

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

All the Same? (p. 3)

God's Plan for the Future (p. 5)

Numbers (p. 9)

A monthly magazine written and 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.

Table Of Contents

All the Same?



3

God’s Plan for the Future



5

Numbers



9

A Parable of the Father’s Love



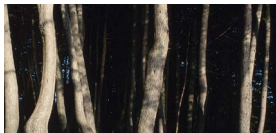
11

Elijah: Drought



14

The Spirit is Willing but the Flesh is Weak



17

Glad Tidings Distributors for orders and payments

United Kingdom

Fiona Oram, 24 Windermere Avenue,
Ashby de la Zouch, Leics. LE65 1FA, UK
Tel: +44 (0)7521 079 190 (24 hrs)
fiona@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Australia

Ruth Morgan, 51 Jesmond Road,
Croydon, VIC 3136, Australia
gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada

Vivian Thorp, 5377 Birdcage Walk,
Burlington, ON L7L 3K5, Canada
vivianthorp@bell.net

New Zealand

Neil Todd, 14 Morpeth Place, Blockhouse
Bay, Auckland 7, New Zealand
thetodds@xtra.co.nz

U.S.A.

Pat Hemingray, 1244 Pennsylvania
Avenue, Oakmont, PA 15139, USA

Other Countries

Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive,
Hollywood, Birmingham B47 5RJ,
United Kingdom
andrew@gladtidings.me.uk

Editor

Andrew Hale, 52 Mardale Crescent,
Lymm WA13 9PJ, United Kingdom
editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Publisher

The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity – Number 248352

All the Same?

AS we sat enjoying the sunshine, my colleague and I started an unexpected conversation. Rather than discussing the company's performance, or plan for the coming quarter-year, he opened with a question. "So tell me about your faith."

I started to do so, but stopped. He is an atheist. Why does he care about my faith? "Where is this coming from?" I asked, "What do you really want to know?"

"I want to understand why you think your belief is different, why you believe what you do. As far as I can tell, all religions are the same. You have blind faith in a higher power and going to a better place after death."

His observation wasn't accurate, of course, but it is a commonly held view. Are all faiths the same?

Authority

The starting point for any belief system should be its authority. Who established it and how do we know we can trust them?

If we believe the Bible, then we are accepting the authority of Almighty God. He declares that He created the universe, and that He has a plan for the earth and mankind upon it.

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).

He also states here that He is the only God, there is no other authority. This is just one of many similar statements which we can find throughout the Bible, and it shows clearly the power behind a Bible-based faith.

The Apostle Paul made a similar statement to Timothy, a younger believer:

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).

Evidence

However, a sensible approach to considering faith will look for reasons to believe the assertions made in the Bible. Put simply, can we trust it?

The short answer is 'yes', and here are a few reasons to believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

◆ **Prophecy:** The Bible contains many hundreds of prophecies about the future. Almost all of them have come true, and the remainder clearly point to events still in the future. These prophecies are very specific, sometimes giving actual time periods in years.

Those still future are detailed and are part of an unfolding plan, so we can see how they relate to each other. Men and women cannot tell the future, so the Bible must have been inspired by God.

◆ **Internal consistency:** The Bible was written over a period of about 1600 years, by more than 40 different people, ranging from kings and priests to tax collectors and shepherds. It was penned in places as far apart as Babylon, Jerusalem and Rome, in three different languages. Despite this, it is one harmonious whole, with a single message throughout its pages. Only God could have had such a book written.

◆ **Ahead of its time:** The Bible talks about public health safeguards such as washing hands and quarantine, thousands of years before humans had identified them. It also describes the earth as a globe and details the water cycle, long before contemporary science had done so. Again, only God could be the true author.

There are many other examples, and *Glad Tidings* looks at all of them from time to time.

The Bible is the Word of God and we can trust it. Its consistency in the past gives us confidence for the future it lays out. This makes a Bible-based faith different from any other.

