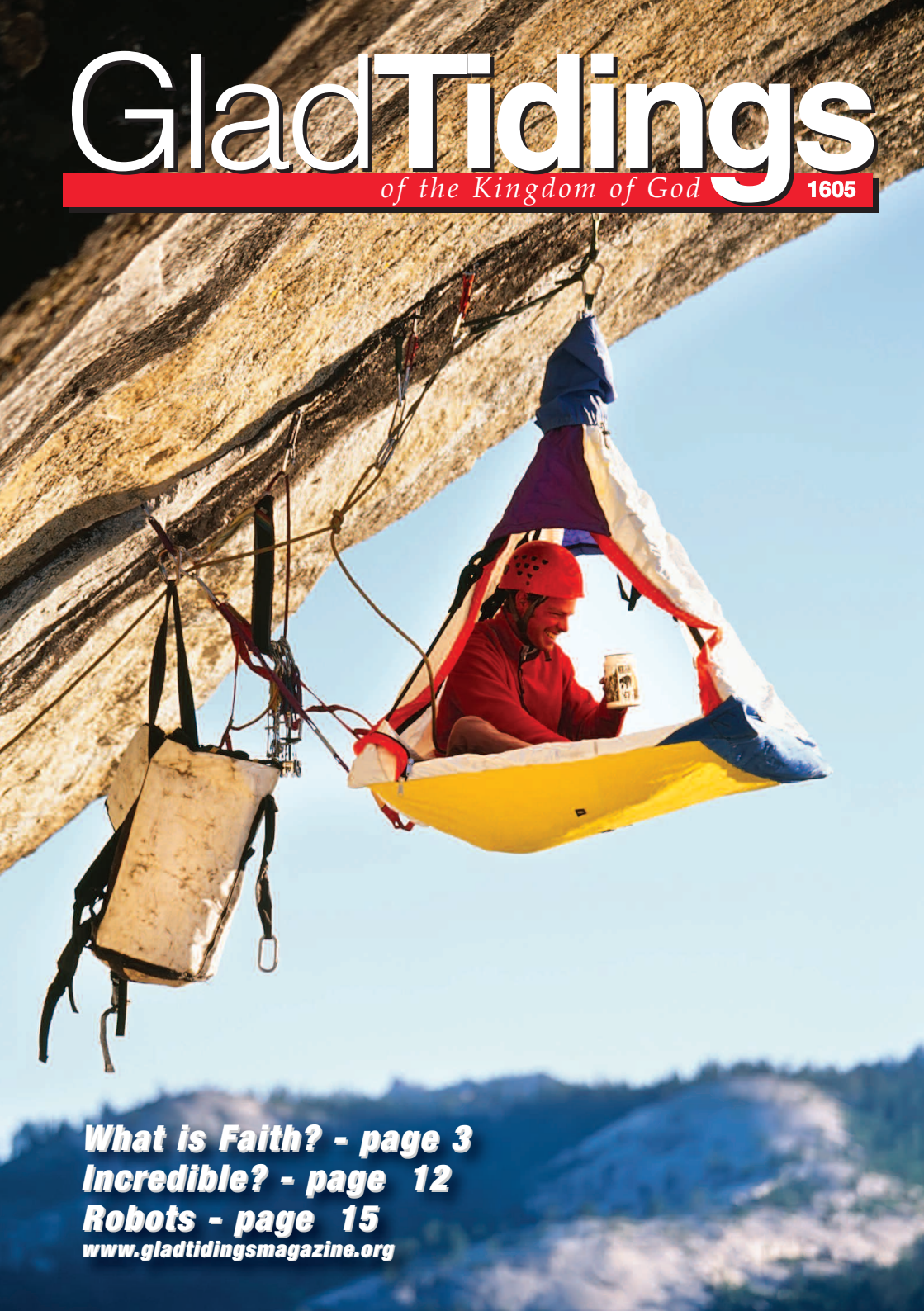


Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1605



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of the Kingdom of God

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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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What is Faith?

