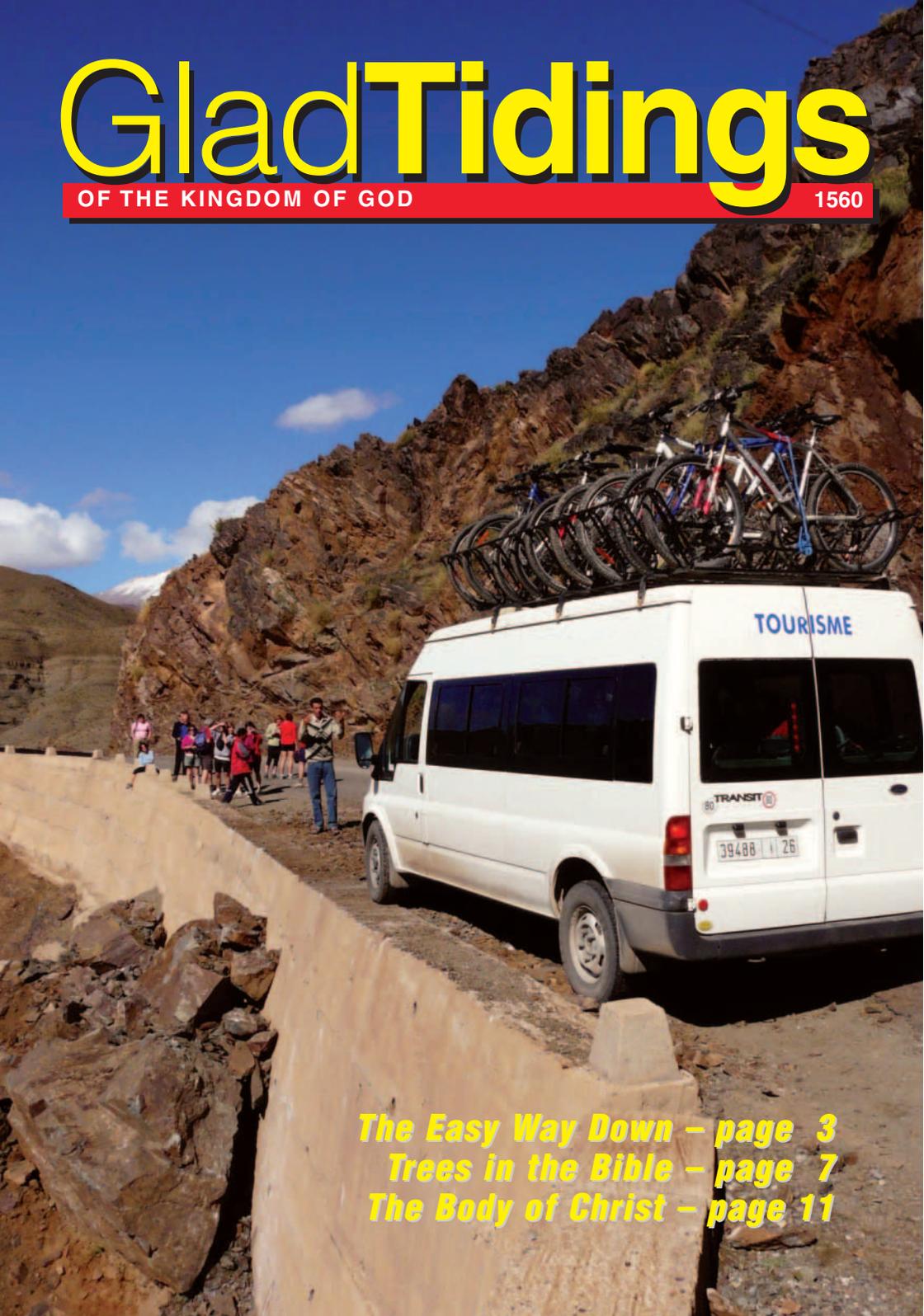


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1560



The Easy Way Down – page 3
Trees in the Bible – page 7
The Body of Christ – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

130th Year

E14

1560



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 Easy Way Down

If you had climbed up a mountain path, the hard way, only to find that you could have driven up, how would you feel? There would, of course, be some satisfaction in knowing that you had exercised your body and had seen things that mere motorists would never have seen or experienced.

There might be some disappointment that, whilst you might have enjoyed a bit of solitude, there were lots of people there already. Or you might have been really pleased with the thought that you didn't have to walk all the way back, but instead you could get a ride back in a car or by hiring a bike.

