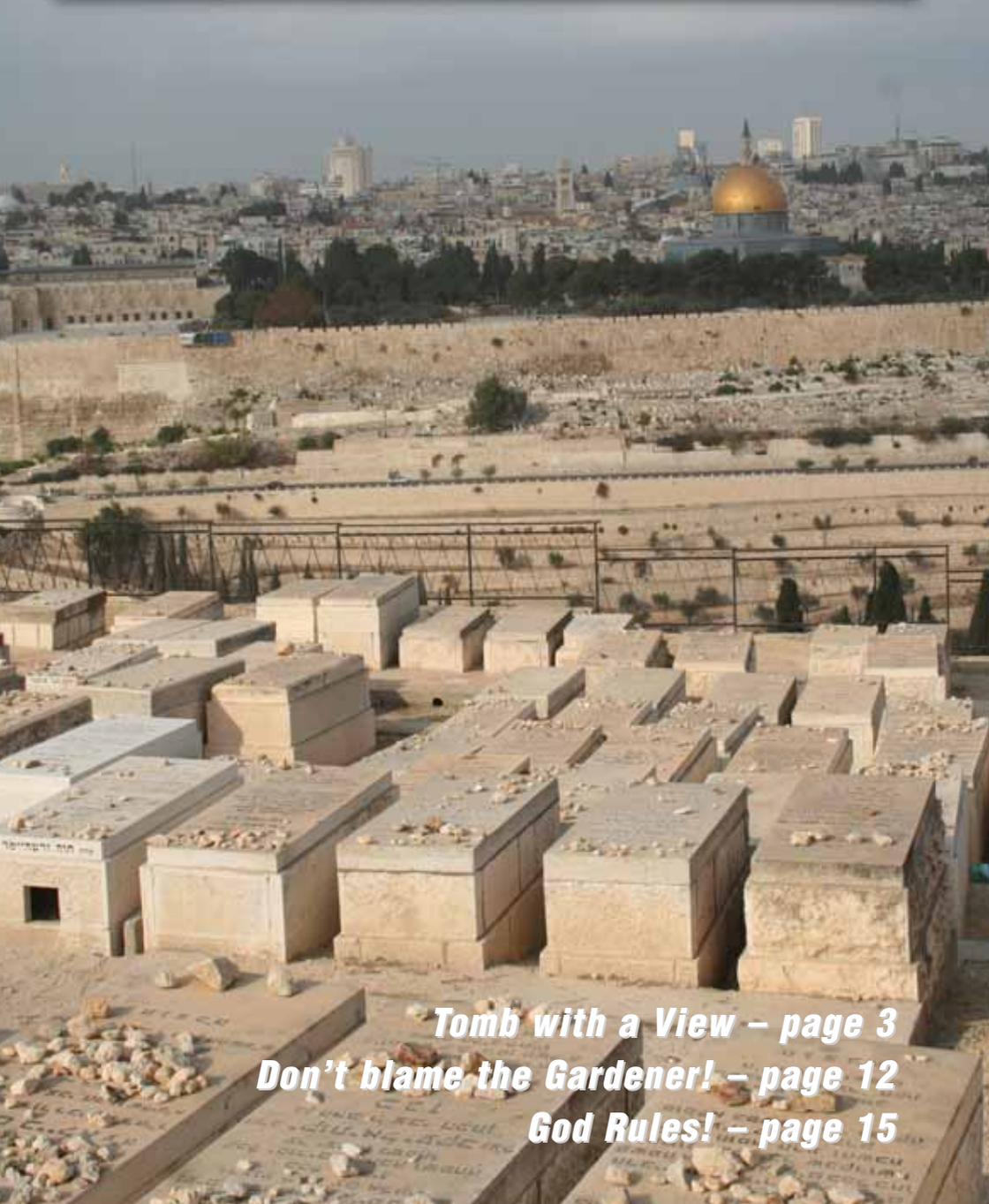


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1535



Tomb with a View – page 3

Don't blame the Gardener! – page 12

God Rules! – page 15

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

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

Its objectives are – to encourage 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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Tomb with a View

Stand on the Mount of Olives and you can gaze down across the Old City of Jerusalem and see the place where once the Temple existed.

