

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1533



Finding Your Roots – page 3
Wisdom from the Word – page 11
Parables about Prayer – page 16

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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1533



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; 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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Contents

Finding Your Roots3

**Revisions and Printing
of the KJV Bible5**

**The Lord is my Banner
.....9**

**Wisdom from the Word
.....11**

**Believing the Seemingly
Unbelievable14**

**Parables about Prayer
.....16**

**Is there a God of Evil?
.....18**

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Finding Your Roots

It has become a popular pastime to track down your ancestors: to find out exactly where the family came from and how far back in time you can go, before the records run out or the family identity is untraceable. People used to trek half way around the world to look at gravestones and study parish registers, and many still do. But now online census data and other electronic records have made searching much easier and this has made the pastime much more popular.

For some people it really matters where they have come from and who they are. Perhaps they never knew their real parents or grandparents and finding out about them is the next best thing to knowing them. Other people struggle with their sense of identity and don't seem to fit in, so they track back in their past looking for answers to who they really are. And sometimes it is important to be able to find out how long your ancestors lived and whether they suffered from illnesses that might have passed down the family line.

Identity

It mattered in Bible times whether or not you could establish your family credentials. The nation of Israel was divided into twelve tribes and you lived within that tribal structure. Each family's inheritance was to be kept within the tribe, so you could not amalgamate your farm with another in some other tribe, for to do so would blur tribal boundaries. And the family mattered because you were identified by the people to whom you belonged. There were many people who shared the same name but they were distin-

guished by the names of their forebears. Take Zechariah, which was a name given to 27 different people in the Old Testament alone. Those individuals are distinguished as follows:

▀▀▀ *Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah was keeper of the door of the tabernacle of meeting (1 Chronicles 9:21).*

▀▀▀ *Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly (2 Chronicles 20:14).*

▀▀▀ *Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people (2 Chronicles 24:20).*

▀▀▀ *Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them (Ezra 5:1).*

Notice that the four different people mentioned here are described in two ways. They performed different functions – a doorkeeper, a Levite, a priest and a prophet – but they are also identified by their family credentials, the key phrase being “the son of”.

Family Credentials

It was possible to change your tribal identity, for example by marrying someone of another tribe. But the tribe of Levi – which provided the Levites and the Priests – was especially careful

to maintain tribal integrity, for a man could not become a priest unless he was born of Aaron's line. That is why King Hezekiah had a census made when he was reorganising temple worship:

Besides those males from three years old and up who were written in the genealogy, they distributed to everyone who entered the house of the Lord his daily portion for the work of his service, by his division, and to the priests who were written in the genealogy according to their father's house, and to the Levites from twenty years old and up according to their work, by their divisions, and to all who were written in the genealogy (2 Chronicles 31:16–18).

When the nation of Israel had been deported to Babylon for seventy years, because of unfaithfulness, upon their return the apportionment of the land they had once owned had to be done by reference to their family credentials. Nehemiah the appointed governor reports as follows:

Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it (Nehemiah 7:4–5).

The Family of God

If we could each trace our family history back far enough we would discover that all of us come from a common ancestor, for Adam was the first man that God created and we are all descended from him and share his characteristics. He is the author of

much of our misfortune, as the New Testament explains:

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

We have each inherited a nature with an inbuilt tendency to sin and we have to work with God if we want to develop a new nature which is inclined in a different direction. And that can be done, for the New Testament begins with the great news of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. His genealogy features in the first eighteen verses of the New Testament, in the gospel of Matthew, to show that his earthly family was descended from the kingly line of the tribe of Judah. But then his Father's identity is revealed:

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20–21).

By becoming related to the Lord Jesus Christ – through faith and baptism – we too can become children of God, patterning our lives after the example of Jesus and following his directions. This is how the apostle Paul advised us to live, as members of God's family:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6–7).