Hard Going?

Surprisingly it can sometimes be harder to walk down a mountainside than it was to climb up it. You use different muscles, tend to put pressure on your ankles and knees, and there is always the risk of slipping and twisting or even breaking something. So, hiring a bike might appear a really attractive option. Think of the exhilaration as the wind blows through your hair and you speed back down effortlessly. The downhill trip will be over in minutes, especially compared to the long hard slog to get to the top.

Life is a little like that. Achieving something you have set your sights upon can take a lot of effort. Sometimes it requires long and concentrated endeavour. You have to apply yourself and might have to give up things you would rather have been doing in order to meet your objective. Perhaps it is an exam you are taking or a qualification that you want to get.

Maybe you're going on holiday abroad and want to learn a bit of the language. Or you might have a book that you've always wanted to finish, but you have to really stick at it. Nothing that is really worthwhile can be achieved without effort, unless you are remarkably talented or gifted. Most of us have to work at it.

Easy Going?

But how long do we manage to keep what we have learned in our heads? Some people come out of an examination room and immediately forget everything they had learned for that exam! If they have to resit, because they failed, they have to learn it all over again. The bits of language you learned for your holiday trip might slip away the moment you return home. And the book you have so painstakingly finished might be forgotten in just a few days. Isn't that depressing!

If you want to keep something in mind, the only option is continued application and regular reminders. To keep the language you learned, you have to use it frequently. To maintain your professional qualification you have to practice it, and top up your knowledge year-by-year. If you want to recall what was in that book, re-reading it is probably the only way to remember it, especially if it was long and complicated. Getting there is hard, but it is deceptively easy to lose everything you worked so hard to achieve.

Drifting Away

The Bible is a hard book to read: well, it's really more like a compact library of 66 books, written by different authors

under God's direction, over a period of several hundred years. Reading it all will take a while, which is why people use daily Bible reading tables. We publish a set of those at the start of each year and use them ourselves every day. For a message from God contains such a lot of information, advice and encouragement that it deserves to be given careful attention by all those who want to be part of His gracious purpose. But it is so easy to forget and to let things slip.

The writer to the Hebrews was writing to people who had seen remarkable things at first hand for, in the first century, the power of God was evident in a way that no longer applies. People saw miracles, witnessed fulfilled prophecies and predictions and heard people speaking in languages they had never learned. Would they ever forget those amazing things? Well they might, for the apostle sounds this warning:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Remember; Don't Forget!

Later, in the same letter, the apostle warns about people leaving their new-found faith (Hebrews 6:4-6) and neglecting to worship the God who had

saved them (10:25). Elsewhere in the New Testament we find constant warnings about the dangers of forgetting and the need to remember (e.g. Ephesians 2:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:5; 2 Timothy 2:8; 2 Peter 3:2). Indeed Jesus instituted a memorial feast – called the 'breaking of bread' (Acts 2:42) – so that believers would remember the significance of his death and resurrection, week by week:

For I received from the Lord that which



I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:23,24).

What a reflection that is on our ability to forget unless we act upon things daily and think about them frequently. The Lord Jesus gave his life to cleanse us from sin and to give us the prospect of everlasting life. How could we forget what he has done? Yet it is so easy to coast effortlessly downhill and, in the process, to forget where we have been and the glorious vision that we had whilst on the mountain top. Remember! Don't forget.

Editor

Saved by Blood

Betty was ill in hospital. She had felt unwell for months and undergone several investigations. Finally blood tests revealed that she was gravely ill and she had an operation.

After the operation she was still pale and extremely weak and even collapsed when the nurses tried to help her out of bed. The doctors decided, with her permission, to give her a blood transfusion. After this Betty told her hospital visitors; “I just can’t believe the difference – I feel like a completely new person and I am so grateful to the donor who gave blood. They have helped to save my life”.

Blood and Life

Blood is mentioned a lot in the Bible. In fact the Bible teaches that the life is in the blood. Thousands of years ago God said to Noah

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood (Genesis 9:4).

Later in the Law of Moses God declared:

Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the stranger who dwells among you, who eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:10-11); and

It is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life (Leviticus 17:14).

This message is repeated several times in the Law of Moses. Nowadays the importance of blood is shown in the amount of information doctors can obtain from blood samples – it tells



them a lot about the functioning of many vital organs in the body. People with abnormal blood can feel very ill, but can be revitalised when given a transfusion of healthy blood. It is remarkable, and compelling evidence for the inspiration of the Bible, that the life-giving properties of blood were identified so many years ago.

