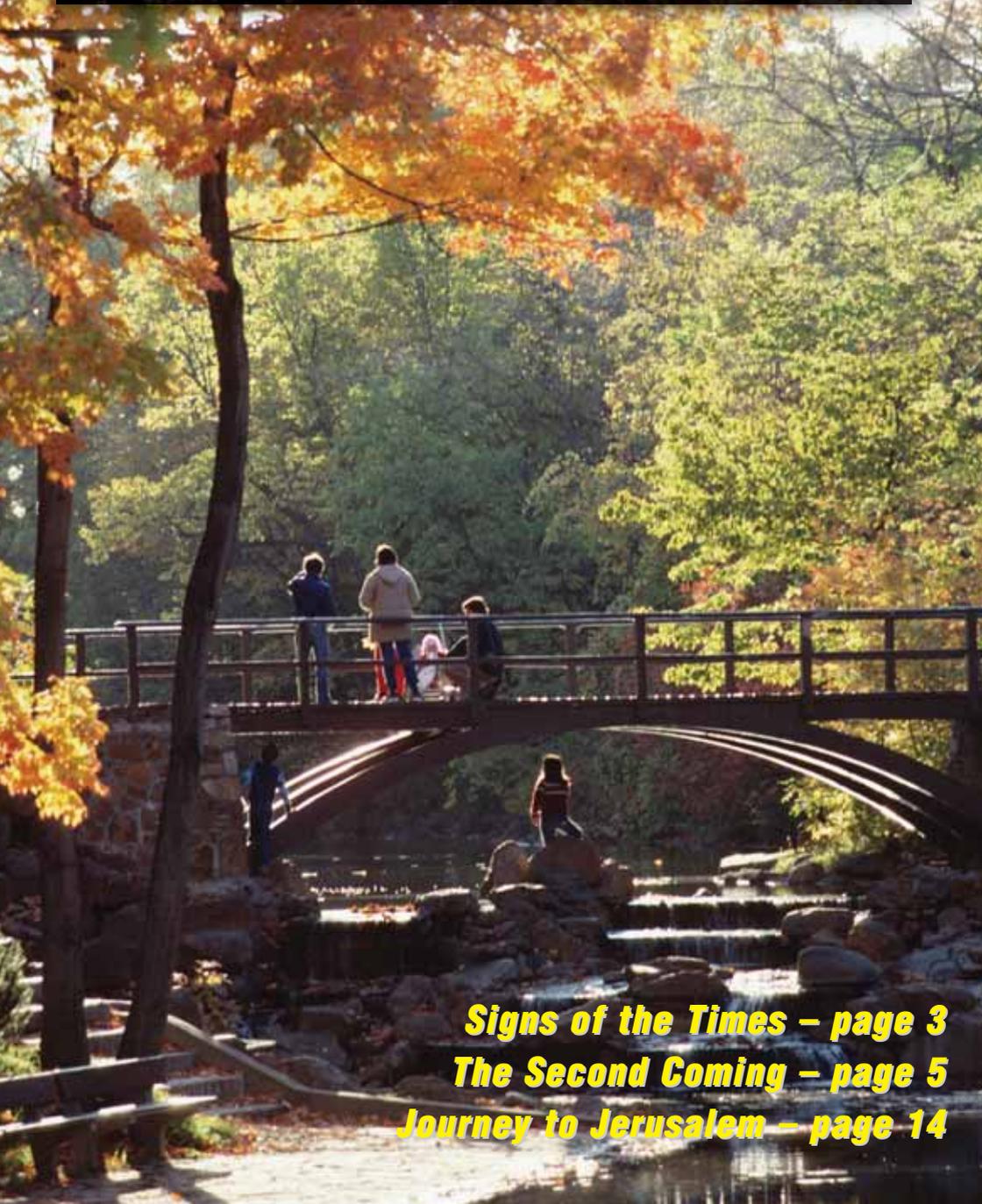


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1554



Signs of the Times – page 3

The Second Coming – page 5

Journey to Jerusalem – page 14

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

129th Year

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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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Signs of the Times

For over three years the Lord Jesus preached the gospel of salvation in Israel and performed wonderful works to authenticate his claim to be God's "only begotten Son" (John 1:18). In his own words:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves (John 14:10–11).

