

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1556



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To Those Who Overcome – page 5
Which is the Oldest Gospel? – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to 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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Getting Up Steam!

The inevitable march of progress means that things get quicker, quieter and more efficient. But this progression often leaves behind things that some people really enjoyed, which is why there is always an interest in how things used to be. Steam trains exercise a fascination over some people who dedicate their spare time to recreate a bit of the past, with all its noise, dirt and steam.

This month's front cover features a privately-run length of railway track which extends from Kidderminster – in the Midlands of England – to Bridgnorth, a small town in Shropshire, just 16 miles away. Known as the Severn Valley Railway, this heritage railway runs along the Severn Valley and follows the course of the River Severn for much of its route.

This is a line largely run by unpaid volunteers who get involved in all sorts of work: repairing and repainting stations, reconstructing viaducts and bridges, and rebuilding locomotives and rolling stock. But, of course, the real fun is operating the trains!

Steam Trains

Those of us who remember when all trains were steam-driven recall them as noisy, dirty and slow, compared with their electric-driven replacements. But they were fun, and the 'clack-clack' of the wheels and the 'choo-choo' of the steam-driven engine lingers in the memory. The desire to recapture youthful experiences and to share the thrill with children and grandchildren is what makes this railway one of the most popular heritage railways in the country.



A steam train derives its power from an engine which produces steam in a boiler, usually fuelled by coal. As the fuel heats the water in the boiler, steam is generated and that is used to drive the locomotive, as well as working the whistle, brakes, pumps and heating throughout the carriages.

Of course, building up the required level of steam takes time, a lot of water, and a lot of effort by the stoker, who has to shovel in the fuel and tend the firebox. Lots of everyday expressions, like "letting off steam" have originated from the world of steam engines which were an important innovation in the 18th century.

Taking Time

We now live in an age when everything has to be done quickly and where nobody has the time to wait around. The Bible foretold that the time would come when everything would speed up:

But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the

end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase (Daniel 12:4).

That time has arrived and now we are often too busy rushing “to and fro” to spend time on what really matters: finding out about the true purpose of the life that God has given us. Of course, it takes quite a bit of effort to read the Bible all the way through and to come to understand it. “*Glad Tidings*” exists to try and help your understanding, but this magazine – now in its 130th year – has never sought to be a replacement for the Bible, only a guide to how best to understand its message. To really understand what God is saying to you, it is necessary to resolve to read the Bible regularly, preferably a portion of it every day. That is why we publish a daily Bible Reading Companion from time to time, one appearing in the last issue. Like a railway engine preparing for a journey, you might feel the need to get up steam before you can set out on a course of action that can change your life, for the better!

Careful Preparation

When God created Adam he was made a full-grown man, out of the dust of the ground and then energised with the breath of God (Genesis 2:7). But when Jesus appeared, he was born of the virgin Mary by the power of God’s Spirit (Luke 1:35). It was thirty years before Jesus appeared in Israel to declare that his ministry had begun (Luke 3:23). Those were years of careful preparation in a working class home, as a member of a large family, engaged in manual work, as a carpenter or a small scale builder (Mark 6:3).

The mission that Jesus was given by his Father was so important that he needed a long time for preparation and

he evidently used that time well. Educated, like most other children at the time in the synagogue, by the time he was twelve years old his knowledge of the Scriptures was amazing. For when, on a visit to Jerusalem with his parents, he went to the Temple, the record says:

They found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were astonished at His understanding and answers (Luke 2:46–47).

Jesus had an understanding of the Scriptures that was second to none. During his ministry the people who heard him speak recognised this:

The Jews marveled, saying, “How does this man know letters, having never studied?” (John 7:15), and

The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:46).

Jesus learned that the Scriptures contained comprehensive details about the work he was to do and the sort of person he was to become and he applied himself diligently to that task. But in order to accomplish that work, Jesus needed years of careful preparation.

If Jesus needed time to prepare himself for the great work of redemption he had come to effect, we too need to spend time preparing ourselves for the great work that God wants us to be part of when His Kingdom is established and, by His grace, we are invited to take part in the process of restoring and beautifying His world.

