

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1571



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of the Kingdom of God

130th Year

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1571



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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Come and See

Visit the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem and you will be invited to look at two key things which suggest that this might be the tomb in which the body of Jesus rested after it was taken down from the cross. The fourfold historical account in the gospels tells us that:

- ① Jesus was crucified at a place named Golgotha and this means “*The place of a skull*” (Matthew 27:33), and
- ② His body was placed in a newly-hewn rock tomb belonging to a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea (27:59–60).

Could This Be?

First, you will be invited to look at a rock face which now overlooks a Jerusalem bus garage, but which is clearly visible from the Garden. Back in the 1850s this spot was suggested as a possible location for Golgotha because of the skull-like appearance of the rock face, an idea which was popularised by General Gordon in the 1880s.

Second, you will be invited to look at and inside a rock-hewn tomb, which is at least typical of the sort of tomb in which bodies were placed at the time of Christ. This one doesn't have a stone that could be rolled across to seal it, but that could have been lost over the centuries.

Plenty of objections have been raised over the years to argue that this is not the actual location, and that the rock face has just weathered to look like a skull. Many people are sure that the real site is where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre now stands, and they

may well be right. It doesn't matter too much either way, given all the changes to Jerusalem over the two thousand years since the Lord Jesus died and was buried. What really matters is that there is no body to be found in any of the Jerusalem tombs that are said to be the original locations and nor was there in First Century times when people went to look in the actual tomb, wherever it was.

Empty Tomb

The close followers of Jesus were expecting a body when they went early that Sunday morning to anoint his body for burial. Things had been so rushed in the evening of the day in which the Lord died and two rich and influential men had intervened to take control. They were followers of Jesus but had not previously disclosed their allegiance, so they were unknown to the close-knit group that had been his everyday companions.

So, after the intervening days, the women went early in the morning, with the necessary spices, to properly anoint the body. As they neared the tomb it occurred to them that they might have difficulty moving the large stone that had been rolled across the entrance, for they had been there watching where their Lord was laid.

That would have been the least of their problems for, unknown to them, a Roman guard had been set and the stone had been sealed to prevent anyone gaining access. The given explanation was that the demoralised disciples might decide to steal away the body and then declare that Jesus was alive again, although the very idea was laughable.

Read the four accounts of what happened and you will discover that when the women arrived at the garden tomb, there was no guard, no sealed stone and crucially no body! The grave was empty. Imagine how distraught and worried these women would have been, suspecting foul play and assuming that someone had stolen the body away.

They just couldn't understand it and were bewildered. Some went to tell the apostles, who were equally perplexed. Even when angels had appeared to explain what had happened, and when the Lord himself appeared to Mary Magdalene to assure her that he had indeed risen from the dead, the disciples were unable to understand what had happened. They had seen Jesus die; they had accepted they would never see him again in this life; now they needed to be convinced before they could accept that a remarkable miracle had indeed taken place.

Forty Days Later

It took days before they were persuaded, days in which there were personal appearances by the Lord, expositions of the Old Testament scriptures to help them understand that this was all part of God's great purpose, and lots of counsel from Jesus himself. For a period of nearly six weeks he met with them and strengthened their faith and their understanding day by day. Then one day as they were walking over the Mount of Olives towards Bethany Jesus left them and ascended to heaven, leaving two angels to explain that he had gone but that he would eventually return, personally and powerfully (see Acts 1, verse 11).

Now it was up to the followers of Jesus to convince other people that

Jesus was alive and well and that a wonderful miracle had occurred. The same Jesus that the people of Jerusalem had seen being crucified; the one whose bruised and broken body had been laid in a nearby tomb; the man who was a known miracle worker, had been the subject of the greatest possible miracle. He had broken the power of the grave and was now in heaven, sitting at his Father's right hand, waiting to return in power and great glory.

What makes the Book of Acts so exciting is that the apostles began to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus in the very city where he had died and had risen from the dead. Those who heard had ready access to the grave and could easily talk to all the people who had witnessed what had happened. If it was a made up story, their hearers would have found that out and the true facts would have been discovered. Two thousand years later it remains the case that the best explanation available is that God raised the Lord Jesus from the dead and exalted him to heavenly glory. Or, as the apostle Peter wrote:

Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it (Acts 2:23–24).

