

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1577



“Onward and Upward” – page 3
Resurrection and Judgement – page 7
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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org

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of the Kingdom of God

130th Year

K15

1577



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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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity – Number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained either from one of the Glad Tidings Distributors listed above, or from one of the contact addresses listed on the back cover.

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Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Cover: On the Männlichen above Wengen, Switzerland
Glad Tidings

Other Illustrations:

Pages 11-13: istockphotos; pg 18: Wikipedia Commons; All other images: clipart.com.

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The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) and other versions are sometimes used.

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“Onward and Upward”

Faced with problems, people develop techniques or catchphrases that enable them to move on. I once worked with a man who addressed every setback with the comment “Treat it as a challenge!” and whilst that was funny the first few times, it became a bit tiresome. Yet people who have made the most of their lives sometimes offer ideas that are closely connected with that way of looking at life.

Marching Onward

Henry Ford, the car manufacturer, said some really interesting things, like:

- ❖ *“Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason why so few engage in it”;*
- ❖ *“One of the greatest discoveries a man makes, one of his great surprises, is to find he can do what he was afraid he couldn’t do”;* and
- ❖ *“Life is a series of experiences, each one of which makes us bigger, even though sometimes it is hard to realize this. For the world was built to develop character, and we must learn that the setbacks and grievances which we endure help us in our marching onward.”*

Henry Ford marched forward from one assembly line to another, in the process building a name for himself; but he was a man who believed in God, for he also said:

- ❖ *“I believe God is managing affairs and that He doesn’t need any advice from me. With God in charge, I believe everything will*

work out for the best in the end. So what is there to worry about?”

Moving Upwards

In that last piece of advice Henry Ford reminds us that our life counts for nothing if it is a mere striving for achievement – one qualification after another, or one invention or discovery to be surpassed by the next one. That would be like a climber who reaches one mountaintop but never stops to admire the view because he is already thinking about the next height he has to reach. He is climbing upwards all the time, but is never content with what he has achieved.

There must be more to life than the perpetual quest for more things to achieve, more money to make, more status to acquire, more self-satisfaction to gain. Life is a gift from God and it is not given so that we can use it for selfish ends. It is given so that we can find out about the finest things in life and those are things that concern God’s purpose and His offer of salvation.

Frustration

There are many frustrations in life and that too is part of God’s design. One wise man put it like this, concerning his quest for meaning and purpose:

I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised (Ecclesiastes 1:13).

The wise man was King Solomon and in his analysis one phrase is often

repeated concerning a life spent in pursuit of things:

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

The phrase “*grasping for the wind*”, elsewhere translated “*striving for the wind*” occurs nine times in this one book – Solomon’s thesis about life. Of course, nobody can actually grasp the wind. But that doesn’t stop people trying to achieve the impossible: wanting more and more and never stopping to think about the real meaning of life. Sometimes we have to stop and look, and marvel.

Sense of Wonderment

Whether you pause to think about the wonder of the human body, or marvel at the magnificence of the created world, or rejoice at the magnificent variety of everything God has made – properly considered, everything that God has made points towards the Creator. As the apostle Paul explained:

Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:20–22).

We need to recapture a sense of wonderment when we think about God’s world, in all its magnificent aspects. Nowadays we hear so much about all that mankind can do, and this is often rehearsed as more marvellous than the created order itself.

We hear a lot about the discovery and decoding of DNA, but the real wonder is the structure of the cell itself and the One who first formed it. Sadly, and nonsensically, that marvellous structure is said to be the product of evolutionary chance, instead of being perceived as part of the building blocks of life brought into existence by Almighty God. Thus, in the first as in the twenty-first century, the apostle’s words ring true: “*Professing to be wise, they became fools*”.

Things Above

Paul did not just write a scathing denunciation of a godless world (like the one in Romans chapter 1). Under God’s guidance, he also wrote to encourage believers to think hard about God, His purpose and the saving work of the Lord Jesus. In another of his letters the apostle said this:

Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1–4).

