

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Lawbreaking (p. 3)

The Gospel and Politics (p. 5)

Striking the Rock (p. 10)

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 humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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Publisher
The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity—Number 248352

Lawbreaking

IS IT EVER RIGHT to break the law? If so, when? When you think you can get away with it? Is it OK to commit a small crime, but not a big one? Maybe it's OK if nobody gets hurt? What do you think?

Maybe there are times when the law is wrong, and it's good to break it if you disagree with it. It is a fact that law and morality do not always coincide. For example there are countries in which the persecution of ethnic minorities is encouraged by law. On the other hand, there are instances in which the laws of a state forbid activities which individuals would find acceptable, for example the medicinal use of certain drugs. Are there circumstances in which it is right to break the law?

Law and Morality

The Bible shows us a time when obeying the law was simple. Not easy—we are sinful creatures, we don't find it easy to do the right thing—but it was uncomplicated. God brought the people of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, and He brought them to Sinai where they made an agreement that

He would be their God and they would be His people (Leviticus 26:12). He gave them a law which is known as the Law of Moses, and it's described in detail in the books of Exodus through to Deuteronomy. This law was to govern every aspect of their lives—civil, religious and personal. Its foundation was the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17).



A 'black box' is a device that is fitted by an insurance company to oblige a car driver to keep to the speed limit. This person feels it necessary to apologise for obeying the law.

The Law was given by God, it prescribed what was right and wrong. Law and morality were the same thing. So for example if you disrespected your parents, you were both doing what is morally wrong and you

were also breaking the law (Exodus 20:12).

When the Psalmist said 'Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day' (Psalm 119:97), it was not that he was one of those peculiar people who enjoy checking rules—it was that the more he studied the God-given Law, the closer he was brought to God and His thoughts and ways.

For us in the 21st Century life is not so simple. Our laws are not God-given, they're

man-made, and they are not necessarily good. Is it ever right to break them? And if so, who decides when it's right and when it's not?

Bible Teaching

For many people this is a moral dilemma. But it's one of those areas in which Bible teaching makes life refreshingly clear. Followers of Christ should be model citizens in whatever country they find themselves:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement (Romans 13:1–2).

However, for followers of Christ there is an extra layer of complication which does not exist for everybody. They have two allegiances: one is to the government of their country, and the other is to Jesus Christ who is their master and king. And there are occasions on which the demands of one conflict with the demands of the other.

Here are two examples. There was an occasion when the king of Babylon ordered all his subjects to worship a golden statue, on pain of death. With great respect, the faithful Jews Shadrach, Meshach

and Abednego said '*Be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up*' (Daniel 3:18). God is supreme in the lives of His people, and they cannot allow anyone else to replace Him (for example Matthew 22:37).

Again, there were occasions when the Jewish rulers forbade Christ's disciples to talk about their faith. The disciples replied, '*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge*' (Acts 4:19). Christians must not deny their master (Mark 8:38).

A little thought will make it apparent that there are actually many areas of life where the

customs, expectations and even laws of the land can conflict with the duty of Christians to their master. One of the defining characteristics of a follower of Christ should be a finely tuned conscience. This means the strength of mind to obey every demand that is made of them by their country's authorities, whether or not it is advantageous or convenient; and also the conviction and faith to recognise when a demand is made which goes against their allegiance to Christ, and then to decline to obey it and accept the consequences.



Tribunal of a conscientious objector during World War II—Christadelphians refused to join the armed forces on the grounds that to do so would conflict with their allegiance to Jesus Christ.

The Gospel and Politics

WHAT PART should followers of Christ take in the politics of their country? Many see it as their Christian duty to be fully involved, so as to be an influence for good in the world.

The first point to consider is that involvement in politics will inevitably involve supporting politicians, and identifying with fellow voters, who do not share your principles. There are governments and parties which label themselves as Christian. Some are more serious about the label than others, but the fact is that no political party really stands for what Jesus Christ stood for.