Editor

Revisions and Printing of the King James Bible

As with all human activities, there were some errors and omissions when the King James (or Authorised) Bible was first printed. In the 1611 first edition there were about 350 printer's errors.

Printing Errors

There were at least two stages in the process where human error could occur in typesetting using moveable metal type. First, there were compositor's errors usually misspellings or words left out. Then there were errors missed by the proof readers. These errors could be words which were correctly spelt, but not the words originally intended (such errors occur today if we are over reliant upon computer spell checks!). The 1611 edition contained 18 errors where the letter "u" was set when "n" was required, for example, "aud" instead of "and".

Here is an example of one verse where a perfectly well-spelt word appeared, but it was the wrong word:

"The children which thou shalt haue, after thou hast lost the other, shall say againe in thine eares, The place is too straight for me: giue place to mee that I may dwell" (Isaiah 49:20, 1611 Edition).

Proof readers for the first edition failed to spot this error, but the word "straight" was corrected to "strait" in following editions. The Old Testament Hebrew word means, "a narrow or tight place". Jesus describes the path to eternal life as being the strait and narrow way (read Matthew 7:13-14).

This verse also shows that some words were spelled quite differently in 1611 from the way we spell them now, indicating that some revision would be necessary over the years, to keep pace with changes to the English language.

Nick-named Bibles

Because of certain important printing errors, some Bible Versions acquired nicknames, and here are two of them.

The 'Wicked' Bible

One edition of the King James Bible (1631) acquired the title 'Wicked Bible' because the printers omitted the word 'not' from Exodus 20:14. "You shall not commit adultery." This proved to be a costly error, for in 1632 a heavy fine was imposed on the printer of £300.00 (then a lot of money).

The 'Printers' Bible

Some of the small Bibles printed in 1612 ('octavo' book) of the King James Bible have for Psalm 119:161, "Printers" instead of "Princes have persecuted me".

Official Printers

The 1611 Bible was not just authorised for public reading in the churches. You had to be an authorised printer before you could print it, as follows:

King's Printer

From 1611 to 1629 the printing of the King James Bible was the sole

privilege of the King's Printer, Robert Barker and his partners. The first folio edition printed in 1611 was followed the same year by a second edition, which was also printed again in 1612 and 1613 with correction of some of the earlier printing errors. For example, in Acts 24:24 Drusilla wife of the Roman Governor Felix was a "Jew", which was corrected to "Jewess".

Cambridge University

Permission was granted in 1628 by King Charles I for the University to publish and print King James Bibles. They produced higher quality Bibles than were previously produced by the King's Printer. Folio editions were printed in 1629 and 1638. These editions also introduced some printing errors.

Oxford University

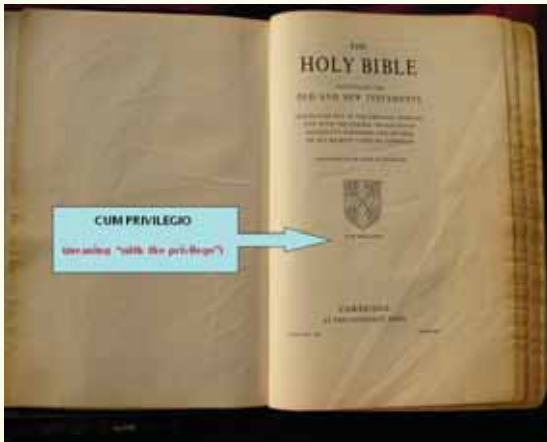
In 1632 Oxford University also secured the right to print Bibles. The New Testament was published in 1673 and the complete Bible in 1675. Further editions followed and by 1683, within ten years of publishing the New Testament,

Oxford University Press became the largest printing house in England.

Revisions

The King James Bible was subject to several more revisions in 1629, 1638 and 1653. These revisions were mainly to correct errors or to replace missing words, wrong spelling or punctuation. Some corrections were made to rectify translation errors. In 1660, after the period of a Puritan government under Oliver Cromwell the reign of Charles II put an end to any idea of a major revision of the King James Bible.

