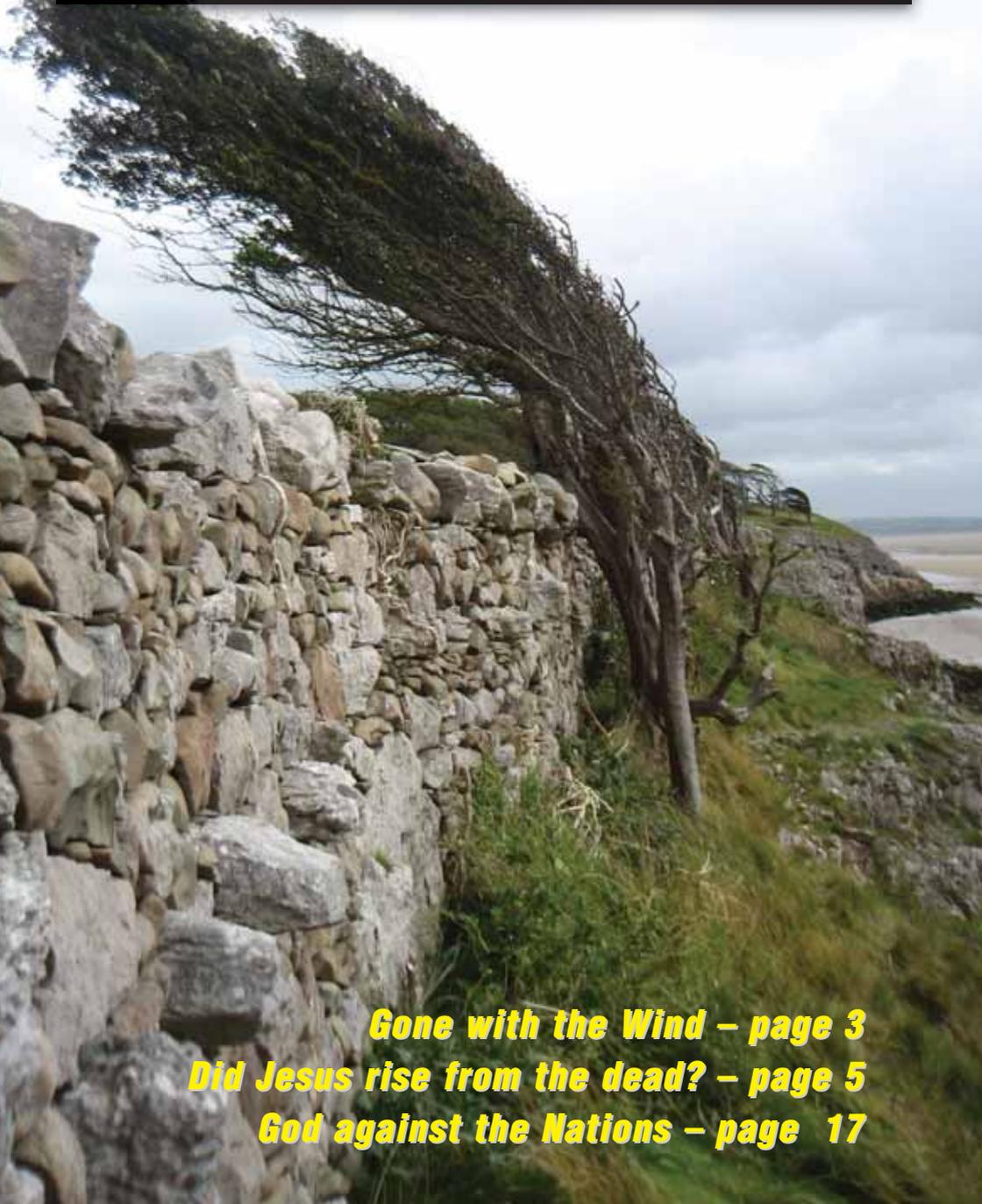


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1546



Gone with the Wind – page 3
Did Jesus rise from the dead? – page 5
God against the Nations – page 17

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

129th Year

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1546



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 men; 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.