Suppose that somebody established a truly Christian political party. Its programme might well be based on Matthew chapters 5 to 7, where we see the Lord Jesus Christ instructing his disciples. This party's manifesto might read something like this:

When we are in power all will be taught to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to love their neighbour as themselves, and to not retaliate when they are mistreated.

No one will be permitted to look with sexual desire at a person to whom they are not married.

No ungodly or unwholesome media will be allowed.

All children will receive thorough Bible instruction, and all parents will set them a good example by regular worship.

No one will lie or deceive.

Employees will not be self-seeking.

It is evident that this party would go nowhere in today's world.

The Kingdom of God

The Old Testament of the Bible describes the ancient nation of Israel as God's nation. He gave them their national constitution. This was a foundation clause:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6).

There was nothing democratic about this. God imposed His law on His people, and expected them to accept and obey it. They accepted: *'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (v. 8).*

In time Israel became a kingdom, but it was understood that the human king was reigning under God:

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them (Deuteronomy 17:18–19).

This period of history was the kingdom of God (1 Chronicles 28:5). It did not last, because of the weakness and sinfulness of

its kings and its population. By the time of Jesus Christ, the Jewish nation was living under the overlordship of the Roman emperor, and were yearning for their freedom.

The Politics of Jesus

It may appear that Jesus was unlike the authoritarian monarchs of the Old Testament. His personal humility, his readiness to suffer all manner of insult and suffering without complaint, his willingness to serve his disciples, all seem to make him unlike the ancient kings, and unlike the God of absolute authority Whom the Old Testament depicts:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25–28).

But Jesus was no democrat. Not only was he meek, he expected his disciples to be meek also. They too are to endure wrong, cultivate humility, and refrain from setting themselves up as judges. The restrictions which Jesus imposes on aggression leave little room for either personal or political agitation (read for example Matthew 5:3–4, 38–46; 7:1–5).

Jesus, like the more godly of the Old Testament kings, recognised God's absolute authority. As a man he was humble and self-denying, but when he stood up for God he was uncompromising. When he says 'Truly I say to you', it is clear

that he is laying down the law as firmly as any ancient prophet who declared '*Thus says the LORD*'. He told his disciples, '*You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am*' (John 13:13).

One thing is absolutely plain: Jesus and his disciples never sought any part in the government of the Jewish nation of which they were citizens, either by collaboration or by revolution. Jesus told his disciples to obey their corrupt rulers, but not to copy them (Matthew 23:2–3). They must pay their taxes to the Jewish authorities (Matthew 17:24–27), and to the Romans (Matthew 22:15–22). If they were mistreated, they must not retaliate but go elsewhere (Matthew 10:14).



Jesus' mission was not political action but to preach the Gospel (Luke 4:43), and that also was the mission of his disciples (Mark 16:15).

A key principle is in the declaration of Jesus when he stood trial before the Roman governor Pilate: '*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world*'

(John 18:36). As far as politics and military involvement are concerned, Christians are to think of themselves as strangers in the country in which they live. They are in fact first and foremost citizens of Christ's kingdom which *'is not from the world'*.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9–10).

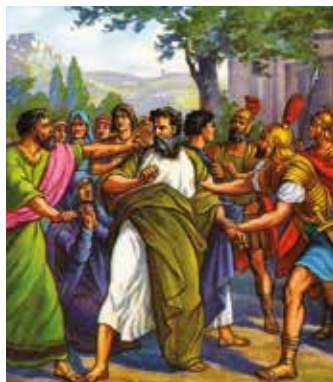
Foreigners and Exiles

Having reminded his readers that they have been called out of darkness into light, in order to be *'God's people'*, the Apostle Peter goes on to remind them what this means for their everyday life:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor (1 Peter 2:11–17).

This is the Christian's political charter. You live, Peter says, in a world controlled by non-Christians. They appoint the rulers, and they make the laws. It is your duty to keep the laws, and give them no ground for accusing you as lawbreakers. You serve God best by letting people see your humility and obedience.

The Apostle Paul's attitude is the same. Followers of Christ are to subject themselves to the ruling powers, for the sake of conscience, keeping their laws and paying their taxes (Romans 13:1–7). They are to deal with the authorities with meekness and avoid contentions (Titus 3:1–2).