Editor

To Those Who Overcome

In this final article we will reflect on some of the blessings which God and His Son will give to those who conquer the works of the flesh and endeavour to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives.

Present Suffering

The apostle Paul suffered so much because of his faith in Christ, and his desire, as the apostle to the Gentiles, to preach the Word of God to all who would hear. The catalogue of some of his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 makes for very sober reading. Yet he is able to encourage the believers in Rome with these words:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

The beatings and deprivations which Paul suffered for his faith, and also those of our Lord, put any sufferings or persecutions or deprivations we may be called upon to endure because of our faith into true perspective. Yet we are still assured that we will share in the blessings; and there is absolutely nothing that this world can give us that can compare with the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. As we have already considered, serving self leads to death, but serving God leads to life.

Great Promises

The gift of endless life, is only the beginning of God's gifts. In the letters which the Lord Jesus asked the apostle John to write to seven church-

es in Asia, he makes a series of promises to those who overcome the trials and pressures of this life and remain faithful to him and to His Father. Here is a selection:

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death (Revelation 2:10–11).

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels (Revelation 3:5).

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God. And I will write on him my new name (Revelation 3:12).

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

The other promises are in Revelation 2:7; 2:17 and 2:26-28. But there is more in the closing chapters, as follows:

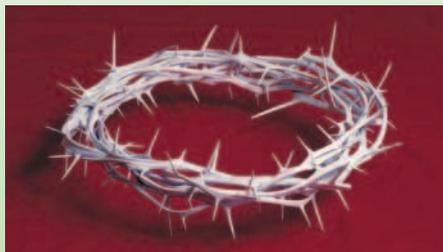
Then he who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:5-8).

Never Alone

The struggle to conquer the works of the flesh and to follow the example of the Lord Jesus is not easy. Nothing worthwhile ever is. But we are not left alone in our struggle for, as we saw before, God is not willing that any should perish. He wants us to be in His Kingdom and He is able to, and will help, all those who ask Him. God and His Son are ever near.

This was the Apostle Paul's secret. This is how he was able to endure all the trials and persecutions which came upon him because of his faith, and also to conquer in the day-to-day struggles to faithfully serve His God. He says to the believers at Philippi:

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).



Vision Required

Another thing which will help us to conquer is to have a strong vision of the future, when God's Kingdom will be established and His Son will reign in righteousness. In this, and also in the day-to-day struggles, the Lord Jesus is our perfect example. He endured the most horrific of sufferings for the joy of bringing so many repentant sons and daughters to God. The Apostle, in his letter to the Hebrews, gives us this wonderful encouragement:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him; for whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:1-6).

The blessings, which God has promised to those who love and serve Him, are beyond compare. Nothing that this

world can offer is of any lasting value. It is only through service to God that we can obtain the true riches. Whatever the cost, it is something worth striving for.

Conclusion

The Bible is indeed a remarkable book. It is God's revealed Word to us. It tells us what God has planned for His world and how you and I, in the grace and mercy of God, can share in the blessings which He has promised. Whether we share in these blessings or not is really in our own hands, for these wonderful things are within our grasp.

The signs are numerous, that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is near,

and that God is still at work in this world, as we have seen throughout this series. We are without excuse. God's Kingdom will be established and God's glory will fill this earth, just as He has promised. When speaking of the signs preceding his return, the Lord Jesus leaves us with this message —

Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:28).

John Shepley

Concluded

The Choice

We all have a choice in our short mortal life,
A choice which we make deep within —
To walk every day as *'the servants of God'*
Or to walk as *'the servants of sin.'*

The *'servants of sin'* is the first easy choice,
For then Self is the big number one,
And we think we are free to do just as we please,
BUT our problems have only begun!

For the heart is deceitful o'er everything else,
And captures us all in its game,
Till we hopefully see that the *'servants of sin'*
And the *'servants of self'* are the same.

When we realise this truth, we should pray to the Lord
For his help from the danger we're in —
Then turn from the broad way that leads us to death:
The *'wages'* for *'servants of sin'*

As *'servants of God'* we will live life anew,
Finding joy which the world knows not of—
This world and its evil are passing away,
But we'll be redeemed by God's love.



