

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD 1450

Out of the Blue – page 3

Was the Tsunami an Act of God? – page 5

The Choice – page 11



Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

121st Year

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1450

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Out of the Blue

It was holiday time when the earthquake occurred in the Indian Ocean – the biggest for forty years – and the results were devastating.

The west coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra was the inhabited area nearest to the epicentre and it was hard hit. More than 70% of the inhabitants of some coastal villages are said to have been lost – over 100,000 Indonesians are thought to have died altogether.

Widespread Ruin

The devastation was not confined to one country. The earthquake caused a tsunami – a huge tidal wave that erupted in all directions – bringing devastation to Sri Lanka, India (including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Malaysia, the Maldives and Thailand. People died from those huge tidal waves as far away from the earthquake as Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and the Seychelles.

It was not just the death toll that shocked the world. It was the huge destruction that ensued to the countries that were affected. Homes, roads, schools and hospitals were all destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people lost everything in just a few minutes of devastation – boats smashed, families drowned, lives ruined. What happened was on a huge scale – someone called it “a global catastrophe”.

World Reaction

Good sometimes comes out of the direst and more dreadful things and that has been the case in the aftermath of the tsunami. A huge relief effort got underway, spearheaded by the United Nations, and there has been a very generous public and governmental response to try to help rescue and rebuild in the various affected countries.

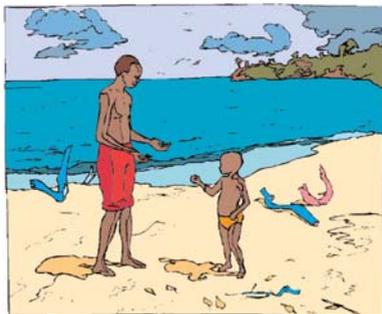
Public attention has focused as well on the human interest stories of people lost and sometimes found again and

happy scenes of reunited families and friends have appeared. Those stories were in sharp contrast to the difficulties faced by the people who have nowhere else to go but their devastated dwellings – who have neither family members nor friends left alive.

In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy the media began to debate God’s role in all that happened and whether He should have intervened – if He exists. There’s a contradiction if ever there was one. For years God gets hardly any mention in the media and His purpose never crosses the minds of people. But when something goes wrong the Creator becomes a target for abuse and public derision.

No Warning

Disaster presents another opportunity for unbelievers to confirm in their own minds that there can be no God, if He allows things like this to happen. That’s an issue that is considered in a later



article in this issue of “*Glad Tidings*”. For the moment there is a more immediate matter to reflect upon.

The massive tidal waves struck the various coastlines at about 8 a.m. local time when some people were breakfasting, some sunbathing or walking on the beach, others were swimming, fishing, diving, sailing – for many of the affected places were holiday resorts, and very attractive ones at that.

Thousands of people were either on holiday or were going about their normal business, at work or in the home. So when the destruction came there was no real warning, at best only a few minutes before the waves struck with such force that they carried everything with them.

It was a huge shock to see a wall of water – up to forty-feet high – rushing towards them and their families. People had simply to turn and run leaving everything: they were fleeing for their lives and heading for high ground, tall buildings or even nearby trees.

Those memories will be etched in many minds for years to come, and not only in the minds of those who were there. People who saw the pictures and heard the screams from far away, courtesy of videos, news-broadcasts, and photographs will also remember and share their sorrow. But what lasting effect will there be on those of us who were merely onlookers? What lessons, if any, will we take from what happened in and around the Indian Ocean?

Take Heed

A warning has been given repeatedly, the last instalment having been delivered over 1900 years ago, that human society as we know it will be destroyed.

The eventual situation will be far better than the world as it now exists, but the process of getting from here to there is going to be traumatic for those people who have chosen to carry on regardless. It has happened before – both at the time of the flood, in Noah’s day; and at the time when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, when only Lot and his daughters were saved. The Lord Jesus referred to both those occasions of unlooked for and sudden destruction and then added:

“Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back ... Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it” (Luke 17:30-33).

The apostle Paul added this warning: *“For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:3-6).*

The choice is ours. Either we can carry on heedless of the coming destruction – of which the tsunami may be a grim foretaste – or we can do something about it and get to understand what it is that God wants us to do, so that we can be ready for the coming age.

Editor



Was the Tsunami an Act of God?