That site is now occupied instead by the Muslim Dome of the Rock and its golden dome is likely to capture your attention. But lower your gaze and you will see tomb after Jewish tomb, for the chances are that you are standing in, or next to, a huge Jewish cemetery. For Bible-believing Jews this is a highly sought after burial place, not just for the view, but for what the Bible says is destined to happen at this very site.

A King in Jerusalem

Jews first occupied Jerusalem at the time of King David – about 1000 years before Christ. It was the very place that God had chosen to have a temple erected which would symbolise His permanent dwelling in the midst of His people. And it was here, where David placed his throne, where God promised that his greatest descendant would rule when He established His kingdom on earth. This is what God promised King David:

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My Son...” (2 Samuel 7:12–14).

There are many such Bible promises about the coming of a King who will reign for God, whose throne will be

established in Jerusalem. The prophets of God develop this theme time after time. For example, the prophet Isaiah predicted the birth of a son to a virgin (a prophecy fulfilled when Mary gave birth to Jesus without there being any human father). Then he says this about the destiny of that Son:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Jewish Messiah

Promises like these rightly led faithful Jews to believe that one day God will send them a king who will rule over all the world. But they did not understand that he was also to fulfil another purpose too; for nobody can enter God’s kingdom by right – whatever a person’s birth or pedigree. All of us need to be saved from our sins and that was what Jesus came to achieve when he was born of the virgin Mary. Mary and Joseph were told at the outset what the Son of God had come for:

“She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Just as there are many prophecies

about the glorious rule of the Messiah when he comes as King, so there are many predictions about the suffering he was to endure and the sacrifice for sin that he would effect when he gave up his life in faithful obedience. But, by and large, the Jewish people saw only one side of that two-sided set of prophecies and when Jesus was born there were only a few people who accepted him as their long-awaited King. They were looking for someone who would come from the Mount of Olives to save them from their Roman overlords and to establish a Jewish Kingdom there and then.

Zechariah's Prophecy

This month's issue contains the first instalment of a series about Bible prophecy. To anticipate a topic the series will eventually consider, this is what the prophet Zechariah says about the time to come when King Jesus – the Messiah – comes to rescue Jerusalem and the Jewish people:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west ... (Zechariah 14:1-4).

It is because of this prophecy, and a matching one in Ezekiel, that Jewish believers want to be buried at this location. They want to be first in the



queue when their Messiah raises people from the dead.

Eastern Gate

The prophet Ezekiel has a detailed description both about the departure of God's glory from the temple at the time of the Babylonian captivity and its eventual return, through the eastern gate of the city of Jerusalem (see Ezekiel 43:1-4). In what seems to have been an attempt to thwart this prophecy, the Muslim rulers of Jerusalem blocked up the only gate along the eastern wall in 810 AD and it has remained closed for 12 centuries. They also placed a Muslim cemetery along the entire length of the eastern wall, perhaps in the hope that this would deter any Messianic arrival.

But the purpose of God cannot be obstructed in that way. When the time is right King Jesus will return and the resurrection of the dead will indeed take place, just as God has promised, to raise to life all those men and women who have put their trust and faith in Him, and who fell asleep in death fully persuaded that their Saviour is coming to bring them back to a better life. The view such people most want is not just to see Jerusalem glorified, but to see the King himself in all his glory.

Editor

The Prophet Isaiah

Throughout Old Testament history God raised up individuals, usually men but sometimes women, who would speak and write His messages to mankind. These people were driven by the power of God, the Holy Spirit. They spoke or wrote in their own words, but the result was the message God wanted them to convey

The Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah lived in the times of Uzziah, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah – about 740 to 680 BC. This was the period when the Assyrian Empire was growing in power, and Judah was about to be invaded by King Sennacherib. Isaiah lived in royal circles (he was a great friend and advisor of King Hezekiah) and had a wife and children in Jerusalem.

In the opening chapter of his book Isaiah, like a doctor, carries out a health check on the nation of Judah –



Michelangelo's portrait of Isaiah

the southern kingdom – and finds it most unhealthy.