Colleen Simons

The Acts of the Apostles

It takes a little detective work to prove that it was Luke who wrote *The Acts of the Apostles*. There is a key verse in Acts when Paul had just arrived at Troas and, at this point, the writer changes from the third to the first person:

*Now after he had seen the vision, immediately **we** sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called **us** to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:10).*

Luke on Board

This subtle change shows the attentive reader that Luke has joined Paul's company at this point. And that he is still with Paul in the last chapter of Acts, when Paul is in prison in Rome, we know because of the language of Acts chapter 28:

*Now when **we** came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him (Acts 28:16).*

From the greetings Paul sends in one of his letters from prison we can work out that it must have been Luke who was with him!

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him) ... Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you (Colossians 4:10-14).

And in his preface to the Book of Acts, Luke refers his friend Theophilus

to the gospel he had earlier written which he calls the 'first book':

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen... (Acts 1:1–2).

Second Instalment

In this second part of the gospel story Luke continues from where he left off. He briefly recapitulates, in Chapter One, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to the apostles, then describes the momentous morning when Jesus led the apostles to the Mount of Olives and from there ascended into heaven, leaving them to carry on his work until his Return:

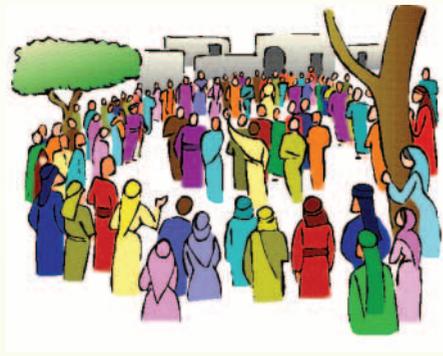
Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as



you saw Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

Now, as their master had instructed them, they must begin their life's work of calling disciples from all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Luke captures the nervous atmosphere of those early weeks, as the apostles awaited the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. They met in fear of the authorities, who were displeased with public rumours that Jesus of Nazareth had come back to life. But once they are anointed with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (one of the great Feasts



of the Law of Moses), it is a very different band of men who face them.

Peter stands confidently in the Temple courts, and persuades three thousand Jews that the death of Jesus was no accident, but an essential part of God's plan, which had been predicted long ago by the prophets.

The Messiah, he explains, had to die. Only when a sinless man was put in the grave could God through him break the power of sin. Without that we would all sleep forever in the dust of the ground. Thankfully, Jesus is alive, and they, his followers, had seen him with their own eyes. By believing in the Saviour, they could be freed from their guilt. It was a glorious beginning to their calling as 'fishers of men'

Spread of the Gospel

Luke picks up the contrast between the joy and unity and fellowship of the early believers, and the cold hatred of their opponents. They were determined to crush this new movement, but proved unable to stop these humble men with their ability to work miracles and expound the Scriptures. Saul of Tarsus, a fervent young Jewish lawyer, was empowered by the High Priest to head the opposition, which grew into a campaign of violence, imprisonment and death. It was the classic response of an intellectually defeated establishment.

The persecution of the original group of believers in Jerusalem, painful though it was, had the effect of scattering them across the countryside. The gospel began to spread and Luke notes the key developments.

- ❖ First, came the campaign of Philip the Evangelist amongst the hated Samaritans, who sincerely believed "the good news of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ" and were baptised.
- ❖ Then a minister in the service of the Queen of Ethiopia, on a once-in-a-lifetime visit to Jerusalem, became the first man from another race to be baptised.
- ❖ Amazingly, Saul himself was then converted, convinced by a personal appearance to him of the risen Christ. His deep remorse was to drive him to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Master he had so misunderstood.

Thus far the Apostles had confined their work to Jews who observed the Law of Moses. It was time to open the door to the Gentiles. Peter was entrusted with this task. Persuaded

through a vision to preach to a devout Roman centurion and his family, he became convinced that God wanted Gentiles to share in the good news about Jesus. When they too received the gift of the Holy Spirit, there could be no doubt.