*In an insurance policy the destructive acts of nature are sometimes referred to as “An Act of God.” The policy then says whether or not it covers those happenings, depending upon its terms and any surcharges that may have been paid. The events in question include things like floods, earthquakes and storms but in this article **David Caudery** invites you to consider whether it is fair to call these events ‘acts of God’.*

God and His World

These thoughts are written for consideration both by those who believe in God and those who do not. Either way, the question people are now asking is why God allows such events, the unbeliever adding “if there is a God”. For those who do not believe in God – in a Creator who is actively involved in the world He has created – these events seem to them to be proof that there is no God. For those who believe there is a God who is actively involved in the world and in their lives, these events cause much heart searching. Here are some pointers that might help both categories of people.

Essential Points to Ponder

The first thing to ask is whether we expect the God who created us to be constantly on the watch in our lives, to protect us from those things that could damage us. For example:

- ⊕ water is essential, life could not exist without it, yet water can kill as the tsunami powerfully demonstrated;
- ⊕ fire heats and warms, but it too can kill.



Elements like these are part of God’s creation. Do we expect God to have set things in motion so that He constantly intervenes to protect human beings from the misuse of these elements? Or should He be expected to save those who fail to take precautions when there is danger from these elements? But

now let’s focus on an even more pertinent point, one which is specifically recorded in the Gospels.

Accidental Damage

There is a way of thinking, which obviously also existed in the days when Jesus lived, whereby any trouble coming into a person’s life – like sickness or some accident – was thought to happen because of some sin on the part of those afflicted, or even something wrong done by the parents! Jesus was asked specifically about that and gave a fascinating response. He had been asked about a case of accidental damage and this is what he said:

“Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all

other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4,5).

In the same passage he tells of what Pilate had done to some Galileans, asking:

"Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (13:2,3).

Now weigh up carefully the powerful point that Jesus was making. He was demolishing the belief many held that some events happened because people were sinners. It is true that in the past some specific events happened precisely for that reason, but on those occasions a prophet from God was sent directly to say so. But, Jesus said, suffering is not the direct consequence of sin. It is not the case that those who sin most suffer most.

"All have sinned"

Those who see the Bible as the most remarkable book ever written – a book which has stood the test of 2,000 years – can identify with its diagnosis that we are all sinners and live in a sin-stricken world. As things are now – with mankind in charge of the government of the world – God allows things to happen, including letting nature take its course. So we cannot complain when a tragedy like the tsunami happens, especially when governments in the region had decided not to install an earthquake warning system.

Those who escape from whatever tragedy is happening, and those people who are mere onlookers – seeing the events from far away – should reflect

on their own lives and their own lack of belief and their failure to get to know their Creator.

However, instead of doing this, there is a temptation to focus on those who are apparently innocent, especially little children. "Why should they suffer?" people ask. This is a hard question, but we should not allow it to distract us from the greater lesson for ourselves. It is hard because we get emotionally involved and fall back on the conviction that, if there is a God, it is most unfair of Him if He does not give us every chance and every blessing.

Like little Children

If we are really sincere about the question of the suffering of little children, we can show our sincerity in at least two ways. First, there is now ample opportunity, through the relief agencies that are bringing much-needed help to the affected region, to give some financial support to those children who survived, and families of those who did not. Second, there is the opportunity for us to use the time that we have left to get our lives right with God.

If neither of those opportunities seems relevant we need to consider if the argument about God's treatment of little children is an issue raised to sidestep the real issue of our own responsibility to God.

Jesus said that we all need to become like little children if we are to please God – trusting, willing and obedient, with lives that are uncluttered by all the complications of adult life:

"Then little children were brought to him that he might put his hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for



of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And he laid his hands on them” (Matthew 19:13-15).

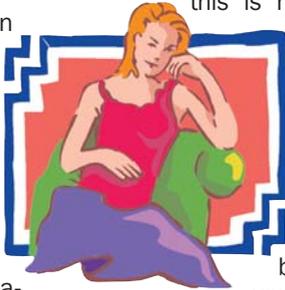
Jesus was encouraging the development of a childlike spirit of trusting in him and in God. Where does such a spirit exist today?

Looking for God

Those who do not believe in God may comfortably recline in their armchairs saying, “There just cannot be a God, I’m sorry for those who believe in such superstition”. They will look out of their windows and see the beauty of the trees and flowers, and maybe forget they have reasoned themselves into believing that all this is the result of pure chance, an incredible accident. Given enough millions or billions of years that tree would have evolved from nothing, that’s why it is here today!

Following the same logic one should look across the road at the neighbour’s house, and say the same thing, given enough millions or billions of years, that house could have invented itself! The atheist will live with his superstitions and die with them. He believes there is nothing beyond this life, so there will be nothing for him!

