

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1595



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of the Kingdom of God

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A monthly magazine published by the
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Its objectives are - to encourage the study of the Bible as God's
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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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Stand Still and Watch

The Israelites had seen amazing things in Egypt. God had brought great and terrible afflictions on their slave masters: the Nile turned to blood, locusts which devoured the country's livelihood, and darkness so thick it could be felt. These were just three of the ten plagues, which culminated in the death of every firstborn male in the nation. It was these acts of God which finally forced the Egyptians to let Israel go.

Joy changed swiftly to fear. Pharaoh's army chased them to the shores of the Red Sea and there was no way out. The three million or so people of Israel appeared to have a stark choice: slaughter and slavery or drowning in the sea. Quickly the fear turned to rebellion against God and His chosen leader, Moses.

In their terror, the people said:

It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness (Exodus 14:12).

However, God had big plans for them. He had brought them out of slavery and He was going to lead them to the Promised Land. He was certainly not going to let them be destroyed here.

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. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (v13-14).

Indeed, God did save them. He parted the Red Sea, Israel passed through it safely, then the Egyptian army was destroyed in the returning waters as they tried to follow. In fact, for forty years, God did amazing things as He brought His people to the land He had promised. At the end of that time, Moses said:

Your eyes have seen every great act of the LORD which He did (Deuteronomy 11:7).

Our Limited Powers

Despite being some 3,500 years ago, this episode teaches us a valuable lesson for today's busy world. All too often we are preoccupied with activity: doing, going, working, getting. Many people today equate being busy with value, and 'keeping busy' is a standard response to say that 'all is well'.

But in the big things of life, this has little value. When someone becomes ill, they cannot cure themselves. If we lose a loved one, no amount of effort can bring them back. Busyness will not make our children happy or well behaved, and rarely prevents us losing an important relationship or a job. In fact, the opposite is often the case.

There are times when we need to stand still and watch; to rely on God's power. Yet this requires some humility on our part, to recognise that we need His help; to recognise that we cannot do everything for ourselves.

This is a lesson the man Job had to learn, when he suffered devastating losses of goods, family and his health. One of his friends said:



God thunders marvellously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend... Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God (Job 37:5, 14).

Shortly afterwards, God would remind Job of his utter powerlessness in comparison to the Creator. Job responded with humility to worship God, who in turn blessed him greatly.

The Strongest Protector

In the story of Job, we again see the good news. God is not only powerful, He is willing to care for His people – those who worship and try to please Him. There is no greater help we could seek. He will protect our eternal well-being because He promises to set up His kingdom here on earth, when Christ will reign as king. He will raise from the dead faithful people from throughout time, and they will live for ever. This is why the Psalmist wrote:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow

your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore (Psalm 121).

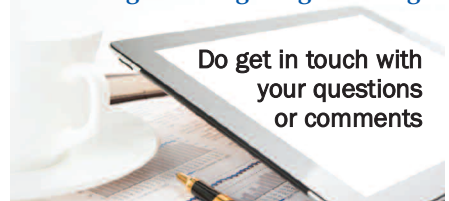
The Lord God gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to make all this possible. We cannot save our own lives or earn a place in His kingdom – it is a gift He wants to give. And He will give it to us if we get to know Him through His message (the Bible) and do what He asks. This means being baptised and then living a God-centred life.

This too is good news for us, as it entails relying on God and not on our own strength. It means ‘standing still’ at times, and watching Him at work in the world and in our own lives. The Apostle Paul put it like this:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32).

Editor

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Calling on the Name of the Lord

What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? There are several Bible verses which mention this, but they are not well understood. For instance, it is common for church leaders to quote verses like:

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).

They interpret this as saying that anyone who calls out to Jesus is saved, from the moment they confess to being his followers.

Another type of ‘calling on the name of the Lord’ which is taught by some, is where people are told to accept Christ as ‘their personal saviour.’ This is done in response to a rousing sermon, after which members of the audience are invited to come forward and declare this to the congregation. If they do, they are said to be saved.

But if we want to be saved, we need to do more than just walk down the church. We will see this as we examine what the Bible teaches.