Glad Tidings Distributors

for orders and payments

United Kingdom – Cilla Palmer, "Highlands",
78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs,
England CB7 5NR
Tel: (01638)723959 (24 hrs & Fax)
cilla@gladtidings.fsnet.co.uk

Australia – Jon Fry, 19 Macey Street, Croydon South,
Victoria, Australia, 3136
gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada – Vivian Thorp, 5377 Birdcage Walk,
Burlington, Ontario, Canada, L7L 3K5
vivianthorp@bell.net

New Zealand – Neil Todd, 14 Morpeth Place, Blockhouse
Bay, Auckland 7, New Zealand *thetodds@xtra.co.nz*

South Africa – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O.Box 50357,
Musgrave Road, Durban 4062, South Africa
antoost@mweb.co.za

U.S.A. – Pat Hemingray, 3079 Kilburn West,
Rochester Hills, USA, MI 48306

Other Countries – Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive,
Hollywood, Birmingham, England, B47 5RJ
andrew@gladtidings.me.uk

Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan, 26 The Crescent,
Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, England, B92 0BP
glad.tidings@virgin.net

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Gone with the Wind

The wind can be relentless. Day after day it can blow in the same direction, especially when coupled with an incoming tide, and that is bound to have an effect.

Look at the tree on this month's front cover and you will see that it has bent before the wind, having been entirely unable to resist it. But the wall, made of sterner stuff of course, has been unaffected.

Single or Double?

The apostle James challenged believers to remain true to their calling and urged them not to be affected by changing fashions and different belief systems. He used the picture of a wave being tossed by the wind when he said:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5–8).

Every day it is possible to see how people are affected by changing views and opinions. The fashion industry thrives on the way that people want to follow the latest style or colour, and aims to affect opinion by frequently showing new designs and presenting different stylistic ideas. But it is not only fashion designers who do that. Newspapers and magazines depend upon something new to write about. Politicians want a new idea to present, so they can be seen to be making

progress towards their stated objectives. People want new things all the time and so opinions alter and behaviours change. But the followers of Jesus recognise that fundamental things can never change and they need to be single-minded in their determination to hold fast to the teaching of Jesus about eternal things, regardless of the winds of change that are gusting around them.

All Change!

It was said of the Lord Jesus that he: *“is the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). No change is needed with the Lord because, when he was raised from the dead and exalted to sit at his Father's right hand in glory, he had attained perfection. No further change was necessary or possible, for you cannot be more perfect than perfect! But that is not yet true of his followers: all who follow Jesus have to undergo a process of change until at last they can become fully like him.

The apostle Paul started out as an enemy of Jesus and was intent upon persecuting his followers and stamping out his teaching. But Paul's life was turned upside down on the road to Damascus and he spent the rest of his time trying to make amends. That was a dramatic change – one that other believers could not accept at first. But he needed an ongoing change before his character could become more Christ like. He once said this:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working

for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

He explained that even hardships in life are God-given opportunities for us to develop our characters, if we view them in that way, difficult though that often is.

Wind Assisted

One evening Jesus spent time with a Jewish leader who was taken aback when the Lord explained that everyone who wanted to enter the kingdom of God had to be reborn, regardless of their race or background. Jews believed that as they were God's chosen people they were already destined to be part of God's ongoing purpose, when His kingdom is established on earth, in fulfilment of promises made by their prophets. Now Jesus said that wasn't the case, but that everyone needs to be reborn "of water and the spirit" (John 3:5).

Nicodemus was well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures, but he was clearly unsure what this meant, so Jesus gave him a little help when he said:

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:7–8).

Jesus was reminding the Jewish leader that the wind is uncontrollable and that you have to take it as you find it. No human power can control it, but it is seen by the effect it has. Some-

times that effect is fleeting, as when it sweeps leaves or debris away. Sometimes it has a permanent – a life-changing – effect, as with the tree we have been considering.

Day after day, week after week, year after year, that tree has been influenced by the direction the wind was taking. It could do nothing but bend before the power of the wind and grow accordingly. Even if the wind then stopped blowing, the tree would continue to grow in the direction that had begun.

Born of the Spirit

Jesus was saying that rebirth of the Spirit is just like that. The Spirit is God's power at work in a believer's life as His Word continues to influence a person. Instructed by Bible teaching, a believer will be subject to gradual change and will be influenced in a particular direction – towards the things of God rather than the things that would naturally attract someone.

For God's Word is elsewhere described as alive and powerful, able to develop in us the mind of Christ, so that we begin to think like him and take him as our example. (See James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23 and 1 Corinthians 11:1.)