We have to lift our gaze to contemplate all that God has done in the past, is now doing, and will accomplish when His gracious plan comes into its final phase. God has a purpose with the earth He has made and the people He is now calling to be members of His family. The next great happening will be the return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ who will begin the process of transforming the world. Then it really will be a case of “Onward and Upward”.

Editor

“Surely, I’m Not a Sinner!”

Some people think that we do not sin if we live a decent life, pay our taxes, and show kindness to our neighbours. With those things done, it is widely thought, we can class ourselves as “good citizens” or even “good people”; certainly not “sinners”. Sinners are adulterers, thieves, murderers, and so on, not like us at all. But if you think that, get ready for a shock.



Biblical Assessment

Who are we to decide whether we are sinners or not? That is for God to decide, and His decision will be in accordance with what He has told us in His word, the Bible, and that is crystal clear. For in one devastating assessment, the Bible says this:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

That statement doesn’t come out of the blue. It follows a long list of Old Testament statements describing the repeated failure of God’s people to keep His laws and to walk in His ways.

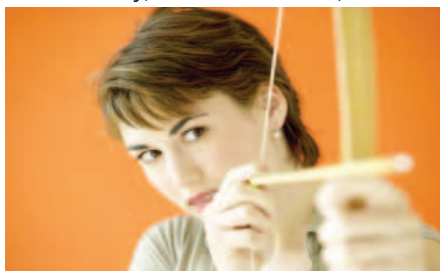
❖ Transgression

There are different words used in the Bible for doing wrong; for example, “*transgression*”. This word means a deliberate “crossing over the line” – a wilful disobedience of God’s will. That all started with Adam and Eve, who chose to do things their way, instead of God’s. Given one simple command, they crossed the line that God had drawn and broke His law, with fatal consequences.

❖ Sin

Then there’s the word “*sinned*” in the quotation from Romans. The original Greek word means, as the rest of the verse says, “falling short”. It was the word used when you shot an arrow at a target and, simply through lack of strength or skill, you failed to hit the target. The arrow literally “falls short”. In other words, that would not be a deliberate act of disobedience, but something that happened through your sheer inability to meet the high standards God expects of us.

Either way, we ARE sinners, whether



deliberately – by an act of will – or simply by our human inability to match what God expects of us.

Salvation

That analysis could easily lead us to despair, except that God has made a provision for all types of sin, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only man who has never sinned. In everything that he did he was righteous and totally obedient to God's will. Never once did he deliberately transgress against God or break His commands in any way. He never failed to meet God's high standard. He never "missed the mark". The Bible describes him thus:

Such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26); and

Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth (1 Peter 2:22).

A Perfect Sacrifice

Because Jesus was perfect, and because, despite sharing our human nature, he overcame human weakness and sin, he was a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Consider what the apostle Paul said about the effects of the death of the Lord Jesus:

For He [God] made him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When the apostle says that he became "sin for us" he means that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, to cleanse us from sin and its effects. That doesn't however mean that everybody is automatically forgiven. Forgiveness is available if we take up God's gracious offer and associate ourselves with what Jesus did and what he stands for. The Bible explains that we do this by believing what God has revealed about His purpose, and by being baptised into the saving name of Jesus.

But how do you start? The first step in this process of reconciliation with God is to acknowledge that YOU ARE ARE INDEED A SINNER in need of God's forgiveness. Come to that conclusion and you are on the road to finding the way to escape sin and its awful consequences. A new journey through life can then begin, one that leads to everything that God has promised, both now and in the glorious age that will begin when Jesus returns in power and glory.

Hamilton Wilson

David's Plea for Forgiveness

There are three Hebrew words for sin – "transgression" (pesha) means 'rebellion'; "sin" (chattath) means 'to miss the mark'; and "iniquity" (awan) means 'perversion or depravity'. The three words occur together for the first time in connection with the manifestation of God's name in Exodus *"The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty"* (Exodus 34:6,7). David's plea for forgiveness is therefore based on his understanding of God's revealed character: *"Have mercy ... according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies"* (Psalm 51:1).