The earnest and sincere Bible believer, accepting this book as the Word of God, has different convictions; therefore his future will be different. But, sadly, there are fewer and fewer such people. Then there is a third group. These folk may go to church at Easter or at Christmas and have a Bible on their bookshelves, but rarely



read it. Perhaps it requires tragedies of the magnitude of the recent tsunami disaster to make such people think hard about the realities of life.

God’s Coming Intervention

Life, as it exists now, is not going to continue on this earth for ever. One of the things that convince Bible believers that this is no ordinary book is that Jesus could foretell 2,000 years ago that God would have to intervene in life on earth to stop man from destroying himself, and also from destroying the earth. (Read Matthew 24:22 and Revelation 11:18.)

Such a prediction might have been hard to believe even 100 years ago, now it is very believable.

Peter, the leading disciple of Jesus, in his last letter to believers wrote about the return of Jesus Christ to the earth in power. He described our age quite remarkably in these words:

“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” (2 Peter 3:3,4).

He then explains how God judged the world in the days of Noah, and says that He will judge the world again, although, thankfully, He has promised never to destroy all life again. But God has reserved this present age for *“the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men” (3:7).*

This world is rushing madly and blindly to keep its appointment with God. A majority of people, at least in the western world, do not even believe that He



exists. Many in the rest of the world hold to their own superstitions and to human teachings as to what God is, instead of having their thinking illuminated by the Bible. God is not willing that any should perish, but do we respect His patience with human beings? No! Instead we pursue philosophies to try to prove, at least to ourselves, that He does not exist.

Working it Out

Belief is a very personal thing. God sees it that way too. The Bible challenges us to work out our own salvation with trembling and fear (Philippians 2:12). Going to church will not save you, at least not by itself. We need to feed on God's Word everyday. Jesus said that we are not saved by bread alone but by feeding our minds on God's Word.

If we make it a practice in our lives to find out what God is saying to us in His Word the Bible then, and only then, we will understand the ways of God. We will

come to understand many things, including that our ways are not the ways of God – His thinking and His purposes are far beyond and above our level of intelligence. His feelings and emotions are far deeper and more wholesome than ours.

Sometimes God allows or even creates a crisis in our lives to challenge us as to where we stand in His sight – whether we need him or not. Do you need Him? Do you need to know why you are alive? If sudden disaster befell you, would you be content just to live and then die so as to become as though you had never existed? Or do you think there should be more to life than that? These are the serious issues posed by the tsunami as by all the unexplained and unexpected disasters of life. They should all make us think hard about the deepest things in life.

David Caudery

When Jesus Comes ...

Jesus will return in judgement. He has told us that his return will come as a surprise, just as a thief comes at night when he is not expected. This lack of expectation would be a feature of that day and a sign that the time of Jesus' return was near. Jesus exhorted his followers to stay awake and be ready to meet him. The world at large would be asleep and not expect him.

In the last chapter of the Bible Jesus tells his followers three times that he will come quickly, or suddenly:

- ❖ *“Behold, I am coming quickly (or suddenly)! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:7);*
- ❖ *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to each one according to his work” (22:12);*
- ❖ *“Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus (22:20).*



Derrick Banyard

The Stones Cry Out

I tell you that if these [my disciples] should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out (Luke 19:40).

The previous articles in this series on recent archaeological discoveries in the Holy Land have described finds that confirm the historical reality of many of the characters mentioned in the Bible. In this article **David Burges** considers discoveries relating to two of the key rulers encountered by the Lord Jesus Christ during his ministry

Many attempts have been made over the centuries to cast doubt upon the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. But few historians today would deny that he lived some 2,000 years ago in Palestine, as recorded in the New Testament. The inspired Gospel writer Luke carefully places his record against a detailed historical background. For instance the ministry of John the Baptist began:

“...in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being Tetrarch of Galilee...while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests” (Luke 3:1,2).

The ministry of Jesus himself began shortly afterwards, following his own baptism by John.

The Roman Governor

It wasn't long ago that many scholars questioned the actual existence of Pontius Pilate, the Roman



Fig.1: The Pilate inscription

Line One
TIBERIVM
Line Two
(PON)TIUS
PILATE
Line Three
(PRAEF)ECTUS
IUDA(EAE)

Fig.2: Text of the inscription

procurator who ordered Jesus' crucifixion. But in June 1961 Italian archaeologists excavating the ancient Roman amphitheatre at Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast, uncovered a limestone block bearing a monumental inscription (Figure 1).

Although damaged, the inscription is clearly dedicated to Tiberius Caesar, and carries the name of its author, "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea" (Figure 2).

