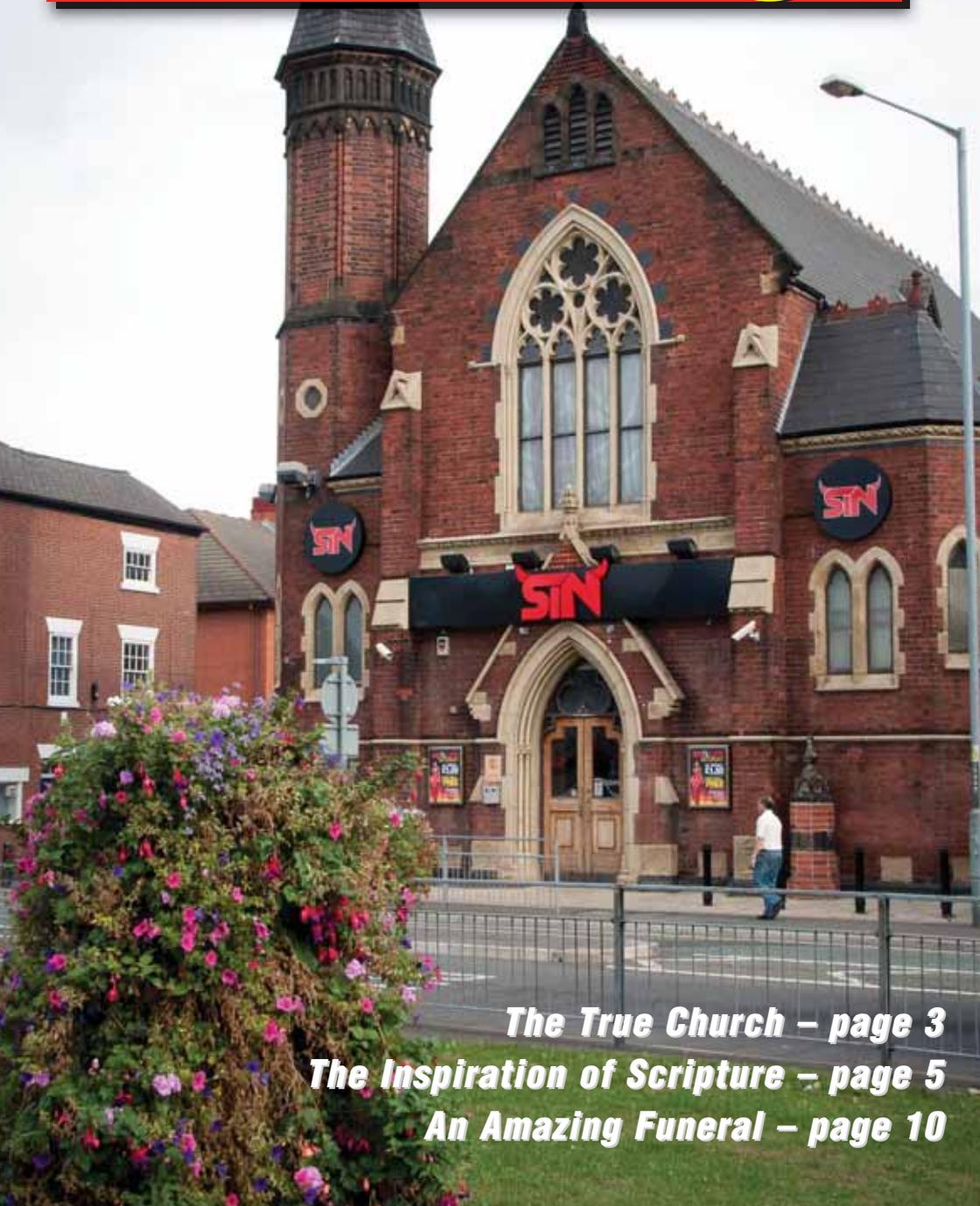


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1549



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An Amazing Funeral – page 10

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

129th Year

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

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

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The True Church

Many church buildings have become a liability rather than an asset. Once constructed in a way that was designed to glorify God, with spires that pointed upwards and architecture that was meant to inspire the worshipper, many churches have become expensive to maintain and inconvenient places in which to worship.

