

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1480



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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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Too Much of a Good Thing?

Everybody needs water. As a rule of thumb, people can only survive for three days without it. It is essential to life.

That's why rainwater is so carefully collected throughout the world or why wells are bored to get clean water. But you can have too much water, as many places have recently experienced, all over the world.

Widespread Flooding

This month's front cover photograph shows the result of heavy rainfall in Sheffield, in England, as large areas of Northern Britain were submerged. Towns like Sheffield, Hull and Doncaster were hit very hard during June, when as much rain fell in 4 hours as would normally be expected in an entire month. As a result, rivers rose and drainage systems were quite unable to cope. And July was little better.

This time it was Central England that suffered, as rain that would normally have fallen over the Atlantic fell on land instead. Rivers like the Avon and the Severn burst their banks. And when floodwater reached a building used for water purification, thousands of households were also left without drinking water. There was a lot of water around, yet none of it was fit to drink.

Places as far apart as Texas and India were also flooded, as weather patterns altered unpre-

dictably all over the world, causing widespread damage and much public concern. For, when the forces of nature are unleashed, the weakness of mankind and the inability of human society to cope is clearly displayed. So, gradually and reluctantly, people are coming around to the view that there may be some truth behind all these warnings about climate change after all.

Keeping One's Balance

It is never easy knowing when you have had enough of something and what might be considered too much of a good thing. Solomon was a very wise man who gave some good advice about the benefits of moderation. Writing for posterity he once said:

"The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (Ecclesiastes 1:8); and

"Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?" (7:16,17).

He meant that we should not be self-righteous, or so wise in our own eyes that nobody can ever teach us anything. But the king failed to follow his own advice; because he ended up with too much of everything –



Flooding on the borders of Worcestershire and Herefordshire, England

riches, wives, concubines and complications – and those things led him astray from God. You can have too much of a good thing, as Solomon showed, but you can never have too much of what God has on offer. He wants us to make Him and His gracious purpose the very centre of our lives.

First Things First

Jesus summed things up very carefully when he said this:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:33,34).

If we decide that the chief aim of life is to find out about God and His purpose, and to make our lives right with Him – which is what Jesus meant by seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness – then Jesus promised that God will see to all the other things we need in life. We can trust Him to look after us and to work all things out for the best.

Jesus was not alone in making this claim. Some 400 years before, the prophet Malachi encouraged his contemporaries to put God first, even though they were living in difficult circumstances. They had just come back from a long exile in Babylon and were resettling in their ancient land after it had been neglected for years. So there was a lot to do to make the land productive and to get things back to how they had once been. It meant a lot of expenditure too, for their farms needed investment and the settlers had to feed and support their families. Perhaps it is understandable that one

thing that suffered was the payment of a tenth of their income to support the priesthood, for that was how the work of the Temple was supported at that time. Without that income the priest had to become farmers themselves, so Temple services and sacrifices suffered.

This is what Malachi said, and his words ring down the centuries, even at a time when tithing is no longer obligatory:

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10).

Raining Blessings

What a difference that promise would make for those in Britain and elsewhere who are being flooded out with contaminated water! Imagine the windows of heaven being opened to pour down a blessing from God. It's a very vivid and colourful picture, which is exactly what Malachi intended.

If we commit our lives to God and place Him at the centre of everything, He will bless us. If we do not, we are the ones who will lose out when His great purpose comes to its intended and inevitable fulfilment.

A new society is to be established on earth with the Lord Jesus as King and then everything will be made new: new people living in a new world, in perfect harmony with one another and with Almighty God. You can't have too much of that!

Editor

It's not the Planet that needs saving: It's Us!

Andrew Walker began this short series by thinking about the way in which mankind is abusing Planet Earth. He considered climate change, our use of the earth's resources, the reduction in bio-diversity because of the way humans are depriving other species of their habitats, and the challenges of nuclear weapons, terrorism and pollution. Now he looks at an even more serious issue.

Homo Sapiens

Many species are becoming extinct, but all these problems could be cured by the extinction of just one species – homo sapiens. It is an ironic name for the human race – 'wise man'. Sadly, wisdom is not the driving force behind our behaviour. We are marked by selfishness, greed and aggression, and it is these qualities that come to the fore in the influence we have on the world we live in.

