

# Glad Tidings

*of the Kingdom of God*

1602



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***[www.gladtidingsmagazine.org](http://www.gladtidingsmagazine.org)***

# Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

133<sup>rd</sup> Year

L17

1602



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

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

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## Acknowledgements

### Photographs:

Cover: Hoad Monument, Ulverston, England  
Ken Anderton

Pg 12: Chris Parkin

All others: Clipart.com

## Bible Versions

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

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# A Strong Tower

Throughout history, people have always built towers to keep themselves safe and to show their enemies how powerful they are. Big structures like the ziggurats in Babylon, the pyramids in South America and Egypt, and even today's skyscrapers, seek to send a message about the power and importance of mankind.

This month's cover photograph shows a monument in the English Lake District to commemorate a local resident, statesman and founder member of the National Geographic Society. Although he died 200 years ago, this 30m high tower still stands, and gives that impression of strength.

The Tower of London is another example of this. It was founded almost 1000 years ago and was originally designed to impress on the locals how powerful were their new Norman overlords. It took its present shape by the 13th Century, and over the following 800 years has served as a prison, an armoury, a treasury, the home of the Royal Mint, a public record office, and the home of the Crown Jewels of England. Despite being besieged several times, it has never fallen and control of the Tower has been a symbol of who really controls the country.

## Defensive Tactics

In Bible times, towers or other fortifications were very important. Without modern weaponry, a fortified building was very hard to defeat. It was common in times of war for the people of a town to withdraw to their tower, as it was easy to defend, and in many cases impregnable by the attackers.

It was however important to choose the right tower and to use it properly. The story recorded in Judges chapter 9 shows that one way to defeat a fortified tower was to set fire to it, if that was possible. The bloodthirsty Abimelech did this, burning alive men, women and children who hid in the tower of Shechem. He tried to do this again in Thebez, but here a woman managed to throw down a piece of millstone from the top of the tower, wounding him fatally. He had his armour bearer kill him as a matter of honour.

Many years earlier, Israel had reached the Promised Land and came to the walled city of Jericho.

*Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in (Joshua 6:1).*

Humanly speaking, the city could not be taken, especially by a nomadic group of tribes with no heavy armaments. But Joshua followed God's instructions and had the people march around the outside of the walls every day for six days. On the seventh, they marched around seven times, with the famous result.

*So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city (Joshua 6:20).*

No walls or towers are too strong for the power of God. This is where we turn to the figurative use of this idea.

## Shelter for the Believer

*From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy (Psalm 61:2-3).*

King David wrote these words, and he had experienced many difficulties in his eventful life. He had confronted the giant Goliath; he had been on the run from King Saul; he had fought many battles; and he even had to flee from his son Absalom who tried to take the kingdom from him. Yet God had preserved him in each of these distresses. He had taken him from being a shepherd to make him king over Israel. This is why David had good cause to trust God.

Why did God protect him in this way? It was because David trusted God and showed that faith by trying to do what God asked of him. God described David like this:

*A man after My own heart, who will do all My will (Acts 13:22).*

It was David's son, Solomon, who wrote many of the Proverbs. He said that what was true for David is true for all believers:

*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Proverbs 18:10).*

God's name is an important and extensive subject; it is more than just what He is called, it is an expression of

His unchanging, perfect character and His fixed purpose with creation. If we associate ourselves with Him – 'run to His name' as it were – then we will find safety there. But notice the qualifier: it is for the righteous, those who show faith and obedience, like David.

## Seeking this Refuge

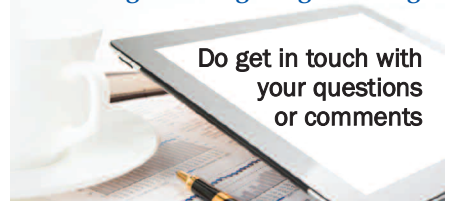
God still offers this protection, through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider these words of Paul:

*We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:28, 38-39).*

What comfort we can take from this promise of God's care. And what a world we live in, where we need just this type of protection. Just like those people of times past, we need to choose the right 'strong tower' and approach it correctly. We can seek refuge with God if we believe Him, trust Him, are baptized and try our best to please Him.

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## Miracles of Jesus - 5

# The Blind Man at Siloam

We do not know the name of the blind man, but we do know he had begged for years by the Temple steps. We know also that by Saturday evening he could see as quickly and sharply as the best of us.