What a wonderful and heart-warming statement that gives every one of us the real hope of life after death, by resurrection from the dead.

Editor

The Perfect Sacrifice

Jesus was victorious over temptation but that victory was not achieved only by himself. He was tempted the same way that we are (Hebrews 4:15) and his human nature would have prompted him to please himself rather than God. As Jesus said:

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

Earlier in this series we saw that Jesus overcame the temptations that came into his mind by remembering what God had written. Hundreds of years before his birth, this prophecy about Jesus was written by the prophet Isaiah:

The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned ... morning by morning, He awakens my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. He is near who justifies me ... (Isaiah 50:4–9).

Life Foretold

All these verses came true in the life of Jesus, as did the prophecy about his death by crucifixion:

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with

grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:3–7).

It is a big mistake to think that God wanted to vent his anger in some way, so instead of killing the sinners (that's us), He had Jesus killed and accepted his death instead of ours. That is a terrible idea.

Identifying with Christ

Every time that Jesus spoke about his expected death, in plain language, he spoke of it as something that his followers must share with him, not something that would happen to him instead of to them. Here, for example, are all the places in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus stresses this:

- ① *He who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:38–39);*

- ② *If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 16:24–25);*
- ③ *Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:26–28).*

Here a “ransom” means a gift that can set a person free from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus was saying that human desires must be sacrificed (given up) when they go against God’s ways for that is what he had done completely and absolutely all through his life, and then he accepted death, “even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). This is a truth that we are asked to accept and then we must make sacrifices in whatever ways that might apply to us.

Vital Lessons

The Apostle Paul explains Jesus’ death in this way when writing to the Romans. He explains that in his death Jesus showed how right God was to outlaw sin, for wickedness was shown up for what it truly is when wicked men wrongly condemned Jesus and crucified him. But, in the process, God also showed that He would go to any lengths to rescue people from sin, for Jesus died as a sacrifice to make them right with God. This is how the apostle explains it, saying of Jesus that:

*God set (him) forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, **to demonstrate His righteousness**, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, **to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness**, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25–26).*

It is a key Bible teaching that God is always right (‘just’), and the Lord Jesus showed that this is true when he accepted that even he, the only truly righteous one, should die. The death of Jesus showed that God is just in what He says, and when we accept this too, in faith, God will ‘justify’ us, or put us right with Him. He is waiting to forgive us when we identify with all that Jesus has done by believing and being baptised. Then, like Abraham in Genesis 15 verse 6, our faith will be counted for righteousness.

God is wonderfully gracious and wants so much to have us in His kingdom when Jesus returns. He gave His only begotten Son to make that possible:

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3);

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32).

John Woodall

Why Wasn't Jesus Good?

One day a certain ruler asked Jesus this question: "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18), and got a surprising reply. Jesus picked up his very first word and asked:

"Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God (Luke 18:19).

Whatever could Jesus have meant? For Scripture is clear that Jesus is the best man who ever lived.

Jesus Never Sinned

Consider these statements he made and the inspired words of his apostles:

Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? (John 8:46).

I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me (John 5:30).

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth"; (1 Peter 2:21–22, citing Isaiah 53:9).

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Perfect after Suffering

These passages are a wonderful testimony to the way that Jesus lived his life: a life of total obedience to his



Father's will. Nonetheless, in his response to the ruler Jesus was not being falsely modest, and we do well to ask what he meant.

On another occasion Jesus said that one day he would be perfected, and the writer to the Hebrews comments twice about this situation:

*'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and **the third day I shall be perfected**' (Luke 13:32).*

*It was fitting for Him (God), for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings** (Hebrews 2:10).*

*Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And **having been perfected**, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8–9).*

Jesus was perfected after he had died an excruciating death, been raised from the dead and been given

the divine nature. Prior to this, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus could have sinned for he was severely tempted. A blind man is not tempted if you ask him to look at an offensive picture: he can't see it! Nor is a dumb woman tempted if asked to say something blasphemous. In the same way, it would have been no real temptation for Jesus if it was impossible for him to sin. Jesus was not intrinsically good: he was just like us and he could have sinned, had he so chosen. By contrast, God is not like this: He has always been good and always will be (Nahum 1:7; Exodus 34:6).

What About Us?