As a result, and because of dwindling attendances, many have been sold and the buildings have been put to other uses. They might now be offices, homes, warehouses, banks or night clubs, like the one in Chesterfield, a market town in Derbyshire, in the north of England, shown on this month's front cover.

Temple Worship

In Old Testament times when Israel was a nation ruled over by God's appointed kings they were instructed to build God a Temple which became the focal point of the nation's worship. It replaced a temporary tented structure called The Tabernacle which had been constructed during their wilderness wanderings and which was their religious centrepiece for many years, until the time of Solomon (about 970 BC).

The Temple Solomon built was to be "exceedingly magnificent" (1 Chronicles 22:5) and was designed to attract the religious attention of nations around Israel and their rulers, who might then worship the God of Israel. But that ideal was seldom achieved and often the building fell into decay and disuse, or it was defiled when the building was dedicated to the worship of heathen Gods.

Temple Tour

The prophet Ezekiel was once given in vision a tour of this very Temple which was being used to worship many different false gods. They had erected idols, painted images on the temple walls, were offering incense to these idols, weeping for a fertility god named Tammuz that was supposed to die in winter and live again in the spring, and even worse things:

He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east. (Ezekiel 8:16).

They had turned their backs upon the one true God and were looking elsewhere for something different to worship and the outcome was disastrous for them. Within a few years that temple had been destroyed and the nation had been taken captive and had been deported to far-off Babylon.

Jesus and the Temple

Seventy years later a small number of exiles returned and resettled in Jerusalem and they rebuilt the temple, as best they could. But it was much later, only about 15 years before the birth of Jesus that King Herod redeveloped it and made it into a magnificent architectural feature once again. This was the temple that Jesus visited on several occasions and which he denounced as a place of trade and commerce rather than true religion. It



Model of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem

had become a place where the religious establishment made money, but imposing their own commercial regulations and by controlling monetary rates of exchange. This was what Jesus said on the first occasion when he drove out the traders:

He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" (John 2:16).

When challenged to show the Jews a sign of his authority to make such pronouncements, Jesus made a statement that would be quoted against him years later, when he was being tried by the Jewish authorities. This was what the Master said, and what the apostle John later recalled:

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body (John 2:19–21).

Jesus and the Church

With the coming of Jesus, many things changed fundamentally. Now there is no need for ritual sacrifice, keeping

feast days, having a special category of priests, special clothes, incense and prescribed offerings. Nor are the followers of Jesus now asked to build a temple or a church in which to worship God. Indeed the temple at Jerusalem was demolished by the Romans less than 50 years after Jesus denounced the religion that was practised there as false and manmade. Instead, his followers met in homes, in rented buildings, in the open air – wherever practical and achievable. For they had come to realise an important truth: the building they had thought to be sacred was in fact profane. It had become a place occupied by Sin, rather than by God – just like the nightclub in Chesterfield.

Jesus was and is the head of the church, and his people are those who acknowledge his headship and come to God through him. They need no church buildings, no priesthood and none of the trappings of religion that some people think important.

For the church comprises the people, not the building, and Christ seeks to live among his people, who try to live according to his standards, following his teaching, awaiting the time when he will return as king to reign on earth. The true church comprises the household or family of God and we should all want to be part of that family, living together with others who believe what the Bible teaches and who share that true and living hope.

I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

Editor

The Inspiration of Scripture

The Bible makes some amazing statements about itself which we need to consider carefully.

Throughout its pages it claims to be the Word of a God who reveals things that are otherwise unknown (Daniel 2:22, I Corinthians 2:9-10, Ephesians 3:3-5). The phrase “saith the Lord” appears over 600 times in the Old Testament, and large sections of the Law of Moses and of the prophets are presented as God’s own words. The Bible claims to be ‘inspired’:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

What is Inspiration?