Worshipping God

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, we are told that Abram built an altar between Bethel and Ai where he “called on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8).

When Abram returned from Egypt, he returned to that place and again, “Abram called on the name of the LORD” (13:4). It was the same with his son Isaac (Genesis 26:25).

Clearly this ‘calling’ is linked with worship, perhaps in the form of prayer

using God's name, which may well be how these early faithful believers worshipped Him.

For Everyone

In the writing of the prophet of Joel we find this verse:

It shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said (Joel 2:32).

Joel was a Jewish prophet but he spoke about Jews and Gentiles calling on God's name. When that very passage was cited by the apostle Peter, in Acts 2:21, it becomes clear that calling on God's name requires some particular action. Peter's audience responded by asking:

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:37-38).

The apostle Paul makes the same assessment of what is required. As a persecuting Pharisee, he had pursued all those who called on the name of the Lord (Acts 9:14), but when he encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus he was told this:

Now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:15-16).

Belief and Baptism

When Paul wrote to the believers in Rome about calling on the name of the Lord, this is how he summarised the challenge to all who want to be saved:

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

He was thus reminding them of the teaching of Jesus:

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

We are saved by the grace of God, not because of the things that we do, as the apostle Paul says elsewhere:

Even when we were dead in trespasses, (He) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:5).

But we are expected to respond to the grace that God shows towards us.

Actions, Not Words

The Lord Jesus made this very clear:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22).

So 'calling on the name of the Lord' is not just confessing belief; it means

something deeper. It involves being baptised into the name of Jesus, and then living a new life in him and keeping him always in mind.

If then you were raised with Christ, 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 (Colossians 3:1-3).

This means NOT doing some things:

Put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth (v5-8).

And DOING some things: Seeking to reflect the character of God and taking the life of Jesus as our example:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection (v12-14).

Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is not just claiming to follow him. It means being baptised to show our obedience and allegiance to him. It means seeking to do his will, and following his example in our own lives.

Grahame A. Cooper

Christ Will Return to the Earth

The work of Jesus on earth did not end when he ascended to heaven. He has important unfinished business to attend to, that demands his return to the earth. From a Biblical point of view, these are interlocking events of the utmost importance. The Bible shows that his coming again to earth is essential for the fulfilment of God's purpose.

There are more than 300 passages in the New Testament and hundreds more in the Old Testament referring to the return of Christ. As an example, both New Testament letters to the Thessalonians refer to the second coming of Jesus in every chapter.

Consistent Bible Teaching

Let's start with words of Jesus himself:

...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31).

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory (Matthew 25:31).

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring;

men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:25-28).

Then we read in the book of Acts:

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).



It was a personal, literal and visible departure. The angels promised that Jesus would come back as he had been seen to go – literally, personally and visibly.

We continue with the clear message of Jesus' followers in their preaching. This is the Apostle Peter speaking in Jerusalem:

He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is he who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

What will Happen?

For the dead to be judged, they need to be raised. When will that happen? The New Testament letters give the answer; here we are quoting words of the Apostle Paul.

Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

The resurrection is “at his coming” and the gift of eternal life is for those who truly belong to Jesus Christ.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom... 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 4:1, 8).

We see these vital events happening at the same time: Christ's appearing, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment to determine who will be accepted or rejected, the establishment of God's Kingdom on the earth, and the rewarding of faithful men and women.

Summary

In this short series about Jesus Christ as he is shown in the Bible, we have seen some important truths. Firstly, that he features so strongly in the Old Testament that, to get a full understanding of him, we need to consult both the Old and New Testaments.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and not God the Son. He is not a member of a three-part deity, but a Son: subordinate and obedient to his Father. He shared our nature, was tempted as we are but never sinned. He shows God's glorious character. Though in his Father's mind from the beginning, his actual existence did not begin until his conception and birth by the virgin Mary.

Jesus, the Saviour, died as our representative and not instead of us. His death and his resurrection were both essential for our salvation. He is at present our high priest and mediator in heaven, so that no other priests are necessary today.

