

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1485



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Christians and the State – page 8
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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters 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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A Place of Your Own

Everybody needs somewhere to live. Most people used to rent accommodation, or work for their employer in a house they provided. Nowadays, people like to own their own houses, if they can afford to, and they do so by borrowing money from banks or building societies, which they pay back over time – sometimes over a long time.

Tomorrow Never Comes

But what happens if you can't afford the payments, because of ill health or because you lose your job? That is what has happened to a lot of people recently, especially in the United States, and the repercussions have spread right across the world.

That inability to pay has affected the families, first and foremost, who have lost their homes. Then it has troubled the banks and building societies who lent the money, and who are no longer able to recover the full amount they loaned. The arrival on the market of excessive housing stock has caused property prices to fall, with many properties standing empty and in decline.

We now live in a world which is directly affected by things that happen far away, which is why people talk about 'the global village'. Who would have thought that a mortgage crisis in the States would have wiped billions of dollars of value off financial institutions all over the world? But that is exactly what has happened; because the

banks who first lent the money to householders have been selling those mortgage debts on, to other institutions, resulting in the 'sub-prime loan crisis', as it has become known. All would have been well if the borrowers had carried on paying back what had been borrowed, with interest. All is not well when a lot of them cannot manage that! The seriousness of these events can be judged from the unprecedented actions now being taken by national banks in many countries.

Financial Collapse

Nearly two thousand years ago, the apostle John was told about the state of affairs that would exist in the final phase of human government, just before God intervenes to save the world. The catalogue of human misery that he was shown, in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, includes a depiction of a collapsing financial system, in which all the previously prosperous people lament their losses. The worldly system is depicted as a city (like that of ancient Tyre or Rome, once economic centres of the world) which collapses, a collapse which everyone sees:

"The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned



with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing” (Revelation 18:15-17).

Our modern world, which is so proud of its technology and computerisation, is more vulnerable than at any previous time in human history. Should it:

- ❖ run out of renewable energy sources,
- ❖ suffer a major computer collapse,
- ❖ be unable to limit the on-going change to the earth’s climate,
- ❖ fail to control the spread and use of weapons of mass destruction, or
- ❖ see the present credit bubble burst

then widespread catastrophe would result. And it is just such a worldwide catastrophe which has been foretold by God’s prophets, who spoke and wrote thousands of years ago, when human society was in a very different state.

God’s Place

Once, long ago, humans acted in such a devastating way that almost the entire population of the earth was destroyed. Only eight people survived that catastrophe, when a worldwide flood brought utter devastation. Noah and his family began all over again, in a new-made world, and the Bible says that their experience is to be replicated at the end of time (see Luke 17:26-30 and 2 Peter 3:3-7).

Much of our world is to be destroyed and replaced by some-

thing far better, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven. He will not destroy the earth, however; nor will he take his followers away to somewhere else. When he was living on earth, as a mortal man, he had nowhere to live and he certainly owned no property (see Matthew 8:20). But when Jesus returns he will have somewhere to live: somewhere to call his own.

Long ago, Almighty God selected a spot on the earth’s surface which He would call His own. He said that He would ‘place His name there’; it was to be His. For a long time the children of Israel waited to find out exactly where that special place was and were finally told that it was the city we now know as Jerusalem. That is the place, Scripture says, from which Jesus will reign as King.

Coming King

That’s the good news the Bible contains – that a King is coming to reign over the world and transform it. When Jesus reigns as King, he will put right all the things that we cannot now remedy. He can heal the sick, feed the hungry, bring peace to countries that are at war, teach the ignorant, control the rebellious, bring justice and fairness in place of injustice and oppression.

In short, Jesus will right all wrongs and change everything that needs changing. He is the man who is uniquely qualified to do all this, because he is the Son of God. And he invites men and women to become part of that new world, to find forgiveness by belief and baptism, and to get a new and living hope. We need to be ready.

Editor

Part One

The Problem of Suffering

Because we have sympathy for those who suffer greatly and want to do what we can to help, we sometimes ask, "If there is a loving God, why does He stand back and do nothing, while the world is full of suffering?"

