

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1536



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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

Its objectives are – to encourage 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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The Narrow Way

Jesus was once asked how many people will be saved: would it be many or few? His answer challenges many of the assumptions held today by people who are hoping for the best.

It is a widely held view that if there is a God in heaven – and a lot of people haven't made up their minds about that – it is to be hoped that He is a benevolent being who will be kind to all those who try to live a decent life. I expect you have heard the argument that “I have never done anybody any harm”, where the inference is that such behaviour should be good enough for God, in the hope that He is not too demanding.

Narrow Gate

So what did Jesus say? Here's the question and the Lord's reply:

(Jesus) went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to him, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” And he said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:22–24).

If you were hoping for a reply that indicated that salvation was freely available for all, regardless of their interest in the things of God, that answer would have come as a disappointment. And there was worse to come if you were in that frame of mind.

Narrow Way

As part of his long discourse, which is sometimes called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urged his followers to

make an effort to find the right path through life. He explained that things were not always easy and that it needed effort to follow him. Here are his actual words:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

These were startling opposites that Jesus used:

- ❖ the gate was either **narrow** or **wide**;
- ❖ the path was either **broad** or **difficult**;
- ❖ the end result was either **life** or **destruction**.

The choice could not have been more challenging, but that is what the Lord intended. For he often spoke of the discipline and determination that is needed for those who want to obtain eternal life and he demonstrated that by the way he lived and died.

Well Worthwhile

People who climb know that it can sometimes be an uphill struggle. Some of the tracks can be very narrow, steep and slippery. So why do people do it, when they could take an easier path or just not bother? They climb for what they get out of it, of course. There is the opportunity to be close to nature; to get exercise; and to enjoy the companionship of like-minded people. Then there are the views which are often more spectacular the higher up the mountain you climb. In short,



people have many different reasons for choosing the narrow path up a mountainside and will put in a lot of effort to make that pursuit possible. They do it because they enjoy it and that is reason enough.

But what if it was a matter of life or death? What if there was a place at the top of a mountain where you could get a potion that would allow you to live forever, but you had to climb the mountain yourself in order to get it? Do you think there would be a queue up that mountain, or would people decide it wasn't worth the effort, and just not bother? And what would your attitude be, when you found out about the offer of eternal life?

One Way

The Bible is consistent in explaining that God has made the offer of eternal life but there is only one way it can be obtained – and that doesn't involve climbing a mountain! Long ago He asked Abraham to follow Him into the unknown by promising him a blessing. During Abraham's faithful life, God added promise after promise, including that through Abraham, and his special descendant, a blessing would come to all nations.

As Abraham's descendants – the Jewish nation – began to enjoy some of those blessings, more and more promises were made and God's plan of salvation became ever clearer. At last

the special descendant was born, of Abraham's line but of divine origin. Jesus was the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary by the power of God. It was through Jesus that salvation would come to all nations and it was only through him that men and women could be saved.

Told by the Jewish religious leaders that they were not allowed to speak about Jesus in Jerusalem, the apostle Peter made this impassioned statement which demonstrates their understanding about the special role of Jesus:

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The Way

He was certain of this because he had been taught it by the Lord himself. Once asked to show his disciples what God was like, Jesus explained that his life was a demonstration of godliness. Then he added:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

Elsewhere Jesus described himself as the door through which people could enter into God's family. He is the door that leads to the narrow way, and only a few people trouble to find the way that leads to everlasting life. There is so much else to do in life and it seems that there are many easier options. Believers' baptism into the saving name of Jesus is the one and only way that leads to the Kingdom of God. What an opportunity! What an invitation!

Editor

Belief in God

There are, and always have been, many opinions on this subject.

- ❖ Is there a God?
- ❖ Need we believe in God?
- ❖ Is belief in God an outdated idea?

The questions and opinions go on, and on. Some people who believe in God are highly educated; others who do not are equally intelligent and nowadays often outspoken. Is there any certain way of knowing? Does it depend on education or on current thinking?

