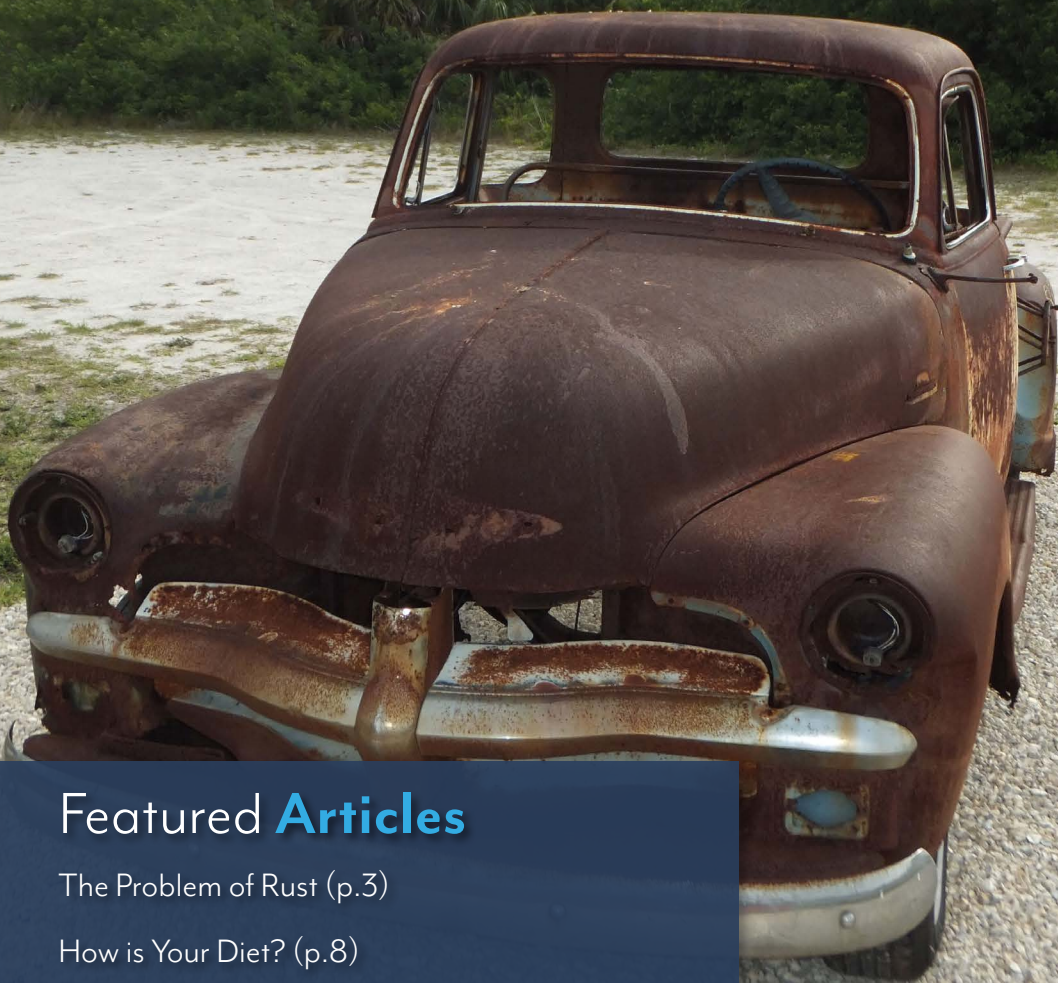


# Glad Tidings

*Of The Kingdom Of God*



## Featured **Articles**

The Problem of Rust (p.3)

How is Your Diet? (p.8)

Fire at Carmel (p.16)

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.

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# The Problem of Rust

IT WAS supposed to be a simple job. Hook up the trailer to the car and take it home. Actually, check the trailer tyres first, to see that they have enough air pressure for the journey. Why are these things never straightforward?

I pumped up the tyres, which instantly went flat again. I checked the tyres, which were fairly new and in good condition – how curious. I checked the valve of one, and it came off in my hand. The same happened on the other side. Oh dear. In fact, the problem was even worse: the metal wheels had rusted and rotted in the salty sea air, and they were good for nothing. Time to buy some new wheels!



## Short-Term Worth

Anyone who has ever owned a car knows about the problem of rust. Within a few short years, the beautiful gleaming vehicle that you bought with your hard-earned

money has turned into a decaying pile of scrap.