Only One Way

Jesus Christ made it very clear that there is only one way to God, and that he is it:

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

He explained to his followers that many would fail to find the way to eternal life:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13–14).

The Bible promise is life forever in the Kingdom of God – a main theme in *Glad Tidings*. Here is one description of that future time:

I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, 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).

Faith in God as explained in the Bible is like no other. It is one based on evidence, built on a true authority and with a confident hope for the future.

Please visit our website for a video on this subject - and more!

www.gladtidingsmagazine.org

God's Plan for the Future

GOD saves us from sin by offering us the forgiveness of our sins through His Son, Jesus Christ. But is that it? We're still going to die. So how does He propose to save us from death – and is that even possible?

This question is answered very clearly in the Bible. For, as one of God's writers (the Apostle Paul) put it:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Resurrection from the Dead

Paul went on to answer his own question as follows:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming (v20–23).

God does not say that His faithful followers will not die. Nor does the Bible say that any of us has an immortal soul that enables us to continue living straight after we die.



Death is the sentence for sin that we all serve, not the immediate gateway to a better existence.

In Bible language, those who have never heard or have refused to accept the gospel are said to 'perish'. God's people do not 'perish', but 'sleep' – in other words, they will 'wake' from death. It was the same with Jesus: his death was a 'sleep', because God brought him back to life.

In the passage above Jesus is described as the 'firstfruits' of a harvest. So God promises that, when Jesus returns to the earth, one of the first things he will do will be to raise from the dead those who have known the good news of the Kingdom of God.

The Judgment Seat

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

In many places the Bible explains that those who have been raised from the dead will then be judged. The quotation above is from the Old Testament, and it is Paul who wrote in the New Testament about:

...the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16).

Those 'who sleep in the dust of the earth' and are raised from the dead will appear before Jesus Christ. Some will return to the grave and to 'shame and everlasting contempt' because of their unfaithfulness. But others will be given everlasting life, to live forever on this earth in the Kingdom of God, where conditions will be nothing like those that prevail now.

The Kingdom of God

God's long-term plan is to set up His world-wide Kingdom on the earth:

In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44).

This was predicted in the Old Testament by many of God's prophets.



Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3).

He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice... He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations... In his days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:2-8).

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. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him (Isaiah 45:22–24).

From just these few examples, and there are many more, we learn several important things about God's Kingdom:

- ◆ It will be a world-wide empire on earth
- ◆ Its capital will be Jerusalem
- ◆ It will last for ever
- ◆ Righteousness and peace will flourish
- ◆ It hasn't happened yet.

The Teaching of Jesus

In the famous 'Lord's Prayer', Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the establishment of this Kingdom.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9–10).

In those few words Jesus made four things clear:

- ◆ He believed the Old Testament teaching about the Kingdom of God

- ◆ This Kingdom will involve total obedience to God's will
- ◆ It will be on the earth
- ◆ It was still to come, when he spoke.

Just before he rose to heaven before their very eyes, his followers asked him,

Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6).

When these same disciples went out to preach, they spoke about the resurrection



of Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Philip, who was one of the apostles:

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

Indeed, this is the big theme that runs throughout the Bible. The Old Testament gives us a detailed picture of what this Kingdom will be like. The New Testament stresses the characteristics of those who will be selected by Jesus Christ at his return, to receive immortality and rule the earth under his overall control.

The Return of Jesus as King

Years before Jesus was born, God gave a prophecy to King David of Israel about the eventual role of Jesus.

I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him... And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever (1 Chronicles 17:12–14).

The angel Gabriel confirmed this when he spoke to Mary, the mother of Jesus:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32–33).

Jesus knew all about his future role:

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

Jesus is not yet ruling on David's throne. He is in heaven with his Father. When he ascended to heaven, a group of his disciples saw him go and angels gave them this message:

While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10–11).

