

# Glad Tidings

*of the Kingdom of God*

1597



***Following God's Guide - page 3***  
***Why Be Baptised? - page 5***  
***The Problem of Drugs - page 10***  
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# Glad Tidings

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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# Following God's Guide

Our front cover shows a beach on a sunny day, the ideal summer spot for many people. Here in the UK, the holiday period is beginning for many, and dreams of warm, lazy days may fill the mind.

To make visits to the seaside safer, a lot of work has been done to educate people about the potential dangers of the sea, as well as to provide guidance and protection at the location. Life-guards are often in attendance, signs indicate safe behaviour, and flags show where or when it is safe to swim.

For the most part, whilst these guides show the way to keep safe and to avoid danger, it is up to individual people whether to follow them, or not. However, we would ignore them at our peril, and common sense tells us to respect them.

## Clear Guidelines

With God, the 'guidelines' are much clearer. The effect of not following His guide is even more serious. This was the case from the very beginning, when He spoke in the Garden of Eden:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).*

Adam and Eve had free will, they could choose to obey God or not, but the outcome was clear: if they ate of that tree's fruit, they would die. We know what happened, of course. They

did eat the forbidden fruit and in the course of time they died. In the same way, when we sin (disobey God) we too will die.

*Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (James 1:14-15).*

However, because God is loving and merciful, He gave the Lord Jesus Christ as a perfect sacrifice. By this, we can have our sins forgiven and live for ever in God's kingdom.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).*

Throughout His interactions with men and women, God has placed this choice before them, and us. Believe in Him and respond properly, and live. Choose not to follow His guide, and then death is the end. Jesus said this:

*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).*

## The Same Choice

This was the choice that God placed before the people of Israel – to obey Him or not. It was clearly spelled out by Moses as they stood at the border of the Promised Land:

*I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set*



*before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).*

To help people, through the ages God has sent messengers such as Moses and the prophets, then the greatest of all, the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, God said that He would continue to do this, even in the future, to help His people follow the rules He established.

*Though the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left (Isaiah 30:20-21).*

One of the things Jesus taught was that the way to a relationship with God and the hope of eternal life is not necessarily obvious to our human thinking. For many, it is simply not the choice they want to make and they choose to ignore it.

*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13-14).*

## The Perfect Sign

When God sent Jesus, He was sending the ultimate guide of how to come to Him. Jesus made it very clear that he was and is the route to God:

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

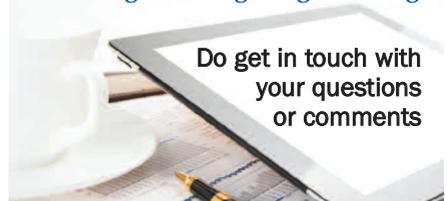
This will continue to apply in the future, when Jesus returns to gather God's people - Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) alike - and to set up the Kingdom of God here on Earth. Of Jesus, it written that he...

*...shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek him, and his resting place shall be glorious... He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:10-12).*

We are very privileged to be able to read our Bibles and understand God's message for ourselves. We have His word preserved for us, and demonstrated for us in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the free choice to follow God's guide or not: but we ignore it at our peril!

**Editor**

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# Why Be Baptised?

Imagine you had murdered a powerful man's son. The son's father had sent him with a message for you. He didn't hurt you. He didn't even defend himself. But you killed him. How could you make amends?

After Jesus' resurrection, the apostle Peter told the people of Israel that they'd done just that. Addressing a large number of people, he said:

*Jesus, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death (Acts 2:23).*

God sent Jesus for a reason. But the leaders of Israel took him, crucified him, and killed him. Peter says that Jesus is now even more important:

*God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (v36)*

God raised Jesus and made him both Lord and Christ. But you – says Peter – crucified him.

## What Can a Murderer Do?

*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (v37).*

After killing God's Son, what could they do? How could they save themselves? Peter told them:

*Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (v38).*

Repent – change your ways – and be baptised. This was what was required for God to forgive even the worst imaginable sin: the murder of His own perfect Son.



## Be Baptised and Forgiven

God won't just "forgive and forget". He won't only remove their punishment. Peter says they'll receive a gift too. God wants to make these sinners His friends. He gives them the gift of eternal life! This promise wasn't just for them. It was for everyone.