Dudley Fifiield: *The Praises of Israel.*

Resurrection and Judgement

There is strong evidence that Jesus was brought back from death and given immortal life by the power of God. So what about all the people who tried to follow him in their lives but are now dead? Are they 'dead and gone', or will they too be raised, to be with Jesus?

Resurrection!

Let the apostle Paul explain:

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13–15).

Notice that he describes the dead as "asleep". As we have seen already in this series, the dead are not now alive, either in paradise or in hell. They are dead, but to God that is like 'sleep' because He has the power to restore their lives, or in other words to 'wake them up', when He pleases.

Old Testament Truth

As with the other important subjects that we are thinking about, Bible teaching about the Resurrection starts in the Old Testament. The Psalmist says that people without a saving knowledge of God are "like the beasts



that perish" (Psalm 49:12–15). But he was a believer, so he can say of himself: "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me" (verse 15). So a person who understands the purpose of God (see verse 20) is to be an exception to the general rule that people die and that is the end. God will bring some people back to life – not all, but some, as the prophet Daniel explains:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:2–3).

If you look carefully at the prophet Isaiah's words in chapter 26:19, you will see that he too looked forward to rising again to a new wonderful life. In the New Testament, Hebrews 11:19 tells us that Abraham also believed in life after death by resurrection.

Jesus' Followers

The godly people who followed Jesus had the same belief in resurrection. Jesus had a friend named Lazarus who

fell ill and died and Lazarus' sisters appealed to Jesus (John 11:23). Notice that Jesus did not offer the comfort that Lazarus was now safely in heaven. Instead this was the exchange of views:

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:23–25).

Those were remarkable claims but what happened next was amazing for, at the graveside:

He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:43–44).

Life and Death

Here is proof that God really has given to Jesus the power of life and death. In John's gospel we read of Jesus making that very claim:

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgement to the Son ... Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:21–22,25).

When will this be? Jesus' friend Martha understood that it will be 'at the last day'. In Bible language, the 'last day' means the time when sinful man's misrule is ended – the time when God takes away man's opportu-

nity to rule himself, and sends Jesus back to earth to rule as King of the whole world. It is the time described by the prophet Daniel:

In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44).

That time could be very soon.

The Judgement

Jesus will return as King and Judge. He will judge all who are responsible to him – raising those who are dead and gathering those who are still alive – (see 1 Thessalonians chapter 4). Here are a few more verses on the topic:

We shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:10–12);

For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

When will this be? When the Lord Jesus has come to rule the world in righteousness, and what a wonderful prospect that is, when: *"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).*

John Woodall

God WILL Intervene!

A selfless, popular man who did a lot of charity work died young. An atheist was discussing this with his friends. "If there really was a God don't you think He would have intervened and lengthened this man's life?" he ranted. The Bible believer spoke up: "How do you know God didn't extend his life?"

We Just Don't Know

Without the inspired comment of the Bible we can never know when God has or has not intervened. Most certainly He has intervened in the past, sometimes in ways we might not have chosen. For example:

- ❖ He brought unpleasant plagues on the Egyptians, in order to bring the Hebrews out of bondage (Exodus 11:1) which was a great deliverance.
- ❖ More drastically, He brought the Flood on the earth because nearly everyone was wicked in His sight (Genesis 6:5-7).
- ❖ Later He destroyed the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).

Cause and Effect?

Yet, in the New Testament, Jesus explained that some local disasters were not the direct judgement of God on wicked people (Luke 13:1-5). When God does not intervene it is certainly not any inadequacy of His power. As the Almighty God He has the power to do what He wishes:

"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" (Jeremiah 32:27).

God oversees everything that happens in the world, but He always acts to further His plan and purpose, whether or not we understand this. Sometimes He does not intervene because of our attitude:

[Jesus] did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58).