“The whole head is sick”, he cried, “and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises” (Isaiah 1:5–6).

The cause of their spiritual sickness was a wrong attitude to God. They thought if they offered plenty of expensive sacrifices, they could carry on making money by extortion and fraud, and God would turn a blind eye. That is a common mistake. God is not interested in expensive offerings. He wants our hearts – our full and complete surrender to His will. He will forgive us, but we have to show our repentance by changing our lives; then God will wash away our sins, and we will be as clean as new fallen snow.

Jerusalem the Golden

The second chapter bursts into a glorious vision of Jerusalem as it will be *“in the latter days”*, with all peoples travelling to God’s new Temple to be taught His laws. Then international justice will be dispensed and enforced so effectively that war will cease and peace prevail. First there has to be a cleansing of human pride, and a day of judgment –

The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day (Isaiah 2:11).

This is typical of how God’s prophets spoke. They had a strong, urgent message for their own day, but they

also push us into the future, by depicting the Kingdom of God, when the ideals that the Bible teaches will be both taught and enforced, so that God's will is done all over the globe. In this way we are given hope.

God's Plan

Even if today we see the triumph of evil and suffer under it, we know that God has a plan that will put everything right. God said to Moses that the whole earth will be filled with His glory (Numbers 14:21) and Isaiah echoes this theme:

Therefore glorify the Lord in the dawning light, the name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we have heard songs: "Glory to the righteous!" (Isaiah 24:15-16)

Isaiah's Commission

The sixth chapter of the prophecy has a fascinating record of the commissioning of the prophet. In the last year of King Uzziah the prophet sees a vision of the Lord on his throne, surrounded by fiery seraphim. His mouth was symbolically cleansed by the touch of a coal from the bronze altar, then he was sent forth to preach God's Word. But he was told in advance that he would not convince the people.

He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive'" (Isaiah 6:9).

This verse is quoted time and again in the New Testament, for Jesus and the Apostles faced exactly the same situation. Like Isaiah, they diligently communicated the word of God, but people behaved as if they were blind and deaf. Only a tiny minority had the

humility to stop and enquire, and the faith to believe and be saved.

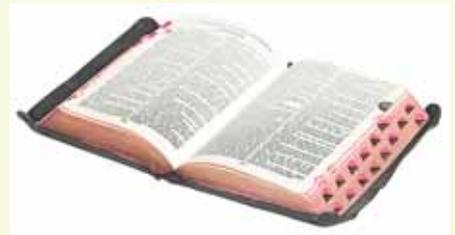
Emmanuel Prophecy

The next section of the prophecy belongs to the time of King Ahaz, a feeble young ruler who found his kingdom attacked by a coalition from Syria and the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. The king was confronted by the prophet outside the walls of Jerusalem, and warned not to depend on the Assyrian king coming to his aid.

"God is with us", the prophet insisted and said that God would give a sign to give the king confidence. A virgin would have a baby (Isaiah 7:14) and call his name "Immanuel" or "God is with us".

Suddenly Isaiah broke out into a song of joy. In the gloomy north of Israel, first to feel the power of the invader, light would dawn and God would send a champion to rescue His people:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light ... For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. and his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time



forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:2,6–7)

How do we understand these cryptic phrases? Well, in the first place God did rescue Judah from the Assyrians in the time of Isaiah. Good King Hezekiah (unlike his father Ahaz) persuaded his people to trust in God, and the angel of the Lord decimated the Assyrian army, as we read in Kings and Chronicles; but there is more to these words than that.

We need to read Bible prophecy with two pairs of spectacles. We put on our short-range reading glasses and see a message for the prophet's day. Then we put on long-distance lenses and read the same words again. This time we see another message that belongs to the time of Christ. He was miraculously born of a virgin, Mary. He was Immanuel, God with us, here on earth, for in him, as John says in the New Testament, the glory of God was revealed. And Jesus, born to be king on the throne of David, will one day reign there forever. Every detail makes sense, for Isaiah was inspired by the Spirit of God.