Human nature is not pleasing to God. We are not 'good' in our current state. While we may do things that are honourable, we also do things that are wrong, have thoughts that are not virtuous and repeatedly disobey God. Sometimes this is against our better judgement, and other times more deliberate. This is sin. Moreover, the Bible teaches that this sinful state leads to death (Romans 5:12, 6:23).

Without the mercy of God we would all be in a desperate plight. But God sent Jesus to save us (John 3:16). What is almost incredible is that because of Jesus' obedience we are offered eternal life with the same immortal nature that Jesus now has (2 Peter 1:4; Romans 6:3-8). It is abundantly clear that some of the suffering of the Lord Jesus was actually for us.

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone

astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).

"Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Amazingly, God is even willing to continue forgiving us despite – given all we know about Jesus' suffering for us – our continued sins.

We Must Respond

But this is not an automatic right. We need to acknowledge our situation and to come in humility to God. He asks us to be baptized to be associated with Jesus' death and resurrection and then to try to fight sin and follow Him (Romans 6:11-13).

If Jesus was not good, then we most certainly are not: if he needed trials and suffering to become perfect, we certainly cannot complain about troubles in our lives. In the Old Testament God pleaded with His people asking what more He could do to make them faithful (Isaiah 5:1-7).

The overwhelming and humbling answer is that God sent His Son, Jesus, to give his life as a sacrifice for sin. Imagine a devoted relative pleading with you as they try to help you. Now imagine Jesus, the loveliest human being who has ever lived, looking at you from the cross. Which of us cannot respond to such unimaginable love?

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Anna Hart

The Letter to Philemon

This short letter was written at the same time as the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian believers. He was in Rome, a prisoner awaiting a court hearing, and whilst he was writing to the whole congregation he also wrote a personal letter to his friend Philemon, to be delivered by the same messenger, Tychicus. With the messenger came a runaway slave, Onesimus, who was being returned to his master (see Colossians 4:7-9). He had met up with Paul in Rome and was now heading back home.

Paul's Appeal

In this letter Paul had a special favour to ask. Philemon was evidently a wealthy man, for his house was large enough for the brothers and sisters to hold their meetings there (see verse 2). In his greetings, Paul commends his friend who had a deserved reputation for love and care for others. But now he comes to the point. He wants to make an appeal.

It seems Philemon had slaves, as most rich men did in those days. One of these – Onesimus – had run away to Rome, where he could safely hide. Somehow he had made contact with the apostle in prison. We cannot be sure how this happened, but it is a fact that God often overrides the circumstances of our lives to bring us to the Gospel.

Perhaps Onesimus had met the apostle at Ephesus while attending on his master, and come to know him, and now, being lonely and afraid, came to ask his advice. However it was, Paul persuaded him to be a Christian, and

he became a valuable minister to his needs. But this left a problem.

Back to Colossae

Paul felt honour bound to return Onesimus to his master. Yet under Roman law, that could leave him open to severe punishment or even execution. So he asks Philemon, as his friend, to take Onesimus back, not just as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

The name 'Onesimus' means 'useful'. Paul makes a play on words, saying he had not been very useful up to now, but perhaps this would be a turning point. And if Onesimus had stolen anything before he left, Paul promised to pay for it.

We are left to imagine the scene as Onesimus steeled himself to knock on Philemon's door, and the angry face of his master as he recognised him, and then his astonishment as he read through the letter Onesimus held out.

In the letter to the Colossians Paul takes care to introduce Onesimus to the congregation as –

“the faithful and dear brother who is one of you” (Colossians 4:9)

– so that there will be no misunderstandings.

This short letter is a model of tact and grace, with a touch of humour. It completes the set of those that are known to be from Paul, although our next letter, to the Hebrews, may well also be from his pen.

David M Pearce

Bible Teaching and Christian Life

*In his first two articles **Dennis Gillett** suggested that our behaviour is conditioned by the things we believe and that character is the outcome of principles learned and teaching understood. In this concluding article he looks further at the underlying principles.*

The Lord Jesus used these words to call men to his discipleship:

Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple ... whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27,33).

Notice that Jesus said “cannot” – not “may not” or “it will be difficult”, but “cannot”. This is a hard teaching and there were many who turned back when they heard it. But the teaching of the King is imperative – it means that SELF and SELF-INTEREST make it impossible to be a disciple when other loves and other forces interfere and intervene and breed dissatisfaction, and cause difficulty.