Visitors to Caesarea's Roman theatre today see a replica; the original is in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. This is the only known inscription mentioning Pilate, although a few bronze coins struck in the years 29-32 AD and bearing his name have also been found.

The Roman historian Tacitus, recording the cruel punishments inflicted by Nero upon the Christians, says: "They got their name from Christ, who was executed

by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius" (Annals xv.44). Pilate is also referred to by two Jewish writers, Josephus and Philo. But the inscription discovered in Caesarea is the first direct evidence of this notorious Roman.

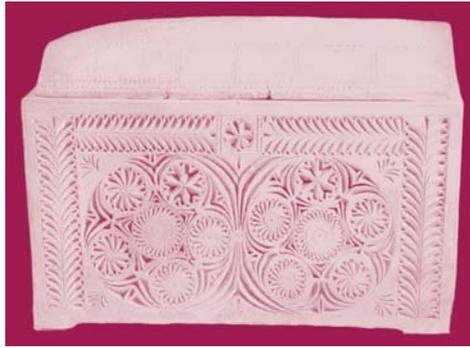


Fig.3 The ossuary of Caiaphas

The Jewish High Priest

In November 1990, workmen were preparing a water park in an area south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem known as the Peace Forest. Their bulldozer broke through the roof of a burial cave dating from the time of the New Testament. Many such tombs are found in the locality.

Inside the tomb the archaeologists found twelve ossuaries or bone boxes. In the hundred years or so up to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Jews practised what is known as 'secondary burial'.

A deceased body was first laid in a recess in the burial cave; then, after the flesh had decomposed, the bones were gathered and placed in an ossuary, usually made of limestone and often decorated and inscribed. The bones of several members of a family could be accommodated in a single ossuary.

One beautifully decorated ossuary (Figure 3) in the tomb was inscribed with the name of none other than the High Priest who was responsible for handing Jesus over to the Romans to be crucified:

"And they led [Jesus] away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (John 18:13,14).

The name inscribed on the ossuary was 'Joseph bar Caiaphas' (Figure 4), 'Caiaphas' being the family nickname. The Jewish historian Josephus confirms that this was the full name of the High Priest of the Gospels! In the ossuary were the bones of four children, an adult woman and a man aged about 60, presumably Caiaphas himself.

The Gospels verified

These two remarkable discoveries have confirmed the writings of the Bible and the secular historians about these two key players in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Once again the Bible is verified as a book of history!



Fig.4: Inscription on the ossuary, with equivalent modern Hebrew letters

David Burges

Illustrations
by David Willey

The Choice

Recently we bought a bird feeder that is hanging from a tree branch in our garden and it taught us an important lesson. It is full of seeds suitable for wild birds and you would have thought that one seed is much like another so far as birds are concerned. But that's not the case!

Fussy Eaters

We were watching a small bluetit perched on the feeder and to our amazement we saw the seeds flying in all directions. The little bird was scattering the seeds as it sorted out which ones it wanted. It became obvious that the bluetit was very sure which kind of seed it required and discarded to the ground those it did not. The bird was making a choice – a very important choice because it knew which seeds were suitable for its diet and that of its chicks waiting to be fed.

Throughout our lives we have to make many choices. Our two year old grandson has to make a choice whether he eats all the food he is given before he is allowed to have any 'pudding'. If he doesn't eat his plate of meat and vegetables then the strawberries he is particularly fond of are not available! He protests sometimes but he knows the outcome is in his hands or hopefully in his tummy. He is being taught to make choices and he has to understand why certain actions are not advisable, like touching the fire because it burns, not letting go of Daddy's

hand when he is going for a walk because there are dangers he might not see.

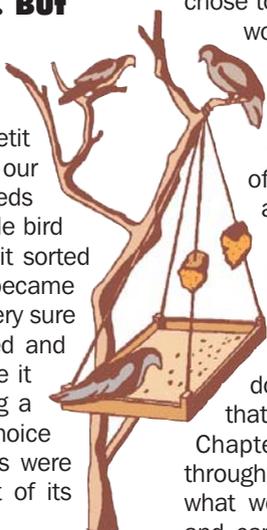
Important Choices

In the Bible we have many examples of people who had to make important choices. In order to make a choice we need to be 'informed' as to the consequences of our choice. In Genesis chapter 3 there was an important choice to be made. Eve chose to believe the serpent that said she would not die if she ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. She chose to ignore the warning that God had given that she would die. The consequence of Adam and Eve's choice has affected mankind ever since and it is only through God's mercy and provision of His Son to redeem us from sin and death that we can have hope of everlasting life.