The God who created us does not, however, intend the human race, which He created to be in His image, to die out. The Bible says that God formed the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18) and, in the last article, we considered God's promises that the earth will be restored, and that Jesus will return, just when all seems lost.

The sobering thing is that when we concluded that mankind was to blame for all the problems the earth faces, it didn't mean everyone else. It meant you and me. This is personal. The fact is, it's not the planet that needs saving, it's us – if you'll excuse the grammar. We need saving because we



have caused everything that is wrong in the earth. That may surprise you, because no doubt you are a perfectly pleasant person who never did anything particularly terrible. You may feel that you're no worse than anyone else, and you may be right: because we're all in the same boat.

But is it possible to be different?

Think of a man

Imagine a man who owned almost nothing, who spent all his time helping other people, who never did anything unkind or spoke a thoughtless word; who loved his enemies and therefore had none. Imagine if everyone on earth was like him.

If everyone lived like Jesus there would be no climate change because we would live our lives using only what we really needed. The planet would not be polluted, scarred by the greed and ambition of men, because we would be caring and kind. Creation would not be exploited as a means of gaining wealth, but cared for as a gardener might tend his precious vegetable patch.

If everyone lived

like Jesus there would be no crimes, and no police to solve them; no wars, and no armies to fight them. No nuclear weapons, no terrorism, no arguments between neighbours. No broken homes, no loneliness. No heroin and cocaine peddled on street corners; no guns, no fights, no drunkenness. No fear of the dark. No child abuse.

And if you think of yourself, no doubt quite correctly, as a pleasant enough person who never did anything badly wrong, remember that pleasant enough people took Jesus and flogged him, then nailed him to a wooden cross and left him to die because they couldn't cope with the fact that he was different.

It's not the planet that needs saving. It's us.

The Sadness of God

There was a time once before when the way men and women behaved threatened the future of the earth. Back in Genesis 6 we read that:

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." (Genesis 6:5,6).

Maybe God was angry at the way people behaved, but that's not what Genesis says. What we read is that he was sad – grieved to his heart.

That tells us something about God and His attitude to His creation. This

planet, with all its teeming life, is not a plaything, made for His amusement. His care for the earth is deep and abiding. He had high hopes for the world, but mankind, to whom He had given free-will in the beginning, used that freedom to spoil His creation.

In the New Testament there are several chapters that compare the flood with the return of the Lord Jesus – 2 Peter chapter 3 is one of them. We read there that people will laugh at the idea that Jesus will return to the earth.

"Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.'" (verses 3-4).

Peter's response is to remind us of what happened in the time of Noah.

"They deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished" (3:5-6).

God brought a flood of water on the earth. Not as an act of revenge, or because he lost his temper, but because he was sad. The flood cleansed the earth and provided a new start, but it did something else as well. It saved Noah and his family. Peter writes:

"God's patience waited in the days of



Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you..." (1 Peter 3:20,21).

The Patience of God

God was patient, and He waited. While many seasons came and went – anything up to 100 years, God waited. Noah, perhaps with help from his sons, painstakingly built his vast wooden boat, slowly hauling logs, sawing and fitting them together. And God waited, and waited, just as He waits for us now.

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" (2 Peter 3:9-10).

The flood cleansed the earth, provided the means of saving a few faithful people – and that will happen again. Peter is telling us, in poetic language, that human civilization as we know it, with its evil and corruption, will be done away with. So what should we do?

Did you notice how Peter wrote that baptism is like the flood? Just as the

flood cleansed the earth and made a new start, so baptism – immersion in water – cleanses us and gives us a new start, as the children of God. And just as the flood was the means of saving Noah and his family, so baptism is a key step in our salvation.

What can we Do?

So where does this leave us? There are some things we should do:

- ✓ We should insulate our houses so that we do not waste so much energy.
- ✓ We should turn the heating down and keep warm in winter by wearing more clothes.
- ✓ If we have a car we should make sure it is a fuel-efficient one, and we should use it less. We should walk more, cycle more, use public transport when we can.

