

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1593



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of the Kingdom of God

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Its objectives are - to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; 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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“Behold the Lamb of God”

When John the Baptist encountered Jesus at the start of his ministry, he exclaimed:

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

At Jesus' request, John then baptised him in the River Jordan. When John met Jesus again the following day, he repeated his words to his disciples, who were with him.

Most people who met Jesus reacted strongly to him; he was striking in his perfection and challenging in his message. But what made John, with his knowledge of who Jesus was and what was his mission, use these particular words?

The answer lies in the principles around how God was going to reconcile men and women to Himself through the work of Jesus. The pattern was laid down in the Old Testament and fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament.

Old Testament Sacrifices

The principle of animal sacrifice was established right at the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. We read in Genesis 3 that after Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were punished, He provided them with clothing made of animal skins. This would of course have required the death of an animal.

In the next chapter, we read about the sacrifices made by Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve.

Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering (Genesis 4:4).

However, Cain brought fruit or grain which he had grown, and this was not acceptable to God. The need for animals to be sacrificed, here a sheep or goat, was established already.

Moving forward to the time of Abraham, a faithful man living in about 2000 BC, we find that this was still the case. He and his son Isaac were going to make a sacrifice, when they had this conversation:

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” Then he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together (Genesis 22:7–8).

It was very clear to both of them that a lamb was the expected sacrifice when approaching God.

This was also the case at the Passover, when God would free His people from slavery in Egypt. The people were to sacrifice a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts of their house – a very graphic display of obedience.

On the tenth of this [the first] month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first



year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats (Exodus 12:3–5).

Along with other sacrifices, keeping the Passover was enshrined in the Law of Moses, given by God shortly afterwards, by which Israel were to live until Jesus came. In particular, we find that the offerings for forgiveness of sins (disobedience to God) were often lambs – see Leviticus chapters 3–5.

These practices were the background to John's comments when he met Jesus.

Fulfilled in Jesus

Jesus' death as a sacrifice was described even before he was born, through the prophets of Israel. Speaking of Jesus' death, Isaiah prophesied:

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 53:7).

When Jesus came, he spent about 3½ years of his adult life preaching and teaching, and then was crucified. Yet that apparently ignominious end was actually in the plan of God. For men and women to be reconciled to Him, a sacrifice was needed.

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission [of sins] (Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus was a perfect, sinless man, who did not deserve to die. Yet he willingly submitted to the will of his Father and offered his life as that perfect sacrifice. In doing so, he represented each of us, allowing us to be reconciled to God, if we choose to accept his work on our behalf.

Knowing that 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).

This demonstrates the remarkable love of God, and of the Lord Jesus, in going to such great lengths to ensure that men and women like us can have a relationship with them and hope to live for ever in God's kingdom.

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atonement] for our sins (1 John 4:9–10).

Editor

The Unique World Leader

Are you getting exasperated with our world leaders? Events like Donald Trump being elected president of the USA and the aftermath of the BREXIT vote in the UK are causing confusion, disillusionment and anger. Political leaders seem incapable of implementing election promises. They are bogged down by arguments, public protests and deliberate opposition from groups like senate and parliament. This frustrates their plans, delays actions and often causes compromise.

Our leaders do not have ultimate power. While in some ways this may be a good thing, it does not inspire us with confidence.

Leaders are also hampered by a lack of knowledge. When making promises before taking office they do not know all the facts and so cannot make reliable predictions. They are fundamentally flawed.

Jesus is Different

After his resurrection, Jesus said: *All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18).*

The Bible teaches that, however world leaders act, God is ultimately in control (Daniel 5:21) One day He will send Jesus back to the earth to set up His kingdom, which will sort out all the world's problems once and for all. It is the only solution and it is certain!

People, however, are jaded by the repeated failure of human leaders and so are understandably sceptical. They doubt that Jesus will succeed with this fantastic challenge and ask: "What will he do? How will he do it?"

