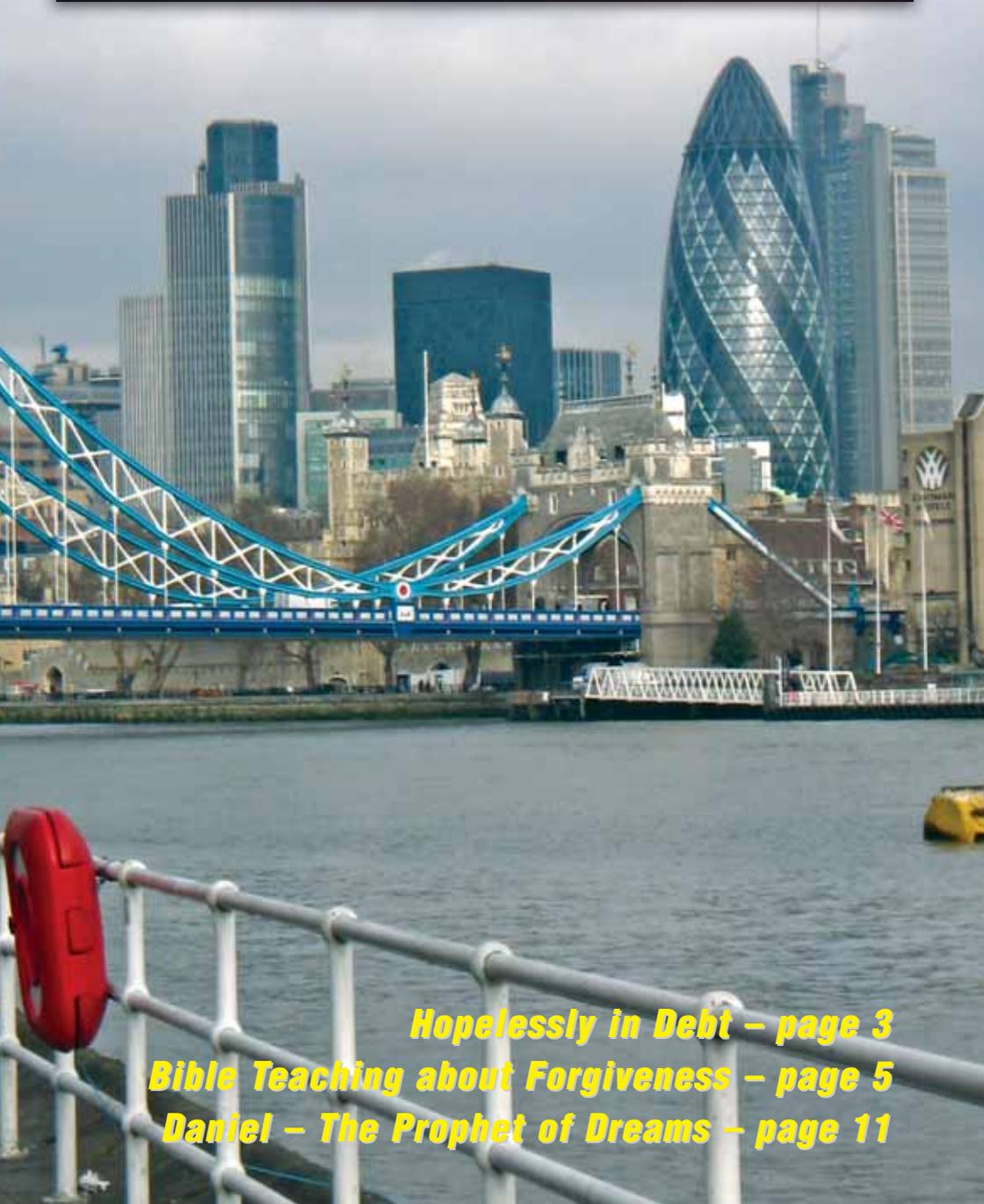


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1539



Hopelessly in Debt – page 3
Bible Teaching about Forgiveness – page 5
Daniel – The Prophet of Dreams – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

128th Year

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1539



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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Hopelessly in Debt

Not long ago a job in international finance was considered very desirable. Working in the City, right at the heart of the international banking system, was a prestige occupation. But since the financial crash of 2007-08 things have been very different.

The global financial crisis has resulted in the collapse of large financial institutions, the bailout of banks by national governments and downturns in stock markets across the world.