However, perhaps disappointed that Christ had not returned, the established church lost sight of the Bible teaching about a world-wide Kingdom ruled from Jerusalem. Instead they developed the view that the Kingdom of God is in heaven and that the deceased go there when they die.

It is vital to try to follow Bible teaching as closely as possible, and the original gospel is that Jesus is to return to the earth, so the Kingdom must still be in the future. One day Jesus Christ will rule over Israel – and, from there, over the entire world. This will fulfil the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah as Saviour and King.

Simply to accept Jesus as our personal Saviour is to understand only part of God's work through His Son. God gave him the name 'Jesus', which means 'God saves'. But He also gave him the title 'Christ' – meaning 'anointed one', the same as 'Messiah'. So, one day Jesus WILL be King!

Rod Hale

Numbers

THE Book of Numbers recounts incidents in the wilderness, following Israel's faithless failure, which prevented them from entering the Promised Land.

It is called 'Numbers' because it records two 'numberings' of the Israelites:

1. At Sinai – 1:1–3 – the population who left Egypt to begin the journey to the Promised Land
2. Near to Canaan – chapter 26 – the population who would enter the land.

Forty long years

The twelve spies sent to reconnoitre in the Promised Land (chapter 13) reported that the Canaanite cities were highly fortified and their armies powerful. Presented with this news, Israel lost faith in God's promise to give them the Land.

So for another thirty-eight years they had to wander in the wilderness. Their journeys, especially during the final years, are related in chapters 21–36. All the generation which left Egypt (from twenty years old and upwards) died in the wilderness, except some of the faithful Levites, and Joshua and Caleb – the only two spies who showed faith in God.

Norman Owen

By kind permission of 'The Christadelphian'

Numbers according to tribe (ch. 1) (Men over 20 and excluding Levi)

Reuben	46,500	Ephraim	40,500
Simeon	59,300	Manasseh	32,200
Gad	45,650	Benjamin	35,400
Judah	74,600	Dan	62,700
Issachar	54,500	Asher	41,500
Zebulun	57,400	Naphthali	53,400
Total: 603,550			

Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

Numbers 14:21 – see Isaiah 11:9;
Habakkuk 2:14.

Numbers 21:8, 9 – see John 3:14,
15; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

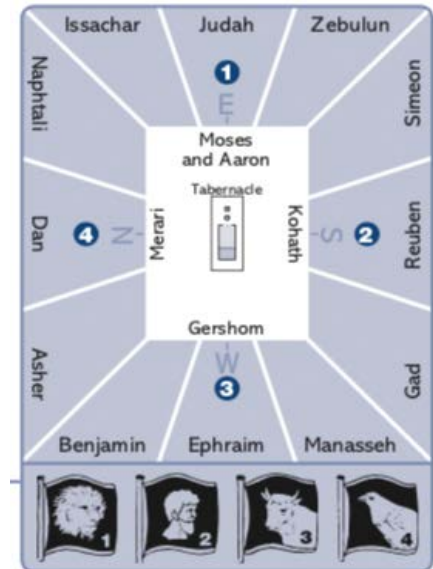
Numbers 24:17 – see Genesis
49:10; Psalm 110:2.



Chapter Summary of Numbers

First census	Chapter 1	
The camp	Chapter 2	
Levites	Chapter 4	
Nazarites	Chapter 6	
Princes	Chapter 8	
Order of marching	Chapter 10	
LACK OF FAITH	Failures at Taberah	Chapter 11
	Miriam's revolt	Chapter 12
	Spies' report	Chapter 13
	Korah's revolt	Chapter 16
	Water from the rock	Chapter 20
	Fiery serpents	Chapter 21
Balaam's prophecy	Chapters 22–24	
Second census	Chapter 26	
Various laws and feasts	Chapters 28–30	
List of journeys	Chapters 33–34	

This graphic shows how the twelve tribes were organised into four groups of three, each with a 'standard'. They camped around the Tabernacle and the priests who worked in it, during the wilderness journeys. This is described in Numbers chapter 2.



