

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1579



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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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Bible Versions

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Jumping for Joy

It was the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw who coined the phrase “*Youth is wasted on the young*”, by which he meant that young people don’t always appreciate what they have.

The two children on this month’s front cover are skipping along seemingly without a thought in the world, using up energy thoughtlessly and rejoicing in their physical ability. Older people watching them might well be heard to say “It’s making me tired just to look at them!” because their stores of energy and strength have now dwindled and, for them, just walking might be an effort.

Discontentment

It is so easy to take things for granted and not appreciate what we have, until we lose it and by then it is too late. When we are young we can’t wait to be older; but when we are much older we would like to be young again, with all that energy and with all of life stretching before us, full of things that might happen. Who knows? It’s all part of the discontentment that many people feel as their lives draw towards a close – many people, but not all.

A remarkable man once penned these uplifting words: “*I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.*” What makes that statement remarkable is that he wrote those words while in prison, chained to a guard and awaiting a trial that could have led to his immediate execution. His imprisonment followed a series of hardships which included flogging, wrongful arrest, attempts on his life, countless dangers, much persecution, many

periods of hunger and thirst, cold and exposure. Life had been tough for him because of his religious convictions and now it seemed that the authorities meant to make an example of him. But they allowed him to send a letter to his associates, perhaps expecting that it would be full of complaints about his treatment and regrets about his life choices.

Contentment

The letter was anything but that. It was a most joyful and uplifting epistle, sent to a Christian community that had supported him through thick and thin. But he didn’t just say that he was content to make them feel better. He explained how he felt and then told them why, and how they could share his sense of contentment.

Because the letter has been preserved for the best part of two thousand years, we can also read it and share his secret. Here’s a longer extract:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have



learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11–13).

It was the apostle Paul who said that and he was no fool. He knew what might have been and what he had chosen instead for, in Philippians chapter 3, he compares and contrasts his Jewish upbringing, with all its promise, with his decision to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. He gladly gave up a promising career, with all its security and likely material prosperity, for life as an itinerant preacher. Read his own assessment:

I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death (Philippians 3:8–10).

Christ Strengthens Me

It would be an understatement to say that Paul was happy with his lot, despite its inconvenience. Happiness is a fine thing; but joy is a much deeper and more profound emotion. It is rooted in deep convictions and firm assurances and those the apostle Paul had in abundance. He had been stopped in his tracks on the road to Damascus and had been given a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, alive and well and enthroned at his Father's side in

heaven. That transformed Paul's life and he lived from then on with the knowledge that Jesus had died for him and that his Lord now lives in glory, helping and caring for all those who put their unquestioning trust in him.

The believers in far-off Philippi had never seen the risen Lord: such visions were given to very few first century followers. But they were fully persuaded nonetheless and rejoiced, as did Paul, at all that God has done in Christ to make their salvation possible. That's why Paul could say in his letter:

*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all **with joy** ... And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and **joy of faith** (Philippians 1:3–4,25).*

They rejoiced together in all that has been done as part of God's revealed purpose, now that salvation has been made possible, through the work of Christ, for both Jews and Gentiles, without distinction.

Inspiring Letter

If you want to be uplifted and encouraged today by Paul's positive and joyful outlook, why not read the whole of the letter to the Philippians?

In the centre pages of this issue you will find a table of Bible readings which, if faithfully followed, will take you through the whole of the Old Testament during the course of the coming year, and twice through the New Testament. That's the way to become joyful yourself, not just for today but all through the year.

Editor

One Bible – Why So Many Different Beliefs?

There are several so-called ‘holy’ books in the world. Sceptics ask what is so special about the Bible. They also ask, *“If the Bible really is true why are there so many different interpretations of it?”* This is a very pertinent question: in fact it is a great shame that there is so much disagreement over God’s Word. This article suggests reasons for this confusion, and warns about the implications.