Evidence all around

Consider the following passage from Romans chapter 1:

What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools ... (Romans 1:19–22)

The argument of the apostle Paul is that the invisible things of God can be seen. But, how can invisible things be seen? His explanation is:

“By the things that are made”.

The evidence for the existence of an eternal power and Godhead – which



we cannot see – is to be clearly seen, or evidenced, by what we can see in the natural world around us.

First Century Thought

Bear in mind that these words were penned about 2,000 years ago, a long time before the Hubble telescope or Electron microscope.

Paul was saying that what we see with our naked eyes of the natural world provides us with ample evidence that an almighty and eternal power exists which created and brought order to everything around us. We don't need to depend on the thoughts of mankind: the latest scientific discovery or theory, or the continuing arguments of men. Evidence for the existence of God is all around us, if we are prepared to look and think about it.



Notice too that to deny the existence of God, since He has given adequate evidence to convince us, leaves us in the apostle's words, "*without excuse*". It is inexcusable to deny the existence of God, regardless of what current philosophy or polite society might think. Do we first need to believe the Bible to accept this proof? Not so! The Bible is pointing out that the evidence for an eternal power and Godhead is all around. If you can accept that, then clearly the Bible will have other good things you want to know about.

Does God have a purpose?

The trees, the flowers, the beauty of the natural world, the stars; none of these things can answer that question. For this information we need words. Such a revelation exists in a book, the Bible.

The Bible claims to be the Word of God. Test it for yourself:

- ❖ Look at the evidence of fulfilled prophecy, for example seen in the crucifixion of Christ as prophesied in the Old Testament.
- ❖ Read the prophecies of Divine intervention in world affairs affecting nations.
- ❖ See the amazing internal harmony of the sixty-six books written over a period of about 1,500 years.



These are topics which are frequently dealt with in the pages of this magazine. The evidence is there. There is an '*Eternal power and Godhead*'. The natural world gives its testimony and the Bible demonstrates itself to be of divine origin, adding to the information we have and leading us to an understanding of God's plan with the earth. Here's just one statement of divine intent:

For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).

What a sure foundation in a world of ever changing opinions. Let's not "*profess ourselves to be wise, and become fools*", but rather accept the evidence from nature and the Bible, and in so doing we will gain a real hope in life.

David Radford

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world ... The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes

(Psalm 19:1-4,7-8)

What is Prophecy For?

Webster's Dictionary defines prophecy as "A foretelling; prediction; a declaration of something to come". It continues by rightly saying:

"As God only knows future events with certainty, no being but God or some person informed by Him, can utter a real prophecy. The prophecies recorded in Scripture, when fulfilled, afford most convincing evidence of the divine origin of the Scriptures, as those who uttered the prophecies could not have fore-known the events predicted without supernatural instruction".

This is what the Apostle Peter says:

... no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).

As we have already seen, God is the controller of all past, present and future events. He knows the future and will make it happen. In this way Bible Prophecy is history written in advance.

Short and Long Term

A Bible prophet often had a twofold role. He was a mouthpiece for God in (1) instructing His people and (2) in foretelling events that would certainly come to pass. In this series we are concentrating mainly on the latter aspect. According to the two tests of a prophet given in the book of Deuteronomy (13:1-3 and 18:21-22), a true prophet was one who:

- ❖ taught things consistent with the rest of what God had revealed, and
- ❖ gave a short-term prophecy which came true.

There are different types of prophecy. Some are "short-term" which established the prophet's credentials; many are "long-term" and extend into the near or distant future from the prophet's own time. Often the prophecies were a combination of both, with sometimes dual or even multiple fulfillments.

Let's consider Psalm 2 as an example, the full text of which is shown overleaf. This is a Psalm of David which clearly had a primary fulfilment in his own day. He was God's anointed king and, under the hand of God, his capital was established in Jerusalem (Zion). This did not happen immediately; first David had to fight many wars with the nations round about who challenged his rule. Eventually they became subject to him and accepted the rulership of the king that God had set upon what God describes as "my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6). The psalm refers to that process of submission to God's intended purpose.