Suffering in our own lives can be a big problem. Some of us are not able to believe in God or the Bible until we have found an answer to the problem of suffering.

We shall look at this problem and see that:

- ◆ ***we suffer because we live in an imperfect world***
- ◆ ***suffering can be a warning that something is wrong***
- ◆ ***suffering can make us stop and think***
- ◆ ***suffering can help build our characters***
- ◆ ***sometimes there are reasons for suffering***
- ◆ ***the Bible tells of a future time when there will be no more suffering***

Suffering seems to be of three types; that which is:

- *caused by ourselves – pain and suffering as a result of accident injuries: suffering resulting from our lifestyle*
- *caused by mankind in general – war, persecution and pollution, and*
- *outside human control – floods, earthquakes, illness and death*

We shall look at these three categories and see what we can learn.



Our Imperfect World

We live in an imperfect world full of imperfect people. This is the root cause of all suffering. The Bible tells us why there is this imperfection and what has been done to remove it in the future. If you have confidence in the Bible message and come to believe what it tells you – and we think there is plenty of evidence to give you that confidence – it has plenty to say about this subject. It even says that suffering can act as a reminder to help us think about things seriously.

The Bible tells us that God sometimes sends suffering to encourage us to go in the right direction in life:

“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

Solomon’s Prayer

Solomon, the wise king of Israel, gave a prayer at the dedication of the temple he had built. This is part of that prayer:

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess your name, and turn from their sin because you afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, that you may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on your land which you have given to your people as an inheritance. (2 Chronicles 6: 26, 27).

From this we can see that Solomon is suggesting that natural disasters such as drought can be sent to make people stop and think about how they are living. God brings suffering on people for their own good. It follows that we should think about why our world is not perfect and what we can be doing about it.

Our own actions

→ Minor Injuries

We cause suffering and pain to ourselves in many ways. We may burn ourselves on a hot object, bruise our hand by hitting it with something or strain a muscle by lifting a heavy object. This sort of suffering is helpful: it tells us not to do it again! Next time we are in a similar situation, we remember the pain and act appropriately. Pain is a warning that things are not right. We must stop and think about the problem.



The importance of this kind of pain is illustrated by an American boy who was born with no sense of pain. He was nine years old when his mother took him to the John Hopkins medical

school in Baltimore one November day in 1937. We might think that not being able to feel any pain would be great. However this is what the examining doctor wrote in his report:

- ✧ *Partial blindness in one eye because when he had sand in his eye he did not notice it until permanent damage had been done*
- ✧ *Scars on almost every part of his body*
- ✧ *Enormous scar across his buttocks, where he had sat on a heater and did not notice until his flesh was burnt to the bone*
- ✧ *One foot permanently deformed, as he had broken a bone and walked about on it for months before it was spotted*
- ✧ *Both hands so badly cut that he would never again be able to straighten his fingers*

We can see from this that pain acts as a danger signal to the rest of us, but this unfortunate boy had nothing to warn him to stop and think when his body was being injured.

→ Accidents

Many of us are willing to do things which we know could involve suffering if things go wrong. Do we consider the risks before we do them? Modern





travel is one example. Many of us travel in cars, knowing of the suffering that could occur.

Some of us, when thinking about the potential suffering involved in aeroplane accidents, decide that the risk is not worthwhile and do not travel by plane. The risk of suffering from accidents sometimes makes us stop and think about what we are going to do.

➔ **Lifestyle-related suffering**

Many of us suffer as a direct result of the sort of life we choose to lead. In some countries, cigarettes carry a health warning, yet how many people

ignore the warning and suffer the consequences later!

Some of us choose to eat too much of the wrong kinds of food and become overweight, with the increasing risk of heart disease and diabetes. Because of immorality, AIDS is another problem that humanity has inflicted on itself.

All of these problems are warnings that we are abusing our bodies.

- ➔ We live in an imperfect world
- ➔ Pain is a warning that things are not right
- ➔ Suffering from accidents makes us stop and consider what could happen
- ➔ Lifestyle-related suffering should make us want to change our lifestyle.