Prove It!

He was once asked by the followers of the imprisoned John the Baptist if he was really the long-awaited Messiah. John had been heralding the coming of Jesus as God's chosen deliverer and redeemer but it seems that, in prison, he had begun to question that, for he was neither delivered nor redeemed from Herod's grasp. This was what Jesus told the enquirers to tell John:

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of me" (Luke 7:22–23).

So there was abundant evidence for those who enquired and who kept an open mind. As a miracle worker, Jesus was sought out by the needy and nobody was sent away with a feeling of inadequacy. Jesus had the power of

God in abundance (John 3:34) and what he had been freely given, he freely gave.

Not Satisfied!

You need to have an open mind if you are to change your way of thinking and there were many people in Israel at the time who marvelled at the Lord and who became his followers. Some left their businesses and families and became his disciples. Others showed themselves willing to die to uphold his teaching. Once, people who were sent to arrest him came back empty-handed saying, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46).

But there were others who could not or would not believe. On one occasion Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Capernaum and declared that he was the bread of life, and many of his followers abandoned him:

Many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (John 6:60).

Among the most disaffected of his hearers were members of the religious establishment who saw themselves and their business interests under attack from one they considered unschooled and uncouth: a Galilean, and from Nazareth at that! They once challenged Jesus in these terms:

The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him asked that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.'

Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And he left them and departed (Matthew 16:1–4).

Signs of the Times

In Britain we have a similar saying, which is thought to be derived from these words of Jesus:

Red sky at night; shepherds delight. Red sky in the morning; shepherds warning.

Weather watchers can tell what the next day is going to be like by careful observation. But the point that Jesus was making was much more profound. If God has given us the ability to forecast the weather, why don't we use that God-given ability to work out where we are in the divine timeframe?

People facing a hard winter, like the family on this month's front cover in Parc du Mont-Royal in Canada's Quebec, can tell that summer is over and winter is fast approaching just by looking at the colour of the trees and watching the falling leaves. For them, these are clear signs that soon the hills and roads will be snow-covered and a new experience of life will have begun.

- ❖ If they are winter-sport enthusiasts, they will greet this with enthusiasm.
- ❖ If they dislike cold weather and the limitation on travel that sometimes accompanies it, they will be hanging on to the last vestiges of autumn and will enjoy it while they can.

Jesus told his enquirers that they should discern “*the signs of the*

times”. God has given us many prophetic signposts that indicate the time when Jesus will return to this earth. In this magazine we frequently review those signs – like the return of the Jews to Israel, where they are surrounded by enemies, and the deteriorating state of the world.

These are pointers to a change that is about to happen. For when mankind's time has run out, and when God judges the time is right for Him to intervene to save us from ourselves, His Son will come to set up God's kingdom on earth.

You may either look forward to that coming age, or regret that there will be things in this age that you will badly miss. Either way, what will happen will happen, in God's good time.

Look Out!

We need to notice the way the world is changing about us and how things are steadily deteriorating. This is exactly what Jesus said would happen until people became very concerned and deeply anxious about the future. If that describes how you feel, then take comfort from these words of the Lord;

And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:25–28).

Editor

The Second Coming

As this series about Bible prophecy begins to draw to an end, it is time to reflect on how all the prophecies and events we have been considering affect us. In this article John Shepley looks at evidence for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The next one in this series, God willing, will discuss the resurrection and judgement that will then take place and finally we will consider what we must do to have hope and the blessings God has promised to those who love and serve Him.

Certain and Sure

Throughout this series we have, at various times, referred to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to set up the Kingdom of God. In fact, all the blessings that will flow in that time depend on this event taking place.

How certain can we be that this will actually happen? If the Bible is the Word of God, and it most certainly is, then the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth is as certain as day follows night. It is one of the major themes of Bible prophecy.