John is the only gospel writer to record the unusual circumstances surrounding his healing. He is emphatic that the man had never been able to see – he was already blind when he was born. Like other disabled people in the capital city, he had a favourite pitch near the magnificent Temple of Herod, where he could call on passing visitors to spare him a coin. Most of us feel inclined to be generous close to our place of worship. He had become a regular part of the scenery, and the disciples must have walked past him many a time when they went up to Jerusalem each year for the feast.

### Why was he Blind?

It was a Sabbath day, and Jesus had just had a heated debate with the Pharisees. He had claimed to be able to set his disciples free from the power of death, but they had first mocked then threatened him. The disciples, not too tactfully, had stopped him on the steps outside and pointed to the blind man to ask if he would settle an argument about him.

Jewish tradition held that all suffering is the result of sin. If you fell under an ox cart, or went down with leprosy, you must have done something wrong to deserve it. This simple linkage was inclined to break down, however, in



the case of a man who had been born blind, because a baby is too young to do anything wrong. Should the blame for his condition, then, be laid at the feet of his parents? That in turn would contradict the teaching of the prophet Ezekiel that God does not punish the son for the sins of his father. It was a nice point of logic, and they wanted to hear Jesus' view.

At a stroke, he demolished the foundation of their argument. *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned"* he said (*John 9:3*). It is true that in a general sense illness is the result of sin, because suffering and death are both part of the curse that came into the world with Adam's sin, and illness is one of the causes of death. But we cannot assume that a particular disease is a punishment for a particular sin. Suffering affects good people as well as bad, as Job found when he was put to the test by the things which happened to him.

The reason this man had been born blind, Jesus went on, was so that he could be made better in a way that would bring men to think about God. With a cryptic phrase, he started them



on that road. *“As long as I am in the world”* he said *“I am the light of the world”* (v5). Whatever did he mean?

## **An Unusual Cure**

Without explaining his words, Jesus bent down, and from his own saliva and the dust of the road, made a sticky mud, which he pasted gently onto the eyelids of the blind beggar. If he was sightless before, he was now doubly blind – blind from birth and blind from the clay. *“Go”*, commanded Jesus when his work was complete, *“wash in the Pool of Siloam”* (v7).

It is barely a quarter of a mile from the Temple to Siloam, a steep downhill road which on a Sabbath would be thick with people. The beggar would know the way, sensing the echoes of the Roman pavement, feeling stored heat from the sun radiating from stone walls, and the perilous descent on



worn, uneven steps to the cool liquid that gushed from the rock at the end of King Hezekiah's conduit. Jesus was offering him the chance of a lifetime. He had never seen a miracle performed, but he had heard that Jesus of Nazareth brought healing to all kinds of sick folk.

He made a strange sight, tap, tapping along with clay-crust ed eyes and a haste that betrayed the urgency of his desire to see. We can picture him, kneeling down alongside the other people there, rubbing his eyes clean with the precious fluid, and turning upwards to see, for the first time ever, golden sunshine streaming down into the dark pool.

The place he knew only from its damp, mossy smell and tinkling watery sounds was transformed into a new world of colour, movement and vibrant life. Cobalt Mediterranean sky, silvery green leaves of olives, red sashes on white robes, bright eyes and creased brown faces – all the sights we take for granted – crashed in upon him with brilliant clarity. It was breath-taking. Tears of joy followed the Siloam water down his cheeks.

Racing back up the hill, weak limbs overstretched and heart pounding with excitement, he burst into the circle of his old friends.

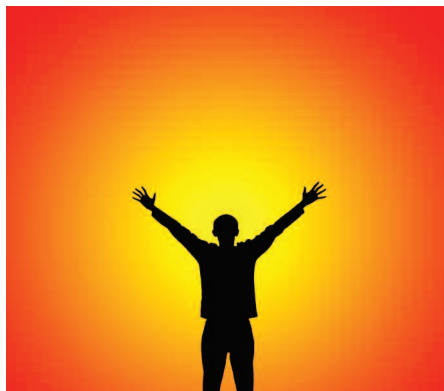
## **Friendly Faces?**

At first they failed to recognise him. We find the same difficulty when someone we know well goes out without his or her glasses. A lady I know sat next to her own mother without being recognised after she had her first pair of contact lenses.