Blood and Sacrifices

There is something even more important about blood. God explained this to Moses:

The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11).

The Law of Moses required the Jews to offer animal sacrifices on a regular basis. This reminded them of their sinfulness before Almighty God, and taught them that because of this they deserved to die. Moreover, obeying these laws kept them under the protection of God in accordance with His promises (Deuteronomy 28:1-13).

However, these repeated sacrifices had serious limitations and should also have taught the discerning Jew that there was a need for a more perfect sacrifice.

The Blood of Jesus

Years later, after the death of Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews taught that *“without shedding of blood there is no remission”* (Hebrews 9:22). It is a clear Bible teaching that *“the wages of sin is death”* (e.g. Romans 6:23), and without adequate sacrifice with blood-shed our sins prevent us from having a relationship with God. The sacrifices in the Law of Moses could not deliver people from ultimate death, but they served an important function, even so:

In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (Hebrews 10:3-4).



There was one perfect sacrifice – the death of the Lord Jesus Christ who himself never did any sin (Hebrews 4:15). So, the apostle continues:

This Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God...For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:12-14).

By contrast with the sacrifices in the

Law of Moses, the sacrificial death of Jesus allows sin to be totally forgiven – taken away. Without the sacrifice of Jesus we would all perish, but if we believe and follow him then we can be forgiven and ultimately granted eternal life (John 3:16).

For this reason the blood of Jesus is described thus:

You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18–19).

It is the means – the only means – by which people like us who had *“no hope”* and were *“without God”* can be *“brought near”* to God (Ephesians 2:12-13). Consequently, God does not ask us to offer animal sacrifices, but He does ask us to respond to the sacrifice of His Son.

We Need to Respond

It is not very painful to give a unit of blood, and a healthy donor does not suffer any side effects. But, as Betty experienced, the consequences can prolong life for the recipient. Betty had to consent to being given blood, and was grateful to the donor.

In great contrast the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus was excruciating and carried out in the face of mockery and physical and verbal abuse. How much more grateful should we be to Jesus for what He has done for us because his shed blood offers us eternal life. But His sacrifice cannot be effective unless we respond and follow him in the way he said. We have no time to lose in doing this.

Anna Hart

Trees in the Bible

*In 1995 the UK government embarked on a project to rejuvenate some of the country's most industrialised landscapes, and 200 square miles of central England were designated 'The National Forest'. It's an initiative that reflects the modern desire to reverse the destruction of nature that has taken place in the past. **Chris Parkin** lives in Burton upon Trent, the largest town in the National Forest, and has seen the area being transformed by the planting of thousands of trees. In this article he explains that some trees in the Bible carry an intriguing significance.*

Tree Pictures

Many trees have particular significance in folklore – for example the long-living yew is a symbol of life, and the oak is associated with strength. In the Bible we see different trees given different meanings. This is not because of any superstition, but because the Bible is a colourful book that often uses graphic images. As any teacher knows, vivid imagery is a useful way to make readers think and remember. Here are three 'tree pictures' the Bible uses.

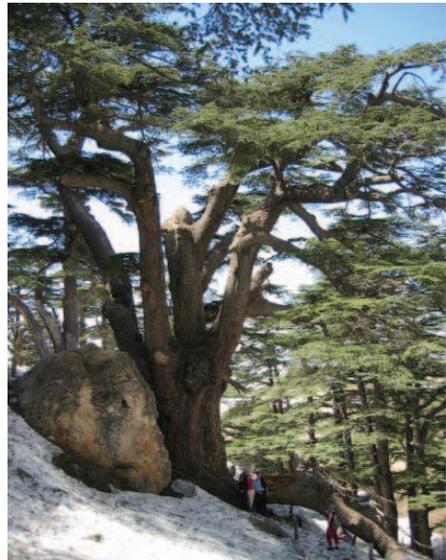
The Cedar

The evergreen Cedar of Lebanon, with its distinctive horizontal foliage, is perhaps the most majestic tree in the Middle East. Its wood has long been prized for shipbuilding, and the most prestigious buildings were built with it, including Jerusalem's Temple and the king's palace.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel tells a parable about a cedar, in chapter 17. A great eagle plucked the topmost twig from a Cedar of Lebanon, and transplanted it to a far off city. Then some seed from that city was planted in a fertile field where it became a spreading vine – much smaller than the cedar. The vine turned its branches towards the eagle until another eagle came, when the vine

turned towards the newcomer. As a result, the first eagle resolved to destroy the vine.