It's not just cars and trailer wheels that deteriorate though. Plants grow and decay every season; wood rots and clothes may be eaten by moths. Unfortunately, even we get sick, and eventually die.

The same applies to any wealth or goods we may build up. It only takes a thief or a financial crisis for them to become worthless. In the West, many people have suffered their pensions being stolen or made valueless; in many countries, hyper-inflation makes money worthless.

## A Better Alternative

The Bible offers a wonderful alternative. Jesus said:

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19–20).*

He was talking about exactly the problem we have been thinking about. We are given the opportunity to build up something of real value, something guaranteed by God who is in heaven.

God has promised that He will send Jesus back to the earth, to set up a kingdom

ruled by God's laws. It was the message Jesus taught:

*Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14–15).*

For God's people, eventually everything which decays will be done away with:

*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 21:4).*

This is a regular theme in *Glad Tidings*, one which appears in every edition.

## Setting Our Priorities

Jesus continued, in Matthew chapter 6, explaining that these heavenly treasures should be our priority in life:

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).*

Because this treasure does not decay, we can be confident. Who better to place our trust in, than in the God who created the universe? He will care for us now, as well as wanting us to be in that kingdom:

*Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?... Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? (v25, 27).*

Note that Jesus did not say our lives would be made easy, or that we would not have to work for the things we need. He was telling us that we can trust in God, that He knows what is best for us.

*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (v33).*

## Christ is Coming

Jesus promised that he would return, and as he ascended to heaven, angels promised exactly that (Acts 1:11). Bible prophecy suggests that this time will be soon.

When Jesus does come, then our worldly goods will be of little use to us. In fact, the prophet Isaiah wrote this about how people will react when God judges the world:

*In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats (Isaiah 2:20).*

God wants us to follow His commandments and in return offers us the opportunity of eternal life in the perfect, decay-free world in the future. To find out more, why not take a look at the Bible for yourself?



# A Kingdom for Both Jews and Gentiles

JESUS told his followers to pray for God's kingdom on earth, "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). God's Kingdom does not now embrace the earth as it does heaven. This is because humankind does not obey God as the angels do.

In the past God ruled over some individuals who were willing to obey Him. He also set up a national kingdom in Israel with which He was very patient until its disobedience became incurable. This kingdom collapsed because God's people rejected Him, as we can read in 2 Chronicles 36:15–17.

## The National Response

What actually happened? First, the Jews were called to be obedient to God, and so occupy the honoured status of being His people (Matthew 3:1–3; Mark 1:14–15).

Second, as a nation they refused. While some repented there were many who rejected the will of God (Luke 7:30). It was the same even after Jesus' resurrection. While many Jews believed, many more did not. Paul repeatedly had to leave them and turn to non-Jews,

the Gentiles (Acts 13:42–48). He later mourned his nation's rejection of the gospel (Romans 9:1–5, 10:1–3).

Third, although they still have a part to play in the purpose of God, they lost their privileged position. Nothing could be clearer than Jesus own words to them: "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it*" (Matthew 21:43).

God did not leave Himself without a people. There was a 'nation bearing fruit' to take their place. It was not now a single race, but individuals of every nation – including Jews – who willingly receive the way of God in humble obedience.



## Individual Response

People who repent as they hear the gospel of the kingdom become kingdom members now. This new generation and class of people is made up of those who accept Jesus as king, and, repenting of their sins, obey him in baptism. They are taught, then they confess, after which they are baptized by being covered in water. Each such individual makes a personal commitment (Acts 8:12).

They are then “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*” (1 Peter 2:9). These words echo those spoken by God to the Jews at the start of their existence as a nation (Exodus 19:6). While this aspect of the kingdom is very real, it has no land at present; its members are strangers and pilgrims in the earth (1 Peter 2:11); and it has no army (John 18:36).

Servants of the king Jesus Christ must behave soberly (2 Timothy 2:24). The kingdom’s laws are simultaneously gentle and stern. They are very gentle because the law of Christ offers infinite forgiveness to the penitent (Matthew 12:31; 1 John 1:9). They are stern because, no matter how much the Lord will forgive, he wants us to strive for perfection (Matthew 5:48). It is what we think which matters, at least as much as what we do (Matthew 5:21–28). We must not forget that wilful sin must be accounted for to God (Hebrews 10:26–31).