Reduce, re-use, recycle: in other words, we should buy less, and use things to the full rather than simply throwing them away.

We should make sure that we think of the earth as it is: the creation of a loving God. We should respect it, and care for it and for all the other creatures who share it with us.

Even More Importantly!

There are some even more important things.

- 📖 Pick up your Bible, open it and read it. If you are just beginning, start with one of the gospels, then maybe Genesis and Exodus, but in the end you should aim to read it all.
- 📖 As you learn more about God, pray to Him and ask Him for help.



📖 Aim to make an informed decision by finding out as much as you can about God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

📖 When you know enough, make a commitment – that’s what baptism is. It’s just like a personal flood.

Remember, God wants you in His kingdom. It’s your choice.

“According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (2 Peter 3:13-14).

Saving the Planet

In God’s Kingdom everyone will be made like the Lord Jesus, and the earth will be restored. The selfishness

that causes poverty will become a love that provides for everyone. The aggression that leads to wars will give way to the kindness that brings peace and contentment. The greed that grasps ever more of the earth’s resources and results in pollution will be replaced by the happy embracing of a humbler way of life. And the earth will respond by producing crops where nothing grew before, with plenty of everything for everyone. Humanity will have been changed, and God will take away the curse of sickness and death.

The planet will have been saved – and by God’s grace, we can live to share it, if we do something about it now.

Andrew J Walker

All quotations are from the English Standard Version of the Bible

When I Consider

When I consider the work of Thy hands,
Perfect in every part,
Thy great creation’s flawless plan,
My God, how great thou art!

Sun, moon and stars, obey Thy law,
Nature Thy rule has kept;
The mighty seas ne’er overflow
The bounds that Thou hast set.

The angel hosts Thy bidding do,
They glorify Thy Name:
The four and twenty elders bow
Before Thy heavenly throne.

So “What is man”, of all thy works,
That Thou should deign to give
Thy Son, a ransom for their sins
That they, through Christ, might live?

Myrtle Dawes



What Was Jesus Really Like?

A few years ago scientists at Manchester University in England used forensic science techniques to try and reconstruct the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their conclusion was that he would have looked like a Palestinian peasant, with close cropped dark hair and olive coloured skin. In this article **Ken Clark** examines what the Bible says about the sort of person Jesus really was.

Striking Features

Some artists have painted the Saviour with an angelic, almost effeminate face. But does it matter what he looked like? There is no record of his appearance in the gospels, itself a clear indication that what we look like outwardly is not important to God. What matters is what we are like inside and how we behave. Yet there are certain things we can deduce about the appearance of Jesus, even so.

It appears, for example, that he had a piercing gaze – one that could stop people in their tracks. And he had a wonderful way with words. People sent to arrest him by the Temple authorities returned on one occasion saying “No man ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46).

When he accused those very authorities of misleading the people and teaching things that were wrong – human traditions instead of Divine truth – his words ripped apart their teachings and left them feeling com-



Nobody knows what Jesus looked like but many people have guessed. This is by William Holt

pletely exposed. He called them “hypocrites”, “serpents”, “a generation of vipers”, and “blind leaders of the blind”. The Scribes, Pharisees, lawyers and rulers all felt his lashing tongue.

Jesus wanted no-one who was really self-seeking, but who pretended to be religion. And the outcome we know. His enemies could not better his great intellectual prowess, so they ensured that he died an agonising death, on a cross outside Jerusalem between two criminals. He was the only sinless man in history and did not deserve to die.

Suffering Servant

Some 600 years before Jesus was born the prophet Isaiah gave some information about the suffering and death that

Jesus would endure. It was not a pretty picture painted by the prophet, for he said this about the sufferings of Jesus:

“He has no form or comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely he has borne our

griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-6).



Years later, another inspired writer said about Jesus:

“Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned

obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:7,8).

This is a fairly grim portrayal, but there is something wonderful about it, even so. This remarkable servant would do the will of God perfectly; he would be *“obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8)*. And it would push him to the limit of human endurance to be submissive and obedient, despite the evident miscarriage of justice that occurred and the heartache that would cause for his followers and his family.