The parable is explained later in the chapter. The cedar represented Israel's king – Jehoiachin – who was taken to Babylon and in his place a much more manageable vine was planted – King Zedekiah and the princes of Jerusalem, who made a covenant with the king of Babylon. But the new king proved unfaithful to that arrangement and sought to do a deal with the king of Egypt instead. Ezekiel warned that this double-dealing would not prosper and history shows that it did not.



The chapter finishes with yet another parable, which sees the grandeur of the cedar established once more:

Thus says the Lord God: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell (Ezekiel 17:22-23).

King Zedekiah – the last of Judah's kings – who had made an agreement with the king of Babylon, broke it and brought disaster on himself and his land. However God gives reassurance that one day He Himself will place the nation of Israel as a 'majestic cedar' in its land. This has yet to happen, but a high King will be established in Jerusalem when the Lord Jesus returns to rule over God's Kingdom.

The Olive

The Olive tree has played a crucial part in life in the Middle East for millennia. Olives are a staple food, and they were traditionally crushed to provide oil for cooking and to give light in the house. The Olive is another tree which is used as a symbol for Israel. In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul discusses the position of the people of Israel in God's plan, after they rejected Jesus Christ. He asks the question:

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin... (Romans 11:1).

In verses 17-26 he paints the



picture of the nation of Israel as an Olive tree in a garden. Some of its branches will be broken off because of the wickedness of the people. Gentiles who believe, he explains, are like good branches from a wild olive tree. When the bad branches are broken off, the good wild branches will be grafted in – but the Jewish people will remain as part of God's purpose. For 'God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew' (Romans 11:2).

Essentially, Christianity is a Jewish faith. When you become a Christian you are adopted into the family of the father of the Jews, Abraham. As the apostle Paul explains:

If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

The Fig

❶ Jesus told a parable about a man who had a fig tree in his vineyard. For three years the tree bore no fruit, so the man lost patience and told his gardener to get rid of it. But the gardener persuaded him to give it one last chance, one more season to bear fruit before he cut it down. This parable is in Luke 13:6-9. It's an enigmatic parable, and probably the listeners didn't know what to make of it at the time.

② Mark chapter 11 contains the account of a strange event in the last week of Jesus' life. He was hungry and saw a fig tree and looked for fruit on it, but there wasn't any. So Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And his disciples heard it (verse 14). The tree withered and died. This seems very odd behaviour from the man who never usually thought of his own needs and always showed such patience, even in the most trying circumstances. However, it makes sense when we think of that earlier parable.

③ The third event comes to the day of Jesus' death, and the appalling scene of the prisoners stumbling through the streets of Jerusalem dragging behind them the crosses on which they were to be crucified. The streets were thronged. There would be the casual spectators who had turned out to watch the

execution; a good number of Jesus' enemies who were there to mock and jeer; but also there were in the crowd distraught women who were weeping for him. Jesus turned to them and said this:

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children (Luke 23:28).

He then issued a grave and sad warning about the evils that Jerusalem was bringing upon itself, saying:

For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry? (Luke 23:31).

When we put these events and sayings together we see that Jesus was developing a theme. The nation of Israel was like a fig tree in God's garden, but it was unfruitful. The gardener did his best with it, but in the end there was nothing else for it, it had to go. History shows us that the uprooting of the nation happened in the terrible events of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and the banishment of the Jewish people that followed. The nation was like a dry, fruitless tree that was fit only to be destroyed, but not forever.

The Fig Tree Restored

Jesus told one more story about a fig tree, recorded in Matthew chapter 24 at the end of a long and detailed prophecy of events that would lead to his 'coming and the end of the age' (verse 3). This prophecy was given on the Mount of Olives, and contains warnings of what would happen in AD70 (the end of the Jewish 'age') and instructions to his disciples on what to do then. It also contains a detailed prophecy of events that would lead to the Lord's Second Coming.



At the end of the prophecy Jesus says this:

Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! (Matthew 24:32–33).

In 1948, with the declaration of the State of Israel, the fig tree of the Jewish nation that had been dead for nearly two thousand years put forth leaves again. Any observer of the modern state of Israel will admit that there's still no fruit on the tree, as far as giving glory to God is concerned. This is yet to come.