First Century Application

It may come as a surprise if you are unfamiliar with the New Testament, but this same Psalm – rooted in the history of David's conquest of Jerusalem – is given a first century application by the inspired apostles of Jesus. They had been opposed by the Jewish religious leaders who had commanded them not to speak or teach in

1. Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?
2. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,
3. "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us."
4. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.
5. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:
6. "Yet I have set my King on My holy hill of Zion."
7. "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten you.'
8. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.
9. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."
10. Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth.
11. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him.

(Psalm 2)

the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). The apostles refused that request and when they returned to the others this was what was said:

They raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God,

who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: "Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ." For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:24–28).

So verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 2, at the very least, also had a fulfilment in the first century in the plot to do away with Jesus. Again we see that God is in control.

Future Application

But the prophetic nature of that Psalm is not exhausted by that First Century application. It has a future fulfilment. Its latter day fulfilment predicts a time to come when some nations will oppose the rulership of King Jesus when he establishes Jerusalem as the capital of the Kingdom of God, as we shall see in later articles. God has a plan for this world and He will bring it to pass.

With some prophecies – such as those already fulfilled and some future ones, like those concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ – we can be dogmatic about their fulfilment. With others – such as those which concern events prior to the Lord's return – we cannot be dogmatic as to how and when they will be fulfilled. For prophecy is primarily a tool to help build up our faith when we see how God has fulfilled His Word, and is still fulfilling it to the very letter. This gives us great confidence that those prophecies yet

remaining will also be fulfilled in their entirety. It can also give us a wonderful insight into the plan and purpose of God.

The Time of the End

There are many books and films that predict cataclysmic events happening to this world, things that would bring it to the brink of destruction. There are so many scenarios which portray the end of the world. With the spectre of global terror, the rampant spread of infectious diseases, man-made environmental disasters and other natural catastrophes, many believe that the days of civilisation as we know it are truly numbered.

The Bible does in fact speak of a time coming on earth when there will be no way out for some people:

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Luke 21:25–26).

These are the words of the Lord Jesus, part of a prophecy he gave upon the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem when he was asked about events in

the world just prior to his return.

The original word translated “perplexity” literally means “at a loss for a way” with the sense of being at one’s wits end, not knowing how to proceed, or without resources. The prophet Daniel describes this time like this:

At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book (Daniel 12:1).

Scriptural Expression

The “Time of the End” is actually a Scriptural phrase which occurs five times in the Book of Daniel. Here are two of those occurrences:

*“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until **the time of the end**; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4);*

*And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till **the time of the end**” (Daniel 12:9).*

This is a time when God will once again openly intervene in the affairs of this world, in order to save it from



destruction and establish His righteousness in the earth. This time is referred to in many ways in Scripture with phrases such as “the last days”, “the day of the Lord” and the “end of the age” also being used.

... knowing this first: that scoffers will come in **the last days**, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3–4);

But **the day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10);

Now as (Jesus) sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of

your coming, and of **the end of the age?**” (Matthew 24:3)

We will look at these and other events concerning this time in more detail later on in this series. For now, let us note that God will bring His purpose about through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Apostle Paul told the philosophers of Athens when he was invited to address them:

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:29–31).

John Shepley

Green

Look around in all that’s seen
You’ll see it’s predominantly green:
The trees of every shape and size
Their greenness with each other vies:
Some dark as darkest curly kale
And others lighter shades of pale
And God with trees and plants marvellous
Chose green, and yet it’s not monotonous.

In lots of places in this world
Fields of green you’ll see unfurled
Endless miles, the same is seen
A wondrous carpet laid in green.
Some artists would provide a show
Of varied hues where colours glow,
Not choose one colour in their plan
But God knows so much more than man.

Peggy Rawson

Could it be Chance?

I am an old man now and, if weather permits, I like to stroll around a local beauty spot, where one can sit and muse. Join me in my thoughts.