Short and Long Term

A new section of the prophecy from chapter 24 to 35 sees Isaiah hitting out at the clumsy attempts by some politicians in Judah to protect themselves from the growing Assyrian threat by making a league with Egypt, the ancient superpower to the south. This, the prophet warns, would end in disaster.

But, for the longer term, this is a warning of another grand theme of the prophets. Before the Day of Judgment Israel, re-gathered from dispersion among the nations, is to face an invasion, not this time from Assyria, but



Isaiah predicts that a time will come when there will be streams in the desert, like this one at Engedi

from a coalition of nations from the distant north. This invasion will crush the proud nation and they will only be rescued from it by the appearing of their King. This part of Isaiah ends with a psalm of joy –

Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:4–6).

Those who know the New Testament well will recognize an allusion to the work of Jesus in healing the sick. Yet this fulfilment of Isaiah's words was only a partial one: a foretaste of the great work Jesus will do when he comes again as King. Then he will open the eyes of Israel, which have been blind for centuries to the Word of the Lord. And he will bring life from the dead for those who died in faith, giving them new bodies, forever free from pain and sorrow.

Servant of the LORD

The most glorious and poetic part of the whole book must be the 'Servant' chapters, which run from chapter 40 to 54. In this part of his prophecy Isaiah is able to look well into the future. He foresees a time when Judah had been conquered and the people taken into captivity in Babylon. He sees the morale of the people at rock-bottom.

Even the faithful few in the nation would have their confidence knocked away when the Temple was burnt, and their last king taken off into captivity, leaving the throne of David empty. Had not God sworn the dynasty of David would last forever? Could it be that the gods of Babylon had proved stronger than the God of Israel?

Isaiah with biting sarcasm rejects the helplessness of gods made from wood and metal to save anybody. Israel's God is eternal, and all-powerful. Wait long enough, he insists, and your faith in Him will be rewarded. Israel will return from Babylon, and life will go on again, and God will one day send the Saviour King.

There is a wonderful refrain in these chapters about Jesus as the Servant of God, the one who would obey His every command, and who would in consequence be rewarded with eternal life and victory. In the course of that obedience, the Servant would bow his will to his heavenly Father's, to the point of crucifixion and undeserved death.

By a dreadful irony, the Servant, rejected by the people he came to save, would die for them, bearing their sins on his own shoulders. Isaiah chapter 53 has some of the most exquisite prophecies in the Old Testament.

It predicts Jesus' silence during his trial, the scourging, the buffeting by the soldiers, the piercing, and his burial in a rich man's grave. It was this very passage which Philip the Evangelist used to convince the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus in Acts 8:27-35. So these prophecies just have to be the Word of God.

Final Message

The great prophet concludes his book with a message of hope, a vision of the Restoration and of the Last Days, when Israel's sins will be pardoned, and King Jesus will come to redeem them, and the faithful from all nations:

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the Lord. "As for Me," says the Lord, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore" (Isaiah 59:20-21).

David M Pearce

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Who is Jesus Christ?

In the first part of this two-part series **Derek Vyse** showed that the creeds that are often recited to affirm that God is a Trinity had come about after much argument and controversy during which there were many other points of views expressed. So he explored what the Bible teaches asking the questions: Was Jesus co-equal and co-existent with God, as the creeds affirm? His interim conclusion was that the Bible consistently declares that God is a Unity, not a Trinity. In this article he looks at what the Bible has to say about other statements from the creeds.

3. Was Jesus Co-existent with God?

The nation of Israel was once taught something which has become a fundamental of their faith and belief in God:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

Jesus said that this was the first and most important commandment in the Old Testament, but does it change, when the New Testament explains about the Lord Jesus Christ? You can see for yourself from the following Bible passages:

For us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6);

There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... (1 Timothy 2:5);

Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He (God) will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unap-

proachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen (1 Timothy 6:14-16).

Notice how careful Scripture is at all times to distinguish between the Father and the Son. God is the source and originator of everything. He dwells in unapproachable light and has never been seen by any mortal. Jesus is His Son and came into existence when he was born of the virgin Mary by the power of God – the Holy Spirit. He is described as “the man Christ Jesus”.