In 1948 David Ben Gurion declared the re-establishment of the State of Israel. It was the fulfilment of Jewish hopes, but it was also exactly what the prophets of God had predicted would come to pass.

The Kingdom of God

So, the Bible paints three pictures of the Jewish people. They are like a fig

tree that was uprooted because it was unfruitful, but has now been planted again; they are like an olive tree whose worthless branches will be removed, and new good branches grafted in; now they are waiting to be established as a majestic cedar, pre-eminent in the forest.

It goes without saying from what we've seen that all this is God's doing, not their own. And the great blessings in store for the world are not for any one race, but they are available for everyone and anyone who wants to be part of the Kingdom of God.

When the Garden of Eden existed on earth it contained many trees and the prophets speak of a fertile and fruitful earth, when Jesus reigns as king. The prophet Ezekiel gives one of the most detailed pictures of what the Kingdom will be like. In a vision he sees a huge temple which is to be built in Israel as the centre of the world's worship. Then he sees a great river issuing from it, to refresh and irrigate the land around. And he sees trees:

Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine (Ezekiel 47:12).

What a marvellous prospect! England's National Forest may be a fine attempt at transforming a region scarred by industry. But in the coming Kingdom of God this scarred world of ours will be transformed back into paradise.

Chris Parkin

The Body of Christ

The last issue of “Glad Tidings” featured the Christadelphian ecclesia in Burton-on-Trent, in the East Midlands of England. There have been Christadelphians in the town for over seventy years and now they have moved to a new building alongside the River Trent. But what are they like? In this article **Malcolm Barratt** explains what it is like to be one of those members who comprise the body of Christ in Burton.

Burton United

There are just twenty of us in this ecclesia – a word which means people who have been ‘called out’ to become members of the family of God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have twelve young ones, ranging in age from eighteen months to 16 years, which makes for a lively Sunday School.

We have been blessed with a great spirit of fellowship and the challenge of moving to a new venue has presented us with big challenges but it has also given us the chance to work together and to grow together.

Christadelphians are a Bible-based community. We hold regular meetings,

on Sundays and in the week, both for adults and for children, and all of us bring something different in our collective worship. That’s what the ‘unity of the faith’ (Ephesians 4:13) is all about: we have to work together to help one another if we are to do what is best in serving the Lord.

One Body

Writing to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul said this about the oneness we should try to develop as fellow believers:

I...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in



love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Notice his repetition of the word "one" (seven times in verses 4-6). God is One and He wants us to be united as well. We have to believe the same things, do the same things and live in the same way. Anything else will result in division and disunity. Imagine what it would be like if your body took direction from two quite different heads, which had entirely different ideas about what they wanted doing and where they wanted to go!

Many Members

Writing to the Corinthians, an ecclesia which had very divisive tendencies, the apostle Paul reminds them of their responsibilities and privileges as members of God's family and he uses the idea of one body as his key theme:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12).

We can readily identify with Paul's argument for, as individuals, we have drawn on our many and varied talents to prepare our new ecclesial room. But then Paul adds this thought:

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased (1 Corinthians 12:18).

It's an important issue to remember that an ecclesia (a congregation) has a part to play that God Himself has chosen. Each unit is only part of the whole body of Christ, each of one

having a particular role, under God's hand. Just as one member of the body cannot take precedence over any other, we have to remember that we are all inter-dependent. We all need one another, as the apostle proceeds to explain:

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary... (1 Corinthians 12:21-22).

Fitting Together

The body of Christ, in this respect, can be likened to a jigsaw puzzle. All the bits are different but when fitted together the pieces make a perfect whole; and the ecclesia takes its proper part in the body of Christ.

Our prayer is that our small ecclesia will be like our Lord Jesus Christ. He is a burning lampstand and a bright shining light. In the town of Burton we aim to be witnesses to His glory through our faith and the things we are able to do.

Malcolm Barratt

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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



Paul's Letter to Corinth

Paul came to Corinth at the end of his Second Journey. It was a busy port at the southern end of Greece, in a region with the Roman name of Achaia. Paul stayed there for a year and a half, and built up a strong congregation of believers.

Circumstances kept him from returning, and in his absence many problems sprang up to blight the cheerful fellowship of the Corinthian brothers and sisters. In the New Testament, this is how believers referred to each other, as adopted members of God's family.