Further Afield

Now it was the turn of a group of believers who lived in Antioch in Syria. They had moved north to escape Saul's persecution and now began to preach to Greeks, that is, people who had no background in the Law of Moses. With God's blessing, great numbers joined their ranks. Luke notes (see Acts 11:26) that it was at Antioch that the believers were first called 'Christians' (followers of Christ). The gospel net was reaching out into the world.

The twelfth chapter swings back to Jerusalem. There had been an interlude of peace after Saul became a Christian. But now King Herod (a relative of the Herod who tried to kill the infant Jesus) turned against the Christians. He executed James, brother of John – the first apostle to die for his faith. Peter was next in his sights, but an angel delivered him by night from Death Row, and Herod himself died,

from a stroke. God was in control, and the believers could breathe again.

The Acts of Paul

The rest of Luke's story is devoted to the titanic missionary work of Saul of Tarsus, henceforth to be known by his more familiar Latin name of Paul. Somewhat surprisingly, since Herod's death is known to have taken place in AD44, we find that 15 years have gone by since the death of Jesus, and 11 years have passed since Paul himself was baptised.

Only now does Jesus, through the Holy Spirit (see Acts 13:2), send out Paul on the first major effort to convert Gentiles (non-Jews). He and his good friend Barnabas were selected by name for this work.

Where should they begin? Barnabas came from the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea, so this was a good place to start, as they set off on the First Missionary Journey. From Acts chapter 13 to the end of Luke's account (chapter 28) we follow the apostle and his companions on three missionary journeys and then on an action-packed journey to Rome.

David M Pearce

(To be continued)



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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



Which is the Oldest Gospel?

The first four books of the New Testament describe the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are commonly referred to as the gospels and it is believed that the earliest was penned by Mark.

What is the 'gospel'?

The word 'gospel' means good news or glad tidings. In the Bible it refers to very specific good news. Jesus preached the 'gospel of the kingdom of God' (Mark 1:14, Matthew 4:23, Matthew 9:35, Luke 8:1). After his resurrection he commanded his disciples to:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15–16).

So 'the gospel' is a message related to a kingdom and it provides a way by which we may be saved. John alone states the purpose of his gospel in these words:

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 20:31).

So the gospel is related to Jesus and to his name. This is re-iterated in Acts 8:12 where Philip preached 'the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ'.

Yet it may come as a surprise that the gospel is not unique to the New Testament.



Old Testament Gospel

In his letter to the Galatians, the inspired apostle Paul stated that the gospel was preached to Abraham. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, who lived thousands of years before Jesus was born. Paul summarised the gospel preached to Abraham in this way:

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).

The promises which God made to Abraham are recorded in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In Genesis 12:1-3 Abraham was told that his offspring would be a great and numerous nation and that, through this nation, all nations would be blessed. Later, Abraham was promised that he personally and his descendants would inherit the land of Israel. Here are those promises:

For all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever (Genesis 13:15), and

Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you (Genesis 13:17).

Promised Seed

In Genesis chapter 22 more details are given about how all nations were to be blessed:

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (Genesis 22:18).

In Hebrew, as in English, the word 'seed' can be singular or plural, but the inspired apostle removes any doubt. For writing to the Galatian believers he gives this inspired explanation:

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).

So, Abraham was promised that he would:

- ❖ become a great nation,
- ❖ inherit a land, and



- ❖ have a special descendant who would bring blessing to all nations.

Abraham did indeed father the Jewish nation which, despite its chequered history, is still with us. Abraham did not inherit the land of Israel. As the New Testament explains:

God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him (Acts 7:5).

When Abraham's wife Sarah died, he has to buy a cave in Machpelah in which to bury her (Genesis 23:7-20), this being situated in the land that God has promised him. But God always keeps His promises, and Jesus assured the Jews that Abraham will be there when the kingdom of God is established (Luke 13:28). This promise is repeated in the letter to the Hebrews, where we are told about Abraham:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going... (Hebrews 11:8);

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... (Hebrews 11:13);

God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Hebrews 11:40).

Promises Fulfilled

God's promise to Abraham could not be fulfilled until the special seed had



been born and had done His work, as in the third aspect of the promises. This seed was Jesus, who was not only a descendant of Abraham but also Son of God. The very first verse of the gospel of Matthew links Jesus with Abraham, and the angel Gabriel promised Mary that Jesus would be a king:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32–33).