‘Inspiration’ is the term for the process by which God revealed his messages in written text, although we are not always told how this happened. It is clear that some writers did research (e.g. Luke 1:1-3 and Acts 1:1-2), others were instructed only to write (Exodus 34:27-28), and some even tried to resist, but were impelled to communicate the message even so (Jeremiah 20:9).

As Bible readers we have two alternatives, either:

- 1 we accept that the written words are God-given, or
- 2 it is something else: a product of human thinking.



A Common View Today

Until the end of last century the words of the Bible were regarded as God-given, but nowadays scripture is not always regarded as ‘absolute’ truth. Arguments rage about which parts of the Bible are reliable or true. Some contend that it contains the opinions of men mixed with divine truth and consequently that it presents a naïve and only partly true account of God and His ways.

For such people, truth is seen to ‘evolve’, in the sense that as time goes on the ‘truth’ changes, similar to the way in which old scientific theories are discarded for new ones that better explain what we can observe. Consequently, many people now regard the Old Testament as less reliable than the New Testament.

Only Partly Inspired?

According to this view, Scripture is only partly inspired, containing the misconceptions, fabrications and delusions of human writers, and the only way to distinguish between truth and part-truth is to use human judgement. Human opinion is therefore rated as

having equal authority with Scripture. Consequently, human ideas that have developed after the Bible was written are presented as more valid than the words of the Bible itself.

Absolute truth, people argue – if it exists at all – can only be obtained by a combination of Scripture, church tradition and human opinion. In other words, people think they can come to an understanding of God in ways other than by reading the Bible.

Jesus and his Apostles

These opinions are radically different from those Scriptures that record words of the apostles and the Lord Jesus himself. It is clear that Jesus held the Old Testament in the highest regard. He once said that:

...one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all be fulfilled (Matthew 5:18)

A jot is the smallest Hebrew letter and a tittle is the smallest stroke in a Hebrew letter. The use of these words indicates that Jesus had absolute confidence in the finest detail of the law.

This is surely consistent with the view that the words in the Bible are God-given and are not the product of a mere human mind. Thus the apostle Paul was quite happy to construct an argument on the basis of a single word in the Old Testament, pointing out that the word was singular and not plural. Writing about a promise that God made to Abraham, he observes:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).

In the same way, the apostle Peter treats the words of prophecy as absolute, saying that:

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

Peter held the view that:

"the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1:25) – in direct contrast to the glory of man which withers and falls away.

Further Examples

There are many Biblical examples of writers who were convinced that the Bible is the inspired and absolutely reliable message from God.

❖ **Matthew** frequently quotes the Old Testament to provide evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah, using phrases like *"So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet"* (Matthew 1: 22).

❖ **Jesus** criticised the religious leaders of his day for adding their own interpretations to the commandments in the Law of Moses in such a way that they had become religious traditions, saying:

"...Why do you also transgress the commandments of God because of your tradition?... Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." (Matthew 15:1-6).

❖ Answering opposition about his claim to be the Son of God, **Jesus** quoted from one of the Old Testament Psalms as authoritative and as revealing an unbreakable truth

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"?' If He called them

gods, to whom the word of God came (**and the Scripture cannot be broken**), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" (John 10:34-36).

Implications for us

If the Lord's view of Scripture is correct then the Bible is the highest possible written authority. Later revelations from God build on but never, ever, contradict earlier ones. If we do not understand or do not like what a Scripture says then the problem lies with us rather than with the text.

The Bible reveals God's character in a way that is unique; it alone tells us what He wants us to do. It is the God-

given means by which we can find out about the salvation God offers us and it is self-interpreting – so there is no need for human philosophy to explain what it means.

There is no other way of learning about God. The claim that all religions ultimately worship the same God is simply untrue. It is therefore absolutely imperative to understand its message and to obey it. Deciding on this matter is one of the most important things we can do – it is a matter of life and death. Writers in this magazine regard the Bible as God's inspired message and strive to understand it, and know what we must do if we are to inherit God's gift of eternal life.