Tyranny

The truth is that Self comes every day seeking for preference and asking to be put first. Self is a tyrant and men standing by themselves are slaves, without consent sometimes, but slaves nevertheless. A man once said:

“What I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practise; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15).

That is the overmastering power of self. It is the confession of a man deeply conscious of his appalling weakness in the presence of self. When we see the matchless purity of the life of the King; when we see him



wholly submitted to the will of God, never once subverted from the path of obedience – his purity has the effect of mocking our own impotence.

It is no good telling me that Jesus is the great example, because I have no power to match his success. I am undone at the fibre of my being. My achievements are utterly short of my aspirations. But the great truth is that we are not saved by example; Jesus is not just an exemplar, he is a redeemer, and a saviour. Through his great sacrifice we are not only freed from the penalty of sin, but at last we are freed from its power. If this is not so then there is some part of the Bible which is false.

Christ the Leader

The New Testament teaches us that Christ is the leader of those who are being saved by the power of God and that power is in the cross of Christ:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Notice it is “the message” – what is being preached – which has the power and that we are either “being saved” or “perishing”. And the writer to the Hebrews explains a little more when he says:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14).

A Clean Conscience

The good news is that Christ is not leading into the Kingdom a group of people who are broken failures, but men and women who have been able to escape the tyranny of self and have come, of their own volition, to serve the living God. For it is our consciousness that determines our conduct and our conduct forms our character. If my consciousness is low, my conduct will be low; if my consciousness is high, my conduct will be higher.

What regulates your consciousness? What cleans your conscience? What you believe and what you have faith in. It follows that if you believe in the saving power of Christ to change your life it could happen. But if you deny it it will never happen. This is a superlative example of Bible doctrine and Christian life. The apostle Paul, who had struggled manfully against self, and had failed when he sought to succeed in his own strength, could later say:

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

That faith is the inspiration of Christian conduct.

Christ is Risen!

The final example of how teaching affects behaviour is the vital and central doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In Luke chapter 24 we read of two people who were sauntering out of Jerusalem on the Emmaus road – they were sad, sorry and dejected. They believed that their Messiah was dead and buried whilst they had hoped to see him reign in triumph. Notice how their lives are in the past tense. They speak to the stranger who joined them in this way:

Jesus of Nazareth ... was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people ... we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel (Luke 24:19–21).

Then the stranger they have met on the road flings back the shutters and opens to them the Scriptures, so that they feel their hearts burning within them. He gives them a new interpretation of familiar things – the old doctrines in a new light – out of the Scriptures of truth. They realise that he – the Lord Jesus – is the Messiah risen from the dead.

They sauntered out of Jerusalem because they thought it was all over; they go back at the double because they realise it is only just beginning. The apostle Paul in the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians is uncompromising about the effect of the resurrection of Jesus. Either he is risen from the dead, he says, and can be known, or else he is a failure and we have all been deceived.

There is no middle course. If the doctrine is false we are still in our sins, the dead in the graves are dead for

ever and we are found to be false witnesses and the most to be pitied. Everything depends upon the truth of this great doctrine. For what good is a kingdom if the king is just a corpse? How can we hope for deliverance if the deliverer is dead? How can we pray for help if the advocate is unheeding?

But when this great doctrine is believed and trusted – see what it does to those who believe. Think of the apostle Peter as an example. Before the resurrection he was fearful and craven, but now he is standing up within a stone's throw of the empty tomb and boldly laying the blame for the King's murder upon the rulers at Jerusalem. He cries in a voice full of brave confidence:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Not in Vain

Two men are in the stocks at Philippi. Their bodies are in chains and their backs torn with scourging and it is midnight – but they are singing and they are singing the song of the resurrection. As we already recollected, the Apostle Paul met the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road and it changed his whole life. From being once a persecutor he became one of the great heroes of the Christian faith and gave his life in the cause of the king.

These men and women of the infant church were changed and energised by the great doctrine of the resurrection. And it still happens. Men may laugh, but we shall proclaim our faith in the resurrected Jesus. Our preaching is not vain. Thank God our sins are forgiven.

The dead are only asleep awaiting the shout of the Archangel and the trumpet of God. The Lord is coming in glory and power. We are not pitiable. Laugh at us if you must, but do not pity us. We believe we have discovered a joy which has eluded all others.

