

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1506

*Living Close to the Edge – page 3*  
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*The Theory of Evolution – page 12*

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

125th Year

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1506

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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# Living Close to the Edge

Mountains are dangerous places at the best of times, but in bad weather they become extremely dangerous. When cloud comes down suddenly, reducing visibility, or when snow falls unexpectedly, blanketing everything, you can lose your sense of direction. Who knows then what lies ahead? A flimsy fence marking the edge of a precipice might easily be obscured and one wrong step could be disastrous.

## Taking Chances

Such dangers can produce quite opposite reactions. Some people decide to opt for the safest possible option. They choose not to climb mountains, go potholing, skiing, or even flying. Their preference is to stay at home where they hope they will be safe.

Others are drawn towards the danger because of the risk involved. They like living dangerously: they feel alive when they are putting their lives close to the edge. That's the way they get their thrills – danger gives them a sense of excitement and adventure. Such people often drive recklessly, take chances in the way they live, and deliberately put themselves in dangerous situations, hoping that everything will work out well. You might have encountered such people, or may even be like that yourself – at least sometimes!

This magazine looks to God's Word for guidance and this marvellous revelation from God has something to say about the way we should live now as

well as in the age to come. What advice does the Bible have to give about the way we should live, and the risks we should take, or not take?

## What is Life?

Life is the most precious thing that we possess. Once that ends, everything ends. Both Old and New Testaments agree that when we die we lose all sensation, all experience, and of course all our possessions, friends and family. Throughout the ages people have tried to persuade themselves that death is really a door to another experience – the start of an adventure, and not the end of one. But the Bible tells it as it really is, and because this is God's revelation, we can rely upon it to tell the whole truth. Here are some examples of a Bible-long teaching:



*“Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him ... He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man who is in honour, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:16-20).*

*“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:7,8).*

That makes grim reading for a magazine which claims to have good news! But if you examine the context of both those passages – and it is always good

to do that – you will see that life doesn't have to end. There's a choice.

## Life after Death

Here are key verses from the same two chapters:

**“But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me” (Psalm 49:15).**

The Psalmist recognises that there is a solution to the problem of human mortality, namely that God can rescue someone from the imprisonment of death and recover his life, by resurrection (when the Psalmist refers to his “soul”, he means his “life”).

*“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, **that they may lay hold on eternal life**” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)*

Here the apostle Paul teaches us that God will confer eternal life upon those men and women who please Him, and who have done right by Him during their mortal existence. And notice what he says about our present existence, that *“the living God ... gives us richly all things to enjoy”*. Our present existence is a gift from God and we should make the most of it, using every opportunity to find out about Him and His purpose, if we want to be part of the life that is to come. The choice is ours.

## Living Dangerously

Given an opportunity to explain the Christian gospel to some intellectuals in Athens, the apostle Paul once sum-

marised the position in these words:

**“He gives to all life, breath, and all things ... so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:25-27).**

His language – about groping and finding – reminds us that we are by nature like blind people who desperately need the gift of sight. Paul was once like that himself (see Acts 9:8,9) before he had his sight restored. Then he could see things he had never previously understood. Now, in Athens, he explained that the great hope for mankind is that of resurrection from the dead at the return to earth of Jesus. But how would his hearers respond? We are left in no doubt, for the record continues:

*“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’ ... However, some men joined him and believed...” (Acts 17:32-34).*

There are many people like that today, who hear God's Word and come to understand it, but who choose to take no action, at least for the time being. Perhaps they think they will do something about it sometime, but not now. Yet none of us know what lies ahead and what dangers or perils confront us, as our life's circumstances change.

There has never been a better time to take action and to establish a lasting relationship with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Why live on the edge when you can learn to live with God?

**Editor**

# The Power of Prayer

**Prayer is the most difficult subject to talk about because it is not really something to be talked about but a privilege to be practised reverently, fervently and frequently.**

Some people only think about God at times of national crisis or when their own lives have become too much for them. Did you notice that when the financial crisis broke in many parts of the world, the word “prayer” itself began to be used by the media much more often than is usual? The very same phenomenon occurred on 11th September 2001 – when those two planes crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York.