Jesus will be like no other world leader. He is totally free from corruption or self-interest. But also, uniquely, he is God's Son and representative. Even before his death he knew what people were thinking (e.g. Matthew 12:25). Now he is immortal like God, and knows everything (Psalm 139).

Complete Power

When he rules, Jesus will have unlimited power. We find this prophesied in the Old Testament and explained in the New.

Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14).

[God] worked in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:20-21).

No one will be able to delay, compromise or cancel Jesus' policies. He will rule with total authority and power. Moreover, no one will have reason to complain that anything he does is unjust or unfair.

Jesus Christ is the leader we need. We must all ask ourselves, "Are we ready for him?"

Anna Hart

The Jesus of the Bible - 2

Son of God, not 'God the Son'

Jesus Christ as shown in the Bible is not equal to God, nor did he always exist. He is subordinate to his Father, although he is the supreme demonstration of God's glorious character.

God is the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Jesus is His only begotten Son and His totally obedient servant. In his earthly life Jesus was of our human nature yet showed the glory of his Father's moral characteristics.

The following sets of verses show how the New Testament makes this point very clear in a number of ways.

How Jesus is Described

The angel answered and said to [Mary], "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

In Part 1 of this series, we saw from the Old Testament that Jesus Christ was clearly in the mind of his Father from the beginning. He was in fact the Lamb of God "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). His personal existence however began

with his conception by God's power and his birth as the Son of God. At this point in time God's purpose was embodied in the Lord Jesus and so the apostles saw his glory as "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he [Jesus] himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Though of divine birth, Jesus shared our human nature. He endured all the temptations that come our way, while never committing a sin (see also Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God'" (John 20:17).

The risen Lord speaking here to Mary Magdalene explained that her God and Father is also his God and Father.

The Father and the Son

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3).



This is a consistent Apostolic description of God as Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, used by Paul here and in Ephesians 1:3, and Peter in 1 Peter 1:3.

There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6).

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

Father and Son are clearly described as separate identities but with a single purpose. In fact, Jesus is clearly positioned as the mediator between God and man, a role he could not fulfil if he were actually God Himself.

In the Future

Even in the future, when he occupies the most high-ranking position as ruler of God's Kingdom, we see that Jesus Christ will remain subordinate to his Father.

For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under his feet." But when he says "all things are put under him," it is evident that He [the Father] who put all things under him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son himself will also be subject to Him [the Father] who put all things under him [the Son], that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:25–28).

In Revelation, Jesus was sending his message from heaven, delivered as a



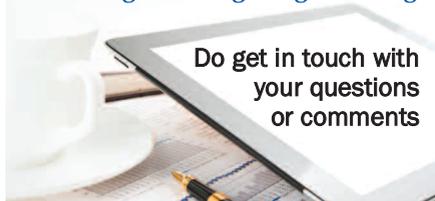
vision to John, who wrote it down. When writing to those who would remain faithful to him, or would “overcome”, he placed quadruple emphasis on “my God”. So, God is the Father, and the Father is God; He is the God of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

All of these references, used in different places and for different audiences, give the same message: Jesus is the Son of God, second only to God Himself in authority, but is not part of God's being.

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The Reliability of the Gospels - 9

'Irrelevant' Details

The Gospels contain many specific pieces of information which would be hard to invent, but which would be easy for early readers to check for accuracy. This leads us towards the conclusion that the Gospels were not invented. Certainly, the 'apocryphal Gospels' (those not in the standard New Testament, which were added later) do not have this kind of tiny detail.

And here's another reason why those details, and even whole accounts in the gospels, were not invented: There would have been no reason to invent them!

Invented for a Purpose?

The critics of the 19th and early 20th Centuries asserted that the Gospels were written in the Second Century by communities within the early church, and that the accounts in them were invented to meet the needs of the community then. These theories came tumbling down when archaeologists showed the extreme accuracy of the descriptions in the Gospels, and scholars discovered very early manuscripts of them. But there is another reason for rejecting this idea, which is that the Gospels are clearly not written to reflect the agenda of the early church.