The Israelites were left in no doubt as to the outcome of a choice that was put to them by Moses. In Chapter 28 of Deuteronomy, God, through Moses, informed the Israelites what would happen if they obeyed Him and carefully followed all His commands (read verses 1 – 14 if you want to see what blessings were on offer). Verse 15 starts "*However if you do not obey ...*" and to the end of the chapter God very clearly sets out what would happen.

Sadly, just like Adam and Eve before them, the Israelites chose not to obey God and the verses have been fulfilled right up to the present day. In Chapter 30:19 of Deuteronomy God again repeats His offer:

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing;



therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (30:19).

Spiritual Discernment

Job has some interesting words about how we make decisions in our lives, for this is what he says –

"For the ear tests words as the palate tastes food. Let us choose justice for ourselves; let us know among ourselves what is good" (Job 34:3-4).

King David also gives us valuable advice on who we should go to for guidance in our lives –

"Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall he teach in the way he chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth" (Psalm 25:12-13).

In the first book of the Bible there is a lovely story about a wife being chosen for Abraham's son Isaac. In Genesis chapter 24 Abraham's servant goes back to the area where Abraham's family had settled after they left Ur. The servant asks God to guide him to make the right choice of a wife for Isaac. Twice during the narrative he repeats the wonderful way his prayer is fulfilled.

There is no doubt in his mind that the maiden who offered him and his camels water is the chosen wife and he tells the family that it is God's choice also. Rebekah shows that she understands she has been chosen to be Isaac's wife and she is given the choice. They called Rebekah, and said unto her, *"Will you go with this man?" "I will go."* She said." (verse 58) Rebekah made an informed

choice – read the whole chapter to see why she made her choice and on what basis she made her decision.

Making our Choices

During our lives we make many decisions or choices – but on what basis do we make them? Often we take decisions that lead to circumstances we would not wish. How do we know which choice to make? Who can we trust to teach us how to make an informed choice – our parents, teachers, friends – or even ourselves? You have made a choice to read this magazine rather than 101 other things with which you could occupy your time.

We believe that the Bible is the best Guide for Life because its words are there to direct our decisions throughout our lives. Jesus tells us to *'Seek first the Kingdom of God'* and then all the other things that we need in this life will be given to us. We need to

work out which are the most important things in life for us and that having an understanding of God's Word, shown to us in the Bible, will put into perspective all the rest of our thinking.

"God Willing"

The apostle James says that when we are making decisions about what we shall do in the future we should always say *'God willing'*, because none of us knows for certain what is going to happen in the future and often events turn out very differently from what we had anticipated (James 4:13-15).

We see all around us people who do not give any thought at all to the ways of God.



So much pain, suffering and sadness could be avoided if only we turn to Jesus and follow his teaching. He warned us to turn away from the broad way and the crowd that leads to death and instead follow the narrow way that leads to life, even though we might find ourselves to be in the minority (Matthew Chap 6:33).



know it makes sense – the choice is yours. For this is what the wise words of the Book of Proverbs say:

“Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, they would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their

own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil” (Proverbs 1:29-33).

Wendy Sykes

The Growth of the Gospel – 10

Saul’s Persecutions and Conversion

*Stephen had been executed at Jerusalem – the first Christian martyr – and, as a result, many believers had fled from Jerusalem and the gospel had spread with them. But the persecution did not end then; indeed many Jews were determined to stamp out this new following. The last thing they wanted was for the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth to be continued but, as **John Hellawell** now explains, God had other ideas and very surprising ones at that!*

Sufferings of the Faithful

During the period of the spread of the Gospel to Samaria and beyond, Saul of Tarsus – whom we met earlier in this series – continued his persecution of the disciples. Chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles opens with this chilling statement:

“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord...” (Acts 9:1).

Details of his activities are recounted later by Paul himself in Acts chapters 22 and 26, when he was under arrest and on trial for the Faith. This is what he then says:

“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and I went to Damascus to bring in chains even those

who were there to Jerusalem to be punished” (Acts 22:4-5).

“Indeed I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:9-11).

These must have been very difficult times for the disciples. If suspected of believing in the Lord Jesus they would be tortured in order to make them utter blasphemy, which would then render them guilty of a capital offence. The vehemence of Saul knew no bounds. He mentions Damascus in Acts 22 but the plural “foreign cities” in Acts 26 indicates that nowhere was safe.

Journey to Damascus

Saul’s expedition to Damascus in order to arrest and deliver disciples to Jerusalem for sentencing was, however, to be his last such venture. For, when he was only a short distance from the city, the Lord Jesus intercepted him.

