

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1497



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Can Christians Speak with Tongues? – page 15

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ), available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message; 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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Israel at War Again

Just before Christmas, Israel began a series of aerial attacks against Hamas activists and days later the Israeli army invaded the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

Rocket Attacks

Hamas is the Palestinian Sunni Islamist paramilitary organization and political party which holds a majority of seats in the elected legislative council of the Palestinian National Authority. The Hamas charter calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and its replacement with a Palestinian Islamic state in the area that is now Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. So there is no love lost between the Israelis and Hamas.

Its methods to destroy Israel have included suicide bombings and, more recently, rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. As their rocketry has improved in terms of range and destructive power, more and more Israelis have come within range. With fears mounting that Hamas was now capable of firing up to 200 rockets a day, with a range of 40km (25 miles), an estimated 500,000 Israelis were in danger of attack. A six-month long truce ended (on 23rd December) and 70 rockets were fired the following day which triggered Israel's military response. Sadly, this has led to much loss of life, including many civilian casualties, in this densely populated part of the world.

Old Battleground

Bible readers will have a sense of déjà vu, for the Gaza strip was occupied by opposing forces for much of Israel's

Bible-long history. The Philistines were an invading force, known to secular history as one of the Sea People, who had travelled from the Aegean. They were formidable warriors with good skills and the people of Israel were unable to defeat them, try as they might. They occupied the eastern coastland of Israel from the time of Joshua right through to their eventual conquest by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC – the same time that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were sent into exile.

Times have changed but one thing has remained constant. The people of Israel were unable to live peaceably with their neighbours in ancient times and the situation appears no better today. This is exactly what the Bible foretold would happen and it was one of the predicted features of the latter days – just before the Coming again of the Lord Jesus: the regathered nation of Israel would find itself surrounded by enemies. Look at this prophecy, written about the time of the Babylonian Exile, more than 2500 years ago:

“Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel ... I will make Mount Seir ... perpetually desolate, and your cities shall be uninhabited; then you shall know that I am the Lord. Because you have said, ‘These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,’ although the Lord was there, therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, I will do according to your anger and according to the envy which you showed in your hatred against them” (Ezekiel 35:5-11).

Ancient Hatred

The prophecy against Mount Seir – an ancient kingdom to the South East of the Dead Sea – was fulfilled absolutely. That kingdom is no more and the land its people once occupied is indeed waste and desolate. But it is important to notice that this warning from God comes in the middle of a series of prophecies about the restoration of the nation of Israel after years of dispersion among the nations:

“For thus says the Lord God: ‘Indeed I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out my sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land’ (Ezekiel 34:11-13).

The inhabitants of Mount Seir said, in the sixth century before Christ, “These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them” and the Old Testament contains several indications that there would be a determined attempt made to destroy the regathered nation (see, for example, Ezekiel 36:1-7 and Psalm 83:1-8). But it is important to understand that the re-establishment of the nation of Israel is a vital part of the unfolding purpose of God, whether the nations around accept it or not.

Alive from the Dead

Later in his prophecy, Ezekiel has a vision of a valley full of dry bones and, as he prophesies, they begin to reassemble – first as skeletons, then corpses, and finally they are energised and stand upon their feet “an exceed-

ingly great army” (37:10). He is told that this acted parable is about the people of Israel who were to be separated from their land and left effectively dead as a nation, just as happened for millennia. But the time would come when God would revive their national hopes and return them to their ancient land and, when the time is right, He will send them a King to re-establish the ancient Kingdom that once existed on earth – the Kingdom of God (Ezekiel 37:22).

At present we are in the middle of that process with the nation of Israel having to fight for its very survival. There is no indication that the “ancient hatred” between it and its neighbours is diminishing. Nor will it, say the prophets, until the Lord Jesus Christ comes to bring peace and justice on earth.

Peace for All

He will not simply bring peace to Jerusalem and Israel, however. His mission is to solve all our present problems; and to unite the world in worship of the one true God. The prophet Zechariah has much to say about the final events that will bring about the return of Jesus, including Israel’s acceptance of him as their long-awaited Messiah. But this is what he sees as the final outcome – a triumph for all men and women who want a better world:

“The Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – “the Lord is one,” and his name one” (Zechariah 14:9).

As we await the outcome of the present hostilities, we also need to be preparing for the coming of the King!