Anna Hart

The Holy Scriptures

The Scriptures of God are quite truly amazing
Preserved down the ages by God's people, the Jews;
Though they speak of their shame and their unfaithfulness,
Yet these were the custodians the Creator did choose.

One would think they would rather have seen their destruction
Than give glaring indictments of their endless disgrace;
To read how stiff necked they were, serving their idols:
Did they think these were written about some other race?

So we in our time have been honoured to read them
And learn from their pages how we can be saved
By applying ourselves to the True Hope of Israel
Learn lessons from how God's own people behaved.

But let us not say they were worse than we are
And think that we never will be led astray,
For our nature is weak and needs a firm rein
And only the Scriptures can teach us The Way.

Peggy Rawson

Malachi the Messenger

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. After he died there was an interlude of four hundred years with no direct revelation from God. Malachi's last message was that God's people must prepare for the appearing of their King.

God's Messenger

Malachi's Hebrew name means "messenger", and his book revolves around that idea. From his comments we can see that he lived after the time of Haggai and Zechariah, because the Temple was rebuilt and the priests were offering the sacrifices commanded by the Law of Moses. But the prophet condemns the attitude of these holy men. As priests, they should have been God's messengers, carrying His word to the people, but instead they were only interested in making a profit for themselves.

The early part of the prophecy is in the form of a dialogue. God makes a statement to the priests, and Malachi expresses the reply they would be likely to give, or perhaps did give to his prophetic challenges. For example, in chapter one God accuses the priests of despising Him.

"How have we despised you?" they cry.

"Because", God replies, "you have offered blind, lame and sick animals as sacrifices".

Under the Law only a blemish-free offering was acceptable, because the sacrifice of lambs and goats pointed forward to the death of Jesus, who was to be morally perfect, and sin-free. But it was convenient to dispose of second

grade animals as sacrifices, because they could not be sold for breeding.

"Try giving your Persian Governor a present of sick animals", says God. "Will he be impressed? Then how do you think I feel? I am a great King, and my name will be feared among the nations. Cursed be the cheat who has a perfect ram in his flock, but substitutes a reject" (see Malachi 1:8-14).

It is a lesson we too need to heed. God is a great King, and we must offer Him our whole heart, not the things that are left over in our life.

Failed Messengers

The priests were failing for another reason too. In those days, if you had important news to pass on, but could not travel yourself, you paid a messenger to take it for you. Back in the time of Moses, God had chosen the descendants of Levi, son of Jacob, as His messengers who were to teach His people His commandments.

My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, And I gave them to him that he might fear Me ... For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts (Malachi 2:5-7).

Sadly, the priests in Malachi's day were no longer sharing God's message with the people.

"You have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts (Malachi 2:8).

Without the vital knowledge of right and wrong, the people were wandering like lost sheep. This is just the problem we all face today, for in our society there is a marked failure to teach children about God, and so they turn to drink, drugs and crime.

Another Messenger

However, God was going to act. He was going to send another messenger called *'the Messenger of the Covenant'*. This Messenger would, said the prophet, come suddenly to God's Temple, and he would purify the sons of Levi, so they would offer the proper offerings to God (Malachi 3:1-4).

With the New Testament in hand, we can see that the promised Messenger was Jesus, who faithfully taught the people the right way to live. He did indeed turn up unexpectedly in the Temple in Jerusalem. Once, with a whip of rope he drove out the evil Scribes and Pharisees who were making big profits from sacrifices and money-changing in the house of God. It was a final warning. Forty years later the Temple would be burned with fire, and the Law of Moses would come to an end.

A Herald

Malachi's last chapter looks ahead, as the prophets always do, from the problems of his own day to a future Day of the Lord. Before that *"great and awesome day of the Lord"*, Malachi said, God would send Elijah the prophet to prepare the people (Malachi 4:5, 6). These words bridge the four hundred years that separate the Old from the New Testament. We know from the gospels that John the Baptist, the next prophet who would come, would have the same spirit as Elijah, that lonely figure who battled

against apostasy in the time of the Kings. He would prepare Israel for the appearing of Jesus. He was the one about whom Isaiah had prophesied:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God ...and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 40:3-5).