A light shone from heaven, so brilliant that he fell to the ground. Although it was noon, this light exceeded the brightness of the sun (Acts 22:6 & 26:13) and a voice interrogated him in Aramaic:



“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4)

This question speaks volumes. The Lord Jesus did not ask, “Why are you persecuting my disciples?” but “Why are you persecuting me?”

Jesus and His Followers

There is a wonderful principle in operation here in which the Lord Jesus associates himself with his disciples. It may be compared with his comments: “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Matthew 10:40). On another occasion the Lord told a parable about coming judgement in which the King was to say to his followers:

“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

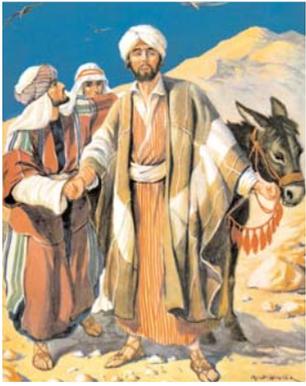
Although Saul asked “Who are you Lord?” it is reasonable to assume that he recognised who it was. Even so, the Lord Jesus left him in no doubt and, whilst identifying himself, he deliberately repeated his association with his followers:

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 9:5).

This phrase “it is hard for you to kick against the goads” may be a reference to Saul’s past behaviour in resenting the effects of Christian witnesses. He could not refute the arguments



made by Stephen (Acts 6:10) and it seems highly probable that the example of those whom he persecuted had deeply affected him. When someone becomes active in any movement and is selected by common consent of their peers to leadership, it is difficult to admit that doubts are creeping in. It may be that Saul's vehemence was his way of trying to convince himself that he was right and Christians were wrong.



Saul's Conversion

Saul realised that there was a purpose in his being intercepted in this way. He asked: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Lord Jesus instructed him to continue his journey to Damascus and, once there, he would be told what he must do next.

We learn later on in Acts that the Lord explained the purpose of his intervention:

"Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18).

The men who accompanied Saul were perplexed by what was happening. They were speechless because they heard a

voice but saw no-one. In recounting the episode later Saul said:

"Now those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me ...and since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus" (Acts 22:9,11).

It may seem that there is a contradiction between the account in Acts 9 ('hearing a voice') and in Acts 22 ('did not hear the voice'). Other translations substitute "did not understand" for "did not hear", suggesting that they heard something but could not make out what was being said, a situation comparable with that recorded in John12:28,29.

When Saul arose from the ground and opened his eyes he found that he could not see. His companions, who were unaffected by the bright light, led him by the hand to Damascus where he remained sightless and for three days neither ate nor drank.

Things had indeed taken an unexpected turn and there were greater marvels in store for this arresting officer who had himself been arrested on the Road to Damascus.

John Hellowell

Bible Line



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Part One

Three Steps to a Happier Life

Do you ever feel like you're going round in circles? You get up in the morning, wash, have breakfast, go to work or college, come home, have tea, flake out in front of the TV, maybe get some house work in if you're feeling up to it, then go to bed. The next day it all starts again – you get up, wash, breakfast, go to work, college and so on.

I think virtually everyone at some point must feel like the rodent, running on a wheel – going round in circles and never getting anywhere. It's at times like these when we might begin to ask the questions – What am I doing? Where am I going? Is there a purpose to life or is everything meaningless?

Age-Old Puzzle

A few thousand years ago, around 930 BC, the third King of Israel, King Solomon was asking these same questions: Is there a purpose to life? What is the best way to live my life? How can I find true peace and happiness?

Just take a look at Ecclesiastes Chapter 2 v 1-17. Remember – Solomon is searching for happiness and a meaningful life. What did Solomon test – or try out – to find happiness? The list, depending on which Bible version you have, is something like this:

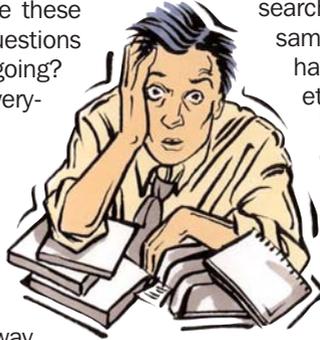
- ✗ *laughter, fun (v2)*
- ✗ *alcohol (v3)*
- ✗ *home improvement, projects, career (v4)*
- ✗ *gardening (v4)*
- ✗ *wealth and material possessions (V7-8)*
- ✗ *Music (V8)*
- ✗ *Sex, family (V8).*

Just looking down that list you can see that nothing much has changed in the past 3000 years! People are still searching for happiness in the same places. Laughter, fun, having a good time. Society offers endless comedy TV shows, and there are countless things to do to have a good time – theme parks, night clubs and so on.