Editor

He Taught them in Parables

The Lord Jesus first appears in the gospel of Mark with this message: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

The whole of Jesus' ministry was to reinforce the urgency of that call, and part of his teaching was made more graphic and memorable by his use of parables. With his audience having to remember all that they heard, for there were no tape recorders or even notebooks in those days, the parable provided a means by which they could easily remember what had been said, and later think about its message.

Sowing the Seed

"Therefore hear the parable of the sower" (Matthew 13:18).

This is one of the important parables of Jesus not just because of what it teaches but also because of the explanation which the Lord Jesus gives of its meaning. It was a graphic picture with which his audience would be thoroughly familiar. If they could not actually see a sower out on the hill side, spreading seed by hand, they would all have seen it not that long before.

They would have seen seed fall on the path, to be eaten by the ever-hungry birds; some fall on rocky ground, where the lack of soil meant a crop quickly scorched by intense heat. They



would have seen thorns and other weeds choke seed which fell on the edges of the field. Then they would see some which fell on good soil to grow and become the crop which made all the work worthwhile. Jesus was not advising about agriculture, of course: his stories had a searching message.

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:19-23).

When the Lord Jesus' audience eventually started to go home they would think about the stories Jesus had told. Perhaps they would begin to wonder if they were included in the parable, and what type of soil they were. It is a question which needs to be considered by all who

hear or read this parable, ourselves included.

Why Parables?

In the same chapter in Matthew's gospel, Jesus actually explains his use of parables as a teaching technique.

"The disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'" (Matthew 13:10-11).

It was only those who spent the time thinking about the message of the parable who benefited from what it taught. He quoted to the disciples the words of the prophet Isaiah (chapter 6, verses 9-10) about a people whose "heart has grown dull". In Isaiah's time, the people had become insensitive to God's message: they were both unwilling to think and unready to try to understand the terrible situation they were in.

They thought that because they were the people of Israel they were all right; but in fact they had drifted slowly but firmly away from God. Serving Him had become a ritual, empty of any real meaning. Jesus explained that only those who want to understand will be able to see through the story to the deeper meaning that lies behind it.

Seed and Weed

There are other parables about the kingdom of God in Matthew chapter 13. One of them develops the symbol

of seed-producing-corn, but gives it a twist. This time the seed is sown in good soil, but an enemy also sows weeds amongst the seed. The picture is predictable. If the farmer were to root out the weeds, Jesus says, he would probably pull out most of the wheat also. The only course of action is to:

'... let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:30).

It is thought that the weed, or "the tares" in some Bible versions, was probably bearded darnel, which is said to be almost indistinguishable from wheat when the two are in the blade, but which can be easily separated when they both come into the ear. The Lord Jesus is

teaching that there will be a judgment, and that whilst people may look very similar, eventually they will be known by the sort of fruit they bear. It's a sobering thought that some are only good for the fire! The parable is explained in detail later in the chapter where the essential point is this:

"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and those who practise lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:41-43).



Other Parables

Jesus continues the series of seven parables, with one about mustard seed. This is a tiny seed which grows into a magnificent tree. In the same way, the response to Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God may be very small initially, but it will grow. At the return of the Lord Jesus the Kingdom will be the thing which fills the whole world. So Jesus continues to look at parables of Hidden Treasure, a Pearl of Great Value, and a Net thrown into the sea. All of these cast some new light on the sort of Kingdom which he will establish and what those who are in it will be like.

Master Teacher

Sometimes Jesus did not use parables. In the Sermon on the Mount and in the "Olivet" prophecy, he used more straightforward discourses, although they both contain some parables. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) begins with the Beatitudes, eight pithy sayings which spell out those who will be blessed by the Lord God. Each starts with a group of people, the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, or those who are merciful, and ends with the blessing promised.

Two groups are promised the Kingdom of heaven; others are to receive blessings which can only come fully when the Lord Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom. The rest of the sermon expands and expounds the teaching of the Beatitudes. It's no wonder that the Sermon on the Mount is sometimes called the Manifesto of

the King.

The pictures the Lord Jesus drew in his preaching would stay in the minds of those who had really listened. They would think about what he had said, finding answers to what they meant, especially if they had heard his explanations of the meanings of some of the parables. It is little different today.

Those who really want to know about the good news of the Kingdom of God will spend time reflecting on the teaching of Jesus and his disciples. They will demonstrate now that they really do want to be part of that Kingdom. For them, the Kingdom is a reality which will come to its fullness at the return of the Lord Jesus, but which is a part of their lives already.