Each of us has been given the freedom either to obey God or to disobey Him. As many of Jesus’ parables of the kingdom

show, there are all kinds of people to whom the gospel of the kingdom is preached (Matthew 13:3–23).

At present this pre-kingdom state includes both good and bad, and only in the future will the bad be discarded (Matthew 13:24–30, 38–43). Some of its citizens are watchful, and some are lazy (Matthew 25. 1–13). In the king’s absence some of his servants serve him diligently, while others waste their opportunities (Luke 19:11–27).

But, above all, this aspect of the kingdom of God is only temporary. None of the promises about the establishment of David’s throne are fulfilled by it. The constant message is that something better is to come. The prophets and the parable in Luke 19 point clearly to a fuller expression of the kingdom at a future time.

## The Future

The Jews thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately (Luke 19:11) and they wanted Jesus to be king there and then. He used a parable to show that, though it will indeed come with all the power they expected, it would not be yet. His servants must serve him faithfully during his long absence, so that when he returns in his power they shall have their reward (Luke 19:11–27).

Jesus will come back again: of this there can be no doubt. Even before he went away he spoke of coming back (Matthew 25:31). His disciples heard this again from the angels at his ascension (Acts 1:11). They

taught the same message as they set about preaching. Jesus Christ must come back in order to fulfil what the prophets had spoken (Acts 3:20–21). The Gentiles were taught the same message (Acts 17:31).

This hope of a king over the earth is not in vain. The world is not to be left to its own devices for ever but will one day be compelled to accept the rule of God. The world has waited for 2000 years since Jesus Christ was born, and all the signs are that it may not have to wait for much longer.

The coming of the Christ to set up the kingdom over all the earth is to be in a time of trouble such as never was (Daniel 12:1). But the coming is also to be at a time when there is a new awakening in the Jewish nation. The Jews will be returning from their long scattering abroad and establishing themselves in Israel (Luke 21:24).



*The State of Israel established in 1948*

We have seen this happen in the past century for the first time in nearly 2000 years. Israel rejected Jesus, so it lost its place as a privileged nation, becoming subject to the judgements of God in its sufferings and dispersion. But the scattering was only to be for a time and Paul, who mourns the unbelief of fellow Jews, speaks of a time when God will restore them (Romans 11:11–28).

Jews will be in Israel to see their king when he returns (Zechariah 12:10). It will not be pleasant for them to see the evidence of the sins of their ancestors, but this will be the critical test: Israel will have to decide whether or not it will now be faithful and repentant. Its future will depend on its decision. Continued rebellion will be punished, while submission will lead to a special place among the mortal people of the world (Ezekiel 11:17–21).

## A Decision

But right now, we are each individually being invited to accept Jesus as king and try to live as citizens of his kingdom, waiting for him to return. When he comes back, those who have had this opportunity will be judged, and those found faithful blessed with immortality in his kingdom (Matthew 25:31, 46).

God's kingdom is at the core of the gospel message and it is our choice right now whether we are to be part of it.

**Alfred Norris**

# How is Your Diet?

THESE days we are bombarded by the media about the necessity of having a healthy diet. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of diet and healthy food plans to be found in magazines and on the Internet, for anyone who desires to lose weight or is health conscious. There are the ‘super foods’, which we are told will improve and maintain our health because they contain all manner of beneficial vitamins and chemicals which our body needs.



## The Flip-side

The flip-side of this is that if we don't care what we eat, abusing our bodies by solely eating junk food, or merely eating 'the wrong foods', our bodies will suffer and in extreme cases we may even shorten our lives! It is important we maintain a good diet to keep healthy, such as eating five

portions of fruit and vegetables per day, or other similarly reputable diet plans.

However, there is another diet from which we will gain great benefit, which will ultimately result in our living for ever! This diet can only be found in the Bible, which is the Word of God.

## Daniel and His Companions

The book of Daniel in the Old Testament is where we have one of the first mentions of diet. We have the account of Daniel and his three companions Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, in their captivity in Babylon. They refused to eat the food and drink sent to them from king Nebuchadnezzar.

*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (Daniel 1:8).*

The chief of the eunuchs was afraid for the health of Daniel and his companions because of his request not to eat of the king's food (v10). Then Daniel said to him:

*"Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your*



servants.” So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies (v12–15).

It was the faith of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah which brought this good health upon them. They trusted in God and didn’t want to be fed food that had probably been offered to Babylonian idols and was thus defiled.

