

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1449

Finding the Right Way – page 3

Put God First – page 10

The Devil and Satan – page 13



Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

121st Year

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (Brethren in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; 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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Finding the Right Way

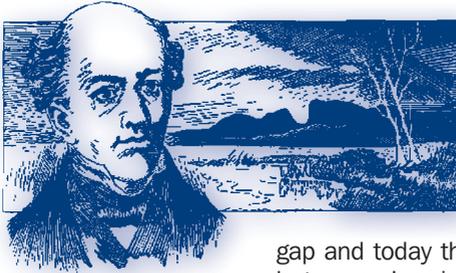
It was June 1828 when a botanist, who was working for Kew Gardens in London, first gazed across to the mountain ridge featured on this month's front cover.

His name was Allan Cunningham and the gap he found through the Great Dividing Range – which runs North to South along almost the whole East Coast of Australia – is today known as *Cunningham's Gap*.

Finding the Gap

Cunningham and his men were surveying and mapping this previously unexplored land and knew that a crossing through the Dividing Range was imperative if settlers were to gain ready access to the fertile farmland that lay beyond it. This was how he recorded his initial findings in his Diary:

"Had the day continued fine and clear, I should have endeavoured ... to have gained the highest ridge ... about 2 miles distant ... it would have enabled me in taking a survey of this ... mountainous land to have observed how far a passage over these lofty ranges could be effected by which the ... country passed over could become accessible from the shores of Moreton Bay or Brisbane River. We, however, noticed from the station to which we had climbed a very deeply excavated part of the main range bearing from us



about N.N.E. two or three miles, to the pitch of which there appeared a tolerably easy rise along the back of a forest ridge from the head of Millar's Valley. So remarkable a hollow in the principal range I determined not to leave unexamined, since it appeared ... it might prove to be a very practicable pass from the eastern country to the Darling Downs and thus form the door of a very considerable grazing country."

It was raining so heavily that the party were confined to their tents for a couple of days but on the 13th June Cunningham sent two of his men to survey the

mountain gap and they returned the day afterwards to say that they had indeed found a passage where a road could be constructed. It was duly built through that

gap and today the highway that stretches between Ipswich and Goondiwindi is known as *Cunningham's Highway*.

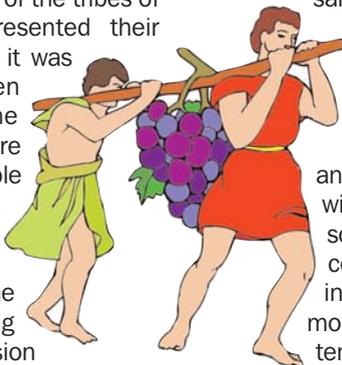
Spying out the Land

Centuries before Cunningham sent out men to spy out the land Moses had done the very same thing. He too was looking for a way into fertile plains – in his case the land of Canaan. This land, "flowing with milk and honey" had been long-promised to the descendants of Abraham, who had been away for generations in Egypt. Rescued from slavery there the new nation, who had been commissioned by God as His people, had reached a place called Kadesh Barnea, when Moses determined to send out spies.

The problem he faced was mountains

that were too high to cross – the land of Canaan was already inhabited and he wanted to know what the terrain was like and how best to enter it with an occupying force.

He sent twelve men to explore and report back, one from each of the tribes of Israel, and they duly presented their findings. Ten of them said it was hopeless to even contemplate entering the land, for the inhabitants were mighty, the cities formidable and the task impossible. The other two saw things differently. They had brought back some of the fruits of the land, including grapes, and their conclusion was that apparently impossible things are possible with God. For them it was just a matter of having faith in God – belief in His promises and in His plan of salvation – and everything else would follow.



Belief or Unbelief?

That stark choice confronts us every day. We may not be contemplating crossing a mountain range or entering occupied territory, but we too have to find the right way through life and that is not always easy. One problem is that we are naturally inclined to go the wrong way, because we have grown up learning to please ourselves. It was wise King Solomon who long-ago summed up the situation in these words, which have a real sting in the tail:

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

It is such an important observation about the human condition that it is repeated in the Book of Proverbs and is accompanied by some very graphic pictures of people who have foolishly

strayed from the right path and ended up in terrible trouble (see, for example, Proverbs 1:11-19 and 7:7-27).