It is an interesting fact that the apostles in their letters freely give advice to their fellow believers on how masters should treat their servants, how servants should treat their masters, and how citizens should obey their rulers (for example Romans 13:1–10, Colossians 3:22–25 and 1 Timothy 2:1–2). But they give no guidance on how rulers are to treat their subjects. There is not one word of advice to Christian magistrates or governments. There can only be one explanation for this: it did not



enter into the mind of the apostles that there could be such a thing as a Christian magistrate or government. The status of Christians would always be as pilgrims in other people's countries. They might be rich or poor, masters or slaves, but they would be subjects and not rulers.

As it was in the First Century, so it is now. There have been superficial alterations in the procedure of government, but few in substance. Monarchs are more rare and democracy is more prevalent, but governments remain godless. The Christian's duty is to obey them and not to participate in them.

The Christian's Citizenship

Jesus said to Pilate, *'My kingdom is not from the world'*. There is a Kingdom to which the Christian belongs. This is the Kingdom of which Jesus Christ is the King.

The angel Gabriel said of Jesus to his mother Mary, *'He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end'* (Luke 1:32–33). This was a prophecy of the Kingdom of God, over which Jesus Christ will reign as King

of the world. This is the Kingdom to which Christians look forward, and to which they belong.

Jesus Christ is in heaven, sitting at the right hand of his Father, waiting to return to take his Kingdom (Hebrews 10:12–13). To the Christian, Jesus Christ is already King. If he is not yet acknowledged by the rest of the world, he is surely acknowledged by those whom he has bought with his blood (Acts 20:28). As Paul says, *'Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself'* (Philippians 3:20–21).

Alfred Norris

Questions? Comments?
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1 Thessalonians

THE APOSTLE PAUL established a congregation of believers at Thessalonica during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 17). The congregation thrived, and later when he wrote this letter Paul said: *'We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3).*

Keep Watch

Paul's friend Timothy had brought news of how they fared (3:6), and Paul now wrote to encourage them. Using the imagery of soldiers on watch, he counselled:

Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation (5:6–8).



The Return of Christ

Every chapter in this letter, written under Divine inspiration, forecasts the return of Christ from heaven to earth (see 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15, 16; 5:2, 23). The Thessalonians were evidently expecting his return to be imminent. Some of their number had already died, and the question was being asked, 'What about those who have died? Will they participate in the great events associated with his return?'

Paul explains (4:13–18) that believers are not like those who die without hope. They will be awakened from their unconscious 'sleep' at the return of Christ, and will join the believers who are still living at that time. They will be caught up to meet the Lord—to be with him as he returns to the earth. Those who are then judged by Christ to have been faithful will become his immortal helpers, to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 1:10—see Romans 5:9.
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 2:19—see 2 Corinthians 1:14.
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:8—see Ephesians 6:14–17.

Striking the Rock

FEW WHO WERE ALIVE at the time could forget the Watergate scandal in 1972. The collapse of an impeached President was seen with frightening clarity. The whole ugly episode illustrated the point that the higher the office a man holds, the greater becomes his responsibility. Lesser individuals commit greater crimes with scarcely a mention when they are found out.



The fall of Moses, the great leader of the Exodus, was no Watergate. His character remained unstained. His faith, integrity, meekness and whole-hearted dedication to the welfare of his people would surely put all of our politicians to the bleakest shame. Yet in one momentary lapse he forfeited the prize of a lifetime. The story is not so well known, and it is worth retelling.

The people of Israel had wandered up and down the Sinai Peninsula for many years. The searing heat and the eye-aching whiteness of sand and scrub had become their life. Daily the heaven-sent manna was

there to be collected on the open ground around the camp, and though gathering food, water and firewood took up much of the day, they managed well enough. That is, until the river dried up. The daily trek to the thin, life-giving stream that meandered endlessly across the desert was as automatic as getting up in the morning. Then, one day, the stream bed was dry. As the desert sun climbed up into the sky, panic broke out in the camp. An angry crowd assembled outside Moses' tent, as if it were all his fault.