The Day of the Lord

Malachi's last words look beyond the coming of Jesus in the first century, and the fiery judgment that fell on Jerusalem in AD 70. They speak of the future, too, when Jesus, God's messenger, will come back from heaven to judge the hearts of all men. Those who stubbornly refused to heed his message will be burned up like stubble in the harvest field:

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves..." (Malachi 4:1-2).

Those who have listened, and feared God, will greet the Lord Jesus with joy, like calves released from the stall after the dreary days of winter. For them, says the prophet, the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in his beams. That's the choice for everyone who reads these words: to believe that Jesus is coming and to prepare for that great Day of the Lord.

David M Pearce

An Amazing Funeral

It was a somber event, for the Queen had ordered a special funeral for one of her Prime Ministers – Margaret Thatcher. Everything was done precisely, and thousands flocked along the streets to see such a rare ceremony. Millions around the world watched it on their television screens. It was a never to be forgotten sight.

Family Affair

Later that day I thought about another funeral, this one attended by a much smaller crowd comprising family members and well wishers. The Lord Jesus had visited his friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary but unfortunately had to leave as violence was threatened from people in nearby Jerusalem. Then a message was received saying that Lazarus was ill but, astonishingly, the Lord did nothing, despite his great love for the family. As the Son of God, Jesus had unrivalled powers to heal the sick, but it was dangerous for him to return to that locality.

Nevertheless, after two days, Jesus announced to his disciples that they would return. The disciples were aghast and thought that a visit would be suicidal. When Jesus told them that Lazarus had fallen asleep, but that he was going there to wake him up, they all thought it best to let nature take its course and believed that Jesus' friend would get better after a good sleep. So Jesus had to explain just how serious the situation was:

Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him" (John 11:14–15).



Many Mourners

When they arrived Lazarus had been dead four days, but there were still people mourning his loss.

Lazarus must have been a man of some standing, or the family must have been well regarded in Bethany, for we read that *"many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother"* (John 11:19).

When Martha heard that Jesus had come she slipped away to see him privately and what she said demonstrated her absolute belief in Jesus' ability to heal:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you" (John 11:21–22).

The reply Jesus gave explains the true Christian hope of life after death. He did not say that Lazarus was better off where he was (in heaven), or that Lazarus was now looking down on them from above. This is what the Master said:

"Your brother will rise again" (John 11:23).

Here is an opportunity for us to compare our own understanding with Martha's beliefs, for she was someone who had been taught by the Lord himself. This is what she said in reply:

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24).

Could we reply as she did? Do we believe what the faithful follower of Jesus believed?

Stunning Words

There followed some words from the Saviour that have echoed in thousands of hearts from that day to this. Jesus had once said that the time would come when those in the grave would hear his voice and those who heard would live (John 5:25). Now he said this:

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26).

Have we sufficient faith to believe too? Does our understanding of Scripture accord with what Jesus was claiming, and is resurrection the hope we share, as the key to life after death? Martha had complete conviction, about both those things, as her words show:

She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

Her sister Mary was then called, and she said the same as her sister, that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would never have died. Clearly the sisters had shared those thoughts together many times.

Jesus Wept

The Lord looked around and wept. It was a touching scene and a reminder that Jesus was a man made in all points like us (Hebrews 4:15). However, his were not only tears of grief, for he felt angry that so many of his countrymen had not heeded his words, despite the wonderful signs he had given them.

Instead their refusal to believe that he was their God-given Saviour meant that people would carry along a path that would inevitably lead to death and the consequent sorrow of those who mourn. But Jesus has come to remove that sorrow and to show us a better way, so he ordered that the stone that sealed the tomb be moved away. Martha was horrified, and said that as he had been dead four days his body would have decayed.

But the Lord replied with such positive words:

"Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

Jesus prayed, then uttered a loud cry: *"Lazarus come forth."*



The crowd must have fallen back with fear as the man that had been dead came forth, still wrapped in his graveclothes. Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go." Surely Lazarus must have been filled with gratitude, and those who had witnessed this resurrection must have been amazed. But not everyone was pleased.

