels were circulating for people to read about the life of Jesus within a few years of the actual events.

You might ask why we need so many biographies of the Lord Jesus. When you need to reconstruct a full picture of what happened in the past (for

example in a court case), you always call on a number of witnesses, so that by comparing their testimonies you can establish the whole truth. In a car accident, one of the spectators may have noticed that the vehicle came round the corner on the wrong side of the road. Another may have arrived on the scene later, but remembers that the driver had a tattoo on his neck as he slumped over the wheel. A third may have noticed that one of the offside front wheels had a completely flat tyre. So you build up the sequence of events on that fateful morning.

Fourfold Record

It is like this with the story of Jesus. Some writers remember things that others did not notice or thought unimportant. Matthew, for example, concentrates on situations where the actions of Jesus had been predicted in Old Testament prophecy, while John selects miracles that Jesus performed which particularly convinced him that he was the Messiah (the anointed one) and the Son of God. Put them together, and you have a vivid impression of what Jesus of Nazareth was really like.

Finally, why are they called 'gospels'? The answer is that this word literally means 'good news'. The gospels tell us the good news that Jesus has come to deliver people from the power of the grave, and to bring about the Kingdom of God, when God's law will be done on the earth, just as it is obeyed now in heaven. And through these writings and those of the rest of the New Testament, Jesus invites us to be there.

Matthew

Matthew is named among the twelve apostles. He even records in his gospel the actual day when Jesus called him from his business as collector of taxes for the Romans, to become a wandering disciple:

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And he said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed him (Matthew 9:9).

In Mark's description of this event Matthew is called by his other name (this is common in the New Testament) – Levi son of Alphaeus.

Matthew, as we noted above, delights to point out the many amazing cases where something Jesus did, or something that happened to him, was a direct fulfilment of a prediction made hundreds of years previously in the Old Testament. His favourite phrase is:

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet... (Matthew 1:22).

Things to look for

As you read through this gospel, look out for prophecies of the virgin birth, of Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem, his work in Galilee, his healing of the sick, his quiet style of preaching, and the donkey ride into Jerusalem. Even Zechariah's forecast of the precise number of silver pieces paid over to Judas the betrayer falls under Matthew's notice.



Along with Luke, Matthew lists Jesus' family tree, proving his blood descent from King David and from Abraham. He is the only gospel writer to search out and record the visit made to the infant Jesus by the Wise Men from the East, and Herod's vain attempt to execute his potential rival.

❖ Matthew 5-7

In chapters five to seven, Matthew gives a very detailed account of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' opening statement of what he asks of his followers. If you have thought of becoming a follower of Jesus, or have already begun to follow him, this is essential reading. Here Jesus develops the idea that God is not a remote deity who can be paid off by expensive sacrifices or fasting or alms for the poor. He shows us a Father who loves His children, and weeps when they let Him down, a God who is Himself the standard we must reach up to. For His followers it is not sufficient to claim they have never killed. They must conquer even the feelings of hate and the desire for revenge that lead to murder.

Jesus dismisses the elaborate system of oaths the Pharisees had developed to guarantee their promises. The believer must always tell the truth, just as God does. It is not permitted to love your neighbour but hate your enemy. You must show kindness even to those who make your life a misery, because that is what God is like. He sends the rain on bad and good alike, in the hope that His enemies might repent and become His friends. So, Jesus said:

You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Nothing less will do. And do not worry about food and clothes and what will happen tomorrow, Jesus says. Concentrate on the Kingdom of God, and your heavenly Father will see to the rest.

Famous Parables

❖ Matthew 13-28

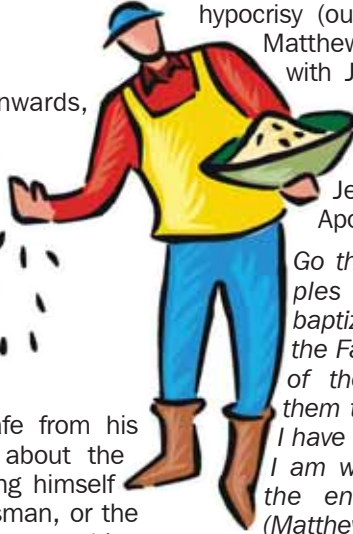
From chapter 13 onwards, Matthew collects together a comprehensive list of Jesus' famous Parables. These are stories taken from everyday life, each of which teaches an important principle in an easily remembered form.

Parables kept Jesus safe from his enemies. He could talk about the Kingdom of God, disguising himself as a farmer, or a businessman, or the son of a king, and there was nothing they could use to accuse him of treason against Caesar. If they did not

understand, the disciples would ask him for the key to the characters in the story when they were alone with him. But often the meaning was so transparent that even his enemies could see he was condemning them.

In his run-up to the crucifixion, Matthew portrays vividly how the leaders of the Jews hated Jesus, and how he in turn publicly exposed their hypocrisy (outward show). Like John, Matthew records the meeting with Jesus by his followers in Galilee after his resurrection from the dead. He concludes with Jesus' command to the Apostles:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen (Matthew 28:19-20).



