

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1598



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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 mankind; 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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The Writing is On the Wall

This is a phrase we use when the signs are clear that something is about to change. It means that clear signs of something unfortunate or disastrous have appeared. Something is about to end, and often it spells catastrophe. If someone tells us that 'the writing is on the wall' for us, then we worry, with good reason.

The expression is used frequently nowadays, whether to talk about the fall of a government, the failure of a business, or even the end of a relationship. It spells disaster, and the source of the saying gives us the reason why. It is God telling us that a crisis is coming!

Belshazzar's Feast

So when was the writing first on the wall; where does this idea come from? The story is a Bible one, from the Book of Daniel, chapter 5. At the time of the Babylonian empire, King Belshazzar held what sounds like a debauched party. With a thousand of his governing class, his wives and concubines, he drank from cups taken from God's temple at Jerusalem, and they praised their pagan idols. They were having a tremendous time, until:

In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other (Daniel 5:5-6).

The mood changed from fun to fear, and the terrified king needed help. Who could read the writing, and who could tell him what it meant? None of the kingdom's wise men, astrologers or soothsayers could read or interpret for him, and the situation seemed hopeless.

Then the queen spoke up. There was a man, who during the reign of one of Belshazzar's predecessors had proved he could solve such puzzles, a man of excellent character. The man, Daniel, was fetched and the king offered him wealth and power to explain the writing to him. Daniel refused the offer, and explained that the message had come because of Belshazzar's pride and godlessness.

This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:26-28).

That very night, mighty Babylon was attacked. Belshazzar was killed and Darius took the throne as the Medo-Persian empire succeeded Babylon. The writing was indeed on the wall!

The End of an Era

We learn from this episode that, when God signals a dramatic change in the world, it happens. He is the creator of heaven and earth, with boundless power, so however unlikely we may think the message, it will be fulfilled.

In very early times the world was very wicked, full of violence. People did whatever they liked, with no care for God. He decided that He would destroy them, and said to Noah, whose family were the only God-fearing people on earth:

The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth... And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die (Genesis 6:13, 17).

The flood came, and only Noah, his family and the animals with them in the ark survived. The flood seemed unlikely, but God's power made it happen, made a new start for humankind, and established a positive relationship with those who tried to please Him.

Jesus gave a very similar type of message to the Jews of his day, warning them that the end was coming for their nation.

When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near... And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20, 24).

Within 40 years, the Romans did indeed besiege Jerusalem, and destroy it. There was awful slaughter, atrocities and slavery, which Jesus also foretold in this chapter. It was another era coming to an end, however much people did not want to believe it.

But there was good news too. This time of sorrow would come to an end, said Jesus, and better things would follow.

Exciting Times

This is where it gets exciting for us. Jerusalem is no longer ruled by Gentiles (non-Jews) but is celebrating 50 years under Israeli rule. So what should we expect?

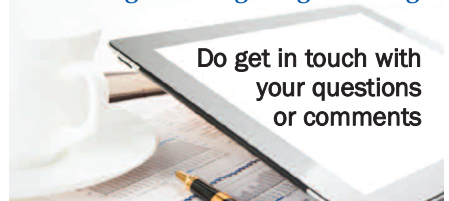
Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (v27–28).

The writing is on the wall for our world. Jesus will soon return to the earth and establish the perfect Kingdom of God. Let's take his advice and not be caught out like Belshazzar.

Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (v34–36).

Editor

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Steps to the State of Israel - 3

The End of the Story

In our two earlier articles, we considered some of the events that led to the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. It has been a remarkable story: a displaced people, scattered amongst the nations of the world, has been repatriated after nearly 2000 years of exile. Bible students have been expecting the Jews to return to their land for centuries (see for example the beliefs of Isaac Newton in *Glad Tidings* issue 1596).