We know what were the main issues in the early church, because we have letters which discuss those subjects. The main concerns in the early church included (among other things): the relationship between Christians from Jewish and pagan backgrounds; the connection between faith and works in

salvation; understanding the return of Jesus and the final resurrection; problems of disunity within the church; eating food which had been offered to idols; and the authority of the Apostles.



These issues are not tackled in the gospels at all, so why invent incidents and teachings that would have no relevance to future controversies? They weren't invented; the detailed accounts are just what happened.

Inconvenient Truths

We can go even further. The Gospels not only contain information which was irrelevant to the early church, they contain material which the early church would have found difficult to understand or even controversial. There are accounts in the Gospels which would have been counter-productive as far as the the early church was concerned. These would never be included in invented accounts.

❖ *"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18).* Here Jesus is clearly

denying the claim to be good. This is not difficult to explain – he was, after all, tempted to sin – but it needs explaining. The opponents of Jesus would find this to be convenient ammunition to throw at Christians. There would be no reason to include it in the Gospel unless the saying, and the events around it, really happened.

- ❖ *“And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58).* This admits that Jesus felt restricted by his hearers’ lack of faith.
- ❖ *“For not even his brothers believed in him” (John 7:5).* This admits that Jesus did not convince his brothers that he spoke from God.

The presence of passages like these can only be explained if those accounts are an accurate representation of what actually happened. No disciple would invent them; they are potentially counter-productive to the message of the Gospel.

Personal Challenges

On top of this, there are passages which would have been embarrassing to major figures in the early church. For example, the disciples failed to understand that Jesus would rise from the dead (e.g. Mark 9:32) and they squabbled among themselves (e.g. Matthew 20:23–24).

We have already seen that Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe in him during his ministry (John 7:5). This would have been a problem for James, who became the leader of the council of

Apostles and thus the most senior figure in the early church. The only reason that one might include something like this is because it was true – it really happened.

Similarly, all the Gospels contain descriptions of the failings of Peter. Peter argued with Jesus about predictions of Jesus’ death and resurrection and consequently received a severe rebuke from him (Matthew 16:21–23). Indeed, while Jesus was being examined by the Jerusalem authorities after his arrest, Peter denied that he had been one of his disciples (Luke 22:54–60).

These are not minor things. They would very definitely not bring credit to the Apostles. Yet they are in the text. The only reason that one can imagine that the Apostles would allow such statements to stand in the Gospels is that they contain accurate accounts of things that actually occurred.

The Gospels weren’t invented to meet the needs of the early church. They were written to provide a reliable record of events that actually happened. They are honest to the point where they criticise the important people in the early church, and to the point where they include events and statements which would have been irrelevant to the early Christian community or even embarrassing to it.

The Gospels are honest and reliable records.

For more evidence about the reliability of the Bible records, and the Gospels in particular, visit:

www.biblethink.org.uk

John Thorpe

Eternal Life

Those who believe in God generally also believe in life after death. Indeed, the prospect for believers obtaining eternal life was a major part of the message the Lord Jesus Christ preached during his ministry.

However, if we consider Christianity in general, we find that there are different understandings of what ‘eternal life’ means. One reason for this is because very few people these days read their Bibles properly (if at all), even if they are believers. It can seem easier to rely on church leaders or the local Vicar, Pastor or Priest to decide and teach what people should believe. The teaching of eternal life is no exception to this. The only way to understand what God says about eternal life is to read the Bible carefully and in context. To read it any other way results in errors and misunderstanding.

This article seeks to explain what the Bible really teaches about eternal life and how it can be gained. We cannot deal with this subject comprehensively, because there is not the space to do so. However, we hope that this introduction will encourage readers to examine their Bible further on this fascinating topic.