Notice that the majority of people (ten out of twelve, or 83% of the spies) chose not to believe God. That has been the same in every age: the majority have always gone their own way and God has worked through a minority. If you choose to believe God and to pay attention to His Word and purpose, as we hope you will, expect to be in a minority so far as people on earth are concerned. But expect to be included in the company of more than ten thousand times ten thousand angels who live to do God’s will, and reckon yourself as numbered among the faithful from all ages who once shared the same hope and who now await its fulfilment as they sleep in the dust of the ground.

A Different Spirit

This was what God said about Caleb, one of the two spies who – like Joshua – had come back full of faith. Think what it will be like when the same testimony is given about you, when the time comes for you to enter the Land of Promise:

“All these men who have seen my glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded my voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected me see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it” (Numbers 14:22-24).

Editor

Are You Oblivious to the Coming Destruction?

It is a characteristic of mankind that people choose to go their own way regardless, being guided and impelled by their faulty human nature.

Adam was warned of the consequences of disobedience but still he disobeyed God and reaped the promised result. The people of Noah's day took no heed to the impending disaster but carried on living as usual until destruction overtook them. Violence was the order of the day for people who were evil and corrupt in the sight of God (Genesis 6:5, 11-13) and they did not really think that God would intervene in the drastic way He did. Jesus said that it will be like that again at the time of his return from heaven.

Sudden Destruction

People can become immune to the possibility of danger. David G. McCullough wrote a book about a situation where danger became familiar; danger was ignored and disaster came suddenly, with dire consequences for many ("The Johnstown Flood", 1968). Johnstown is a steel town in Pennsylvania, 78 miles east of Pittsburgh. Green hills close in on every side of it and small dams had been built to provide waterpower for machinery in the valley but, under pressure from heavy rainfall they had sometimes burst, for the town was at the confluence of two rivers.

These were minor events in comparison to what was to come.

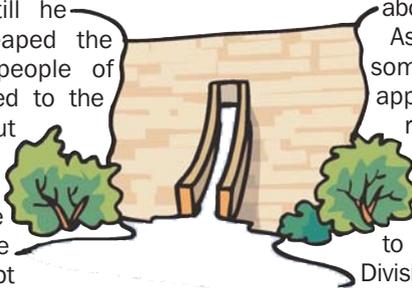
A huge dam was built up in the hills above Johnstown, the work beginning in 1838. This lake covered about 450 acres and was nearly 70 feet deep, containing an estimated twenty million tons of water. The top of the dam was about 450 feet above Johnstown.

As might be expected, some town folk were apprehensive but the reservoir served an important purpose. It sustained the canal system from Johnstown to Pittsburgh (the Western Division of the state's "Main Line" canal) and that required vast supplies of water for its operation. Previously water shortages had occurred nearly every summer, causing business to suffer as a consequence, so the dam was reckoned to be a good thing and so it was built – between 1838 and 1852.

Overtaken by Events

As things turned out the dam was unnecessary. The Pennsylvania Railroad was built and the Johnstown to Pittsburgh rail link was completed six months after the completion of the dam, making the canal system redundant.

The canal system was sold five years later, after which it was largely neglected. In 1862, after heavy rains, the dam broke for the first time but the water level was low and little damage done. In 1875 the dam was sold and four years later sold



again, some safety cast-iron discharge pipes having been removed and sold for scrap. The lake was then stocked and used for the recreational purposes of fishing and sailing by wealthy men. Further damage was done by heavy rains in 1881 but examiners pronounced it safe.

The townspeople's general sense of apprehension changed to a hardening of the mind against the possibility of danger. As one observer recorded later, "Sometime," they thought, "that dam will give way, but it won't ever happen to us!" Leading citizens did not heed the warnings of engineers who examined the dam. The furnaces of Johnstown were busy and the people were living very full lives and in their minds the threat posed by the dam receded.

Calamity!

Then, on Thursday May 30th 1889, a hard cold rain began to fall. The rivers rose rapidly and cellars in Johnstown filled with water. The level of the lake increased at an alarming rate and in the afternoon the dam was breached and that tremendous volume of water poured out and the lake was emptied in less than forty-five minutes!

David McCullough describes the plight of the inhabitants of Johnstown and tells of the surprise and suffering that came to them, with people and homes swept away. In all 2,209 people died, of whom some 400 were never found. Had the warnings been heeded, the calamity could have been prevented and lives saved. But this is how it is with man.