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When it actually happened in the 20th Century, the truth of Bible prophecy was powerfully demonstrated. For the first time in millennia, the Jews formed an independent nation. Israel can now be counted amongst the nations of the world. 2018 will mark the 70th anniversary of the formation of the State. But the original concept of a national home for the Jewish people as laid out in the Balfour Declaration (see part 1 of this series) has been badly spoiled as a result of the continuing conflicts between Israel and her neighbours. The story is clearly not yet over.

The Arab–Israeli Conflict

Within hours of the Declaration of Independence being made on 14th May 1948, fighting between Jew and Arab erupted. The following day, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and forces from Iraq invaded the former British mandated territory in an attempt to wipe out the fledgling state. Amazingly, despite a large superiority in numbers, the Arab invasion failed to achieve its objectives and after 10 months of fighting, Israel held on to the area allotted to them by UN Resolution 181 and had taken more than half of the area recommended for an Arab state in the Partition Plan.

The nation of Israel continued to grow and prosper, with three quarters of a million new settlers arriving between 1948 and 1951, mostly from countries in the Middle East which had expelled them. About the same number of Arabs were displaced as a result of the fighting. The Jewish population of Israel grew from 657,000 in 1948 to 1,810,000 in 1958, and it now stands at 6,500,000. The Palestinians look back to this time and call it *Al-Nakba* (the Catastrophe). Troubles between Israel and her neighbours – known as the Arab–Israeli Conflict – have continually featured in our newspapers ever since. Here are some of the most notable incidents.

The Suez Crisis

In response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by President Nasser of Egypt in 1956, Israel, Britain and

France attacked Egypt by invading the Sinai Peninsula. While militarily successful, with Israel taking the Gaza Strip and Sinai, it was a disaster for the allies, since the UN and USA refused to support the action. In fact this marks the point at which Britain's role in the area effectively ceased. This affair now confirmed the USA as Israel's chief ally. America has given huge financial and military aid to Israel, and can usually be counted on to support Israel when other countries are against her.

The Six-Day War

Relative peace was enjoyed for a little over 10 years. But the underlying hatred of Israel continued, especially amongst Egypt and the displaced Palestinians. In May 1967, President Nasser sent Egyptian troops into Sinai and closed the 7-mile wide Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, thus stopping



Israeli Troops led by Generals Moshe Dayan & Yitzhak Rabin entering the Old City of Jerusalem, 7th June 1967

all trade between Israel and the East. The result was another conflict in the Middle East.

Despite facing Arab countries with nearly twice as many troops, Israel convincingly defeated first Egypt then Jordan and Syria, taking the whole of the Sinai Peninsula, all of the West Bank and the Golan Heights in the north. With a loss of 689 Israeli lives, the victory was won in a mere six days. The rest of the world looked on in amazement. Here was a victory reminiscent of the days of Joshua in the Old Testament!

For the Israelis, the capture of the ancient city of Jerusalem from Jordanian occupation was a very emotional moment. For the first time in two thousand years, Jerusalem was in Jewish hands again.

This event was particularly important for Bible readers, since Jesus prophesied that *“Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* Luke 21:24. Jesus spoke these words some 40 years before the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple (as Jesus had said earlier in his Olivet Prophecy in Luke 21). From that time until 7th June 1967, Jerusalem had been under the dominion of one Gentile power after another. Surely this is a sign to the world that God's plan is nearing its climax.

The Yom Kippur War

Following the Six-Day War, peace was short-lived. Egypt and Syria were determined to take back the land that Israel had conquered in 1967. On the 6th October 1973, while Israelis were at prayer on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement), Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria. It

took 11 days for Israeli forces to recover from their shock. By this stage they had crossed the Suez Canal into Egyptian territory. Egypt was on the brink of a military disaster. The war was eventually stopped following pressure on Israel from the UN and USA.

Since this time there has been no full-scale war between Israel and her neighbours. But there have been many incidents such as the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 2006 following repeated rocket attacks into Northern Israel by Hezbollah, a terrorist organisation sponsored by Iran. Incursions into the Gaza strip have taken place in 2008 and 2014 following rocket attacks by the Palestinian organisation Hamas.