It seems that it is only in times of war or crisis that people turn to prayer. Some use it as if it were a fire extinguisher; as though it came with a message – “For use only in case of emergency”. People seem to believe that they can manage quite well on their own to a large extent, but occasionally need a God to pray to, to appeal to, to blame, or to curse.

## **God is in Heaven**

As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe in a personal spiritual and eternal Being in heaven who is merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth. We

are also convinced that He has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind not only in His Word, the Bible, but also through the personality of His only begotten Son (see Hebrews 11: 6 and John 14:6-9). Everything we can appreciate about His intentions with

His creation, God has explained to us in His Word – the Holy Bible. If our prayers are to be real and meaningful we need to accept what God has revealed and believe in God’s gracious purpose with His creation.

In His infinite wisdom, God made mankind with a somewhat apparently perverse ability. We all have the ability to turn our backs on our Creator, if we so wish. This is why we so often persuade ourselves that we can manage without God (except

under certain circumstances) and why people often decide that there is no ultimate purpose in life. So many people see this present life as a sequence of random events rather than as a preparation for a life to come. For them, things happen and God just doesn’t come into their picture of life at all. But God is in heaven, whether we choose to accept that fact or not.

## **Drawing Near**

For those of us who have come to terms with God’s revealed intentions, the situation is very different. Prayer expresses the desire of men and women to be part of God’s gracious purpose and to be near to Him. There is in the heart of one who prays rever-



ently, fervently and frequently, an eager desire to praise and to serve God and to be able to come very close to Him. Such a person recognizes the changelessness of God, His infinite power and His ineffable love shown to mankind in His Son. Yet there is also the realization by such a person that he or she is stricken with a rebellious nature, of which we have spoken, which wants to be independent of God.

There are two problems that confront us immediately:

- 1 This spirit of rebellion finds its expression in sin, a term which simply means wrongdoing. This attitude of mind has become a barrier which people erect between themselves and their Maker. Yet God, in His gracious mercy, has made it possible for this barrier to be removed.
- 2 In general, mankind is blind to the fact that we are suffering from what we must call a terminal illness and until we realise the meaning of our mortality – that we are bound to die – we will not understand the importance of finding God’s remedy. For there is already a cure!

As someone once wrote: *“The Saviour of men, even Jesus of Nazareth pressed forward in his life to a voluntary death as an act of redemptive grace so that man should be released from the bondage of sin and prepared for participation in an earth purged of evil and filled with divine glory”*. This is exactly what John says in his gospel (John 3:16) and in his first letter (1 John 4:10).

## Finding Safety

There is only one refuge from the storms of life. It is God Himself. As the Psalmist once wrote:

*“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him I will trust’”* (Psalm 91:1,2).

The apostle Paul, writing his letter to first century Christian believers in Ephesus, marvels at the wonder of God’s plan of salvation for mankind. He is moved to offer heartfelt thanks as he begins his third chapter. However, he immediately interrupts himself (see Ephesians 3, verses 14-21). He is overwhelmed by the abundant grace and mercy of God who has included not only Jews but also

Gentiles in His wonderful plans. His prayer is that his readers (and that includes all of us) should be transformed from men and women who are stricken by a terminal illness (mortality) into men and women who have become new creatures in God’s sight.

Such people are no longer condemned to eternal oblivion in death, for they have disowned their old

selves and taken on a new identity. They are people in whose hearts Christ dwells by faith. They are people who now understand something of God’s purpose – and that they can have a part in it. They have come to terms with the awe-inspiring grace and mercy of God expressed in the words – *“It is*



*your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"* (Luke 12:32).

## **Transformation**

So the power of prayer for a man or woman who has begun life anew in Christ is so great that he or she can be changed from a sinner into a saint; from a prisoner of sin into a free person in Christ; from a person condemned to death, to a son or daughter beloved of God. And even then there is more! The new man in Christ who has been begotten by the Word of God and baptised into the saving Name of Jesus, is still someone who must continue to live out this mortal span, subject to all its ups and downs, to all its temptations and trials and to all its moments of joy and of sadness.