In the sunshine the sea in front of me is shimmering as if coated with thousands of jewels. The Purbeck Hills in the distance make a perfect backdrop, with varying shades of green, interspersed with patches of vivid yellow from the rapeseed crop. It is a scene that is not easily forgotten.

Have you ever asked yourself how it is that we have acquired our appreciation of such beauty? No animal has it. Have you ever seen a cow or a horse gazing appreciatively into the distance? Could it be the result of chance?

The birds

The seagulls soar gracefully overhead and I ponder on the marvellous way that their feathers are made, and the way in which they function.



They are astonishing, as are all birds. I read recently of the Arctic Tern that in its annual migration flies North to South and then in the reverse direc-

tion, travelling 25,000 miles. It travels from ice field to the tropics, and back to the ice again, sometimes to the very nest from which it originated. From where do the marvels of navigation come? Could that be the result of chance?

The bees

In front of me a bee gathers nectar and pollen, to prepare food supplies for the coming winter. As a beekeeper for some years I used to wonder at their industry with their honeycombs made so precisely that they are at exactly the right angle to hold the maximum amount of honey or pollen.



In addition, their bee dance is fascinating as each worker bee comes back with news of another food source, and points to the part of the compass where it can be found. The more vigorous the dance, the richer was the source. How do they do it? Could it be chance?

The insect world

A butterfly and a dragonfly hover in front of me as I prepare to leave and they remind me of a film depicting the



300 mile journey of the Monarch butterfly. Unerringly these Monarchs travel to their mating grounds. What a journey for so frail a creature! Could that instinct to travel so far to perpetuate their species have come about by chance? It doesn't seem likely to me.

The Natural World

The sun dips low in the autumn sky and I start to walk up the hill. So many thoughts fill my mind.

Could the Venus fly trap work so ingeniously by chance?



How could that Dorset salmon find its way back through hundreds of miles of the Atlantic Ocean to the very place in which it was spawned?

Could the Bombardier Beetle have evolved such a marvellous chemi-

cal defence without intelligence in its making?

Chance seems impossible however many millions of years you give it over which to range. By contrast, I muse over the profound words with which the Bible begins:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

Now that makes real sense. When I hear people remark on the marvellous design of this or that creature or of this flower or tree, I can only agree and think about the marvel of the Designer who has made all these wonderful things to beautify His world. No wonder the hymn writer was moved to say:

*Fill Thou my life, O Lord, my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.*

I am almost home and a funeral cortege passes by, reminding me of so much. But that is a meditation for another day.

Ken Clark

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Jeremiah – Prophet of Doom?

Jeremiah prophesied later than Isaiah – around 600 BC. He lived through the last years of the Kingdom of Judah. He was in Jerusalem during the final siege and saw its horrors, and witnessed his people being led away into captivity in Babylon.

His Message

Jeremiah is usually associated with messages of gloom, because so much of his long book warns of judgments about to fall on unrepentant Judah. But he actually has some really lyrical prophecies about the Kingdom of God, when the Lord will forgive and restore His people.

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem. His family came from a village called Anathoth, a few miles away. He seems to have been a lonely man, for he was not married, and had few friends. Yet for over 40 years the prophet faithfully brought to his people the Word of the Lord, receiving in return only abuse, beating and imprisonment.

His Calling

Jeremiah was commissioned, like Isaiah, as a young man. Like Isaiah, he saw a hand from God touch his mouth.

“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” said the heavenly messenger. “See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9–10).

Notice there are both negative and positive elements in this command. God would first pull down, in judgment, but then build and plant in restoration and forgiveness.

The prophet uses brilliant metaphors to drive home his message. One of the most striking, which runs through the first five chapters, likens Judah to God’s wife, married to Him by a vow made at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses.



The Lord, unhappy at their worship of other gods (the equivalent of adultery), warns them that He will have to put them away. Even at this late stage, when His patience was almost exhausted, God was prepared to put the clock back and start again, if they would come home to Him. But time was fast running out. Captivity loomed.