Key businesses have failed, there has been a marked decline in consumer wealth and a downturn in economic activity which has resulted in a global recession. In turn, this has caused such a loss of confidence in the banking system across the world that it has triggered the European sovereign debt crisis, making it difficult for some governments in the euro zone to refinance their government debt without assistance from elsewhere.

Root Causes

Analysts have given many different views about the reasons for this collapse. They include the absence of a sensible lending policy, insufficient safeguards within the banking system itself and inadequate regulation. But the root cause is really much simpler. It was greed that fuelled the whole process: the desire to make more and more money.

The end result is that we are all worse off as a result of the crash. Banks are now wary of lending, despite government encouragement to do so. Loans are hard to get and businesses are struggling as a result. Because people are short of money there is less



London's Financial Centre viewed from the River Thames

consumer demand, so the recession continues. Governments are trying to reduce their expenditure, so public sector pay and pensions are under attack; people are being asked to work for longer before they get their state pensions; the standard of living that has been enjoyed in the past is now declining as the realization dawns that you have to earn rather than borrow.

Deeper in Debt

Read the Bible and you will find that the Lord's Prayer is not quite what you thought it was. The language that has been drilled into schoolchildren and church congregations over the years is as follows:

"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us".

But the words in the Bible, spoken by the Lord Jesus himself, are these:

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors (Matthew 6:11-12).

The word "trespasses" has an old fashioned flavour, but we are only too familiar with the idea of debt, whether

personal, business, national or international debt. It means that something has been borrowed that has to be repaid and sacrifices have to be made to make that repayment possible. But who are we in debt to, and how do we go about trying to repay?

A Metaphor

Imagine that you wanted to study to get a qualification but it was far too expensive for you to contemplate doing so. A benefactor heard about your desire and generously advanced you a loan so that you could get the qualification on the understanding that you would repay when you were in a position to do so, the qualification making that repayment possible.

But instead of applying yourself to your studies you spent the lot on having a good time and ended the period with no qualifications and no means of getting a job. You had just had a good time and had spent the loan on yourself and your friends. How would you feel when you next met your benefactor and had to explain that you couldn't possibly repay the loan, not now and probably never?

In the same way, we are in debt to God if we take the gift of life that He generously provides and squander it on ourselves, having a good time, and never giving God a second thought – never even asking “What is the purpose of Life?” It was the apostle Paul, addressing some philosophers and learned men in ancient Athens, who summed up the reason why we are given life in these words:

He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they

should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26–27).

Seeking and Finding

God has given us the most valuable thing we possess – the gift of life. We have the choice of how to use it: either as we think best – having a good time – or by taking advantage of the opportunity to find out about God and His gracious purpose. Wasting time makes us like the ungrateful student who might have acquired a skill for life, but didn't bother because he was having too much fun. But there is something else to consider.

We are born with a tendency to please ourselves rather than others and need saving from ourselves if we are to become the sort of people God wants us to be. God did something about that when he sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to live on earth and to die to save us from our sins. That was the most remarkable gift ever. As one New Testament writer puts it:

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32);

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15).

God wants us to take full advantage of these gifts. Until we do so we are hopelessly in debt. When we seek for Him and find Him those debts can be wiped away and we can receive this assurance:

*The wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God is eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).*

Editor

Bible Teaching about Forgiveness

People fall out and disagree with one another, sometimes over quite trivial matters. So often, they then avoid one another and, if they absolutely have to speak, they do so ungraciously.



Neither wants to be seen to be losing face over the disagreement which by that time has become the proverbial mountain instead of remaining a mere molehill. Sadly, this can happen within a family or amongst a group of friends. It also happens among nations when great diplomacy is called for!

Reconciliation

In all these cases some sort of reconciliation is needed. Much discussion can then take place, called these days “talking it through”, so that no one appears to be losing face. Open admission of faults and genuine apologies are rare and seem to be out of fashion these days! How newspaper editors love to dig into mistakes in the lives of politicians and celebrities and then publish what they have discovered, declaring it to be “in the public interest”!

We are going to see what the Bible

has to say about a greater and markedly far-reaching reconciliation – between a man and his Maker. But we must first say why such reconciliation is necessary. What had gone wrong, what is the cause of the rift and who is at fault?

What went Wrong?

It all began long ago in the Garden of Eden. Eve did not abide by God’s instructions regarding the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She then, having succumbed to the temptation, enticed her husband Adam to do the same and the first knowledge they shared was of their own nakedness and they experienced a real sense of shame and of guilt.