Under Pressure

Something of the pressure Jesus endured is captured by Luke, who was a doctor, and who must have been told by witnesses about the ordeal Jesus endured in the Garden of Gethsemane, as the moments ticked away until his capture and trial:

“He knelt down and prayed, saying, ‘Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done.’ Then an angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly. And his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:41-44).

Notice the crucial things about Jesus. It is not what he looked like that mattered but how he behaved and what his relationship was like with God, his Father. It is just the same for us. Nothing matters more than our relationship with God and here, once again, the actions and words of Jesus help us to see what we should be like.

The Lord at Prayer

Near the end of his life on earth we are privileged to have one of the prayers of Jesus. It must move us to respond if we want to be among the Lord’s followers, for during that prayer he said: *“This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).*

If we want eternal life it can only come in one way – from God, through the Son whom He sent. Note that despite his magnificent life and perfect obedience, not in one place is he called “God the Son”. He was the Son of God and in the prayer in question, in John chapter 17, Jesus prayed to God that his followers in all ages might be able to achieve the same unity of mind and purpose that he had enjoyed with

his heavenly Father:

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. And all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me, that they may be one as we are" (John 17:9-11).

The Great Commission

Jesus died a cruel death, on public display as though he was a criminal and was laid to rest in a rock-hewn tomb. But three days later God raised him from the dead. For by obeying his Father's will, he conquered death and was raised to everlasting life. The risen Lord remained with his disciples for forty days, encouraging, instructing, and leading them to do a great work. They had to evangelise the world and Jesus gave them precise instructions:

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned'" (Mark 16:15,16).

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19,20).



Why the three names? The Father is the Creator, the Son the means by which we can approach God because he is our redeemer and mediator, and the Holy Spirit is the operative power of God in the work of redemption.

They were to observe *"all things"* that Jesus had commanded them. Truth should never be altered. It is too precious to be besmirched with falsehood, so the Lord's emphasis was that they should teach ALL things. No deviation was permitted. And the Lord who spoke did so with the authority of one who was victorious over death and who gave the firm promise of overseeing his church until the time came for him to return.

Now in Heaven

When the forty days had ended, the Lord ascended to heaven before his awe-stricken disciples. Yet, even as they looked, heavenly voices asked:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Could anything be clearer? Jesus had gone but would be back; so they had urgent good news to impart to all who would listen. The Lord would return not just as King of Israel, but King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to rule the whole world. What a prospect! At his return he would be gentle with the willing; just and severe with the unwilling;. For we know that the Lord can be mighty in forgiveness as well as mighty in reproof.

He who cured so

many in his mortal life will bring relief to all nations. The man who defeated sin in fair battle, will finally put an end to all death (see 1 Corinthians 15, 24-28). When that happens, God will be all in all. What a concept! God will be in all the faithful, who will be incorruptible and immortal. It is breathtaking to consider a world where sighing and sorrowing has ceased and where sin has been eliminated, all because of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, proclaimed so clearly in our Bibles.

Our Response?

What then is our response to be? We must make a decision and either honour God or serve self. There are but two choices. If we live only for today we have decided our own end - the grave. That is not brutality but justice. If we commit our way to God, in Christ, we



will receive a warm welcome in God's coming Kingdom. For Scripture says two wonderful things:

"Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in

part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12);

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2,3).

We will know what Jesus is really like when, by God's grace, we are changed to be like him. That's an offer no-one should refuse!

Ken Clark

Knowing God

There is a peace which passes understanding
 There is a joy that only God can give
 There is a calm amidst great tribulation
 There is a way which shows us how to live.

God's Word of Truth can change our way of thinking
 Take root within our heart and thereby grow,
 And only then will we begin to realise
 The wonder of the God we love and know.

This wonder leads us all to life Eternal –
 But only when we know our God above,
 And His dear Son – will we reflect His Glory,
 And then reciprocate His wondrous love.



Colleen Simons

This is Jesus Speaking



Five or six huge explosions rumbled out into the night. We woke with sweated brow and heart pounding. They certainly got our attention even though we had been warned by the authorities that this would happen. Two giant disused cooling towers were being destroyed at the local power station. We then turned over and went back to sleep.