Lawrence Cave

To be continued

Comfort

When illness brings us very low
 Or we're not young any more
 Our frailties may bring us down,
 And when our health is poor
 'Tis then that just a kindly word
 Can make our spirits rise;
 We thank God for the bond we share
 Within a love that ties.

Our hearts can grow so lonely
 With our life partner gone;
 We know that we shall meet again
 But Oh the time's so long,
 And when we are confined at home
 And the hours go slowly by
 Our ill-health is so hard to bear
 We try hard not to cry.



Our Lord when in his days of flesh
 Endured the cross of shame
 'For the joy that was set before him,'
 And we must do the same;
 For though it seems so far away
 When our frailties will be gone
 We *shall* know the Kingdom glories
 When we are 'clothed upon'.

Peggy Rawson

Christians and the State

For every would-be disciple of Jesus, there has to be a day of decision. Through a growing understanding of the Scriptures, we come to realise that the only way to eternal life is through Jesus Christ. We recognise that we need to leave behind our connection with Adam the Sinner, and join ourselves to Jesus the Saviour. So we are baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Strangers and Pilgrims

At this point we deliberately cut off our connections with this world, and set off on a journey to God's Kingdom. We are like Abraham, leaving Ur of the Chaldees to go to a land God would show him. Or we take the Israelites as our example, for they left Egypt to cross the wilderness to the Promised Land.

The Lord Jesus is coming soon, to sweep away all human governments, and to become King of the whole world. In that day of revolution and permanent change, all right-minded people, aspire in God's mercy to be Jesus' immortal ministers and officials: the people who will help him to rule his kingdom.

That being so, on the day we are baptized we say goodbye to the country of our birth. We become citizens of God's kingdom. No longer is our loyalty to England, Russia or America, but to Jesus our King. In a figure of speech, our position becomes that of aliens – people who live in a country but have a different nationality. Or, putting it another way, we are like travellers with a visa, passing through one country on the way to another.

This attitude is found in all the great

men and women of the Bible. In their hearts, they were pilgrims, travelling ever onwards with no time to stop and build a house. Take a look at these important Bible passages which show this should be our attitude, too:

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11: 8-10).



Citizens of Heaven

In this quotation we see that Abraham literally left the country of his birth, and deliberately lived in a tent not a house, when he reached the Promised Land. He was showing his Canaanite neighbours that he did not belong to their society, but was waiting for the day when God would give him their land. All believers are in the same position, waiting for Jesus to give them the Kingdom. We may not actually sell our house and move, like Abraham did, but in our hearts that is what we do when we are baptized. We leave behind this evil

world of sin and wickedness.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16).



Note the expression ‘strangers and pilgrims’. A stranger is an alien, and a pilgrim is a man on a journey. Note too that it says these great men and their families never went back to the place they had left, even though they could easily have done so. In return, because they were now walking through their lives with God, He was prepared to be known as the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac. He travelled with them.

Outcasts from Society

“Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to him, outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:12-14).

In this passage we see that Jesus himself had to turn his back on ‘the

camp’ – the Jewish state, the Temple and the Law and all that they stood for. This act of separation cost him suffering and persecution. The writer says we may experience the same harsh treatment when we walk away from this world; people consider us to be traitors, and disloyal to the State. Many of the Christian Jews who read the letter to the Hebrews would have had literally to walk away from Jerusalem when the Roman armies surrounded it in AD 70. If they clung to the Jewish state and stayed in the city, they lost their lives. We have to be prepared likewise to drop everything and go when the call comes.

If we linger and look back, we shall be overthrown. Speaking of the day of his return in Luke 17:29-32, Jesus has a three-word warning – ‘remember Lot’s wife!’ Lot’s wife had her heart in the city of Sodom, where her house was, with all her possessions. When the angels came to warn her to leave immediately, she lingered on the road. She looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt as the sulphur rained down and destroyed the wicked city.

“Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17,18).