When Jesus was present with the disciples, there was a sense in which the Kingdom of God was in their midst. Today, those who have come to accept the law of the King, and who seek to live with him, day by day, have also begun – however indistinctly – to live the life of the coming Kingdom.

Mark Sheppard

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After The Flood

*The Flood, which is described in Genesis chapters 6-8, lasted for a whole year and it was only then that Noah and his family were able to leave the ark and begin their life again. The first thing Noah did was to offer sacrifices, to thank God for their deliverance, after which God explained how their new society was to be set up. And, as **Dudley Fifiield** now explains, a prophecy was made about Noah's three sons.*

The Line of Shem

① After the flood God made a choice between the three sons of Noah – Ham, Shem and Japheth. It was through Shem that He chose to reveal Himself and preserve the knowledge of His Truth in the earth, for this is what the prophecy said:

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant” (Genesis 9:26,27).

Significantly, ‘Shem’ means ‘a good name’. It links Shem with the purpose enshrined in God’s Name. Prophesying of the future renown that should come through him Noah gives insight into the divine purpose to be fulfilled through the Semites,

“May God enlarge Japheth, and may he (God) dwell in the tents of Shem” (9:27).



② This prophecy was fulfilled initially when God dwelt in the Tabernacle, built at the time of Moses, in the midst of His people, Israel, and, finally, when the Lord Jesus was born. For the gospel records that:

“The Word became flesh and dwelt (lit. Tabernacled or tented) among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Whilst he could have been born into any nation on earth, Jesus was born to a virgin who lived in Israel: to a Jewess who was of the line of Shem, just as the prophecy had indicated.

Sons of Men

③ While the purpose of God was to be carried forward in this way, the aims of men generally had not changed at all. Genesis chapter 10 tells us of a character named Nimrod:

“Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel,

Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:8-10).

Here is described the origins of the city and kingdom of Babylon, the epitome of man’s arrogance. It was the archetype of all false worship and of everything that God hates.

Nimrod the Hunter

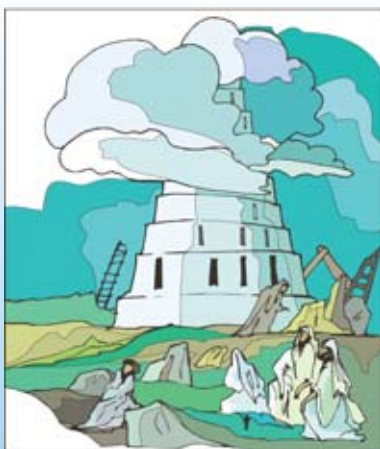
- ④ Nimrod, like the mighty men of Noah’s day, was a mighty man in the earth, a great warrior, and undoubtedly a man of violence.

“He was a mighty hunter before the LORD”.

We must not be misled, however, by the words *“before the LORD”* for they in no way signify divine approval. The men of Sodom were sinners exceedingly before the LORD (Gen. 13:13), and perhaps the phrase indicates the blatant manner in which they indulged their sins, behaving before the LORD as if He were of no consequence at all.

Nimrod is described as *“a mighty hunter”*, and it is possible that this phrase has a deeper significance than might first appear. There is some evidence that the early Kings of Assyria were known as ‘hunters of the people’ because of the cruel and remorseless way in which they hunted down and destroyed their enemies.

Perhaps Nimrod was such a man: given to violence



and vengeance, an arrogant warrior king who had no place for the LORD God or His purpose. This is substantiated by the meaning of his name, for names often have particular significance in Scripture. “Nimrod” is derived from an abstract noun meaning ‘contempt; rebellious’.

Literally the name means *‘let us rebel’*. It may have been given to him as his character developed and became apparent. Or, perhaps, he took it for himself in the pride he felt in his own achievements, and in the manner in which he despised and ridiculed the children of God.

Tower of Babel

- ⑤ This attitude is seen fully developed in the events recorded in Genesis 11. For the men who dwelt in Shinar said,

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (11:4).

Their spirit of rebellion in following the way of Cain is manifest. *“He built a city”*(Gen. 4:17) and now they said *“let us build ourselves a city”*. They were not *“strangers and pilgrims in the earth”* looking *“for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11.10), as were those men and women who had faith in God.

Rather they were concerned with building a society in which they could indulge their lusts and glory in themselves. Despite the purpose of God which is enshrined in His Name, they defiantly proclaimed “let us make a name for ourselves”.