4. Was Jesus Co-Eternal with God?

Contemplating His death upon the Cross, Luke says that Jesus’ sweat was as it were great drops of blood (Luke 22:44), such was the pressure and agony that Jesus endured. Death was the prospect that loomed large, with all



the aspects of shame and public exposure, and Jesus willingly submitted himself to that ordeal. But we should never think it was easy or that it took no effort on the part of the Lord. He had come to give his life as a sacrifice for sin and thus to save humanity.

Mortal not Immortal

That Jesus could die at all indicates his mortality. An immortal being cannot die: that's what immortality means! So when at last Jesus endured the cross and gave up his life, uttering the great cry "*It is finished!*", he was dead.

By that the Bible means he had ceased to exist, for death is the cessation of existence, an unconscious and powerless state or condition. So how did Jesus come back to life again? Did he raise himself, because he was co-eternal with God his Father? Let the Scriptures answer that question again:

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses (Acts 2:32);

Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man stands here before you whole (Acts 4:10);

Him God raised up on the third day, and showed him openly (Acts 10:40);

But God raised him from the dead (Acts 13:30);

He whom God raised up saw no corruption (Acts 13:37).

Look how clear this is and how straightforward, compared with the complexity of the creeds. Jesus was a mortal man who had to earn immortality and this he did by his perfect obedience.

As the apostle Paul explains it:

Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:8–11).

5. Did Jesus Pre-Exist?

Luke's record of the birth of Jesus indicates a nine month gestation period. Mary became 'great with child' and the days of her delivery were accomplished (Luke 2:5,6). Matthew uses the word 'begat' in the genealogy of Jesus and about Jesus' birth for he was conceived or begotten in Mary's womb (Matthew 1:20).

The apostle John uses the phrase "*the only begotten Son of the Father*" (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18), to explain that Jesus was born by the power of God overshadowing Mary. She was not someone through whom a pre-existent Christ was given access to the world of men. Mary was a key contributor to the nature and characteristics that Jesus inherited from her.

It is a crucial New Testament teaching that Jesus was born of a woman and that from his mother he inherited the characteristics that are common to all descendants of Adam and Eve:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14).

This New Testament teaching is matched by Old Testament promises about One who was to be born to fulfil the following:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15);

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

So Jesus was not pre-existent but came into existence when he was born of Mary some 2000 years ago. In the mind of God his birth was known about and was predicted, but Jesus faced all the problems we too share and triumphed wonderfully over them. There was nothing automatic or inevitable about this: his life was a display of perfect purity and absolute obedience.

Flesh and Blood

Jesus inherited a nature like ours with its inbuilt tendency to do wrong, rather than right, and we substantially undervalue his achievements if we misunderstand what these Scriptures are saying and opt instead for man made creeds which confuse the truth.

For if by the one man’s offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many (Romans 5:15);

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3);

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4);

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15);

... who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered (Hebrews 5:7–8).

Conclusion

Jesus inherited Adamic sinful nature, fought against it throughout his life and formally conquered it by his victorious resurrection, when God his Father raised him from the dead and gave him immortality.

He was not God; was and is not part of a Trinity; and did not pre-exist. Instead Jesus was the Son of Man (his favourite description of himself) born of his mother Mary and he was the Son of God because he came into existence by Holy Spirit action in bringing about the conception in Mary’s womb.

The choice we all have to make when answering the question “Who is Jesus Christ?” is whether to believe the creeds or the Bible. They offer two quite different answers to the question. One set of answers is man made. The other is the explanation that God himself provides.

Derek Vyse

Don't blame the Gardener!

Joel was angry. He cherished his garden, working hard with loving care and attention to detail. He pruned his plants when needed, watered and mulched, and protected them from the extremes of weather.

So it was with a mixture of shock and disbelief that he stared at the disaster in front of him. His attempt at grafting had failed. What could at best be described as a 'dry twig' was brown and incapable of surviving, let alone thriving and producing fruit.

Despite years of experience he had a failure on his hands, and Joel conceded he could do no more and that the best place for it was the compost heap.