‘Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours’ (Jeremiah 5:19).

Messages from God

In chapter 7 Jeremiah is told to stand in the gateway of the Temple and address the crowds. They came there

to worship every Sabbath, and thought they had done their duty. But back at home they each had their own favourite gods, and their lives denied their claims to be God's people. "Amend your ways!" he cried. It is the same today. People persuade themselves that if they turn up at church three times a year, or kiss a few icons and repeat 'Hail Mary!' God will protect them. But He demands our obedience all the week, not just on Sundays.

Dramatic Acts

In chapter 13 the prophet is made to act out his message. He had to buy an expensive new linen belt, and wrap it round his waist. Then he had to walk hundreds of miles to the River Euphrates, dig a hole and bury it. A long time afterwards, he was told to repeat the journey, and dig it up. It was, of course, ruined by damp. What, they must have asked, was this all about?

The answer he gave them was that the belt stood for the people of Judah, once as close to God as a girdle. Now they were spoiled by their idolatry, and soon they would make the long march to the Euphrates, on the way to captivity in Babylon.

Retiring?

Two chapters later Jeremiah was so depressed at the hostile reception he received to his utterances he really wanted to give up:

Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent for interest, nor have men lent to me for interest. Every one of them curses me (Jeremiah 15:10).

But God had not yet given up on His people. There might still be one here

or there who would listen and respond to His grace. So Jeremiah must plod on, He said, and He would guarantee that his life would be preserved from their hatred.

More Acted Parables

In chapter eighteen Jeremiah is seen walking down to the field south of Jerusalem where the potter had his workshop. Here he saw a lump of clay spinning round on the wheel. But the clay was stiff and unyielding, and the potter gave up, squashed it into a ball, and started again.



The message was that God works with nations in just the same way. He has the skill to make soft human clay into characters of beauty and utility. But if people are hard-hearted, and fail to respond to the pressure of His fingers, He will discard them and start all over again. This God would do centuries later, when He offered the gospel to the Gentiles.

Next Jeremiah had to carry a pottery vessel to the Valley of Hinnom. Here, over the years, the families of Jerusalem had queued up to burn their children in the fire to Moloch, the god of the Moabites. That is how bad things were. Jeremiah was told to smash the pot to pieces. "So", he roared, "God will break this people and this city".

Later the prophet was ordered to wear a wooden yoke across his shoulders every day for three years, to indicate that God would put Judah and the surrounding countries under the yoke of Babylon, until the time of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson (see Jeremiah 27:2-7).

In chapter twenty, the chief priest Pashur arrested poor Jeremiah for his prophecies, and shackled his feet in the public stocks. He was utterly humiliated. This was when he decided to stop speaking in the name of the Lord, but found he could not.

Jeremiah's Chronology

Some chapters of Jeremiah are out of chronological order. However, he always dates his prophecies by the year of the king that was reigning at the time, so it is easy to check the sequence. Chapters 22 and 25 jump back to the time of King Jehoiakim, but chapter 24 returns to the reign of the last king of Judah – Zedekiah. In this chapter we have a vivid figure of speech. The prophet saw two baskets of figs, one juicy and ripe, and the other quite bad.

The good figs were the captives that were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. They were fortunate, although they might not see it that way! A merciful God, knowing the end was coming on the Jewish state, was sending them away to preserve them, so that in years to come a remnant could return to the land.

The bad figs, the rebellious ones, would die in the siege. Chapter 25 is particularly interesting in this respect, because here the prophet declares plainly that the duration of their captivity would be seventy years –

This whole land shall be a desolation



and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 'Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the Lord; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation' (Jeremiah 25:11–12).

As we discovered in the historical books, this remarkable prophecy came true in the Return under Joshua and Zerubbabel.