Indian Ocean Earthquake

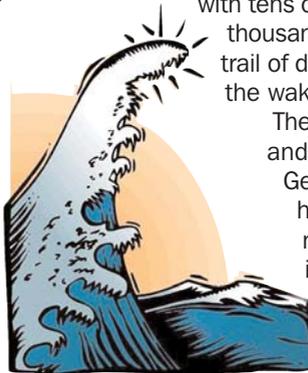
It was much the same with the earthquake that recently occurred in the Indian Ocean. This is thought to have

resulted from a shift in the earth's tectonic plates which registered 9 on the Richter scale – the international standard for measuring earthquakes – making it the fifth largest since 1900 and the biggest quake for 40 years. It caused giant waves that could be detected across the planet and a wall of water, 30ft high in parts, swept into Indonesia – over the coastline of India and Sri Lanka and across Southern Thailand – with no warning whatsoever. The results were devastating with tens of thousands of people killed, thousands more wounded, and a trail of destruction and damage left in the wake of the giant waves.

The happening was monitored and recorded at the British Geological Survey's Edinburgh headquarters thousands of miles away from the quake itself in the Indian Ocean and the magnitude of what had occurred was realised immediately. But the people who were in the immediate locality had no warning.

There is an international warning system for coastal communities which can give between three and fourteen hours notice of impending danger which was begun in 1965 and is administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Member states include all the major Pacific-rim nations in North America, Asia and South America, as well as the Pacific islands, Australia and New Zealand, France and Russia.

However, India and Sri Lanka are not members. So there were no wave



sensors in the region and therefore no way of telling which way the giant waves would travel. Thus no warnings could be given and the disaster struck while people were oblivious to what was happening.

Warnings in God's Word

That is not the case with the Bible's warnings of judgement to come. Nobody should be in any doubt about what is coming when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven. He is coming to call the world to account for its godless and heedless ways. For nearly 2000 years that warning has been part of God's message to mankind, together with the caution that many people will ignore it. It was the apostle Peter who wrote this divinely-given forecast of the unbelief and lack of readiness which would exist in "the last days" before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word,

reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:1-9).

Then Peter adds this word of advice which all wise-hearted people will want to heed:

"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (3:14,15).

The end of human government will be bad news for some and good news for others. As we see world events moving towards their final phase we should be making the most of the opportunity that still exists to learn

about God and to take advantage of His kindness and mercy in giving us the opportunity to prepare for what is coming upon the earth, so that it will not take us unawares.

There is a warning system in place and we need to take note and act accordingly.

Derrick Banyard



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13. Book of the Bible

Jesus at the Centre

This is the last article in the series that has provided an overview of all the Books of the Bible. Now **Dudley Fifield** shows that everything comes together in the Lord Jesus Christ who is at the very centre of the purpose of God.

Central Figure

It is not possible to overstate the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the central figure in the work of God. Everything revolves around him. As the apostle Paul said:

“In him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17 Revised Version).

If we think of our solar system, it all revolves around the sun. Take the sun away and the rest would disintegrate. So, in the Lord Jesus all things hold together;

“For all the promises of God in him are Yes, and in him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

It is as though all the promises that God had made through the centuries were awaiting their fulfilment in the Coming of the Son of God and that, when he was born and lived such a gracious and obedient life, there was a “Yes” given to everything that God had said would happen. And, as “Amen” means “So let it be”, the coming of Jesus was the final confirmation that God meant what He had said.



On-going Expansion

After the ascension of the Lord Jesus into heaven, the Book of Acts records the establishment of the Christian Community in Jerusalem. It describes how the gospel, in ever-increasing outward circles, was carried from Jerusalem to Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire. In the early chapters, it is Peter and John who led that preaching work, particularly to the Jews but, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, it is the apostle Paul who becomes the dominant figure, preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

The expansion of the gospel to Gentiles (non-Jews) was first made by Peter (Acts chapter 10) and, despite some early teething troubles, all the apostles worked together to further the Lord’s work during his absence in heaven, including writing many letters of instruction and correction to early Christian Communities and individuals.

After the Gospels and the Book of Acts, with the exception of the last book (The Revelation of Jesus Christ), the rest of the New Testament is composed of these letters written by the apostles.

• *The apostle Paul wrote 13 of them – nine to communities of believers and four to individuals;*

- *James (the Lord's brother) wrote one epistle;*
- *Peter two;*
- *John three; and*
- *Jude (another of the Lord's brothers) wrote one.*

The Epistle to the Hebrews bears no title of authorship and opinion is divided as to whether it was written by Paul or some other individual.

Christianity – Astray!

These letters give us a remarkable insight into the development of Christianity in the first century. One of the things that can both impress and depress us is the way in which, so soon, human nature began to assert itself and to corrupt, both morally and doctrinally, the faith of those early believers. Here are a few illustrations:

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17,18);

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? (Galatians 3:1);

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using - according to the commandments and doctrines of men? (Colossians 2:20-22).