He will return to earth to raise the dead, carry out the judgment and establish God's Kingdom.

Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour and coming King, appeals to all who would be his true disciples, as he did to those who he met personally, saying “Follow me”.

Mark Sawyer

(Concluded)

News!

There is very little good news in the media these days. We are reminded on a daily basis of the enormous problems facing the world. There is the war in Syria with the sickening images of death, destruction and the resulting refugee crisis.



There is the ever-increasing threat of terrorism in the world. There is an obscene gap between the rich and the poor, often due to corruption. Tonnes of food are wasted every day while millions starve. Many countries are facing political unrest and there is the never-ending arms race, more diplomatically known as “defence”. We are constantly reminded of climate change caused by industrialisation and the consequent pollution of our atmosphere. Many species of wildlife are in danger of extinction due to man’s destruction of their habitat. There is increasing financial instability and mental health problems are growing, as is dependence on alcohol and drugs.

Good News!

Are you tired of hearing all this bad news? Don’t despair! This magazine is devoted to presenting the Bible answer to all these problems. The Bible shows us that God’s promises are always

kept and we can trust in His solution for the future. For example:

He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor (Psalm 72:4).

This is exactly what our world needs. Zechariah and Isaiah tell us about God’s appointed king, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the peace of his reign:

He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zechariah 9:10).

The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever (Isaiah 32:17).

Jesus himself promised the answer:

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:27, 28).

Yes, all these difficulties which seem insoluble now, will be solved. It will not be by mankind, but by God. He has promised to send the Lord Jesus back to the earth to deal with all these problems, to establish God’s righteousness and its resulting peace.

That is why we call this magazine *Glad Tidings* or “Good News”.

Marion Buckler

The Ten Commandments in the 21st Century - 7

Honesty and Coveting

The Ninth Commandment: **You Shall Not Give False Evidence**

This commandment is primarily aimed at people who are asked to give evidence in court. When someone is accused of a crime, the judge asks people who saw or heard the incident to stand up in court and recount exactly what happened. They are made to swear an oath that they will only speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The judge (or jury) must decide what really happened by listening to a number of witnesses, asking them questions, and comparing their accounts.

Now, if someone has an enemy who is accused of a crime, they might be tempted to invent an untrue or distorted account in order to have the person punished, whether or not they

are guilty. A rich person might bribe witnesses to change their story to escape being condemned.

A typical case was the trial of Jesus. The High Priest wanted to have Jesus put to death. So men were paid to say that they had heard Jesus say he would destroy the temple and then build it again in three days. Under Jewish law, this would be blasphemy, a crime worthy of death. Jesus did say those things metaphorically, but the false witnesses distorted his words.

Under the Law of Moses, a witness who was proved to deliberately have told lies in court was given the same punishment they hoped to have brought upon their enemy. We can read more about this in Deuteronomy 19:16–19.

It was obviously very important if justice was to be done that people accepted the responsibility to speak the truth in court. Otherwise the country could be reduced to anarchy.

A Principle for Life

Although the precise wording is aimed at the situation in a court of law, in other places it is made clear that God always expected His people to speak the truth.

You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:11–12).

Note how the Law refers you back to God Himself. God does not tell lies, or



hurt innocent people. He is kind, and absolutely reliable. If He says something, we know it is true.

When we come to the New Testament, this commandment is repeatedly laid upon Christians. It is a fundamental aspect of Christian life that we love truth. Christadelphians even call the system of doctrine that we believe 'the Truth'.

There is much error out there in the field of religion, some of it deliberately false. We must only be satisfied with truth in what we believe, and we must always speak the truth to each other. The Apostle Paul says in Colossians 3:9: "*Do not lie to one another.*"

This aspect of the Gospel is very important, and we need to take it to heart. In Revelation 21:8 we read that liars are amongst those who find themselves condemned to the 'Lake of Fire'; in other words, they will not be in God's Kingdom.