*For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call (v39).*

God wants to give this to everybody He calls, who repents and is baptised. That's why many of those who heard Peter's speech were baptised. It's why believers throughout the New Testament were baptised. And it's why you should consider being baptised.

It doesn't matter who we are or what we have done. If we repent and are baptised for the forgiveness of our sins, then God holds out the promise of eternal life. It is for us to respond, now and every day, to God's call.

**David Barnes**

## Steps to the State of Israel - 2

# Declaration of Independence

The Bible prophesied that the Jews would be regathered, after being scattered amongst the nations of the world. For centuries, Bible students had been anticipating this event. The fact that it has happened over the course of the last hundred years has been a great source of interest and excitement, since it demonstrates that God is still active in the world and that His plan is being fulfilled.

*Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 43:5-6).*

In the first part of this series, we considered the events that led to the Balfour Declaration. This was a statement by the British Government, stating that it viewed with favour the establishment of a home for the Jewish people in their ancient homeland of Palestine.

We saw that one of the most significant factors behind this was that most of the members of the Government in 1917 had been brought up to read the Bible. They therefore considered the Jews to be “the People of the Book”, unlike the prevailing view in much of Europe, where anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) was rife.

In this article we move forward to the events leading to the next great step: the Declaration of Independence of 14th May 1948.

## After the Balfour Declaration

Sadly the optimism amongst Jews and their supporters was rather short-lived. The intention of settling Jews in Palestine was a good one, but in practice there were many hurdles that nearly proved fatal to the whole concept. In the peace conference that followed the First World War, Britain was awarded a Mandate over the territory of Palestine.

But keeping the peace over this part of the world was not easy then, just as it isn't today! The British Government, in an attempt to prevent bloodshed between Jew and Arab, imposed quotas restricting the number of Jews allowed to settle in Palestine. This worked against the whole idea of providing a safe haven for the Jews of Europe and Russia, where persecution was growing steadily.

## Anti-Semitism

The ending of the Great War brought many problems, especially in Germany, where the majority of people were struggling to come to terms with their defeat. They soon found a scapegoat for their troubles: the Jews.

Anti-Semitism grew alarmingly, encouraged by extremist political groups. The appointment of Adolf Hitler to the role of Chancellor on 30th January 1933 was a dark day for European Jewry. In his book *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had made it clear that he intended to destroy the Jews, and in the 12 years of his dictatorship he almost succeeded.

On 10th November 1938, a further downward step took place, known as *Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass). Hundreds of Jewish synagogues were burned down, Jewish shops and businesses were looted, Jewish books burned in the streets and thousands of Jews rounded up and sent to concentration camps. If there was ever a time when these people needed a safe haven it was then. But in 1939 Britain produced a White Paper imposing punitive restrictions on Jewish emigration to Palestine. It is true that some hundreds of Jewish children were taken into Britain in what has become known as the *Kindertransport*; nevertheless, millions of Jews were trapped.

As Hitler's territorial ambitions grew, so the misery of European Jewry increased: first Czechoslovakia, then Poland, France, the Low Countries, Russia etc. In each of the territories where Nazi power or ideology took hold, the rounding up of Jews began. At first they were taken to concentration camps. Then mass murder began. Even this was insufficient, so a new method of genocide was devised: the Final Solution. The names of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen have become synonymous with

the horrors of the gas chambers. It seemed that all hope was lost for the Jews.

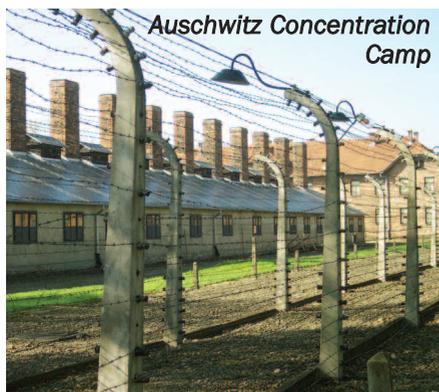
## Bible Prophecy

It is a remarkable fact that the plight of the Jews was prophesied in the Bible, even before the time of Jesus. Here are some examples:

*They shall stumble over one another, as it were before a sword, when no one pursues; and you shall have no power to stand before your enemies. You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And those of you who are left shall waste away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands (Leviticus 26:37–39).*

*Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, 'Oh, that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Oh, that it were morning!' because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see (Deuteronomy 28:64–67).*

Both of these passages make it clear that the future of the Israelite nation was dependent on their obedience to the Law of God: something they had solemnly agreed to do. If they followed



**Auschwitz Concentration Camp**

God's commands they would be blessed. If they forsook His commands they would suffer terrible trials.