Moreover, the blessing for all nations is the hope of eternal life rather than extinction:

...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:15).

This salvation was promised before the birth of Jesus and is exemplified in his name:

She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

What must we believe?

It follows that to be saved we must believe the things concerning the name of Jesus (describing his work of salvation) and the kingdom of God to

be established on earth. This is what the apostles preached and this is what we should also believe and teach:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him (Acts 28:30–31);

He went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8)

When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12).

A message without Jesus is NOT the gospel of the Bible: nor is it a message without the kingdom of God. The gospel of the Bible includes Jesus and the kingdom, and this gospel was preached very early on in the Old Testament. Any other gospel is false:

Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8–9).

The message is clear. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. We need to understand it in order to comprehend what Jesus achieved for us and what God asks of us to be saved. The gospel does not only belong to the New Testament – it is much, much older.

Anna Hart

What about the Devil and Satan?

In the last article in this series we took a hard look at the realities of human nature and saw that the desires to please ourselves are deep-seated.

We see that plainly as we observe the world around us. Try adding up the proportion of human effort that goes into trying to stop people doing what they shouldn't do – armies and the supply of weapons, police and their equipment, the security industry in all its forms, courts and prisons, anti-terrorist protection, surveillance and detection. The list is almost endless.

The point for us is that everybody is made of the same stuff. The desires that make all this necessary are in all of us, and when we give way to these desires we not only make other people unhappy, we sin against God.

A Grim Picture!

The apostle John describes it this way:

For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

The apostle Paul, who told us about his own struggles against sin in Romans chapter 7, compares Sin and Righteousness, in chapter 6, to two rival kings who own slaves. If we live to please ourselves we are serving 'King Sin', but when we repent and try to please God instead, we become servants of 'King Righteousness' (see Romans 6:16-20). He concludes that passage with these words:

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:22–23).

A Wicked Angel?

Many religions have the idea that there is a god of evil, or a wicked angel called 'Satan' or 'Eblis,' who tempts people and is the source of all the evil in the world. This is a mistake. For, in this entire section in Romans, Paul never once uses the words 'Devil' or 'Satan'.

This is because these terms are simply ways of describing temptation and sin in their various forms. They are not names for an evil angel who can invade human minds. They are dramatic ways of describing human waywardness in all its forms. Thus, the letter to the Hebrews tells us what Jesus did, in these terms:

*... that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, **the devil** (Hebrews 2:14).*

Then, in chapter 9, we are told that:

*He has appeared to put away **sin** by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26).*

Jesus 'destroyed the devil' and Jesus 'put away sin' – these are just two ways of saying the same thing.

Start in the Old Testament

As always, the Old Testament lays the

foundation for a proper understanding of Bible teaching. Back in Genesis (chapter 3, verses 1-15) we saw how the first temptation came to the man and his wife from outside themselves. A creature called a serpent or snake suggested that God did not mean what He said, and that they could disobey God's law without any penalties. Some people say that inside this snake there was an evil angel called the devil or Satan. But when they were found out, Adam blamed his wife and she blamed the snake.

The snake however had nobody else to blame! Further, it was punished by having to crawl without legs and live on soil like a big earthworm. This disproves the other idea that an evil angel disguised himself as a snake, because no-one believes that there is a wicked angel crawling about eating soil! This strange and unique snake was responsible, on its own, for the temptation: but Adam and Eve made their own choice.

Snake, or Dragon

This account leads us to see how snake-like creatures such as 'dragons' or crocodiles are used in the later books of the Bible as a picture of people or nations opposed to God. Eve took the snake's suggestions into her mind. She adopted its way of thinking, that God can be disobeyed without punishment. From then on, when a human organisation rebelled against God, the snake or dragon picture was used to describe it. Here are three clear examples to look at –

❖ Babylon:

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel, he has swallowed me up like a monster; he has filled

his stomach with my delicacies, He has spit me out (Jeremiah 51:34).

❖ Egypt:

Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him: 'You are like a young lion among the nations, and you are like a monster in the seas, bursting forth in your rivers, troubling the waters with your feet, and fouling their rivers' (Ezekiel 32:2).