I have a friend who loves to climb. He is happiest hundreds of feet up in the air, with nothing but his skill and strength keeping him in place. One slip, one lapse of concentration, could bring a fall and terrible injury on the rocks below. What protects him? A rope, barely a centimetre thick.

He is of course not alone in this: the front cover picture shows how many climbers camp overnight, suspended by rope from the rock face. It is hard to imagine how one might sleep like this, but they do. And it is not a new phenomenon. I was fascinated with the stories around attempts to climb the north face of the Eiger, a mountain in



Switzerland. This was first achieved in 1938, and back then the climbers would tie themselves onto the rock face to sleep overnight. Apparently, they were so tired from their exertions that they would sleep soundly for several hours, despite the danger and the cold.

I once asked my friend how he could put his trust in such a flimsy lifeline. He answered that it was more than strong enough to hold the weight of several people, so why should he

worry? He has faith in the rope and is prepared to commit his life to it. I believe that the rope is as strong as its manufacturer claims, but would not trust it with my existence. That is the difference between faith and belief.

The Bible Definition

In *Glad Tidings*, we often refer to Hebrews 11 as the 'faith chapter', as it tells the stories of men and women of faith, and why they are counted as faithful. The start of that chapter gives us a definition of faith:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

So, faith is more than just belief. It is about substance and evidence – it is based in reality. Faith is something we can see. How can this be, given that it is not a thing that we can pick up or show in a picture?

The writer acknowledges this in one of the first examples used in this chapter:

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (v3).

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 describe the creation, carried out by the word and power of God. We cannot see God, or His power, or His word, but we can see the world in which we live. That is evidence for those things we cannot see.

Seeing the Invisible

The remainder of Hebrews 11 is dedicated to showing faith in action, helping us to 'see' what in practice is invisible. Faith is shown by people's response to it, and how they act upon it. It is shown by action:

For by it the elders obtained a good testimony (v2).

The first examples (in verses 4–7) are taken from the early chapters of Genesis. Abel was murdered by his brother, but had shown his faith in bringing the right sacrifice. Enoch pleased God in his life, showing faith. Noah prepared a huge boat, miles from the sea and in a world which had never seen rain. It is worth reading the stories in Genesis chapters 4–6 to experience the real drama in each case.

Each of these men believed God, trusted Him, and acted on that confidence, committing their lives to Him. This is faith. Seeing their actions, we witness their faith.

Vital to Please God

More importantly, we are told that God recognised their faith. He accepted them because of their faith and credited it to them as 'righteousness' or being acceptable to God. Another good example of this is Abraham, a key figure in Hebrews 11:

He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

In fact, faith is not just important, it is critical if we want to be part of God's purpose:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Committing to God

We all have the same opportunity to be part of God's plan. We can read our Bibles and understand what God wants to say to us. There is plenty of proof in the Bible that what it says is true, so we can believe it. Then we can commit ourselves to Him. Or we can choose not to.

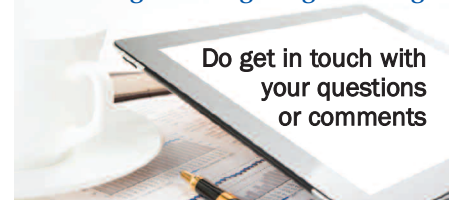
Think about the climber and the rope. I can believe the rope is strong enough, but that belief alone will never get me up the rock face. My friend trusts the rope, has faith in it, and so gets to stand on top of the mountain, drinking in the view and excited by his achievement.

Faith is putting what we know into action, showing evidence for what is in our hearts. A life of faith will be fulfilling now, but more importantly brings us into God's family and His plan.

He wants to place us in His kingdom, to show us the whole of His purpose fulfilled. Let's trust Him, put what we can read into action, and be part of the great things God has prepared for those who love Him.