It was not the first time such an emergency had arisen. The community had run out of water before, many years ago when these men and women were children, on the other side of the wilderness (Exodus 17:1–7). That was now a dim memory, and their present need was pressing. Moses and Aaron, accused of bungling incompetence, sought help from the angel representative of God in the Tabernacle. Once more, the LORD saved the day. *'Take the staff,' he ordered, 'and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle' (Numbers 20:8).*

Rash Words

Moses took his trusty shepherd's staff, and summoned the people together. When

they were standing quietly, he raised his voice. There was anger in his tone, his patience with the people was wearing thin. 'Hear now, you rebels,' he shouted: 'shall we bring water for you out of this rock?' (v. 10). Lifting the rod high in the air, he crashed it down twice on the black cliff behind him. Immediately, a great plume of cold, clear liquid gushed out and ran across the sand in a growing flood. People and animals alike were soon gulping down the precious, life-saving water.



But God was angry. It was not the people who were in trouble this time. It was Moses. Time after time the people had blamed him when things went wrong, and this time he had had enough. 'Shall we bring water for you?' he had shouted. He never doubted that the water would come when he struck the rock. But God had asked him to speak to the rock. The way he put it, he and Aaron were the benefactors, while the LORD, the

real source of the miracle, was left in the background.

It was out of character for Moses. David the Psalmist, meditating upon this incident years afterwards, said: 'It went ill with Moses on their account, for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips' (Psalm 106:32–33). However, God would not accept an excuse. 'You rebelled against my word,' he said to the contrite leader, 'in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarrelled, failing to uphold me as holy at the waters before their eyes' (Numbers 27:14). In putting himself before God, and producing the water his way, he had not preserved the high standard of respect that God demands. The Creator's judgment was swift. 'Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them' (Numbers 20:12). When he died, his bones would be buried outside the Land of Promise, like the others who had rebelled against God.

God Tests Us

This incident shows how a crisis searches us out. The Israelites depended on the river. Simply by allowing it to dry up, God put them under pressure. As Moses said to the people afterwards, He was 'testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not' (Deuteronomy 8:2). He was searching Moses' heart, too. Life is full of the unexpected. We must keep our thoughts unwaveringly on God, listening to His word and doing precisely what He says. Then He will lift us up in His everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27), and carry us

through our troubles. And if we aspire to lead others, we must be especially on our guard against self-importance. 'They that are low need fear no fall.'

Grumbling Again

Another drama followed. The people had come to the frontier of the Edomites, south of the Dead Sea, on the last stage of their journey. The Edomites were related to the Israelites, being descended from Abraham (Genesis 36), but they refused them permission to cross their country. The Israelites had to make a long detour of 200 miles instead, *'and the people became impatient on the way'* (Numbers 21:4).



A few grumbles escalated into a wholesale moan, and soon the camp was buzzing with complaints. 'There is no food,' they said, *'and no water'* (v. 5), ignoring the fact that God continued to send them daily the water from the stream, and the plain but nutritious manna that was there every day. *'We loathe this worthless food!'* they cried. They were tired of waiting for the Promised

Land. It always seemed just round the corner. Once more they spoke against Moses. And soon they spoke against God.

Do you blame them? For most of the people, the wilderness had been their home all their lives. They had few luxuries—perhaps a little milk or cheese to eke out the manna and the water, and a day's rest on the sabbath. Life was humdrum and hard. It is not surprising that their patience had expired, with nothing but promises to keep them going. Yet really, when you think about it, is not life just like that for many of us, most of the time? We pursue an uneventful routine from bed to table, maybe to work and back to bed, with only occasional breaks to relieve the monotony. And the coming of Christ, the great hope of the Christian, has been two thousand years in waiting, so that most believers have died without seeing it happen.

Do not Christ's followers also live for promises? If they should begin to feel envious of their neighbours who seem to enjoy themselves without God, they need to remember that God faithfully provides them with homes and clothes and enough to eat, besides the promise of the Kingdom for the faithful (Matthew 25:21).