They wanted to hide from God because they knew they had sinned, in that they had fallen short of the standard that God has set. Sin is rebellion against God’s instructions and that brings its own consequences (Genesis 3:17-21).



So at the very beginning man, having rebelled against God, needed his sin to be covered by the shedding of blood. You ask why? It should have been his own blood that should have been shed, for God had said that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would die. But Adam's immediate death would have destroyed God's purpose with mankind almost before it had begun (Genesis 1:26-27)! Yet because of Adam's sin, man has become a creature subject to sin and ultimately death. It grabs every one of us by the throat!

This is why our world is as it is. Disagreement and conflict plague mankind at every turn and, in general, men and women ignore what the Bible has to say about such matters (Psalm 14:1-3). We are born creatures who are prone to the sickness of sin. There isn't one of us who is free of it or its consequences. Only one man has been able to resist the inbuilt tendency to sin, so that he could be described as the sinless one.

Downhill Fast!

The sad thing at the start of human history was that matters deteriorated very quickly. In the time of Noah, we



Mankind was going downhill fast!

are told that people offended God in every possible way. The historical account says:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:5-6).

Sin separates us from God, who is wholly morally pure. We are thus distanced from the God we seek to worship (Colossians 1:21). So we have a deadlock! This is the crisis that confronts the world: that mankind and God have become distanced from one another and it is our own fault! We have to come to realise that God is holy and righteous and that He cannot tolerate sin or the rebellion of sinners!

Does this mean then that God's purpose with His creation is thwarted? Does this mean that the earth will never be filled with a people who show the beauty of His character? Will there never be a race of people on the earth that will bring praise, honour and glory to the holy name of God by their faith and obedience?

God has the Answer

The answer to this dilemma does not lie in man, as one of the Old Testament prophets expressed the problem in his prayer to God:

O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing (Jeremiah 10:23-24).

Alone and unaided, man can do nothing to undo the havoc that he has brought upon himself. But don't despair, help is at hand!

What a great consolation the message of Scripture contains. It tells us what God is like and that in itself gives us hope. For God said to Moses that He is like this:

“The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6–7).

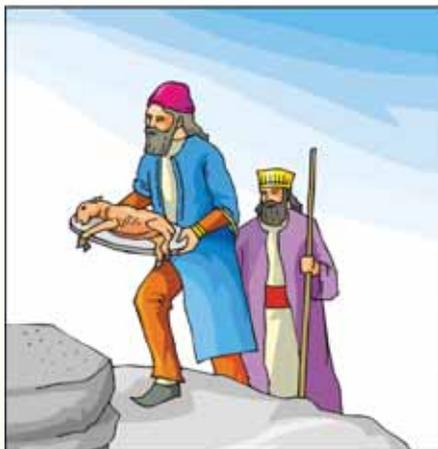
The God of heaven is abundantly merciful, but His holiness demands that sin cannot be tolerated or ignored. So, forgiveness will be given by God Himself.

Bloodshed to Aton

God’s chosen people, the Jews, never realised just how abhorrent their sin was to their God. Nor did they really appreciate why it was that there could be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Leviticus 17:11).

Wrongdoing should evoke in our hearts a feeling that we have offended our Maker and that we deserve to perish. We should all really lose our lives every time we sin! But, thanks be to God, He is merciful, gracious and longsuffering. Far back in history, the Jews were instructed to make sacrifices for their sins, thereby acknowledging their own guilt. In that way their sins were “covered” – hidden, as it were, from God’s sight. But these sacrifices were only preparatory; of themselves they could not remove sin or its effects.

The New Testament makes that observation in a letter written to believing Jews:



For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? ... But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (Hebrews 10:1–4).

God’s Gift to Us

These sacrifices all pointed forward to God’s greatest act of love and mercy. He Himself made the greatest of all possible sacrifices so that the sins of mankind could be forgiven, without compromising His righteousness or His holiness. It isn’t, as so many false religions teach, that we give up this or that in order to placate the anger of a vengeful God to get Him on our side.

Rather is it that He Himself has made the greatest of all possible sacrifices so that our sins might be forgiven and that we can be on His side (I John 4:9–10).

Yes, it was God Himself who sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for our sakes, undeserving as we are (John 3:16). This is at the very centre of God's great plan of reconciliation between Himself and His creation (Romans 5:7-8).

Jesus spent the whole of his life for our sakes and then gave his life for us, so that the barrier of sin which mankind had built between ourselves and his Father might be removed.