Note the words ‘come out’. These are the same words that the Lord spoke to Abraham. We have, Paul says, to separate ourselves from the idolatry and filth of the world, and become God’s children, part of his big family.

Must we Obey?

If we are no longer in our hearts citizens of England or Russia or America, do we need to obey the laws of those countries? The Bible says we should obey them, and take care that we never have to go to court for breaking them. We must remain law-abiding people. Here is a passage from the apostle Peter:

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good” (1 Peter 2:13,14).

We should never find ourselves being arrested for stealing or fraud or violence. Our Master has taught us all these things are wrong. Our lives should be examples of truth and kindness and patient submission. Peter said in the passage above that we should obey every law that the king or president sets over us, so it applies to everyday things such as not exceeding speed limits if we are driving a car, or paying our taxes to the government. For Jesus said himself, on two occasions, that his followers must pay their taxes (see Matthew 17:24-27 and Mark 12:17).

God’s Appointment

The apostle Paul also said that we must pay the government its dues, because it has been set there by God to preserve law and order, and it needs money to do so:

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the

authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves ... Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour” (Romans 13:1,2,7).

It might seem strange to think of Caesar, or the president, or the local council, being appointed by God. Paul is not saying they are good servants of God who respect and fear Him. Many times they have been idol worshippers or atheists.

But God sets them there to give protection to honest citizens, and, generally, to allow freedom to preach and to worship. Of course, there have been periods when that has not happened, but God eventually disposes of wicked rulers and appoints others in their place. Paul says in this passage that it is a matter of conscience for the Christian to pay all forms of tax – custom dues as well as income tax. We must not cheat or evade our legal responsibility.

So the followers of Jesus should be model citizens, obeying the laws of the land and quietly awaiting a better government when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven. They are strangers and pilgrims here until that time and must remember that their true loyalty is to heaven. Should there be a conflict of interest, then heaven must come first. The right attitude to politics and any involvement in local or central government is something that needs separate consideration in the next issue, God willing.

David M Pearce

The Garden of Eden

❶ The first geographical location mentioned in the Bible is Eden. The name means *'delight, pleasant'* and is descriptive of a large tract of land of which the garden, which the Lord God planted, formed a small part.

❷ Many suggestions have been made as to the location of this garden. In particular the naming of the four rivers of Eden has led many to assume that the land between the two rivers (i.e. Euphrates and Tigris), sometimes called the "cradle of civilisation" was the site of the paradise of God.

❸ This view does not take account of the flood of Noah's day when *"the fountains of the great deep were broken up"*. There must have been earthquakes of cosmic proportions; great cataclysms that rent the surface of the earth and sent great tidal waves sweeping over the earth. The topography of the land must have been drastically changed, so there can be no guarantee that the rivers we know today follow their original courses. In fact the description of Hiddekel (the Tigris) as *'that which goes towards the east'* is in contradiction to its present course, which is approximately in a southerly direction.

❹ Again account should be taken of the fact that

when man was cast out of the garden he travelled in an easterly direction (Genesis 3:24; 4:16). It seems more likely, therefore, that the growth of civilisation in this area is a development that can be traced to the period after man was cast out of the garden and perhaps more certainly to the world after the flood, than to that which preceded it.

❺ It should be considered also that there is something incongruous about the idea that God should have allowed the area which was once associated with the paradise which He planted, and where He was pleased to dwell with men, to become the seat of the kingdom of men – Babylon in all its pride and arrogance. Throughout Scripture Babylon is the very opposite of all things divine.

❻ It might be thought, in the light of the foregoing, that it is not possible to determine the location of the garden and certainly we cannot be dogmatic about the issue. But the Bible does seem to give us clues and the whole of Scripture points indisputably to one place where the Garden of Eden could have been planted. There is a land in which God has always delighted and that is the land He gave to the people of Israel. Moses said of this land, that it is:



“a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year” (Deuteronomy 11:12).