On the other hand, there have been a number of attempts to find peace in the Middle East, the most notable being the visit of President Sadat of Egypt to Israel in November 1977. This was an historic event, which led to the normalising of relations between Israel and Egypt. Sadly the quest for peace between Israel and her other neighbours has been less successful, apart from an agreement with Jordan. The animosity between Israel and the Palestinian peoples has proved to be a particularly difficult problem.

Will There Ever Be Peace?

The key to this question lies in Jerusalem. While it is true to say that the city is in Jewish hands, it is still the most disputed place on Earth. It is a holy site for three of the world's major religions, being sacred to Christians, Muslims and Jews alike. There can be no lasting peace in the Middle East until the sovereignty of Jerusalem has been settled. Israel refuses to countenance the partition of Jerusalem, claiming it as her capital city.

It is clear to see that Israel is becoming less popular in the world. Not many nations are prepared to speak openly in Israel's favour any more. In fact it is not difficult to see that the dispute over Jerusalem could escalate into a serious war, even dragging the super-powers into conflict.

Bible Prophecy

The Bible prophesies a time when Israel, newly gathered from the nations, will face a huge invasion of peoples intent on her final destruction. For example in Jeremiah:

For behold, days are coming declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of My people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it... Thus says the LORD: we have heard a cry of panic, of terror and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach, like a woman in labour? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! That day is so great, there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:3, 5-7, ESV).

Similarly, in Zechariah:

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zechariah 14:2).

But the prophet then continues, making it clear that, when Israel has

nowhere to turn, God will intervene and demonstrate that He is still interested in His people:

The LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle (Zechariah 14:3).

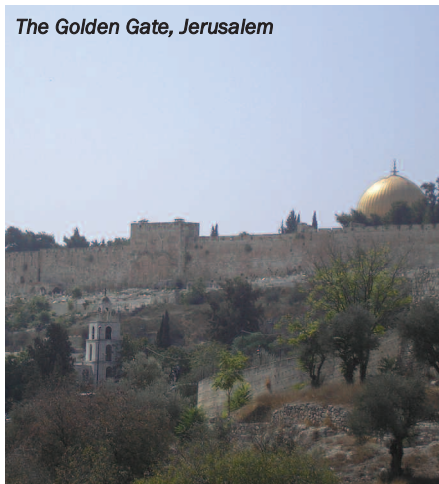
The remarkable thing about the prophecy of Zechariah is that when these things happen, the people of Israel who remain shall see the one who has saved them:

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child (Zechariah 12:10).

On that day Israel will recognise their Messiah: the one they pierced and hung on a cross!

Conclusion

The steps to the current State of Israel have been remarkable. So many



The Golden Gate, Jerusalem

events that could not have been foreseen by human knowledge were written in the Bible long before they took place. The very existence of Israel as a nation is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy and is a clear sign to the world that we live in the last days, before the intervention of God in human affairs. Only then will there be a true “National Home for the Jewish People”.

The nations of the world have unwittingly played a part in this great epic, but the end of the story will not be a secular Israeli State in the Middle East! Neither will it be a land partitioned between Israel and Palestine. All the peoples of the Middle East as well as the three major world religions will have to recognise the authority of God in the matter.

The true end of the story, as prophesied in Scripture, will be none other than the establishment of the Kingdom of God on this earth. A kingdom centred on Jerusalem, the place where the Old Testament King David reigned:

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 call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:30–33).

Simon Collard

(Concluded)

Does the World Have a Hope?

The world is at rest. War is a thing of the past. Terrorism is no more. All around the globe, weapons have been decommissioned, no longer able to kill or maim, but turned into the tools for producing food. In fact, no one is learning how to fight, the military academies have gone, and leaders are preaching peace.

There is enough food and water for everyone, plenty in fact, and the peace and prosperity of this time mean that everyone has access to them. Add to this universal good health, no one is ill, suffering or in failing health, so that even the hospitals have been closed – but for such a wonderful reason – they are no longer needed.