Deuteronomy 28 maps the sequence of Israel's history centuries in advance, as they first obeyed and then disobeyed God. However, the passage in Leviticus also makes it very clear that God would never totally destroy His people.

*Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God (Leviticus 26:44).*

So it has been with the Jews in modern times. When it appeared their hope was totally lost and that Hitler would finally annihilate them, the dawning of a new hope began.



Ezekiel contains a remarkable prophecy about the resurrection of the nation some time in the future. The prophet is given a vision:

*The hand of the LORD came upon me... and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones (Ezekiel 37:1).*

God speaks to Ezekiel to explain the vision:

*Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'" (v11).*

Then God commands him to speak to the dry bones, and He makes a promise:

*Therefore prophesy and say to them, "Thus says the LORD God: 'Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel'" (v12).*

And so it has happened. Before the Final Solution could be completed, the Third Reich was destroyed. The allied armies opened the gates of the death camps to reveal the bones of millions of Jews who had been slaughtered. And yet, this was the start of the restoration of the nation.

## **The Final Obstacle**

For those Jews who remained in Europe and Russia, there could only be one place to go: Palestine. But one obstacle remained: Britain again! Being the mandated power in Palestine, the British authorities ensured that the movement of Jews into the country was tightly controlled and ships full of Jewish families were actually turned away. The situation for the hundreds of thousands of survivors from the death camps was becoming desperate.

The plight of the Jews was brought before the United Nations, which voted in November 1947 (almost 30



***British soldiers prevent the disembarkation of Jewish refugees from the ship “The Exodus”***

years after the Balfour Declaration). By a majority of 33 to 13, the UN voted in favour of partitioning the land into a Jewish territory and an Arab territory with Jerusalem as a UN-administered International City. At last the Jews were to have their own State. Britain finally withdrew from Palestine on 14th May 1948. So great was Britain’s desire to leave that they did not exit in an orderly fashion and did not hand the government of Palestine over to anyone!

## **God at Work**

Once again we have seen God at work amongst the nations. The First World War led to the liberation of the land of Israel from Turkish rule and the opportunity for the Jews to have a homeland. But human intentions are frequently short-lived and Britain’s Mandate over the land became too difficult for her to keep to the promise that had been made. Meanwhile the terrible persecution of Jews during the Holocaust became the driving force that

forged the desire amongst Jews to make Palestine their homeland. The new state was declared on Friday 14th May 1948 by David Ben-Gurion (the first Prime Minister).

You can imagine the thrill that Bible students must have felt when Ben-Gurion announced that this Jewish State would be called Israel. The People of the

Book were finally back in their land!

But the Declaration of the State of Israel was not the end of the story, as we will see in the next instalment.

## **Simon Collard**



***Declaration of the State of Israel by David Ben-Gurion, 14th May 1948***

# The Problem of Drugs

Drugs destroy lives. In my professional life I met many young people whose lives had been blighted by the use of illegal drugs. It was one of the saddest things I saw. One abiding memory is of a handsome young couple, sitting in hospital, holding hands and staring into space. I asked, “How long before they are cured?” The gloomy answer was: “Never. They are stoned out of their minds on Heroin.” I left much saddened that more promising lives had been thrown away.

Yet this is not a new problem: drugs have been used throughout the years for people of all ages, to get into a high emotional state or to be dragged to the depths of despair. The more popular drugs for each generation tend to change regularly, with new ones being tried all the time. Each presents new dangers and damage.

## The Bible View

The Bible states that we are *“fearfully and wonderfully made”* (Psalm 139:14). Why then would we interfere and take drugs illegally when bad effects will be a certainty? Once addiction sets in, the capacity to fight it is lost.

The apostle Paul warned against this in his time. He said:

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery... (Galatians 5:19–20).*

We stop there, for that last word in Greek (the original New Testament language) is *‘pharmakeia’* – very



similar to the modern word *‘pharmacy’*. Drug taking seems to have been part of many of the Roman world’s pagan rites, and the Bible gave a positive warning against it.