David M Pearce

Four Inspired Gospels

Four books inspired, fully inspired, of God; four books written by men moved by the Holy Spirit; books that are true, flawless, perfect. The four Gospels are written with a distinctive design, and that which is included in its pages, and all that is left out, is strictly subordinated to that design, according to a principle of selection. In other words, nothing whatever is brought into any one of the Gospels save that which was strictly relevant and pertinent to its peculiar theme and subject, and all that was irrelevant and failed to illustrate and exemplify its theme was excluded.

A W Pink "Why Four Gospels"?

Physical Changes in the Land

The return of the Lord Jesus and the establishment of God's kingdom will bring about great physical changes in the land of Israel, for the whole topography of the land will be changed. The Bible gives us some tantalising glimpses of this time, particularly in the books of Zechariah and Ezekiel.

In that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through my mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal (Zechariah 14:4–5).

Earthquake!

The return of the Lord will trigger a massive earthquake in the land which will have repercussions worldwide. Such an earthquake will release awesome power and will have dramatic consequences on the topography of the land, for the record continues:

And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be "The Lord is one," and His name one. All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised

up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited (Zechariah 14:8–11).

Lifted up!

It seems the whole area around Jerusalem is to be elevated so that Jerusalem will be seen from great distances. This is corroborated by other Scriptures. For example Isaiah says:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it (Isaiah 2:2).

Zechariah says that living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea, that is the Dead Sea, and half to the western sea, that is the Mediterranean, and the whole area around Jerusalem will be turned into a plain. Isaiah says that the house of the Lord will be established there. These thoughts are brought together in the prophecy of Ezekiel where we read how these living waters which come from the Lord's house will heal the Dead Sea.

Jerusalem Temple

In the last nine chapters of his prophecy, Ezekiel describes a temple which is

to be built to the LORD in the latter days which will be a house of prayer for all nations, and also how the land is to be divided among the tribes of Israel. In chapter 47 we read:

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar ... Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine (Ezekiel 47:1–12).

Return to Fertility

What a remarkable picture this is. The whole land is to be rejuvenated. In

Isaiah we read that in that day "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). "Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree" (Isaiah 55:13). God also says through Isaiah:

I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, that they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it (Isaiah 41:18–20).

The saving of the nation of Israel, and indeed the world from itself, will be the work of God and His city of Jerusalem (Zion) will be the centre-piece of His Kingdom.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King (Psalm 48:1–2).

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts (Jeremiah 3:17).

This is part of the fertile future that God has in store for the earth and its future inhabitants, and it can be ours!

John Shepley

Are You Saved?

The house was blazing and fire-fighters were rescuing people trapped inside the inferno. It was extremely dangerous and the fire-fighters had to apply their skills with great care. “Thank you SO much for saving me”, gasped one man who had finally been brought to safety. “No problem”, said the fire-fighter “but you stay well away from the building now; don’t go anywhere near until we say it is OK”.

Some minutes later the man ran back to a part of the house that did not look as though it was on fire. No-one knew why and no-one could stop him. Suddenly there was an almighty crash and part of the building fell on him, killing him outright.

Remember Lot’s Wife

There is a similar account in the Bible. Angels visited the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and told the man Lot to get out, together with his family. God was going to destroy these cities because their inhabitants were so wicked. Lot’s family was led to safety by the angels, who even held their hands and told them:

“Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain” (Genesis 19:17).

However, after being taken out of the city, Lot’s wife did look back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus refers to this in Luke 17:32, warning people of the importance of taking notice of his words.

In each of these scenarios people had been removed from inevitable destruction by being taken to a safe place, but they subsequently perished because of their own foolishness.



Doubtless they thought they were ‘saved’, even though they perished.

Jesus our Saviour

We are all painfully aware that the human race is a dying race. Everyone dies. However, the Bible tells us that God sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. (1 John 4:14). In fact being associated with the name of Jesus is the only way of escaping permanent death.

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

So God has provided a way of escape from inevitable destruction. Consequently, the Bible refers to believers as ‘saved’ (2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 3:5, Romans 8:24). Some professing Christians believe that this means that eternal life is guaranteed to them, whatever might happen. This is not what the Bible says. The death of Jesus can save us from eternal death, just as Lot’s wife was saved from the brimstone and fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24). However, just like Lot’s wife, we might still perish.

This is clear in the writings of the apostles. In 2 Timothy 1 Paul describes believers as ‘saved’ (verse 9) but subsequently urges Timothy to ‘*hold fast the pattern of sound words*’ (verse 13) and clearly states that some people have in fact strayed from the correct way (2:16-18).

Similarly, Paul tells the believers at Corinth that they are saved by the gospel “*if you hold fast the word which I preached to you*” (1 Corinthians 15:2). Jesus Himself says that “*he who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matthew 10:22 and 24:13). The point is reinforced in 1 Corinthians 1:18 where Paul describes believers as “*us who are being saved*” (also 2 Corinthians 2:15).