The end of that process will come when God extends His power to make believers just like Jesus when he confers the gift of eternal life to those who are to inhabit the wonderful kingdom when he returns. It's a marvellous promise that "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:3). So if we want to be in that Kingdom with Jesus we need to let his teaching mould and shape our lives now, so that it can change us forever.

Editor

Did Jesus rise from the dead?

You'll hardly be surprised to know that this article is to confirm to you that he did. And what's more his being raised from the dead has a most important bearing on our salvation and our attitude towards the Bible.

Well Established

The life and death of Jesus Christ are historically corroborated facts. Every time we look at the year on the calendar or write the date, we're reminded about approximately how long ago he was born. We cannot exclude Jesus Christ from history. But what about his resurrection from the dead?

Some have found it hard to believe that such an astounding thing happened. The disciples of Jesus himself found it extremely hard to believe. One of the great ironies of Christ's resurrection is that it was his enemies (the religious leaders) who harboured the suspicion that he might rise from the dead, or at least they remembered and felt worried about what he had said about being raised from the dead. Matthew tells us what they said to the Roman governor and what was done to allay their fears:

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember, while he was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.'



So the last deception will be worse than the first".¹ Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard (Matthew 27:62–66).

You would certainly not call this a belief that Jesus would rise from the dead, but at least there was a feeling of unease camouflaged by the claim that the disciples might attempt to steal the body.

This contrasts tellingly with the disciples' unbelief and lack of understanding, and their failure to remember what Jesus had repeatedly taught them about his being put to death and then being raised again on the third day. They were devastated by his execution and, as to his being raised from the dead, nothing was further from their expectation! John tells us:

For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead (John 20:9).

To that puzzling state of affairs we'll return later because, as events unfolded, the disciples' complete unbelief

was later transformed into complete conviction that Jesus had indeed been raised to life.

Four Theories

In modern times, those sceptical of Jesus' resurrection have advanced four principal theories supposed to disprove it. Let's review each one of these in turn.

❖ The Swoon theory

The more one thinks about the "swoon" theory, the more preposterous it seems. The idea that Jesus was not really dead but revived in the cool of the tomb is outlandish when you consider the nature and extent of his injuries. Having been scourged - a punishment so cruel that many died as a result of this alone - he had been impaled on the cross by nails through his hands and feet for six hours, and then had a spear thrust through his side.

Couple these facts to the familiarity with death of the Roman execution squad who were experts at their job and could be expected to know whether a victim was dead or not. To imagine, if he was not dead, that anyone in such dire physical condition, in mortal need of urgent medical attention, could have freed himself from the grave clothes that had about 100 pounds weight of spices bound into them, could have summoned the strength to move the heavy stone securing the tomb, and then escaped past the guards, defies belief. It can only be described as naïve.

Furthermore, had Jesus done this, how could he have then convinced the disciples (and incidentally have walked from Jerusalem to Galilee in the process) that he was in reality their risen Lord, and so have changed their

sorrow and disillusion into joyful enthusiasm, their strained friendship into adoring worship? This theory just can't be taken seriously.

❖ The Wrong Tomb theory

This theory proposes that in the semi-darkness of early dawn the women disciples mistakenly went to another tomb - the wrong tomb, which happened to be empty. There they mistook a gardener for an angel. Luke 23:55 makes it clear that the women took the trouble to gain exact knowledge of the location of the tomb and they checked that the body of Jesus was in it. If, as the theory suggests, it was too early to see properly, then it would also have been too early for a gardener to be at work.

More important, Joseph of Arimathea would have known full well in which tomb he and Nicodemus had placed Jesus' body. After all it was Joseph's own new tomb. In the minds of the guards and the Jewish authorities there was no doubt that the tomb (the right tomb) that had contained the body of Jesus was now empty. The action they took demonstrates this. Matthew describes what they did:

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and



consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matthew 28:11–15).

Had the correct tomb not been empty, this bribery transaction would not have been necessary. In conspiring to spread the rumour that the body had been stolen by Jesus' disciples, there was no argument about whether the correct tomb was empty. To their dismay it was empty! Not one of the conspirators doubted it. Therein lies another irony. Those who desperately wanted an occupied tomb were forced to accept it was empty. Jesus' disciples, who actually needed it to be empty, were reluctant to accept that it was empty and jumped to the wrong conclusion that the corpse had been stolen. Somehow that has the ring of truth doesn't it?