No doubt

Scriptural references to the second coming of the Lord are numerous. In fact, it is estimated that there are over 300 in the New Testament alone. The Bible leaves us in absolutely no doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ will one day personally return to earth; and the world, as we know it, will never be the same again. Here are a few passages of the many that could be quoted about his return.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they



will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30–31).

And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10–11).

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:19–21).

So What?

As we have seen during this series, the signs are that the return of the Lord is near. How then does this affect us personally? Not many people are really expecting the Lord to return to set up a worldwide kingdom which will replace the kingdoms of this world. The Scriptures are clear; the world in general will be taken by surprise.

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



God's Kingdom will come when we least expect it, like a thief in the night!

This should not be the case however with believers. Those who understand God's purpose should always live in

expectation of this world-shaking event. In this we are given encouragement by the Apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus himself.

Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:1–4).

But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:34–36).

Change of Lifestyle

The above words of the Lord Jesus are essential advice to us who live in the last days, and something we need to reflect on. There are so many distractions in this world; so many things which can crowd into our lives and choke the good Word of God. If we want to have a life in the age to come, if we want to share in the blessings of the Kingdom, then we have to focus on the things of God now and seek to do His will. We need to learn to live in daily expectation of His Son's return.

John Shepley

The Book of Jonah and Jesus

*There are striking parallels in Jonah's age-old prophecy, written long before the time of Jesus, with what happened to Christ himself. Indeed, as **Marian Canoles** explains, Jesus refers to the experience of Jonah and likens it to what will happen to him at Jerusalem.*

Jonah's Journey

Although gifted with the voice of prophecy, Jonah was happy to prophesy when the message was good for his nation (2 Kings 14:25), but he fled from the face of the LORD, rather than preach to the wicked Ninevites. They were enemies of Israel and he was afraid that they might repent and thus be spared, when he wanted them destroyed (see Jonah 4:2). So he boarded a ship and set sail for Tarshish – in the opposite direction to Nineveh!

At sea, a terrible storm arose, so severe the mariners feared for their lives, while Jonah slept undisturbed below. Assailed by the crew, he was accused of bringing all this evil upon them because he had said: "I am a Hebrew. I worship the Lord who made the sea and the land", thereby setting himself apart.

Man Overboard!

At his urging they heaved Jonah overboard and the sea was miraculously calmed. What happened next was no accident. God had prepared a great fish which swallowed Jonah, and for three days and nights he remained in the belly of the unique creature.

Aware that God was still in control of his life, Jonah prayed hard. He prayed the most beautiful of prayers (chapter 2) calling to God from the depths of the sea, revealing the truth of God's great mercy:

Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:8–9).

After this acknowledgement the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land, so that he could now go to Nineveh and fulfil his God-given mission.

Jesus like Jonah

Jesus, like Jonah, was a Jew. But he was a most special Jew, his roots traceable in Matthew's genealogy all the way back to Abraham. He too was challenged by God but, unlike Jonah, he never once shirked that challenge. Taken by God into the wilderness, after fasting forty days and forty nights, he faced and withstood temptation. He was a man without sin, fit to be offered as a perfect sacrifice to save us. By his conduct he gained in full the right and power to preach and once, as the crowds about him increased, the Lord compared himself to the prophet Jonah:

This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation" (Luke 11:29–30).

His words came true in the saddest of circumstances. When Jesus was arrested by the Jewish authorities and charged with blasphemy – because he said he was the Son of God – his own people would not believe or accept his claims, despite all that he had done. They demanded his crucifixion in place of Barabbas, a common criminal and it was left to a Roman soldier to make an observation which should have been apparent to all the Jews:

When the centurion, who stood opposite him, saw that he cried out like this and breathed his last, he said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39).

The Sign of Jonah

The miracles that had been seen in Israel during the ministry of Jesus had not ended when he died, as the women who came to anoint his dead body were to discover. Instead of finding a body, they met an angel who told them:

He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay (Matthew 28:6).