What about quality of life? In this world, there is justice for everyone, whoever they are. No one can oppress others, all have the opportunity to live, to develop and to enjoy the wonderful world. Those who do good flourish, rather than being ignored; loneliness is banished in the happy communities



of this world. Children grow up without fear or threat, playing happily in the streets. Education is complete and

beneficial, learning about how this wonderful age came about, the will and purpose of God, and how to please Him.

And the government? The Lord Jesus Christ rules the world with justice and mercy, providing strong, godly leadership. He implements God's laws, ensuring moral and spiritual goodness whilst protecting everyone from violence or injustice. This immortal king has the characteristics of his Father, God, and rules with both His power and His kindness. His followers are also immortal and are tasked with teaching and caring for the nations of the earth. It is a perfect world.

The Real Future

This may all seem like wishful thinking. In today's chaos of violence, crime and inequality, surely this is sheer fantasy? Can we really hope for such a world?

The answer is 'yes'. The Bible is the word of God – it provides ample evidence of this – and it foretells exactly this future. Read Psalm 72 and Isaiah 2, 11, 35 and 66 to see where the descriptions above come from. This is not from the realms of fantasy, but something we can actually look forward to. It is the Kingdom of God, to be established here on earth.

Not only this, but it has been God's plan from the very beginning, and He has explained it in His word. Right back in the time of Moses (about 1500 BC) we read:

Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD (Numbers 14:21).

The same message is repeated in Psalm 72:19 and Habakkuk 2:14, and in Isaiah 45 it is explained a little further. Through the prophet, God explains that He created the earth with a specific purpose in mind:

For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).

In the following verses, He explains that this purpose is filling the earth with people who He has saved, who worship Him, seek to be like Him, and offer the praise He truly deserves.

There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength' (v21-24).

The Promise

Some 2000 years before the time of Jesus, God spoke to Abraham, a man who believed God and tried to please Him. In fact, he was called 'the friend of God' (James 2:23). God made him a number of promises about a great family and a land, of which this is one:

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (Genesis 22:18).

Jesus is descended directly from Abraham and also King David, who lived around 1000 BC. In the New Testament, Galatians 3 explains that he is the 'seed' or descendant who is mentioned here. In a Psalm penned by David we are told clearly how God's purpose will be fulfilled, in His kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ. Speaking about this king, he wrote:

His name shall endure forever; his name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed (Psalm 72:17).

Evidence

If we want to live in that perfect world, then, like Abraham, we need to believe that God will fulfil His promises, and to respond by being baptised and trying to reflect His character now. God does not ask us for blind faith, He has given clear signs that His kingdom will come, such as:

- The return of the Jews to Israel
- A world full of godlessness
- Wars, terror and hopelessness.

The world does have a hope – the Kingdom of God – and it can be our hope. Let's look to the future:

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 21:3-4).

Andrew Hale

Miracles of Jesus - 1

Jesus Heals the Centurion's servant

The miracles performed by Jesus in the gospels arouse curious reactions. Some just refuse to believe them, assuming they were made up by fanciful disciples who lived long after the events. They disregard the fact that two of the gospel writers were eyewitnesses of the events they record.

Others take a pseudo-scientific view to discredit them, looking for 'rational' explanations. Jesus walked on water, they say, by sticking to shallow, half-submerged sand banks near the shore of the Sea of Galilee; he did not really die on the cross, but fainted, and later revived in the coolness of the tomb. In both cases, the detail of the gospel records automatically excludes these 'explanations'. The water walking took place in a gale in the middle of the night. The soldiers in charge of Jesus' execution were surprised he had died quickly, and to make sure he was really dead, stabbed him with a spear.

So often the critics of the Bible fail to read it carefully. They pick out the odd verse, or rely on memory, and ignore the facts.

In this series, we propose to examine some of Jesus' miracles quite closely, looking at the detail and the evidence that finally led the tough Roman centurion at the foot of the cross to exclaim, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).