The four were affected in a positive way by their diet, which was far healthier than the king’s portion as given to the rest of the young men. We can be quite certain that the Lord God was behind the amazing result of their simple diet of vegetables and water.

Ultimately, Daniel who loved God and who was “greatly beloved” (Daniel 9:23) was promised in the final verse of the book that he would be resurrected to eternal life and obtain his inheritance:

*Go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of days (12:13).*

Certainly, Daniel received great benefit by being obedient to God’s commandments.

## The Word of God

During the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness he quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3 and said:

*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).*

In fact, Jesus countered all three of the temptations which came to him in the wilderness, by quoting Old Testament verses. In Matthew 4:7 he quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 and in Matthew 4:10 it is Deuteronomy 6:13.

Jesus used the Word of God as a weapon to combat the temptation to disobey God’s commandments. The Word of God is described as “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17), and as Jesus showed it is the best defence in times of temptation.

The Word of God is also the means of our spiritual sustenance. A healthy person has a healthy appetite, whereas a sick person has little or no appetite. It is possible to gauge a person’s spiritual health by the state of their appetite for the Word of God; how much do they read it, how important is it to them in their lives? Conversely, someone who has little appetite for the



Word and godly things in general, will be spiritually unhealthy.

## Food for a New Life

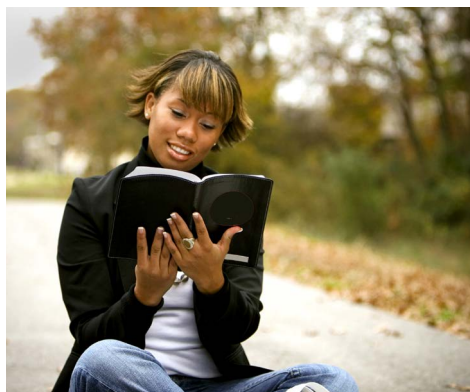
At baptism we symbolically die and rise again to a new life (Romans 6:3–5). We are then described as ‘putting on Christ’ and adopting a new spiritual outlook, very different from the ‘old man’.

*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Romans 6:6).*

On rising out of the baptismal waters we are figuratively raised to a new life leading to the kingdom of God – God’s Way. In order to do this we find the letters of the New Testament full of valuable advice and guidance on how one should live this new life; after having been “baptised into Christ’s death” (Romans 6:3), as Paul says in the next verse:

*Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (v4).*

An essential part of this new life is to ensure we don’t spiritually starve so that our new life withers away. In Jesus’ parable of the sower we are shown just how this can happen (Luke 8:5–15). We need to be spiritually nourished and built up, starting immediately we commence our new life in Christ. It isn’t enough to live off our natural food but the ‘food of the spirit’ which is



essential for salvation and eternal life in the kingdom. It is vitally important for our spiritual well-being that we are nourished by the food that really matters – the Word of God, and by putting it into practice.

As the Apostle Paul taught his young fellow-believer, Timothy:

*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed... For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:6, 8).*

This is not to say we shouldn’t look after ourselves, or that we should neglect our physical health. It is a matter of putting our spiritual health first. This is the diet that really matters, and it is the only one that ultimately will provide us with unbounded good health, because it will give us life for evermore in the kingdom of God.

**Grahame A Cooper**

# Judges

A history of the period during which God saved the largely disobedient Israel from surrounding nations, by the hand of certain tribal leaders called ‘judges’.

## No King in Israel

The Book of Judges covers the period from the death of Joshua to the time of Samuel.

During this time Israel often failed to look to God as their Ruler – hence the repeated comment: *“In those days there was no king in Israel”* (18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

## The Judges

Many times during this period, surrounding nations were able to invade Israel, as shown on the map. However, from time to time God gave Israel deliverers – judges – who, with His help, overcame those enemies and ruled God’s people.

## Jesus the Judge

When reading this book, it is helpful to look for comparisons with Jesus Christ – the one sent by God to save his people from sin and death, who will come again to Israel as Judge, Deliverer and King



### Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

Judges 5:12 – see Psalm 68:18;  
Ephesians 4:8.

Judges 8:23 – see John 6:15.

Judges 11:27 – see Genesis 18:25;  
Matthew 25:34; Acts 17:30, 31.