1 Corinthians

The First Corinthian Letter was written from Ephesus, on the other side of the Aegean Sea, where Paul stopped for three years of his Third Journey. News of the troubles in Corinth had been brought by members of the household of a sister called Chloe, during a visit to Ephesus (see 1 Corinthians 1:11). Shocked by these revelations, and unable to go to them in person because of his commitments at Ephesus, the apostle decided to write them a strongly worded letter instead.

Paul had been shocked to hear that the church in Corinth had become divided into rival groups. As the previous article explains, the Greek word 'ekklesia' – which is translated 'church' in the New Testament – always refers to a congregation, not to a building.

There was one group in Corinth that claimed they were supporters of Peter, another which said that Paul was their leader, and yet another group that declared they followed Christ. This is

terrible, the apostle declares. There is only one head to the Christian community. The apostles and their helpers are builders, he says, adding extra stones to a foundation. That foundation is Christ, and Christ alone.

Paul took them back to the time he first came to them, fresh from his rejection by the philosophers of Athens. There was only one topic he had preached, and that was Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and raised from the dead.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1–2).

However popular a particular preacher might be, he was of no importance compared with Jesus himself.

Problems, problems...

In chapter five, Paul applies himself to a serious problem of immorality in the church. One of the members was reported to have an on-going relationship with his father's wife (probably his step-mother). Yet the congregation allowed this to continue without censure. Here the apostle was emphatic – something must be done. They must hold an assembly of the church, and condemn the unrepentant sinner to be expelled.

Next he tackles a case where two Christian brothers had fallen out, and had gone to law against each other.

Surely, he says, this can be settled by an arbitrator within the church.

He returns to the subject of sexual relationships. A prevailing Greek philosophy taught that the body and the soul are separate, so it did not matter what they did with their bodies. Going to bed with a prostitute (common as part of the worship in Greek temples) was therefore considered harmless in the ancient world. But Paul's view is that our bodies belong to Christ, and must be kept holy.

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

God appointed that sexual relationships should be enjoyed within the marriage bond. To avoid the strains caused by celibacy, it was better to get married. If a man or woman became a Christian but their partner remained an unbeliever, they should continue to live together, unless this would cause strife. And someone whose partner died was free to be married again, but only to a believer.

Eating Meat

Chapter eight examines a question the Corinthian believers had sent to him. Is it right, they asked, to eat food which has associations with the temples of the heathen gods? There were many shrines in Greek cities, and people would sit in temple restaurants to chat or conduct their business, in the process eating meat that had been offered first to the idols. Even joints on sale in the markets had frequently been re-cycled from sacrifices. Some in Corinth felt that as heathen gods

have no real existence, they could sit down, give thanks and enjoy it. Paul's ruling was significant. What matters, he says, is the effect of your action on other people. If by eating you tempt another sensitive brother to do the same, against his conscience, or if eating makes you appear inconsistent with your beliefs in the eyes of an unbeliever, you should abstain from eating.

We all have to make sacrifices to help others to the Kingdom of God. Paul himself, he explains in chapter nine, had deliberately foregone his right to have his preaching expenses paid, to avoid putting off people who would think he preached for money.

We have to be like athletes, who deprive themselves of many pleasures to win a prize in the Games. Being baptised is only the beginning. We have to persevere for a lifetime. All Israel crossed the Red Sea with Moses, but only two reached the Promised Land.

Bread and Wine

Now the Apostle looks at the public assemblies of the church, especially their weekly gathering to remember Jesus by eating bread and drinking wine. He ruled that the sisters should have their heads covered during this time, to demonstrate that the Church to Christ is subject to her Lord. He protested against their allowing the service to degenerate into a drunken feast. And he was particularly concerned about these meetings being disturbed by noise and disorder.

In the First Century the Apostles were able to confer the power of the Holy Spirit they received on the Day of Pentecost to other believers by the laying on of their hands (see Acts 8:14-17). Paul lists the different gifts

in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Foremost were those which helped the running of the church and its preaching efforts – prophecy, teaching, healing and administration. Bottom of the list came the ability to speak to foreigners in their own language – something with a limited usefulness except to preachers. However, some of the members at Corinth with this gift had been using the Breaking of Bread assembly as an opportunity to show off their linguistic abilities, speaking out loud in a foreign language which nobody in the congregation could understand. This must stop, Paul insisted. No one was to speak in a foreign language unless he stopped to allow the message to be interpreted, and if a prophet had a message to give (in Greek) that must take priority. He concluded with this statement:

“All things should be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The Greatest Gift

In the midst of his rules about public assemblies Paul slips in a delightful chapter (1 Corinthians chapter 13), in which he teaches that possessing a Holy Spirit gift was unimportant compared with possessing the quality of love. Christian love is more than sexual attraction or the love of a mother for a child. It is sacrificing self in order to save others.