An Unusual Centurion

There are several Roman centurions in the New Testament. By nature and



training, army commanders tend to be robust characters – mentally disciplined, clear thinking and decisive.

The centurion at Capernaum was no exception, but he also showed respect and consideration for those in his charge. The Romans were the occupying power in first century Palestine, but this centurion had an excellent rapport with the Jews of his area. We are told he paid out of his own pocket for the local place of worship, as the Jews told Jesus:

He loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue (Luke 7:5).

This centurion also had a great respect for the men who served under him. Even his servant, or slave, "was dear to him" says the record in verse 2. When the man fell sick, his master did his best to find someone to make him better. It was a hopeless quest, for Mark's gospel says he was "ready to die" (v2).

We do not know for sure what the illness was, although Matthew 8:6 describes it as paralysis. This can stem from injury, such as a bad fall, or from a stroke or a virus affecting the nerves. Whatever it was, he was not expected to live.

The Man from Nazareth

It was at this crisis that news of the young teacher from Nazareth filtered through to the centurion's household. Jesus had already worked miracles of healing in the vicinity, including the public healing of a man with a shrivelled hand actually inside the synagogue at Capernaum. Opposition from the Jews had driven Jesus into the countryside for a while, but now he was back, and with reports coming in every day of his cures, the centurion saw the possibility of helping his dying servant. He turned to his friends, the Jewish elders, to ask the young rabbi to pay him a call.

Jesus could so easily have snubbed them – told them he was too busy to help, reminded them of their hostility and sent them away. It would have been understandable. But it would not have been his way; he went. We can be sure he went, not to save the reputation of those proud, hypocritical elders, but for the sake of the sick man and his warm-hearted master.

A Remarkable Message

For Jesus to get there took time, because his footsteps were always dogged by a large and demanding crowd. Word seems to have gone on ahead to the centurion's house that Jesus was on the way, for what happened next was extraordinary.

Jesus and his attendants, walking



towards the Roman villa, were met by a group travelling towards him in the opposite direction. The centurion had sent a party of his friends to intercept the healer. They brought a message from the great man:

Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it (Luke 7:6–8).

The message was respectful – how different from the scorn Jesus had to endure from the people of his own nation! He, the centurion, the representative of the Emperor, was counting himself less worthy than the carpenter from Nazareth. He had decided there was no point in Jesus making a special journey. If he had the power of God to heal, he did not need to be present in the room. A word would do.

The explanation that followed was clear. He himself was under authority. He was responsible to his commanding officer, who, in turn, had a regional commander over him, with a chain of command all the way back to the

Emperor in Rome. When he gave an order to his lieutenant, the effect was immediate. There was no questioning, no argument as to why he should obey. The iron discipline of the army worked like clockwork. To challenge an order was to challenge the authority of the superior officer, an authority that came ultimately from the Emperor. To disobey was punishable with death.

In the centurion's mind, there was no question that Jesus could cure his slave. Although he had probably never met him, he had heard enough reports to know he was no impostor. Just as the centurion had the authority of the Emperor invested in him, so Jesus had the authority of God. He did not need to threaten or raise his hand to produce a result. At a word of command, the disease would depart from the servant's body, as rapidly as the slave, when well, would run to fetch his master's cloak.

The Miracle

Jesus was visibly impressed by the centurion's conviction that he could work the cure. A Gentile (non-Jew) was putting to shame the very people who had been waiting for centuries for the coming of Messiah, the Son of God. We read in Matthew's account:

When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom [Israel] will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:10-12).

Jesus did indeed say the word, and the man was healed.

"Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour (v13).

Our Response?

When Jesus returns to set up God's kingdom, then those who reject him and his power will, in turn, be rejected.

But we can be part of that wonderful world order. Like the centurion, we need to listen to the evidence from the



reliable witnesses in our Bibles, and declare with faith that Jesus is Lord. If we do so, then in this life we can experience the limitless love of God and His Son. Then we share the hope of being in that kingdom, to sit down with the greatest men and women the world has ever known. As the apostle Peter wrote:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16).