How then is this new life in Christ so different? It is different in the sense that the believer has surrendered his or her life to God – a God who can now be addressed as “Father”. Life’s battles need no longer be fought alone, for God is always near at hand and can be talked to in prayer. Prayer is the opportunity to be alone with Him in the quietness of His holy presence, anywhere and at any time of the day or night. We can thus draw away from the hectic and distressing things that happen to us every day into the serene presence of God Himself.

Those men and women who are always looking for something else for their contentment, who are always



keen to “get away from it all for a while” have missed the essential message of the gospel. Let your minds dwell for a moment on these Scriptures (Matthew 6: 6; John 17: 15-21; I Thessalonians 5:16-23; I Timothy 6:6). Even the Lord Jesus needed to do this and to have these moments of quiet (Mark 6:31-34&46). If he needed them, so too do we!

## **Coming to God**

In a parable that Jesus taught, the younger son in a wealthy household turned his back on his father, demanded his inheritance, and left home. All was well while his pockets were full of money and he could buy his friends. But as soon as those pockets were empty, Luke tells us that “*he began to be in want*”. He then composes what is in effect a prayer to his father (Luke 15:18-19). All the while he had been away that same father had been eagerly looking for his return and the son’s prepared words are cut short by that loving father (Luke 15:20-24).

Yet those who have turned to God in prayer through Christ have an even greater privilege than that younger son. Because Jesus understands us so well, he himself brings our prayers before the Father’s throne of grace (Hebrews 10: 22 and I John 1:9). He is standing alongside us, holding our hands as it were, as we seek for that forgiveness for our sins.

Even then there are times when we do not know just what to say in our prayers. Perhaps we are ill and in pain;

worried or distressed; burdened or even crushed. Yet because we have entrusted our lives to Him we can enjoy this great privilege of addressing God as our Father in heaven. And there is the greatest possible sense of assurance for the Scripture says:

*"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8: 28).*

The believer trusts the Father implicitly and leaves the resolution of apparently unending problems to Him, not as a last resort but as a priority. So I beseech you, do not put your trust in the uncertain promises made by men. Do not rely on the hopes offered by politicians or sociologists, however well-intentioned they might be. Instead, turn to the Living God through

His Son, realise to the full the power of prayer in the knowledge that God has promised:

*"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and he shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass ... Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass ... For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth ... the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 37:4-5, 7,9,11).*

**Trevor A Pritchard**

## **The Pharisee and the Publican**

*(Luke Chapter 18)*

Two men went up to the temple to pray  
The one was a proud Pharisee;  
He prayed with himself, for his prayer reached not God,  
And the reason is easy to see.

His words were a list of the things he had done,  
It wasn't a prayer but a boast;  
In praising himself whilst denouncing the rest  
He was doing what he enjoyed most.

Afar off, a Publican prayed with bowed head;  
He would not raise his eyes on high  
But smote on his breast as he humbly prayed:  
"God have mercy, for a sinner am I".

What a powerful lesson this is to each one  
For we all need His mercy and grace;  
And God will exalt the repentant and meek,  
But the arrogant He will abase.



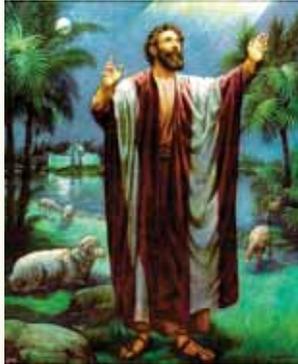
**Colleen Simons**

# Abraham and the Promised Seed

*Examining the promises that God made to Abraham, **Dudley Fifield** has shown that one strand referred to Abraham's natural descendants – the nation of Israel. But God's purpose began with them so that it could enlarge and expand to include many nations. And it focussed on one particular descendant – the Lord Jesus Christ.*

## Summary

- 1 Abraham was to be the Father of many nations (both Jews and Gentiles were to be descended from him).
- 2 His seed (singular) would inherit the gates of his enemies and in him all families of the earth shall be blessed.



*“This is my covenant which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you” (17:10,11).*

We have seen already that Abraham would have natural descendants – the Jewish people – but the promises he received also referred to a much wider group of descendants.