This spirit of defiance is further indicated by the manner in which they appear to make a play upon the name of Shem (‘a good name’), almost making a pun out of it in the way they mockingly rejected the salvation of God. As the LORD said:

“Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Genesis 11:6).

⑥ Here is unbridled rebellion with no restraint upon the crookedness of their hearts or the perverseness of their spirit. They had no time for God or His Way in the earth and their spirit finds its ultimate expression in the proud words of King Nebuchadnezzar, surveying his handiwork:

“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30).

Babylon was a human society created by man with no place for God. But for haughty and arrogant King Nebuchadnezzar, God had a message. He was to become as

the beasts of the field and seven times would pass over him:

“till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (Daniel 4:25).

⑦ Here is the answer to the pride and wickedness of men. Here is assurance and consolation for all those who put their faith in God. Man can never frustrate His purpose. He is sovereign, always in control; and as His purpose develops we shall see that when He calls Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, the emphasis is once more upon the greatness of a name – not elevated and inflated by the pride of man, but truly exalted by the working of God’s mighty power:

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2).

⑧ The Blessing of Abraham finds its fulfilment in the Name of Jesus Christ. It was the apostle Peter who looked right back to the time of Abraham, when he said:

“You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having raised up his Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.” (Acts 3:25 & 26).

Dudley Fifield

Waiting and Waiting

I eventually got to see the surgeon and he was quite matter of fact about it. I had a cancer.

He explained all the options. Yes, there was a choice but none of the options was especially appealing. For me there was only one option that seemed right: surgery. That sounded a radical enough treatment to be sure: the cancer would be completely cut out.

The waiting time appeared the shortest too. And, of course, I prayed as I went in, whilst I was in there, and as I came out. More particularly, that evening before we went to bed, my wife and I prayed. I was sure that it was all in God's hands, but I still did not understand what it all meant for my life. It's so easy to confuse a lack of understanding with a lack of faith. Understanding will come as time rolls by: though I might not have too much of that left, as far as this life is concerned.

Another Visit

I was to see the surgeon again. It took a bit of prompting before I got around to ringing the nurse who had been designated as a kind of mentor. That was a good idea and helpful in this instance. The surgeon had said that my case would be dealt with in weeks.

The problem was that the nurse let slip that "URGENT" was written on my file. That was unsettling. Time seemed now to be ticking by and nothing had really

happened. I had my scans weeks ago. Would the opportunity for surgery be lost? Would the surgery be less effective than I had first thought? All went quiet. Well not really quiet. During that time I had seen many people (other Christadelphians) as I tried to continue with my daily service of God, in my ecclesia, in my family and so on. The recurrent theme of their conversation was sympathy, prayer and encouragement.

"We are thinking of you, we will be praying for you. Please keep us informed about what is happening."

I began to feel like the apostle Paul who, after his epic voyage through storm and shipwreck to Rome, was met on the last stretch by brothers in Christ:

"... When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage" (Acts 28:15).

Never have I been so grateful for my brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus who were praying on my behalf.

No Hurry!

The surgeon told me that there would be no harm in waiting a short time. I was reminded again of someone who once said, when all I was waiting for was a cup of tea, *"Patience is a virtue and David is cultivating it!"* Well, I was now!

This all enshrined a great truth. If we need patience then God is not going simply to give it us (gift wrapped or otherwise). Instead He will provide the circumstances in which it can be developed;



and we have to learn that, as we proceed with our lives, He is overseeing events, always.

The Day Approaches

The surgeon had told me that the operation would take place about the middle of September. My wife said she thought he said the end of September. Either way, time now seemed to be rushing on to a date – a date I wasn't sure about. It is just like that with the coming of the Lord; and just like that with the day of our death! It has to be difficult to organise your life when there is an important event looming, yet you don't know the date when it will occur. Jesus once told a parable about a man who was busy with plans to expand his business and make more and more profit. Then the message came to him:

"You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20).

Whilst waiting, I had to clear my diary of appointments that could be affected (which incidentally, and in the event, I could have fulfilled). Patience began to wear thin. Had they lost my notes? Had they forgotten me? I rang the nurse again, several times and eventually, after what seemed an age, I got a specific date, first a pre-operation visit and then for the operation two days later. That looked good, seemed all fixed, but then the hospital bug struck.

The Day Arrives!