A Coming King

A most amazing prophecy is found in chapters 30 to 33. Here Jeremiah states that God will never cast off the Jews. He would punish them for their hard heartedness, but eventually He would regather them to their land. This prophecy had a primary fulfilment in the return from Babylon but, like Isaiah, Jeremiah was looking into the distant future as well for, in chapter 33, God insists that a king is going to sit on David's throne again:

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth ... For thus says the Lord:

‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel ... If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne ...’ (Jeremiah 33:14–21)

When the captives returned from Babylon, they had no king. The throne of David has been vacant for 2,500 years. But when Jesus was born, that throne was promised to him:

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:31–32).

So the prophecy of Jeremiah belongs to our future, to a time when Israel is regathered from dispersion and Jesus, the Branch from the tree of David, will bring joy to God’s people.

Imprisoned!

The scariest story about Jeremiah is when he was put in the dungeon. He had told the people that if they wanted to save their lives they should leave Jerusalem and surrender to the Babylonians. This way they would avoid the inevitable siege. But Jeremiah’s enemies saw this counsel as treason, and had him arrested. They did not like to shed his blood – after all he was a prophet of the Lord – so they lowered him into a deep water cistern under the city. Here he sank into deep, sticky mud.

They put a stone lid over the cistern, and left him to die, standing up in the darkness. God had promised him that

his life would be preserved from his enemies, but now his faith in that assurance was sorely tried. He shouted, but nobody heard. He prayed, but nothing happened. Hours passed. At last he heard a noise above his head. Daylight appeared. It was Ebedmelech, a black man, servant of the king, who had learned of his plight and come to rescue him. God had kept His word, after all.

Extraordinary

Here is one more extraordinary prophecy from Jeremiah. This statement from God shows how He controls everything:

“Do not fear, O Jacob My servant,” says the Lord, “For I am with you; for I will make a complete end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but I will not make a complete end of you. I will rightly correct you, for I will not leave you wholly unpunished” (Jeremiah 46:28).

‘Jacob’ is a synonym for the nation of Israel. They have certainly tasted the bitterness of God’s discipline over the centuries. But the fact remains that they are still here in the world today. There is an Israeli flag flying in New York among the national flags that make up the United Nations. But where are the Babylonians today, or the Assyrians, or the Romans – all nations that sought to drive the Jews from their land? They are nonentities. They have disappeared into the sands of history, just as Jeremiah said they would.

That’s how remarkable God’s Word is. Prophecy demonstrates that the Bible is true and that God is in complete control of all that happens in His world.

David M Pearce

What did Jesus Mean?

Some Hard Sayings

Jesus was an exceptional teacher with a remarkable message from God but people didn't always understand what he was saying. It needed to be thought about and considered carefully and sometimes his followers walked away in confusion. In this article **David Budden** looks at some of the sayings of Jesus and explains what they mean and what they don't mean.

I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Matthew 5:39).

We can be absolutely certain that Jesus did NOT literally mean that the correct Christian response to violence would be to invite a second blow. How can we be so sure? We can be absolutely sure because Jesus himself did not respond in that way when he was attacked, and it is always the case that Jesus practised what he preached!

Consider the situation: Jesus stood on trial for his life before Caiaphas the High Priest. He had been blindfolded and someone gave him a tremendous swipe across his face. Did Jesus invite a second blow on the opposite cheek? He did not! He told the man off!

"If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike me?" (John 18:23).

So, if Jesus did not mean that one should invite a second blow, what did he mean? Here is a possible answer. It seems that Jesus meant:

- ❖ "Do not seek revenge";
- ❖ "Let there be no 'Getting my own back'".

This example gives us a clue how to look at some of these 'hard sayings'. Sometimes Jesus highlighted his teaching in a way that put great emphasis on the vital point, thus underlining the lesson he was giving. It is our task to try to discern the truths he was thus conveying.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, a very sincere and highly intelligent man, yet even he was puzzled by this comment. He took the words literally, at face value, and asked Jesus:

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4).



Obviously Jesus did not intend his words to be taken literally – but what did he mean?