There had been an earthquake and the Lord had risen because God raised His Son from the sleep of death. This remarkable happening, so well attested by the scriptural evidence, was a sign that like Jonah, Jesus had not been swallowed up by the grave, but had conquered death itself, by the power of God:

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).

“Three days and three nights” but no longer, for Jesus was raised to ever-



lasting life and now sits in glory at his Father’s right hand in heaven. Jonah survived death by drowning, but Jesus conquered death.

More Parallels

Jonah’s prophetic calling was not finished when he was disgorged by the whale: far from it! Now he had to undertake the mission that he dreaded and go and preach to Nineveh. Entering the city of a nation that would, in the future, do much harm to his people, Jonah told them what God had to say: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jonah 3:4).

Just as he feared, the people of Nineveh believed him and repented, hoping that God would change His mind – which He did, by His grace. Jonah was angry and decided to sit out the forty days in the hope that judgement would indeed befall the people of Nineveh. He complained that God was too merciful and forgiving, forgetting that he too had been a recipient of God’s mercy, when he had run away.

It was hot, but Jonah made a shelter and God prepared a plant that grew quickly to give Jonah some more shade. But a worm attacked the plant and it withered and again Jonah was angry, causing God to offer this explanation and appeal:

You have had pity on the plant for which you have not laboured, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left – and much livestock? (Jonah 4:10–11).

God has mercy upon people who repent even though they are not His people by birth and even though they have been ignorant of His purpose. As the apostle Paul says to us:

At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12–13).

Call to Repentance

When Jesus began his ministry in Israel his message was remarkably similar to the one that Jonah preached:

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

He was declaring himself to be God’s chosen King, saying that if the people of Israel wanted to enter God’s Kingdom they needed to change their ways and turn again to God. That’s what repentance really means. Sadly, his words and the words of his apostles, when they too made the same offer, were ignored by the nation as a whole. Jesus said that if they did not hearken and repent, their city would be destroyed and forty years after his death that is exactly what happened to Jerusalem.

The parallel with Jonah’s work in Nineveh is only too clear, as Jesus himself explained when he was appealing to his listeners to respond and repent:

The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here (Luke 11:32).

Let us not make the same mistake. God is giving us the opportunity to change our ways and follow the teaching of Jesus. The warning is the same as to Nineveh and Jerusalem: that if we do not we too will perish. But the God who loved the inhabitants of both those cities loves us too and does not want us to be destroyed. He sent His Son to give us the certain hope of salvation, and here is His assurance in the Word of truth:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:9–12).

Marian Canoles

Paul before a mob in Jerusalem

When the Apostle Paul left the elders of the Ephesus church on the beach at Miletus he told them he did not expect to see them again. On his way back to Jerusalem he was again warned that he might suffer for going there.

Bound for Bonds

Paul stayed briefly in Caesarea with the evangelist Philip, who had stayed there after he had moved on from Azotus and the other coast towns, as reported in Acts 8. There, a prophet named Agabus, who came from Judea, dramatically foretold Paul's forthcoming bonds by taking Paul's belt and binding his own hands and feet, saying:

Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles' (Acts 21:11).

Paul appeared unmoved, saying simply that he was happy to go to Jerusalem, even if it meant imprisonment or death. The key phrase was "I am ready" (21:13).

At Jerusalem

Reaching Jerusalem Paul visited James and the elders of the Jerusalem ecclesia. They persuaded him to sponsor some young men who had a vow to discharge so that he could demonstrate his reverence for the Temple and the Jewish Law. Sadly this did not work. Paul had continued his associations with those who had come with him, and had been seen in the city with an Ephesian called

Trophimus. When he was later seen in the Temple, his enemies wrongly assumed that he had taken Trophimus there also into a part of the Temple where Gentiles were not allowed to go.

Before anyone realised what was happening a riot erupted against this supposed desecration of the Temple. Paul was dragged from the Temple, the gates were shut, and the mob were about to kill him. Fortunately, the Roman soldier in charge of the Fortress was alert and able to intervene and so save Paul. He arrested him, thinking he had done something wrong, but at least Paul was safe!