Perhaps we do not sing about it as joyfully as we ought but it is true and it is real. Jesus is alive now and is the High Priest of the Universe. His love is stronger than death and mightier than the grave and it is still making heroes today. All over the world and every day his men and women venture forth in his name on the high and holy enterprise of doing his business and seeking his will. Some are safe and sound; others are risking their lives for his cause. Why do they do it? Because they have been illuminated and invigorated by the great doctrines of the Word of God – in which they trust and by which they are inspired.

So this is our appeal. If you mean business about your religion; if you are earnest about your spiritual life; if you really want to find joy and hope in this hopeless world, then let the revelation of this Word of God become your master passion.

Trust it, believe in it with all your heart – seek to make it something that is central in your life. Do not be insulted but I am compelled to say that without it you are impoverished and utterly inadequate. Believe in it and you have discovered the secret of life. But there is no middle course. In the end you will believe in it and live, or you will reject it and perish. And about that you have no argument with me – it was Jesus who said it. I can say no more.

Dennis Gillett

A Regrettable Attitude

In my spare time I drive people to the doctors or similar appointments. We often have conversations about recent events. Whenever I find or make an opportunity to talk about the state of the world and what the solution is, I find very few passengers who are willing to engage in any really serious conversation. They seem to want to change the subject away from the Bible very quickly.

Maybe I'm not quick-thinking enough to think of a way to keep their minds on the subject. Yet I've found that other friends of mine have the same difficulty in getting a positive response in similar circumstances. But why?

Perhaps it is because there is a regrettable but observable move to undermine religion these days. Certainly Church attendance is getting less. Watch any quiz programme and notice how participants can easily answer questions about pop music and band names but very few can answer any biblical questions.

Wonderful Hope

Whatever the reason for this ignorance, it is truly regrettable. Here is a book which admittedly is 'heavy going' in some places but which nevertheless contains a wonderful message for a world in deep trouble. Much of it makes exciting and interesting reading. The essential message is a very simple one. In a collection of books written over a period of 1,500 years, by men from various backgrounds and education, it tells us about the creation of the world and the plan and purpose of its Creator. What is more, the message



which runs through these pages is consistent from the beginning to the end. Such a harmony indicates a divine presence behind these writings.

In short, the Bible tells us that this world was created by God and given to mankind to look after; that God has a long term purpose which has been persistently hindered by human disobedience. This disobedience – from very early on in man's history – alienated mankind from God. From that time on, the Bible tells of the means by which God will achieve His original purpose and what we must do if we wish to have a part in it.

Two Groups

Ever since Adam and Eve's disobedience there have been two classes of people: those who wanted to go their own way and those who were willing to go God's way. God showed how He wanted the human race to go when He ruined Egypt by the ten plagues as judgement for Pharaoh's lack of co-operation and brought the Israelites into the land He had promised. At that time He also promised that He would send a prophet to whom people should listen (Deut. 18:18).

In due course that prophet came: he was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In his perfect life we see the kind of person God wants: a person all can look up to and take as their role model. In his day, once again people were divided. We are told that *“the common people heard him gladly”* (Mark 12:37). On the other hand, the leaders saw him as a threat to their power, position and livelihood. Eventually they found a way, as they thought, to get rid of him. But the tragedy of Good Friday ends with the glory of Easter Sunday.

Convincing Account

The more carefully you read the gospel records, the more convincing the evidence becomes. Many have found that believing in the resurrection accounts is more credible than not believing that miracle occurred.

One major piece of evidence is the way a frightened group of men who ad



The Garden Tomb in Jerusalem – this time with no one waiting to look inside!

lost their leader and locked themselves in a room for fear of arrest were galvanised into a group of dedicated preachers who went throughout the Roman world preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. If necessary, they were even prepared to give their own lives for what they believed. At the ascension of the Lord Jesus, angels encouraged them with these words:

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).

Some time prior to this Jesus himself had said that he would return *“with power and great glory”* (Luke 21:27). The power that Jesus will exercise will be such that he will do away with all human misrule, all cruelty and oppression, all disease, all man’s abuse of this wonderful planet. When he comes as king, Jesus will rule with justice and establish righteousness. As a result of this there will at last be peace on earth.

The Lord Jesus is the one person who will have not only the power but the moral authority to do this. There is nothing else in all the world that can give us a hope like this. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is what all true Christians are waiting and looking for. How the world needs it!