❖ **The Hallucination theory**

This theory proposes that the disciples imagined they saw and spoke to, and were spoken to, by Jesus. It's a fact that hallucinations can come to those who are looking for and anxious to see the subject of the hallucination. However, there's absolutely no evidence that the disciples were in a frame of mind conducive to them imagining that Christ appeared to them.

Exactly the opposite was true. As mentioned earlier, they hadn't understood Jesus' teaching about his death and resurrection. They were desolated by the tragedy of his crucifixion and

believed him to be dead. The other feature of hallucinations is that they affect individuals, whereas in this case as many as 500 people at once (as Paul informed the Corinthian church) would have had to experience a hallucination, and that's unthinkable. As one writer has put it: "Why exchange a physical miracle for a psychological one?"

❖ **The Theft theory**

This follows two routes. The body of Jesus is alleged to have been stolen either by his disciples or by the Jewish religious authorities.

Take the first hypothesis. All evidence points to Jesus' friends entirely lacking the will to do such a thing, nor indeed to propagate afterwards what would have been the false idea of his resurrection. Nothing was further from their minds. They were cowed, dispirited and frightened to the point of hiding themselves away.

The Roman and Jewish authorities had taken no chances: there was a strong guard on the tomb and the stone at its entrance was sealed. So, had the disciples wanted to steal the body, they wouldn't have been able to. Even if they had succeeded in doing so, would they then have been prepared to suffer persecution, imprisonment and even death for the sake of what they knew to be a lie? That's the crowning improbability isn't it?

The second hypothesis is that Jesus' enemies, the rulers, removed the body from the tomb. But why? What would have been their motive? To do so would have only fuelled the rumours they wanted to prevent. The record of their conduct makes it clear beyond doubt that it was their resolute intention to make sure that Jesus' body stayed in the tomb. It was extremely

important to them for the body to be there.

Where was the body?

We can draw two conclusions now about these theories.

- 1 If the “wrong tomb” theory, the “hallucination” theory or the “theft by the authorities” theory had been valid, all that it would have been necessary for the religious authorities to do to utterly demolish the subsequent core teaching of the apostles that Jesus had been raised from the dead would have been to produce his corpse as evidence. No one did produce the body, despite pressing reasons to do so. No one could produce the body because there was no body. The tomb was empty. Jesus had been raised from the dead!
- 2 If the “swoon” or “theft by the disciples” theories had been correct, it’s inconceivable that the disciples would have become transformed into such fearless and committed preachers of Christ’s Gospel, as indeed proved to be the case.

Independent Accounts

The appearances made by the risen Lord Jesus Christ recorded in the four gospels, the book of the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians chapter 15 are clearly not a stereotyped repetition of a concocted story. They are independent accounts involving a variety of witnesses.

The overall effect of these appearances by the risen Christ in totally transforming the attitude and character of his disciples is probably the most

convincing single piece of evidence for the truth of Christ’s resurrection. Men, apparently in the grip of fear and overwhelmed by despair, were galvanised into courageous, dedicated and outspoken action.

Their preaching had the resurrection of Christ at its very heart. It turned the world upside down, and its effect is felt even to this day. Ask yourself the question: Would they have been prepared to so act and to hazard their lives if they themselves had not been completely convinced that the tomb was empty and that their Lord had indeed risen from the dead?

Christ and the Bible

Christ’s resurrection has made him the paramount witness to the truth of the Bible. His reverence for the Old Testament Scriptures as being his Father’s Word, his use of those Scriptures in his teaching and their detailed predictions about him, all point to the need to believe the Bible in its entirety if we are to be his true followers. If Jesus was indeed raised from the dead, and to immortal life at that, as the apostles believed and taught, then his witness to the truth of Scripture is totally vindicated.

God requires faith from each one of us. We can’t advance absolute proof that Jesus was raised from the dead, but the cumulative evidence is so strong that it is the nearest thing to proof.

The Resurrection and Us

How important is the resurrection of Christ to our salvation? I want to take you now to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Paul wrote this letter to a church with a number of problems, none of them more serious than the one he dealt with in chapter 15. In the

church at Corinth there were some who questioned the truth of Christ's resurrection. Paul took this to be a fatal departure from the true Gospel and from the message he had preached to them. This is how he opened the 15th chapter:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1–3).