When Jesus spoke there were no mighty explosions, no flashing lights, yet he certainly got the peoples' attention – and they stayed awake. They said he spoke with authority, so they listened, to him more than to the other religious teachers of his day, the Scribes and Pharisees.

“So it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28,29).

The “people” referred to are some who were regarded as unteachable: rejects and outcasts of polite society, who were able to draw close to Jesus and hang on his every word (Luke 15:1). Even when Jesus seemed to be saying difficult things that many could not understand or felt embarrassed about, they stayed close to him.

“Do you also want to go away?” Jesus once asked some of his followers, and they replied:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:67,68).

It was Peter who said that, but he



spoke for all twelve disciples. He was expressing a simple trust in Jesus himself and, in particular, his conviction that Jesus had something to say which was of abiding value. When an ordinary man has come to such a conclusion for himself, having learned it by daily contact, then we should sit up and take notice.

Sermon on the Mount

One of the most fully recorded teachings of the Lord Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount. We have already had cause to refer to it. Notice how it begins:

“And seeing the multitudes he went up on a mountain and when he was seated his disciples came unto him.” (Matthew 5:1)

The teaching was firstly for the disciples of Jesus, but listening in were a whole crowd of folk. That means surely that we all start out as listeners from the edge of the crowd but also that we each have the potential to become intimate disciples for whom this teaching is intended. As we read the words now, we can almost hear the Master saying them:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

(Matthew 5:3-10).

We must be struck by the difference there is here from anything we have ever heard in this world before. They hold out to us such wonderful things that they are either the most exquisite truths or the most dreadful lies. In time we can come to understand that all these teachings originated in the Old Testament; that Jesus has made those promises attainable; and that, once again, Jesus' teaching is in complete harmony with all that is written there. These things are indeed the most exquisite truths. Above all I hope you will come to trust the Master who spoke these words.

True Happiness

Just look at the first word Jesus used in each of his statements. The word “blessed” means “happy”. These sentences show us the secrets of true happiness. Every single day the whole

human race is in pursuit of happiness and personal fulfilment. We all tend to seek it in discovering ourselves, fulfilling personal ambition, indulging what we want to do – rather than what might be good for us! When we listen to what Jesus said, however, we discover that the values there expressed are entirely different from what the world around us would have us believe.

Let's be quite clear about this. The things that Jesus taught affect our basic understanding about almost everything, whether they concern personal relationships, our political attitudes, the way we do our jobs, even what job we would want for ourselves, and all the aspirations of our lives. This is the point when we might want to switch off and stop listening to Jesus because he presents us with so many challenges. But that's exactly what the Lord meant to do. Listen on if you want to find the true happiness – the blessings – that Jesus was offering, and offers still!

Inherit the Earth

Jesus had an understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures that was second to none. When, for example, he promised that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5) he was basing his promise on the Book of Psalms. Here are some of those teachings that originated about a thousand years before:

“Evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD they shall inherit the earth ... But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace ... The LORD knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever ... For those blessed by him shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off ... I

have been young and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his descendants begging bread” (Psalm 37: 9,11,18,22,25).

The whole Psalm is about the difficulties the Psalmist had in trying to obey God in a world that doesn't. Meekness can often be mistaken for weakness. The Psalm is actually telling us that meekness is that quality that allows God to rule in our life. A meek person accepts His overruling hand and resists the wickedness of the world. The meek person also believes in both God's daily support and in His desire to reward His children with a future hope – nothing less than an inheritance on the earth. We have already mentioned that this will come to pass when Jesus Christ himself returns to the earth to reign as king. So Jesus could say:

“Blessed (or Happy) are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” And so it will be. Clearly there will need to be radical changes. The challenge to each of us as we listen to our Lord Jesus is to make those changes now so that we may be ready when he comes.