Maybe we can work miracles, or understand the Bible in original Hebrew or Greek, or even die as martyrs to the faith, but it will mean nothing to God unless we have also acquired love. And he gives a powerful definition of what love means, in practice – patience with others, the forgiveness of wrongs, kindness and humility.

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is a monumental essay about the resurrection of the dead. Chloe’s messengers had brought word that some in Corinth no longer believed there would be a resurrection at Christ’s return, and cast doubts about how a human body coming back to life could inherit an eternal Kingdom. First, Paul insists that the resurrection of Jesus himself is absolutely central to the Christian hope. Innumerable witnesses, including the Apostle himself, had seen the risen Christ. Without the empty tomb, none of us can hope for eternal life, for a dead saviour cannot help anyone. Then he explains the process – Christ rose first, as the forerunner of a great harvest of believers who will rise at his Second Coming. The bodies we have now will be changed to immortal ones, and at the end of the world, when all God’s enemies have been subdued, death itself will disappear forever.

The last chapter of 1 Corinthians deals with Paul’s great project – the Collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem. He wanted the Gentiles to show their solidarity with Jewish believers by supporting them in this practical way, and they should start putting the money on one side now, in a collection box, he suggests, so that it would be ready when he came to see them. Such weekly collections are still around today.

We have spent some time on this particular letter – 1 Corinthians – in order to show what a breadth of wisdom and practical instruction we can glean from Paul. We can eavesdrop on his advice to Christians who lived in a very different world from ours, but pick up lots of lessons which still apply in the twenty first century.

David M Pearce

God With Us

First Century Christians, predominantly Jews, were steeped in the teachings of the ancient Holy Scriptures. They believed God to be in control of the world – a very real presence in their daily lives, and this perception held true through many centuries.

God's People

Before he set out to deliver the descendants of Jacob from bondage in Egypt, Moses asked God: What shall I say to the children of Israel? What is your name? And God gave him this reply:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).

In view of what the people had seen, both in Egypt and in the wilderness, they approached God with awe and fear. The Old Testament is the record of a close knit family, headed by a God who commanded perfect obedience, the absence of which brought immediate punishment. Now, 2,000 years after Christ, this perception has gradually changed. Grace abounds. The New Testament God of love, compassion, forgiveness and mercy takes precedence over the Old because of what we have seen as a result of the life and death of Jesus Christ.

The Hope of Israel

Presiding over the building of His earthly kingdom which began with the Exodus from Egypt (c.1447 BC), the ever-present God directed, guided and punished His people. All this was carefully documented for the benefit of

truth-seekers both then and now. To ignore these historic books and to discount the Old Testament God is to sever any possible relationship. The option does not exist to prefer the New Testament God – full of love and compassion – as though He is not responsible for the judgments that sweep across the pages of the Old. For, to many believers, it seems the two Gods – of the Old and New Testaments – can never meet. But meet they must.

The tie that binds the Old to the New Testaments rests in a statement made by the apostle Paul from prison in Rome where he awaited trial. He was then free to preach, and preach he did for two whole years. Calling together the chief Jews, he explained why he had appealed to Caesar:

*For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because **for the hope of Israel** I am bound with this chain (Acts 28:20).*

Jesus is the Bridge

The record in the Acts shows how the apostle continued to expound the Kingdom of God, persuading the Jews concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the prophets (Acts 28:23). He was trying to convince them that the life and sacrificial death of Jesus were central to both Testaments. Paul's expectation and the hope of every Christian is the gospel or good news of the kingdom of God. An understanding of this fundamental truth leads us back to the Old Testament, 2,400 years after the creation, when God made a promise to Abraham, the father of the faithful:

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you" (Genesis 13:14–17).

Paul explains the vital importance of this theme to Christians in Galatia telling them that those people or nations of faith, will be blessed with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:8). This is the hope of Israel; the hope to live eternally in God's promised kingdom to come, with Abraham, and all people of faith up to this day (see Hebrews chapter 11). The Jews for the most part were blind to this truth, and because of it, the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, giving us the opportunity to join the family of God (Acts 28:28).