The Authority of the Bible

Some people believe that our knowledge has evolved with time, so writers of the Bible were limited by their primitive beliefs. They argue that with our superior knowledge in the 21 century we know better than the Bible. The outcome is that there is wide disagreement about what is ‘truth’. This is the sort of chaos that was prevalent in the times of the judges of Israel (Judges 17:6, 21:25). The Bible claims to be the Word of Almighty God, who is not restricted by human knowledge, so people who think like that do not believe the Bible.

Another issue is that many people do not regard the Bible as the ultimate authority for spiritual and moral matters. They see ‘good’ in other religious systems, and so mix Bible teaching with non-biblical teaching: they combine worshipping Almighty God with worshipping false gods. This is exactly what the Jews did, which resulted in their being taken in captivity away from their land (e.g. Ezekiel chapter 6). The Bible states categorically that there is only one God, that



religions do NOT all lead to the same place or to the same god, and it warns against all compromise. If the Bible is God’s Word then its message cannot be compromised. Any belief, however appealing, which contradicts the Bible must then be wrong.

Misuse of the Bible

Some people simply cannot believe certain aspects of the Bible. For example, the Old Testament teaches about the resurrection from the dead. Nonetheless, in the time of Jesus the Sadducees denied this doctrine. Jesus criticised them for their lack of belief (Matthew 23:23–33).

On the other hand, another religious group in the days of Jesus had added to the Law given by God. God had strictly forbidden this (Deuteronomy 12:32). The Pharisees in great zeal had embellished the Old Testament by trying to explain laws and adding to them in ways not endorsed by God Himself (Mark 7:1–13).

Sadly, some people base their beliefs on only part of the Bible, typically the New Testament and especially the Gospel of John. This causes mis-

understandings because the New Testament writers were nearly all Jews, and the words and ideas they wrote need to be interpreted in the context of the Old Testament. Biblical expressions have biblical meanings, not 21st Century Western ideas. So we cannot correctly interpret the Bible by only studying parts of it.

Similarly, others take verses out of context and force a meaning on words that was never intended. We can be guilty of this in everyday life: misrepresenting what someone has said by failing to quote a preceding question or the full response given by the person. Biblical words had an original meaning and have lessons for us, but we need to examine the context in which they were written.

Finally, even people who believe in the unequivocal authority of the Bible genuinely disagree about certain aspects of interpretation.

Errors can be serious

Some beliefs are correct. Any others that contradict these must then be incorrect. For example, it cannot be true that the hope of eternal life is both on earth and in heaven. If belief must precede baptism and if both are necessary then infant christening cannot be valid. Dead people cannot be unconscious for ever and also have immortal souls.

Certain terms are non-biblical – they cannot be found in the Bible at all. Examples are:

- ❖ that God is a Trinity,
- ❖ that we have an immortal soul,
- ❖ that purgatory exists,
- ❖ the practice of christening.

Non-biblical terms lead to non-biblical teachings which in turn can lead to non-biblical behaviour.

The Apostles' Creed in the second century A.D. uses biblical language, but later creeds, like the Nicene and the Athenasian Creed add non-biblical language and are so dogmatic that they foolishly insist that belief in them is essential. We cannot be certain about matters that are not discussed in the Bible. Conversely, if something is taught in the Bible then we have no right to alter it. Moreover, if God has revealed it to us then we need to take notice of it.

Tragically some religious groups discourage their members from asking questions or even reading the Bible. Instead they encourage people to believe what the church leaders say, without questioning it. The apostles warned against believing doctrines other than those which they, by the Holy Spirit, taught (Galatians 1:8, I John 4:1). The believers in the northern Greek town of Berea (now known as Veria) were commended for checking the apostle's teachings against the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

The present confusion of religious beliefs is a terrible state of affairs which, understandably, puts off many people. But the problem lies entirely with us and not with the Bible. We must read the whole Bible and try to understand its message, because it really does matter what we believe. We should not be influenced by tradition, teachers, words of hymns or any human arguments, but read the Bible as a whole to establish truth.