❖ Rome:

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns (Daniel 7:7).

Daniel 7:19-28 contains a word-picture prophesying the rise of Rome and this helps us to understand the Book of Revelation, because Rome ruled the world when Jesus was here. Roman soldiers crucified Jesus and persecuted the apostles. Rome was described in these dramatic terms:

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Revelation 12:9).

When Jesus returns, many will oppose him because they will still want their own way; but Jesus will bring all evil under control at last. This is described as 'Satan being bound' (Revelation 20:1-3), and it can't happen quickly enough!

The next article in this series will look at more of the ways in which these words 'Devil' and 'Satan' are used in the Bible.

John Woodall

Thoughts on Forgiveness

New bride shot to death at local shopping mall...

Tourists from Great Britain killed in automobile crash by drunk driver...

Man bereft of wife, two daughters, killed in vicious murder spree...

These recent headlines provoke a quandary, certainly for Christians who are commanded to forgive men their trespasses. Dealing with the grief and heartbreak created by events like these seem to be not only unreasonable, but impossible. To forgive is to wipe the slate clean. Is it possible to forgive and forget the terrible wound with which you've been afflicted?

Forgive us our Trespasses...

To forgive all trespasses against you to secure God's favour is a thesis we ought to explore. Often it's the hardest thing we'll ever have to do, and yet it is of paramount importance. Christ, teaching men how to pray, in his sermon on the mount said this:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15).

This is a *quid quo pro* arrangement whereby you forgive men their trespasses and God will forgive you. Does the command weigh heavily on you? Does it strike fear into the hearts of those of us who fall short of that ideal? Is it a stumbling block to our full expression of faith?

The Lord's Prayer

The words of the Lord's Prayer are sacred yet it seems that the intended meaning of some of those words is misunderstood. Here is one case in point. When we pray the words: "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10) – what do these words mean to people? We are praying for God's kingdom to come on earth, yet there is a widespread belief that the kingdom of God is in heaven, where the souls of people are destined ultimately to dwell. People who believe that the Bible actually teaches the Return to earth of the Lord Jesus have no problem with this prayer. For others, the apparent confusion begs for resolution.

So, do other misconceptions exist in the Prayer? We're asked to forgive men their trespasses to ensure God's favour. Is this a work that mortal man can do? Something is missing here. God is commanding us to do what only He himself and the Lord Jesus have the right and power to do. How do we come to grips with what we think we must do to obey God? Can we handle trespasses against us in the way we perceive to be the will of God?

Christ's Example

The way we should try to live is demonstrated in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18, verses 23-35) and the challenge it sets us is made abundantly clear. The gist of the parable is that we must forgive our debtors even as Christ has forgiven us. Because our sins are forgiven, we should in turn have

compassion on our fellows. The parable ends with these words:

Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? (Matthew 18:33).

It's interesting to note here that the servant repented and promised to repay the debt. It appears then that genuine forgiveness is to renounce resentment or retribution for trespasses done against us.

God's Prerogative

What was Jesus saying when he asked the Father to forgive those who had crucified him? His words reflected an attitude of total submission to God, the Father. For the underlying truth is that only God can forgive sins. The Scribes once attacked Christ saying:

Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone? (Mark 2:7).

But, to demonstrate that God had given him the authority to forgive sins, Jesus responded in these words:

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" – he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (Mark 2:9–11).

Where do we stand in the light of this truth? Do we have this power as well? On the surface it would seem so if we are told to forgive men their trespasses. But in your heart can you feel that? Or are we being asked to do the impossible: to forgive when that is not our prerogative, but God's alone? Or does Christ's statement in the Lord's Prayer have a more far-reaching meaning?

God's Salvation

Jesus once said this about our prayers:

... whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive (Matthew 21:22).

Those words may hold the answer to the question of the forgiveness we should be extending to others. In the final analysis, only God can save and only God can forgive. We cannot look into another person's heart and determine his or her repentance, and true repentance is always a prerequisite to forgiveness. Only God can do this. True, we can sometimes forgive with a tender heart toward our fellows, when we remember we are all but dust. But only some of us will rise to that spiritual height and others of us will not achieve it.