If we truly believe this and want to be part of that Kingdom we must prepare ourselves for it by making clear our desire to accept Jesus as our Saviour and role model and we must show we believe in him by obeying his commands.

J. Michael Buckler

The Cradle of the Earth

Of the various theories put forth regarding the whereabouts of the Biblical Garden of Eden only two are credible because they are based on the source of the history – the Bible. The popularized theory fixes Eden in Iraq – Babylonia – near the mouth of the Euphrates.

This traditional site, embedded in the minds of man and child over the ages, is generally accepted as a truth not open to question. However a recent theory, set forth by geologist/author Gaines R. Johnson, declares with certainty deduced from the topology, that Adam and Eve and the centre of the Garden of Eden were somewhere at or very near geographical Jerusalem.¹ Two conflicting theories that locate Eden either in Babylon or in Jerusalem – both based on identical scripture – need investigation.

Eastward in Eden

In the beginning God planted a Garden '*Eastward in Eden*' (KJV). In the NIV: *He planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed* (Genesis 2:8). In this garden were many trees, including the tree of Knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of Life, both integral to the destiny of man. After the fall, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, '*lest they take of the tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever*' (Gen. 3:22), the promise of immortality thus being withheld until God's kingdom comes. A river flowed out of Eden parting into four headwaters: Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel (Tigris) and Euphrates,



the latter two extant to this day.

This description does not tell us much. Is Eden due east of the Mediterranean Sea, or does it lie further east in Mesopotamia, near the mouth of the Euphrates? The Bible will support both interpretations. Historians and scholars have traditionally taken the latter view, locating the Garden in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) – ancient Babylonia. However, they base their conclusion on evidence that does not take into account the disruptions of the great flood that enveloped and devastated the whole known world some 1600 years after creation.

The deluge transformed everything, generating awesome geological changes. Simultaneously the fountains of the great deep were broken up, coming up out of the earth, and the windows of heaven opened (Gen. 7:11). Heavy, steady rain continued forty days and forty nights, the waters ever increasing until both hills and

mountains were covered. Waters continued for five months so that every living thing was destroyed from the face of the earth, vastly altering the geological landscape.

It's possible – yes probable – that the courses of the Tigris and Euphrates were re-routed in the topographical upheaval. In Genesis we note that the Tigris flowed from Eden toward the east (Gen. 2:14). Today it takes a southerly route, so we know that at least one of these rivers did change course after the Flood.

Two Other Rivers

It is said that the Pison and Gihon rivers disappeared completely, but is this true? Did they dry up or go underground for centuries? This may be the fate of the Pison, but not the Gihon, mentioned several times in the Old Testament. The scriptures tell of King Hezekiah (741–726 BC) consulting his military officers about blocking up all the springs in the land to thwart the coming invasion by Sennacherib, the Assyrian, causing the 'upper Gihon' to flow westward to the City of David (2 Chronicles 32:30). Also King Solomon's anointing took place at Gihon, described as a 'spring in east Jerusalem', indicating a sign of life (1 Kings 1:38).



The newly-discovered Pool of Siloam, outlet of the Gihon in Jerusalem.

These two references support the Genesis record. The Gihon was indeed in Jerusalem, fully recognized by Israel's inhabitants, despite the horrendous event of the Flood which contributed to its supposed disappearance. This may well be when the Pison morphed into one of the many springs flowing outside the city, or possibly the 'brook' that ran through the midst of the land (1 Chronicles 32:4).

Was it Jerusalem?

Let's consider the idea that the Garden was planted 37 miles east of the Mediterranean coast, in Jerusalem, a city destined for God's future blessing when:

The Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody (Isaiah 51:3).

Once you consider the idea that Eden was where Jerusalem is now located, it's easy to envisage the possibility that it was here that God first communicated with mankind, here the Lord Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God and here he will rule as King over that Kingdom (Isaiah 2:3). It was in Eden that God explained two key things which are not open to challenge: that man is mortal and that God offers the gift of immortality (Gen. 3:24). In the very place where Adam and Eve fell from grace the Lord Jesus Christ died to turn the curse of death into the blessed hope of eternal life, hence the promise:

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).