The most significant revision of the 1611 King James Bible took place in 1769. Benjamin Blayney revised the grammar and punctuation and introduced running heads at the top of each page column, and chapter summaries were also added. Blayney's revision work is still the standard text of the King James Bible today. There were protests, led by Thomas Curtis, that with successive editions critical changes were being made to the 1611 text. This complaint was investigated by the Oxford University Press and they concluded that the changes were of no importance whatever to the message.



Title page to the modern King James Bible, printed by Cambridge University Press, 'Wide Margin Edition'.

In 1883 to convince any doubters of their conclusions, they published the original 1611 text, so that people could read and make comparisons between the different editions and draw their own conclusions.

Publisher's Monopoly

The 'Constitutions of Oxford' (1407) were designed to prevent John Wycliffe from producing Bibles and religious tracts. From then on there were restrictions in force on printing Bibles. From the time of King Henry VIII the publishing of Bibles required Crown approval. Henry granted a five year licence to Thomas Cromwell (1539) to print Bibles. This produced revenue for the Crown and income for the printer. The Catholic Queen Mary I granted a Royal Charter to the Stationers Company (1556) which gave them a monopoly and control in printing books.

Copyright

King James Bibles usually include the words 'Cum Privilegio' on the title page indicating that the printer had been granted the privilege of printing the Bible. In the seventeenth century there were only three approved publishers of the King James Bible. In Scotland this monopoly was abolished in 1839. However, this restriction on who is permitted to publish King James Bibles still applies today. One new publisher has entered the arena because they are licensed in Scotland and sell Bibles both North and South of the border. Today two printers have the rights to publish in England the King James Bible – the Oxford and Cambridge University presses – because Cambridge now own the Queen's printer, the Eyre and Spottiswoode publishing house.



Title page to the Great Bible 1549, printed in Fleet Street, London by Edwarde Whitechurch.

To America

Provisionally there was a conjunction of events that led to the King James Bible going to America and becoming the leading translation of God's Word for the nation. The Lord had spoken through the prophet Isaiah that His Word was to go to all nations. Jesus was to come and the Gospel message was to show God's purpose with Israel and to be a light to the Gentile nations.

Listen, O coastlands, to me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord has called me from the womb; from the matrix of my mother He has made mention of my name ... Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that you should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth' (Isaiah 49:1,6).

This is how it all worked out, under the hand of God:

1607

Sir Walter Raleigh founded the English colony of Virginia where Jamestown was established the

same year. This presence of English speaking people from the British Isles led to companies developing trade links with America. Many were Puritans who sought religious tolerance beyond the influence of King Charles I.

1620

The Pilgrim Fathers emigrated to America to settle in Virginia. They were Puritans who did not find a place that was acceptable to them either in the Netherlands or in the England of Charles II, where the Church of England was the basis for political and religious stability. Therefore, early in the seventeenth century, the King James Bible crossed the Atlantic. Towards the end of the seventeenth century more colonists followed in their thousands to the Eastern coastline of America, from Georgia to Maine. They were responsible for the King James Bible being the Bible of first choice and English being the common tongue. All imported English language Bibles were the King James Version because the 'copyright' restrictions on printing Bibles applied to the colonies. Due to the American War of Independence the British Government imposed an import-export embargo. This included cutting off the supply of Bibles to the colonists. This only provided a spur for the colonists to print their own Bibles!

1777-81

Robert Aitken, a Scottish immigrant printed four editions of the New Testament and in 1782 with the approval of Congress and the commendation of George Washington

he published the first American printed Bible. It was the King James Version with the Apocrypha omitted. After the American Revolution (1776-83) Independence was achieved and the restrictions of the English Crown on printing Bibles became meaningless. However, trade resumed and the importing of King James Bibles resumed and dominated the market.