Needing to be Saved

When Peter was being tried before the Jewish rulers, he told them regarding the Lord Jesus Christ:

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Being saved – from what? From the curse of sin and death under which all men and women live. Death is the end of life for everyone. Sin is the disobedience of God’s commandments.



Throughout history and perhaps especially these days, a great many people have chosen to ignore Him and to do whatever is “right in their own eyes”.

Back at the beginning of the Bible, God decreed to Adam and Eve that the consequence of their act of disobedience would be their deaths after years of toil and strife living their lives. To Adam, God said:

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken: for dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3:19).

The Promise to Abraham

In Genesis we read about the faithful man Abraham. God makes him a number of promises across the later years of his life, and in chapter 17 He tells Abraham:

I give to you, and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Genesis 17:8).

We see here that God promised Abraham he would possess the land of Canaan for ever. Despite this, he didn't possess it in his lifetime, not even by the time of his death. This caused the writer in Hebrews to make this comment about him:

By faith he [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:9)

The promise made to Abraham means that he must be raised from the dead and given eternal life, for that promise to be fulfilled. This must still be future, as it has not happened yet. Abraham had faith in God's promises and looked far into the future to the time when he would live for ever in the kingdom of God.

Another Genesis account of Abraham concerns him and his son Isaac. Genesis 22 tells how God instructed him:

Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you (Genesis 22:2).

God's command to Abraham was a test of his faith and obedience. Although God did not let him go



through with a human sacrifice, Abraham proved that he was prepared to do anything God asked of him. This was also an enacted parable of resurrection from the dead. We find again in Hebrews that a commentary is provided:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Hebrews 11: 17–19).

Job

Another Old Testament man of faith, Job, believed in the resurrection of the dead. He knew he would live again after his death:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed,

this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25–27).

Clearly, Job looked forward to the time when he would live again, even though his body had been destroyed (decayed in the grave). He believed that he would be raised from death, to stand again upon earth and that he would see God with his own eyes.

Jesus' Message of Eternal Life

As we have seen, the Old Testament teaches us that eternal life is promised to the faithful, but quite often it is implied, rather than plainly stated. In the New Testament, however, it is explicitly stated, and especially as taught by Jesus.

He came to speak the truth to all who would hear him, saying to his disciple Thomas:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

Jesus is the only way to life – eternal life – there is no other way for anyone to come to God. In fact that is the message of Peter which we considered in our introduction. Jesus also said:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16–17).

To be saved ultimately means being saved from the curse of sin and death;

being found worthy at the judgement to be granted eternal life and permitted to enter the kingdom of God.

In Luke's Gospel, we have the account of a lawyer who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life:

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him "You have answered rightly: do this, and you will live" (Luke 10:25–28).

Conditions and Judgement

Eternal life is not automatically given; it requires a commitment to a life faithful to God. Indeed, Jesus said he was the only way to life – meaning eternal life – and that by keeping his commands we demonstrate our commitment to him:

If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love... You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you (John 15:10, 14).

Keeping the commandments of the Lord Jesus is totally necessary if we desire eternal life. True believers can look in hope for the day when they will be raised from the dead and granted immortality – eternal life in the kingdom of God.

After the resurrection, there will be a 'Day of Judgement', which Jesus

taught clearly in his parables. For good examples of these, read ‘the parable of the talents’ (Matthew 25:14–30) and ‘the parable of the sheep and the goats’ (Matthew 25:31–46). These give word-pictures of people found worthy at the judgement who will be permitted and indeed welcomed to go into the kingdom of God.

We see in these parables that, again, eternal life is not given automatically, it requires a response from the believer. Jesus summarised this responsibility and the right outlook:

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

This means putting God, and everything He promises and asks of us, first and foremost in our lives.