⑦ Why did God choose this land? Why did He select Jerusalem? Why is it in this place that God has been pleased to reveal Himself to men and to dwell among them in past ages? Because it is a very special place, as these two Scriptures indicate:

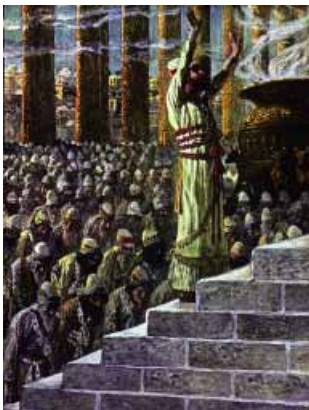
“When you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make his name abide” (Deuteronomy 12:10,11).

Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; and he said ... *“that your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may hear the prayer which your servant makes toward this place” (1 Kings 8:22-23,29).*

⑧ This decision was not taken suddenly. It was not a change of plan, but in the eternal purpose of God, the choice was made before ever the Garden of Eden was planted, that in that place God might walk amongst men and have communion with His

creatures. In other words, God has consistently manifested Himself in this place throughout human history. Surely the garden of Eden was not in the place where men have traditionally supposed it to be, but in the area surrounding the city Jerusalem, the land of promise which will yet be the seat of God’s kingdom upon earth.

It is here that God *“will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”* (Revelation 2:7). It is *“there (in Zion) the LORD commanded the blessing – Life for evermore”* (Psalm 133:3) when He will transform the earth, *“The LORD will comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody”* (Isaiah 51:3).



⑨ How significant it is therefore to reflect upon the fact that there, in the very same locality, where man first sinned, the Lord was crucified. In Jesus – nailed to a tree – we have once more in Eden a veritable “tree of life” to which men may come and, by God’s grace live for ever.

Digression

We might profitably digress here. To the thief on the cross, the Lord Jesus said *“today you will be with me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23:43). The word translated *“today”* can equally be rendered *“this day”*. So, in response to the man’s request: *“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom”*, the Lord Jesus answers him

that in this day, this day of which you speak, you shall be with me in paradise. The question we need to answer is why did the Lord Jesus on this occasion refer to paradise with all its echoes of Eden restored?

There appears at first sight to be a discrepancy between Matthew's gospel and Luke's record. Matthew says that both thieves taunted him (Matt. 27:44). Luke tells us that one of the thieves railed on him saying: *"If you are the Christ, save yourself and us'. But the other, answering, rebuked him"* (23:39,40).

What is the answer to this apparent discrepancy? There is no error. We know that Jesus was on the cross for six hours. Matthew records the initial response of both men whereas Luke is telling us of the subsequent change that occurred in one of them as a result of what transpired as they all hung together on their crosses.

Surely what we see is that the primary concern of Jesus, as he suffered, nailed to his cross, was still for others, for these two malefactors who were dying without hope and without God in the world. What a thrilling and moving thought it is that in his last hours, the Lord might have preached the gospel to these two men, and to such good effect, that one of them became one of the most outstanding illustrations of faith in all Scripture.

A Believer!

The dying thief believed – and how it must have gladdened the Lord's heart. He believed in a dying man who taught

about resurrection from the dead and that salvation from sin and death could be obtained through him – Paradise indeed! If indeed the Lord was crucified in Eden, how appropriate; for surely he must have talked of Adam's transgression, of sin and death, of man cast out of the garden, of the way of salvation through him, in his sinlessness.

If this is indeed so, with what added meaning can we invest the words of the thief:

"Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed

justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (23:40,41).

Such is the significance of the place where the Lord was crucified, and this is the reason for the Lord's otherwise strange use of the word *"Paradise"* on this occasion. It speaks to us of Eden restored, of God dwelling amongst men, of peace and joy and happiness in God's coming Kingdom on earth.

Dudley Fifield

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Paul Travels to Corinth

*Leaving Athens, Paul travelled to Corinth. The contrast between the two cities could hardly be greater. Athens was a cultivated, university city populated by intellectuals who, in the words of Acts 17:21, “spent their time in nothing else but to tell or to hear some new thing”. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with two ports and a thriving, prosperous commercial outlook. **John Hellowell** now explains what happened.*

Key Location

The location of Corinth was a key factor in its commercial success, for it was situated near the Isthmus of Corinth – the narrow land bridge between the Adriatic and the Aegean seas. This meant that it was close to the north-south land route and the overland crossing between the ports of



Lechaeum in the west and Cenchrea in the east, where a Christian community developed. We learn that Phoebe, an influential lady who had become a believer, was from Cenchrea (Romans 16:1).