Future Intervention

Some of God's interventions described in the Bible are amazing, but the most cataclysmic are yet to come. He is going to judge the world when He sends Jesus here:

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

Ultimately, Jesus will reign on earth over a wonderful kingdom. We often imagine that this will happen overnight when suddenly all the world's problems will be solved. But the Bible does not say this. The apostle Peter likens this time of 'the end' to the days of Noah, saying:

This they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:5-7).

Divine Judgement

The destructive judgement brought about by the Flood was literal, and these words read as literal destruction by fire. Certainly mass destruction in the Middle East is prophesied, for the prophet says of Jerusalem:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zechariah 14:1–2).

However, the judgements at that time may be more worldwide:

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch” (Malachi 4:1).

The apostle Paul also speaks of a fiery judgement:

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9).

What Must We Do?

These verses show it is imperative not to oppose Christ when He returns, but that is not enough. There will be mortal citizens in the kingdom of God (Isaiah 65:20), but given these prophecies we

cannot assume that if Jesus comes in our lifetime we will survive to see the kingdom. Far less are we assured of automatically receiving eternal life.

In the past when God has acted in judgement, He has always provided a way of escape for the faithful.

- ❖ Noah had the ark (Genesis 6),
- ❖ Lot was taken out of Sodom (Genesis 19), and
- ❖ Egyptians who joined the Hebrews in Goshen avoided the plagues and left Egypt with them (Exodus 12:38).

All these people obeyed the commandments of God, and what God commands now is that we repent:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

Noah was moved with fear when he built the ark – a respectful fear of displeasing God. This was not a fear that rendered him paralysed and inactive, but a godly fear that motivated him to respond in faith (Hebrews 11:7).

The Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah and as a result Jerusalem was sacked in AD 70 and they were dispersed. We face a similar condemnation if we reject Jesus (Hebrews 10:26–27). God does not deal gently with those who reject His Son. Furthermore, doing nothing now is rejecting both Jesus and salvation.

The choice is ours: we can choose God’s wrath or His love. With world events pointing to the imminent return of Jesus, we may not have much time to decide, for God is most certainly going to intervene.

Anna Hart

Why should I Believe in a God I can't See?

- ❖ Because there is a lot of evidence around us that there is a power greater than ourselves;
- ❖ Because there are many facts that can only be explained by the existence of such a power.

We can understand that it's hard to believe in a God we can't see, so let's explore the reasons for believing in a power greater than ourselves.

A God we Can't See.

❖ Observable facts in science

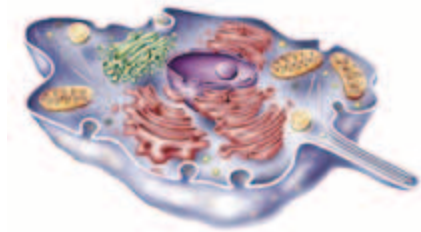
Wherever they look, scientists find that our world is made up of distinct animals and species. There are no observable facts to support major development of species.



This implies that a superhuman intelligence produced the different animals and species.

❖ Where did life come from?

The cell is the basis of all life. It has many life support systems. These systems are dependent on each other and cannot exist without each other. One example is that cell walls are only



made by enzymes. And yet the enzymes cannot do their job unless they are kept in place by the cell wall. It is difficult to see how the first cell appeared unless it was complete and fully functional.

This implies it was created.

❖ The laws of physics

The laws of physics are very precise.

For example, the volume, pressure and temperature of the air in a car tyre are all interrelated in a very accurate way. When the temperature goes down by a certain amount, the pressure in a particular tyre will always go down by the same exact amount. The existence of these exact laws implies a "law giver".



❖ The universe “seemed to know we were coming”

Well known writer Professor Paul Davies wrote in his book “The Goldilocks Enigma”:

If almost any of the basic features of the universe, from the properties of atoms to the distribution of the galaxies, were different, life would very probably be impossible ... a biofriendly universe looks like a fix – or ‘a put-up job’, to use the pithy description of the late British cosmologist Fred Hoyle. It appeared to Hoyle as if a super-intellect had been ‘monkeying’ with the laws of physics. He was right in his impression.