The Kingdom of God on Earth, Not in Heaven

There is a common misconception amongst some believers that the faithful go to heaven at death, to receive a reward there. However, a careful reading of the Bible tells us otherwise. Eternal life will be enjoyed by the faithful on earth, not in heaven.



We can see this from the example of the Apostle Peter at Pentecost, preaching to the Jews:

Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne... (Acts 2:29–30).

That descendant was the Lord Jesus Christ (see v31) who is now in heaven awaiting the day when he will return. Peter was quite clear: David did not ascend into the heavens (v34). David was described as ‘a man after God’s own heart’ (Acts 13:22). If he did not ascend to heaven, we can be sure that neither will we!

Peter’s message was that Jesus, the firstfruits of the resurrection to eternal life, is in heaven, awaiting the appointed day of his return:

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool” (Acts 2:34–35).

That day will be wonderful, when faithful men and women from all time will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God, to enjoy that promised eternal life.

Let’s take the time now to read our Bibles, find out about God’s promises and what He wants from us, and get our lives right with Him, so that we too can inherit eternal life.

Grahame A. Cooper

The Ten Commandments in the 21st Century - 5

You Shall Not Murder

Sometimes this, the sixth commandment, has been misunderstood as reading “You shall not kill”. The Hebrew word here means murder, that is an unlawful killing.

Although Christians are not allowed to kill people at all, the Israelites were authorised by God to kill God’s enemies, such as the Canaanites. They were also instructed to execute convicted murderers (judicial killing). So under the Law, some kinds of killing were lawful. We should therefore see this commandment as prohibiting pre-meditated, deliberate killing of a human being because of hatred or anger.

An Early Commandment

It is important to note that this commandment, like many others, goes back long before the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses merely combines these ancient laws into a comprehensive written list. For example, Abel offered to God the firstfruits of his flock (Genesis 4:4) which later became a commandment in the Law of Moses. Abraham divided the animals in half when God made a covenant with him, but did not divide the birds (Genesis 15:10), also as in the Law of Moses.



The original commandment about murder was made immediately after the Flood, when God gave Noah the rules about killing animals for food.

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

God said Noah and his family should not eat blood, because blood represents the animal’s life. The blood was to be poured out on the ground, to show that man does not possess the life of the animal. It belongs to God, Who alone gives life. God continued:

Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man (v5–6).

If anyone spilled human blood in anger, his own blood was to be poured out, because he had taken away life that belongs to God. Only God has the right to take away life. We see this too in Deuteronomy 32:39.

A Modern Commandment!

Does this commandment apply to Christians today? The answer is ‘Yes, only more so!’

The Lord Jesus makes an important speech on this topic:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder,

and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire (Matthew 5:21–22).

So it is not enough to be able to say ‘I have never committed murder’. Even to hate your brother so that you shout abuse at him is a serious crime in God’s opinion, and to curse him could put you in danger of ‘hell fire’. The word for this is ‘Gehenna’ in the original text, and it was the place in the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the rubbish from the city burned day and night. Jesus uses it on a number of occasions as a figure for complete destruction.

In passing, when the Bible talks about ‘our brother’ this does not just mean the son of our father. All Israelites were counted as brothers (e.g. Deuteronomy 24:7), and in Christ believers are all brothers and sisters, even though we are not related.

Deal with it Early

Murder is only the last event in a chain. We have a saying ‘the thought is father to the deed’. If we start off by hating somebody, then our hatred may grow until it is all-consuming and results in violent action.

Jesus is telling us to get rid of the hatred as soon as it begins, so that it develops no further. We must learn to forgive people who do bad things to us, and not respond with more bad actions.

The Apostle John puts it very bluntly, so there is no misunderstanding:

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15).

It is interesting to note that the Law of Moses says the same thing:

You shall not hate your brother in your heart (Leviticus 19:17).

The passage says if we feel we have been treated badly, we should go and tell the offender about it, and give them the opportunity to apologize and be reconciled to us. The Fifth Commandment is intended to stop violent crime, and here the Sixth encourages us to deal with bad feelings promptly, and put them away, so that we will not become murderers.