*Therefore the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was*

*blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he" (v8-9).*

He was the same person, but transformed from a hunched and sightless beggar into a radiant, excited youngster, bubbling with energy and joy.



The Pharisees were soon on the scene, dampening his enthusiasm with their ingrained hostility to the man who had made him better. Oblivious to the remarkable miracle that had been worked on the man, they decided that because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, he must be a sinner.

When someone pointed out that sinners do not usually work miracles, they changed their tactics and tried to suggest the man had never been blind in the first place; that he was making it all up. That argument fell to the ground when his parents came along and insisted their son had been born blind.

As the man himself mocked them for their refusal to accept the power of Jesus, they resorted to the age old weapon of out-argued clerics, and excommunicated him. This was a fearful punishment for a devout Jew,

cutting him off from synagogue, Temple and employment.

Knowing how wounded he would feel, with his new joy turned to loneliness and fear, Jesus himself went to look for his latest disciple. *"Do you believe in the Son of God?" (v35)* he enquired gravely. The blind man recognised the voice, but had never before seen this strong face with its compassionate but penetrating eyes. *"Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"* he asked (v36). *And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen him and it is he who is talking with you" (v37).*

For the first time, he looked at the man who had opened his eyes, and gratitude, awe and respect filled his heart. Falling at Jesus' feet, he worshipped him.

## **The Complete Healing Process**

What was the lesson behind the clay? Why did Jesus send the man to Siloam to wash? And what did he mean when he said this?

*For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind (v39).*

John only gives us a slender key to its interpretation. He mentions, in passing, that the word 'Siloam' means 'sent' (v7). It is a theme of John's gospel that Jesus was 'sent' from God. He mentions the fact 40 times in his 20 chapters. Therefore we may safely assume that the Pool of Siloam was symbolic of the Lord himself.

But why did Jesus cover the blind man's eyes with mud? Again, it is an Old Testament theme that man was made from dust, and that for his sins against God, he is doomed to return to

dust when he dies. ‘Dust’ equals ‘flesh’ is the idea, and ‘flesh’ in its pride and arrogance rebels against God. The blind man was symbolic of us all, cut off by our sins from the warmth and light of God’s presence, as Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden. But God sent us a saviour, His Son, to wash away our sins. If we follow his commandment carefully, we too will go down the steps into the water and come up new men and women.

Like the beggar man, we are all born blind. We are sinners by birth, and not even the most skilled and dedicated doctor can take away this malady. Neither can money buy us a cure. We have to believe in the power of Jesus to make us better, and go down into the water of baptism, washing away the clay of our past sins. That living water,



gushing out of the cool rock, can open our eyes and give us a new start in life. We shall be as happy at discovering the Saviour God has sent as the blind man at the Pool of Siloam.

## Recognising Our Need

Sadly, though, we will find plenty who, like the Pharisees, would pour scorn on our new-found faith. It is pride, so often, that blinds people to the truth about Jesus. The words of Jesus fit their case exactly “...now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains” (v41).

Confident in their college degrees, their traditions and their wisdom, they are not prepared to consider the claims of the carpenter from Nazareth. They cannot bring themselves to admit they need forgiveness from God. They will dream up many ingenious theories to explain away his miracles, even though, as the blind man pointed out with devastating logic:

*Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind (v32).*

This is what Jesus was talking about in verse 39. He came ‘for judgement’ because he divides mankind; everyone has to make up his or her mind about Jesus, one way or the other. Either you accept his claims, or you reject them; there is no middle way.

Those who insist they can see quite well, thank you, and have no need of the Light of the world, remain eternally blind.

But those who are prepared to admit they are blind, helpless in the dark world of sin and death, can call on his healing power and be made to see.

**David M. Pearce**



# Things of the Kingdom and of Jesus the Christ - 2

## Preaching to Jews and Gentiles

*The things of the kingdom and Jesus the Christ are preached throughout Acts: from the third verse to the last verse of the book. This series of articles on Acts explores these 'things'.*

The Acts of the Apostles is the inspired record of the words and activities of the apostles soon after the ascension of Jesus Christ. These men were eyewitnesses of many of the things they believed. They had the power of the Holy Spirit, which is God's power, and were fearless in their preaching about Jesus.