Editor

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The God of the Bible - 2

How We Know About God

If we want proof that God exists, and if we want to find out more about Him, then the Bible is the key. It is the vital source of information about God. Without the Bible, it would just be guesswork and wishful thinking.

Inspiration

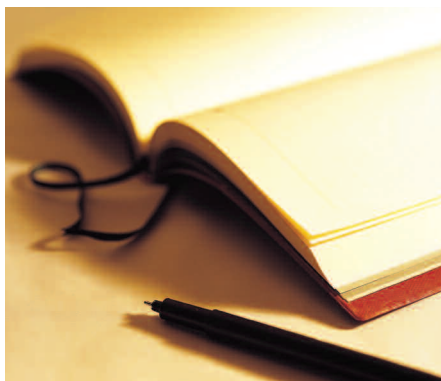
God has revealed His message to us in the Bible, and it took many centuries to complete.

He did this through people whom He chose to act as His messengers. There were over 40 writers – including kings and peasants, doctors and fishermen, princes and herdsmen, poets and labourers. If this work was man-made, then the result would have been a complete jumble of ideas and opinions. Instead, there are 66 books which give one consistent message. There is no contradiction, no disagreement.

‘Inspiration’ is how the Bible describes the process by which God caused people to speak and write what He wanted.

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

This is how Peter, Jesus’ disciple and another Bible writer, put it:



No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

We are given good reasons to believe the Bible to be the Word of God.

The Witness of Jesus

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, believed the words of the Old Testament. He quoted them extensively and referred to the characters and stories from its pages. After his resurrection, he showed himself to some of his disciples, as Luke records:

Then he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself... Then he said to them, “These

are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me." And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25–27, 44–45).

Jesus also promised that the power of God would be there for the New Testament writers:

When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak; and he will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13–14).

The Proof of Bible Prophecy

As we know, sometimes to our cost, human predictions cannot be trusted. Weather and stock market forecasts, even football transfer rumours often turn out to be wrong.

But God's predictions are different. The Bible contains many prophecies of the future which have all come true – or are coming true. As no human can foretell the future, these are proof of His existence and His power.

I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them (Isaiah 42:8–9).

The history of the nation of Israel, along with prophecies about Jesus, are just two examples of fulfilled prophecy.



Israel

Some 3,500 years ago, God said this to the people of Israel:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6).

What's more, He promised them the land that we now call Israel. This is because He made specific promises to Abraham about his descendants – the Jews.

I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you (Genesis 13:16–17).

To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates (Genesis 15:18).

But holding on to this land would depend on their behaviour towards

God. Despite His extraordinary patience with them, if they continued to be disobedient to Him, they would be punished:

The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life (Deuteronomy 28:64–66).

This came true and you can read all about it in history books. The Jews were scattered from their land, and have been persecuted almost everywhere they settled. Older readers may remember it happening in Europe, in the 1930s–40s.

But God also said He would limit their punishment:

“For I am with you,” says the LORD, “to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished” (Jeremiah 30:11).

In fulfilment of His words, Jews are back in that land and are a nation in their own right. But troubles continue for them and their neighbours. Here is a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled, but will be – perhaps very soon – because the solution to the problem of Jerusalem is seen as the key to world peace.

It shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zechariah 12:3).

Jesus Christ

By the time that Jesus was born, a huge amount of information about him had already been prophesied. Here are just a few examples.

- ❖ He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14)
- ❖ He would be devoted to obeying God (Psalm 40:7–10), which would lead to him being misunderstood by his family (Psalm 69:8–9)
- ❖ He would preach obedience to God (Isaiah 61:1–3)
- ❖ He would be betrayed by a close friend (Psalm 41:9); both Jews and foreigners would be involved in his death (Psalm 2:1–3)
- ❖ He would have a dreadful death (Psalm 22, with graphic details)
- ❖ He would be raised from the dead and go to God in heaven (Psalm 16:10–11)
- ❖ He is destined to rule the world (Psalm 2:4–12).