Paul's Address

Before they could take him back to the fortress for safekeeping, Paul asked if he might address the crowd, and after clarifying exactly who he was, Paul was allowed to stand on the steps leading into the barracks to address the mob. He spoke to them in Hebrew, which pacified them somewhat, and began by giving a little of his background.



The Roman fortress of Antonia was just behind the Jerusalem Temple

He was a Jew born in Tarsus and brought up in Jerusalem, where he was educated in the school of the rabbi Gamaliel. This was in accordance with the Law given through Moses, and he had been as zealous for this law as anyone. He then acknowledged the messages that Jesus had taught his followers, calling it “the Way”. Paul explained that he had persecuted those who had followed it, and he called on the High Priest and other Elders of the Jews to confirm that. It was the High Priest who had given him letters of authority to go to Damascus to continue the persecution, and bring any he found in bonds to Jerusalem. Perhaps there was an acknowledgement of the irony of that at that point!

Damascus Road

Paul went on to remind them what had happened on the Damascus Road as he approached the city, just before noon. This is an event so important that Luke, the writer of Acts records it three times, once as it happened, and twice as Paul defended his way of life, when on trial. This was where Paul’s dramatic encounter had occurred with the Lord Jesus.

I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting’ (Acts 22:7–8).

It is interesting to note that the Lord Jesus regarded Paul’s actions as being against him, even though Paul was actually persecuting his followers. This interchange was heard only by Paul, who asked Jesus what he was to do. The answer was to go on to Damascus, where he would be instructed. He had to be led by the hand, as the bright

light had temporarily blinded him.

Paul continues to recount how Ananias came to visit him to restore his sight, and to tell him what the Lord God had in store for him. There he was told what needed to be done, for Ananias said:

The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth. For you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:14–16).

Baptism Essential

Quite clearly, all those who come to the gospel, whatever their previous position or background, have to start following the Lord Jesus by being baptized. Being buried in water, if only for an instant, is always the symbol of death to an old way, and the start of a new life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then told the mob about his return to Jerusalem where he was warned to flee. This was because of the antagonism of the Jewish rulers to one who was seen as a renegade. He had been right in the thick of it, involved in the death of Stephen (Acts chapter 7) and so was now in danger himself. He left, with a mission from Jesus to preach the gospel:

He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles’ (Acts 22:21).

Preaching the gospel to the Jews was what Paul had done, and that – and the reaction of the angry mob – was the reason why the apostle was now a prisoner of the Romans.

Mark Sheppard

The Dead will be Raised

In the last article in this series we saw that the Bible teaches that the dead are really dead. They are not transferred from life to heaven or hell, but fall into an unconscious state and cease to exist.

The Dead are Dead

This idea that the dead are truly dead is so unusual that we should spend more time thinking about it. Almost all the religions of the world have the belief that the real person is something invisible inside the body, and that when the body dies the real person leaves it and goes somewhere else.

Thousands of years ago the ancient Egyptians believed this, and it is still central to most religions today. In English the words 'soul' or 'spirit' are both used to describe this 'invisible self' that people wrongly believe in. From this idea comes the belief that living people can receive messages from those who have died, and anyone with a reputation for arranging such communications is often sought after by grieving relatives.

False Beliefs

The idea that the dead are alive in some other place is mistaken. Worse than that, it leads to some very evil consequences. You might worry that there is a place where the wicked are punished and from that comes the false belief in hell-fire torments. I know that Jesus spoke about 'hell-fire' (literally 'Gehenna-fire', Matthew 18:8) but when he was here on earth, 'Gehenna' was the name of the rubbish dump

outside Jerusalem where rubbish was burned. The word 'Gehenna' just stands for 'complete destruction', not endless torments. But people who fear that their loved ones are being tormented in 'hell' or 'purgatory' feel they have to pay priests to offer prayers for them. As if God will forgive people if you pay enough money!

Another evil is the idea that dead people need gifts or service of some kind, or that they have mysterious powers to help or even to curse those who are still alive. This leads to the worship of dead ancestors and saints, and even making images of them, or the belief that dead saints or imams can speak to God on our behalf. These are practices that the Bible forbids (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6).