Cargoes were transported across this narrow strip of land and smaller boats were even hauled overland on rollers, thereby avoiding a sea journey of about 500 miles. Nero began to construct a canal in 67 AD, but it was not until the 19th century that boats could pass through the isthmus.

Corinth had been razed to the ground in 146 BC as punishment for its anti-Roman revolt and lay derelict for about a century, when it was rebuilt as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar in 46 BC with the name Laus Iulia

Corinthus (Corinth, the praise of Julius). This means that it was a relatively new city, only about 100 years old, when Paul arrived. In 27 BC it became the capital city of Achaia. The city hosted the Isthmian Games in a stadium attached to the Temple of Poseidon (Neptune) and this seems to have provided Paul with some of his metaphors in his Corinthian correspondence.

Corinthian Characteristics

As a flourishing maritime capital city, Corinth was totally cosmopolitan with all nations, creeds and religions represented. This mixture tended to encourage the adoption of the lowest common denominator of behaviour and the city was described as the “cess-pit of the Empire”. In particular, it was notorious for its sexual licence which, given the general laxity in these matters in Greek society and religion, must have been extreme. The Greek verb *korinthiazō*, ‘to act the Corinthian’, described debauchery and fornication at its worst. Other phrases to enter the Greek language were ‘Corinthian companions’, and ‘Corinthian girls’, both euphemisms for prostitutes.

Corinth boasted a large Temple of Aphrodite (Venus) which was staffed by 1,000 female attendants who were, in effect, prostitutes. In Greek society no stigma was attached; rather it was regarded as commendable to visit the temple and indulge in such “worship”. It is necessary to mention these things, for it is hard to imagine a less likely place in which the Christian faith could flourish. Yet, as we shall see, in spite of the city’s immorality and materialistic outlook, the Gospel message took root and blossomed.

The Power of the Gospel

As Paul was to remark later, amongst the converts that he made in Corinth were those whose lives were formerly totally alien to the Christian standards of morality and behaviour. His list includes those who had been

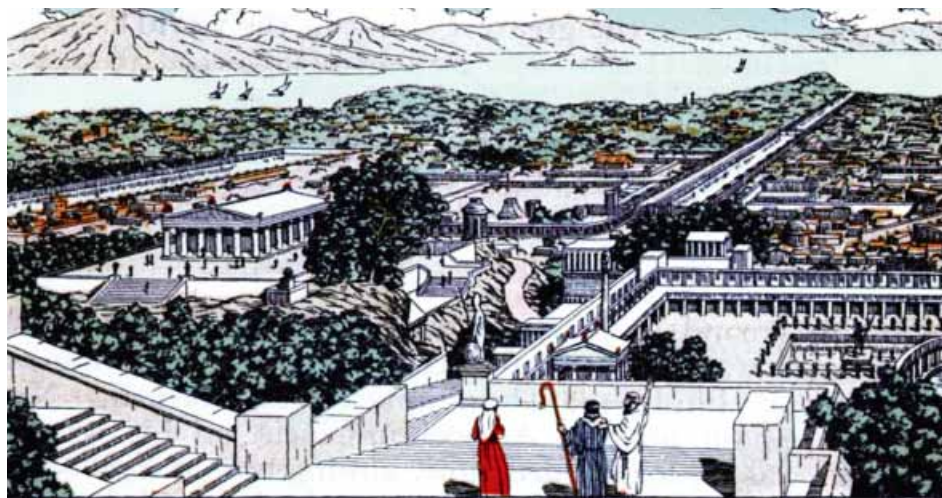
‘fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous persons, drunkards, revilers and extortioners’ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Given such a list it is evident that the Gospel message was able to effect a dramatic change in the lives of those

who were willing to respond positively to the preaching of Paul. No-one is beyond the reach of the Gospel, provided that they repent and are baptised. No-one can use their current lifestyle as grounds for rejecting the offer of salvation and saying that they are beyond redemption. The grace of God in Christ Jesus is more than adequate for every need.