These are only some instances of how the Bible is proved to be God’s Word. If we choose to know more about God’s purpose, the Bible is the only place to find it. It’s here that we discover that it contains remarkable promises to us – not just about this life but also about the life to come.

Rod Hale

Samson – a Flawed Man of Faith

Samson is an unusual Bible character, who divides opinion on how to understand his behaviour. He is included in Hebrews 11, the chapter which lists many great men and women of faith. However, his story contains details which seem to contradict the view of Samson as a faithful man.

This paradox is actually true of many people who pleased God. We can gain great encouragement from Samson, seeing that despite our flaws, we too can inherit God's promises, as Samson surely will.

A Special Role

An angel was sent from God to tell Samson's parents about him before he was born.

For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Judges 13:5).

Being a Nazarite was being set apart to commit one's life to God. This would be central to Samson's spiritual successes and failures.

Interestingly, Samson was not to bring about a total deliverance from the hands of the Philistines but he was to begin that noble work, a work that continued under the leadership of Samuel the prophet (1 Samuel 7:3–14) and King David (2 Samuel 3:18). The victories of these great men were

only partly to do with their own endeavours. None of them could have achieved anything without God. Samson had to learn this lesson the hard way, but only after he had experienced notable victories.

As Samson grew up, *'...the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol (Judges 13:24–25).*

This power of God gave Samson extraordinary strength and he used it to start saving Israel and to kill many Philistines.

Controversy

These successes were brought about in highly unorthodox ways. For example, Samson looked for a Philistine wife, which would ordinarily be unacceptable for a Jew. However, on this occasion we read:

It was of the LORD—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel (Judges 14:4).

Perhaps this would allow him to infiltrate the enemy ranks, or perhaps it was to initiate the flashpoint which would come next.

On the way to meet this woman, Samson came across the vineyards of Timnah. It is surely significant that we read of a Nazarite encountering a vineyard, as he was prohibited from drinking wine or other alcohol, or

eating anything produced from grapes. Despite this enormous temptation, there is no evidence to suggest that he ate or drank anything prohibited.

The Sweet Riddle

However, Samson then confronted a lion, which ended up providing a temptation which was too strong to resist.

The spirit of God enabled Samson to kill the lion, using that miraculous strength. Bizarrely, honey could later be found in the carcass. As this sweet delight could only be obtained by touching a dead body, which was most definitely unclean for Israelites to touch (see Leviticus 11:27) it does seem that eating the honey was not a good thing for Samson to do. Perhaps this explains why, after sharing it with his parents, Samson *'did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion'* (Judges 14:9).

This encounter with the lion would have further significance in Samson's life as it provided the material for his famous riddle:

Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet (v14).

This passage raises many questions: What was the point of this interaction? Was humiliating the Philistines with a riddle part of the plan to save Israel? Perhaps this was an arrogant display which showed that Samson had become distracted from his mission.

Attacking the Philistines

Whatever one decides regarding the riddle, the spirit of God was still upon Samson. He was able to fulfil the wager he made about the riddle in



dramatically violent fashion. His opponents solved the riddle by threatening his wife, forcing her to make him tell her the answer. In response, Samson killed thirty Philistines and gave the thirty changes of clothes to them.

Following this minor victory over Israel's persecutors, Samson's Philistinian wife was given to his friend; understandably, he was furious. In an elaborate attack on the Philistines' economy, Samson's unorthodox behaviour continued:

Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves (Judges 15:4-5).

The Philistines blamed Samson's wife and her father for bringing about such a disaster and burned them alive. This provoked Samson even more, so that in revenge he *'attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter'* (v8).

Although Samson was killing many Philistines, it ultimately appeared to make the situation worse. In an act of cowardice, the Israelites handed their

champion over to their Philistine rulers (verses 12–15).