There are a large number of features about planet earth that are “just right” to support life. These critical things include:

- ✓ distance from the sun
- ✓ stability of the sun
- ✓ size of the sun
- ✓ earth’s angle of axis
- ✓ tilt speed of rotation
- ✓ proportion of land and sea
- ✓ composition of the atmosphere.

It looks as though the universe and



our earth have been “arranged” to support life.

❖ Unlikely accurate predictions

We can only predict the future based on what has happened in the past. God is not limited to our level of intelligence and foresight.

Over 2,000 years ago the Bible predicted that the Jews would be generally unpopular and have a history unlike any other nation. These detailed predictions have all come true.

These predictions must have come from a power greater than ourselves.

Why Bother?

The main reason why we should think about such a power is that, left to ourselves, we have no long term future.

It is an unfortunate fact that virtually everything in our world is deteriorating. Sooner or later that includes us as well. We all share the problem that we have no long term future.

As we cannot solve this problem, we need help. But we need help from someone we can trust. We also need to be sure that our helper has the ability and willingness to do something about our problem.

If we can find good evidence of a God who is willing and able to help, we should at least consider whether there could be a solution to our problem.

God's Rescue Plan

If you take the time to look you may find this problem solved by the God of the Bible.

- ✓ The God of the Bible has a realistic rescue plan in place for planet earth.
- ✓ It is relevant and makes sense in the 21st century.

This plan can include you as well as the planet.



It is obvious that this plan was devised by someone well acquainted with the problems of our world. It tells us of the return to the earth of Jesus Christ. He will set up a righteous world-wide government that will tackle the problems of:

- ✗ injustice
- ✗ poverty
- ✗ illness
- ✗ ageing and death
- ✗ war and famine
- ✗ natural disasters.

Here are just two passages of scripture that speak about the changes that God intends to make when Jesus returns to earth, to establish God's Kingdom here, once again:

Now when he [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received



him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9–11).

So, Jesus is to come to earth again, to rule from Jerusalem, as the prophet Isaiah promised:

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. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem... (Isaiah 2:1–3).

We are offered the opportunity of helping to implement this rescue plan, by working with Jesus, but we need to be rescued from sin and death ourselves through the saving work of Jesus.

Lawrence Cave

No Entry into Heaven!

There's a children's counting song that goes like this:

*"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,
All good children go to heaven".*

It's a good rhyme and might be helpful to teach children their numbers, but the theology is questionable.

Bible Teaching

If you are up for a challenge, here's one. Does the Bible promise believers that they will go to heaven when they die?

Anyone who cares to read the Bible objectively, with an open mind, will discover that there is no verse to be found throughout Scripture which tells us categorically and unambiguously we go to heaven when we die.

Instead there are many verses which tell us that we do not go there, but that death is an unconscious state from which some people will be awakened at the return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider some of the evidence:

No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13).

Only Jesus has gone to heaven, where he now sits in glory at his Father's right hand (1 Peter 3:22), awaiting his return to earth. Not Abraham, not David, nor any of the people who are declared to be faithful followers of God. As the letter to the Hebrews explains, they are still awaiting their reward:



"All these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

The gift of everlasting life will be theirs, and could be ours, but only when the time is right.

Jesus did not 'come down' from heaven in a literal sense. He only came into existence when the action of the Holy Spirit upon the womb of the virgin Mary caused Jesus to be born as "the only begotten Son of God" (Luke 1:35, John 1:18, 3:16,18).

God had always purposed to have a Son who would save the world, for He foreknows everything from the beginning. This is what Jesus meant when he said the Son of man had "come down from heaven" (John 6:38), in just the same way that Manna had been provided from heaven (6:48-51).