This long period of waiting reminded me about waiting for the coming of the Lord. Undoubtedly the Lord will come. Will it be in my lifetime? All the things

that are wrong with the world, all life's distractions, can mask the fact that the promise of His Coming is sure.

Essentially we have to be patient and remain alive to the possibility that His Coming could be anytime soon. However we still have to continue to serve. There is no value in trying simply to wait.

The very process of living life fully in His service at home and in the Ecclesia is all part of preparing for that great day. It is part of the mechanism for developing us

so that we are made ready to spend eternity in His service in the kingdom that Jesus will set up when he returns to earth, to reign as king.

Disappointment

At last I arrived at the hospital only to be told that they hadn't sufficient nurses to undertake our care after the operation because of the latest hospital infection. There were three of us altogether, all keyed up and with nowhere to go except back home! So, back home we went. I was bewildered, my faith intact, but completely unable to understand the purposes of the Lord. What was this delay about?

Maybe there was still a lesson about patience to learn. Maybe this was the Lord's way of protecting us from a super-bug. I reassured myself with the knowledge that God knows what He is doing and, whatever happens, it will be the right thing, all things considered.

Meanwhile I came to realise that every new day I have been given is a gift from God, of His goodness and mercy. It is yet another opportunity for service.

David Nightingale



Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler

When the rich young man came running to Jesus with his problem about the search for eternal life, he received a double rebuff – and this even though “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mark 10:21).

First, Jesus asked him a searching question: “*Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God*”. There was purpose in this frosty reception. The young man’s point of view needed to be changed drastically. He had come asking how he might inherit eternal life. That word “*inherit*” speaks volumes, for a man inherits what is his by right. So Jesus was at pains to impress on this would-be disciple that no man has a title to everlasting life. The only thing a man can earn is “*the wages of sin*”. Eternal life is God’s free gift.

The Great Challenge

Then Jesus said: “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21).

The words have filled many readers with puzzlement as well as with a certain fear lest the demand should apply to them also. How is one to understand this? Does Jesus really require his disciples to forsake all to this extent? For if indeed he

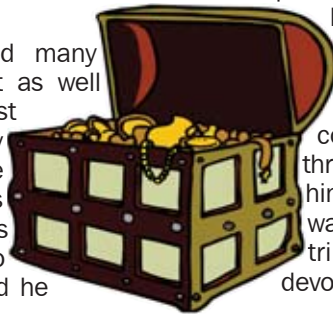
does, then he has had very few followers during the past nineteen centuries, and today most of us are merely pretending to be Christians.

The usual evasion from this very uncomfortable conclusion is to suggest that this was a commandment addressed especially to this man because he was not only rich but also in love with his riches. To which the obvious answer is: “*And so is everybody who has wealth – and not only they, but also those who haven’t!*” Let us try to be honest about this. Everyone is in love with money. There is not a single reader of “*Glad Tidings*” who would not be delighted to find himself ten thousand pounds (or dollars) better off tomorrow morning.

Not for Everybody

However the fact remains that this instruction was special to the rich young ruler, and was not intended for general consumption. This conclusion may be safely inferred from the fact that Jesus had other rich friends upon whom apparently no such requirement was laid. Neither did Paul insist on the application of such a stringent principle by the wealthy Christians of his day.

The probable explanation of the difficulty lies in a different direction. In the combined narratives of the three gospels there are several hints that this eager seeker was a Levite, a member of the tribe of Israel especially devoted to the Temple service



and the religious instruction of the people. To this tribe no inheritance in the Land was allowed by the Law of Moses. The Levite was to subsist on the tithes and offerings brought by the people. He was called to a life of faith: *"The Lord is his inheritance."*

This Levite, however, had great possessions. His life hitherto had been a point-blank denial of the very principle he was supposed to exemplify to others. So, putting his finger unerringly on the weak spot, Jesus required him to put his life right according to the Law which he himself was supposed to teach to the people.

"He was sad at this word, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions" (10:22).

Great Refusal

In the Tate Gallery in London there is a famous picture by George Frederick Watts of this rich young ruler, titled



"For he had great possessions". It shows this rich young man wearing a sumptuous robe edged in ermine and with a richly-jewelled hand over his eyes. And as he turns away from such an exacting Master, there is behind him in the picture a blank wall. It may not be exactly true to the facts of the story, yet it is wonderfully true to experience! He was turning away to nothing!