1861

Abraham Lincoln used the King James Bible (the 1853 edition, printed in Oxford) when he took the oath of office of President of the United States. The same Bible was used again for this purpose by President Obama in 2009.

1856

The American Bible Society was concerned to maintain textual accuracy and published an American version of the Authorised Version text. The result of their work was a King James Bible with corrections of printing errors and the use of more modern words.

As you can see, the King James Bible has had a lasting influence on American political life. It is a Bible which has remained as far as possible true to the original documents from which it has been translated. It is important for modern version translators to maintain this integrity.

Peter Moore

Next: The impact of the new versions of the Bible

The Lord is my Banner

Each of us will sometimes have used an emblem, either from our school house shield or from some club or society. It is a visible sign of identity.

It might have been a badge sewn on a blazer, or the club's scarf. This visible sign identifies us with that group. We feel comfortable with that association, having friends in the group who share the same values. As human beings we have an in-built need to belong to others of a similar persuasion.

Sporting Identity

In sport, the decoration of people, places and vehicles is very visible and normal. As the victors wend their tumultuous way home the crowds acknowledge their triumph by waving flags or banners. A lot of public attention is being given to the 2012 Olympics, for understandable reasons. Every country wants to readily identify their athletes, hence the use of the national flag and a logo or costume that makes a difference. Look out for 'Team GB'!

Many of us identify with our team. It is a worthy venture, even if we don't go to the matches. Television brings most sports events into our living rooms, so we can be arm-chair supporters! Others are uncomfortable about giving real support to skilled sports-people because they do not share their values. Aggressive advertising can sweep us into situations that may not match true allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whose Identity?

Each of us, whether actively involved



with a team or not claiming any real sporting feelings, should look into our hearts and discover our real passions and interests. Recreations like stamp-collecting or truck-spotting can suck up enormous amounts of time and energy. We don't have to travel great distances to pursue our hobbies: with the internet the world is our 'oyster'. 'Face-Book' invites its members to declare their interests and passions and millions of folk are to be found exchanging information over the web every minute of the day and night.

Some are making good use of the media in quietly preaching the gospel of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. We all should gaze into our hearts and discover our real persuasions. Who is the centre and passion of my life? Under whose banner do we want to travel?

Travelling with God

In the Old Testament, people showed their faith in interesting ways. Abraham was a man with an 'open house' (or

tent). Travellers would benefit from his hospitality, which included his faith in the God who made the stars. They would leave his company knowing about God's plans for His people. Abraham obeyed God and left the luxuries of Ur, becoming a tent-dweller. He passed over great rivers to reach the Promised Land where the Israelites finally made their home.

The marvel is that God's kindness towards Abraham can be extended to anyone who really desires to share Abraham's hope. In his household Abraham had living evidence of God's blessings. Isaac was born by God's miraculous intervention. The elderly childless couple were rejuvenated and became joyful parents.

Early Victory

Later when the nation of Israel was establishing its land, they defeated many godless and wicked people who had to be removed if God's ways were going to thrive. In one such battle against the Amalekites, things went against the Jews until Moses sat on a



stone and his companions held up his weary arms so that the Lord's power could strengthen His army to defeat the foe. Joshua was told to record the victory in a book – so future generations could be encouraged by God's willing support. Moses also built an altar which was called Jehovah-Nissi – *'The Lord is my banner'* (Exodus 17:15).

True believers pledge to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. They understand that as mere humans the only outcome there can be in life is death. So they seek something better and, understanding Christ's message, they repent and are baptised. They thus take on the saving name of the Master. So for all followers of Christ – the Lord is our banner.

The New Way

We need to ask: "How does my banner look?" Is it clearly visible to those around? Would it show that we are different and have 'passed over' into a new way of life? If you haven't yet decided to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, believing the gospel and being baptised is a way to display your faith in the One who said: *"I am the Way"* and *"Follow me"*.

Without Jesus our world is doomed – we know that in our hearts. World leaders are helpless. Under the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ we can be in God's Kingdom – the New World He is to establish here on earth. All those who declare true allegiance to Jesus will be blessed for ever.