**Norman Owen**

*By kind permission of ‘The Christadelphian’*

# Light of the World

LET'S first consider what the Bible says about Light. Light is primal, fundamental, essential. We read in the book of Genesis that in the beginning the earth was:

*...without form and void (Genesis 1:2).*

That means it was in a condition of chaos. In that condition of chaos God did a fundamental thing:

*Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (v3).*

That was done with purpose. It was the beginning of a process which led to life. God created light, then the waters were divided, then there came life. Light, water, life.

And this pattern which we see in the creation of life itself, we also see in the process of creating spiritual life: a person receives the light of the Truth, then is baptised in water, then starts a new life. The apostle Paul shows the link between the natural and the spiritual:

*God who commanded light to shine out of darkness... has shone in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6).*

## Light and Darkness

We shall best understand the significance of light if we can understand something of the meaning of darkness. When the earth was 'without form and void', the

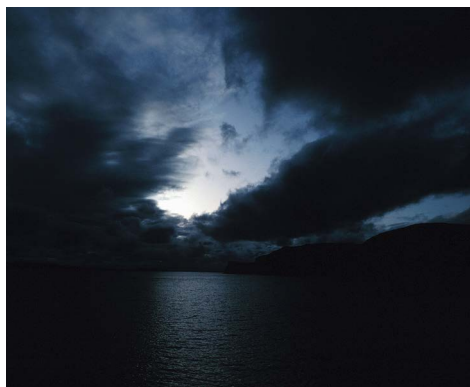
record says "*and darkness was on the face of the deep*" (Genesis 1:2). The darkness is associated with the chaos.

Darkness is used in the Bible to represent ignorance of God and His purpose. For instance, when the apostle Peter wishes to describe the transition from ignorance of God to a knowledge of the Gospel, he says that:

*[God] has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).*

When darkness is used in the Bible in a moral sense, it is used to describe that which is in rebellion against God. Death and darkness express the final outcome of evil. The apostle John says of the loveless man who hates his brother, he "*is in darkness even until now*" (1 John 2:9).

In the book of Proverbs those who "*leave the paths of uprightness*" are said to "*walk in the ways of darkness*" (Proverbs 2:13). The final



destiny of the wicked is to be cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:30). People who are in darkness are without form and void. Their lives are void – without purpose. Their eyes are blinded.

## Another Creation

There is a sense in which God has looked at our world and seen a great darkness: people groping in the gloom, their concept of God distorted by human philosophy. God saw this state of darkness and knew the remedy. He knew they needed illumination of the mind. And so once again God did an elemental thing – He said, “Let there be Light” – and the word He spoke became flesh and a light came into the world. This happened at the birth of Jesus Christ. This is how John’s gospel describes it:

*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:4–5, 14).*

So Jesus came, the Light of the World, and the frontiers of darkness were flung back. He spoke of judgement on hypocrisy and men recoiled with fear. He spoke of help and salvation and they were won over by his compassion.

He felt all the agony of the widow of Nain and raised her son from the dead (Luke 7:11). He felt the paralysing pain of the

two sisters of Bethany and gave them their brother alive (John 11:43). He revitalised a man’s withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, because he was that kind of saviour (Matthew 12:10).

People heard his words and marvelled; they saw his good works and glorified God. Some slandered him but when they did it, they made themselves liars. They beheld this glory of grace and truth – so the light flashed and flamed among the streets and hills of Israel, and it cut into the darkness incisively, like a knife.

This is what light does. The apostle Paul says:

*All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light (Ephesians 5:13).*

When we stand in the presence of the light we see ourselves as we really are – we are ‘made manifest’. And there is something else light does – when we stand in the presence of the light we find God is revealed. Light shows us what we are, and it shows us what God is.

## The Light of the World

So it was in Israel when the light came into the world. As Jesus spoke the words of life they sensed the feeling of supremacy, of kingship, of authority. They confessed:

*No man ever spoke like this man! (John 7:46).*

Standing in the presence of that light they knew their own thinking and actions were wrong. One of the noblest of them said:

*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*  
(Luke 5:8).