Even worse was to follow for, writing to the Thessalonians who were living in the constant expectation of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul had this to say:

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

Repeated Warnings

The Apostle Paul repeated this warning on several occasions:

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:28-30).

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1,2).

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3,4).

The situation created by these evil influences – which means that much of modern so-called Christianity is astray from true Bible teaching – will eventually only be put right by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally

The last Book of the Bible –The Revelation of Jesus Christ – is not an easy book to understand. It is a book that is written in sign and symbol. However, its purpose is clear. The Greek word translated ‘Revelation’ is ‘Apocalypse’ (a Greek word, which has just been anglicised, and which means ‘the manifestation’ or ‘the coming’). This book is all about the circumstances that will lead up to the Coming of the Lord Jesus:

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants - things which must shortly take place. And he sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John” (Revelation 1:1).

That is its grand theme. It is a development of the wonderful prophecies that we saw in Daniel chapters 2 and 7, which culminate in the Kingdom of God being established on the earth. The Book of Revelation sees that as the grand outcome of all things, when:

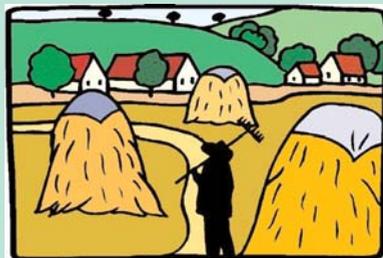
Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).

The last recorded words of the Lord Jesus in Scripture echo this truth, and every faithful longing heart must echo the response of the apostle John:

“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (22:20).

Dudley Fifield
Concluded

Put God First



Too busy with the cares of life;
The harvests very good;
No storage, so he thought he'd build
A bigger barn of wood.

When it was full he'd take a rest;
At last he could afford
To spare the time, his God obey,
And work hard for the Lord.



Alas, that night he passed away;
No second chance there'd be.
This lesson we should take to heart,
It could be you or me.

The things that matter most to us,
Are things that we will do,
And if these things are not for God,
They will be futile too.

Don't strive to build a bigger barn,
To store our treasures great;
The Master could come any time,
And we could be too late.

Gwen Marley

Heber – Man of Mystery

*There are many things to ponder in the Bible account and many questions that arise, not all of which can be answered from within the Biblical account. We are sometimes dependent upon external findings, such as those that result from archaeological investigations, traditions or chance findings of ancient inscriptions. In this article **Barbara Spencer** offers an insight into the life of a man who is just a name in the Bible account, albeit one whose name appears among other people who are important in the purpose of God.*

Why “Hebrews”?

If you have ever stopped to ask yourself why the Jews are called “Hebrews” and not “Abrahamites”, or suchlike, you will have concluded that they were named after “Heber” or “Eber”, one of Abraham’s ancestors. “Heber” is the Greek form of his name (which appears in the family tree of the Lord Jesus Christ); “Eber” is the Hebrew form, and that can be found in several places, wherever the family of Abraham is being mentioned. Here, for example, is the record in 1 Chronicles, where all the family trees are assembled together:

“ All these were the sons (or descendants) of Joktan. Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, Abram; the same is Abraham” (1 Chronicles 1:23-27).

Or in the Genesis account itself:

“Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born. The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram. And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber. And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the

earth divided; and his brother’s name was Joktan” (Genesis 10:21-25).

Notice that there was something special about Heber (or Eber); he was Shem’s great grandson, yet he is singled out for a particular mention at the start of that passage. And the descendants of Abraham are thereafter to be known as “Hebrews” – descendants of a great forefather, it would seem. Shem loved and respected Eber’s family and so too did the Jewish people.

Helpful Traditions

There are both Arabic and Jewish traditions that may help our understanding and there is a remarkable inscription that has been discovered. The Jews believe that Heber was a great prophet. The Arabic tradition is more specific:

“That the Adites were swept away by God because of their impiety towards Him, after Heber’s nurture of them in the knowledge of the truth.” Wherever the Adites lived, it seems that Heber had visited them to keep their faith alive. So both traditions seem to complement one another and the inscription adds a lot of additional information.