Despite the magnitude of the miracle, the enemies of Jesus decided that they had to kill him, and Lazarus, for good measure (John 12:10).

Issues for Us

The whole incident poses some question for us to ponder.

- ❖ Whose side would we have been on – that of the believers or the unbelievers?

- ❖ Will we die in hope of being raised from the dead?
- ❖ Do we have a firm expectation of standing again on that thrilling day to praise God?
- ❖ Do we share the faith of those who were the first century followers of the Lord Jesus?

It doesn't matter how small or how big our funeral procession is, as long as we go to sleep knowing that we have a positive faith, like that of Martha and Mary. No man can offer us such a free gift. We neglect it at our peril. But surely we will not turn away. There will be thousands praising God on that superb day when Jesus returns. Pray God that you may be there.

Ken Clark

Only One Thing

Martha was harassed with much preparation,
And many things worried and troubled her mind;
While Mary sat still at the feet of her Master,
Absorbing his words, which gave light to the blind.

*"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me
To work all alone? Bid her help me to serve".*
Her words showed frustration, impatience and anger,
One could tell at a glance she was losing her verve.

Then Jesus replied in a voice calm and soothing,
He told her he knew she was troubled and stressed,
But Mary had chosen the only thing needful,
And no-one could take that good part she possessed.

So what of ourselves? Only one thing is needed,
To seek first God's Kingdom, and all that implies,
To grow in His Word, and to love His commandments,
To do what is good, what is right in God's Eyes.



Colleen Simons

A Great Council

It is often the case when a new group of people come together that there can be tensions and misunderstandings. It was like that with the early followers of the Lord Jesus as they sorted themselves out. One problem which rumbled on for a long time during the first century was whether the early Christians needed to keep the Old Testament law or not; in particular, whether circumcision was necessary for the Gentiles.

The Issue

When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to report on the work they had done in their first journey together, they came across a group of men from Judea who were teaching that *“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”* (Acts 15:1). In fact the rite of circumcision had been introduced well before Moses, in the time of Abraham. But was it really obligatory for all believers? Paul and Barnabas said it was not and considerable debate took place in Antioch, so that eventually it was decided they must consult the congregation in Jerusalem, and in particular the Apostles of the Lord Jesus. Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed as representatives of the Antioch congregation.

The visitors from Antioch were warmly welcomed, but before long they were confronted by others who also insisted that circumcision was necessary to be saved.

Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them (the Gentile

believers), and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).

The Discussion

When considering this problem with the Apostles and elders, we are told there was “much dispute”. The two speeches which are recorded in Acts chapter 15 seem to have been given to sum up that debate, the first by the Apostle Peter. This is the last we hear of him in the book of Acts, though his two letters come later. Briefly, and succinctly he summed up the problem and the way the Lord God had led him in the preaching work.

“Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:7–11).

Peter had experienced problems himself in realising that it was no longer necessary to keep the Jewish law, and recognized how difficult it had been to do so. The apostles and elders had not been able to keep the law

entirely, and neither had all the Jews who had gone before. Why was it necessary to insist that Gentiles should even try, especially as the Lord God had said nothing about it when He had so carefully guided Peter at the conversion of Cornelius and his family? This silenced those who had been arguing giving Barnabas and Paul an opportunity to explain their work, and its results. They had not been guided to insist on circumcision either, in spite of all the signs and wonders which “*God had worked through them among the Gentiles.*” (v12)

James Sums Up

It fell to James, presumably the Lord Jesus’ half-brother, to conclude the debate. His was another concise and carefully worded address. He reminded the congregation of what Peter had said about his work under the hand of God with Cornelius, and then quoted two Old Testament prophets, Amos and Isaiah in support of what Peter had done, and finally he gave his verdict.

Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood (Acts 15:19–20).