As Paul pointed out, both the death and resurrection of Jesus had been “according to the Scriptures”; in other words they were in fulfilment of predictions made in what we call the Old Testament. This had not only been the Gospel message he had preached to them, but Christ's resurrection had been authenticated by numerous witnesses. In the next few verses he listed many to whom the risen Christ had appeared – and that included Paul himself – and then we are told just how indispensable is Christ's resurrection and our resurrection to salvation and life after death:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise

up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:13–19).

No Resurrection – No Hope!

Paul is saying that if there's no resurrection, there's no living Lord and Saviour, indeed no Saviour at all - a hopeless situation. No resurrection, no salvation. Notice that if there is no resurrection, even those who die “in Christ”, as he put it, have no hope and will perish.

However Paul's conviction about Christ's resurrection was total and positive:

But now 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 two different “alls” in that passage. When it says “in Adam all die” it means the entire human race, and when it says “in Christ all shall be made alive” it does not mean the entire human race, but all who are genuinely “in Christ”. What we're being

told is that Jesus' resurrection was the first of many that will lead to eternal life, for he is "the firstfruits" of a harvest yet to take place. When will that be? Can we expect to receive eternal life immediately after death? The answer is "No", but rather it will be after being raised from the dead "at his coming". As Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy,

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: (2 Timothy 4:1).

Clearly, those who are dead when Jesus comes will have to be raised in order to be judged. The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish God's Kingdom is referred to hundreds of times in the Bible.

Are we Christ's?

Thinking back to those verses from 1 Corinthians 15, we must be clear about who will be "made alive" when Jesus comes again. Remember, it said "those who **are Christ's** at his coming". This will not be everyone, but only those who belong to him and are his people. Paul was here going straight to the wonderful end result for faithful people "in Christ". The fact that judgement will intervene after the resurrection does mean that some who are raised, having had the opportunity in their lives to understand what God requires of them but having failed to respond, will not receive the gift of eternal life.

How can we become "Christ's"? The positive step that we're required to take to belong to Christ is to be baptized. Jesus taught this:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

Total immersion or "burial" in water declares the association of a responsible, believing person with Christ's death, so that we die to the enslavement of sin and are associated with the forgiveness that his sacrifice accomplished. The act of rising up out of the water of baptism joins us to the resurrection of Christ so that we are able to begin to walk in a new way of life now, with the hope of being raised from death to life in the future, as Christ was. The letter to the Romans chapter 6 details this teaching.



Summary

There is ample supporting evidence to help us have sufficient faith to be convinced that Jesus really did rise from the dead.

- ✓ *His resurrection sets the pattern for our hope of life after death.*
- ✓ *It leads to the outcome God has designed for us - to be like Jesus in mind, body and nature in his Father's Kingdom on the earth.*
- ✓ *We're told what is expected of us now to become Christ's and to belong to him. The way is still open.*

What's your response going to be?

Mark Sawyer

God Reveals Himself

God tells us all He wants us to know about Himself and His purpose, in the Bible.

The Bible is complete in itself. It consists of sixty-six sections (each one called a 'book'). It begins, in Genesis chapter 1, by explaining that God created the earth and all the things that live on it, including us.



When the work was completed, everything was described as 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). Next we are told how this 'very good' state was spoiled when man disobeyed his Creator. But, to recover the situation, we are told how God then began a process that would repair the damage, and make all things 'very good' again, in the course of time.

Man was shown that he could be forgiven if he believed what God said, if he confessed his sins, and offered sacrifices that would teach him important lessons. But he had to be willing to learn.

God's solution

As the Bible progresses, this 'way of salvation' is made steadily clearer.

Generation after generation, mankind made the same mistakes as the first man Adam. All humans failed to some extent, and sooner or later everyone died. Then at last Jesus came, born of a woman and truly human as we all are, but begotten by the power of God. He succeeded where we have all failed.

Unlike us, Jesus resisted all temptation and lived a perfect life. Then he allowed wicked men to crucify him and he died, of his own free will, as the perfect sacrifice. In that way Jesus put this troublesome human nature behind him forever, because God his Father raised him to perfect immortal life.