Paradise Restored

The first Messianic prophecy appears in Genesis, when God said that there would be perpetual enmity between the serpent (which becomes a symbol of sin) and the seed of the woman – Jesus (Genesis 3:15). So it was that Jesus was bruised upon the cross and sin was destroyed. And Jerusalem is the place which God said that He would choose, as Moses said:

When you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide (Deuteronomy 12:10–11).

That place was Jerusalem and it remains a city which is central in God's plan and purpose for the earth. If we begin to view the ancient city as the place where God first established His garden, we can understand God's affinity for Jerusalem, as the prophet said:

For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns (Isaiah 62:1).

Which Garden?

When Christ walked the earth he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God, explaining that those who believe in him will be granted a place in the everlasting Kingdom which is to come. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane, just across the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem, where the Lord struggled against his natural feelings and was totally submissive to his Father's will. It seems that in this locality Adam had long before faced his moment of truth and had failed and here Jesus triumphed over his nature, in total submission.

Here the first man sinned and fell from grace; here Christ (the last Adam) was crucified just outside the city gates, in a sacrifice instituted by God for the redemption of mankind. How fitting all that is, and how appropriate that all this should have happened in Jerusalem rather than in Babylon.

It would have been near this spot that the disciples of Christ were walking with their Lord, asking him about the coming Kingdom: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). His followers were looking for the fulfilment of God's promises made so long before, and the true Christian's prayer should be for God's Kingdom to come and His will then to be done on earth.

Does it Matter?

As citizens of the 21st century we might be so far removed from God's Word that we might wonder if these

ideas make any difference to us. Three reasons come immediately to mind to suggest they really matter:

- 1 This real and living hope centred in Jesus gives life a new direction. We are led away from error and a misunderstanding of God's message to man; we no longer view the Bible as fable, make-believe or fantasy.
- 2 If we accept that Eden was created by God in Jerusalem, we can better appreciate the basic concept of the categorical imperative in the lives of men, called 'a sense of place', a euphemism for Home. The Bible satisfies that need that all people have. By faith, Abraham, the tent dweller, looked for a city that has foundations whose architect was God (Hebrews 11:10).

Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, but he has not yet received the promise (Hebrews 11:39-40). He will find a place in which to dwell when he is raised from the dead to become part of the New Jerusalem community which forms God's Kingdom on earth (Revelation 21:1-4).

- 3 Most telling of all the arguments are the prophecies made about Babylon (where it is commonly thought that Eden was located) and those about Jerusalem, the city of the great King.

❖ **Babylon**

This is what the prophet said:

'O Lord, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.' Now it shall be, when you have finished



Reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate that once stood in Babylon.

reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary' (Jeremiah 51:62-64).

❖ **Jerusalem**

This is what the prophet Joel said of the city where King Jesus will reign:

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls (Joel 2:31-32).

Marian Canoles

¹ Johnson, Gaines R. "The Bible, Genesis and Geology", 2nd edition, 2013. Website: <http://www.kjvbible.org>.

“Here today, gone tomorrow”

We know this saying only too well! It applies to the fashions around us and the celebrities we admire – whether they are pop-stars, film-stars or footballers. Such people make the headlines for a while but are soon replaced by others. The most famous brand names in the retail world have their day, but are eventually taken over by other more successful ones.

It is similar in the natural world. Plants, trees, flowers all live for a while, some longer than others, but eventually they die. We see the same processes in the animal world and know the regret we feel when a cherished pet dies.

Highs and Lows

How many times have you come to the end of a special day – a birthday celebration or a wedding anniversary – and wished that those feelings of well-being and happiness would never end? But tomorrow comes and we are back to the humdrum routine of daily life. We all experience such highs and lows in life, but as we get older we realise that we are on a downward slope which ends in death.

The stark reality is that life is transitory and death is unavoidable. This is why we need the Bible – God’s Word – to shed light on the problem. Many verses in the Bible confirm our observations that life is short and that we are mortal. Here are just a few:

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue (Job 14:1–2);

As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more (Psalm 103:15–16).

Eternal Life

But the Bible also teaches that death need not be the end. In his letter to the Corinthian believers, the apostle Paul explains how the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ gives us the hope of resurrection to an endless life:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at his coming (1 Corinthians 15:19–23).

So the saying “Here today, gone tomorrow” does not have to be true for us! We have a choice.

Marion Buckler

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