David M. Pearce

We Can't Help It!

Sally was getting frustrated with her two-year old daughter who was having yet another tantrum. "She's SO strong-willed and determined", groaned Sally. "Well, so are you!" volunteered her friend. "Her genetic inheritance is her genetic inheritance, you know. It's in her genes – she can't help it!"

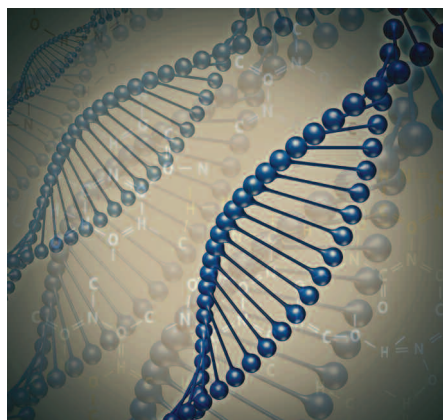
Some people do seem by their very nature to be much more agreeable – kinder and more selfless than others. So just how much are we responsible for our behaviour and how our life develops?

Nature and Nurture

Genes are not the only factor: environment, especially in childhood, can be very influential on subsequent adult behaviours. For example, abused children can grow up to be abusers, while on the other hand children can develop useful skills by watching and working with relatives.

Additionally, we all know examples of children who seem to have very similar characteristics to one or both parents, or some other close relation. This includes physical characteristics, interests, habits, skills and personalities. Some characteristics do seem to be inherited. Indeed, certain serious medical conditions are definitely known to be inherited genetic disorders.

There have been many scientific studies on genes, but there is no clear consensus about precisely what is inherited. Key research has involved sets of identical twins. Some identical twins, who have been adopted by dif-



ferent families and kept miles apart in childhood, seem to have striking similarities in adult life. Conversely, the detailed study of many other identical twins brought up in the same family have revealed pairs of adult twins with quite different personalities, temperaments, outlooks, interests and behaviours. Yet they clearly have identical genes, and obviously the same parents and the same schools and upbringing.

In fact, many connections between genes and personal characteristics are weak, leaving lots unexplained. Moreover, it is notoriously difficult to separate genetic effects from environmental influences: this is sometimes called the 'nature versus nurture debate'.

However, the current view is that our genes lay out a set of possibilities with limits on what we can become. They provide a set of options. But the life experiences that we then have determine what we actually become. So nowadays, rather than believing that we are completely programmed by our

genes, scientists believe that for many of our characteristics our environment is at least as influential as our genes.

It seems therefore that we may not have complete freedom in the way we behave. But we do have choices and partial freedom within the constraints of our genes. We can respond to reasoning. We can exercise self-control and this can be strengthened or weakened. While it may be difficult to change a core personality trait, it is accepted that with effort we can change our behaviour. Genetic make-up is not a defence in a criminal court.

Bible 'Genetics'

Science and the Bible agree that both nature (genetics) and nurture (environment) affect our behaviour. Scientific thought has changed, but the Bible is clear and consistent. There is one thing that we most definitely inherit from our parents, and it is a fatal condition. As members of the human race we are descendants of Adam and so are destined to die. We inherit mortality: whether we live a long or a short life eventually we all cease to exist:

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 (1 Corinthians 15:21–22).

Quite obviously, Sally's daughter was not responsible for her genetic make-up. Nonetheless Sally thought that her daughter should modify her behaviour. Similarly, we are not to blame personally for having human nature.

We all naturally have thoughts and desires in our minds, but the problem is that these can and often do become sinful:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (James 1:13–15).

God does hold us responsible for our actions (see Ezekiel 33:12–20), and we read that sin leads to death:

The soul who sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4).