Why do people take illegal drugs today? Sometimes it can be the sign of someone who feels unloved, is frustrated, insecure, or just looking for ‘kicks’ or to escape boredom. A local health sheet states that *“99% of young people who turn to drugs have family health problems”*.

The people who take these substances for recreational use see them as a way of escape from something – even normality – yet of course many problems can follow. Drugs will damage their health, their family and relationships, even drive users to crime. Every day, newspapers record violence, death and disaster to young lives, driven by drugs.

## A Fuller Life

Following Bible teaching helps us to remove our inherent selfishness, and moves us to think of others. This means recognising and seeking to help those with problems, such as the disillusioned, the aged, the ill and the lonely. We cannot do much good by opting out of society. That is a negative approach, but the Bible always points to a positive goal for which to aim.

By reading our Bibles, we will gain conviction that God has spoken, and that He will fulfil His promises. Once we see the richness of what God offers, everlasting life in His kingdom, then the things of life today will be seen in their proper light.

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

What then are the things we long for? For many it means wealth, to be able to do all the things we desire. Yet we can see that those who have the finest of everything often fall prey to drug use as they are still unhappy. God sets clear priorities for us:

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

*The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22–23).*

If our priority is God's character and His kingdom, then this will leave less room for damaging habits. In the same way we cannot exhibit these qualities if our minds are out of control.



God requires discipline in His children, which may be difficult at times, but He holds out the marvellous prospect of being counted as faultless, having all of our faults forgiven and being welcomed into His kingdom, where no unhappiness or foolishness will spoil our existence. Our goal should be to:

*Become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:15).*

Let Paul conclude our thoughts:

*Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things (Philippians 4:8).*

**Ken Clark**

# The Holy Spirit

Many individuals and religious groups claim that they are able to 'speak in tongues' and perform miracles, just as the Bible tells us that the apostles and First Century Christians did. They will state that, unless we possess these 'gifts of the Holy Spirit', we are not real Christians, or we are just beginners.

This is an important subject, therefore, because the question of 'What is a Christian?' is at the heart of Christianity. It is also a matter of authority – is it the Holy Spirit speaking directly to us, is the Spirit influencing the church, or is God's communication through the Bible?

We believe that most claims to possess the Holy Spirit are made by sincere people; but we believe that they are mistaken. We say this because by reading the Bible without prejudice we can see that, although Christians did once possess the Holy Spirit gifts of prophecy, healing, and so on, God planned for these powers to be temporary, and withdrew them within a few years.

## God's Marvellous Power

The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit – His energy or His power. The writer of the Psalms writes of God:

*Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire (Psalm 104:4).*

So the angels are embodiments of that Spirit, but usually God's power is invisible, although the effects can be dramatic. We see this first at the start of the creation of the world:



*The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2).*

At first those waters covered the face of the planet. By the end of the sixth day the earth was transformed, the solar system was defined and life of all sorts had been created. In the following Bible comments, we see again how God's spirit and His power are used in the same way:

*He has made the earth by His power (Jeremiah 10:12).*

*By His Spirit He adorned the heavens (Job 26:13).*

Another example is the miraculous birth of Jesus, God's Son who was conceived without the aid of a human father. Mary was told:

*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).*

## Given to People

On certain occasions, God caused men and women to be filled with His Spirit to carry out specific tasks which required abilities above what is normally humanly possible.

As we read God's record of events that took place before Jesus, we see the history of a people who were chosen by God but who usually let Him down. This was despite the fact that they were led by rulers who had God's Spirit specifically given to them and prophets who received messages from God to give to the people.

Thus Moses and Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Saul (1 Samuel 11:6) and David (1 Samuel 16:13) are just some of the men who represented God's authority and who were given the Holy Spirit to guide them in their decisions in ruling the nation. Both the Old Testament (in Nehemiah 9:30) and the New Testament (in 2 Peter 1:21) refer to God using His Spirit to give messages through chosen prophets by the process of 'inspiration'. This meant warning and teaching His people.