In characteristically paradoxical fashion, Samson used his God-given strength to complete an even more impressive victory, killing a thousand men with the fresh jawbone of a donkey. On the one hand, touching the jawbone was unclean for an Israelite to do (see Leviticus 11:26). On the other hand, what an extraordinary triumph God brought about by Samson! It echoes the words of Joshua:

One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He Who fights for you, as He promised you (Joshua 23:10).

After his victory celebration, Samson recognised that it was God who was responsible for his triumph:

You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant (Judges 15:18).

More Conflicting Actions

The contradictory actions of Samson continued:

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her (Judges 16:1).

However, the local people tried to take him prisoner, which led to him taking remarkable action:

Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron (v3).

This seems to be a partial fulfilment of one of the promises to Abraham: “*your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies*” (Genesis 22:17).

Samson’s next love was for another woman called Delilah. This was entirely disastrous and led to him being well and truly humbled.

Firstly, Delilah was willing to betray him in exchange for money. How could Samson love such a woman?

We all make foolish decisions in life and frequently fail to learn from our mistakes. Comfortingly, Samson – a man recorded in the faith chapter – was no different from us.

Yet again, a woman was to entice or entrap Samson, and again he gave in when he was pressed. By giving in to Delilah’s pleading, he revealed that, spiritually speaking, he was indeed as weak as any other man.

Really Weak

It was only after Samson’s hair was cut off that “*the LORD had departed from him*” (Judges 16:20).

This is very important to bear in mind. Even after the incident of the harlot and the other possible indiscretions described above, God was still with Samson until this failure.

We can take comfort from this. Like Samson, our actions can sometimes be inconsistent: on the same day we can perform acts of goodness and acts of wickedness, but God will still be with us, if we stay with Him.

His patience is not infinite however, and He will ‘depart from us’ if we stray too far from His ways, or deny His sovereign power and will, as Samson did in allowing his hair to be cut.

It would appear that Samson struggled with temptation when he saw it,



take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" (v28).

God heard his prayer:

Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life (v30).

Like Jesus?

as most men and women do. It was therefore an appropriate punishment that his eyes were gouged out and he was brought to Gaza, the very place where he saw the harlot.

The Philistines were jubilant with his capture, describing Samson as *"the destroyer of our land, and the one who multiplied our dead"* (Judges 16:24).

Such a description means that Samson's victories were significant successes in the life of this unorthodox leader.

Samson's confidence in his own strength to resist temptation and so to win battles against the Philistines was his downfall. Being forced to be a grinder in a Philistine prison was what was required to humble him and for him to remember that it was God who had been the source of his strength. The time in prison also allowed his hair to grow again (Judges 16:22), the outward sign of his dedication to God.

The Philistines then brought Samson out of prison to mock him in their temple of idol worship:

Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow

This final victorious act of self-sacrifice is where Samson can justifiably be seen as a parallel to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus did many wonderful works in his life but it was his sacrificial death which achieved the greatest victory: the conquest of sin and death. In the same way, Samson killed great numbers of the Philistines in his life, but far more in his death.

We can identify with Samson's experience of serving God. Sometimes we can be inconsistent; sometimes we can give in to our selfish desires; from time to time we can forget that it is God who is the source of all strength.

When this happens, let us remember that we can return to our God in humble prayer and be forgiven, as Samson was. God has a plan for us, and He will not leave us, if we do not leave Him:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

Stephen Blake

Incredible?

People react in different ways to the challenge of Bible truths. Some may mock them; others may find them interesting but avoid giving them serious thought. Those who give them genuine consideration will sooner or later find them a compelling reality.

In the first century, the Apostle Paul spoke publicly in Athens, debating with the philosophers there. He talked about the certainty of a moral reckoning at the end of the world, and about resurrection; the mix of responses was as we might expect:

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed (Acts 17:32–34).