## Many Nations

The promise that Abraham should be “the father of many nations” is contained in the 17th chapter of Genesis. There God says:

- ✓ “I will ... multiply you exceedingly” (verse 2);
- ✓ “you shall be a father of many nations” (v.4);
- ✓ “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you” (v.6).

Circumcision was the token of the covenant that God made with Abraham:

This rite symbolically indicated the cutting away of the power of human flesh. God's purpose was not to be fulfilled through the agency of men but by the power of God. In effect we are being told that the real significance of this promise is to be found in spiritual terms not in physical ones.

This is confirmed by the apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans. Writing of circumcision the Apostle says of Abraham:

*“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also” (Romans 4:11).*

## Spiritual Values

Circumcision, as Paul explains it, was all about spiritual values not about the importance of the physical act itself. Nobody can earn eternal life, however much they try to cut off their natural fleshly desires. God counts us righteous when we believe in Him and trust in what He can do for us. This is what Paul meant when he said that righteousness could be imputed to men of faith. Paul continues his explanation with a most remarkable declaration:

*“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (4:13)*

Abraham and his faithful seed (or descendants) are to inherit the world and they are to be men and women who are deemed to be righteous in God’s sight because of what they believe. All these things were done in those far off days, recorded in Genesis, for this reason:

*“So that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’)” (Romans 4:16,17).*

It is true that in the physical sense nations were descended from

Abraham, as we have seen. But the real point of the promise was that all those who showed the faith of Abraham are regarded as the children of Abraham and with him they will inherit the earth. A time will come when, in God’s Kingdom, the earth will be inhabited by a multitude of redeemed men and women and every one of them will regard Abraham as their father. They will so regard him because they will have obtained their righteousness, and through it eternal life, by believing the foundation principles that were first revealed to

Abraham in these early chapters of the Book of Genesis.

## One Special Seed

Right at the centre of this redemptive work of God is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Abraham was promised one special descendant and this promise featured prominently in the many things that God said to Abraham:

*“The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants (seed) forever” (Genesis 13:14,15);*

*“Also I give to you and your descendants (seed) after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (17:8)*

*“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (22:18).*



*The land of promise*

It is these four simple words “and to your seed” and their variation “in your seed” to which the Apostle Paul makes particular reference when writing to the Galatians, for he gives this important explanation:

*“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).*

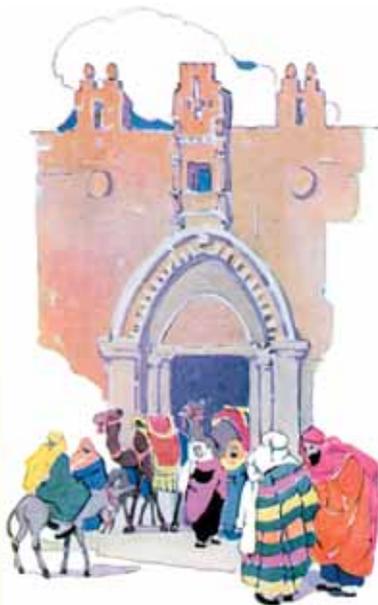
Later in the chapter, as the argument is developed, Paul writes:-

*“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (3:27-29).*

## **Jesus is the Special Seed**

The Lord Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the seed of Abraham. It is through his sacrifice that all nations of the world are blessed – counted righteous by God. Not every individual who ever lived, but those who have the faith of Abraham. There is no barrier, for the great multitude of the redeemed who sing their praises to the Lamb exclaim:

*“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain,*



*“... thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies” (Genesis 22:17 KJV)*

*and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9,10).*

We read in Genesis 22 that Abraham’s seed was to possess the gates of his enemies. The city rulers sat in the gate; so to possess the gate speaks of conquest. It means that the one who holds the position has authority to control who goes in and who comes out. The Lord Jesus has conquered sin and death.

He is the one who once declared:

*“I am the First and the Last. I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades (the grave) and of Death” (Revelation 1:17,18).*

So our eternal future is in the control of the Lord Jesus Christ. It all depends upon our relationship with him. What do we want to happen? To be lost for ever in the oblivion of death, or raised to glorious immortality, to live and reign with him in God’s Kingdom?