When confronted by hideous evil, God has opened to us a way. When we yield to God the work of forgiveness, we are acknowledging that of our own selves we can do nothing. But when we cast our burden on the Lord, because of our inability to forgive in the way God requires, we are relieved of guilt.

When we yield ourselves to God and pray that He might forgive, we free ourselves of the burden of hate, rage, and other debilitating behaviour that will ultimately destroy us. And, because of the sacrifice of Christ, we can be forgiven the hard feelings we sometimes feel toward those who have trespassed against us. In the final analysis it is God alone who takes vengeance and He alone who confers absolute forgiveness. Therefore, when we say, 'I forgive you', what we are really saying is, 'Father, forgive them', as did Christ, in the belief that we are acknowledging that forgiveness is His prerogative.

Marian Canoles

It's a Wonderful World

In early morning sunshine I watched a beautiful green woodpecker. It was pecking away vigorously on the tree trunk. Each time it stopped pecking it turned its head and listened. On the third attempt it placed its long tongue into the bark and withdrew an insect. Then the drumming began again.

I wondered at the force needed and questioned whether it caused pain. It was only later that I learned that the woodpecker has tremendous neck muscles with attached shock absorbers. How could evolution explain this fantastic design, for there had to be a combination of power, acute hearing, a special beak with powerful neck muscles and a long tongue! All would have to work together from the beginning or the creature would die. I must be frank and say that for me everything points to a unique designer.

Things Great and Small

It started to rain, so I went indoors only to see a magnificent spider's web stretched across the window. I am told that the silk-like fibres have to have tremendous strength to hold any insect landing on the web. In addition, I learn that a spider has compound eyes, and spinnerets from which the



web is spun out for our wonderment. It is fascinating to see how quickly the spider can run across the web, but an insect is held still, quite firmly. What wonderful Being created that spider? It also would have to be perfect from the beginning.

Solomon was a great thinker, and he said:

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise. Which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest (Proverbs 6:6–8).

I have seen many types of ant in the local forest, all seeming to have differ-

ent types of work to do. In addition I have seen films of enormous anthills in Australia. Inside are hundreds of ants all performing various tasks of ventilation, feeding the young, growing fungus gardens, and all with a queen at the head, much like the bee colony. Millions of years of development could not have resulted in such a complicated system happening by chance. Each ant colony has its own system, forming a highly developed complex organisation. Everything shows the indications of design, and where there is design there must be a Designer.

Great Oaks

A little while ago we had a tremendous thunderstorm. The result was lots of broken branches, but hundreds of acorns. These are the product of the oak tree. They are quite small, yet when they have germinated acorns grow into a huge tree. We have one in the local forest that is reputed to be 2000 years old.



Think of the enormous number of insects that live in that tree. In the forest the pigs are sent in to consume the acorns, as they can be injurious if horses eat them. Many do not know that Moses gave God's command that Israelites were not to eat pig flesh.

Why? Because of tape worms being passed to those who eat the flesh. Even today one European country insists that pork must be inspected, with slices taken to ensure it does not have the tape worm called *Trichinella Spiralis*.

How was Moses to know this? It was information given to him by the God he worshipped. God did not want His people suffering the pains of a tape infestation. What a blessing to have this information at a time when medical research was non-existent. Never look on the Bible as old fashioned: it is the most up-to-date book in the world, and it is there for your salvation.

The Bible tells us about the Great Designer who made the world according to His purpose and who has a plan of salvation for everyone, if they only take the trouble to read His Word. The Bible is nothing less than God speaking to YOU!

The Tardigrade

I was sent a newspaper cutting from Brisbane relating to a tardigrade, a fearsome looking creature, with a nose like a bottle top, yet it was less than 1mm long. It had eight legs, and is able to survive in temperatures close to freezing, and well above boiling point. We can only stand back and wonder at the multitudinous creatures on earth.

It stretches the imagination to think that they all came about by chance. We can only stand back and realise that the Being that created this magnificent earth, speaks to us and, by His grace, offers us salvation. What an opportunity for us all!

Ken Clark

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