After that the apostles of Jesus went out into the world inviting everyone to follow Jesus, to believe his teaching and sincerely try to live the same way. Those who obeyed this call would be forgiven and have the hope of enjoying eternal life when Jesus returns as King. Then the earth, which sinful men and women have so misruled, will be filled with God's glory.

The Bible ends with beautiful descriptions of the earth and its people when that 'very good' state has been restored. Sin, pain, sorrow, and even death will be gone forever, and God will be praised by all (Revelation chapters 21 & 22).

Start to Finish

So the Bible tells the whole story, from beginning to end. For each period of history it gave men and women guidance as to the way they should live their lives. In the period before Moses (before about 1400 BC), people such

as Abraham: “obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5).

The Law given through Moses: (Exodus-Deuteronomy)



This God-given law added details to those basic principles of living so that the whole Jewish nation could be governed by them. When that Law was complete, all were warned:

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32).

Later, the great prophet Isaiah wrote:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isaiah 8:20).

The Coming of Christ

When the Lord Jesus was born, God’s revelation of what He is like reached a new phase, as the apostle explains:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these

last days spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2).

Jesus calls himself the ‘Alpha and Omega’ (Rev 22:13). Alpha & Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In any language, everything is said by using the letters of the alphabet or their equivalent. So it is that God reveals everything that He wants us to know in and through Jesus, who said “*the Scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35).

Jesus is God’s “*Word made flesh*” (John 1:14). The last message sent to us from Jesus before he comes back as King is the Book of Revelation. In it he warns that if we add to his words, God will add to us all the plagues described there, and if we take away from his words, God will take away our hope of eternal life (Rev. 22:18-19). So, in the Bible, and perfected in the work of Jesus, God’s revelation to us is complete.

Warning & Encouragement

Sadly, many religious men and women in every age have not accepted this. Some ‘added’ traditions that Jesus said “*made the word of God void*” (of no effect)”(Matthew 15:3-8). Others added visions and revelations that they thought they had received. Others have ‘taken away’, either by rejecting parts of the Bible they do not agree with, or by neglecting them. Some people described in the Acts of the Apostles show us the right way:

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

John Woodall

“Why don’t you practise what you preach?”

Many people ask this question, often pointing out that some non-believers seem kinder and more selfless than believers. Yet it is not really surprising if some Christians urge others to succeed where they fail.

Doctors and nurses give lifestyle advice that they themselves do not follow. Parents urge their children not to repeat their own mistakes, and teachers tell students to adhere to standards that they sometimes breach. Although there is no excuse, such examples show that the phenomenon is not peculiar to Christianity. Nor is it new.

God Does Not Like Hypocrisy

Several times Jesus criticised the Jewish leaders for their hypocrisy. In Matthew chapter 23 he listed several ways in which the scribes and Pharisees were failing, although they had set themselves up to be examples to the people. He criticised them for being proud and self-righteous, for replacing God’s commandments with human tradition, and for picking and choosing which commandments they obeyed. Here’s an example:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Matthew 23:23–24).



In a similar way, the apostle Paul criticised people who had double standards:

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? (Romans 2:21–22).

Why do Christians Fail?

There is a popular belief that we are all basically good. The Bible, however, consistently describes us in a very different way:

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

Jesus said that:

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies... (Matthew 15:19).

With the unique and notable exception of Jesus, everyone in the Bible, including those who are deemed faithful, failed. Some did so dramatically.

God described king David as “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22), but David committed both adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11 & 12).

Peter was a very enthusiastic disciple of Jesus whose faith enabled him to walk – at least for a short time – on water (Matthew 14:26-29). Nonetheless, when under pressure, Peter three times denied that he knew Jesus (Luke 22:54-62).

There is Forgiveness

David and Peter were both forgiven for what they had done, because they repented. The apostle John re-iterated that we all fail (the Bible calls that “sin”), but assures us that God will forgive true believers:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8–10).

However, we cannot use the kindness of God as an excuse for doing wrong. Paul argued very strongly against this:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1-2).

Moreover, Paul described the continual battle that he waged against his natural instincts thus:

The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (Romans 7:19),

And elsewhere:

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27).

These Christians were well aware of their failings, and Paul acknowledged the danger of his becoming a hypocrite. Their preaching was consistent with their practice.

Some Phony Christians

There is another sad aspect to this. Some professing Christians are not truly faithful, and we cannot always identify the true from the counterfeit. The distinction will be made clear however when Jesus returns. That is just what Jesus said would happen:

Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:22–23).