Let us make sure the Lord Jesus Christ is our banner this year, and forever!

Andrew Tennant

Wisdom from the Word

The Old Testament contains three types of divine instruction: lessons from history; books of prophecy and books containing wise sayings. These wisdom books are the Book of Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. David Pearce summarised the first two of those books in the last article in this series and now explains key messages in the rest of these wise writings.

Proverbs - Wise Sayings

A proverb is a saying that sums up a life experience in a pithy and memorable way. We use them all the time, and it is surprising how many people quote Bible proverbs without realising where they come from, for example – “pride comes before a fall”, “a friend in need is a friend indeed”, and “you reap what you sow”.

It is only when you try to compose a proverb yourself that you realize how much wit and observation of human nature it takes. King Solomon, as we saw in the book of Kings, was gifted with extraordinary wisdom. Most of the Book of Proverbs can be attributed to him. He must have had secretaries who wrote down his observations as they rolled off his lips; later they came to be compiled into the collection we have in our Bible.

The Book of Proverbs begins with an extended allegory, occupying nine chapters, based on two symbolic women. One is Wisdom, who stands in the street and calls to passers-by to

appreciate that we only have one existence, warning them not to waste time on empty attractions that quickly fade, but to serve God, for He can truly reward us.

By contrast there is Folly, portrayed as a glamorous adulteress, who invites young men to turn aside into her chambers to enjoy brief and illicit pleasures – that end in death! We are meant to see the contrast between serving God, and pursuing the way of the world which is obsessed with money and pleasure. It anticipates Jesus’ brilliant parable of the two roads – the narrow, exhausting one that leads to eternal life, and the broad, easy way that goes down to destruction.

From chapter ten onwards, we are treated to a glorious miscellany of often amusing but powerful rules and warnings that cover all aspects of life. They are just as true today as in the time of Solomon – indeed some of them are bang up to date. Take the repeated warnings about neglecting the discipline of children, for example:

- We see the fruits of “spare the rod and spoil the son” in our society, with teenage gangs terrorising our big cities.



- The hurt that comes from telling tales behind the back,
- the wisdom of consulting a range of advisors before taking action,
- the danger that pride may lead us into hasty actions we will regret at our leisure.

All these and more are waiting for your attention in this amazing book. And time and again the writer returns to the point that if we base our lives on God's commands, we will find happiness now, and future blessing. For this is the wise counsel of the Book of Proverbs:

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:6).

Ecclesiastes – Empty Life without God

The curious English title of this short book is taken from the name given to it in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). "Ecclesiastes" comes from the same root as the Greek New Testament word for "church" – Ecclesia. This word means a collection of people who are called out and the Hebrew title literally means a "gathering". Perhaps the idea is that we should come together to listen to the words of the Preacher, who introduces himself in the first verse. He says he is the son of David and King of Jerusalem, which unerringly links him with Solomon.

Ecclesiastes is the distilled experience of a man who had access to all that this world



can offer. Solomon was incredibly rich, and able to indulge himself with lavish entertainments, great building projects, a huge harem, and sweet music. He tried them all, he says in chapter two. And yet he found no lasting satisfaction in his achievements

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my reward from all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labour in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:10–11).

The book pinpoints a fundamental truth about human endeavour. Whatever we already have, we want more. We work overtime for months to save up for a new car or a great holiday, and when we have bought it, we find there is a more powerful model available or a more fashionable resort to fly to, and we are off again, striving for the latest or the biggest or the one that we see our neighbours are able to afford.

Happiness is elusive. It does not come from possessions or from climbing up the social ladder. In fact, the poor man may be happier than the rich.

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity ...The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep (Ecclesiastes 5:10,12).