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

We are all prone to do wrong things, and it is often an internal fight to do what we believe is right. The apostle Paul described this battle, acknowledging that he could not win it by himself (read Romans 7:15–25). Furthermore, we also need to know what is 'right', and this is where the Word of God is essential. The Bible is like no other book – it is the words of God Himself. So it can show us the right way to try to think and to behave (Psalm 119:97–104). Jesus said that his words were life-giving:

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

Overcoming Our Nature

He also told us that we should not simply follow what the majority of people do in life (Matthew 7:13). The apostles urged believers to change

their thinking to God's way of thinking. Paul wrote:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

The apostles told believers to think on spiritually beneficial things (see Philippians 4:8), and stressed the saving power of God's word:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you (1 Peter 1:22–25). See also Acts 20:32, Romans 1:16, 2 Timothy 3:15.

Our environment can affect the way we think and this in turn can influence the way we behave. Sally's daughter had probably seen her mother lose her temper, and copied her. We too are influenced by people we love and with whom we spend time. Bible truth enlightens the mind and helps us to move more towards thinking like God, although this is never fully possible in our mortal state (Isaiah 55:8–9). We need to avoid bad influences:

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you

learned, and avoid them (Romans 16:17, and also 1 Timothy 6:20–21).

By choosing spiritually healthy environments we can nurture more godly attitudes and behaviours, and reactions to the way we are, as God asks of us.

It is Our Choice

We are in a serious plight, being by nature 'desperately wicked' (Jeremiah 17:9). Despite this God has offered us eternal life if we turn to Him.

We... preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them (Acts 14:15).



We cannot help how we start off, but by God's grace and with the help of His Word we can influence how we turn out. The choice is ours, and we must accept personal responsibility for whether we accept or reject God's offer. There is no one and nothing else to blame.

Anna Hart

Who Are the Christadelphians?

We are often asked to write about the Christadelphians, the community who produce *Glad Tidings*. We rarely do so, because our focus is the Bible as the Word of God, and we encourage everyone to read it for themselves. However, we hope this summary is helpful.

The name ‘Christadelphian’ consists of two Greek words: *christos* and *adelphi*. Together they mean Brothers (and Sisters) in Christ, that is, associated with or belonging to Christ.

Members of the community meet in small and large groups, which are usually called ecclesias. This is the Greek word for an assembly or church, is used to make it clear we are talking about the people, not the building.

There are Christadelphians in many countries of the world, for example in Australia and New Zealand, across Africa, in the Caribbean, South America, Canada, and the USA; across Europe from the UK to Russia and Norway to Italy; across Asia, including India, Nepal, and the Philippines.

We are brothers and sisters ‘in Christ’. We have no priests, pastors or bishops, and no one is in any way superior to another. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Head.

Christadelphians believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and is the only basis for our beliefs and teaching. We have no controlling church council.



The Christadelphians

Each Christadelphian ecclesia selects from its members a secretary, a treasurer and a small committee to administer day-to-day affairs.

All Christadelphians are independent, and encouraged to preach the Gospel whenever the opportunity arises. Some are chosen to speak at public meetings or are asked to be missionaries.

The Christadelphian community relies only on its own members to contribute money to expenses of individual ecclesias or shared activities, to help the sick and elderly, to pay for Sunday Schools, Youth Clubs, Children’s Homes and missionary work (such as literature, travel and adverts).

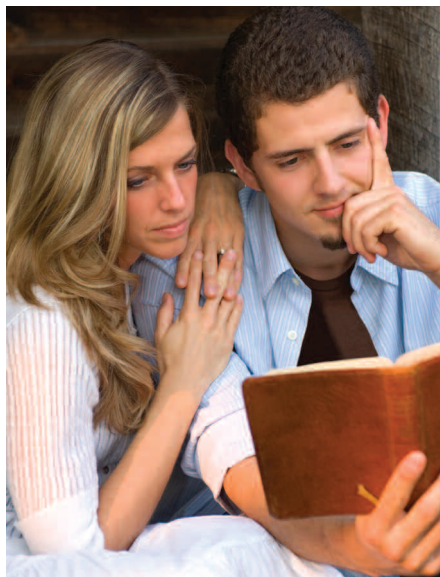
We are not a charity organization that collects money from the general public and distributes it to those in need. We do, however, contribute to several national and international charities.