God is One, and we should worship Him alone; and do so only through Christ, not through people who wrongly claim to be priests. For there is only one true priest who can intercede for mankind:

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



The True Hope

The last article quoted a few places where the Bible denies this idea that we continue to live after death. Another is Ecclesiastes 3:19, which says that man dies just like the beasts:

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 3:19).

Apart from the mercy of God, that is the end for everyone and everything. But God has from the beginning been calling men and women to serve Him, so that the earth can be filled with His glory, according to His promise. Although most of the people who responded to this call have died, God who gave life by 'breathing the spirit of life' into dust to create Adam can just as easily breathe His spirit back into the remains of those who have died.

No Resurrection

Isaiah tells us exactly what God will do. Writing about some pagan people he says: *"they are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise"* (Isaiah 26:14). But then the prophet is assured that he and all God's servants will be raised to life again:

Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead (Isaiah 26:19).

Isaiah looked forward to enjoying the reward for faithfulness that we saw described in Psalm 49:15 and Daniel 12:1-3. So can we.

Death Defeated!

These Old Testament passages lay the foundations for our understanding of God's ways. Here we have a few examples of dead people being raised to life again but, of course, those people died again later in the normal way. What happened to them was not the wonderful resurrection to eternal life the Bible promises.

Up to now, only one dead person has been raised to eternal life – the Lord Jesus. The evidence that Jesus truly did rise from death is massive and none of the attempts to explain the facts in any other way will stand careful examination, as we hope to see later in this series. Jesus once said:

I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:18).

Understanding that Jesus did rise from the dead can change our lives. A clever lawyer named Saul was once transformed from being an enemy of Jesus and his followers into a follower himself when he saw Jesus, gloriously alive again after his death. Later he wrote:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The word "firstfruits" implies a future harvest and it is one that we can be part of, if we properly understand and believe God's purpose and act accordingly.

The good news is that we can be part of it, if we really want to be. For, at the Coming of Jesus, the dead will be raised!

John Woodall

Journey to Jerusalem

The infant nation of Israel had been set free from their years of slavery in Egypt when they came to the Red Sea. With the Egyptian army behind and the barrier of water stretching ahead there appeared to be no way out.

But God rescued them once again, opening a way across the Sea and closing it when their enemies tried to pursue. Safe on the other side, with a long journey ahead of them to get to the Promised Land, they sang a song of deliverance, the words of which contained details of their eventual destination:

You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established (Exodus 15:17).

Long Journey

- ❖ It would be 40 long years before they reached the Land that God had long ago promised to their forefather Abraham, for they lacked his faith and would not put their trust in God. So they wandered aimlessly about in the wilderness of Sinai until a new generation emerged who would conquer the Land.
- ❖ It would be nearly 500 years before they found “the place” which God had chosen as His city – Jerusalem – and another 40 years before “the sanctuary” – the Temple – would be built, in the time of Solomon.

So the Song they sang looked forward to a destination 200 miles away and

something that would only happen more than 500 years in the future. Now that’s forward planning!



Meanwhile they faced an arduous trek across the desert of Sinai where the shifting sands would make life quite difficult. But there was something upon which they could utterly depend – God was rock solid. He would never leave them; nor would He forsake them, until they arrived at the destination that He had planned for them.

Food and Drink

Every day God provided manna: food in the wilderness which sustained them. Morning by morning it appeared and they collected it for themselves and their families. And to show that God was their Rock, Moses was told that water would be provided miraculously:

The Lord said to Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” And Moses did so

in the sight of the elders of Israel (Exodus 17:5–6).

Through His miraculous power, God provided water for over half a million people and their flocks. The miracle of water as well as manna six days a week, lasted many years, seemingly for the whole forty years, until the nation finally entered the Promised Land.

Laws for Life

Nor was that all that God provided. He gave the infant nation laws by which to live and counselled them how to keep free from disease and danger. The foundation of that law of life was inscribed by God's finger on two tablets of stone.