A Parable of the Father's Love

HOW do you get the attention of a room full of teenagers, especially when all you want to do is engage them with the Bible? I sat squashed in a corner with a close friend, wondering what was going to happen to quell the near riot going on. Through the legs of the milling bodies I had caught sight of something rather unusual – a large piece of tree trunk sitting in the middle of the floor. Right now someone was sitting on it.



There was a sudden shout and the crowd around the door began to back away from that area. As they did so, others ceased their jostling and fairly quickly found seats, until the floor was cleared. In the large space there stood another of my friends; he was beginning to swing a large wood cutter's axe. The axe reached the height of its swing and was brought down with a huge noise. Crash! The axe head was buried in the top of the now vacant tree trunk. There was absolute silence and my friend began his story.

“What have this tree trunk and the axe got to do with a parable in the Bible? The one about two sons, one of whom wanted his

inheritance early? Perhaps we should read it.” He took a rather well used Bible out of his pocket.

A Bible Story

“It's found in the Gospel of Luke chapter 15.” He read aloud the story Jesus told, about a young man who asked for his inheritance and went off to ‘live it up’ in a country far away from his father, the farm and his family. Soon the money was all spent and the young man began to be in need, all of his ‘good life friends’ were gone and there was a famine. He ended up feeding pigs, and eating worse than they did. His life was a disaster.

“I was better off at home,” he thought, “but will they take me back?” Hungry as he was he started the journey home.

What he didn’t know was that, day after day, his father had been watching for his son to return, looking down the road just to see if the young man was coming. Happily on this one day, as the father gazed along the road, there was the distant figure of his long-lost son trudging wearily along. The father ran down the road to greet his son, threw his arms around him and welcomed him back home. There was feasting and a generally good feeling around the family home – the lost son had returned. Life could begin again. The father was happy.

A Worrying Experience

“We still have the question, what has this to do with a hunk of wood and a great axe?” My friend continued his story, which he told as follows.

I had been doing some preaching work in a northern Scottish town, not far from which was a forester’s camp. The camp was a rough place where all sorts of men gathered looking for casual work, and possibly a hiding place. They were running away from the law, family breakdown, debt and all manner of personal disaster. It wasn’t the kind of place where we would be doing any preaching work!

As I drove my car to my peaceful accommodation, it was very late. I drove down a hill into the deserted town and as a set of traffic lights changed to red, I pulled



up. Before I knew what was happening, the doors of the car were suddenly flung open and three burly guys got into the back of the car and slammed the rear doors behind them.

“Tek us home, will ye!” came a slurred, drunken request. There was nothing for it. I would have to drive them out to the camp. I was sure that was where they lived. “And what are you doing in these parts?” one asked.

“I am doing some Bible missionary work,” I replied.

“You can’t be serious!” Raucous laughter flowed from the back seats. As the laughter subsided, one said, “Read us something from the Bible.”

“I’ll have to pull over, if you want me to read.” I said. ‘But what should it be?’ I was desperately thinking to myself, really uncomfortable with the whole situation and not wanting to let anyone ridicule the Bible.

In a convenient layby I stopped the car and reached for my old Bible – this one I just

read from. What should I read? As I pulled my Bible from the shelf, I dropped it on the floor and it flopped open. As I picked it up, I saw that it had opened at one of my favourite passages – Luke 15, the parable about the father’s love. I decided to read it, as I had no better idea, and it certainly is a story that most can understand. The men of course were still sniggering a bit, half whispering amongst themselves,

“He doesn’t know what to read.” “Oh! Give the man a chance.”