We are not paid for any of the services we perform, whether we are secretary, preacher, missionary or Sunday School teacher. All is done in a spirit 'as to the Lord'.

We do not spend vast sums of money building churches and temples. Ecclesias may meet in homes or hired public rooms, but often in their own simply furnished halls.

If someone wants to become a member of the Christadelphian community, the procedure in the Bible is followed: a person hears the Gospel, understands it, believes it, repents of his or her sins and associates with Christ by being baptised.



We meet together as often as possible for worship, to give and receive encouragement and to remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ by sharing bread and wine as taught by Jesus himself. We also meet for preaching the Gospel and for Bible Study.

Christadelphians are no better than anyone else. We acknowledge that we are sinners and continually in need of forgiveness. We will only be made perfect when Jesus returns to the earth and invites his followers to be in his Kingdom.

We do not take part in politics or vote for human governments. We are waiting for the Kingdom of God under the one and only world ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christadelphians do not join the army, navy, air force or police. Such service would be opposed to the teaching of Jesus (John 18:36; Matthew 26:52). Most countries allow conscientious objection to these types of services.

Christadelphian teaching seeks to follow exactly that taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles. It is not influenced by man-made doctrines or rituals, nor does it change to suit mankind's ideas.

Christadelphians Believe and Teach That...

- ① The Bible is God's written message to men and women. The writers were instructed and inspired by God.
- ② The God revealed in the Bible is the only true, living God, the Creator of all things. He is immortal.
- ③ God has a wonderful purpose with the earth and with men and women upon it.
- ④ Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He was born to the Virgin Mary by the

operation of God's special power called the Holy Spirit.

⑤ The Kingdom of God will be set up on earth when God's appointed King, Jesus Christ, returns in person to the earth. He will establish peace, justice, true worship and right living among all nations.

⑥ The Christian Gospel, or Good News, as taught by Jesus Christ, invites men and women to believe this good news and live for ever in God's new world.

⑦ The Bible teaches that we are all sinners, and that we are all mortal and will eventually die. Death is really the end of life and we know nothing when we are dead. We need to be saved from remaining dead.

⑧ God has appointed Jesus Christ as the Saviour of mankind. He lived a life of service and obedience to his Father (God). He taught people about the hope of living for ever in God's Kingdom. He did no sin. Wicked men killed him by crucifixion (that is nailing him to a cross) and his body was placed in a grave.

⑨ Because Jesus did no sin, he could not justifiably stay in the grave. God raised him from the dead and gave him immortality, which means he now lives for ever.

⑩ God accepted the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, and will forgive the sins of all who believe the teaching of Jesus and associate themselves with him.

⑪ We show that we belong to Jesus Christ by being baptised after we have

understood and believed the Gospel and repented of our sins. Baptism as taught in the Bible, is a complete immersion in water. It marks the end of our old way of life and the beginning of a new life.

⑫ When Jesus returns to the earth, all people from throughout history who are judged faithful will be granted immortality and will live for ever in his kingdom.

⑬ The nation of Israel are God's special people. Their return to their land was foretold by the Bible and they must eventually accept Jesus Christ whom they crucified.

⑭ God's Kingdom will begin with Israel, and will eventually include all the population of the earth.

⑮ Events in the Middle East are a sign that God is still concerned with the nation of Israel.

⑯ In obedience to the command of Jesus Christ, true Christians meet regularly to remember the sacrifice of Jesus by sharing bread and wine.

This is a very short summary of God's plan with the earth and with men and women upon it. *Glad Tidings* regularly covers the different aspects of it in more detail, so please do keep reading.

If you wish to know more, please do access our previous articles and magazine editions online at:
<http://www.gladtidingsmagazine.org/previous-articles/>

Ivan Sturman

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