Anna Hart

God and Man

Human pride is the greatest enemy in the relationship between God and mankind. It will deceive the heart of man every time and thus obscure the difference between God and man.

Worlds Apart

Many agree in theory that but for Jesus Christ the relationship between God and man is tenuous indeed. The man and ant comparison is inadequate. The gap between God and man is the difference between the finite and the infinite. It is the difference between One who can see millions of light years in space, and one whose vision is limited by the horizon.

Everyone acknowledges this great difference in theory, but what happens in life? Where does God fit in? How is He thought of?

The Average Man

Look at the average man in the developed world. He has a good life, good job. There are people who are less important than he is. In his own little sphere at home, he is the boss (or thinks himself so). His wife and children respect him, and look to him for guidance and protection. He seems to be the centre around which the whole universe turns. You can see what a feeling of complacency this makes. His ideas about himself can get all out of proportion. He does not travel much and has little comprehension of the earth's immensity. He does not recognize that there are seven billion others like him, each of whom feels he is the centre of the universe.



The difference between a man and an ant is as nothing compared with the gap between man and God.

The Christian Man?

Take this modern man, however, and make a Christian out of him and see his feeling of self-importance grow. This man of mediocre ability has the opportunity and privilege not given to many; the privilege of standing up and being listened to. He has become a kind of guardian of other people's morals.

There's a touch of the martyr about him too; he doesn't allow himself to do some of the things that other people do, so he stays out of politics and avoids the military. This is painless because of the society in which many people live which is built around the rights of minorities. All this lends special importance to him. He's respected by his friends, does not harm anyone, may even do good works. He says his prayers, which are mostly repetitious, night after night, automatically, often swiftly, to God his kindly benefactor and may make some trivial personal requests.

Holy God

In his self-importance, he forgets he is praying to the wrathful God of Israel,



Our life is like the mere flicker of a candle

overseer of the Universe of unlimited properties. He forgets that he enjoys and has a relationship with a God far beyond his ken, with whom this could be no relationship at all except for God's act of almost unbelievable kindness: the perfect life and sacrifice of His Son. How easy it is for the apparently good moral Christian to raise himself so high in his own esteem as to create a blasphemous and fictitious relationship between himself and God.

Fresh Perspective

There is a cure. Picture a desolate beach in late summer: winds; ceaseless pounding of the surf; the whistle of the wind; myriad forms of life eking out an existence on the fringe of the

ocean; millions of little shellfish burying; shells worn smooth; sand grains uncountable, coarse on the beach then made smooth.

God knows about it all – each shellfish, every grain of sand. These shifting sands existed age before we were born and will continue after we're gone. The ceaseless pounding will continue. In a scene so vast, the wonder is that we are noticed at all.

We're but the flicker of a candle on the face of the earth, then gone. In the face of such a scene, we can only fall at the feet of our Creator and contemplate in wonder the marvel of it all and the great hope of salvation:

O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens! (Psalm 8:1).

Leroy Canoles Jr

From: www.thepreachersays.com

with permission



Christmas Without Christ?

As the year nears its end, the question is often asked “*What are you doing for Christmas, this year?*” The likely answer will be about where and with whom we are going to spend a few days over the festive season; what will be eaten – will it be a turkey or a goose; what favourite drink will be consumed; what presents are likely to be received or given. In short – the question is meant to prompt some heart-warming recollections about a time of self-indulgence and excess.

There is nothing wrong with the idea of families getting together and enjoying themselves, of course. We like to share time and goods with those we love. But how many of us think of the reason for all that celebration? At the true heart of these festivities should be the belief that Jesus Christ our Saviour was born.

Whether Christ was born in December or not doesn't really matter; scholars think that it was more likely that he was born in September. The important thing is that there is a time of the year when people might stop to think about Jesus as someone who is right at the centre of God's plan of salvation.

Celebration!