There was a rock-carved inscription discovered many years ago in Husn Al-Ghurab in the Hadramaut area of South Yemen, and was made by a tribe called the Aws, the Beni Ac. This is part of what it said:

We dwelt living long luxuriously in the Zenanas of this spacious mansion: our condition exempt from misfortune and adversity. Rolled through our channel the sea, swelling against our castle with angry surge; our fountains flowed with murmuring falls above the lofty palms: whose keepers planted dry dates in our valley date grounds; they sowed the arid rice. We hunted the mountain goats and the young hares, with gins and snares; beguiling, we drew forth the fishes. We walked with slow and proud gait, in needle-worked many coloured silk vestments, in whole silks, in grass-green chequered robes. Over us presided kings far removed from baseness, and stern chastisers of reprobate and wicked men.

They noted down for us, according to the doctrine of Heber, good judgments written in a book to be kept; and we proclaimed our belief in miracles, in the resurrection, in the return into the nostrils of the breath of life.

Made an inroad robbers, and would do us violence; collectively we rode forth, we and our generous youth, with stiff and sharp-pointed spears; rushing onward proud champions of our families and our wives; fighting valiantly, upon coursers with long necks, dun-coloured, iron-grey, and bright bay, with our swords still wounding and piercing our adversaries; until, charging home, we conquered and crushed this refuse of mankind.

Aws the Beni Ac

Heber's Teaching

This ancient Yemeni tribe seem to have had a pleasant enough lifestyle, robbers and violence apart, but what interests us is what they said about the “*doctrine of Heber*”, for it tallies with both the Arab and Jewish traditions – that he was a prophet and that he shared the knowledge of the truth with others. If this is the same Heber, and if the inscription is that ancient, then he taught: “*belief in miracles, in the resurrection, in the return into the nostrils of the breath of life.*”

The inscription gives the impression that Heber did not, or had not, lived among them. They wrote down what he preached in a ‘book’ as a record of his teachings. If, as it seems, he was doing a tour of all his family units – trying to keep his families’ faith alive – he would also have visited his great, great grandson Terah in Ur. If so, he might well have known young Abram, and perhaps Sarah, Lot and Nahor as well.

This is only a suggestion but as Heber out-lived Abraham by some sixty years it is certainly possible that they met occasionally. Remember that the population of the earth was very small in their days, as Abraham was born just 300 years after the Flood that had reduced the population to just eight people in all.

Hope of Resurrection

We know that Abraham believed in the resurrection of the dead, for we are told that in the New Testament, and can deduce it from the record in Genesis chapter 22:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:17-19);

It seems that Heber had that understanding too and that he shared it with others, in just the way that we should share our faith and understanding. He taught people to remember God's miracles, the resurrection, and the return into the nostrils of the breath of life. Telling others of our faith can be dispiriting. From the Arabic tradition, it seems that Heber was not always as successful as he would have hoped. Human nature does not change; but some listened to him and some will listen to us too when we tell them of the wonders of God's Word and of His offer of salvation to us.



Ancient Faith

This ancient faith – which understands that we are mortal and are in need of resurrection if there is to be any life after death – is still the faith that saves. Heber had been dead a long time when a man who called himself “A Hebrew of the Hebrews” would stand up and confound his opponents with this simple phrase:

“Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day” (Acts 24:21).

That man was the apostle Paul and his words show clearly that he was a true descendant of Heber, not just because of his family descent but because he shared Heber's faith – the faith that saves.

Barbara Spencer

The Devil and Satan

*Very different views are held about the existence or otherwise of the Devil or Satan but what really matters is what the Bible teaches. Apart from God's revelation of what is true and what is not, none of us is in a position to say whether a supernatural Lord of Evil exists or not. In this article **Norman Owen** summarises what the Bible actually teaches.*

The Devil

It may come as a surprise to some to find that the name “Devil” cannot be found in the largest part of the Bible – that is, in the Old Testament! However, this should not really be surprising when we realise that the word “Devil” is from the Greek word “*diabolos*”; so it would not appear in Hebrew – the language in which



*Is this the devil of the Bible?
It is not!*

the Old Testament was written. So what about its appearance in the Greek New Testament?

Sure enough that Testament contains the word “*diabolos*” just 35 times. In English this word is sometimes rendered “Devil”, but the word means “an accuser” or, sometimes, “a false accuser”, and is translated like that as well. But what

does it mean when the New Testament talks about Jesus and the Devil?

Mortal or Immortal?

Did you know that the Devil is not immortal? According to the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus destroyed the Devil by overcoming all temptation and through His death on the cross.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

This Scripture tells us many things, including the fact that the Devil cannot possibly have been an angel, as some people suppose. For Jesus once said that those believers who obtain eternal life will become equal to the angels, in that they will never then die (*Luke 20:35,36*).