Free to Worship

When we try to discern the character of God, analysis proves both Testaments to emanate from the same source. The God of the Bible is an unchanging God, everywhere present by His spirit, or power. He controls the earth He has created and sustains the universe. His purpose with the earth is a plan which proceeds from embryo (the seed of the woman Genesis 3:15) to full birth (Revelation 21:3). An immortal God, He is not subject to any rules of behaviour, but He always acts in a way which is consistent with His holiness and His great love for mankind.

The New Testament explains that Christians have been freed from the Law of Moses and have been given the responsibility of following Christ's teaching, exercising their own free will. God intervened in the life of Cornelius, the first Gentile Christian, and in visions to Cornelius and Peter (Acts 10), to bring together Jews and Gentiles in support of His purpose. But in the New Testament, as opposed to the Old, God acts behind the scenes, as it were, with Christ front and centre.

God continues to demand obedience, requiring all believers – as He did Israel – to hold themselves separate and holy. Israel failed, lapsing into idol worship and unfaithfulness of many kinds, and the opportunity has now passed to others, for the time being. The New Testament emphasizes that we should concentrate on developing the inner man – the spiritual side of our natures – exemplified in the Beatitudes. Christ's children are treated like grown-ups, although God's punishment will continue to condemn sin and disobedience, but in a different way.

The difference is that we ourselves must handle the matter. The challenge is to bring our bodies into subjection, with the help of Christ, and to prepare ourselves for his Coming and his Kingdom:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself (Philippians 3:20–21).

Marian Canoles

God's Purpose with the Earth

In the last few articles we have been considering the problem of sin and how it is described in the Bible – as both 'the devil' and 'Satan'. Now, I am happy to say, we can return to a more positive message.

God's Plan

Despite all the tragedy brought about by mankind's disobedience and heedlessness, God has been steadily working with those who want to be His children. Always He is seeking people who want to start again and live their lives in His way. Thus, to Noah God said:

I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation (Genesis 7:1).

To Abram (Abraham or Ibrahim), who was then living in Ur of the Chaldees, God said:

Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing (Genesis 12:1–3).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul explained that this promise is part of the gospel of salvation:

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).

Father of the Faithful

The people we know as Jews, or Israelis, are descended from Abraham's grandson Jacob. When the family had grown into many hundreds of thousands God said this to them:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine (Exodus 19:5).

The later books of the Bible show us that although most of these people chose to please themselves, there were many who chose to go God's way. In the lives of all these people, God was working. The Bible shows Him as a God of action – not only a Being with high thoughts and moral principles but a God who reveals Himself in what He does. The Bible is filled with references to God's activities –

- ✓ rescuing Israel from Egypt,
- ✓ leading them to the land promised to their father Abraham,
- ✓ bringing foreign armies against them when they went badly astray, then
- ✓ having mercy and restoring them when they repented and turned back to Him.

Psalms 103 through 107 are meditations on history – mainly Jewish history - from this point of view.

Still at Work

Students of Bible prophecy recognise that God still works in human affairs

today. From 1948 onwards He has allowed the people of Israel to have their own state again, after they had been scattered for nearly 2,000 years. Here are a few examples where the Bible stated very plainly what God planned to do, many centuries before He did it. Please read them carefully and think about them.

'I am with you,' says the Lord, 'to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished' (Jeremiah 30:11).

Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places; the city shall be built upon its own mound, and the palace shall remain according to its own plan' (Jeremiah 30:18, see also Ezekiel 36:24).

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near ... For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:20–24).

While the return of the Jews to their former land is remarkable, there are many other evidences that God is still working in the world today. For example, Europe, after being torn apart by wars for centuries, has come together in the European Union – a kind of revival of the Roman Empire in a new form. Together with many other Christadelphians, I believe that this is fulfilling the prophecies in Revelation 17:12-14.

These events are clear signs that, before long, Jesus will be here as King, to judge the world in righteousness. The nations are lining up for the great conflict called 'Armageddon', just as the Bible foretold.

God and Us

God is still working with individuals too, and He wants to work with you and me. Jesus once said:

The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him (John 4:23).

The Apostle Paul, speaking in Athens, explained that when God made the world and suited the various races of people to different climates, it was with this intention:

... so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring' (Acts 17:27–28).

This same Living God wants to guide our lives now, and grant us a place in His glorious Kingdom, to be established on earth when Jesus returns as King. He will not force us, for He gave us freewill, remember. We have to invite Him into our lives. This is how Jesus beautifully expresses the opportunity that is ours:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).

John Woodall

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