Paul was not put off by this, and the resurrection continued to be at the heart of his message. He would continue passionately preaching the glorious message of the gospel (the good news, or glad tidings) summarized like this:

The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).

In fact, he challenged the highest authorities in the land when he was on trial for his life. He asked:

Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? (Acts 26:8).

It was King Agrippa who heard that question, and heard Paul confirm the

truth that Jesus Christ had indeed been raised from the dead (v23). It shook him to his very core, and he confessed:

You almost persuade me to become a Christian (v28).

A Cornerstone of Christianity

Christianity is not a man-made collection of fables, but God's message to mankind, proven by history and experience.

One of its foundations is life after death by resurrection from the grave; this is the true Christian hope of everlasting life in the kingdom of God – on this earth. And it will happen only when the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to the earth to establish that kingdom.

Paul emphasizes this in his First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, which is full of evidence and explanation of resurrection.

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 (v20–22).

In fact, Paul makes a challenging statement which leaves us in no doubt as to the importance and truth of this teaching:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching

is empty and your faith is also empty (v13–14).

If there were no resurrection, then faith would be pointless, worthless and all who have put their trust in God would have made a huge mistake. His Son, Jesus, lived an absolutely perfect life. Could it be that after he was crucified, died and was buried, that was all?

A Hard Reality

All his life, Jesus trusted that his Father would not leave him in the grave to corrupt, as promised in the Psalms:

For You will not leave my soul in Sheol [the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10).



We may marvel how Christ's mother kept her hands off the soldiers as one of them pierced her son's side with a spear as he hung on the cross (see John 19:34). It seems almost incredible that God, Jesus' Father, watching the tragedy on Golgotha should have done nothing. But we read that *"these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled"* (v36).

And on the third day, Jesus Christ did rise from the dead. His faith in God was justified, vindicated, proven true by the remarkable fact.

The Defeat of Sin

If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, then as Paul writes, there would be another terrible consequence:

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Without his resurrection, then Bible teaching about forgiveness would all amount to mere mockery. The prophet Isaiah spoke about resurrection and forgiveness and put it like this:

You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back (Isaiah 38:17).

If the cross had been the end, Christ's brave attempt to be a Saviour would have failed. Then his opponents, selfish, wicked, sinful people, would have had the last word after all. Not only this, we would all be left subject to sin and death, without hope of reconciliation to God or a place in His kingdom.

But Jesus Christ did rise from the dead, sin is defeated, and we have everything to live and hope for in him, *"who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification"* (Romans. 4:25).

The Defeat of Death

The last consequence which Paul suggests, if Jesus had not risen from the dead is that after death we would have had no hope:

Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (1 Corinthians 15:18).

In other words, if Jesus never rose from the dead, why should they? If the one perfect life that has ever appeared on earth failed to overcome sin and death, how could anyone else? If that was the case, then they would have perished, died permanently, without hope for the future.

But as we have seen, Jesus was raised, and he was raised to an eternal life of power. This means we can have confidence in life after death for his followers:

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9).

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

The Triumph

So, with Paul, we have looked at the grim prospects and consequences if Christ had not been raised from the dead.

We also saw the apostle's burst of triumph: *Now Christ is risen from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20).*

How did Paul know? We have the answer in verses 5–8 of this chapter. Paul had spoken to many of the people who had met Jesus after his resurrection: Peter (Cephas), the twelve apostles, over 500 people at once, and James. Finally, Paul himself had met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Paul was inviting his readers to do the same, to meet and talk to these eyewitnesses and hear the proof for themselves. We are 2000 years too



late to do this ourselves of course. However, what we do know is that these witnesses were not disproved. Rather they gave faith to those who spoke to them, and despite terrible torture and death, they refused to deny what they knew to be true. We can share Paul's confidence. Jesus rose victorious over death:

I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen (Revelation 1:18).