His coming into the world was certainly a cause for celebration. Why not open your Bible now and read the accounts? You will find them in Matthew chapters 1 and 2 and Luke chapters 1 and 2. Angels, shepherds and wise men celebrated his birth, so why shouldn't we? Some of the promises made about Jesus were fulfilled during his life on earth, like this one about Mary:



She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us” (Matthew 1:21–23).

But many of the promises given at the time of his birth were not fulfilled. Bring Christ into your Christmas this year by reading Luke 1:30–33 and Luke 2:11–12. These prophecies will only be fulfilled when Jesus comes back to earth – not as a baby in a manger, but as King over God's Kingdom (see Luke 1 verses 32–33).

So, this Christmas read the Bible story again. Make it the start of a daily routine when you can spend time finding out more of God's wonderful purpose for you, me and the whole world. Use the Daily Bible Reading Planner (overleaf) to make that happen.

Bring Christ into Christmas and make sure he becomes part of your whole life.

Marian Buckler

Bible Reading

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17	Joshua	1	...	7	1 Thes.	1, 2
18	...	2	...	8	...	3, 4
19	...	3, 4	...	9	...	5
20	...	5, 6	...	10	2 Thes.	1, 2
21	...	7	...	11	...	3
22	...	8	...	12	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
23	...	9	...	13	...	4
24	...	10	...	14	...	5, 6
25	...	11	...	15	2 Tim.	1
26	...	12	...	16	...	2
27	...	13	...	17, 18	...	3, 4
28	...	14	...	19	Titus	1, 2, 3
29	...	15	...	20, 21	Philemon	...
30	...	16	...	22	Heb.	1, 2
31	...	17	...	23	...	3, 4, 5

JUNE

1	Joshua	18	Isaiah	24	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	19	...	25	...	8, 9
3	...	20, 21	...	26, 27	...	10
4	...	22	...	28	...	11
5	...	23, 24	...	29	...	12
6	Judges	1	...	30	...	13
7	...	2, 3	...	31	James	1
8	...	4, 5	...	32	...	2
9	...	6, 7	...	33	...	3, 4
10	...	8	...	34	...	5
11	...	9	...	35	1 Peter	1
12	...	10, 11	...	36	...	2
13	...	12, 13	...	37	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	14, 15	...	38	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	16	...	39	...	3
16	...	17, 18	...	40	1 John	1, 2
17	...	19	...	41	...	3, 4
18	...	20	...	42	...	5
19	...	21	...	43	2 & 3 John	...
20	Ruth	1, 2	...	44	Jude	...
21	...	3, 4	...	45	Rev.	1, 2
22	1 Sam.	1	...	46, 47	...	3, 4
23	...	2	...	48	...	5, 6
24	...	3	...	49	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	4	...	50	...	10, 11
26	...	5, 6	...	51	...	12, 13
27	...	7, 8	...	52	...	14
28	...	9	...	53	...	15, 16
29	...	10	...	54	...	17, 18
30	...	11, 12	...	55	...	19, 20

OCTOBER

1	1 Chron.	15	Ezek.	27	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	28	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17	...	29	...	3, 4
4	...	18, 19	...	30	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	31	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22	...	32	...	3, 4
7	...	23	...	33	...	5, 6
8	...	24, 25	...	34	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	26	...	35	...	3, 4
10	...	27	...	36	John	1
11	...	28	...	37	...	2, 3
12	...	29	...	38	...	4
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	...	39	...	5
14	...	3, 4	...	40	...	6
15	...	5, 6	...	41	...	7
16	...	7	...	42	...	8
17	...	8	...	43	...	9, 10
18	...	9	...	44	...	11
19	...	10, 11	...	45	...	12
20	...	12, 13	...	46	...	13, 14
21	...	14, 15	...	47	...	15, 16
22	...	16, 17	...	48	...	17, 18
23	...	18, 19	...	49	...	19
24	...	20	...	50	...	20, 21
25	...	21, 22	...	2	Acts	1
26	...	23	...	3	...	2
27	...	24	...	4	...	3, 4
28	...	25	...	5	...	5, 6
29	...	26, 27	...	6	...	7
30	...	28	...	7	...	8
31	...	29	...	8	...	9