Just open your Bible and dwell for a moment or so on these passages of Scripture which spell out for us the abundant mercy of God. They are full of the consoling message of salvation (John 1: 29; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Colossians 1:20-23).

God's Invitation

The God of heaven Himself wants to forgive us our sins, amazing as that might seem:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

God wants all of us to repent – to come to a better mindset and to turn to Him in gratitude acknowledging and confessing our sins and pleading His forgiveness for the sake of what His Son Jesus Christ has achieved, through his trials, temptations and anguish.

The wonder of God's gracious forgiveness is extended towards us when we unreservedly pour out our confessions before Him – and only He knows just how real those confessions are! He is faithful, because of what He has promised. He is just, because of what the Lord Jesus has achieved for us.

What heart warming reassurance believers who have been immersed into the Saving Name have above all else, because reconciliation has been achieved (I John 1: 7-10). But baptism is another part of this wondrous story!

Forgiven to Forgive

Jesus taught us to ask God to "*Forgive us our debts*" and this privilege brings its own responsibilities (Matthew 6:14-15). The Bible clearly teaches us that if we are seeking the forgiveness of God then we need, in turn, to show that same quality of forgiveness towards others:

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:12-13).

Our attitude to others should not be grudging. Our forgiveness should not be a matter of last resort. It should be offered willingly and lovingly. This involves showing a certain generosity of spirit and a willingness to take the blame even when it's not our fault (I Peter 2:19-24).

The thing that should always motivate and encourage us is the example of the Lord Jesus. His is the most wonderful example of forgiveness in the whole of Scripture. Think of the Lord Jesus himself, who endured such pain and suffering as he hung on that cross of shame. Now hear and consider these gracious words:

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

Trevor A Pritchard

What Will Happen Tomorrow?

We may make our plans from day to day – even hour by hour – but we can never be sure that we shall be able to do what we plan.

If ever we needed to be convinced of the truth of that statement, events of which we are only too well aware have done just that: the Asian tsunami, terrorist bombings, the latest earthquake – these are things which ended the lives of thousands and changed the lives of countless more.

Facing the Unexpected

You and I, of course, are well aware of the way in which the unexpected can happen at any time. At least we like to think we are, all the more so as we grow older and supposedly wiser. That is why we take out insurance policies on things we own, yes, and on our lives too. If we have dependants we are not being very wise if we do not make provision for them should anything happen to us. Even so, it is often the case that we never expect disasters to befall us and are taken aback when trouble comes.

Is there anything we can do which will enable us to face the real challenges and uncertainties of life? Indeed there is, for if we think seriously about the future there is something we can do now which will

prepare us for whatever tomorrow might bring.

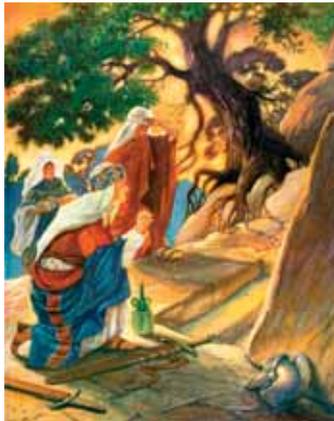
Life after Death

Nobody likes to think about the day of their own departure: all the more so if there is no belief in a life beyond the grave. Do you believe in an afterlife? If you don't, then do please read on. Many people sincerely believe there is life beyond the grave. Is this just wishful thinking or just a means of taking away some of the pain caused by bereavement? If you do believe in an afterlife, how sure are you?

Just suppose that one day you met a man whom you knew well and who you yourself had seen die an agonising death with appalling injuries. You had not only seen him die, you witnessed the burial of his corpse. Imagine that when you met this same person again – alive and well – that the marks of those injuries were still apparent. Would you then believe in resurrection from the dead? I'm sure you would!

Of course you'll know where I am coming from. This was exactly the situation when Jesus of Nazareth, having been cruelly executed by crucifixion, and then buried, appeared three days later to those with whom he had lived and worked for more than three years.

His death had come to them as a great shock. They had believed that he was the Christ – the



Messiah – the Son of God. Now they were convinced that he was alive. That wasn't easy, not at first, for it was the last thing they expected, having witnessed his death on the cross. So for the next six weeks the risen Jesus was seen by eleven of his disciples and by many others. On one occasion he was seen by more than five hundred people at once. At the end of this time the record tells us that his disciples witnessed his ascension to heaven and were told he would return to earth again just as they had seen him go.

Can We Believe?