### To the Jews

Nonetheless, the Jewish authorities persecuted them and tried their utmost to stop them telling people about the resurrection of Jesus. This was despite all the evidence of their miracles, their personal witness and the teaching in their Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus was a Jew, and the Law of Moses and Old Testament prophecies had been given to the Jewish nation. The Old Testament had revealed to them the character of Almighty God, and His plan and purpose for the world. Jews were, in fact, 'His people' provided that they obeyed His commands. Unfortunately, throughout their history the religious leaders had often failed to believe and obey, and this culminated in their rejection of Jesus as their promised Christ (Messiah). By doing this they also rejected God's

offer of salvation, as this was only possible through Jesus. He said:

*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).*

### To Everyone

In Acts chapter 10 we have the account of how God persuaded the apostle Peter that both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) were to be called to be part of His family.

*Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).*

The first Gentile to be baptised was the centurion Cornelius. Thereafter the apostles witnessed to both Jews and Gentiles alike, because there was no discrimination in the terms of this offer of eternal life:

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:27-28).*

This concept was revolutionary to the Jews but had been promised years before by their prophets. For example, God had said of Jesus:

*It is too small a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).*

## **To Us Today**

Today we all have access to the gospel message, in our Bibles. This is an awesome privilege, and given the sad history of the Jews we need to make sure that we have a true understanding of what God asks of us. This means keeping to the message preached by the first century apostles, and ignoring those who water down the clear message of the Bible or add things that are not in. The Apostle Paul wrote:

*Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8–9).*

In the letter to the Romans he makes it abundantly clear that we Gentiles have no room for complacency. If we do not believe and obey, we shall be 'cut off' (see Romans 11:18–22).

## **The Apostles' Message**

The table opposite shows themes about the gospel that occur regularly in Acts, focussing on the period from Cornelius in chapter 10, and predominantly the record of the apostle Paul's missionary journeys through the Mediterranean area following his dramatic conversion (in Acts chapter 9).

The apostles usually went first to the Synagogue to preach to Jews, using their Old Testament scriptures to show them that Jesus was their Messiah.

Their initial preaching to Gentiles was, understandably, slightly different. This audience was less familiar with the Jewish scriptures and beliefs, and so the message was often tailored to the situation of the audience, but **Jesus was always the focus of their message.**

We can see that there is a very consistent message being preached: repentance, baptism, the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus the Christ, the only saviour, and the promise of his return and the kingdom of God after a time of judgement.

This gospel message is centred on Israel and founded on the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. This essential link with the Jewish scriptures was a key primary message to the Jews, but also essential for the Gentile converts. Paul's letters to churches containing both Jewish and Gentile members (e.g. Corinthians, Romans and Galatians) make continual reference to the Old Testament in explanations of key Christian teaching and conduct. We therefore need to study **the whole Bible** to understand what God wants of us.

There are many different christian groups with very different beliefs. Every Bible reader needs to ask himself or herself whether their beliefs are the same as those of the apostles, who preached with the authority of the Holy Spirit. If so, the question is whether we are truly committed to them.

**Anna Hart**

Theme in Preaching	References in Acts 10-28 <i>(while witnessing to Jews AND Gentiles)</i>	Number of references in Acts 1-9 <i>(witnessing to Jews)</i>
Jesus was approved by God	10:38; 22:14	4
Jesus was crucified	10:39; 13:27-29; 26:23	6
God raised Jesus from the dead	10:40-41; 13:30,33-37; 17:3,31; 25:19; 26:23	8
Belief in resurrection	17:18; 23:6; 24:15,21; 26:8	1
Jesus was exalted / is in heaven	10:36	10
Jesus is the Christ	17:3; 18:5,28; 19:4	4
Apostles were witnesses	10:39,41; 13:31; 22:14-15; 23:11; 26:16,22	6
Apostles had Holy Spirit power and authority (#)	10:19,44; 11:12,15-16,24,28; 13:2-4,9,52; 14:3; 15:8,28; 16:6-7; 18:5; 19:6; 20:23; 21:4,11	10
Gentiles also to be offered salvation	10:35; 11:18; 13:46-48; 15:7,15-17; 26:23	2
These events were prophesied in the Old Testament	10:43; 13:23,29,32-35; 15:15-16; 17:2-3; 18:28; 24:14; 26:6,22; 28:23,25-27	9
The importance of the name of Jesus	10:48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:5,13,17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9	10
Salvation is through Jesus	10:36,43; 13:23-26,38-39; 15:11; 16:31; 22:16; 26:15-18	4
Jesus will come back / judge the world	10:42; 17:31; 24:25	2
Kingdom of God	14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31	2
The need for repentance	11:18; 13:24; 14:15; 17:30; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20	4
Baptism	10:37,47-48; 11:16; 13:24; 16:15,33; 18:8,25; 19:3-5; 22:16	5
The importance of the Jewish fathers	13:17,32; 22:14; 24:14; 26:6; 28:17	4
God is the creator	14:15; 17:24	1