Grafting Olive Trees

Grafting does not always work. It is used to try to combine two plants, usually to unite the strong and healthy system of one with a branch or shoot of the other. In Bible times it was common to graft olive trees. Wild olives would grow quite easily, with strong root systems, but with poor fruit.



By contrast, cultivated olives could produce very good fruit but were not always strong. By grafting part of a cultivated olive into the wild olive the gardener could produce a plant that was strong and healthy, and which also produced good and plentiful fruit. The Bible uses this principle to teach us about obedience and how to be saved.

The Jews and Abraham

In Old Testament times God's chosen people were the Jews, with a sad history. Jews are descendants of Abraham, whose life is described in the book of Genesis. Abraham was a wonderful man with amazing faith, described as a 'friend of God' (James 2:23), and he is referred to throughout the Bible. Abraham was promised that he would be given a land 'for ever', and that his descendants would constitute a great nation. He was also promised that there would be a special descendant of his through whom all the world would receive blessings (Galatians 3:8,16).

In course of time Abraham's descendants became the Jewish nation. God brought them to live in the land of Canaan (Israel) and gave them a law, known as the Law of Moses. Moreover, God promised that while they were faithful the Jews would thrive and enjoy His protection (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). However, if they were disobedient they would be deported from Canaan and taken into captivity (Deuteronomy 28:15-36, see especially v 36). Sadly, they chose to disobey God and to ignore His commandments.

God as a Gardener

God is often compared to a gardener, and His people to a vine or other plants. God asks for obedience from His people and this is likened to the plants producing good fruit. The prophet Isaiah describes the loving care God gave to His people – pictured as a vine – and His sadness at the poor fruit:

He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine ... So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes ... “What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?” (Isaiah 5:2–4).



The nation of Israel was likened to a vineyard that was to bring forth fruit to the glory of God. But they failed and were fruitless.

God was the perfect gardener, but the plant (the Jewish nation) did not bring forth good fruit. There were always faithful individuals, but despite the efforts of numerous prophets sent by God, the Jewish nation degenerated into disbelief and disobedience, and they were taken into captivity. Years later some of them did return to their

land, but were still not fruitful. Tragically, as a nation, they rejected Jesus when he came. They even cried out for him to be crucified, despite the fact that he had declared himself to be the promised Messiah – the special descendant of Abraham – who was sent by God to be their king. (Galatians 3:16, Luke 1:32,33).

Hope for Gentiles

By God's grace, this apparent disaster has given Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews) a wonderful opportunity. The offer of eternal life has been made available to us. This is described in Romans as follows:

For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience... (Romans 11:30)

In his letter to the Christian believers in Rome, the apostle Paul writes about Gentile believers, likening them to wild olive branches grafted on the olive tree of Israel.

“...if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do



not support the root, but the root supports you” (Romans 11:17-18).

This analogy is unusual because the gardener is grafting wild olive branches onto the cultivated tree, to replace branches which He has broken off. This way round is ‘contrary to nature’ (verse 24), and is probably depicted like this to emphasise the efforts to which God will go to in order to save people. He does all He possibly can.

A Warning

But there is a clear warning.

“..Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you goodness if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11: 20-22).

The nation of Israel had agreed to obey God, but they failed. The offer of salvation is now offered to Jews and Gentiles alike – on the same terms. But we have no place to be proud or complacent. God did not spare the unfruitful olive branches of faithless Israel, so He will be just as severe with faithless Gentiles. However, if we accept His offer and then continue to be faithful, He is kind and merciful.

Being Fruitful

Abraham was promised the land for ever and in Hebrews chapter 11 we are told that he will be given eternal life when all of God’s promises are fulfilled. If we want to take part in the blessings promised to Abraham we need to have an active, obedient faith, like that of Abraham. Even after the horrors of their captivity in Babylon, the Jews argued to Jesus that they had a

special status with God because they were descended by birth from Abraham. However, Jesus retorted that the true descendants of Abraham were those who have faith like Abraham:

They answered and said to him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children you would do the works of Abraham’ (John 8:39).

None of us deserve salvation. We have all done wrong – sinned – and so we all deserve death. God offers us the gift of eternal life and we need to do what He says in order to receive this amazing gift.