Now notice how this passage throws light on to Hebrews 2:14. Angels cannot die, but the Devil can! And the Devil is described as *“him who had the power of death”*. Work out who or what is responsible for death and you have solved the Biblical equation.

Good Satans

As we have already noted, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. So the title *“The Devil”* nowhere occurs in this part of God’s Word, but the Hebrew word *“Satan”* appears 19 times. Just as *“diabolos”* has a meaning, so too does *“Satan”* or *“Satanos”*. It means *“an adversary”* or *“an enemy”* and a number of times it is translated into English like that, and not all adversaries are bad. Far from it!

It may be surprising to think about good adversaries, but they certainly exist in the Bible. A *“Satan”* is not necessarily someone who is evil. There is an

interesting example in the First Book of Chronicles, which can be compared with the parallel account in the Second Book of Samuel. Here are the two accounts:

“Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel” (1 Chronicles 21:1);

Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah” (2 Samuel 24:1).

Notice here that it was God behind the move: He acted as an adversary in this case!

❖ Satan in the Book of Job

The Hebrew word *“Satan”* occurs 13 times in the Book of Job and in our English Bible the word is left untranslated. When the *“sons of God”* (that is, the believers) met for worship there was someone amongst them who was very envious of Job. This adversary thought that if Job had all his many blessings removed, he would not be as good as he thought he was! So God allowed this adversary to have his wish concerning Job. He did this because He wanted Job to learn an important lesson and He needed to teach Job’s so-called friends a lesson too.

Throughout the book, and especially at its end, all that happened to Job is attributed to the hand of God. So it was that when the trial was over:

“All his brothers, all his sisters ... came to him and ... they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold” (Job 42:11).

❖ Satan in Zechariah

To understand the use of the word *“Satan”* in this prophecy it is helpful to

compare it with the Epistle of Jude in the New Testament. It will be obvious, when we do this, that both parts of God’s Word are telling us about the same incident. For example, both chapters tell us about “the angel of the LORD” though Jude says it was “Michael the archangel”. Both mention garments that were “unclean”; both mention “being pulled out of the fire” and both refer to the Mosaic priesthood.

We can note also that Zechariah speaks about a Satan who tried to resist the rebuilding of the temple after the Jews returned from Babylon. This was a group of adversaries led by Tatnai and others (see Ezra 5:3). In Jude this opposing group is called “the Devil” because they were indeed “false accusers”.

So by careful comparison of the two records we can see that the Satan here was a group of people who opposed the rebuilding work in Jerusalem. They were adversaries to those Jews who had returned from captivity, so they were dubbed “Satan” – these were bad adversaries!

The Devil Destroyed

So how did Jesus destroy the devil when he died? And what exactly is it that “has the power of death”, as Hebrews 2:14 defines “the devil”? Again the answers can be found by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

It is Sin that has the power of death – for death came into the world because of Adam’s sin and holds us in bondage because we too sin. This is how the apostle James puts it:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I

am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13-15).



The adversaries in Zechariah’s time were those who tried to stop the building

And how did Jesus overcome that power and render it powerless? Jesus destroyed “the Devil” when he “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Jesus overcame all the temptations. He was tempted in all points like us but he never once sinned. In all that he did, Jesus was victorious over sin, in all

its various guises and expressions.

For Ourselves

We must look to the Word of God to learn how sin can be overcome in our own case. Jesus Christ came to save sinners. We need to believe the truth about him and how he overcame all temptation and sin. We need to understand why he died on the cross and why God raised him from the tomb.

Then, when we believe “the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” we need to be baptised like those mentioned in Acts 8:12. By this means we can become God’s children, “brothers” or “sisters” of the Lord Jesus Christ, in hope of eternal life when he returns. By God’s grace this hope can be yours!

Norman Owen

9. The Growth of the Gospel

The Gospel Spreads beyond Jerusalem

The brutal execution of Stephen in Jerusalem – judicial death by stoning because he was reckoned to have blasphemed God – marked a new development in the spread of the gospel. He was the first martyr but now there would be many others who might lose their lives because of their faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

*As **John Hellawell** now explains, Jerusalem had suddenly become a dangerous place in which to live and it was best to get out of there!*

Persecution and Dispersion

The murder of Stephen was the signal for a concerted persecution of the members of the church in Jerusalem. Saul, whom we met in our previous article as the guardian of the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, was instrumental in arresting and imprisoning those who believed in the Lord Jesus. His actions were intended, no doubt, to suppress the growth of the new faith and, if possible stamp it out completely.