The living Christ now sits at the right hand of God, waiting to return to earth to raise and judge the dead, and grant immortality to the faithful. He is God's evidence that death is not necessarily the end. His resurrection is also God's guarantee that He will carry this out:

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

Through baptism into Jesus' saving name we access the promise of resurrection and immortal life, a promise and a life which nothing can ultimately destroy. We can have a permanent personal relationship with him who said:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live (John 11:25).

Claud Lamb

Robots

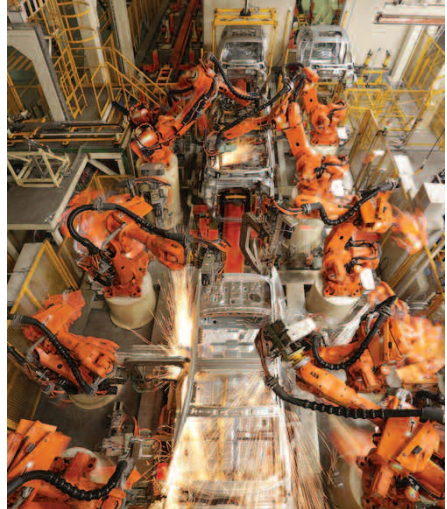
After the loud bang, Arthur opened his eyes, relieved that he was still alive. The crash had happened suddenly and unexpectedly. In a state of shock he climbed out of his car, which looked like a write-off, and staggered across to the other car. He was ready to give the driver a piece of his mind.

However, Arthur was concerned when he could not see the driver, fearing that he could be severely injured. Then the truth dawned on him: there was no driver. Arthur had heard that driverless cars were being tested in several countries, but it was his first encounter with one. Questions had always been asked about their safety. For example, who would be responsible if they were involved in a serious or even fatal road traffic accident?



Robots and Responsibility

Debates about robotics and devices with artificial intelligence have raged for years, as the issues are complex. It is undeniable that, for a number of purposes, such systems are safer, more productive, more efficient and more precise than human beings. Good examples of this are the han-



dling and disposal of dangerous nuclear waste, where radiation levels are far too high for humans; the meticulous interpretation of X-Rays and scans; and precise keyhole surgery.

The engineers who design these systems include experts in hazard analysis, and they try to cover every eventuality. In some cases this involves systems being programmed to improve or 'learn' - to modify their behaviour based on their 'experience'.

Important questions need to be addressed about where blame falls when such automated systems fail, either through sabotage or mistake. Some people argue that the systems should be transparent; in other words that their line of reasoning should be clear. Others say that a named human being should always take responsibility for a system's decision. Another approach would be for a black box data recorder (as in an aeroplane) to

enable experts to analyse accidents, identify the likely causes and then remedy them.

Our Freedom of Choice

We are not robots. The Bible says that God, our supreme designer, allows us to make our own choices in life, whether good or bad. Using our intelligence and power of reasoning we have more choices than are available to a robot. Some decisions are just a matter of personal preference with no serious consequences. But we can also, either deliberately or by mistake, make decisions that are harmful. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's specific commandment in the Garden of Eden, the results were disastrous for the human race.



In any situation, our actual choices may be influenced by our genetic make-up and by our personal circumstances. Nonetheless we are not pre-programmed or controlled by an external console. Nor are we left to our own devices. God has given us divine guidance in the Bible, telling us what is right and what is wrong.

Consequently, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that we are responsible for our own actions:

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:20).

While sometimes we can claim that we did not really mean to do something, we cannot claim to have been 'sabotaged' by any external force:

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 (James 1:13-14).

In some circumstances, we are not even innocent of the failings of other people, because we should be a good influence.

If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand... Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul (Ezekiel 33:6, 9).

How to Choose?

We have some control over the company we keep and the environ-



ments in which we operate. We must choose the right sort of friends, as ungodly influences will encourage us to have bad habits:

Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Unlike robots, there can be no doubt about who is responsible for what we do. However, like robots, we cannot always give an honest explanation of our reasons or motives.