**Dudley Fifield**

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## Part Three

# The Theory of Evolution

Earlier **Lawrence Cave** explained that an observable fact is something that can be proved beyond doubt. By contrast, he noted that scientists create theories about something they want to look at in a little more detail, theories which are based on a set of assumptions. Using that model, Lawrence now puts the theory of evolution to the test.

## The observable facts

A theory should be the best explanation of the facts we see around us. The theory of evolution talks about gradual change over many millions of years. So we should expect the fossil record to show a continuous progression through all sorts of stages of development, enabling us to trace evolution. For example we should see features such as wings in various stages of development.



*Trilobite fossil*



*Archaeopteryx fossil*

When we look at the fossil record, we see that all the fossils appear to be fully formed, well-defined species with well-defined features. An example that is often used to support the idea of transitional species is the fossil of “Archaeopteryx”. “Archaeopteryx” had feathers like a bird, but it appears to have had a toothed jaw like a reptile. But the fact is that all the features of “Archaeopteryx” come fully formed. It doesn’t have half feathers – it has fully formed feathers just like those on the wings of birds we have today. As much as we can tell from the fossil record, it suggests that everything that was

needed for flight is present. It had a braincase similar to a modern bird. From the facts we have, everything had progressed to be a fully formed bird.

This lack of transitional fossils was acknowledged by Professor Steve Jones of University College, London, when he published an updated version of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1999. This is what he wrote:

*“The fossil record – in defiance of Darwin’s whole idea of gradual change – often makes great leaps from one form to the next. Far from the display of intermediates to be expected from slow advance through natural selection many species appear without warning, persist in fixed form and disappear, leaving no descendants. Geology assuredly does not reveal any finely graduated organic chain, and this is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against the theory of evolution.”*

So we can see that the fossils give us an important fact. The fossil record does not contain the partly developed animals that the theory of evolution predicts. Now let’s look at some of the other facts that are used to support this theory.

## Classification of animals

Another argument used to support the theory of evolution is comparative studies of modern animals, known as “cladistics”. When you look at animals, you will see that certain animals look

like other animals. And scientists have produced a classification system so that things that look like each other are classified as being similar. For example, monkeys and humans both have arms and legs, and five fingers and five toes and therefore humans and monkeys are classified together.



As another example, horses and donkeys and zebras all look like each other, with minor variations. So scientists have looked at all the creatures around the world and classified them



all in this way. However, we can't do any experiments, and there is no way of knowing how these observable facts came to be. The theory of evolution simply provides one possible explanation of how animals came to look like they do. A perfectly valid alternative explanation is that some intelligent power created them like that.

## Variations within species

Another argument that is used to support evolution is variation within species. When we look at dogs we can see many different breeds. Human beings on a relatively small timescale have interbred dogs to produce a wide variety



of breeds. The argument is that, given enough time, these variations could produce new species.

But the simple fact is that this has never been observed. And in fact the scale of change is vastly different. It's one thing, as Darwin did, seeing finches with different types of beak; it's a huge jump to say that the same mechanism could explain the appearance of a heart, the appearance of bone, the appearance of feathers, the appearance of warm-blooded creatures, etc. Big changes have never been observed, and it is not good scientific practice to extend known information far beyond what has been seen. So it is not scientific to use very minor changes as evidence to support the great changes required by the theory of evolution.

## Lawrence Cave



- ▶▶▶ **The fossil record contains only fully formed animals.**
- ▶▶▶ **Classification of animals tells us nothing about how they came into existence.**
- ▶▶▶ **Minor changes are not scientific evidence of large changes.**

# God's Purposeful Creation

The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob grew into a nation whilst they were in bondage in Egypt. From there they were rescued when God demanded: "Let My people go!" and Moses then led them through the Sinai Peninsula into the Promised Land. As they were about to enter the land, Moses made this statement to encourage the people to be faithful and obedient to God:



cover yourself with light as with a garment, who stretch out the heavens like a curtain" (Psalm 104:1,2).