The great Apostle Paul languished in a weary prison cell, yet he could write: *'I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content'* (Philippians 4:11). The Christian's reward lies in the future, in God's Kingdom. *'I press on towards the goal for the prize'* was Paul's motto (Philippians 3:14).

The Bronze Serpent

God was grieved by the Israelites' lack of faith. *'Then the LORD sent fiery serpents*

among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died' (Numbers 21:6). Yet again, the magnanimous Moses went down on his knees to pray for the people. God showed him a remarkable cure for the venom of the snakes: 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live' (v. 8). It sounded an unlikely medicine. What difference could a bronze snake on a pole make to a dying person? Doubtless some Israelites stopped in their tents, moaning in pain, and refused to make the effort to crawl to the centre of the camp. The cure lay not in the serpent itself, but in the faith of the beholder. A lack of faith had inspired the grumbling that brought the fatal malady. Only rekindled faith in God would put it right.

Allegories

There is a rich and powerful allegory behind both of the events we have been considering. They lead us firmly to the presence of the Lord Jesus. The serpent in the wilderness is mentioned by Jesus himself: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,' he said, 'so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3:14-15). The serpent is a symbol all through the Bible for human nature, our

inward rebellion against God. It condemns us all to die, like Adam our forefather, driven outside the gates of Paradise because he succumbed to the serpent's lie (Genesis 3). Yet Jesus, the Son of Man, lived

in a body just like ours, and never sinned. He choked back every selfish thought, through every minute of the day.

That devotion to God's will marked him out from his fellows. In Jesus, sin itself was put to death.

So when cruel men took this wonderful man and nailed him to the cross, and lifted him up in public view, the contrast between the ugliness of sin and the obedience of Christ was turned into a great public spectacle. God focuses our gaze on to the two sides. We see the jeering

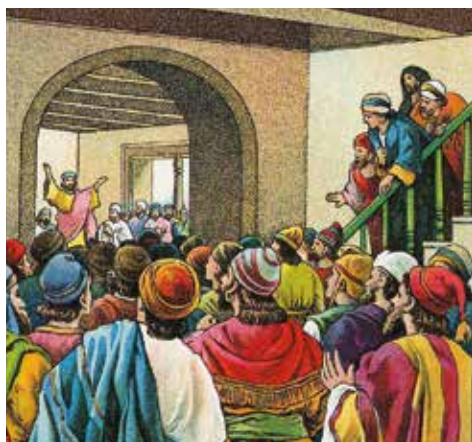
spectators, the callous soldiers and the scheming rulers. Then we dwell on the loving, forgiving, holy Son whom He sent to show us how to live. He calls on us to change places. We have to confess our guilt, and move across from the ranks of God's enemies to the family of Jesus Christ.

It is an act of faith as clear as that displayed by the poisoned Israelites as they sought to escape the effects of the serpent's bite. On the face of it, it is just as unlikely to work. What can a dying carpenter from an obscure village in Galilee do for me, the sceptic will urge. Thousands were crucified. Why should this one make any



Various health agencies use the serpent on the pole in their logo. Few people are aware of the motif's Bible origin.

difference to the history of the world? Well, the choice is still ours. If we examine the life of this carpenter, we find the Son of God walking amongst people. When we discover that the very manner of his death was foreshadowed by the bronze serpent, 1500 years before it happened, that should make us think very hard indeed. Since the earliest days of Christianity there has only been one answer: to repent, and be baptised into the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).



That brings us to the smitten rock. The wilderness journey of the Israelites is likened by the Apostle Paul to the pilgrimage of the followers of Christ. They *'were baptized into Moses,'* he says, *'in the cloud and in the sea,'* just as the Christian life must start by baptism into the name of Jesus. And he continues, they *'drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ' (1 Corinthians 10:2-4).* The life-giving water that sustained the Israelites came from a stricken rock. And from the smitten body

of the Lord came the blood and water that preserve his people from eternal death. *'Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4:14).*

How neatly and completely does the Bible hang together. It teaches us by pattern and picture the plan and the will of God. From Genesis to Numbers, from John to Corinthians, the message is the same. God grant us wisdom and patience, to complete the journey, and win the prize of eternal life.