The Tenth Commandment: You Shall Not Covet

The Hebrew verb here 'to covet' refers to something that takes place inside our heads. It means desiring something we do not have, but which someone else has. We may see a rich man drive past in his four-wheel drive Mercedes. We imagine ourselves driving up to our new house in a car like that, and we are consumed with the desire to have a similar limousine.

If we actually took his car, it would be stealing. This commandment tells us that even the desire to have it is wrong. It is different from all the others. If we bow down to an idol, everyone can see it. If we commit murder, a body lies on the ground. But if we break the Tenth Commandment nobody can see it. Nobody, that is, except God.



We have some examples of coveting in the Bible. In Genesis 3, when Eve stood under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the serpent suggested it was all right to eat the fruit, she coveted it. It looked juicy and attractive, she was hungry, and if she ate it, it could make her as clever as God Himself. It was wrong for her to eat it, but she desired it in her heart, and before long she was biting into it. She coveted the forbidden fruit.

When the nation of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land, the first city they came to was Jericho. God told the people that they would capture the city, but that all the silver and gold they found must be given to the Tabernacle, and the rest burned with fire. Later, they would be able to take home the spoil from other cities, but this first one was to be given to God.

One of the soldiers entered a house belonging to the enemy. He saw a piece of clothing, a heavy wedge of pure gold and some pieces of silver. It seemed a shame to him to have to burn the garment, and to hand over the money to the priests. The man, Achan, said:

When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred

shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them (Joshua 7:21).

He admitted himself that he had broken the Tenth Commandment. He wanted something that God said he must not have. A few hours later he was dead.

Coveting in Today's World

We can see that this commandment is probably the most difficult one to keep. It is natural to covet. It is human



nature to envy someone who has the perfect figure, or a big yacht, or an Armani dress. We want things, all the time.

In fact, coveting is at the heart of the advertising industry. We switch on the TV and within minutes we see the perfect family on the beach in the sunshine, the mother in her sunglasses relaxing with a magazine, the father with his children trying out their new jet ski, and we want to be there. We must go on a holiday like that. Or we see a Land Rover bouncing across the desert in the Dakar Rally, and then the advert shows a man just like us slipping behind the wheel of a new shiny car and accelerating into the distance,

and we want a car like that. The advertisers put pressure on us. They make us feel inadequate and useless unless we have the computer or house or washing machine they are trying to sell. They coax us to covet.

Jesus' Teaching

What does the New Testament say about coveting? Jesus has an important saying we need to remember:

Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15).

The situation was that there were two brothers, whose father had died and left property which was supposed to be divided between them. But one brother refused to hand over the half that belonged to the other. So Jesus was asked to act as arbitrator between them. But Jesus refused. To him, money and possessions were unimportant. We are not here, he said, to accumulate wealth and possessions. We are here to prepare for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus went on to tell the story of a rich farmer who had an excellent harvest, with so much corn his barns were full and still there was corn standing outside. So he decided he would knock down his old barns and build bigger ones. It would cost him a lot of money, but after that he could stop worrying about the future because he would have so much corn in store that he could relax and have a really easy time for years.

He did not think to say thank you to God who had sent the rain and sunshine that gave him such a bountiful harvest. We can imagine he went to

bed full of plans for spending his money. But that night he died of a heart attack. Read Luke 12:16–21 for the full story.

Notice the sting in the tail. Jesus says this man was rich in his own eyes, but he was not rich in God’s sight. When we are dead, the only thing that will matter is how rich we are in God’s eyes. People today put their savings into stocks and shares, or put them in the bank to collect interest. But there is nothing actually there except certificates, or numbers in a computer file. You cannot take your savings into the Kingdom of God. What will count on the Day of Judgment is what you did with your time and money while you were alive. Jesus said:

Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:33, 34).



Putting It into Practice

Coveting will ruin our life. It will make us miserable, because it leaves us unhappy because we do not have the things that we desire. Human nature

means that even having spent a fortune on those things, we will immediately want something bigger or better, never satisfied.

Yet at the end of our life, God will not measure our success by how nice our apartment is or how many designer outfits are in our wardrobe. Like the servants in the parable of the talents, He will look at how much we have gained for Him (Matthew 25:14-30).