In those heavens we are told by scientists that there are quasars, exceptionally luminous galaxies, far brighter than normal starlight, their brilliance generated, it is said, as matter is pulled towards a giant black hole at its heart. The Hubble space telescope has pho-

tographed this. Such is the greatness of God's creation! So let us think with awe of what the great apostle Paul wrote about God, when describing His awesome majesty:

*"He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power" (1 Timothy 6:15,16).*

*"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29).*

God has revealed many things to us so that we can become obedient to His laws and follow His ways and those revealed things include the Genesis account of creation. So we would expect to find things there which help us to understand God's moral purpose.

## **"Let there be Light!"**

God's revelation begins with Light, not the light of the sun or moon or stars, but the light of God! We are reminded of what the Psalmist says:

*"Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great: You are clothed with honour and majesty, who*

## **God knows Best!**

We realise as we read Genesis chapter 1 how different things were then from how they are now. For instance, people and animals fed on plants and herbs growing from the ground (see verses 29-30) and animals did not prey on others for food. So the Genesis account takes us back to a time when things were in their infancy and if we

track right back to the Creation account we find that everything was ordered and structured in exactly the right way to sustain life. There is no conflict with the order as it is now proposed by scientists:

- The entry of light on the first day is followed by the division of sea and sky on the second.
- The separation of the land mass out of the sea and its bringing forth of grass, herbs and trees with their seeds is on the third day.
- The heavenly bodies are revealed on the fourth.
- The fifth sees the bringing forth of life forms in the sea and sky – fishes and birds,
- The sixth sees the formation of living creatures, including man.

All this was a purposeful step-by-step progression towards the creation of mankind and how small it should make us feel when we recognise that we are created beings and Almighty God is our Creator. This was how the prophet Isaiah expressed it, when he voiced God's declaration:

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void [margin – empty, without fruit], but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:8-11).*

## **Divine Communication**

This is a necessary reminder that God knows more than we do; *“He spoke, and it was done!” (Psalm 33:9).* He brought everything into existence by *“the word of the LORD” (33:6).* The same God uses His words to communicate with mankind. The prophet who declared that God's thoughts and ways are far above ours also said:

*“Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6,7).*

God is merciful to those who seek Him, for He created the earth to be inhabited by men and women who incline their hearts and minds to hear Him and to follow in His way. Side-by-side with statements about the power of God are invitations for us to listen to what He has to say. Here's another:

*“He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground ... The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy” (Psalm 147:4-11).*



God did not just create the heavens and earth and leave it there. His care is continuous, His power unending and both love and power are in perfect balance.

## Sun and Moon

The creation of heavenly bodies was intended to regulate our life:

*“God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night” (Genesis 1:14-16).*



Man has measured time from the position of the moon and stars for as long back as we can find and he has observed eclipses of the sun and moon.

There is a historical record of a man who foretold an eclipse of the sun in BC 585, basing his argument on one which occurred in BC 603. Do you think it is design or coincidence that when we observe the sun and moon from the earth they each appear much the same size, although we know they are not and their distances from earth are not the same? In a solar eclipse seen from the earth the moon almost exactly covers the sun, while for a

lunar eclipse the shadow of the earth blocks out the sun in the same way.



The discoveries of science confirm the greatness of God's precise control of the Universe. We feel the benefit of the sun's rays suitably filtered for our environment, yet experts tell us its mass is 330,000 times greater than the earth's and millions of tons of that mass are converted every second into energy billions of times greater than any man-made nuclear station. A hurricane moves three and a half million tons of air at between 100 and 200 miles per hour. God's power is there and He is in control!

*“The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:3).*

## Roy Waddoup

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# **Paul on Trial before the Sanhedrin**

*Thanks to the quick action of the Roman commander in charge of the Fortress of Antonia, the apostle Paul had been rescued from a Jewish mob and had been brought into the Fortress. So that he could determine whether or not Paul was a troublemaker, the commander arranged for Paul to appear before the Jewish Council – the Sanhedrin – so that he could give an account of himself. These details, contained in Acts chapter 23, are now examined by John Hellowell.*

## **Paul protests his innocence**

The start of this trial was strange for no opening formal charge was made. The Roman commander, Claudius Lysias had ordered the Sanhedrin to hear the case so that he could ascertain exactly the crime of which Paul stood accused. In some ways this was a trial about a trial. Since Jewish law assumed that a man was innocent until proven guilty, and there seemed to be no accusing witnesses present, it is difficult to see how progress could be made. Perhaps that is why Paul took the initiative and stated that he had no case to answer:

*“Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).*

At this declaration, the High Priest Ananias ordered those close to Paul to strike him on the mouth, no doubt a gesture intended to indicate that he had no right to address the court in that way and that what he claimed was untrue. The claim made by Paul may, at first sight, seem to be contrary to his state-



ments elsewhere. For example:

*“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9).*

Or again:

*“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...” (Ephesians 3:8).*

The explanation for this apparent contradiction is given in 1 Timothy.