One cannot help but feel a pang of regret that one whom Jesus loved should turn away so decisively. Happily, it is possible to

find in the Bible story strong hints that this Great Refusal was not final. There is good reason to believe that, later on, this reluctant disciple had his hesitations swept away. For Barnabus the Levite *did* sell all and give the proceeds to the poor, and he did indeed come and follow Jesus.

Harry Whittaker

Consider the Lily

Solomon in all his glory! – a stupendous sight to behold
Amassed with riches and splendour, apparelled in jewels and gold
Yet consider the humble lily, unassuming but with beauty to please;
Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Her simpleness and her beauty, our Lord could plainly see,
Not the costly outer garments that clothe our vanity;
Since God made all, He does not need the trappings we put on
But a heart that's meek and humble will remain when these are gone.

Peggy Rawson

Part Three

Can Christians Speak with Tongues?

*In this examination of First Century experience, **David Willey** has shown that the gift of the Spirit conferred upon the apostles in Acts chapter 2 meant that they could speak in other languages without having to go to a language school. That proved to be a huge help with their preaching, but what other purposes did this Spirit gift confer?*

The Conversion of Cornelius

In Acts chapter 10 we read of the conversion of Cornelius. He is important because he was the first Gentile to be baptized into the saving name of Jesus; so this was a major turning point in the spread of God's message of salvation. If you read Acts chapter 10 you can see how it all happened.

Cornelius was a good-living man. The record says that he was:

"A devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2).

Notice, first of all, that he was devout and God-fearing. But more than that, he had also taught his household likewise to be God fearing. In other words, he preached by example. He also gave of his wealth to the people in his vicinity who were less well off. Finally, he was a man of prayer and he prayed to God regularly and consistently.

Not Enough!

But that was not sufficient. He

was really coming to God on his own terms. He needed to know about the saving work of Jesus Christ. This is a really important point! If we wish to be saved from our sins, that can only be accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ. So it is important that we know about the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was exactly the same for Cornelius, so an angel appeared to him and asked him to get in touch with the Apostle Peter, who was staying in Joppa at that time, so that he could explain the whole truth to him.

It is also important to note from this incident that Peter himself needed to understand that God's saving truth was now available to Gentiles as well as to Jews. God intends that all men should have the opportunity of being saved, subject to His calling – so we see that both men were really on a steep learning curve.



Whilst in prayer, the apostle Peter was told by God to go and visit Cornelius

Peter's Visit

We need to pass over the next few verses and pick up the incident in verses 44-48, where we read that after preaching about the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who listened to Peter's words. Who were these

people mentioned in verse 44? Well, verse 24 tells us that Cornelius had called together *'his kinsmen and near friends'* – so there was a goodly number present who had heard the words of Peter and they were probably all Gentiles.

Furthermore, the fact that these had received the Holy Spirit greatly impressed the Jews who had accompanied Peter from Judaea, because it showed beyond any doubt that God Himself was now calling Gentiles to a belief in Jesus.



So they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (verse 48).

Unusual

The whole process is unusual in that the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius and his friends before they were actually baptized. But the Lord God was making a vital point. He was emphasising to Peter and his fellow baptized

believers that the gospel message was to be preached to Gentiles as well as to Jews. God was saying that as far as He was concerned, not only Cornelius should receive the truth as it is in Jesus, but it should be preached to all Gentiles. The gospel should be preached to all, both Jew and Gentile.

The reason for us looking at the incident is that the sign that God used to make His point was that they were all able to *'speak with tongues'*. Again we raise the question: how do we understand the phrase: they *'heard them speak with tongues'* in (verse 46)? What exactly does that mean? Was it really a speaking in foreign languages and dialects? The answer is, of course, "Yes".

Proof Required

If we go to the next chapter we read how that when Peter got back to Jerusalem, he had to face criticism from his colleagues – and he goes through the whole incident to explain that the Lord God had ordained it all. And in Acts 11:15, when telling them about the *'speaking with tongues'* he makes this point:

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the

Divine Assurance

And how did they know that these new believers had received the gift of the Holy Spirit? The coming of the gift was the same for them as it had been for the apostles on the day of Pentecost!

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God" (Acts 10:44-46).

They too were able to speak with tongues. As this was a visible and unmistakable sign from the Lord God, Peter and his compatriots had to agree that there was nothing to stop them from being baptized. As Peter said:

"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47).

beginning”.