The documents that record what we have been describing are part of the Bible. There can be no doubt that these people really did believe they had seen Jesus of Nazareth, raised from the dead. Remember this. Many of those who claimed to have seen him alive – and preached about it – faced persecution and death for their belief.

Please read these documentary accounts for yourself. Be critical and weigh the evidence, recognising that one of the strongest evidences is the fact that the Old Testament (written centuries before Jesus was born) predicted his death and resurrection.

We know that one day – unless Christ comes first – we shall all die. Because Jesus came back from the dead, does this then mean that we shall do so? Not necessarily.



At this point we must quote from the Bible – where else? This is what Paul, who claims to have seen the risen Lord, writes.

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

There are some very important things to notice in this quotation.

- ❖ Christ is the first one to have risen from the dead.
- ❖ Others will rise when he returns.
- ❖ Those who will rise are described as 'in Christ' and 'belonging to him'.

We must now face some direct questions.

- ❖ Do you believe that God raised His Son from the dead?
- ❖ Do you believe that Jesus will return?
- ❖ Are you 'in Christ' and do you 'belong to him'?

Your answers to these questions will tell you whether or not you are prepared for tomorrow – and remember, tomorrow will come – whether or not you have prepared.

I hope and pray that this short article will encourage you to think seriously about these things.

David Ogden

Daniel - The Prophet of Dreams

The last of the four great prophets of the Old Testament is Daniel. Like Ezekiel, he was taken prisoner to Babylon, where he was talent-spotted by Nebuchadnezzar, and eventually promoted to be a top-rank adviser to the king. In this position he could influence the treatment of his people, the Jews, teaching the pagan monarch to respect Israel's God. Thus we have three great prophets all active at the same time - Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel and Daniel in Babylon. God was surely watching over His people at this critical time.

Training Course

As a young man, Daniel and three of his friends were deported to Babylon where they were selected to be trained in the University there, by absorbing its language and culture. Daniel came to prominence when King Nebuchadnezzar awoke from a nightmare, but could not remember the details. The interpretation of dreams was important to the Babylonians (they were obsessed with wanting to know the future). The king grew angry when his professional advisers failed to satisfy his curiosity and resolved to kill all his advisers, including the trainees!

Daniel asked the God of Israel to reveal the dream to him. Like Joseph standing before Pharaoh centuries before, he was given details of the dream and the power to interpret it. The king, he explained, had seen a giant idol made of four different metals, which stood on feet of iron and clay. A stone from heaven struck the image, ground it to dust, then grew until it filled the whole world. Daniel was also given the interpretation, for God revealed that he had given the monarch an amazing glimpse of the whole history of the world, right up to the time of the end.

World History in Advance

The gold head of the idol, Daniel said, stood for the Babylonian Empire. It would be followed by another empire, then another, and yet another. After that there would be no more world empires until the stone from heaven brought a new kingdom that would last forever. Looking back, we can see this is precisely what happened.

When Babylon fell, the Medo-Persian Empire took over its territory. Then there were the Greeks, and finally the Roman Empire,



which, like the two long legs of the image, lasted the longest.

After Rome fell, there has been no further universal kingdom until our own day. Like iron and clay, our world is ruled by a mixture of governments, with no true cohesion between them. The next event must therefore be the return of Jesus – depicted by the stone – who is coming from heaven to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Daniel's Three Friends

Daniel's three friends also had their day. Years later, Nebuchadnezzar decided on a public display of his power and importance. He commissioned a magnificent gold-plated idol on a plinth – it stood 90 feet (27m) high – and set it up in a vast open space. Then he commanded all the governors of his great empire to attend the dedication ceremony. They poured in to Babylon from as far away as Egypt and Carchemish (nobody dare upset the king), all dressed in their best suits.

Then came the big day. The heralds shouted out in a variety of languages that when the orchestra began to play everyone must bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's new god. Obediently, the thousands of officials fell on their faces – all except three. Daniel's three friends had agreed that they could never compromise their principles. The Law of Moses said "no graven images and no bowing down to them". So they refused to bow the knee.

A furious Nebuchadnezzar commanded that they be burnt alive, but minutes later he was amazed when he saw them untouched by the flames, and an angel standing with them in the fire. When they emerged unscathed, the king decided their God must be stronger than his. So, the attendees

returned to their distant lands with the news, not of Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol, but how three brave Jews had defied him and yet been saved by their God. So much for human pride!