Solomon comments wryly that life is unpredictable. "Time and chance happen to them all" (9:11), he perceives. Often the

millionaire dies young, and has to leave his wealth to others, who quickly squander it. Before we realize it, we are old, and life has slipped through our fingers. His last chapter concludes with a graphic portrayal of the weakness of old age, and the inevitability of death.

Man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets (Ecclesiastes 12:5).

It all sounds very gloomy. And truly, life is empty, apart from God. Solomon emphasises the word “vanity” (emptiness) as the sum of human activity. Whatever we do “under the sun” ends in the grave. We need to lift our eyes above the sun to the throne of God, and see that this life is intended as a testing ground, a preparation for a life to come where we can live in His presence. Here is Solomon’s last word on the subject -

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

The Song of Solomon

The last work in the Wisdom and Poetry section of the Old Testament is also attributed to Solomon. It describes the love of the writer for a simple country girl – the deep longing the couple have for each other, the agony of separation, and the joy of reunion. There are different characters who speak in turn – the Lover, his Beloved, and the Daughters of Jerusalem (modern translations of the Bible have notes to show which is speaking). Classic poetry, it uses elaborate similes and figures of speech –



the bridegroom is both a gazelle and an apple tree, and his bride in turn a mare, a lily and a beautiful garden. The intriguing question is, how did this love story come to be included in the Bible?

The answer is probably that it is intended to have a deep symbolic meaning. There is one tiny clue in Paul’s New Testament letter to the Ephesians. In the fifth chapter, which centres on marriage, he speaks of Christ’s tender care for his Bride, the Church.

Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her ... that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25–27).

Jesus lovingly prepares his bride for the wedding, making sure she is “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”, and this seems to be a quotation from the Song of Solomon 4:7. So perhaps the poem is an allegory of the intense love that Jesus has for his followers. He spoke of himself as a bridegroom in Matthew 9:15, and of his return from heaven for the wedding in the parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:6. If we truly follow him, we shall long with the same intensity to be united with him.

David M Pearce

Believing the Seemingly Unbelievable

Imagine someone from 200 years ago visiting us today. They would know nothing of electricity, cars, aeroplanes, or mobile phones. How amazed would they be? Now try to imagine someone in the 1800s describing our way of life to a friend. It would all seem incredible.

Godly faith has always required people to believe things that are well outside of their experience – things that seem incredible

The Resurrection of Jesus

The apostle Paul, talking about the resurrection of Jesus, asked King Agrippa “Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:8). This was indeed a phenomenal miracle, because Jesus was not only brought back from the dead: he was raised to eternal life. In one of his letters Paul says:

...Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him (Romans 6:9).

This had never, ever, been known before. Jesus had raised people from the dead and there are resurrections recorded in the Old Testament, but these resurrected people were not immortal – they died again in due course. Jesus was the first to be raised to immortality.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... Christ the firstfruits, afterward those that are

Christ's at his coming” (1 Corinthians 15:20,23).

Jesus had no experience of people being raised to immortality. As he went willingly to his sacrificial death Jesus believed that his Father could and would raise him to eternal life.

Death

We are not told much about life in the Garden of Eden, although the record in Genesis 1 repeats that everything was “good”. Before they sinned Adam and Eve had most certainly not seen a person die. It seems unlikely that they had seen the death of an animal. They were told that if they disobeyed God they would die – they would cease to exist. How unlikely would this seem to them in their idyllic surroundings? And what a shock when their conditions changed and they and all their offspring did indeed become dying creatures.

The Flood

In Genesis 6 Noah is told to prepare for a great flood. This flood was of cataclysmic proportions. Noah may never have experienced rain. Genesis 2:5 says, *For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth”.*

Even if rain had fallen by Noah’s day there had never been a flood like the one experienced by Noah. He had to believe that this would happen; had he not believed, and done as God asked of him, he and his family would have been destroyed. As Hebrews 11:7 says:

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household.

Other Examples

Hebrews chapter 11 is not specifically about believing the incredible, but there are many examples in it of people who did just this. They were looking for ‘things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1).