# This was a very special privilege of the early apostles to enable them to establish the first century Christian churches.

# Looking Forward

A while ago, we found my old camera. I had it when I was 18; it's a semi-electronic Single Lens Reflex and it was pretty well state-of-the-art at the time.

My son was fascinated. He'd never seen a camera that uses photographic film. He examined it reverently as though it was an antique – and suddenly I felt like an antique myself. He gazed in awe through the viewfinder and I showed him how to focus and set the aperture. I explained that when you press the button, the shutter lets in light which reacts with the film inside. Then you wind it on to take another picture. You can only take two or three dozen pictures, then you send the film off to be developed, and only then can you look at the pictures you've taken.

“So how does it take movies?” he asked. “It doesn't,” I said. He was appalled.

Determined to maintain some credibility, I assured him that he shouldn't judge the old relic until he'd seen what it could do. So we bought a roll of film, and went out and took some photos. Two weeks later we got the prints back and I had to admit, they're not actually as good as the photos I get from my pocket digital camera.

## The Danger of Nostalgia

Old things have charm. Sometimes it's because their style recalls the tastes and style of a previous age; or the technology is simpler, or the construction seems more robust, or sometimes their fascination is simply due to the knowledge that they've been part of



the lives of generations of people now gone. Old things are a link with the past, and there's romance in that.

Nostalgia has its place – but it can be unhealthy. Wise king Solomon said:

*Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” for you do not enquire wisely concerning this (Ecclesiastes 7:10).*

## A World in Decline

People have always been prone to looking at the past with fondness, but perhaps never more so than in our day and age – because all the signs are the world really is getting worse.

The Bible said it would. In his great prophecy, known as the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus warned that this will be a dangerous and fearful time:

*“When you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and*

*famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:9–11).*

The apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy warned of a decline in morality and behaviour:

*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:1–5).*

If you stop and think about your experience of the world you live in, it’s likely you’ll recognise that these are statements that apply to today!

Many people today recognise that the world is becoming an increasingly dangerous and unpleasant place. Some withdraw from it and take refuge in fond memories and fantasies of better times in the past. The Christian, on the other hand, recognises these things as signposts to the coming Kingdom. As Jesus said in the same prophecy:

*Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:28).*

## **Longing for Egypt**

There was an occasion when an entire nation gave in to a severe bout of nostalgia. Early in the Bible we read how God rescued His people Israel from slavery in the land of Egypt, and

brought them out to lead them to the Promised Land. It was a long journey through an inhospitable wilderness, and people being people, they quickly started moaning. They recalled their previous lives:

*We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic (Numbers 11:5).*

Actually, their lives in Egypt had been terrible: they had “groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out” (Exodus 2:23) – but they’d forgotten



all that! When life in the wilderness got uncomfortable, they looked back. These false memories of Egypt were more appealing to them than the unknown Promised Land.

In the Bible the Christian’s life is compared with the journey of Israel through the wilderness (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 10). He or she has left their old life of slavery to sin, and are travelling through the wilderness towards the Kingdom which God has promised. The warning is there – be objective when you look back!

**“Learn from the Past; Live in the Present; Look to the Future”**

I don’t know who coined this phrase but it’s an excellent piece of advice,



and when you look at it from the Bible's perspective it's particularly profound:



It was foolish for the nation of Israel to yearn for their old life in Egypt, but God did not want them to forget about it. When He rescued them from their slavery He told them to remember the occasion, and He gave them the Passover feast as a yearly reminder of it (see Exodus 12:24-25). Jews today still keep the Passover, observing God's command. As God told them in His Law:

*Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm (Deuteronomy 5:15).*

Many of the Psalms in the Bible are concerned with reminding the Jews about their history. For example, Psalm 78 is largely a poetic catalogue of all the great things God had done for His people, and the many ways they had been foolish and let Him down throughout their history.