Here is what the Apostle Paul said towards the end of his life:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:6–8).

Jesus said:

Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:31–33).

David M. Pearce



The Reliability of the Gospels - 11

Conclusion: Reliable Records

In this series, we have seen considerable evidence that the Gospels are a reliable record of the events that they describe. This evidence was broken into two main kinds, internal and external. The internal evidence relies on nothing outside the Bible, but can be seen entirely from the text itself. The external evidence involves comparing the Gospel records with the records of archaeology, ancient writers and other material from the time of the Gospels.

External Evidence

Among the external evidence was the following:

Archaeology and History: The detail of daily life, the times, places and sometimes people which appear in the Gospel narratives can be matched with details of the same things discovered by archaeologists or contained in ancient writings. Some refer to the minutiae of life: stone water jars (John) and tiled roofs (Luke). Others involve an understanding of the working of government in the Roman empire, details of geography or the names of prominent men. The Gospels show both kinds of evidence in considerable quantity.

Linguistic Fossils: The Gospels contain a number of Aramaic phrases, and Aramaic or Hebrew forms are often present in the Greek in which the Gospels were written. It would be virtually impossible for someone living in the Gentile world, which after 70 AD included the areas of Judea and Galilee, to invent a text with such a Hebraic linguistic form.

Undesigned Coincidences: These are tiny, apparently irrelevant details in one Gospel which match similar details in other Gospels to reveal a sub-narrative which does not appear in the main story. Undesigned coincidences only appear in records which are accurate representations of real events; they are extremely difficult to include in a fictional or inaccurate account. The presence of a large number of undesigned coincidences in the Gospels (with possibly still more to be found) indicates that they contain exactly such an accurate record. Not only that, but they indicate that the manuscripts were copied accurately after the Gospels were written.

The Frequency Distribution of Names: Names change with the decades and a picture of precisely what proportion of people would have each name would be very difficult to remember, or to discover from scratch without modern methods of analysis. Despite this, an analysis of the names in the New Testament shows that they have precisely the kind of distribution that we would expect from a true account, accurately remembered.

Internal Evidence

Detail in the Account: The writer of a fictional account who wished to pass off his work as a true record would avoid details of customs, people, places and times as these could easily be tested against accurate accounts or the memory of witnesses. A writer recalling an actual event, however, might very well include such detail as

part of the memory of what happened. The Gospels are full of such details; Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree (Luke 19:4), while Jesus made clay to heal the blind man (John 9:6-7). Details like this are completely absent from such apocryphal gospels as the Gospel of Thomas, or are flagrantly wrong in others, such as the Gospel of Peter or of Barnabas.

Inclusion of Irrelevant Material:

This is material which doesn't contribute to the account involved. Some is seemingly irrelevant to the story being told, such as the detail that the fragrance of the oil with which the feet of Jesus were anointed filled the house (John 12:3). Some is irrelevant to the early Christian community, such as the fact that Jesus paid the temple tax after sending Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish. Some might even be counter-productive, such as the fact that Jesus was accused of being mad (John 10:20), or that he ate with sinners (e.g. Luke 15:1-2). Someone writing a fictional account would be unlikely to include detail which does not bear on the story; and to include detail which would detract from the message of the account would be very odd unless the account was an accurate record of something that really happened.

The Presence of Embarrassing Material:

The Gospels were written either by the Apostles or people close to them, who would look up to them and see them as important spiritual leaders. They would not invent accounts which showed the Apostles in a poor light. But the Gospels contain many such details. The disciples failed to understand Jesus' message (Mark 9:32) and squabbled with one another as to who was most important among them (Luke 22:24). Peter denied Jesus



(Mark 14:66-72), the other disciples forsook him and fled (Matthew 26:56), and Jesus' brothers (who included James and Judas who later became prominent in the church and wrote letters found in the New Testament) didn't believe him (John 7:5). This shows an honest and accurate account of real events rather than a work of fiction.

Inspiration

We have seen evidence for the reliability of the Gospel accounts. Jesus said and did what the Gospels record. The accounts are accurate, and as the tests were carried out on modern texts, the originals must have been copied with considerable accuracy.