Heaven: God's Dwelling

Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Here is an unambiguous statement from the Old Testament telling us God lives in heaven and the earth is the place for mankind. That is a statement that is often made in Scripture. King Solomon could pray to God, asking Him: *"Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive"* (1 Kings 8:30). And the Psalmist declares:

"The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men" (Psalm 115:16).

Earth Not Heaven

Heaven is where God, the angels, and now the Lord Jesus Christ live. It is not intended to be the future inheritance of mankind. Jesus is coming to earth to establish God's Kingdom here and to make the world a beautiful place once again: an earth filled with God's glory. As the Book of Revelation explains, heaven is coming to earth.

I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There

shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:1-4).

Jesus explained that to his disciples on the eve of his death:

"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you" (John 13:33).

The disciples were to understand that heaven was not their intended destination, and they did understand it. For the apostle Peter was to declare a few weeks later that:

"David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand"' (Acts 2:34).

David was a man after God's own heart but he was both "dead and buried", asleep in death until Jesus returns to awaken him, just as David expected. For the psalmist of Israel said this about his expectations:

In death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:5);

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness (Psalm 17:15).

Times of Refreshing

What the apostle Peter taught was entirely in accordance with David's beliefs, for this is the consistent teaching of Scripture. There is a time coming when people will be renewed and refreshed after the trouble and sadness we now see around us:

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so

that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:19–21).

Jesus taught that believers should work to store treasure up in heaven rather than upon the earth, something that can only be done by living faithful, godly lives (see Matthew 6:19-20). This does not mean, however, that we will go to heaven to get our spiritual treasure – the reward of everlasting life that God offers to His faithful followers. Rather it means that a record of all things done will be kept in heaven. God never forgets faithful service. Take the apostle Paul as an example of someone who gave up everything in the service of his Lord. What was his hope as he faced the prospect of execution at the hands of the Roman authorities?

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only



but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

This reward, for the apostle Paul and others like him, is to be brought from heaven by the Lord Jesus when he returns to the earth, as has been promised. That reward will be eternal life in the Kingdom of God – on earth and not in heaven. It will be at this time that: *“the meek ... shall inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:5).

Confusion?

So, given this clear scriptural teaching, where did the idea come from that we go to heaven at death? It originates from teachings of the early Church fathers such as Augustine of the fifth century AD. He had embraced the pagan philosophies of Plato and other Greek philosophers and taught them as though this was Biblical doctrine.

Thus the idea developed that human-kind has a natural immortality (an immortal soul), and because this was an appealing notion it ousted the clear Bible teaching that immortality is only to be given by Jesus to those who are resurrected and judged worthy to enter God’s Kingdom – on earth and not in heaven, remember!

The idea of inherent immortality led to equally false teachings about heaven and hell, purgatory, spiritualism and suchlike. Once you start to combine a pagan idea with God’s revelation in the Bible, you never know where it might lead or what confusion it might cause. But the truth is simple. None of us can enter heaven, which is God’s preserve. But there is a real promise of life after death, by resurrection from the dead at the return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s something not to be missed.

Grahame A Cooper

Living like a King

Hezekiah and the Assyrian Invasion

After restoring the Jerusalem Temple, Hezekiah's next task was to organise the priests who had not been as keen as the Levites to cleanse the Temple. The king began by ensuring that the Asherim and high places around the cities of Judah were removed.

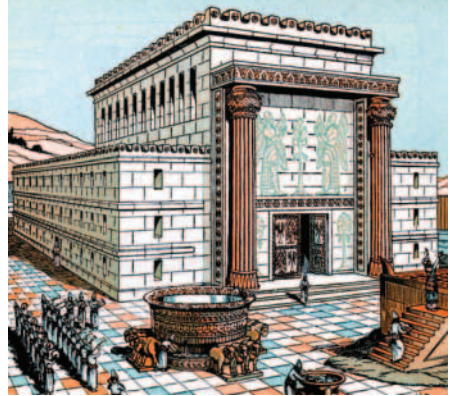
Asherim, or groves, were places used to worship the Canaanite goddess Ashirtu. The high places were sometimes used to worship the Lord God, but were also used for corrupt worship. Now they were all removed.