NOVEMBER

1	2 Chron.	30	Dan.	10	Acts	10
2	...	31	...	11	...	11, 12
3	...	32	...	12	...	13
4	...	33	Hosea	1	...	14, 15
5	...	34	...	2	...	16, 17
6	...	35	...	3	...	18, 19
7	...	36	...	4	...	20
8	Ezra	1, 2	...	5	...	21, 22
9	...	3, 4	...	6	...	23, 24
10	...	5, 6	...	7	...	25, 26
11	...	7	...	8	...	27
12	...	8	...	9	...	28
13	...	9	...	10	Colos.	1
14	...	10	...	11	...	2
15	...	11	...	12	...	3, 4
16	Neh.	1, 2	...	13	1 Thes.	1, 2
17	...	3	...	14	...	3, 4
18	...	4	Joel	1	...	5
19	...	5, 6	...	2	2 Thes.	1, 2
20	...	7	...	3	...	3
21	...	8	Amos.	1	...	4, 5
22	...	9	...	2	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
23	...	10	...	3	...	4
24	...	11	...	4	...	5
25	...	12	...	5	2 Tim.	1
26	...	13	...	6	...	2
27	Esther	1	...	7	...	3, 4
28	...	2	...	8	Titus	1, 2, 3
29	...	3, 4	...	9	Philemon	...
30	...	5, 6	Obadiah	1	Heb.	1, 2
31	...	7, 8	...	2	...	3, 4, 5

DECEMBER

1	Esth.	9, 10	Jonah	1	Heb.	6, 7
2	Job	1, 2	...	2, 3	...	8, 9
3	...	3, 4	...	4	...	10
4	...	5	Micah	1	...	11
5	...	6, 7	...	2	...	12
6	...	8	...	3, 4	...	13
7	...	9	...	5	James	1
8	...	10	...	6	...	2
9	...	11	...	7	...	3, 4
10	...	12	Nahum	1, 2	...	5
11	...	13	...	3	1 Peter	1
12	...	14	Hab.	1	...	2
13	...	15	...	2	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	16, 17	...	3	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	18, 19	Zeph.	1	...	3
16	...	20	...	2	1 John	1, 2
17	...	21	...	3	...	3, 4
18	...	22	Hag.	1, 2	...	5
19	...	23, 24	Zech.	1	2 & 3 John	...
20	...	25, 27	...	2, 3	Jude	...
21	...	28	...	4, 5	Rev.	1, 2
22	...	29, 30	...	6, 7	...	3, 4
23	...	31, 32	...	8	...	5, 6
24	...	33	...	9	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	34	...	10	...	10, 11
26	...	35, 36	...	11	...	12, 13
27	...	37	...	12	...	14
28	...	38	...	13, 14	...	15, 16
29	...	39	Malachi	1	...	17, 18
30	...	40	...	2	...	19, 20
31	...	41, 42	...	3, 4	...	21, 22

By courtesy of The Christadelphian

Jesus – the Son of David

The New Testament opens with the statement that Jesus is the Son of David (Matthew 1:1) and many times during the gospels Jesus is addressed as David's son or descendant (see Matthew 9:27 ,12:23 ,15:22, 20:30 and 21:9). But it is not only the contemporaries of Jesus who so named him. The angel who came to tell Mary that she was chosen by God used that very designation as well:

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:30–33).

Promises to David

By referring to David as "his father" or ancestor, Gabriel was indicating that promises made to David some 1000 years earlier had not been rescinded, but were still awaiting their fulfilment. This is what David was promised:

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me ... And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12–16).