People like Samson, Elijah and Elisha are recorded as having God's Spirit to perform miracles and acts of healing. What we, if we are not careful, regard as a New Testament phenomenon, turns out to be not so 'new' after all. God at particular times and for particular purposes gave His Spirit to particular people before the time of Christ, for the tasks of governing His people and revealing His Word.

## Jesus

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah said: "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me*" (Isaiah 61:1). After Jesus

received the Holy Spirit at his baptism, he taught that these words applied to himself (Luke 4:17-21).

What was different about Jesus was that, as the apostle John says, "*He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure*" (John 3:34). In other words he spoke and acted on God's behalf as no one has ever done before. He is God's Son, and he was given his Father's power without limit. His words carried the authority of the king's son and his miracles were the evidence that what he said was true (John 5:36). This was always the purpose of miracles, that they should support, not replace, the preaching of the Gospel, because it is God's will that people should be persuaded to believe His message.

## The Apostles

*I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father (John 14:12).*

In these words Jesus described the legacy and the work that he was giving his followers: that they should carry on where he left off when he went to heaven, and preach the Gospel throughout the known world.

When he spoke these words, the apostles had already been preaching and had already received the Holy Spirit to help them in that work (see Matthew 10). Now, as he prepared them for his heart-rending departure, he promised them 'another comforter' (support or help) i.e. the Holy Spirit. The translators of the Bible tend to portray 'the Comforter' as a person, although this is not supported by the

text. Jesus was talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, God's invisible power, which they would receive to help and support their preaching.

In John chapters 14–16, which we are now going to examine, 'the Comforter' is described as 'the Spirit of Truth', showing that this was its purpose. The ways in which they would be helped may be summarised as follows:

- ❖ **John 14:26 and 16:13:** to teach, remind, guide them 'into all truth', so that they might have a proper knowledge and understanding of the things of God.
- ❖ **John 16:8–11:** to show right from wrong, God's justice and coming judgment.
- ❖ **John 15:26:** to 'testify' (provide evidence) about Jesus by miraculous acts (see for example Acts 14:3).

The apostles were 'filled with the Holy Spirit' at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). They were miraculously aided to preach the Gospel in foreign languages to the people from different countries who were gathered there. For some listeners it had the desired effect and 3,000 were baptised. This is the real meaning of 'speaking in tongues' – to speak foreign languages.

## Early Christians

With the Holy Spirit inspiring their preaching and providing evidence of the genuineness of their message about the Lord Jesus, assemblies of newly baptised believers grew and the gifts of the Spirit were needed for other reasons. These early assemblies needed guidance in their administration and development. The Old Testament pattern of Spirit-guided



ruling and prophesying was repeated in these communities. For example, Paul's letters were addressed to them.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we have a list of the God-given abilities in use to support the task of preaching the Gospel and strengthening the believers in their assemblies.

*To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:8–10).*

Verse 28 extends our view to the different ministries and offices which were carried out. These people had the Holy Spirit to help them perform their roles. In his letter, Paul warns that no one should become proud because of the things they could do and say with the help of the Spirit. Rather, they should remember that they were part of the 'body of Christ', the body of believers.

In the next chapter, he says that a Christian's behaviour, in showing love, is more important to God than any of these abilities.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).*

Love is the enduring quality, a standard that is eternal – unlike the gifts of the Spirit, which, though impressive, would fade away (verse 8). Some of his readers would have been brought down to earth as he describes this stage of the church's development as childhood (verse 11), which passes as maturity is reached.

Why does Paul say this? Remember the lesson from the Old Testament: that God gave His Spirit to particular people at particular times for particular purposes. In the First Century, we have noted the specific purposes. Whilst at that time possession of the Holy Spirit was widespread, 1 Corinthians 13:9 tells us it was given 'in part'. Paul foresaw:

*When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away (1 Corinthians 13:10).*

At this point the distribution of Spirit gifts would no longer be necessary.

## The Bible

Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of the scriptures, the written Word of God, and its many purposes.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

Shortly afterwards the Bible as we know it, consisting of Old and New Testaments, was completed. It was the work of the Holy Spirit, given by inspiration of God.

This written form is how we can 'possess' the Holy Spirit today – the written Word of God absorbed into our minds, directing our words, our behaviour, our lives. As before, in its dynamic form, it is the source of all truth. It teaches us the Gospel and provides evidence that it is true. It achieves the objectives of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; but it is available to everyone in their own language, to study at their leisure.