- Sarah, Abraham’s wife believed that she could have a child even though she was ‘past the age’ (Hebrews 11:11);
- Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11: 19);
- The Hebrews passed through the Red Sea (Hebrews 11: 29);
- The walls of Jericho fell down (Hebrews 11: 30).

These were all ‘firsts’ – things that had not previously been known.

Our Faith

God asks us to believe things that might appear to be unbelievable. It is vitally important that we believe His promises.

○ Jesus will return to the earth

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

○ A multitude of people will be raised from the dead and judged; many of them will become immortal

The Father has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he

is the Son of Man ... The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:26-29; see also Daniel 12:1-3).

○ Jesus will become king

He must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (I Corinthians 15: 25-26).

See also Luke 1:32-33; John 18:37; Revelation 11:15.

○ There will be great changes in all aspects of the world

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse ... with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth ... The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:1-10).

See also Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 35, and Revelation 21:3-4.

These prophecies point forward to a very different time. Yet we must believe what God has said, however incredible it may seem to us. Because whether or not we are ready, it will all surely happen, just as God has promised.

Anna Hart

Parables about Prayer

Luke records three parables by Jesus which are not in the other gospels. The first is part of his response to the disciples' request "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). We have considered the first part of that answer: the prayer known as the Lord's Prayer. The accompanying parable is about someone who had unexpected guests arriving at midnight, when the cupboard was empty.

Hospitality!

In Israel at the time of Jesus hospitality was a great responsibility and to fulfill the host's obligations it would be necessary to provide food. There are many examples in the Old Testament of unexpected guests arriving. When three angels arrived to visit Abraham he said to them:

"Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant" (Genesis 18:4–5).

Abraham actually provided a lot more than that, which must have taken some time to prepare, but we see clearly how acutely the obligation to provide was felt. So the neighbour with an empty store cupboard would have had little alternative but to go and borrow from the next door neighbour. Yet the response at that late hour can be readily imagined, and Jesus used that likely response in his parable:

"Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in

bed; I cannot rise and give to you" (Luke 11:7).

Persistence

Some people would give up and go away empty-handed, but the point of the parable is that the man in question went on asking until the necessary food was given. At midnight, you may not get a response because you are a friend, but you may well get one by persistence, because you have made a nuisance of yourself. The Lord Jesus summarises the situation as follows:

"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

It is not enough just to pray. Jesus tells us to be persistent in prayer, to go on praying, to show the Lord God what we need. The answer to our prayers may not come at first, but it will come, if what we ask is pleasing to God. The teaching is not yet finished. Jesus talks about fathers who are asked for something good, responding instead with something similar, but unpleasant. No good father would give a serpent instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg. So, says Jesus, if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more does the Lord God give good gifts to those who ask Him.

The next two parables are found in Luke 18. The first, known as the Parable of the Persistent Widow, or sometimes the Parable of the Unjust Judge, is to teach that we should pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The

purpose of the parable is very similar to that which comes immediately after the Lord's Prayer. The judge did not fear God or man, but when a poor widow came seeking justice he eventually did as she asked, because she was persistent. It is the lesson which is so important:

"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" (Luke 18:7).

The lesson again is that prayer has to be unrelenting. It is just no use praying once, and giving up. We must "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Right Attitude

The next parable has a different theme and is about some people who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). It concerns two men who are praying: one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The latter was one of the despised tax collectors, who were so often in league with the Roman power and who made a good living out of taxing their fellow countrymen.

In the parable, both men went up to the Temple to pray, the Pharisee praying an eloquent prayer. It was not easy being a Pharisee; that demanded a rigid adherence to the minutiae of the Jewish law. This Pharisee wanted



everyone to know that, as Jesus explained:

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector' (Luke 18:11).

Next he reeled off a list of all that he had done, and all he had not done:

"I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12).

In sharp contrast to that, the prayer of the tax collector was extremely simple:

The tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' (Luke 18:13).