Jewish “exiles” in Corinth

On arriving in Corinth Paul found Aquila and Priscilla and it is suggested that this was not simply a chance meeting: Paul knew that they lived in Corinth. Aquila was a Jew from Pontus, the region of Asia Minor which lies on the southern shore of the Black Sea. Priscilla is a diminutive of Prisca, the name which Paul uses when he sends greetings to the couple in Romans 16:3. They had come to Corinth because the Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. The Roman historian Suetonius explains that “*they (the Jews) were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus*”. It seems likely that Suetonius mistook the real cause of the riots – Christus –



and assumed that the ringleader had the quite common name Chrestus. The two words would sound very similar. If this is correct, we can guess that the Faith had been brought to Rome by Jewish Christians who had returned after Pentecost (Acts chapter 2).

Opposition

They would, no doubt, have met with opposition to their preaching about the Lord Jesus. The response of the Jews who resisted the preaching and found themselves unable to refute the evidence presented by the Apostles and others, that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah and that all the events of his life had been set out prophetically in the Old Testament Scriptures, was to cause a riot. Paul had experienced this in almost every city where he preached: at Pisidian Antioch (13:14); Iconium (14:5); Lystra (14:6); Thessalonica (17:1) and Berea (17:13).

The number of Jews in Rome was likely to be quite large so the opposition would be formidable. It must have reached the stage where the Pax Romana in Rome had been shattered to such an extent that the Emperor lost patience and solved the problem by expelling this notoriously troublesome race in about 49/50 AD. Of course, this would include law-abiding believing Jews like Aquila and Prisca.

A little detective work shows that the couple travelled extensively. In 1 Corinthians 16:19 they are in Ephesus having travelled there with Paul (Acts 18:18,19); yet later, when Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, they were back in Rome (Rom.16:3)! One might surmise that they had branches of their business throughout the Roman

Empire.

Paul the Tentmaker

Paul stayed with them because they shared the same beliefs and they were tentmakers. When we are told that it was because Paul was of the same craft or trade (Acts 18:3), we may wonder why Paul, the lawyer and university graduate should be a tent-maker. Unlike some other religious leaders, a rabbi was not regarded as being a full-time occupation. The rabbis taught that even a rabbi should have a trade: *“Whoever does not teach his son a trade is as though he brought him up to be a robber”*.



So, Paul the lawyer was also taught the family business of tent-making. It is quite possible that the bestowal of Roman citizenship on the family at some time in the past was for services to Rome, especially the Roman army, which had a great need for tents for its troops. If, as

some commentators suggest, the term is extended to include other, similar, products and especially leather-goods then there would be an even greater market.

Paul begins his preaching

As was his usual custom, Paul began his preaching by attending the synagogue. His policy was to preach to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16; 2:9-10).

It is interesting to note that archaeologists have found a lintel in Corinth with an inscription, although incomplete, that was from “The Synagogue of the Hebrews” and it may well be the one in which Paul preached. This

preaching continued every Sabbath for some time and initially he had some success and was able to persuade “both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). This probably means Jews and Gentile “God-fearers”, that is, Gentiles who attended the synagogue services, but who were not full proselytes.

The Jewish faith was attractive to non-Jews who had become disillusioned with the current Gentile religions, but many were not prepared to undergo the rites which would be necessary to become proselytes, in particular circumcision, a procedure which was abhorrent to Greek and Roman culture. In passing, it is probably significant that when Gentiles learned that Christianity did not require them to submit to circumcision, this made it particularly attractive to converts, especially since it was regarded initially as a form of Judaism.

More Opposition

When Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth he seems to have concentrated his efforts in persuading the Jews that Jesus was indeed their Messiah or Christ. Once more, the Jews opposed Paul and blasphemed. In response, Paul used the gesture of shaking his garments to signify he would no longer be ‘contaminated’ by the dust of their presence (cf. Nehemiah 5:13 and Acts 13:51) and warned them of the serious consequences of their rejection of the Gospel: “*Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean...*” and added “*From now on I will go to the Gentiles*” (Acts 18:6).