Do Not Make This Your Excuse

If you imagine that you or anyone can be the perfect Christian who never succumbs to temptation, then you delude yourself. The Lord Jesus NEVER sinned, and he died for us so that our sins can be forgiven. His followers all make mistakes, but that shouldn’t be your excuse. However, there is NO other way by which we can be saved (Acts 4:10-12).

Kind deeds, however selfless, are not enough – we need to follow Jesus. Do not make the failings of others your excuse for not obeying the call of the gospel.

Anna Hart

Antioch in Pisidia

Following the conversion of Cornelius, Peter had been put in prison and released, and Paul had moved to Antioch in Syria, having been sought out by Barnabas.

A direct intervention by the Holy Spirit instructed the members there to select Barnabas and Saul for a special work. So they sailed to Cyprus, which was Barnabas' home country, preaching there before moving on to Antioch in Pisidia.

Another Antioch?

This Antioch had been founded by Seleucus Nicator and named after his father Antiochus. Now it was the centre of military and civil administration for the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia. On this trip into Asia, Paul seems to have adopted the leading role, and when they joined the Jews of Antioch in the synagogue it was Paul who responded to the invitation for a “word of encouragement” after the reading of the Law and the Prophets. As we read the report of Paul's words it becomes obvious that he had listened carefully to Stephen's defence, just before he was killed, for it was almost as if Stephen was speaking:

Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness (Acts 13:16–18).



It is as if Stephen's words had been burned into Paul's mind. Paul talks of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness, of the kings they asked for and, in particular, King David. This provides him with the link to the Lord Jesus Christ:

“From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Saviour – Jesus” (Acts 13:23).

Forgiveness through Jesus

Before saying any more about the Lord Jesus, Paul talked about the work of John the Baptist, whose mission had been to proclaim repentance to the people of Israel. Repentance is firstly an acknowledgement of sin and then a change in the direction of a person's life. Clearly Paul felt that this message needed to go far beyond the boundaries of Israel, it had to go to Jews everywhere, also to Gentiles. Having established the need for repentance, Paul then talked about the work of the Lord Jesus. He was scathing in his condemnation of those who failed to recognize that the one who was born in Bethlehem and who preached in the land of Israel was actually the one they

had been reading about in their Bible.

Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause for death in him, they asked Pilate that he should be put to death (Acts 13:26–28).

There must have been a sense of dreadful poignancy for Paul in those words. After all he had been one of those who had failed at first to recognize or understand Jesus. Yet, Paul continued, all was not lost. The Lord God had raised Jesus from the dead. He now began to quote the Old Testament, remembering that his audience would be predominantly Jewish.

In quick succession, he quoted Psalm 2, Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16, words his audience would have known well. Then he talked again of David, making the contrast, just as Peter did on the day of Pentecost, that David who wrote the Psalms was dead. David “saw corruption”, but Jesus was raised from the dead. It is in the name of Jesus that Paul and Barnabas were able to preach forgiveness of sins. He went on to explain that those who believe in Jesus are freed from sin in a way which was not possible under the law of Moses.

Huge Response

As in all the accounts of great speeches in the Acts, Luke must be giving us a précis of what Paul said, but he carefully included Paul’s final appeal on that occasion.

The impact of all Paul said was obvious, and they had to promise to return on the next Sabbath day to continue the message. There was much discussion of what had been said after the synagogue service had finished, and during the following week the message of what Paul had been saying had got round the city, for, “on the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44).

Reaction!

Sadly this upset many of the Jews from Antioch, who could not bear the thought that Gentiles could also be included in God’s salvation. So Paul and Barnabas had to declare that if the Jews would not hear, then they would take the message to the Gentiles. Again he was able to quote the Old Testament in support of this, for God had said of the work of His Servant, the Lord Jesus:

It is too small a thing that you should be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

Many Gentiles in Antioch did believe and a congregation of believers was established there.

Sadly, as before, the Jews made trouble, and the missionary pair – Paul and Barnabas – were ejected from the city and driven out of the district. They set off for Iconium, the next place they were to preach, leaving behind a group of disciples who were “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52).