The Apostle Paul has the same kind of good advice in Ephesians 4:26 – do not go to bed angry, he says, make peace before you sleep. This is especially good advice for husbands and wives.

John says we cannot even claim to be a Christian if we hate our brother or sister:

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 John 4:20).

This is serious. So, for the Christian, it is not just murder that counts as a serious crime. Even just hating another will keep us from the Kingdom of God. We can see that God’s principles are unchanging and are very relevant in our lives today.

David M. Pearce

Humbling the Proud

We read of the character of God that He takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11 – see also 18:23).

Because of this, God does not always leave people to continue their wrong behaviours. Sometimes He intervenes in their lives, to correct them and bring them back to Him. A good example of this is where He chooses to humble the proud.

One man who was proud and boastful about his achievements was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. God intervened in this man’s life in an extraordinary way in order to humble him. The good news for the king was that he responded positively.

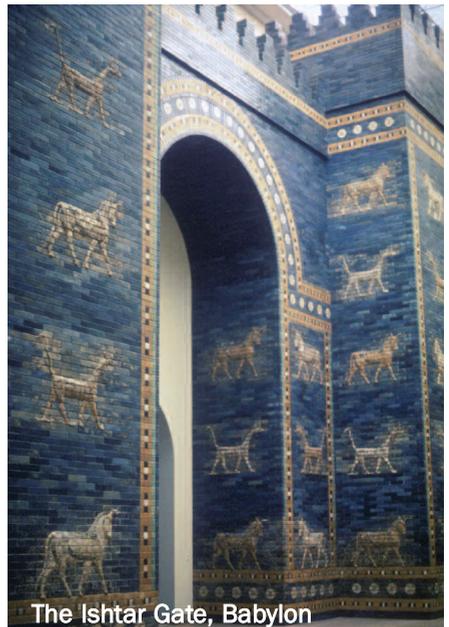
Sadly, his descendant Belshazzar did not follow Nebuchadnezzar’s example but continued to be very proud. The lessons from these two ancient kings are timeless – as applicable today as they were when they took place so many centuries ago.

The Dream

Nebuchadnezzar had a fascinating dream given to him by God, the Most High, recorded in Daniel 4:10–17. A great and fruitful tree was to be cut down and have its branches removed, and then have metal bands put around its stump. Then there was a picture of a man living like an animal, with animal instincts, eating grass and soaked by the dew.

It was the Jewish prophet Daniel who gave the shocking interpretation of the dream. The king was to be:

Driven away from mankind and your dwelling place is to be with the beasts of the field, and you are to be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules. Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity (Daniel 4:24–27).



The Ishtar Gate, Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar was an extremely proud man who required dramatic events to unfold in his life to bring about his repentance. This did not happen instantly. Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king said:

Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty? (Daniel 4:29).

Nebuchadnezzar had not heeded the dream's message to change his ways and instead carried on in his arrogance, believing that his prosperity was solely due to his actions. He did not acknowledge that his sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty were all given to him by God (see Daniel 5:18). This blasphemy did not go unpunished and the dream was fulfilled.

The Fulfilment

Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws (Daniel 4:33).

This proud monarch was brought to his lowest point, living like an animal with no power or even human dignity. He endured this punishment for a great length of time, the 'seven periods of time' (Daniel 4:16) may well have been seven years! In this incident, the Proverb is shown to be true:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling (Proverbs 16:18).