It's good to learn from the past, that's how we equip ourselves for the future. But it's not good to dwell on regrets. One of the great liberating blessings of being a child of God is that He forgives, entirely and unconditionally, whatever it is that we may

have done – any and every time we tell Him we're sorry. Foolish or wicked things we've done may play on our minds, but not His. This is what the prophet Micah said:

*Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:18-19).*



If you're one of those people who puts slogans on their walls, how about this one:

*This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).*

A recognition that God is a God of love and you are in His hands makes for an up-beat outlook on life. Life is a gift, and when (as happens in everyone's life) things go badly, one of the best remedies is to do what the old song says, "Count your blessings one by one!"

The book of Ecclesiastes, the Bible's book of philosophy, asks the great questions about the meaning of life – why we are here and what is the purpose of life. It advises:

*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going (Ecclesiastes 9:10)*



Jesus said this:

*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. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:31–34).*

What a brilliant recipe for life! Don’t stress over what tomorrow will bring – trust in God, and live in the present. But notice that phrase in the middle – ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’. This is the critical point for us, and where we should be setting our priorities.

There are some people who have no care for God, and their attitude is “You only live once so enjoy it while you’re here”. There were people in despair who once said, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” (Isaiah 22:13).

That is entirely different from the attitude which Christians should have.

The way to live a good life is not to devote it to having a good time, it’s about making the most of your time.

What does it mean, ‘seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness’? It means to try in your life to be like God; to try to serve Him, by doing His will with your life; and to look forward to the time God has promised when His kingdom will arrive and be a reality on this earth.

The Apostle Paul described it as belonging to God and to His coming Kingdom, and he put it like this:

*Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body (Philippians 3:20–21).*

In other words, we belong to God and our allegiance is to Him, not to the present world order of self-indulgence. We eagerly await the return of Jesus, who will reward those who have ‘sought first the kingdom of God’ with everlasting life.

The Bible is full of promises of the Kingdom that is shortly to be established on this earth. *Glad Tidings* is full of it as well, as you’ll have noticed if you’re a regular reader.

The old camera is back in the cupboard. Life moves on, technology progresses. It’s good to look to the future – especially when you know what the future holds.

*As it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).*

**Chris Parkin**

# Peace

Worries over Brexit, concern over inflation at home, alarm over nuclear threats in North Korea, wars, disease and starvation, ever present threats of terrorism – is there no end to the depressing news? Mankind cannot find permanent solutions to the overwhelming problems which beset us.

We recently witnessed the centenary commemoration of Passchendaele, a terrible battle in the 1914–18 war. Remembering the loss of tens of thousands of men who were killed in that massacre led one descendant to hope that the memory ‘would persuade at least one person not to fight’. A worthy sentiment, but we know that “the war to end all wars” did not achieve that end and we are still witnessing conflicts around the world.

One way to cope with bad news is to block it out by enjoying ourselves and having a good time – which is what many people in western society do. But that doesn’t make the threat go away.

The prophet Jeremiah told his listeners that God was not happy with this attitude:

*Everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:13–14).*

## Real Answers

This magazine tries to show that there is an answer to all these problems – God’s answer recorded in His Word, the Bible. The promise of a new world



order with people living at peace with each other flows through the Bible like a golden thread. Here we read of the work that Jesus will accomplish when he returns from heaven:

*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever (Isaiah 9:7).*

This is the world we would like to live in, isn’t it? But peace will only come as a result of righteousness, with people being pleasing to God.

*Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever (Isaiah 32:16–17).*

Only by reading the Bible for ourselves will we understand the full picture of how, through Jesus, God will bring about peace in the world. So let us open it now and discover how you and I can be part of that peaceful world.

**Marion Buckler**

# Abraham & Sarah: Strangers and Exiles

Abraham and Sarah went through so much together as husband and wife, with their shared faith in God. Their love for each other was evident in their lives and Abraham's love for Sarah continued after she died.