Getting the Mind Right

There are other ways in which Jesus used the Old Testament as the springboard for his teaching. Here's another example; one of several in the Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that it was said by those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ (empty head) shall be in danger of the council” (Matthew 5:21,22)

This one comes, of course, from the Ten Commandments. On the face of it, Jesus appears to say something different from what is in the Old Testament but, in fact, he is referring to what was written and is going several steps further. The old Law could only legislate for personal actions whereas Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter. He recognises that if we despise our fellows then we are already some way down the road toward desiring to “murder” them. The desire to murder must start with a wicked thought that has been allowed to fester and grow. So the Lord challenges us to get our thoughts, as well as our words and actions, under control.

Face the Challenge!

It's not easy. Jesus has shown us how to do it perfectly, but we find it difficult to pick up the challenge of controlling our actions. It is doubly difficult to control our words. As the apostle James says:

“If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body.” (James 3:2).

And what about our thoughts – are they under control? James says:

“Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires (thoughts) and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death” (James 1: 14-15).

What a state we are in! What a remarkable person the Lord Jesus Christ was. He was without sin! This must be another reason why we need to listen ever so carefully to all that he has to say.

David Nightingale

Paul at Thessalonica and Berea

Europe has turned out to be as dangerous as Asia Minor for the apostle Paul and his companions. Their work in Philippi resulted in their arrest and imprisonment but, under the hand of God, that turned out well. Their jailer and his household accepted the gospel message and were baptized. What further adventures lay ahead? That is what **John Hellawell** now explores.

Departure from Philippi

Leaving Philippi, Paul and his party set out for Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. On their journey they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. There is no information in Acts regarding any preaching activity at these towns, but in Apollonia there is a plaque on a rocky outcrop which claims that this was the site where Paul preached to the citizens.

Thessalonica was a free city but does not seem to have been a Roman colony, hence the presence of a Jewish synagogue. Philippi was a colony and had no synagogue, probably because the Emperor Claudius had banned Jews from Rome and Roman colonies were regarded as part of Rome abroad.

"Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2,3).

Although Paul's commission was to

be the apostle to the Gentiles, he habitually began his preaching in each new location by visiting the synagogue. His maxim was "to the Jew first, and to the Greek" (Rom.1:16; 2:9,10). He was determined to give the Jews every chance of accepting the gospel.

On three consecutive Sabbaths, Paul developed his argument that the Messiah, according to the prophetic Scriptures, had to suffer and then rise from the dead. This concept would not be part of the general expectation of the Jews at large, any more than it was of the Lord's immediate disciples and especially the Twelve. So Paul would have to demonstrate that this was implicit in the record and then he would be able to witness that these things had happened to Jesus of Nazareth, proving that he was the Messiah, the Christ.

Civil Disturbance

Some of the Jews were persuaded by the arguments that Paul advanced, novel though they must have seemed. In addition, a large number of God-fearing Greeks and many of the prominent women of Thessalonica were also converted. Other Jews,



however, became jealous of Paul's successful preaching and resorted to their favourite tactic: civil disturbance. Rounding up some unsavoury characters (literally, 'loungers in the marketplace') they assembled a mob and sparked off a riot. They then stormed the house where they believed Paul and Silas were lodging in order that they could be assaulted by the gathered mob.

Realising that they were not there, they dragged the householder Jason, and some of the disciples, before the city officials shouting that these men, who have caused trouble all over the world had now come to Thessalonica.

Not only had Jason actually welcomed these men into his house, they were defying Caesar's decrees and claiming that there was another King – a man called "Jesus". Paul and Silas had evidently got over their message regarding the coming King and his Kingdom! This is, of course, the essence of the "good news" or "gospel".

These allegations threw both the assembled crowd and the city officials into turmoil. Their concern was, no doubt, that of being blamed by Rome for tolerating insurgents and potential traitors. However, the legal proprieties were observed: Jason and his colleagues were released on bail.

On to Berea

At nightfall, the disciples in Thessalonica dispatched Paul and Silas to the neighbouring city of Berea knowing that the Jews would not rest until they

had done them harm. This was evident from their later behaviour (Acts 17:13). The apostles followed their normal pattern and, on arriving at Berea, went into the synagogue. It must have heartened Paul and Silas to discover that the Jews there were of a more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message eagerly and, to their credit, they checked the Scriptures in order



to verify Paul's teaching.