*“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:12-15).*

Paul does not claim that

he is righteous, only that he has always acted in good conscience. As he says:

*“For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but he who judges me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:4).*

This statement is more readily understood in the New International Version of the Bible:

*“My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me”.*

### **Conscientiously Wrong**

When Paul had persecuted the church he did it with a clear conscience, believing that he was doing the Lord’s work; but that did not absolve him from blame. Several times in his letters (e.g. 2 Corinthians 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:3) Paul declares that he has a clear conscience. Perhaps the most significant factor here in Acts is that, while Paul’s conscience was clear, he strongly suspected that some of those who were accusing him had guilty consciences and were maintaining their stance against the Way outwardly, yet knew that all the evidence pointed to its truth.

This was clearly the position on an earlier occasion when Nicodemus came by night to the Lord Jesus and declared:

*“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2).*

The use of the pronoun “we” shows that at least several of the rulers had

faced up to the evidence and yet were reluctant to admit this openly. It seems possible that the same was true now and this may explain the attitude of some of the Pharisees, for they protested:

*“We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God” (Acts 23:9).*

The action of the High Priest, Ananias, fits well with what is known about him. He had been appointed High Priest by Herod of Chalcis, a brother of Herod Agrippa I, in AD 47 and remained in office for about twelve years. In AD 52 he was sent to Rome by Quadratus, Legate of Syria, accused of fomenting the risings in Judea but was acquitted by Claudius, as a consequence of the pleading by the younger Agrippa. He was a Sadducee, as were most of the High Priests, who gained office largely as a result of their pro-Roman tendencies.

As Josephus, the Jewish historian informs us, he was notoriously unscrupulous and a ruthless politician. He was known for his avarice and liberal use of violence. He appropriated the tithes which were the dues of the

ordinary priests and was liberal with his bribes to the Romans and also to the Jews. Even after he was deposed from office in AD 58 (only a year after this incident) his wealth and influence allowed him to use assassination and violence to further his own ends. His support for Rome caused resentment amongst patriotic Jews and during the war of lib-



eration which broke out in AD 66 he was extricated from a sewer in which he was hiding and, along with his brother Hezekiah, was put to death.

### **Paul's Reaction**

No doubt recoiling and smarting from the blow he had received, Paul made the following prophetic statement:

*"God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"*(Acts 23:3).

The description of the High Priest as a whitewashed wall is rather odd. It might be thought to refer to the common practice of whitewashing tombs, especially during the annual feasts to prevent accidental ritual contamination by making them more evident. Certainly the Lord Jesus made a similar comment regarding the scribes and Pharisees:

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"* (Matthew 23:27,28).

But the phrase here is whitewashed wall. It has been suggested that this might be a reference to the wall of Ezekiel chapter 13:

*"Because they lead my people astray, saying, 'Peace', when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy*



*"God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!"*

*wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall. Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, 'Where is the whitewash you covered it with?'... So I will spend my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, 'The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it ...'"* (Ezekiel 13:10-12,15, NIV).

Here the wall is unstable but the cracks have been whitewashed over so that it looks sound; yet it will not remain long. So Ananias and all he represented would soon succumb to the Lord's judgments. This seems to be borne out in Paul's next comment regarding the incongruity of his being subject to illegal actions in a court!

*"You sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"*

His statement was really in the form of a question: *"Do you actually sit to judge me...?"*

### **Turning the other cheek?**

Comparisons have been made between Paul's reaction to Ananias here and that of the Lord Jesus when on trial before Annas, the father-in-law of a former High Priest, Caiaphas.

That is something to consider as the details of this particular trial are examined in the next article in this series, God willing.

**John Hellowell**

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