Gabriel was explaining to Mary, who was herself a descendant of King David, that, as Jesus would be her son, he would be the promised descendant who would occupy the throne of David – the throne David once had when he ruled from Jerusalem – and that he will reign, as David once did, over the house of Jacob (a term which refers to the nation of Israel).

Mary's Response

Some months later, while visiting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary was moved to make this magnificent expression of praise to God when she reflected upon the coming birth of Israel's Messiah – her Son Jesus:

He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed. He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever (Luke 1:51–55).

Notice that Mary understood that Israel was still God's servant despite all their unfaithfulness over the centuries. She also understood that God showed love to the seed of Abraham (a term which can refer to the Israelites – see Genesis 15:13) because of the faithfulness of Abraham himself.

Zacharias Speaks

Mary was not alone in this understanding, for her song of praise was

followed by a prophecy from Elizabeth's husband, Zacharias, in which he said:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant—as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old – salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days (Luke 1:67–75).

These words of Zacharias affirm the continuity of God's purpose – the promises made to David and to Abraham will be fulfilled in the Son of God. That message of salvation went out firstly to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 10:6, 15:24) who needed to repent, believe the gospel and be baptized.

John the Baptist's Cry

It was John the Baptist (son of Elizabeth and Zacharias) who taught the Jews so powerfully that fleshly descent from Abraham is no longer enough. He urged them to be baptized for the remission of sins and issued this warning:

You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham (Luke 3:7–8).

It is no longer birth that qualifies a person to be a member of God's people, John explained, but rebirth in the waters of baptism. That does not mean, however, that God has cast away his people Israel. They are, as the apostle Paul explains, "*beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:28–29).*"

Despite Israel's faithlessness in refusing to accept the Lord Jesus as their long-promised Messiah, God remains faithful to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. And Jesus is still the Son of David as well as the Son of God.

King of Israel

When Jesus returns from heaven he is coming to be king of Israel as well as king over all the world. At that time both Jews and Gentiles will rejoice together in their Lord, who will, at last, fulfill what the aged Simeon said as he greeted baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph had brought Jesus to be circumcised and, in the Temple, they met two faithful people who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah.

Simeon was one of them and he was able to recognise that Jesus was the Son of David who will save both Israel and the nations from all their problems. This is what he said:

Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart In peace, according to Thy word; for my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel (Luke 2:29–32).

Stephen Blake

Quotations from the NASB

Guiding the Nations

Among the many wonderful things revealed by the prophet Daniel is this promise, given to all those who become members of God's family, by faith and baptism:

*Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, **shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.** His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him (Daniel 7:27).*

When the Kingdom of God is established on earth, at the return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ, Daniel tells us that Jesus will invite 'the saints' – that means all the men and women who have pleased him in their lives – to help him govern the Kingdom of God on earth. To understand what this means, we need to be clear about the state of the world at the time when Jesus returns.

Desperate Need

Most men and women and their rulers will be taken by surprise; but they will be challenged to accept the rule of Christ. The Second Psalm foretells this:

Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us." ... Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion." "I will

declare the decree: The Lord has said to me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession ... Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him (Psalm 2).

The same decree is mentioned in the Book of Revelation when an angel cries:

"Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:7).

Much Better Life

The men and women who submit to this demand when Jesus comes, and accept his rule, will be allowed to live in the Kingdom that he will establish. They will be mortal, but will live longer, with happier peaceful lives and less disease than now, as the prophet Isaiah explains:

No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;

for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands (Isaiah 65:20–22).

Bringing Peace and Order

God's 'saints', (all who have been accepted by Christ at the Judgement (see Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10), will by this time be immortal. But the mortal people will need governing. As is the case now, people's behaviour will need controlling for the good of all but, more importantly, men and women will have to learn the ways of God, just as we are trying to do now.

So who will guide and teach these mortal people after the return of Christ? Jesus promised his apostles that: *"in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matthew 19:28).