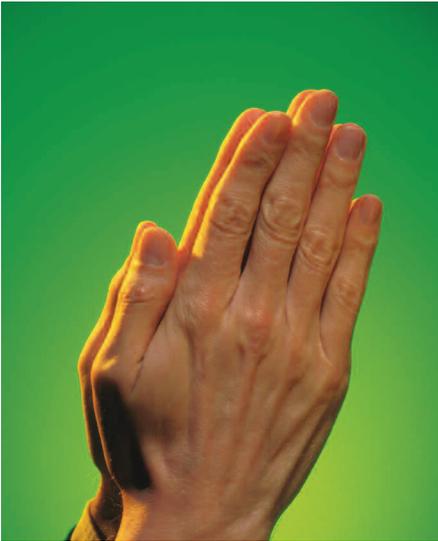
How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to the divine punishment that was inflicted on him? Did he feel hatred towards God because of the suffering he endured? Did he think God was unjust; a cruel dictator to be avoided at all costs? Not at all.

The Response

But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?' At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendour were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counsellors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was re-established in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honour the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride (Daniel 4:34–37).

Once Nebuchadnezzar had demonstrated that his pride had turned into humility and had acknowledged the greatness of God, the Lord was merciful. He restored the king's majesty and splendour, all the power of his kingdom.

The end result was that Nebuchadnezzar turned from his evil ways to



worship the only true God. In fact, he became a believer. When we think of Nebuchadnezzar, it is easy to picture his arrogance and pride. It is much harder to remember that he repented. In doing so, he was therefore in the same position as all those who have changed their lives, repented from their sins and turned to God.

This episode serves as a reminder that anyone can be brought low by circumstances in their life. These may even have been brought about by God in order to correct them. The great news is that anyone can repent, become a believer in God and be reconciled to Him.

Learning the Lesson?

Sadly, although the later King Belshazzar knew what happened to his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar, he did not act upon this knowledge. After recounting the events which had happened to Nebuchadnezzar, it was again the prophet Daniel who declared to Belshazzar:

Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this... (Daniel 5:22).

Belshazzar continued to be proud and self-confident, ignoring the Most High. He did not humble himself, even though he was aware of the incredible events which had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. His punishment was severe:

That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain (Daniel 5:30).

Evidently, with knowledge comes responsibility to act upon it. Let us apply what we can learn from studying the lives of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, as summarised in the Proverb:

A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honour (Proverbs 29:23).

Stephen Blake

*All quotations from the
New American Standard Bible*



Bees

Once the warmer weather starts, it is amazing how quickly insects start to appear. I was out walking last spring and passed some gorse bushes. They were in bloom and absolutely covered in bees collecting pollen.

Different Roles

These were female honey bees that may have been only three weeks old. Their first three weeks of life after emerging from the pupae is spent mainly in the hive feeding larvae, trimming cells and capping honey cells. This allows time for their wax glands to develop and they can then emerge for us to see, collecting nectar and pollen. They are commonly known as worker bees and do indeed work until they die, which in a busy summer can be as little as three weeks later.

One of the most well known things about bees is that the males are called drones and do nothing. This is not strictly true as they are responsible for the continuation of the hive by mating with the queen, which actually costs them their life. There are far fewer male bees than female bees; if they have not mated when winter comes or

there are adverse conditions, they are ejected from the hive and die.

The queen bee is a bee which has been fed on "royal jelly" continually and so grows to one and a half times the size of ordinary bees. After mating she will continue to lay eggs until almost the end of her life, which can be up to five years, far longer than the other bees which look after her.

Collaboration

The bees that form the hive all work together for the good of their hive. They each have a role to play and they all perform the tasks allotted to them. The hive is protected and food is provided, sufficient to see enough bees through the winter to start the whole process again the following spring.

Yet these creatures are tiny in comparison with so much around them. Scientists are beginning to learn more of the ways of bees such as their now famous "waggle" dance which directs other bees to rich sources of pollen. The curative powers of honey have been recognised for centuries and possible uses of royal jelly are being considered.

But while much is being discovered much is still a mystery. In these small but apparently essential insects there is evidence of the power of God in creating something that is vastly more complex than first imagined. It also has the potential to help people in providing something that not only tastes good but can help in the healing processes.



Jill Thorpe

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