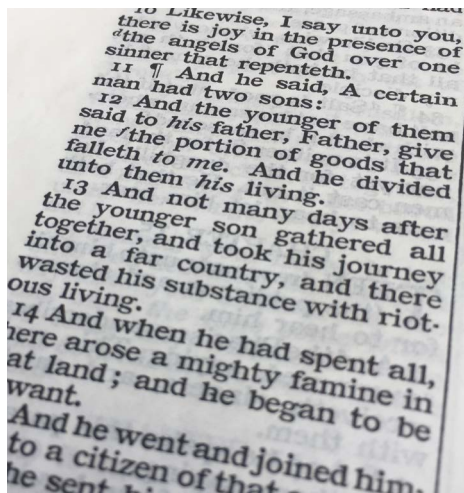
“A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me...”

Impact!

It went very quiet as I read and the story unfolded. At the end of the story, a kind of hush settled into the car. For what seemed like ages, no one spoke, until one man nudged my shoulder and said again, “Tek us hame.”

The rest of the journey was completed in silence, and nothing was said as they tumbled out of the car in a forest clearing outside their cabins. I drove away wondering whatever had happened to three roaring drunks because of reading that simple parable.

Later in the week I happened to spot two of the men in the town, looking reasonably sober. I thought to myself, ‘I won’t ignore you, I want to know if you have any memory of the other night.’ Sure enough they knew me all right and passed a few pleasantries.



Eventually I asked, “And where is your friend?”

“Oh,” they said almost in unison, “He’s gone back home.”

For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found (Luke 15:24).

David Nightingale



Drought

DROUGHT and famine were a constant problem in Israel, going back to the time of Abram; it happened not long after he had moved into the land.

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land (Genesis 12:10).



It happened again in the time of Abraham's son, Isaac. In the time of his grandson Jacob (also known as Israel) there was a major famine, when seven years of plenty were followed by seven years of famine. It was this which caused Jacob to send his sons to Egypt to seek for food, and which resulted in them staying in Egypt for some 400 years.

The sons of Israel went to buy grain among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan (Genesis 42:5).

Later, during the time of the Judges, it was famine which caused a man called Elimelech to go to Moab.

Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah,

went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons (Ruth 1:1).

It was a sad story at first. Elimelech and his two sons all died in Moab. However, one of the sons was married to a Moabite girl called Ruth. Once the famine was over, she returned with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Bethlehem.

Ruth later married a man called Boaz, and became part of the ancestry of the Lord Jesus. The hand of God can be clearly seen at work here.

A Warning

It was a principle which the Lord God set out as instruction for His people of Israel, right from the time of Moses.

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:... The LORD will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish (Deuteronomy 28:15, 22).

If Israel did not do as the Lord God wished, then punishment by drought and famine were to be part of what they should expect. It is not surprising then to find that in the time of Ahab the Lord God saw fit to enforce this warning. Ahab worshipped false gods and led Israel in doing the same, with particular influence from his wicked wife, Jezebel. God wanted to tell Ahab that his wrongdoing would be punished, bringing problems for the whole nation.

Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1).

This was slightly different from what had happened previously, when God had either specified the length of the famine, or had sent a famine without specifying when it would end. Now the length of famine appeared to be in the control of Elijah.

Enter Elijah

The announcement of famine introduced the enigmatic prophet Elijah. We are told

very little about him, except that he was from Tishbe, in Gilead. A footnote in the English Standard Version of the Bible suggests that 'of Tishbe' could be rendered as 'of the settlers'. There is no consensus about where Tishbe was, and we know little else about Elijah's background.

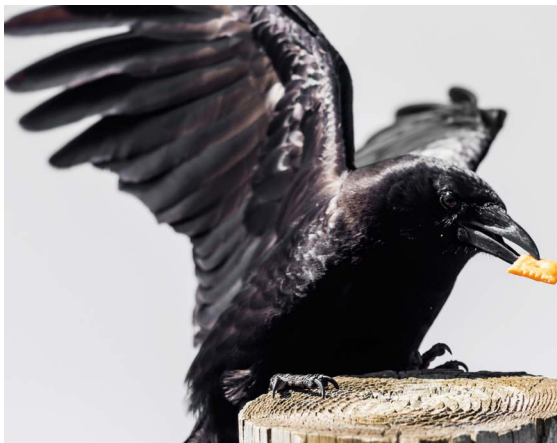
We are not told of his parents, whether he was ever married, or had children. It seems that he lived a very solitary life, appearing when there was work for him to do, and disappearing just as suddenly. The one feature of his life which we are told is his manner of dress, though this comes much later:

Then he said to them, "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?" So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite" (2 Kings 1:7-8).