That tells us who will be in charge of the nation of Israel: some Jews will accept Jesus (Zechariah 13:8 suggests just one third of those who have returned), and the Apostles – alive and perfect after the Resurrection – will rule them on his behalf. However, the Kingdom of God will include all nations, as the Psalmist explains:

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before him, and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve him (Psalm 72:8–11).



"As the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people"

God's Chosen Guides

Who will rule and guide all these nations? Remember what Daniel said – 'the saints' will! Ordinary people like you and me – if we have the faith to obey Jesus in our lives now – will be made perfect and immortal. Then, by God's grace, he will appoint us to be the guides and teachers that men and women desperately need. Here are quotations that confirm this:

The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever (Daniel 7:18);

I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15);

If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us (2 Timothy 2:12);

He who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' [Psalm 2] — as I also have received from my Father (Revelation 2:26, 27).

John Woodall

Is God's Love Unconditional?

One of the great truths of the Bible, in perhaps its best-known verse is that: *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

The thought is echoed by the apostle Peter when he says that *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).*

But does that mean that God loves everyone regardless of anything and that He means to save everybody who has ever lived? Or has God made His love conditional upon some response?

Careful Reading

False ideas often come about because the Bible is read in an incorrect way. Take the wrong idea that Lucifer is a fallen angel, also known as Satan, or the devil. There is only one verse in the Bible where the name “Lucifer” is found, and then only in the King James (and the New King James) Version. Here it is:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! (Isaiah 14:12).

Read the Bible correctly and you will see that this verse is directed at the king of Babylon (v4), and in (verse 12) he is being likened to the Day Star (a translation many modern versions adopt) – that is, the planet Venus. It is important to read the Bible properly, otherwise we get all sorts of wrong ideas and end up picking and choosing the verses we take notice of.

God's Conditions

So, does God love us unconditionally, or are there conditions before we come within the ambit of His love? Look at God's dealings with the nation of Israel: people he had rescued to be His own special nation. When He brought them to Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments, this is what He said:

*I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, **to those who love Me and keep My commandments** (Exodus 20:5–6).*

And when He offered them blessing after blessing, this was the condition He specified:

***If** you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, **then** I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit... (Leviticus 26:3–4).*

That seems perfectly clear. God wanted His people to obey His commandments as a prior condition. He would *not* bless them if they disobeyed Him and went against His laws by worshipping Idols and living immoral lives.

Naaman and Elisha

In 2 Kings chapter 5, there is the account of the healing of Naaman, who was a commander of the army of the king of Syria but who was a leper. He came to Israel seeking a cure for his debilitating condition and had been told that he could be cured if he went to see the prophet Elisha. Arriving

there, Elisha sent a messenger who told him to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times and he would be cured. At first, Naaman refused, but then relented, and when he had done so: *“his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean”* (2 Kings 5:14).

Get the point? There was a life-changing blessing awaiting Naaman, but it only arrived when he obeyed. If he had gone off in a rage, or had chosen to ignore the message from God, he would have died a leper. Obedience to God’s commands brought health and healing.

What Jesus Said

The Lord Jesus had important things to say about people who failed to obey his commandments:

- ❖ *Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?* (Luke 6:46);
- ❖ *If you love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:15);
- ❖ *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him* (John 14:23).

These words are quite plain, Jesus wants us to obey his word. That means that we should follow him and obey what he taught and not rely upon man-made versions of Christianity. Much of what now passes as Christianity is based upon the traditions of men and Jesus had strong words to say for those who were: *“laying aside the commandment of God”* and, instead, *“hold the tradition of men”* (Mark 7:8).

It is the Word of God which is inspired and we need to read it for our-

selves to understand just what God has revealed about His will and purpose (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

Seeking for Truth

Jesus was God’s Son and was born on earth so that we can be saved from sin and death. He came to tell us what we are to do if we are to be found within the circle of God’s love and thus find salvation. His parting words to the disciples included the command that they should tell everybody about God’s offer of salvation:

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

This was a message from the Father for, as Jesus explained:

I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent me gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told me, so I speak (John 12:49–50).