In the light, men discover themselves and God and they become responsible. This is what I mean by the light cutting incisively like a knife. The principles which underlie this are revealed most carefully by Jesus:

*I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears my words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day (John 12:46–48).*

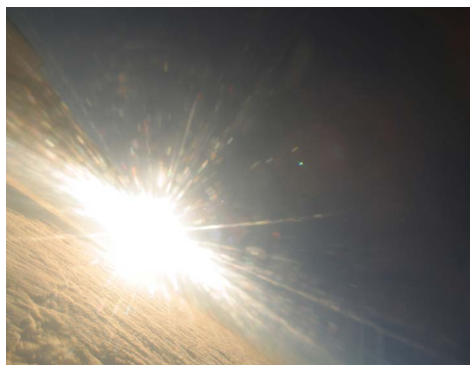
Jesus is saying that he came into the world as the force of light to dispel the darkness. He reveals that as the darkness is dispelled it brings salvation and it brings judgement.

## Call to the Light

What a solemn thing the Gospel is. People choose their destiny, God does not force upon anyone what they do not desire. Those who have been called to the light and rejected it have chosen death.

Those who have accepted it have chosen life, but for them the light is still revealing. It lays bare the things they have kept in the recesses of their lives. It unmasks them.

Yet though it is searching, it is the only thing worth having. Those who choose life have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and share his victory over the darkness of this world.



Before he was crucified, Jesus said to his disciples:

*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid... In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 14:27, 16:33).*

These things are the centre of the Christian faith. A person may know a great deal about religious things and still lack the clarity which comes from this spiritual light. It illuminates our disobedience to God (sin), helps us begin to appreciate His glory and greatness, and shows us the way to Him through Jesus Christ.

Light has come into the world and therefore we can find strength for our weakness, wisdom for our folly, relief for our bruises and grace to help in time of need. To walk in the light is to surrender to it and obey it. That means that by the light that has come into the world, life will be interpreted, service will be guided, suffering will be transformed, the Gospel will be proclaimed and destiny will be sealed.

**Dennis Gillett**

# Too Good to be True?

“HOW could you fall for that?” exclaimed Susan’s mother. “I’ve told you: if it seems too good to be true it is too good to be true! There are warnings about those scams. I thought you had grown out of fairy tales.” Susan had been shopping on the internet and had claimed an attractive ‘free’ voucher, without realising that in so doing she had initiated a monthly payment to the company.

Most of us like a bargain, especially getting ‘something for nothing’. But there is the well-known saying ‘no such thing as a free lunch’. However, there is one offer which is free, truly amazing and absolutely genuine.

God offers us eternal life. This is not simply an extension of life as we know it, with its mixtures of pain and pleasure. It is an opportunity to serve Him in idyllic conditions, with no negative aspects, and even to share His divine nature (2 Peter 1:3–4). The offer is for us to be like the resurrected and immortal Jesus. Moreover, we have to do very little to accept this offer – it is described as a gift.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).*

God’s grace is the offer of that ‘free gift’, and part of the faith God requires is for us to believe that it is true.

We are told to believe the gospel, repent and be baptised and then to follow Jesus (Mark 16:16, Acts 20:21). This offer is beyond our wildest dreams. By ourselves we could not imagine what it will be like, but God has told us in His words in the Bible.

*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. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9–10).*

This offer is all the more amazing because we are by nature enemies of God (Colossians 1:21), but He does not want us to perish (2 Peter 3:9). The Bible instructs us what to do and warns us about taking no notice (Acts 17:30–31).

The choice, however, is ours. It is an offer, not an obligation. Susan had the choice to read terms and conditions and to ignore the voucher; we have the choice to read the Bible and to accept or reject God’s offer. The promised life is not a fairy tale. But many genuine offers have time limits. One day – when Jesus comes back – it may be too late to respond.

God’s free offer may seem too good to be true, but it is genuine and we still have time to accept it.

**Anna Hart**

## Fire at Carmel

THE LORD God sent Elijah back to the land of Israel, because it was time for the famine to end.

When Elijah returned to the land, King Ahab was desperately trying to provide water and grass for his horses and mules. Ahab and his steward, a man called Obadiah, divided up the land between them, to try and find a spot which had not been affected by the drought. Obadiah was a godly man:

*Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly. For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water (1 Kings 18:3–4).*



This would have required a lot of work, to ensure that the prophets were fed, even with meagre rations, and especially to escape detection by Jezebel.

Whilst Obadiah was searching, Elijah met him, asking him to go and tell Ahab that he was back. Obadiah was reluctant to do so, suspecting that the minute he went off Elijah would vanish again. The king had searched everywhere for Elijah.