He was easily identified by what he wore, a man with an austere demeanour and distinctive clothing. Later, in the time of the Lord Jesus, John the Baptist seems to have adopted a similar style.

The Bible record does not specify where Elijah appeared and spoke to Ahab, but it is likely that Ahab was in the vicinity of his palace in Samaria at the time. Once he had delivered his uncompromising message, Elijah departed. A man like Ahab would hardly welcome such a message, and might react violently. A woman like Jezebel would be equally dangerous, though it is not said whether she was present or not.

Having delivered the message from God, Elijah was instructed by Him to depart, travelling eastward to the brook Cherith, which flows into the River Jordan on its eastern bank. Elijah was told:



twice a day the ravens brought him 'bread and meat', sufficient to sustain him.

We are not told where the ravens obtained the food, but each day it came. It would have been a test of Elijah's faith. Would he

You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there (1 Kings 17:4).

Living By the Brook

This would pose a problem for Elijah. Drinking water from the brook would be fine, but the raven was an unclean bird under the Law of Moses. It was quite specific.

And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard... every raven after its kind (Leviticus 11:13, 15).

Elijah, being a godly man, and therefore determined to keep the law, would not wish to eat anything which was either unclean itself, or unclean because it had been in contact with an unclean animal. However the Lord God was quite specific, Elijah was to receive his food from the ravens, and he seems to have accepted that, and

wonder whether the ravens would arrive for his next meal? Or might they miss just this one time? It is a powerful illustration of the truth of the Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Elijah did not even have a whole day's food at one time, but the Lord God sent it to him meal by meal, morning and evening, and it did not fail.

It was only when the water from the brook dried up, that Elijah had to move on. The record does not say how long that took. Fed by the dew and rain, the smaller brooks would not last that long under drought conditions. But the Cherith had provided a safe haven for Elijah, and he was not found, in spite of Ahab's diligent searching. God protected His prophet. It was eventually time to move on, and Elijah was sent north-west, into Sidon, to be safe for another period.

Mark Sheppard

The Spirit is Willing but the Flesh is Weak

ONE of the most spiritually and emotionally distressing times for the Lord Jesus Christ was in the garden of Gethsemane. Immediately before his arrest and crucifixion, it was a time of fervent prayer for the Son of God, an example which he wanted to see his disciples practising too.

However, Jesus found his disciples were sleeping during this time of excruciating trial. The explanation of such behaviour was captured poignantly by Christ:

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41).

This profound statement is very helpful for us to consider. It explains why we can so readily relate to the disciples' experience of weakness; failing often to do the right things despite truly desiring to be spiritual.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he began to be sorrowful and



deeply distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me" (Matthew 26:36–38).

Here the narrative emphasises to us how deeply distressed Jesus was, which is then underlined by his emotional statement that he was 'exceedingly sorrowful, even to death'. Such a time of extreme sorrow for the Master surely would have made it more likely to bring out the spiritual qualities in his disciples; surely they could have kept his request to keep watch with him?

He went a little farther and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not

as I will, but as You will.” Then he came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, “What? Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:39–41).

A Sobering Example

The disciples did not even manage to watch with their Lord for one hour. A part of us may find it tempting to judge them for their shortcomings, but a moment’s reflection will tell us that we also would have fallen asleep. For we are all weak at times when we should be strong; doing the right thing can seem just too hard.