Alcohol is still one of the things people turn to for fun. Try walking down your local high street on a Saturday night – and you'll see that drunkenness and drugs are sadly at the forefront of life for many. People seem to feel trapped in the cycle of working all week and then getting drunk at weekends. The cycle begins again on Monday morning – living for the drinking binge of the coming weekend – and ironically the measure of a good time is that you can't remember what happened. Surely there must be a happier and more meaningful way to live!

Other Diversions

The things referred to in verse 4 of Ecclesiastes 2 – home improvements and gardening – are perhaps more respectable



ways to fill our lives. Gardening and home improvement programmes are all the rage in Britain at present. These things might be enjoyable, but do they ultimately give us true happiness and meaning in our lives?

Another addiction or driving force in the lives of many is money. We all need a certain amount of money to survive – but for some, large houses, several cars, a yacht and maybe a holiday home seem to be essentials. So money making is an addiction, a feverish necessity which becomes the only focus in life.

Also mentioned in verse 8 is music. What a wonderful thing music is! It can make you sad, happy or relaxed. I personally would not like to be without it. But again, for some, music becomes the reason to exist. Many become involved in performing at gigs, and the pop scene has always been notorious for drugs and sexual immorality. Is this where true happiness lies?

Relationships

The last thing Solomon mentions in verse 8 is sex –

he says that he:

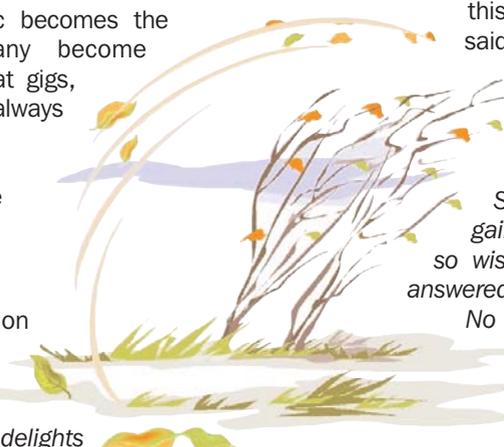
“acquired a harem – the delights of the heart of man” (NIV). Now if sex holds the key to happiness and a meaningful life Solomon should be able to tell us, because he strayed from God’s principles and managed to collect 700 wives and 300 concubines – which is probably a world record!

Perhaps Solomon wanted many children – a huge family. Many people desire a family or at least want a husband or wife for companionship and this is a good thing. But does family life provide us with true peace, happiness and meaning? Well, let’s see what Solomon said about

all these things which he tried out:

“Anything I wanted, I got. I did not deny myself any pleasure. I was proud of everything I had worked for, and all this was my reward ...Then I thought about all that I had done and how hard I had worked doing it, and I realized that it didn’t mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind – of no use at all” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11).

Can you imagine that! Being the wealthiest person in the world and achieving great things, being a powerful king and coming to the conclusion that: “it didn’t mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind – of no use at all!” What made Solomon come to this conclusion? We find the answer in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 for this is what Solomon said:



“I thought to myself, “I will suffer the same fate as fools.

So what have I gained from being so wise?” “Nothing,” I answered, “not a thing.”

No one remembers the wise, and no one remembers fools. In days

to come, we will all be forgotten. We must all die – wise and foolish alike. So life came to mean nothing to me, because everything in it had brought me nothing but trouble. It had all been useless; I had been chasing the wind” (2:15-17).

Chasing the Wind

So Solomon found that it was futile trying to find happiness in laughter, fun, alcohol, home improvements, gardening, wealth and material possessions, money, grand projects and careers, music, sex and family life. He had been chasing the wind.

What a brilliant metaphor – we can all understand how stupid it is to chase the wind. If you try and grasp it in your hand it disappears – it’s only air. Notice that Solomon also points out that the reason why these things are futile is that we all must die, so none of these things are permanent.

Solomon’s sentiments about death making life meaningless are echoed by Paul in his letter to Timothy, and by Job:

“What did we bring into the world? Nothing! What can we take out of the world? Nothing!”
(1Timothy 6:7).

“I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing”
(Job 1:21).