Prophecy Fulfilled

Daniel's prophecy is full of great stories. You must read them. He continued in the service of the kings of Babylon until he was an old man and, in 538 BC, saw the fall of the city at the hands of the Medes and Persians, just as he had predicted. He was called out of retirement to help the new administration and was appointed by Darius, the new ruler, as head of a triumvirate – of three presidents – entrusted with the smooth running of the country. Perhaps Darius found that Daniel knew the culture and customs of Babylon better than his Persian colleagues.

The other two presidents were jealous of Daniel, and plotted his downfall but could find no fault in his work, for he was a man of great integrity. So they persuaded the king to issue a decree by which anyone who asked a petition from anyone other than him for a period of 30 days would be executed.



It sounded harmless enough, and the king signed the papers. Eagerly the two envious officers paraded in front of Daniel's house. They knew he always prayed to his God from his balcony three times a day. Would he decide to pray out of sight for a month, to avoid the decree?

Daniel knew the eyes of the Jewish community would look to him for a lead. He would not compromise. On cue, he opened his windows and fell to his knees. That was all they needed. Soon the old man was arraigned in court, accused of breaking the law and was found guilty. The sentence was that he be thrown into the lion's den. But that was not the end of him. When King Darius went to the execution chamber next morning and undid the royal seal on the stone that acted as a door, the faithful prophet was still alive. His God had delivered him from the lions.

Once again a decree was issued across the new empire, honouring the God of the Jews. So both Jeremiah and Daniel were trapped in a pit, sealed with a stone, and both lived to tell the tale. They are a wonderful foreshadowing of what happened to Jesus. He too was falsely accused, executed, entombed behind a sealed stone. But, to everyone's amazement, he emerged from the grave – gloriously alive from the dead.

More Prophecies

The rest of Daniel's writings – from chapter seven onwards – are concerned with prophecies of the future, and have been shown to be completely true to subsequent history. These chapters go back to an earlier period – to the time of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king. Daniel had two sets of dreams of his own.

In the first, four animals came out of the sea in turn – a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fierce dragon-like beast. In the second he saw a contest between a ram and a male goat.

The four beasts of chapter seven match the four empires in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but this time the fourth, the Roman one, continues on in a modified form, oppressing God's people until the time of the end, when it is destroyed in the Last Day of judgment. The ram and the he-goat in chapter eight are identified within the chapter as the rulers of Persia and Greece, and history shows that Daniel was absolutely right for the power of Persia fell before the growing might of Greece.

Perhaps the most astonishing prophecy is chapter eleven, which is a long, blow by blow account of the future wars between the Seleucid kings of the north, based in Syria, and the Ptolomies of Egypt. There are around 15 kings or queens mentioned in the chapter (including the infamous Cleopatra), and the chapter includes a vivid picture of the rise of the Roman Empire, some three and a half centuries after Daniel died.

It finishes, as do so many prophecies, with a jump to the Time of the End, and Daniel's version of the destruction of a latter-day king from the North on the mountains of Israel. The aged prophet, dismayed that so many events must take place before the Kingdom of God, is comforted with these kind words:

“Go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days” (Daniel 12:13).

David M Pearce

In Jerusalem

Before he was taken from them into heaven to be with his Father, the Lord God, Jesus promised his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When given to them, this power from God enabled them to perform miracles, the first and most obvious being the ability to speak in different languages. Naturally this created quite a stir. Galilean fishermen who had never been to a language school, and others like them, were able to talk in other languages and dialects. How come?

Peter's Message

It fell to the Apostle Peter to explain. Having declared in uncompromising language that none of those affected were drunk, as some thought, Peter followed the example of Jesus, and quoted the Old Testament in support of what had happened. Like the Lord Jesus, Peter seems to have had an impressive recall of what was written, for he said:

"This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams'" (Acts 2:16-17).

It followed, he continued, that those who heard them speaking should not have been surprised. Telling his audience about the Lord Jesus, whom they had been involved in crucifying, Peter explained that God could not have left him in the grave because he was totally sinless.

*"God raised him up, having loosed the pains of death, **because it was not possible that he should be held by it**"* (Acts 2:24).

King David's Prophecy

Then Peter quotes more of his Bible, this time the words of King David in Psalm 16. It is worth reading both Joel chapter 2 and Psalm 16 to follow the argument in full.

All his audience knew about King David, who was the greatest of all the Kings of Israel. He was the author of a great many of the Psalms, and is described as *"a man after (God's) heart, who will do all my will"* (Acts 13:22). David had received a promise about One special descendant who would sit on his throne and of whom God had said: *"I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*

Peter reminded them that David was dead and that they could all go and see his grave should they so wish. So, he reasoned, what David had said did not apply to him, but to someone else. What had David said?