In other words, we see that just as on the day of Pentecost ‘speaking with tongues’ was the means of enabling people from all parts of the Roman Empire to understand the gospel message in their own tongues (that is the meaning of the phrase “upon us at the beginning” in 11:15). In like manner, when Cornelius and those of his house were also able to ‘speak with tongues’, that means that they too were then able to speak in foreign languages.

Authenticity

So this marvellous aid – the gift of language – which enabled the apostles to spread the gospel message to all people also served another purpose. The ability to speak in tongues was an instantaneous way of determining beyond a shadow of doubt that one really possessed the gift of the Spirit.

There are many other references to

‘speaking with tongues’ in the New Testament which should all be understood in exactly the same way. The gift was the ability to speak in foreign languages. As we already said it was primarily given as an aid to preaching the good news of the Kingdom.

Furthermore, we need also to understand that only the apostles had the power of passing on the gifts of the spirit to other people. Cornelius and his household were exceptions to this general rule because they received the gift as a result of the direct invention of the Lord God. As we have seen, this was to emphasize God’s calling of the Gentiles to a belief in Jesus, just as He had first called the Jews. But in every other instance in New Testament times it is noteworthy that only the apostles had the power to pass the Spirit gifts to other people. And that has important consequences, as we shall see.

David Willey

A Christ-Like Spirit

We should comfort those who sorrow
And rejoice with those who smile,
Our love should abound to all around
For we’re only here for a while.

We should sing with those who are happy
And weep with those who mourn,
Living each day as Christ showed the way:
Giving hope to the lost and forlorn.

So give help to all those who are helpless,
Give gladly and don’t turn aside;
As children of light, our lamps should be bright,
Showing others that Christ is our Guide.



Colleen Simons

Light and Darkness

The Bible is full of contrasts. The very act of creation is described in Genesis chapter 1 as a transformation from chaos to creative order; and from darkness to light.



*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘**Let there be light**’; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:1-4).*

Spiritual Enlightenment

Without light, life is not possible. But in many Bible verses the word “light” is not referring to physical light at all – not to the light that streams in through the window. They are referring instead to spiritual enlightenment and are leading us to think about the transformation that knowledge of the gospel can have on our minds.

We are familiar with the idea that education can change our entire outlook and make us able, where we

once were unable. In the same way, the knowledge of God can alter our outlook on life entirely. It can bring order out of the chaos, by showing us what God wants us to do and how He wants us to behave.

The writer of Psalm 43 longed for spiritual insight to bring him nearer to God:

“Oh, send out your light and your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise you, O God, my God” (Psalm 43:3,4).

As another Psalmist also understood, if we want to live a true and wholly meaningful life, we have to read and understand God’s Word, the Bible. For, he said: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).*

The Light of the World

Jesus was the word made flesh, for in him and by him God spoke as never before or since (Hebrews 1:1,2). He was the Son of God and the New Testament says that he revealed what God is really like:

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him” (John 1:18).

Before Jesus came, all sorts of questions had remained unanswered. We were in darkness about precisely what God was like and what He would do to save mankind from sin and death. It had long been foretold that when the

Messiah came, his coming would throw light on all those dark places:

*“Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, **the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people;** but the LORD will arise over you, and his glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isaiah 60:1-3).*

Light out of Darkness

This was more than a prediction that the infant Jesus would be sought out by wise men from afar, although their coming was an initial fulfillment. It was a promise that the Messiah can bring enlightenment into even the darkest home and blackest heart. And lest we should be in any doubt about who that Messiah really is, consider these words in the gospel record about the time when at 30 years old Jesus began his public ministry:

*“Leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea ... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: **the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.**’ From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:13-17)*

And these spoken by Jesus himself:

*“Jesus spoke to them again, saying, **‘I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’**”*

(John 8:12).

Feeling not Seeing

Without the illumination that comes from God’s Word, we are just like people groping around in pitch darkness. We don’t know where we are going; we have no real purpose or direction in life. But if only we will turn towards God, there is a better way. He calls us out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The apostle Paul was once addressing a very learned group of people who he accused of gross ignorance! He told them that they worshipped a God they did not know then he said this:

“God, who made the world and everything in it ... has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him” (Acts 17:24-27).

Unless we are enlightened by God’s Word, and learn from Him, we are like blind people feeling our way around. But God wants us to be enlightened. As the apostle Paul puts it:

“It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Marion Buckler

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