David M Pearce

g l ea n i n g s

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It is published bi-monthly and can be sent free of charge to anyone who is registered blind.

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God is Still Looking

TO INTRODUCE this subject, may I ask you to read the Bible book of **Genesis chapter 3** and the first nine verses?

Like many people you may believe that there is a God but not be particularly convinced that He is interested in people. You may accept that He made the world, but that was that. Maybe you feel that if He had an interest in people now, He would do something about our problems. Perhaps you believe, like very many people, that God is going to be more interested in you when you are dead.

If you'd like to know what the Bible says about the afterlife, that's for another time (not that the answer is complicated, just lengthy). The same must be said about God's dealings with present problems. I am not avoiding the subject, the answer is important, but we must reserve it for another time while we deal with our subject: *God is still looking.*

We want you to know, we want you to have confidence, that God continues to care about His creation. We want you to know and have evidence that God is not just a God of Bible times but of today and tomorrow. He is a God who is interested in you and me.

God Is Everywhere

Someone once asked me how God could be everywhere. How could He see us and people on the other side of the world at

the same time? We are better placed in our modern world to understand this than ever in the past. In our homes we can see and talk to people in different parts of the world, simultaneously in real-time, and even see people deep in space on the same screen. With the right equipment we can receive and store several incoming pictures at once. We can do what God, with His vastly superior nature, has always been able to do. He is able to store and remember—and also, like us, erase certain selected unpleasant parts!

We are better placed in these days to understand how God can hear lots of different conversations at the same time. Businesses rely on phones and voicemails, and conversations can be easily recorded and stored. As in our case, God may not reply immediately to communications.

Another example. I am constantly amazed by the amount of material which can be stored on my computer. This is nothing compared to the vast collection of material which is stored on cloud servers by media companies. If this is what we can do, what can God not do?



Now I'll ask you to read **Psalm 139:1-10**.

The Bible says God is everywhere. How is it then, we might ask, that in Genesis 3:9 God was looking for Adam? Did He not know where Adam was?

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:8-9.

The merciful answer is that God knew perfectly well where Adam was. He was giving him the chance to confess what he had done. But Adam did not take the opportunity. Instead he made excuses and tried to pass the blame. That was the first sign of the change in his nature that was a consequence of his eating the forbidden fruit.

Now read about the first murder in history—**Genesis 4:8-9**. Cain not only made excuses, he was insolent. God knew exactly what had happened.



People God Sought Out

Three and a half thousand years later, God knew about a woman of faith living in a heathen city. When the Israelites, at God's command, were about to destroy the city of Jericho, God arranged a series of events which gave Rahab the opportunity to declare her faith, and ensure the safety of all in her house when the city fell. God knew there was someone worth saving. The account is in **Joshua 2** and **6**.

You wouldn't perhaps expect God to know of an African immigrant in Israel in 600 BC, would you? But read **Jeremiah 38:6-13** and **39:15-18**. Ebed-melech risked his reputation and his life to speak to the king and rescue God's prophet. God rewarded him with his life: when the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem came he was guaranteed his survival, because he trusted God. God knew about the faith of that man when, perhaps, no one else did.

You would like an example from the New Testament? In Luke 19 we read of a most unlikely person, a tax collector who was working for the Romans. Such people were hated by most Jews because they were collaborating with the enemy, and also because many of them took more money than they should if they saw a way to do so. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, and to most people he was not a good person to know—but he had an interest in Jesus. When he heard that Jesus was in town he climbed a tree to get a better view. Perhaps he did this because he was small, but perhaps he also did it to hide because he knew he was unpopular. Jesus not only knew he was there, he knew his name! Please read **Luke 19:5-10**.



Notice those last few words: '*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*' (Luke 19:10). There is no doubt that God is looking for everyone who has even just a little genuine interest in him. Jesus said, '*It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish*' (Matthew 18:14).

I could mention many more people whom God looked for and found in Bible times. I could tell of a man who insisted that Jesus was an impostor—as many do these days—but God gave him the opportunity to confess his mistake, as He did Adam, and this time the offer was accepted. The account is in **Acts 9**. He changed from a violent opponent to a caring believer. His name was Saul—later the Apostle Paul.