This was sound advice. It did not ignore some of the wise provisions of the Jewish law, which in many respects was thousands of years ahead of its time, but removed the requirement to keep all those things – like sacrifices – which the life and death of the Lord Jesus had fulfilled. James reminded his audience that the Law of Moses was read throughout the world wherever there was a synagogue. Those who

wished would always be able to find the message of the Law which God gave the Jews.

Apostolic Letter

So a letter was written to the congregation in Antioch carefully making the points which James had made in his summing up. They also sent two members of the Jerusalem ecclesia to confirm the message which Paul and Barnabas would also take, that whilst circumcision was needed to keep the Jewish law it was not needed for the Gentile followers of the Lord Jesus. The two delegates were named Judas, also called Barsabbas, and Silas. Paul and Barnabas were lovingly described as “*men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

The letter insisted that what was written was not just from those who had met together in Jerusalem, but that it had the endorsement of the Holy Spirit.

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:28–29).

The letter and the discussion which preceded it are excellent examples of the way disputes should be resolved among believers. Sadly, another dispute was just around the corner.

Mark Sheppard

God's Spirit in His People

We have previously considered how the prophet Jeremiah (chapter 25) was given a cup of wine, which symbolised God's anger, and he was to insist that the nations drink of it.

Previously, it was Israel which drank deeply from this cup because of their lack of faith and their turning away from him. All through their long years of dispersion they drank continuously from this cup of the Lord's anger, in the many persecutions and banishments which came upon them.

Change of Fortune

This would change, as the prophet Isaiah declared:

Thus says your Lord, the Lord and your God, who pleads the cause of His people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of My fury; you shall no longer drink it. But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to you, 'Lie down, that we may walk over you.' And you have laid your body like the ground, and as the street, for those who walk over." Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you. Shake yourself from the dust, arise; sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion (Isaiah 51:22–52:2).

What a change of fortune it will be for the nation of Israel when they



Jeremiah's cup of wine symbolised the wrath of God being poured out on all nations

finally repent and turn to God, and God's spirit is in them to bless them. The Scriptures give us a few insights into this time. We saw when considering the "valley of dry bones" prophecy that, when the people repent and God's spirit is in them, they will stand upon their feet an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:9-10). In other words they will then become a formidable force.

Israel's Transformation

We are given an insight into what this means in the section of Zechariah's prophecy – chapters 12 to 14 – which we have already referred to a number of times in this series. For when God acts to deliver His city of Jerusalem, it seems He will also use His people.

In that day I will make the governors of Judah like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves; they shall devour all the surrounding peoples on the right hand and on the left, but Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place—Jerusalem. The Lord will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah. In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the Lord before them. It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:6–9).

Similar words are found in the prophecy of Micah.

Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, that tarry for no man nor wait for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, who, if he passes through, both treads down and tears in pieces, and none can deliver. Your hand shall be lifted against your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off (Micah 5:7–9).

Change of Heart

As we have considered previously, when God's spirit is in His people they will have a change of heart and will delight to walk in His ways and He will abundantly bless them (Ezekiel 36:26-32). He will also make a new covenant



with them, for they will share a new relationship.

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jeremiah 31:31–33).

Jerusalem the Centre

When God's kingdom is established on this earth, with His king reigning from Zion, Jerusalem and the land of Israel will become the centre of worship for the nations of the world. In that day, the blessings that were promised the nation if they were faithful to God, as detailed in Deuteronomy chapter 28, will finally come upon them.

The Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase

of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them (Deuteronomy 28:11–13).

Israel a Blessing

Throughout their long dispersion the Jewish people became “a proverb and a byword among the nations” (Deuteronomy 28:37). This will certainly change; for in future they will be sought out for good and not for evil.

The prophet Zechariah expressed that change this way:

Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”’ (Zechariah 8:22–23).



Not only will this time of blessing be of great benefit to the nation of Israel but it will benefit all the nations of the world as well. For then the great promise to their forefather Abraham will have its final and greatest fulfillment. When he was asked by God to leave his home and go to a land that He would show him, Abraham was told this:

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2–3).