Mark Sheppard

God against the Nations

We saw in previous articles that there is a time coming when God will once again openly intervene in the affairs of this world to save it from destruction, and to establish His righteousness in the earth. Man has once again corrupted God's way upon the earth (compare Genesis 6:12) and He will bring the world, and by extension its people, to account. He will do this because of man's wickedness and the way the nations in general have dealt with His people.

God's Righteous Wrath

In Jeremiah chapter 25 the prophet is given a cup of wine, which symbolises God's anger (compare Psalm 75:7-8), and is told to insist that all the nations drink of it. Initially this concerned the nations round about Israel but, as we have already seen, prophecies normally have a dual fulfilment and this one applies to the latter days as well.



In this chapter God says:

“For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by My name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth,” says the Lord of hosts. “Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: ‘The Lord will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will roar mightily against His fold. He will give a shout, as those who tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise will come to the ends of the earth – for the Lord has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh. He will give those who are wicked to the sword,’ says the Lord.” Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. “And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground” (Jeremiah 25:29–33).

God's Accusation

An indictment is a formal accusation. These are terrifying words for it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). We read in the prophecy of Joel:

For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of

Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land (Joel 3:1–2).

This will most likely apply first of all to the nations around Israel, but by extension all nations because of the many alliances which today exist between the more developed nations and the nations of the Middle East. The valley of Jehoshaphat is thought to be an allusion to God's marvellous deliverance of His people in the days of King Jehoshaphat, when God delivered His people from a great confederacy comprising Ammon, Moab and Edom (2 Chronicles 20).

United Assault

Will Israel first of all suffer a final persecution from the nations round about before God intervenes? There are some suggestions in the Bible that this may be the case. Psalm 83 seems to suggest a final united assault by the nations round about Israel in the latter days.

Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold, your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more" (Psalm 83:1–4).

The Psalm goes on to list all the nations which were then round about Israel with a plea for God to act and to

overthrow them. Some Scriptures also seem to suggest a future desolation for God's witnesses (e.g. Revelation 11:1-13). There is also a hint of this desolation in the first part of the passage from Jeremiah 25, which we considered above. Whether or not Israel will be overthrown once again before the Lord comes, the time is coming when God will enter into judgment with the nations.

Gathered to Judgement

The Book of Revelation describes the way in which God will gather the nations of the world together to judge them:

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.



For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." And they gath-

ered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (Revelation 16:12–16).

Armageddon

Whatever the actual meaning of the symbols used in the above verses, the intent is clear. God will gather the nations of the world to judgement for He has an indictment against the nations. Although the word “Armageddon” has become proverbial for a time of unprecedented cataclysm, this is the only time it appears in the Bible.

There are many suggestions as to its meaning as there is no literal place called by this name. One of the most popular is that it refers to the valley of Megiddo in the land of Israel. Another is that it literally means “a heap of sheaves in the valley of threshing”. Regardless of how these prophecies eventually come to pass, it is obvious it will be a time of great distress for the peoples of the world.

For the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up – and it shall

be brought low ... The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day, but the idols He shall utterly abolish. They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily. Sever yourselves from such a man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he? (Isaiah 2:12,17–22).

No wonder, as we considered before, it will be a time of trouble such as never was.

John Shepley

God Rules!

One God, the Father, LORD of all,
Almighty, and All wise,
Rules o’er the nations of the earth
With ever watchful eyes.

Lest we forget what God has done,
Or what He still will do,
He gave to us His written Word,
For Gentile, and for Jew.

We need to read it carefully,
So we can meditate
Upon the wonder of God’s love,
For it is very great.

God gave His son to show the way,
A sacrifice for sin:
Now we are asked to cultivate
A Christ-like mind within.

Gwen Marley

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United Kingdom

The Christadelphians, Freepost,
MID 30912, Birmingham, B27 6BR
libraryCALS@btconnect.com

Africa & Europe

Christadelphian Bible Mission,
404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham,
B28 8SZ, UK *requests@cbm.org.uk*

The Americas

CBMA, 19111 Kinsie Street,
Northridge, California, USA, 91324
ksommerville@unitedagencies.com

Caribbean

CBMC, Box 55541, Unit 119, 15280,
101 Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada,
V3R 0J7 *philsnobelen@shaw.ca*

India

T Galbraith, GPO Box 159,
Hyderabad, 500001, India

South and East Asia

ACBM, PO Box 42, Wallacia, NSW
2745, Australia
coelmada@ozemail.com.au

Local Information