*David says concerning him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. **For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.** You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence'* (Acts 2:25-28).

David had therefore spoken of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a thousand years before it had actually happened. Peter quoted David again, in Psalm 110, which is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament.

“The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Peter used these words of David to show that God had made Jesus whom they crucified both *“Lord and Christ”*. Lord is a title of respect which is only used by believers of the Lord God himself and of His Son, the Lord Jesus. Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *“Messiah”* – the anointed one. Peter identified the Lord Jesus as the one who should come.

Jesus – the Son of God

Those who followed Peter’s argument carefully now realized that the one who had been crucified really was what he had claimed to be. What Pilate had written over his cross was true! Jesus was both the Son of God and the King of Israel. Some of those listening to Peter would have been part of the crowd who had stood near to Jesus shouting *“Crucify him”* to Pilate. They now realized that they were guilty of a dreadful crime. Their question is full of anguish:

When they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

Peter told them that they must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. In a way Peter had picked up both the mantle of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. He was calling men and women to repentance. That repentance had to be shown in

baptism. In the New Testament this is an act which always involves a complete covering by water. Peter’s preaching must have been particularly forceful, for about 3000 were baptized on that one day, a huge increase in the size of the infant congregation in Jerusalem.

First Century Practice

We learn also about the practice of that early group of converts. The Acts record continues:

They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

Clearly they did not regard baptism as an end, but as the beginning of a life following the apostles’ teaching, firmly based as it was on the teaching of the Lord Jesus. They kept the breaking of bread – the way the record describes the Lord’s memorial supper. A little later the chapter tells us that they were *“continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house”* (Acts 2:46).

Finally they shared prayer together, not as an afterthought, but as that part of their lives which bound them together. All these activities were seen as a full and necessary part of the life of the believer. So the teaching of the apostles was heard and known about throughout Jerusalem and *“the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:47). The Jerusalem congregation continued to grow as more and more realized the importance of the teaching of the apostles. And what they believed and taught should be the basis of our faith too.

Mark Sheppard

Signs which Jesus Gave

The Lord Jesus Christ gave various signs to help us identify the days immediately preceding his return to earth. Many are contained in what is known as the Olivet Prophecy – recorded in Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13 and Luke chapter 21.

A Nation Reborn

Probably the greatest sign that Jesus gave concerned the rebirth of the nation of Israel. This came to pass in 1948, after almost 2,000 years during which the Jewish people were dispersed among nations all over the earth. Jesus predicted that dispersion when he warned that Jerusalem would be overthrown by the Romans.

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near ... For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled ... there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles...” (Luke 21:20–24).

The Fig Tree

Immediately after these prophetic words in the Olivet Prophecy we have these words:

*Then he spoke to them a parable: “**Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.** When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.*



Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away” (Luke 21:29–33).

In Scripture, the fig tree is symbolic of the nation of Israel. For example:

*I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; **I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season.** But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved (Hosea 9:10).*

*For a nation has come up against My land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion. **He has laid waste My vine, and ruined My fig tree;** he has stripped it bare and thrown it away; its branches are made white (Joel 1:6–7).*

Further, Jesus told another parable about the nation of Israel using the same metaphor of a fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) and acted out another parable to the same effect when he cursed a fig tree which had become unfruitful (Mark 11:12-14). What Jesus was predicting was that the nation of Israel

– pictured as a fig tree – would again revive, and would do so at a time when many other nations were also achieving independence. That is exactly what has now happened to the nation of Israel.

Independence!

Against all the odds and the course of history, in the middle of the last century, on the 14th May 1948, Israel was once again established as a nation in fulfilment of Bible prophecy. In August 1947, the UN Special Committee on Palestine had recommended the termination of the British Mandate and the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State, with an international regime for Jerusalem.

Palestinian Arabs and the governments of all the Arab countries declared that they would forcibly oppose any implementation of these recommendations. The vote was taken at Flushing Meadow, New York on 29th November 1947 and was passed with a majority of 33 in favour, 13 against, 10 abstentions and 1 absent. There followed a time of unrest in the Middle East which continues to this day.

This is what Paul Johnson in his book “A History of the Jews” said of this period –

“Israel slipped into existence through a fortuitous window in history which briefly opened for a few months in 1947-8. That (too) was luck, or providence”.

How well we can see the hand of God in bringing His people home. No other nation has maintained a national identity after more than 1800 years of exile. The rebirth of the nation of Israel is a modern day miracle and a standing testament to the marvel of Bible prophecy.