Remarkably, even in his time of trial, Jesus’ concern was for his disciples’ spiritual well-being and he again instructed them to ‘keep watching and praying’. This was to help them avoid temptation, and surely the same principle applies to us if we are trying to follow Jesus. The best way to combat temptation is through prayer to God. We will frequently be tempted to do the wrong things however, because of our humanity. As Jesus taught, ‘the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak’.

Spiritual Lessons

To help us understand better what Jesus meant, we can look to other parts of the Bible, particularly to the letter to the Romans, which provides a helpful commentary on this hugely significant theme.

The language of ‘spirit’ and ‘flesh’ occurs frequently in Romans 7 and 8. It is used to explain the battle inside any believer: the conflict between the desire to be obedient to God and the natural inclination to do whatever we like. For example, in chapter 7 we read:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do (Romans 7:14–15).

How comforting these words are to us as we can appreciate that even a godly man like the Apostle Paul experienced this inward battle to live a spiritual life in Christ. Paul continues:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members... So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:18–25).

We can clearly see the connection from these passages to the experience of the disciples in Gethsemane. Paul’s spirit was willing but his flesh was weak. He uses the



picture of two conflicting forces in his mind – this is his human nature fighting his desire to obey God.

The similarities continue in chapter 8 as again we read about flesh being related to weakness (verse 3) and of how we can call God ‘Abba, Father’ (verse 15) which is exactly the title Jesus used to address God in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). Finally, by comparing Romans 7 and 8 with Jesus in Gethsemane it may help to explain why the topic of prayer is introduced in Romans 8:26 as we have already seen how important prayer was in Gethsemane.

Responding as Spiritual People

When we read of Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane, we can learn to be more thankful for the suffering which he went through in order to save his people from their sins – this includes us, if we choose to follow him.

We can appreciate the importance of prayer during times of trial and sorrow,

and we can also understand more about the condition in which we all find ourselves – desiring to do good, but being unable to because of the weakness of our flesh (our human nature).

Thankfully, God sent His own Son:

...in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

Jesus overcame sin and died to become free from the natural desires of the flesh. We too must die – in symbol – by being baptised into his death, so that we can share in his victory over both sin and death (Romans 6:1-5). There is no other way to live the life of the Spirit and cease to live according to the inclinations of the flesh



We can humbly and joyfully give thanks with Paul who wrote:

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24–25).

Stephen Blake

Free Offer

If you would like to receive the Glad Tidings magazine FREE for 6 months – send your name and address to one of the addresses below. Or go to our website at: www.gladtidingsmagazine.org/free-magazines

Name

Address

Postcode

Country



Addresses for the Free Offer :

In the UK write to: FREEPOST GLADTIDINGS
(fiona@gladtidingsmagazine.org)

In Africa and Europe write to: Anne Bayley, 68 Hay Lane, Shirley, Solihull B90 4TA, UK

In other countries, to: Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive, Hollywood, Birmingham B47 5RJ, UK
(andrew@gladtidings.me.uk)

Contact Details:

To find out about your nearest Christadelphian Meeting, or to request free Bible literature or a correspondence course, please write to the address nearest you.

United Kingdom

FREEPOST GLADTIDINGS
fiona@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Africa & Europe

Christadelphian Bible Mission,
404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham
B28 8SZ, UK
requests@cbm.org.uk

The Americas

CBMA, 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA
93065, USA
cbma.treasurer@gmail.com

Caribbean

CBMC, Box 55541, Unit 119, 15280, 101
Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada V3R 0J7
philsnobelen@shaw.ca

India

T Galbraith, GPO Box 159, Hyderabad,
500001, India
tim@galbraithmail.com

South and East Asia

ACBM, PO Box 152 Cobbitty NSW,
Australia 2570
coelmada@gmail.com

Photo Credits:

Front cover: Roman site at Xanten,
Germany
Ken Anderton

www.facebook.com/GladTidingsMagazine/

www.youtube.com/channel/UCxb_gW5cp8LUTMQQFtpRw

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

H18