Those blessings are also available to us, when we learn to share the faith of Abraham and come to understand how God is at work in the world to bring about His gracious purpose. Just as Israel will be energised anew by God’s Spirit, when they come to understand and accept the Lord Jesus as their Messiah – their Deliverer, so we can be instructed and helped by God’s Spirit when we understand and believe the great promises made in God’s Word the Bible.

John Shepley

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God Shared His Plans

Earlier in this series **John Woodall** has given reasons for believing that when God created the earth and all that is in it, He had a clear purpose in mind. That purpose is that the earth will be filled with His glory. Now he explains what that means.

God's Glory

If you read Exodus chapters 33:18 to 34:8, you will see that God's glory is not only power and light. His "glory" includes His character, His mercy and also His justice. Moses had asked to see God's glory; instead he was given an explanation of the character of God.

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "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).

God's Law

God wants men and women who share His values and try to live like Him. This is why God gave His people His Law – through Moses – because when people keep God-given laws they become a little more like God Himself. For they will have started to display His glory in their lives here and now.



It is not possible, however, for the whole earth to be filled with God's glory by the effort of a few individuals in each generation. Men and women have free will, so the people who want to be obedient will always be out-numbered by those who decide to please themselves.

An Appeal to Individuals

Throughout the ages, God's method has been to tell particular people called prophets and apostles about His plans and His laws. They were told to pass on the information to anybody who would listen. That way, although only a minority in each generation would listen, over the centuries a "great multitude" (Revelation 7:9) would steadily be formed.

Of course, each generation would die out, but the God who made Adam and Eve from the dust in the first place can just as easily re-create (or "resurrect") those who die. The result will be that when the Resurrection takes place, this "great multitude" will be alive again, eager to fill the earth with God's glory, as He has always planned.

Chosen People

Taking it one stage at a time, God announced His plans and his promises to various faithful people.

- ❖ **Noah** – God promised that the earth would never again be destroyed by a flood, and the



rainbow would be the guarantee of that (Gen 9:11-15).

- ❖ **Abraham** – God promised that he would have many descendants; that he would possess the land that we call “Israel”; and that one of his descendants in particular would bring a blessing to all mankind (Gen 12:1-3, 15:4-7, 22:16-18). In time, some of Abraham’s descendants (the Jewish people) were formed into a kingdom, with their own king; and, much later again, Jesus was born (the special descendant who had been promised to Abraham) (Matthew 1:1).
- ❖ **Prophets and Psalmists** – God promised that some time in the future He would create a worldwide kingdom in which these promises to Abraham and his family would be fulfilled. God will be obeyed, and the human race will at last enjoy peace and justice (Psalm 72, Isaiah 2, Amos 9:11-15).
- ❖ **King David** – God promised a descendant who also would be the Son of God. He was to be so special that he would reign over this God-given kingdom forever. We have seen already, in this series, that Jesus is that One who was thus promised so long before.

- ❖ **“Son of David”** – God has promised rulership over the nations (Psalm 2:7-9). And when Jesus came, one thousand years after this promise was given, he promised to share that status with his “apostles”, which is what he called the twelve men who followed him most closely (Matthew 19:28).

- ❖ **The Apostles** – Jesus promised them that they would be administrators in his kingdom (Luke 22:28-30). When the Kingdom of God is established on earth it will therefore be a real practical government – one that is fair, and works for the benefit of all (Psalm 72).

Promises to Us

To his ordinary followers, amazingly, Jesus promised (and still promises) the opportunity to help him in that wonderful work of turning this misused planet into a place of peace and praise and plenty. He says in Revelation 2:26-29 that he wants to share with us the promise that his Father made to him (The Son of David) in that prophecy written one thousand years earlier in Psalm 2.

Jesus seriously wants us to help him to fill the earth *“with the glory of the LORD”!* When he returns to the earth that will start to happen and we need to be preparing for it now.

In a dozen other places the Bible assures us that this is the serious invitation of Almighty God to all of us. This is the way in which *“all nations will be blessed in Abraham and his descendants”*, as God promised so long ago.

John Woodall

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