Those Ten Commandments about honouring God and His laws form the basis of our legal system and the smooth running of our society. If man just did as he felt or wanted all the time there would be anarchy – general public disorder without control. This would be a fearful situation. The Bible shows many times that man left to his own devices turns to evil and brings disaster. If people follow God's laws then national life can be secure and fulfilling.

There are many prayers in Scripture that show when men base their lives on God, then real happiness is found:

Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter. I will praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:19–24).



These are wonderful things, for this passage is a prophecy about the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, written a thousand years before he was born! It is also a picture of a stable and glorious city – Jerusalem.

The Psalmist looks way beyond his own time to the kingdom of God which is still future. Jesus taught that he will be a great King over the whole earth, imposing God, his Father's, will. Times will then be wise and just – resulting in security for all peoples. When the Lord Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of government, conditions will be truly wonderful for all who live in that kingdom age. When that day dawns, this marvellous kingdom will be a place where all people will rejoice.

Transformed Earth

These glories are not a mere dream or vision of godly prophets; these men were given clear pictures for us to share and believe. In God's kingdom on earth, the very fabric of society and nature will be transformed. Isaiah was

given such a vision, something we can both understand and long for:

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God (Isaiah 35:1–2).

The prophet is also shown how the people will be healed:

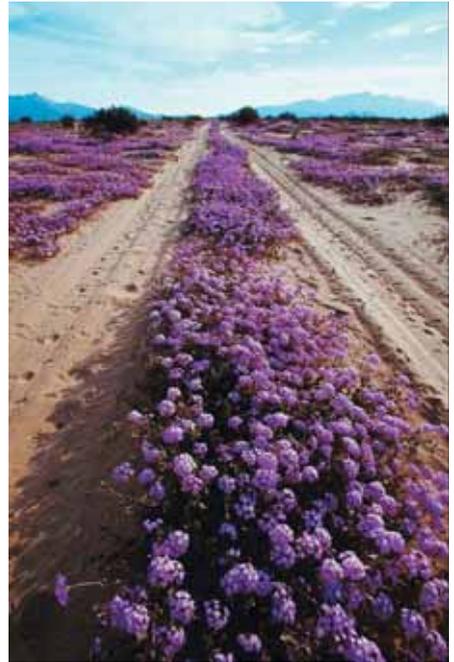
Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, “Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:3–6).

Journey’s End

Isaiah then describes what it will be like when the people of God are invited to meet the King in Jerusalem:

A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray (Isaiah 35:8).

Holiness means a place and a condition completely separate from the rough and tumble of human life, with its violence and inequality. God will create this in His New World Order – His coming Kingdom. As his prophecy unfolds, Isaiah foresees a company of people arriving at the end of their pil-



grimage through life, following the way that God has ordained:

The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isaiah 35:10).

These who have been “ransomed” – or bought by God, through the saving work of Christ – are the people who are to be invited by the Lord to enter the kingdom of God. In that empire, reaching out into all the world from Jerusalem, people will truly enjoy the blessings of God forever.

This is a journey – the Journey to Jerusalem – that the Bible invites all of us to make, if we choose to follow the King, to obey his commands and to become his friends.

Andrew Tennant

The Four Gospels: John

John was the brother of James, the two sons of a man called Zebedee who ran a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee.

Their mother was probably Salome, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, a faithful disciple. John never names himself in his gospel, but uses the pseudonym ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’. His style is scholarly and meditative – at times almost mystical. He tells us plainly that he chose to write his gospel to show that Jesus was the Messiah (the King promised to Israel) and the Son of God.

It is likely that John wrote his gospel after the other three, but it was probably completed before the Fall of Jerusalem in AD70, because in chapter five he says the Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed the paralytic man, “is” by the Sheep Gate, with five roofed colonnades. This building would not have been accessible to his readers after Jerusalem was destroyed.

Eight Signs

John selects a total of eight great miracles that Jesus performed, and explains the background and the implications behind them that to his mind prove Jesus’ claims beyond reasonable doubt.

Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that

believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

So John does not set out to tell us everything that Jesus did, He concentrates on particular events and places, often recalling in great detail the actual words used by Jesus and his enemies, like a television news reporter on the spot. His account of the Last Supper, for example, runs to five whole chapters. John really makes you feel you have been in the presence of the Lord.

Thematic Gospel

❖ **Light and Darkness**

It is fascinating to follow some of John’s great themes. He starts off, for example, with light and darkness. He likens God’s opening day in the creation week to the beginning of Jesus’ work as the light of the world – a time when the darkness that fills human hearts was pushed back, as Jesus came to show people face-to-face what God is really like. The glory of God, familiar to the Jews as a bright cloud in the Tabernacle or Temple, becomes the revealed love and truth and holiness of a carpenter who is the Son of God.

John shows Jesus opening the eyes of a man blind from birth by getting him to wash away the mask of clay over his eyes in the water of the Pool of Siloam. Siloam, John points out, means ‘Sent’. Jesus had been sent, to open closed minds, and to light the way to eternal life.

❖ **God’s appointed time**

Another theme is ‘the hour’ of

destiny. As Jesus proceeds through his ministry, John sees him protected by his Father from stonings and plots to kill him, because his hour had not yet come. He had a task to complete. But as he comes to the end of his work at the Last Supper, the time runs out. Now the long-awaited hour has come. He goes forth to meet his enemies, and a cruel death.

❖ **Sabbath Works**

John underlines the many miracles Jesus worked on the Sabbath day. He chose to break the convention that healing was work, because, he says, His Father was still busy at work, bringing about the true Sabbath rest of a Kingdom where disease, part of the Curse that came from Adam's sin, will be removed for ever.

Old Testament Fulfilment

Often John picks up allusions to Jesus' work in the Old Testament, or the fulfilment of direct quotations, where he and the other disciples did not realise the connection at the time, but were stunned afterwards to find everything that had been predicted had come true. This is still one of the most powerful arguments there is for believing in Jesus: the fact that his ministry had been mapped out centuries before, by the foreknowledge of God.

A good example would be the turning of the water into wine at the wedding feast Jesus and his disciples attended when the wine had run out.

Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the



master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" (John 2:6–10).

The water pots were used for ceremonial washing before meals. That act gave a symbolic outward cleansing, but it was not a cleansing that reached the heart. They represented, John hints, the Law of Moses, which had become redundant with the coming of Jesus. When Jesus turned that water into wine – new wine which was far better than the old – he was signifying that he, and he alone, could provide something which would transform people's lives from within.

Five Thousand Fed

In the same way, John describes the

feeding of the five thousand from five barley loaves and two small fish. Although this miracle – which John calls a ‘sign’ – is recorded in all four gospels, only John records the immediate aftermath: that the multitude wanted to make Jesus their king there and then (John 6:15). And only John, with his concentration on what Jesus said to explain his actions, records the Lord’s explanation the following day in the synagogue at Capernaum when he compared his actions to those of Moses in the wilderness:

Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe (John 6:32–36).

Jesus is the bread of life, he says, and without him we shall die in the wilderness of sin.

Triumphal Entry

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey particularly catches John’s attention. He had read the passage in Zechariah 9:9 for years, but only after it happened did he realise it was a prophecy waiting to be fulfilled:

Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.” His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were

written about him and that they had done these things to him (John 12:15–16).

The prophet Zechariah had foretold the coming of a King who is to rule the world, which is why the crowds who lined the streets of Jerusalem welcomed him with such enthusiasm.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zechariah 9:9–10).

But, as John records, before Jesus was to reign as King, he had first to give his life as a sacrifice for our sins, so that we can be part of God’s Kingdom when Jesus returns. John ends his gospel account by telling us about the glorious resurrection of Jesus and his appearance to the disciples.

More to Come

That is not the last we hear from John. He went on to write three letters of the New Testament, similar in style to his gospel. And he also received the visions of the book of Revelation, which he penned from enforced exile on the island of Patmos, at the end of his life. In those visions we learn more about the time when Jesus will return as King, to reign over God’s kingdom on earth.

David M Pearce

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