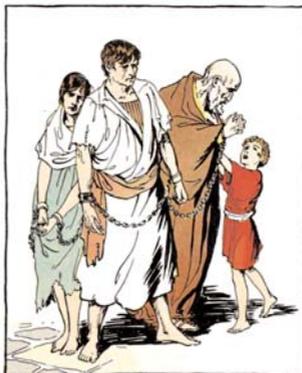
However, the effect was exactly the opposite for one reaction to this persecution was for the remaining believers to leave Jerusalem and move to Judea and Samaria (8:1) which effectively meant throughout the whole of the country. This response was in accord with the Lord's earlier command (Matt.10:23). Only the Apostles remained in Jerusalem. The persecution and subsequent scattering only served to ensure that the Gospel message spread further and wider.

We met Philip earlier in connection with the

provision of welfare for the widows (6:5). Like his companion Stephen, he not only "waited on tables" but was also an active preacher. His visit to Samaria would mean that the Gospel message would come to the place where the Lord Jesus met the woman at the well (John 4:19 -42). Given the earlier positive response to him, this would be a useful place for Philip to start. Multitudes responded favourably to Philip's preaching and the miracles which he performed; these included healing the mentally ill, the paralysed and the lame. No wonder "there was great joy in that city".

Simon the Sorcerer

Philip had a competitor living in the city. A man called Simon had impressed the people of Samaria in the past with his sorcery. This probably meant that he used the arts of a magician to claim that he had supernatural powers and perhaps made a living by the use of astrological predictions, fortune-telling and similar enterprises. When Simon encountered Philip's signs and miracles, he must have quickly



recognised that, while his own efforts were counterfeit, those of Philip were evidently genuine.

It might have been expected that he would have been hostile but it is to his credit that he recognised Philip's superiority. He was converted and, as in all cases recorded in the New Testament, he was baptised in recognition of his new-found way of life. Simon continued with Philip and we must assume that his commitment was genuine even though, as was soon to become evident, his spiritual condition was immature.

John visits Samaria

News of the successful preaching by Philip soon reached the Apostles in Jerusalem. In the past Jews and Samaritans had been hostile to each other (John 4:9) but now the Gospel was to come to all men and women (Mark 16:15). Since this was a significant development, it was agreed that Peter and John, two senior Apostles, should visit the new converts in order to show their support and approval for what Philip had achieved. They would also pray that the Samaritan disciples might receive the Holy Spirit.

It is evident that the Holy Spirit gifts were not automatically received at baptism and that Philip was unable to confer such gifts. One can only conclude that the Apostles alone had the power to convey the Spirit gifts by the "laying on of hands".

Simon was greatly impressed by the Apostles' ability to confer the gifts and offered to pay for the privilege of being able to do the same. The commercial

value would be enormous for then he could claim to be "some great one" or "great power", as he used to describe himself, and he could achieve far greater notability than before.

Peter castigated Simon strongly: how could he imagine that a divine gift could be bought. His heart was not right and, it seems Peter provided a catalogue of the dire consequences of his attitude. These are not recorded but Simon asked that he be prayed for "that none of the things" which Peter spoke of "may come upon" him.

The apostles had given their seal of approval on Philip's work and as they returned to Jerusalem they availed themselves of the opportunity to preach in many of the Samaritan villages.

Philip converts an Ethiopian

Philip was now given a new mission to intercept a traveller on the desert road from Jerusalem to the south. This man was an Ethiopian who had been visiting Jerusalem and was now returning to the royal court of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, where he was, in effect, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

He is described as a 'eunuch', although this may not be literally the case, for in many eastern courts the word was used to describe high officials generally and the word is sometimes translated "chamberlain". If, as some believe, he had been up to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple, then it would be highly unlikely that he was literally a eunuch in view of Deuteronomy 23:1.

The Ethiopian was sitting in his chariot reading aloud from the scroll of the Old



Testament prophet Isaiah. Reading aloud was common practice in ancient times but it may be that he was doing this for the benefit of his entourage of servants. It was quite probable that the scroll had been purchased during the visit to Jerusalem and strongly suggests that this man was either a Jew or a proselyte convert.

Exemplary Humility

The Holy Spirit bade Philip approach the Ethiopian and, running alongside his chariot, Philip asked whether he understood what he was reading. In the original, his question as posed assumes a negative answer: “You don’t understand what you are reading do you?” would be a modern equivalent.

The humility of this high ranking Ethiopian is exemplary: he did not respond by telling Philip to mind his own business but readily accepted the help offered and invited Philip to join him in his chariot.