If you accept that the Bible is the inspired (God-breathed) Word of God and give it the respect it deserves, then it is important to read the Scriptures properly and reverently in order to find out the truth it contains and what God requires of His faithful followers.

- ❖ *God does not love us unconditionally,*
- ❖ *He loves us if we keep His commandments,*
- ❖ *So it really does matter what we believe and how we live.*

Grahame A Cooper

Living like a King

Jeroboam the Son of Nebat

There were two kings of Israel named Jeroboam but the first is nearly always described as the one “*which made Israel to sin*”. He was the first king of the divided kingdom of Israel but it need not have been like that. Jeroboam became king because of Solomon’s foolish behaviour.

The LORD said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant” (1 Kings 11:11).

Divided Kingdom

That servant was Jeroboam. He received the promise from God through the prophet Ahijah who said: ‘*Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes*’ (11:30–31).

It was a clear demonstration to Jeroboam that the LORD God had lost patience with Solomon, who had promised so much, but had failed to follow up on his earlier potential. Solomon forgot that he should have been true to God.

The prophecy given to Jeroboam became known to Solomon, and he fled for safety to Egypt, as the young Lord Jesus was later to do with Joseph and Mary. It was only after Solomon had died that Jeroboam knew it was safe to return.

Foolish King

When King Solomon died, Rehoboam his son went from Jerusalem to Shechem for it was there that he

would be installed as king. Jeroboam became the spokesman for the people, asking that the hard service which the nation had endured under Solomon should be made easier. Initially Rehoboam acted well, asking for three days so that he could consult his advisors. Sadly he did not accept the good advice given by the older men but heeded the younger ones and told his subjects:

My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions (v10–11).

This was no recipe for popularity nor was it a way to ensure the unity of the kingdom. The majority of the people decided they could do better, and ten tribes defected to make Jeroboam their king. The result was that Solomon’s kingdom was split in two: the kingdom of Judah in the south and Israel in the north.

False Worship

Jeroboam should have been able to begin his reign secure in the knowledge that the division of the kingdom was part of God’s overall plan, but no:

Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah” (1 Kings 12:26–27).

Perhaps it was only natural, if the people followed the commands of God and went to Jerusalem three times each year to worship they would inevitably see how things fared in Judah, and might think that the grass was greener there than in Israel. Such thinking was to ignore the detail of the promise which God had made to him.

“I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you” (1 Kings 11:37-38).

Jeroboam should have remembered this. If he knew what would happen when the people went south to worship, so did God. If he knew they might be attracted by things in Judah, so did God. He would have made provision for this. He had promised Jeroboam a sure house, a long line of descendants, as he had promised to David. Jeroboam did not believe God. He trusted in his own wisdom, always a fatal mistake.

So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, *“You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 12:28)*

It was almost a re-run of what happened in the wilderness not long after the nation had left Egypt. Moses had stayed on the mountain longer than the people had expected, and they had demanded that Aaron do something about it.

“And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:4).

They knew the calf had not taken them out of Egypt, but closed their minds to the truth.

Bad Start

Henry Ford is reputed to have said “History is bunk”, but it can give some idea of what might happen in a given set of circumstances. Jeroboam should have known what happened after Aaron was responsible for a golden calf. God’s anger was roused. He had said to Moses:

“Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you” (Exodus 32:10).

It was not likely that He would view any more favourably the golden calves made by Jeroboam. This is the great lesson from his life: we need to listen carefully to what God says, and act upon it. The record tells us that *“this thing became a sin”*, and from then on the reign of Jeroboam declined.

His son Nadab followed him on the throne, but he was the last of the line of Jeroboam, and the nation of Israel suffered from continual changes of dynasty for the rest of its history. For many of those kings the epithet was true, they followed in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat *“which made Israel to sin”*.

Mark Sheppard

Quotations from the ESV

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