God asks us to Obey

God has saved mankind from the inevitable death sentence. However, He asks us to respond individually: to believe and be baptised :



He who believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

Jesus said that:

unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

These are very strong words without any possibility of compromise. Later in the chapter Jesus says that we must believe on the ‘name’ of the Son of

God (v 18). It is abundantly clear that this belief is not merely an intellectual assent to the record of Jesus’ life. It also requires a personal commitment, which must be based on an understanding of what the ‘name’ means. Jesus means ‘Saviour’ and Christ means ‘Anointed One’.

Saving Name

Jesus’ name is associated with doctrine (i.e. beliefs), for the Jewish authorities commanded the apostles thus:

“But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:17–18).

It is therefore necessary to understand his name and the implications for our relationship with him. Jesus commanded his followers to live by the same selfless and godly principles that he did (John 13:34). He described this as taking up our cross:

Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).

This obviously requires us to understand what Jesus himself believed and how he lived.

We have been offered a reprieve from the death sentence that was ours from the moment we were born. We have been offered salvation. Are you content to stay in peril, or have you responded to this offer? This is the most important decision we can make, and make it we must!

Anna Hart

Are you Fully Committed?

The Bible is unique. It contains details of the spiritual journey of some great men and women who endured much hardship but emerged from their adventures more committed to the cause than ever before. Their life stories are written for our benefit and we should be able to measure our commitment by comparison, so let's look at a few examples.

My Servant Job

Job was a righteous man who was tested to the limit when illness and disaster came 'out of the blue.' One moment he was a prosperous family man: the next moment he had lost almost everything, but just note his immediate reaction:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).



Job had many other things to say as his sufferings continued but he emerged a better and a stronger man as a result of his trials and was amply rewarded at the end of his life. All of us are tested at some time in our lives, but what is our reaction?



Joseph the Dreamer

Joseph did everything well, but that didn't stop him being hated by his brothers and sold as a slave to an Egyptian master. He was a good slave and was soon trusted to manage his master's estate, but there came a time when his employer's wife tried to seduce him. It would have been so easy to give in, but his words were remarkable. He turned to her and said:

There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (Genesis 39:9).

Joseph had great God-given principles, and he wasn't going to turn away from them. What would we have done had we been a slave in an officer's house? It would have been easier to succumb to the temptation than to resist it, for Joseph was then thrown into prison and put in chains. But when

the time was right, God delivered his faithful servant and made him one of the most important and influential men in Egypt.

Naaman the Leper

A great Syrian warrior named Naaman had, on one of their military engagements into Israel, captured a young girl who became his wife's maidservant.

Her faith was amazing. Her Master suffered from leprosy and she suggested that a prophet in Israel, named



Elisha, would cure him if he only asked. Naaman took her at her word and headed a delegation to the king of Israel to ask for a cure. The king was taken aback, and thought the Syrians were looking for another reason to attack Israel, but he sent him to the prophet (see 2 Kings chapter 5).

Elisha had never cured a leper before, but he was a man of God and sent a message to Naaman to go and wash himself seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman was furious, and was determined to head home, but wiser counsel prevailed and he went and did what was commanded. On the seventh

time he arose from the water all his deformities were gone and his flesh was like that of a new-born child. It was an amazing transformation, but it is also a challenge to us, and our commitment.

The Bible tells us that to align ourselves with the saving work of God in Christ Jesus, we too should be immersed in water – being baptised, once we understand what the Bible teaches. Have we the sort of commitment Naaman showed? If we have, there could be no finer response to God's call to us.

David: God's King

Have you ever considered David? He is called "*a man after God's own heart*". He must have led a wonderful life, and he speaks to us in the Bible about commitment, in these words:

Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him (Psalm 37:5-7).

David saw a clear distinction between those who listen to God, and those who just can't be bothered. Then he added this exciting thought:

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

What a future is prepared for those who trust in God. If we commit ourselves to God, and give him our lives, we will never have cause to regret it. God will never ever let us down, but He does expect us to commit all our ways to His fatherly care.

Ken Clark

Should we expect an Easy Life?

The question is often asked “As I am a good person, why do things go wrong in my life?” This question highlights the fact that it seems to be thought that a successful life will follow for those who believe in God. However the Bible does not teach this.

Jesus: the role model

I suppose we would all agree that Jesus was a ‘good’ person. However we can hardly describe his life as a happy or successful one. In fact the Bible, speaking prophetically of Jesus, says this:

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him (Isaiah 53:3).

Jesus said of himself:

“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).

There is, therefore, no reason to assume that just because we serve God we will have an easy or pleasant life. We can hardly expect a better life than Jesus had, for he said himself:

It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! (Matthew 10:25).

Not good enough!

The Bible teaches that we are all

sinners because of Adam’s sin and the resultant effect upon all of us:

...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

However, Jesus can make us good. It is only when we appreciate this and recognise our need for salvation from our sin that we can benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus. Once we realise that we are sinners we will want to associate ourselves with the risen Jesus. This is achieved through the waters of baptism – that is by total immersion of an adult in water. The person who recognises their sinfulness and who desires to please God will be baptized to show that they deserve to die and wish to try to live a life which pleases God. Paul describes the change that then takes place in these words:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4).

So, rather than wondering why being ‘good’ does not bring happiness we should think about what Jesus actually wants us to do. True happiness will come for those who are given eternal life in the kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

Peter Forbes

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