What we haven't considered is evidence of inspiration, that the Gospels contain a message from God. This can be shown by fulfilled prophecy (for example the Olivet prophecy of Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) or by the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

When we consider also how the Old and New testaments are interlinked, we can see that the whole Bible is God's word.

John Thorpe

(Concluded)

For more on this subject, please visit www.biblethink.org.uk

The God of Purity

In Hebrew and Greek (the main original languages of the Bible) the word “holy” means “set apart”. That word sums up God. He is set apart from the rest of His earthly creation. In fact, God had to set Himself apart when man disobeyed Him and introduced sin into the world. The prophet Habakkuk says of God:

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness (Habakkuk 1:13).

Matters have become steadily worse during the time that man has managed planet earth. Today’s instant media means that we can easily see just how bad things are. Wars and civil unrest are erupting in many parts of the world, and hunger in others. Everywhere we see the breakdown of personal relationships and ecosystems collapsing because of the way we exploit the planet and each other. There is selfishness and greed on a grand scale.

Moses described the purity and holiness of God when he was permitted to see His glory during Israel’s wilderness journey:

The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty (Exodus 34:6-7).

We see not only that God is pure, but that this purity has consequences.

An Angry God?

It may come as a surprise to think of God as angry. Many people rightly believe that He is a God of love, but that is where they leave it. They fail to recognise that He is also a God of justice and righteousness. Some people have suggested however, that God is vengeful, particularly in the Old Testament. However, although God talks about taking vengeance (see Hebrews 10:30) it is in the context of those who insult the sacrifice that His Son made.

So why does God get angry, and what does He get angry about? God’s anger is different from our hot-tempered rudeness and wrath. He is as much sad as angry, but when God shows these emotions, action follows.

God’s anger at the violence and evil in the world at the time of Noah is described like this:

The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:6).

What makes God angry is violence, ill-treatment of other human beings, and our failure to respond to His purity and His love.

The Bible has a catalogue of occasions when people failed to do as God asked, deliberately went against His express wishes, or were ungrateful when He showed great kindness. Consider the story of the Israelites in Numbers 11:4-10 or the consequences for the people of Isaiah’s day when they ill-treated each other and ignored God (Isaiah 5: 21-25).

God comments on His own slowness to anger (Nahum 1:3). Peter picks up on this when he says that God is:

...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We tend to get angry when we feel misjudged or insulted. To a degree that is how God feels. Humans tend to seek Him when we think He might be useful to us, and to ignore Him at other times. We misjudge or misrepresent His purity, love, kindness and provision of salvation through His Son.

He wants to help and look after us, but many only want that on their own terms, being able to do whatever they want, and that includes selfishness, greed, violence. It's not surprising that He gets angry.

The good news is that when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to set up God's kingdom, human selfishness and pride will be eliminated and God will no longer be grieved or made sad.

A Jealous God

Jealousy is an emotion we can all relate to. We want to be the centre of attention, to be loved and valued. Jealousy is an emotion that may only affect us mildly and intermittently, or it may be a passionate overwhelming obsession that dominates our thinking and can lead to terrible words or actions.

God describes Himself as jealous:

The LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14).

This is repeated in Deuteronomy 4:24, adding that He is a "consuming fire". God is using this description of

jealousy to demonstrate how much He loves us and how badly He wants to have a relationship with us. He does not appreciate having rivals for our affections and attention. What is the centre of our lives? To what do we give our time, effort and emotion? Whether it is sport, music or any of the other everyday things that can take over, they can leave little or no room for God.

By contrast, in the life of the Lord Jesus, every waking moment was dedicated to carrying out God's wishes. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all of our being and that the second is to love our neighbour as ourselves. Not much room is left for self after that, nothing which could make God jealous.

Purity in Action

We do not want to make God angry or jealous, we want to reflect His purity in our lives. Jesus explained the purity of God when he said:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5 :8).

This is difficult. How often do bad thoughts pop up in our heads, unexplained, unwanted and reluctant to leave? trying to become 'pure in heart' is the work of a lifetime.