Joel was an experienced gardener, but his grafting failed, and the plant died. God is the perfect gardener, and He does all He can to save us. He can do no more. Now it is up to each of us to try to do as He asks.

Anna Hart

Being Fruitful

Jesus told the Jews of his day that because they had not received him as their King they would lose their special status.

“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43).

It follows that all who seek to follow Jesus must bear fruit to the glory and honour of God.

The fruit God wants is a changed life as we try to live like Jesus (Galatians 5:22-24).

God Rules!

In this first article, beginning a series about Bible prophecy, John Shepley explains that God is in control of the world and has a glorious plan for its future. As the series unfolds he will consider what prophecy is and look at some of the things it says about the Time of the End. Even though the immediate future for the world looks quite depressing, the good news is that there is a sure promise of a better time to come, when God's kingdom is established here.

God in Control

One of the fallacies of human governments today is that they think they are in control. This, of course, is brought about by humanistic thinking that man is the master of his own destiny. Even though the problems which confront civilization today seem insurmountable, man is confident in his own ability to solve them and bring about a better world.

The Bible, however, gives us a different and more realistic perspective. It shows us that God is in control and that events in the world are unfolding according to His predetermined plan. At a time of national unrest when the future of the nation of Judah seemed to be in the balance, the prophet Isaiah gave this word from God:

“Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:8–11)

“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, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11).

Although these words were spoken specifically about ancient kings – of Assyria, Babylon and Persia – who went about trying to accomplish their own desires, they give us a timeless insight into the fact that it is God who is really in control.

Ruler of Kings

Daniel Chapter 4 gives us another wonderful insight into how God is in control. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was a hugely powerful ruler at a time when there were few limitations to what a king could do.

One day he had a dream about a great tree which gave food and shelter to the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven. In his dream he saw a watcher come down from heaven proclaiming that the tree be cut down and then he heard these astonishing words:

“Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him. ‘This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men” (Daniel 4:15–17).



returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:33–35).

Nebuchadnezzar – the absolute monarch – came to realise that God is actually in control and that all human rulers are subject to His direction. The importance of these words is abundantly clear. It is God who rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He will.

He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding (Daniel 2:21).

These words are just as valid today as when they were first written. The rulers of today are also set up and removed by God according to His will, so that His purpose will be accomplished. This is something we have always to take into account as we consider the time of the end.

The Interpretation

Daniel interpreted the dream and told the king that it was about him, and his future prospects. If he was proud of his rulership, he was to be humbled until he had learned the truth about God’s supreme control over all human affairs.

It came to pass twelve months later, when Nebuchadnezzar’s heart was lifted up with pride, that this dream became reality:

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding

John Shepley
Ipswich, Australia

Choosing a Wife

*In the first part of this article **Hamilton Wilson** offered some helpful advice about how to choose the right partner for life. Now he explains the high ideals of the New Testament and shows how a good marriage should be based on the fine example set by the Lord Jesus.*

In the New Testament there is a passage which explains the ideals, qualities and the symbolism of marriage. Ephesians Chapter 5 is well worth reading in full, but here are some key points.

Submission

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:22–24)

Paul isn't advocating a slavish submission, as some have interpreted it in the past, but that there should be a spirit of co-operation between man and woman. That was the original intention with Eve, who was to have been "a help meet" or "a helper suitable for him". She was to complement Adam's qualities by bringing to the partnership the qualities of a woman's care and compassion.

Note that there is a spiritual hierarchy set out here – God, Christ, man, then woman – "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body" (5:23). It follows from this that wives should be subject to their husbands, but this gives no sanction for a husband to act in a domineering, bullying or selfish way. Marriage should

be a loving, complementary partnership, though it would appear that the husband, as the representative of Christ in the family, is to give the lead and example in the home and in spiritual things.

Love

Husbands have duties and responsibilities too:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 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).

From this passage it would appear that the Christian's aim in marriage is to act out a parable of Christ and his church. We are enacting in marriage what our relationship with Christ should be like. If we come to marriage with that highest of ideals we will go a long way to establishing a loving and lasting relationship, and one that will be blessed by God.