In Genesis 23 we read of Abraham's grief and the remarkable process by



which he acquired a burial site for his wife. How striking it is, that even though they had such a huge role to play in the purpose of God, Abraham did not own any land where he could bury his own wife. As the New Testament comments, Abraham and Sarah considered that they were *'strangers and exiles on the earth'* (Hebrews 11:13). They were looking forward to the time when God would grant them entrance into the *'city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God'* (Hebrews 11:10).

## Burying the Dead

The chapter in Genesis opens with the sad record of faithful Sarah's death:

*Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her (Genesis 23:1-2).*

Sarah is the only woman in the Bible of whom it is recorded how old she was when she died. At the very least this shows how Sarah was held in such high honour during her faithful life, and this esteem is carried into the Bible record.

Abraham was understandably distraught over her death as he mourned and wept for her. It was imperative that he made appropriate arrangements for his beloved wife's burial.

*Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I am a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight" (v3-4).*

Abraham was in the vicinity of the Hittites (or 'sons of Heth'), a point heavily emphasized in the text. For example, the Hittites are referred to as 'the people of the land' in verses 7 and 12, and consider how much the words are used here:

*Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city... (v10).*

Why should there be so much emphasis placed on the fact that Abraham was seeking to purchase a burial place from the Hittites?

## Promised by God

The Hittites are mentioned earlier on in Genesis in connection with the promise God made to Abraham:

*On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates — the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites" (Genesis 15:18–21).*

The land which was promised to Abraham's descendants was occupied at the time of Abraham by many different peoples – such as the Hittites!

In light of this knowledge, Abraham's method of purchasing a burial place for Sarah takes on greater significance. For instance, Abraham could have approached the situation by demanding that the Hittites give him a burial place. He could have said something like, "The Most High God has promised this land to my descendants – you are going to be thrown out of it anyway so give me it now so I can bury my wife!" This is not how the man of faith conducted himself at all.

## Respectful Negotiations

As mentioned above, instead of forcibly stating his right to the land, Abraham described himself to the Hittites as being a 'a foreigner and a visitor' (23v4); in addition, he was so

respectful towards them that it is recorded twice that Abraham 'bowed before the people of the land' (verses 7 and 12). The Hittites reciprocated this respect for Abraham as they called him 'Lord' (verses 6, 11 and 15) and a 'mighty prince' or 'prince of God' (verse 6, depending on which version you read).

They were very willing to agree to Abraham's request for Sarah's burial place:

*Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place (23:6).*



When we read verses 8–16 we see that Abraham had identified the cave of Machpelah, on the land of Ephron the son of Zohar, as the right place to bury Sarah. Ephron was more than happy to give Abraham the cave free of charge:

*No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead (v11).*

However, Abraham honourably insisted that he pay the full price. He was keen to respect the customs of the people of the land, a point that one commentary expands upon for us:



*'The mention of the trees [verse 17], the weighing of the silver by current standards [verse 16], the proclamation in the presence of witnesses at the city gate [verse 18]... conforms in detail to Hittite law' (P. Alexander and D. Alexander, The Lion Handbook to the Bible (Oxford, 2009), p. 139).*

This is helpful to us in at least two ways. Firstly, it provides evidence that the Bible is historically reliable. If the record in Genesis 23 was fictional, then the details would almost certainly not correspond to Hittite law. Secondly, it strengthens the main point that has been made – Abraham respected the customs of the Hittites.

## **Faithful Living Today**

Are there any practical points which can be taken away from reading about Abraham's interaction with the Hittites?

We live in a world where fewer and fewer people believe in the only true God, which can make developing faith challenging. It may even be that we face mockery or aggression because we respect God and His Word.

However, like Abraham, we should endeavour to *'live at peace with all men' (Romans 12:18)*. We should also respect the laws and customs of the place where we live, so long as they do



not conflict with God's word or our individual consciences.

Sometimes preaching the gospel does offend people such as the Pharisees in Jesus' day, as reported in Matthew 15:12). But Christ never taught that his followers should go out of their way to offend people, and some of his early followers were actually well-liked members of society:

*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:46–47).*

Abraham and Sarah were described as showing faith in God, aspiring to be in His kingdom more than wanting the benefits of this life. There is a good pattern to follow, one which leads to an important relationship with God. We read:

*God is not ashamed to be called their God (Hebrews 11:16).*

**Stephen Blake**

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