*As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, 'He is not here,' he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you (v10).*

Obadiah had a very real fear that Elijah would simply vanish away again, as he had done in the past, and so he would incur Ahab's wrath, to say nothing of what Jezebel might do. Elijah had to patiently reassure him that he was going to talk to Ahab that day.

It was not a very encouraging meeting. Ahab saw all of the problems of his kingdom as emanating from Elijah.

*Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" (v17).*

Elijah needed to explain the real source of the problem:



*And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals" (v18).*

## The Challenge

It was then that Elijah gave Ahab a challenge, an invitation to a decisive test to see which was the true God. Ahab was to assemble all of the prophets of the false god Baal and the Asherah at Mount Carmel, a total of 850. When they were assembled, Elijah told them the details of the contest.

Each group, the 450 prophets of Baal, and just Elijah, on his own for the Lord God, was to prepare a sacrifice, and a bull for each group laid on wood. The difference from a normal sacrifice was that they were not to set it alight; each party in turn would call on the name of their god, and the one who answered by fire was undoubtedly the true God. The prophets of Baal accepted this, and also Elijah's challenge to be first to try.

They began to call "O Baal, hear us!", but there was no answer. They continued till noon, by which time Elijah began to mock them. He suggested that they needed to call louder, perhaps Baal was meditating, or on a journey, or perhaps asleep.

As they continued into the afternoon, the noise of 450 prophets must have been quite deafening, they began cutting themselves with knives and lances so that blood flowed freely. Still no answer, the bull



and the wood lay there untouched and uncharred.

## Power and Prayer

At the time when the evening sacrifice should have been offered in the Temple at Jerusalem, Elijah called a halt. There presumably had been an altar to the Lord God there on Carmel at some time, but now it was broken. Elijah had begun to repair it, first taking twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, and making these into an altar, with a trench all around it. The trench was large enough to hold about 15 litres.

Elijah then laid the wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces and put that on the wood. Then he told some of those helping him to do a remarkable thing. They were to fill four water jars with water and pour it out over the sacrifice, wood and altar.

Some have wondered after the drought where the water would come from, but Mount Carmel was not far from the sea,

and so that would be possible. Having done so once, Elijah asked them to repeat the exercise and then to do it a third time. The sacrifice and wood were soaked, and there was even enough water to fill the trench that ran around the altar.

Then, with none of the histrionics of the prophets of Baal, Elijah prayed to the Lord God.

*LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again (v36–37).*

God's answer was immediate, powerful and direct. Fire fell from heaven, consuming the bull, the wood, and even the stones and dust, finally licking up the water in the trench. The crowd's reaction was sensational:

*Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!" (v39).*

This is particularly appropriate, as the name 'Elijah' means 'The LORD is God'.

## **Rain at Last!**

Elijah was able to capitalize on this and ordered that all of Baal's prophets should be executed. They would not be allowed to continue their work. Then he instructed Ahab to prepare himself for his homeward journey, back from Carmel to Jezreel.

*Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain" (v41).*

This would have seemed a little optimistic, for as yet there was no sight of a cloud in the sky. Ahab went to eat, Elijah to pray. Taking his servant, he went up to the top of Carmel and putting his head between his knees he prayed for rain. His prayer complete, he sent his servant to see if there was any evidence of a cloud, but still the sky remained entirely blue. Elijah prayed again and sent the servant once more. It was only at the seventh time that the servant came back with the message:

*There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea! (v44).*





It was enough for Elijah. The servant was sent off with another message, this time to Ahab, that he should set off for Jezreel before the rain stopped him.

## On the Move Again

The gathering storm built up. It had not rained for more than three years, but now “the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain” (v45).

Ahab set off in his chariot, but Elijah was also going to Jezreel, and he ran in front of Ahab until he came to the entrance of the town. It was about 27 miles from Carmel to Jezreel, the equivalent of a marathon, and at the end of what had already been a strenuous and tiring day.

Whilst we assume that he was given miraculous help by God here, Elijah must have been a man of tremendous physical

as well as moral and emotional strength. Yet in the New Testament he is described as being like us.

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit (James 5:17–18).*

James is teaching us about the power of prayer. God will listen to us and wants us to go to Him like a father when we need His help. We do not have to be physically different from others.

It had been a tremendous triumph for the Lord God over the false idols, and also for Elijah as His prophet. Yet before long Elijah was to be brought to the depths of despair, and that will provide a warning for us all.



**Mark Sheppard**

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