Since they gave Paul a fair hearing and confirmed for themselves the truth of his message from the Word, many of the Jews believed as also did a number of prominent Greek men and women.

Forced to Move On

However, news of the successful preaching of Paul inevitably reached Thessalonica. True to type, the recalcitrant Jews there, having been thwarted once, travelled to Berea with the intention of causing trouble by stirring up the crowds.

The disciples lost no time in sending Paul away, while Silas and Timothy stayed on in Berea. A party of loyal disciples accompanied him to Athens where they left him and returned with Paul's instructions to Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

The gospel had to be preached, whatever reception it received, because it contains God's offer of salvation, as important then as it is now.

John Hellowell

The Creation

*The Bible opens by declaring that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” and for centuries that truth was accepted without question. But times have changed and now people want to be persuaded that there is a God in heaven and that the Bible account is true and reliable. In this article, **Dudley Fifield** sets out some pointers that will help someone with an enquiring mind to find out just what the Bible does, and does not, tell us.*

- 1 *The Bible is not to be read as a kind of scientific handbook. It is concerned with spiritual rather than material values. Nevertheless, given that the Bible is the work of the Creator, we would not expect to find proven scientific errors in its pages.*
- 2 *Given then that the order of creation in the first chapter of Genesis, beginning with water and light and ending with man, follows the broad scheme of scientific understanding of the conditions necessary for human life to exist, the question must be asked: “How did this ancient book get it so right?”*

One scientist has calculated that given the options to choose the odds against getting these factors in the right order are 1000 million to one. Only the Creator Himself, in His own way and using His own words, could have produced such remarkable accuracy.

- 3 *We have probably all heard of the ‘big-bang’ theory. It is said that everything began with a huge explosion that has caused what is described as “an expanding universe”. Those who remember the Second World War will have very vivid recollections of the consequences of ‘big-bangs’. Those*

who are younger will have seen ample evidence on TV news broadcasts that tell us of the atrocities committed by men. Was there ever an explosion, big or small, that ever created anything other than total chaos and confusion?

- 4 *We do not have to be scientists to appreciate how true this is. We think of the perfection of the heavenly bodies in their movement through the heavens. Just consider the following simple facts that can be confirmed by any standard encyclopaedia.*



- a The earth rotates at 1000 mph at the equator. If it was, for instance, only 100 mph then day and night would be ten times longer and all vegetation would be burned by the sun.
- b The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 F. If the earth was 50% nearer to the sun then we would all roast to death. If we were 50% further away, then we would all freeze to death.
- c The Moon is 240,000 miles away from the earth and controls the tides. If it were only 50,000 miles away, then great tidal waves would flood the earth, twice daily.
- d The earth travels around the sun at 66,000 miles per hour. If this speed could be effectively reduced then the length of our seasons would be affected. We could conceivably have winters that lasted for a hundred years, making life as we know it, impossible.
- e Who then established so precisely the positions of the heavenly bodies? Who determined the speeds at which they should revolve and pursue their paths through the heavens?

These are only a few instances of the countless circumstances necessary for life as we know it, to exist on the earth. Yet wonderfully and marvellously they all come together to enable life to continue. Could a 'big-bang' have produced such remarkable accuracy and precision?

God-Made

The Bible provides an answer to all these questions and this is the only sensible and logical conclusion to

adopt. Here it is in the words of the Psalmist:

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your possessions" (Ps. 104:24).

The prophet Isaiah, faced with the transient and fleeting nature of human life where all flesh is grass and men fade and die (Isaiah 40:6-8), calls on mankind to consider the majesty and power of God:

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as his counsellor has taught him? With whom did he take counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?" (Isaiah 40:12-14).

Notice the remarkable way in which the prophet, by a figure, impresses upon us the omnipotence and omniscience of God. He uses the ordinary, everyday things that men use when they strive for accuracy in their work, the span, the scales and the balance. All of these are, of course, unnecessary for the Creator of the Heaven and the Earth, who truly challenges us in the face of such wonders. And this is the challenge:

"To whom then will you liken me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25).

Dudley Fifiield

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