There was a humble prison officer. We are not told his name. There didn't seem to be anything special about him, yet God caused the Apostle Paul to cross from Asia to Europe to find and baptise him. The record is in **Acts 16**.

What About Us?

Do you think that because all this happened years ago it could not happen now? I have news for you. The things that have been happening in the land of Israel since the Second World War were promised by God three thousand years ago—in Old Testament times. God is not restricted by time. The most unlikely things

concerning Israel were promised, but they have all happened. Again, I cannot go into detail here about the place of present-day events in the purpose of God. If you read **Ezekiel 37** you will see a prophecy which is in the process of being fulfilled, as we watch. I mention this in order to demonstrate that God is still active, and that He is looking for people who will believe with a little encouragement.

Having found them, what does He want them to do?

He wants them to pick up a Bible and read it with interest and with prayer, to believe Him, to repent and be baptised (like the Apostle Paul and the Philippian prison officer), and then to live a new and Christ-centred life.

God is looking for us. If we have found God, we can be confident that when Jesus Christ returns to eradicate war, famine, crime and disease and all the other ills of this present age, he will find us. And we can look forward to his greeting: '*Enter into the joy of your master*' (Matthew 25:21).

David Welch

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NC *The article Will you go to heaven? (issue 1655) said 'The Bible says nothing about us going to heaven'. What about Jesus' words in John 14:1-3: 'Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.'*

Ed WE NEED TO READ the Lord's words carefully. Notice that he says he is going to prepare a place for his disciples, and will come again to take them to himself. They will not go to heaven to be with him, he will come again to be with them.

What does this mean? The answer is in that word 'rooms'. In the original Greek it's a word that means 'dwelling place'. The word is only used twice in the Bible—here, and later in the chapter in v. 23: *'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'* That word 'home' is the same Greek word as 'rooms' in v. 2.

So the Lord is not saying that his disciples will go to him in heaven—he is saying that he will come to them on earth.

God's desire to dwell with His people is one of the central themes in the Bible. This was the reason for the Tabernacle

in the wilderness: *'let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst' (Exodus 25:8)*. The theme comes into sharp focus with the life of Jesus Christ: *'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14)*.

John chapters 14 to 16 contain Jesus' words to his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, where they shared the Last Supper on the night before his betrayal and death. They're words of comfort and encouragement, preparing them for his departure. They centre on the promise that although he was going away, he was not really leaving them: *'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you' (14:18-20)*. If you read these chapters you'll notice how often the words 'abide' and 'dwell' occur.

When we are baptised we become children of God. One of the great privileges of being a member of God's family is that, wherever we may be, whatever may be going on in our lives, whatever we may endure, even if we feel abandoned or cut off—as long as we remain faithful to him, we are never alone: *'I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20)*.

The Whole Armour of God

IN SEVERAL of his letters the Apostle Paul likens a believer to a soldier, who needs armour for his fight.

Here are ten words from 'the whole armour of God' in Ephesians 6:13–17: on the left are the items of armour, and on the right are their spiritual significance.

Find the ten words and then match them in five pairs.

What did Paul say the believer should have strapped to their feet?

BELT

FAITH

BREASTPLATE

SALVATION

HELMET

TRUTH

SHIELD

WORD

SWORD

RIGHTEOUSNESS



J E H D N H Y S R G S W V
 H T U R T E D Y H A T N T
 M L D H Y L F P L I L Z T
 D R U R J M L V O V E E R
 N R F P I E A G X H B L S
 B R E A S T P L A T E W D
 D R O W I Q A M X N O Q D
 Z U G O C T Y S R R S W J
 Y J N W B X H X D B S C R
 R I G H T E O U S N E S S

(The Wordsearch uses the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

Anna Hart

Answer: On the feet the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.
 FAITH; HELMET of TRUTH; BREASTPLATE of RIGHTEOUSNESS; SHIELD of
 DROWNING; SWORD of SALVATION; WORD of the Spirit the WORD of God.

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