This included the bronze serpent made by Moses when the nation was suffering from serpent bites in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9). For this, too, had become an object of false worship.

Priestly Duties

Hezekiah then followed David in organizing priests and Levites into correct groups for the work of the Temple. He reminded the people of Jerusalem of their duty to support those who worked in the Temple with *“the portion due to the priests and the Levites”*. This was done very willingly and soon the message spread to those who lived outside Jerusalem. The people gave the tithe very willingly, so that all the food had to be piled up in heaps. Hezekiah was impressed.

Azariah the chief priest, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, “Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the LORD, we have eaten and had enough and have plenty left, for the LORD has blessed his



people, so that we have this large amount left (2 Chronicles 31:10).

Such a surplus could not be just left, it was brought to a suitable place in the house of God and Conaniah, one of the Levites, was placed in charge of it.

The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that following the restoration of Temple worship the king of Assyria threatened to conquer Hezekiah's kingdom unless he resumed paying the tribute money his father Ahaz had paid. Initially the new king tried to ignore this demand, judging that the Lord God would protect him and his people. It was a sound basis to work on, but Hezekiah later began to waver.

It was at about this time that the northern kingdom of Israel came to an end, overthrown by the Assyrians, 247 years after the break with King Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Understandably, Hezekiah would begin to feel quite uneasy about his northern border.

Careful Precautions

Hezekiah made careful plans to keep the kingdom safe from invaders. One of the problems he would face was the provision of water. A siege of the city of Jerusalem would quickly succeed if there was no water for its inhabitants, however much food they had stored.

So Hezekiah's men first stopped up water springs outside the city, to prevent the Assyrians finding water. Then it is thought that a tunnel was dug (or perhaps extended) to provide water for the city in the event of a siege. They also renewed the fortifications which had been allowed to fall into disrepair.

Another important preparation was to support the morale of the troops and commanders. So Hezekiah said:

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chronicles 32:7–8).

The Attack

When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, launched the attack against Jerusalem it began with a war of words. If he could make the people of Judah afraid it would be easier to conquer the land. So his messenger issued this challenge:

“Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, ‘The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria?’” (32:10–11)



The Siloam Tunnel in Jerusalem, also known as Hezekiah's Tunnel

He told them that they could not trust in their gods, as Hezekiah had removed their altars.

“Now, therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand!” (verse 15).

But he quite forgot that no other nation had the Lord God of Heaven as its God. What Sennacherib saw as an attack on Hezekiah was really an attack on God. Such an attack could not go unpunished.

The Rabshakeh

Sennacherib entrusted the siege of Jerusalem to his Rabshakeh. “Rabshakeh” is a title, not a name, and is used to describe a royal counsellor for military affairs; this would be a senior post in Sennacherib's army. He too was eloquent in his derisory comments:

“Behold, you are trusting in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. But if you say to me, “We trust in the LORD our God,” is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, “You shall worship before this altar?”” (Isaiah 36:6–7).

He made these comments just outside Jerusalem, so that it was possible for all of the people of the city to hear what he said. Hezekiah’s three emissaries, Eliakim, Shebna and Joah pleaded with him to speak in Aramaic, not Hebrew, for they did not want the rest of the people to be alarmed by what he said. Rabshakeh would have none of it, and continued to mock, aiming to sap the confidence of the people. He was another who did not realise that what he said was heard by the people and also the Lord God. He went on:

“Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, “The Lord will deliver us.” Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?” (36:18–20).

Such comments were a blatant attack on the power of God. Hezekiah had instructed his envoys not to answer, so all three kept quiet, simply reporting back on what was said. It was a difficult time, but the Lord God watched and heard, as we shall see.

Mark Sheppard

Quotations from the ESV

To be concluded

The Destruction of Sennacherib

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!



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