On this occasion Jesus provided his own explanation, for he spoke of three births:

- (a) verse 6 *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh”;*
- (b) verse 5 *“Except a man be born of water...”, and*
- (c) verse 6 *“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit”.*

These are readily identifiable.

- (a) **Being born of the flesh** is something that happens to all of us: God-fearing and atheists alike, for it refers to our natural birth. We are all flesh and blood beings.
- (b) **Being born of water** refers to the rite of baptism. Indeed later in the same chapter of John we read that *“after these things Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea, and there he remained with them and baptized”* (John 3:22) and then we are told that John the Baptist was at work nearby *“because there was much water there”* (3:23).

When someone acquires a knowledge of gospel truth, he or she believes and understands that baptism is a ‘picture’ of a burial and a resurrection (see Romans chapter 6).

That is the ‘way’ that God has appointed for us to show that we want to be associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is an act of obedience and of faith. The event is firmly etched into the memory – the date, the circumstances, the words spoken – all this

is remembered as a new start, a new birth into the family of God.

- (c) **Being born of the Spirit.** This is referring to the life-long effort to bring our hearts and minds into harmony with the example of Jesus. It is not a smooth growth from spiritual infancy to manhood and sometimes set-backs occur. But the overall picture is one of developing maturity. There is no date marked on the calendar; there is no ‘event’ etched into the memory. It is a life-long process, constantly trying to develop the mind of the Spirit, and thus becoming a true child of God.

Of course, blemishes will be with us to the end of our days but having been *“born of water”* will mean that we come before God with all those blemishes removed from sight. Forgiveness is absolute.

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple”
(Luke 14:26).

These words seem to be totally at variance with the Christian way of life and we must try to look ‘underneath’ the words to see the lesson which Jesus is trying to emphasize. Fortunately there is a practical example which Jesus gave and this will help us.

Early in Jesus’ ministry he generated opposition from the scribes and Pharisees through his fearless denunciation of their hypocrisy. Their hatred of him was boiling up to fever-pitch and there was muttering about assassination.

Now the half-brothers of Jesus were very sceptical of his claims to be the Messiah and they became very alarmed by the way Jesus was behaving and they even began to doubt his sanity. They decided that, for his own safety, Jesus should be locked up and they even prevailed on Mary, his mother, to join them in seeking to remove Jesus to a secure place. This brings us to Mark 3:1-6, 20-21 and 31-35.

There were large crowds of people following Jesus at the time and among them were scribes and Pharisees filled with jealousy and intense hatred. Jesus had actually gone into a house and when his brothers, accompanied by Mary, arrived it was quite impossible for them to approach him so they called requesting him to come out to them. Jesus knew perfectly well what their mission was and when their message was passed on to him he looked at those people who were listening eagerly to him:

And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:49-50).

Poor Mary! Can we imagine her feelings on hearing that? What Jesus was saying was this, "Mary, you might be my mother in the biological sense of the word; but that counts for nothing if you do not believe in me and do not trust me!"

Thus Jesus put his duty to his Father first. His duty to his mother and his brothers came second. And that is what he meant when he said that those who would be his disciples must put God first in their lives; other considerations must come second. It was not a matter of 'hate', it was a matter of priorities; the word 'hate' was used to emphasise the point that Jesus was making.

Coming back to Mary, we know that she recovered from her lapse of faith in Jesus because she was present at the crucifixion. Nevertheless she must have reproached herself for having allowed the younger sons (see Matthew 13:55) to prevail upon her to try to deter Jesus from fulfilling the mission his Father had set before him. But all is well that ends well.

David Budden

Unmerited Grace

Another day has come and gone
With blessings I can see
And I can now reflect upon
God's love to such as me.

Yet often I forget to thank
My God for His good grace
And take for granted all His gifts –
Forget to seek His face.

But if God should forget me,
How sadly would I grieve,
I can't exist without Him,
For in Him I live and breathe.

So may each day be filled with praise
As I pray on bended knee,
Ever mindful of His gracious love
To such a one as me.

Colleen Simons

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