Selfishness?

Next the apostle Paul says:

Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:28).

At first glance it could be said that there is a selfish motive in having a good marriage! But this verse explains that a marriage forms an indivisible unit: there is no room for selfishness, for the married couple are to be “one flesh”. We’re now able to see that the expression in Genesis “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5,6) doesn’t just consist of sexual union, but means that there should be a blending of mind and spirit as well. But if we can’t aspire to love at the level shown by the Lord Jesus, we should at least love our married partner as much as we love ourselves:

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (Ephesians 5:29).

The key phrase given in chapter 5 about married life – “even as unto Christ” – is something to be borne in mind in all walks of life. If we modelled human relationships on the perfect pattern shown by Jesus, that would go a long way to salving the problems of family relationships that we see blighting the lives of many families around us today. And it would resolve many of the disputes seen in the workplace.

Searching Questions

In the light of Paul’s inspired counsel, if you are looking for a life-mate, you have to consider whether you both have the same priorities in life. As a Christian, you promise to dedicate your life to the highest possible service to God.

- ❖ Can you share that high ideal with someone who has no interest at all in spiritual values?
- ❖ Can you pray together, to help each other to attain to the Kingdom of

God, which should be the highest aim for each marriage partner?

- ❖ Will you be able to agree, when the dilemmas and problems of life arrive, as they surely will, that they will be solved by reference to God’s Word and His will?
- ❖ Will you be able to agree how you will spend your time together, in serving God, or in the use of your means and assets in His service?
- ❖ What will be your main aims and ambitions together for any family you may be blessed with?

Staying Together

Please don’t go into marriage with the prevailing attitude of “if it doesn’t work out, we can always get divorced”. There is no way that Christ will give up on his church. There is no way that Christ will divorce us. God intended marriage for life; we have to work through our problems, just as He works through our problems and helps us.

If we make wise, informed choices based on the principles laid out in Scripture, we will have a happy and satisfying marriage, which will, in God’s grace, lead us to that great day of rejoicing envisaged in the Revelation of Jesus Christ (chapter 19:7-9), when God’s purpose comes to its final phase.

It says a great deal that the coming of Jesus to claim his followers and to be united with them in the Kingdom of God is described as a marriage scene. Our marriages now should be the beginning of eternal relationships in God’s coming Kingdom.

Hamilton Wilson

The Great Commandment

Jesus was once asked which of God's commands was the most important. Referring to two Old Testament scriptures, he answered as follows:

"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

The second important command was bundled with the first because by caring for others we show our love for God and His salvation. These two rules, Jesus explained, summarize both the law and prophets. By implication they are also at the heart of the gospel.

What is Love?

Loving God is easy to talk or write about; not so easy to do. Also many people think of God's love as something emotional or sentimental. Yet the whole Bible teaches us that God's love is what today we call "tough love".

Relating to a God we cannot see may seem difficult, but we can relate to fellow humans and take a hard look at the way we live. God has prescribed a way of living – of living and loving – that is designed to bring us the best chance of happiness in our fractured world. Our attempts to live in this way help us to discover what His love is like. But how do these principles work out in the life of a Christian today?

Motivation?

It is not just a matter of showing that we care for others. Many people throughout the world care from totally secular motives. The Christian cares for others as a practical way of loving God and that is meant to extend far beyond helping. For example, if we love God we will try to keep his rules. This means not being violent, not committing immorality, not being greedy for money, giving our time, energy and money wisely to match God's priorities and being in control of our behaviour as far as possible.

It also means doing those small things to help people who meet us regularly in all aspects of our daily lives, and doing little "chores" or bigger things that we may not wish to do. The point is that our behaviour is meant to demonstrate that we love God and are following as well as we can His pattern of life and not doing just what we want to do, so that when the Lord Jesus returns he will be pleased to recognise our love and offer us a place in the Kingdom he is to set up on earth.

True Love

Our love is nothing compared with the love that God shows to all His creation, but we must do what we can to respond to that love, by loving.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:10,11).

Cynthia Miles

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