Paul needed a new venue for his preaching. He was offered the house of a man named Justus, who worshipped God and, ironically, was next door to the synagogue! Even more devastating for the intransigent Jews

was the decision by their synagogue ruler, Crispus, and his entire household, to join Paul. This had a dramatic effect on others when they heard of it and they believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Paul may have begun to wonder whether his success in converting the Gentiles would have the same effect as elsewhere, that is, to provoke a Jewish back-lash. The Jews did not accept the Gospel and yet objected violently when the Gentiles did so. This could happen again, in Corinth, but the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul in a night-time vision reassuring him:

“... Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10).

This assurance would have been a great source of strength to Paul, for by now he must have become tired of the physical suffering which he had endured continually. His later account to the Corinthians makes us realise the extent to which he was prepared to go to bring the momentous news of the Gospel to the world (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Perhaps more encouraging was the Lord’s comment “*I have many people in this city*”. From a human viewpoint it would have seemed unlikely that many of the population of Corinth would have been interested in the Gospel message.

Once more, the power of the message became evident, offering something far more worthwhile than the temporary pleasures and materialism of that city. This message is equally relevant for today.

John Hellawell

Digging For Victory!



I am a terrible gardener. It's not that I don't do it or don't enjoy it, but I do tend to dig up what was wanted and leave the weeds that should have been removed.

What I plant seldom seems to thrive or produce a crop similar to the one on the packet. The whole thing often leaves me disappointed and frustrated – but then I go back and have another go. It's a good job that food on the table doesn't depend on my gardening skills.



Gardening does however remind me of where it all went wrong. Remember how, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve took the fruit they should have left and ate it, only to be punished for breaking God's law. Among other things, God said this:

"Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

The Curse

We sometimes forget that this statement governs our lives, and it is easy

to forget it if we usually get food from the local supermarket with very little trouble. It's different if you have to grow your own; that brings home the reality of the situation, for tilling the ground can be really hard work. In our last article we saw how Jesus taught us to face up to reality: we need to repent and change our whole approach to life if we are to have any prospect of everlasting life. What did Jesus tell us about the 'after life' and did he say anything about the dreadful curse that threatens our

extinction? He did! Jesus replaced the curse with blessings like these:

- ➔ *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*
- ➔ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled...*
- ➔ *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*
- ➔ *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:5-10).

The Blessing

If we were snatching after straws we might be tempted to think that 'heaven' is the place the righteous go to at death. This cannot be so if you read these promises carefully. The inheritance God promises His children

is upon the earth, but it will be in a world where the hungry are filled, where peace prevails and when the Kingdom of God has come from heaven, at the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus confirms this when a little later in this address he shared with his disciples a prayer which included the request:

- *Our Father in heaven*
- *Hallowed be your name*
- *Your kingdom come*
- *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9,10).*

Notice that Jesus prays for two things:

- God's Kingdom to come
- God's will to be done on earth (in the same way in which it is now done in heaven).

"Thy Will be done"

Clearly God's will is rarely done on earth now; sadly there are very few men and women who acknowledge Him or do what He requires. So, in this prayer, we hear Jesus explaining that God has a plan.

One day, the sort of things that now exist in heaven – where God rules and His will is done perfectly, in particular by the angels – will happen on the earth also. Jesus was praying for the completion of that plan – the coming of a time when those who are promised a blessing will receive the ultimate blessing of being in God's kingdom on earth.

At that time the curse will be removed and blessings will abound. There is much to think about, of course, including:

- When all this will happen,
- What will happen to those who are now unconscious in death and
- What is to happen at the judgement?

But, for the moment let's concentrate on the promise that there is a time coming when everything in the garden will be rosy, for blessing will triumph over cursing.



As the prophet Amos said about that time:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "When the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of my people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God (Amos 9:13-15).

David Nightingale

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