These are sobering thoughts, aren’t they? We might find pleasure in our families, homes, careers and gardens and so on, but these things - along with us – will soon disappear. They cannot provide permanent happiness, or give our lives meaning – so what can? Solomon gives us a clear answer to these questions. This was his discovery:

“After all this, there is only one thing to say: have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all that human beings were created for. God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret”
(Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Finding Meaning

How does this answer our questions of finding happiness and purpose in our lives? Well, a belief in God makes everything meaningful. You see, if we were going to die, and that was the end of it, everything would be meaningless, as Solomon says, “The best thing we can do is eat and drink and enjoy what we have

earned.” So eat drink and be merry would be the best attitude we could have about life - if death was the end.

But Solomon knew that death was not the end – look again at verse 14: “God is going to judge everything we do.” Solomon knew that God would raise the dead and judge them. This is a clear scriptural teaching. Both Old and New Testaments clearly teach that resurrection is the only hope of life after death. Daniel says:

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

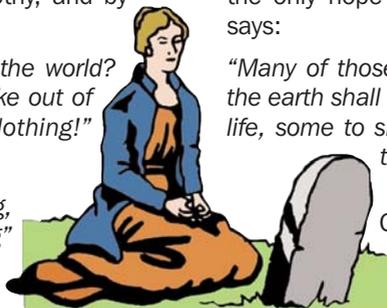
Those who know about God will be raised from the dead and judged according to how they have lived their lives. The stronger possibility for us is that Jesus will return in our lifetimes – so we might not even die before we are called away to judgement:

“We who are alive on the day the Lord comes will not go ahead of those who have died. There will be the shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first”
(1 Thessalonians 4:15,16).

The signs are that Jesus could return at any moment to set up God’s Kingdom here on earth. But how does God’s promise of resurrection and judgement lead us to purpose and happiness? In the next article, God willing, we will look at three simple steps to a happier life, and how they are tied in with these promises of Resurrection and Judgement.

Sarah & Andy Joiner

Most Quotations are from Today’s English Version of the Bible, except where shown



Remember 24th August!

The Bay of Naples, in Italy, was peaceful. The nearby volcano had been quiet for centuries and past eruptions had enhanced the quality of the soil around it.

Mount Vesuvius was green, its slopes populated by vineyards and fertile fields. At nearby Pompeii, houses and buildings of many kinds had been built. All was well.



came chaos. Vesuvius came alive in all its fury to bring sudden darkness, death and destruction to towns and villages up to fifteen miles around the volcano.

The excavations of modern times have illustrated very graphically the manner in which people were overtaken by this disaster. Death came to them in all sorts

And then...

The morning of February 5th, A.D.62 was a sunny and normal day of work and pleasure, but it was interrupted suddenly by a great roar, caused by an earthquake. Roads within and around Pompeii opened up, houses reeled and temple columns fell and the reservoir gave way and caused floods.

It was a warning that the volcano was going to erupt! But during the next seventeen years people repaired the damage, then built even better and more beautiful houses and temples. Life went on contentedly. Memories of the earthquake faded. Pious sacrifices to the gods brought assurance to the people that all would be well.

In the beginning of August, A.D.79, brief tremors shook the ground but only the slightest damage was caused. Springs ceased to flow and wells dried up but life went on, the people feeling calm and secure. It was on the 20th August that worrying roars and noises occurred. Horses, cattle and birds first became alarmed as though they were apprehensive of what was coming. Then on the 24th August

of circumstances. Whether sleeping, working, indulging in pleasure, sheltering or fleeing, they were overwhelmed by sudden destruction. It is awesome to contemplate their experience through all the turmoil of their last hours. We can look back and see how different it could have been had the earthquake warnings been heeded. The ensuing sadness and suffering might have been avoided.

Signs of the Times

Christadelphians draw attention to 'signs of the times' to emphasise that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is fast approaching, to bring a time of resurrection and judgement, and a time of universal political change.

It needs little imagination to see that the taking over of the government of all the nations in the world will be an operation on an unprecedented scale. The new King will overcome and prevail, as the Scriptures foretell: the kingdoms of men will indeed become the Kingdom of God, to His glory. The crucial thing is to be ready. Remember 24th August, A.D. 79.

Derrick Banyard

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... the Lord will return in glorious bodily form from the heavens (Acts 1.11) and that, when He comes, He will find a world, as a whole, unwilling to receive him: willing, indeed, to engage in open rebellion against him (Psalm 2; Revelation 19:19). And we believe that He will, as he must, conquer, and take over the world.



Alfred Norris

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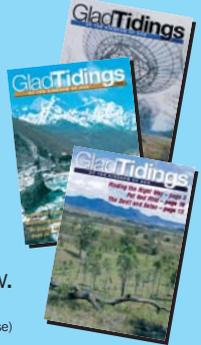
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