The rebirth of the nation of Israel is the sign to this generation that the Kingdom of God is near. But the parable says “*the fig tree, and all the trees*”. Not only did Israel spring forth as a nation in the middle of the last century, so did many of the nations round about Israel as the colonial powers relinquished their physical presence in the Middle East. These events have a lot to do with the turmoil of the last days, as we shall see as this series continues

Some Other Signs

Jesus gave many other signs about the state of the world immediately prior to his return. Look again at the passage we briefly considered earlier in this series. It carries on from the passage from Luke chapter 21 referred to above:

... And they (the Jewish people) will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And 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. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Luke 21:24–27).

These are details about world conditions now existing and we need to think about the implications of all that in the next article of this series.

John Shepley

Stars in the Book of Job

Most biblical scholars agree that the book of Job is one of the oldest books in the Bible. It is thought to have been written 3,500 years ago.

The content is mostly a dialogue between Job and his three friends who came to comfort him after a succession of dreadful troubles overtook him and his family.

The friends quite wrongly concluded that his sufferings must be a punishment from God because of some great sin he had committed. One purpose of the book is to show that affliction may come to anyone, and that it is not necessarily a specific judgment from God. So, at the end of the book, God blesses Job and takes away his affliction, instructing him to pray for the forgiveness of his friends for treating him the way they did.

Amazing Insights

Apart from this key theme, there is a lot of general information in this amazing ancient book. In particular we find reference to several star constellations that were just as recognizable to Job as they are to us. In the following passage, God refers to several heavenly constellations when He was demonstrating to Job how little he really knew about Creation:

“Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion? Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?” (Job 38:31–33) .

* Pleiades

The Pleiades is a small constellation of stars shown in this picture.

There are only five prominent stars, but a good telescope shows many more. To

locate the group with the naked eye, one must follow along the line to the right of the three stars that form the belt of Orion and you will pass Taurus, and then see the unmistakable blue blur, which is the Pleiades.

* Orion’s Belt

Most people will have heard of the Orion constellation. It was seen by the ancients as a huge giant in the heavens and his belt was seen as a row of three bright stars, with the sword below. The star representing his head is the huge star Betelgeuse, which is 600 light years away, and is a reddish colour as seen to the left. It is about 400 times larger than our own Sun. In fact, if Betelgeuse was to be centered over it, its diameter would



reach beyond the orbit of Mars. Since there are many stars very much bigger than Betelgeuse, our Sun, by comparison, seems tiny, and ourselves upon it, as microscopic.

* **Mazzaroth**

What about Mazzaroth? It is far too large to be shown here, but it is an ancient Hebrew name for the Signs of the Zodiac, meaning a Circle of Animals, a surrounding belt of twelve constellations by which ancient mankind divided up the year into months, an arrangement that was known and used for thousands of years. This was just as God intended for at the creation of the heavenly bodies, God said:

“Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years” (Genesis 1:14) .

* **The Great Bear**

The reference to the Bear with its cubs is appropriate to the two constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, otherwise known as the Great Bear and Little Bear, constellations which are only visible in the northern skies. Each is formed by seven stars. The one ending the tail of Ursa Minor, is actually the Pole Star, or Polaris, seen at the far right of the adjacent picture. It is so close to Earth’s axis, that from our own perspective, it barely moves its position all year round, all the other stars and constellations revolving around it.

Human Limitations

From Job chapter 1, verse 3, we learn that Job was a man of renowned greatness, who would have studied these constellations. But he could not answer God’s questions about them,



nor did he understand the ordinances of heaven, most likely meaning the Laws of the Universe, for the origin of which modern science has absolutely no explanation. But, Job was being forcefully reminded that these ordinances are the work of a super-intelligent Creator: God Almighty, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He was the very One who was addressing His servant Job.

David, the sweet psalmist, began Psalm 19 with the words:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork (Psalm 19:1).

View the starry heavens on a clear night, when there is no moon, and try and find a spot well away from city street lights, and yours will be a glorious and unforgettable sight. Both Job and David had not the slightest doubt that an all-wise God was their Creator.

Truly, the more one looks at this heavenly glory, and understands the immense distances involved in constellations and galaxies, the more one is driven to the same conviction as Job and David. All this magnificence, held together by universal laws, can only be the work of Almighty God; the loving and all-wise Creator who speaks to us in His Scriptures about Salvation.

Malcolm Edwards

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