The passage which he was reading is from Isaiah 53:

“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, Yet he opened not his mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of my people he was stricken” (Isaiah 53:7-8).

Who was It?

The Ethiopian was concerned to identify the one so described – was it the prophet himself or was it someone else? Philip was able to explain that the prophecy related to the Lord Jesus. The Ethiopian

may have heard something of the new movement while he was in Jerusalem and would almost certainly have heard of the claims that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead after his execution by the Romans. If he had heard about the trial he would know that the Lord Jesus had not defended himself against the false charges laid against him.

Philip now preached the Gospel. He began at the passage the Ethiopian was reading for

the whole chapter relates to the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. There were other key texts within the Isaiah scroll which he could use, for example –

- ✧ *the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14;*
- ✧ *the ideal King in Isaiah 11:1-10,*
- ✧ *the work of John the Baptist in Isaiah 40:3, and many others.*

All this had been written down some 500 years before it was fulfilled.

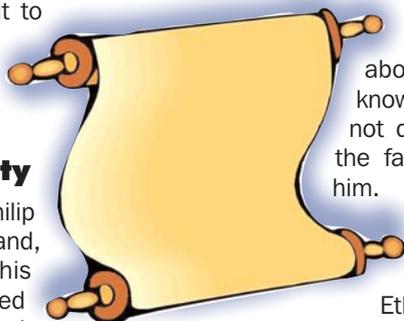
As Philip instructed him, so the Ethiopian would begin to see how the life and work of the Lord Jesus fulfilled the ancient promises in God’s Word, most of which would be familiar to him as they were to all Jews or proselytes.

Baptism Essential

As they went down the road, they came to some water (cf. Isaiah 43:19!) and the Ethiopian exclaimed:

“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (8:36)

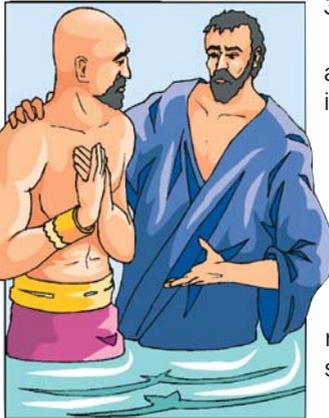
Philip must have explained the necessity of baptism. He now emphasised the importance of belief and the Ethiopian assured him that he was fully satisfied that Jesus was the Messiah or Christ, whom the Jews had expected for



centuries, and, even more significant, that Jesus was the Son of God.

The necessity for a true understanding of God's purpose was obviously an essential pre-requisite to baptism. It cannot be administered to those, such as infants or children, who do not understand what is involved. What followed is also significant, for it explains the way in which the rite of Christian baptism was originally administered. If it was adequate to sprinkle the candidate's head with water, as some claim, then there would surely be an adequate supply carried by the Ethiopian's servants! The exclamation at the sight of water would be pointless if sprinkling was acceptable. The details which follow confirm that the original mode of baptism was by complete immersion in water:

So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water... Acts 8:38-39



This accords with other descriptions of baptism in the First Century. John the Baptist, we are told, was baptising:

"in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized" (John 3:23).

The emphasis on the ample amount of water indicates that immersion was involved. The representation of baptism as a figure of death to the old way of life and resurrection to the new, as explained by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6 which involves a symbolic burial in water, cannot be represented by merely sprinkling with water.

Once the baptism was completed, Philip was caught away and the chamberlain saw him no more but went on his way rejoicing at his new-found life in Christ and carrying the Gospel message far south to Ethiopia. Philip landed at Azotus on the coast and made his way northward to Joppa, preaching as he went until he arrived home in Caesarea (see Acts.21:8).

John Hellowell

Christian Baptism

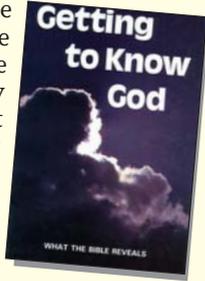
There is a precise act of obedience asked of us. It is called baptism, and Paul links it with crucifixion (Romans 6. 1-6). The one who is baptized recognises what the Lord has done by his death, and joins him. The one who is baptized admits that there is nothing to be hoped for from the old man, and is born anew (John 3.3-5; Titus 3. 3-5). But all this demands choice: intelligent, informed and humble choice. It is such as the Lord himself did when he was thirty years of age: *"Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness"* (Matthew 3. 13-17). *"Us,"* said the Lord, and he meant himself and the sinners with whom he consented to be associated. It is hard to understand how men can invent reasons for not accepting such an appeal.

Alfred Norris

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