If we are truthful with ourselves we know that we are not always able to explain why we have done or not done certain things. So we can fool ourselves, and we can fool other people, especially after the event – we can be very devious!

But we do not need a black box recorder because we can never fool God. He always understands our motives and thoughts. So, He does not need our explanations – we are totally transparent to Him. In fact, we cannot even argue with Him, or justify ourselves to Him, as the man Job found out – see how in Job 38:1-4 and 40:2. Furthermore, we can never, ever blame Him (or His design of us) for our own failings: we are wholly responsible for ourselves.

God has told us the cause of our bad ways, and also how to be saved from destruction by accepting His offer of eternal life. The good news is that

despite our failings, He is willing to forgive us and welcome us into His kingdom.

Learn From God

Arthur is still not sure whether he, the driverless car, or some other factor was responsible for the accident: lawyers are still arguing.

However, when deciding who is accounted worthy of eternal life, God will have no dilemmas of judgement – He knows everything. It is therefore vital that we use our God-given reasoning abilities to learn what He wants of us and to do the best we can to obey Him, avoiding influences that could lead us astray.

We are not robots. We make our own choices and we alone are responsible for our actions and hence for our eternal destiny.

Anna Hart



War and Peace

The human race has had thousands of years to establish peace on the earth, but look at the state of affairs. In the last hundred years, over one hundred million people have died in war.



Frightful weapons have replaced the rifle and shell, which were terrible enough. Death can be delivered over vast distances, and with great accuracy. Weaponry exists that can eliminate 250,000 people in a vast fireball, in a matter of seconds. We see too the number of wars in Africa, in the Middle East and elsewhere, where brother kills brother and millions are homeless. It is frightening.

I have just been reading Joel and there is a verse that rivets the attention. It looks at the time just before Jesus returns to set up God's kingdom on earth, and it states:

I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke (Joel 2:30).

I wonder if this is a description of the effects of modern warfare. Certainly, Daniel warned us of frightening times

just before the Kingdom of God is established:

There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time (Daniel 12:1).

Preparation

This is not meant to worry us but to prepare us. When we see these things happening, we can be sure that the Lord Jesus is preparing for his return. What a glad day that will be!

Whatever fearful events may take place the Lord Jesus calls on his followers to stand firm for their faith. In that grand Sermon on the Mount, he told us how to live, how to prepare:

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

In a world where many think only of themselves, he shows that pride is an enemy of true Christianity.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (v7).

Being merciful is important on a personal level, behaving in a forgiving, gentle way to those around us. At a national and global level, it is sadly lacking, one of the root causes of war and atrocities.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (v9).

Peacemakers are few and far between in our world. Jesus teaches

us that it is a vital character trait in his followers. We have peace with God, so should be constructive not destructive.

Just before he faced the horror of man's cruelty in his torture and death, Jesus gave us a powerful example of this type of attitude when he said:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

Better Times Coming!

At Jesus' return, there will be peace and harmony for those who have loved him. That is when the world's wars will be replaced by perfect peace. What a vision!

How then could a Christian press a button and wipe out a whole city? Or spray gas over little children? There is so much confusion among the nations that statesmen do not know which way to turn. Efforts to find peace fail or are sabotaged. Jesus said this about the time before he comes back:

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 the heavens 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).

It is an invigorating call to all who follow the Lord Jesus. Don't be despondent, don't give up, be ready!



The awful problems of the world are signposts that the Kingdom of God is coming.

The prophet Isaiah had much to say about the Kingdom. He wrote about the work of Jesus in establishing peace and doing away with the weapons of war:

He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Isaiah 2:4).

Describing the rule of the Prince of Peace, Isaiah said:

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. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:7).

Isn't it exciting to think on what God has prepared for those who love Him? No human can promise that but God will fulfil it, and soon!

Ken Clark

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