He could not even lift his eyes heavenwards, he was so ashamed of his own sinful state. Yet his attitude of mind was such that Jesus says:

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

The attitude we adopt when we pray is clearly as important as the words we say. This is another illustration, given by the Lord Jesus, of the wise words in Ecclesiastes: "For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Were those words of Solomon in the mind of Jesus as he spoke about the publican? He seems to be telling us that long prayers with flowery language are nothing like as effective as short prayers which, whilst respectful, go straight to the point.

Mark Sheppard

Is there a God of Evil?

When we face temptation and have to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, when we choose to do wrong, who is to blame? Are we entirely at fault? Is it the devil? Or is it a bit of both?

The Bible clearly shows that we have to watch ourselves, but God gives us a choice. However, if God's way is different to our way, and we go in the wrong direction, who is to blame? If God prompts us by the Bible, His Word of Truth, to do the right thing, and we choose the wrong thing, what prompted us to rebel and go our own way?

The Source of Sin

We need to consider where sin comes from, that influence which can lead to transgression. In the New Testament a term is used – the Devil and Satan. Is this a human being, or is it a fallen spirit? Faced with a question like that, we need to examine the Bible carefully, for sometimes picture language is used to make the lessons more powerful and impressive. Could it be that there is a rival to God out there, who is trying to influence by his wiles and wickedness?

The Bible tells us clearly that Adam was responsible for bringing sin into the world:

*Through **one man** sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ... by **one man's disobedience** many were made sinners (Romans 5:12,19).*

Go back to Genesis chapter 3 where all this happened and you will find no reference to the Devil or Satan, only to

Adam and Eve who were tempted to disobey God by a serpent, which was then punished for its misguided shrewdness.

Did you know that the Old Testament's first five books – Genesis to Deuteronomy – are completely silent concerning a personal supernatural devil? One God alone is spoken of throughout the Bible, and a stark alternative is set before the children of Israel. They were challenged to choose good, and thus choose God, or to do evil and refuse His good way.

God's Challenge

In the fifth book of the Bible – Deuteronomy – Moses sets this challenge before the nation of Israel:

“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28).

There was a blessing for following God – the only true God – and retribution should they choose to follow other gods, which are not gods at all but only idols. Those challenges were made again, before the Israelites went into the Promised Land:

I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you

may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish (Deut 30:15–18).

Ever-Present Danger

God set before His people life and death; good and evil. It isn't that Almighty God is going to tell us what to do, and a lesser god – a personal Satan or his servants – will tell us to do wrong, leaving us to choose. Whether we go back to the time of Eden or forward to Jesus Christ, through the prophets, it is God who offers that choice. To do His will is a blessing and to do contrary to His will brings a curse. And the ever-present danger that Moses diagnosed was *“if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away”*.

The real challenge we face comes from within, out of the heart. Ever since Adam transgressed we have been inclined to do what is wrong and have to make an effort to do what God wants. In that both the prophets and the Lord Jesus agree:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man (Mark 7:21–23).

But there is a remedy and much help is at hand. In the longest psalm in the

Book of Psalms, we read these words:

Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God! (Psalm 119:115).

The danger the Psalmist saw was that there were people who would seek to take him away from God. But he knew a better way:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path ... The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (Psalm 119:105,130).

This inspired writer knew what the Lord Jesus was later to practise: that daily attention to God's Word can keep us safe when temptation assails us. In answer to every temptation, Jesus pointed to the commandments of God with the words *“It is written”* (Matthew 4:4,6,7,10).

Conclusion

All these passages point to the fact that the devil we must fear is not a supernatural evil spirit, an evil god of immense power, but rather it is the evil influence that comes from within us, or from other peoples' evil human desires. Of this the apostle John wrote when he warned that:

All that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:16–17).

There is no God of evil, but there is a supreme God of good, who wants us to resist what is wrong and to follow what is right, for our eternal benefit.

Ken Quixley

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