It is good news that because of Jesus' sacrifice, God will credit us with this purity as we try to improve our own minds through His word.

God will always remain holy and pure. He will remain set apart until the earth is restored to perfection in His kingdom. Starting now, we can learn to be pure through Jesus.

Cynthia Miles

Friend or Foe?

“Stick ‘em up!” cried the boy. “Are you friend or foe?”

The two boys were having fun playing, ignorant of the seriousness of war, or of the fear that an apparent friend was really an enemy. Sadly, there are circumstances when it is important to try to establish whether someone is friend or foe.

During the second world war, radar-based systems were developed to identify friendly aircraft, but it was much harder to identify hostile aeroplanes. Nowadays with terrorist activity, it can be difficult to identify foes. Similarly, it is not easy to identify spiritual foes.

Jesus and Enemies

Jesus was betrayed by one of his supposed friends, the disciple Judas Iscariot (see Matthew 26:14–16). Jesus knew that this would happen. He had few friends and he said:

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:14).

In the days of Jesus, Israel was under Roman occupation, which the Jews hated. Despite at least two of the gospels having been penned by Jews,



there is no record of Jesus describing the Romans as enemies – human politics was not his concern. He does, however, use ‘enemy’ language when describing opposition to the word or will of God. Nowadays this can be seen in propaganda which denies God’s existence, or ignores what He wants from humans.

God and Friendship

Many people who believe in God are confident that He loves them whatever they do. However, in the Bible there are only two people whose relationship with God is described as friendship.

Abraham is specifically called a “friend of God” (James 2:23) and we are told that God talked with Moses “as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). If God loved everyone unconditionally it is extraordinary that there are not more occasions when God is referred to as our friend, or people as friends of God.

In contrast, there are occasions when people are referred to as enemies of God (e.g. Numbers 10:35). Moreover, there are things that God positively hates, including pride, lying and violence (see Proverbs 6:16–19) and practices that are ‘abominations’ to Him (Deuteronomy 12:31).

The Bible does say that God loved the world, and that in submission to His will, Jesus died to save people. However, it is clear that this is conditional and Jesus can only save those who respond to the gospel message.

For 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 angel Gabriel told Mary, “*he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21); that is not **all** people.

Sin and Enmity

It is not pleasant to think about sin, which is disobedience to God, but we must. Even the kindest, most selfless person is a sinner, and sin inevitably leads to death.

When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (James 1:15).

This is very serious. The dreadful fact is that all people are naturally enemies of God because of the way that they think and act. Paul wrote:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

He stated that, before their conversion, the believers at Rome were enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Even some professing believers were still enemies (Philippians 3:18–19).

The apostle James taught that “*Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

This is extremely strong language. Surely none of us wants to be an enemy of God. However, this is our natural state. By nature we are wicked. This is because in the Bible the word ‘wicked’ refers not just to those who do what we consider to be dreadful things, but to everyone who is godless.

We need to understand how God views us, our ways and our thinking and what He wants. Moreover, we cannot work these things out for ourselves, because our whole way of thinking is instinctively godless. To deny or reject God’s way of life and therefore His supreme and unequivocal authority is to be wicked. To do things ‘our own way’ in the way we enjoy or ‘think best’ is wicked.

Paul graphically described his struggle against human nature as a war (Romans 7:23). We are our own worst enemy, and without responding to the gospel message we are without hope.

At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

What Can We Do?

Amazingly, God has provided the solution. No matter how heinous our sins, they can be forgiven if – but only if – we truly repent (read 1 John 1:5–10). We can therefore go from foe to friend.

There are therefore two distinct sets of people: those who are trying to please God, and those who are not. The latter are His foes. Jesus also warned about people who falsely claimed to be his followers (Matthew 7:21–23). They remain His enemies.

It is a frightening thing to be an enemy of God. So it is utterly amazing that God offers us eternal life. He really is a God of mercy and compassion. However, like the boys in the game we all need to ask ourselves where our allegiance lies and whether we be “friend or foe”.

Anna Hart

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