Let the written Word of God fill us, be absorbed into our minds. Let it direct our minds, our behaviour and our lives.

*And in keeping them [God's statutes] there is great reward (Psalm 19:11).*

**Rod Hale**



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# Jesus, the Master Preacher

After Jesus had performed many miracles in Capernaum, the people understandably did not want him to leave their city:

*But he said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee (Luke 4:43–44).*

This demonstrates how central preaching was to the life of Christ. Although he could undoubtedly have helped lots of people by remaining in selected areas, it was vital that his message reached as many people in Israel as possible. As we would expect from the Son of God, Jesus was a masterly preacher.

There are numerous examples that would illustrate this point, but the incident involving a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well in Sychar (also called Shechem) is particularly powerful. To best appreciate the impact Jesus had, we want to set the scene and carefully consider the challenges which faced Jesus in preaching to this woman.

## A Hostile Audience

Just prior to the conversation, we read;

*When the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John... he left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But he needed to go through Samaria (John 4:1–4).*



When Assyria defeated the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, taking their capital Samaria, they introduced a non-native population to the area. The Samaritans were descendants of the surviving Israelites who intermarried with the new immigrants.

They never re-integrated with the Jews of the Southern kingdom of Judah, and the rift became irreparable. The building of the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim, overlooking Shechem (see John 4:20), set the seal on Jewish hatred for the Samaritans, and the Jewish king Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 BC. Jewish hatred and disdain for the Samaritans came from these historical and racial consideration.

Based on this, we can appreciate the historical background as to why in the time of Jesus, “*Jews have no dealings with Samaritans*” (John 4:9). As Jesus was a Jew, there were immediately two enormous barriers in the way of preaching the Gospel to the Samaritans: there was a racial barrier and the barrier of the historical rivalry between these two peoples.

When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, two more barriers appeared: moral and social. The moral barrier was self-evident in that the woman claimed not to have a husband but Jesus knew that she had *“had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband”* (John 4:18).

Finally, the social barrier existed by the very fact that she was a woman. Sexism against women was a huge problem in the time of Jesus. There was even a Jewish prayer which included the words; *‘Blessed art thou, O Lord... who has not made me a woman’* (*The Lion Handbook to the Bible*, p. 626). Perhaps this helps to explain why the disciples *“marvelled that he talked with a woman”* (John 4:27).

## Breaking Down Barriers

So there were at least four obstacles in the way of preaching the Gospel to the Samaritan woman; it would take a masterly preacher to remove them. It is fair to say that Jesus and this woman did not have much in common on which to base a conversation!

However, Jesus spoke about the one thing they did have in common at that moment – water:

*A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink”* (John 4:7).

From this unremarkable request, Jesus was then able to preach to her about the gift of God, living water and eternal life (John 4:10–13). From such a simple starting point, Jesus was able to overcome the enormous barriers which stood in the way of preaching – he was even able to continue preaching a positive message when the

woman brought up the religious difference which existed between Jews and Samaritans (see John 4:20).

Throughout the interaction, the woman’s appreciation of Jesus’ identity changed. First she addressed him as “a Jew” (v9); then she addressed him as “Sir” (v 11, 15, 19); then she perceived he was a “Prophet” (v 19). By the end of Jesus’ brief conversation with her, she was telling the people of her city that he was the “Christ” (v 29)!

To bring about such a rapid development in the woman’s understanding shows how effective Jesus was at converting people who were willing to hear the simple but profound message he had to offer.

## A Message Shared

The woman did not keep her new-found faith to herself – she went and told her whole city. Her personal testimony led to the uplifting conclusion:

*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans had come to him, they urged him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his own word. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”* (v39–42).

This all started from finding common ground about water! Truly Jesus was a master preacher.

**Stephen Blake**

# Everything Working for Good

*We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).*

Whilst I was reading a commentary on Romans 8:28, I was reminded of the times when people reassure a hospital patient, or someone who has been in an accident, that they're not to worry; that everything will be all right. On a first aid course, we are told to comfort the patient. Even if we were to fear the worst, our words are meant to instil confidence. We wouldn't be so cruel as to say "you may lose a leg", or "you may not recover from your heart attack".

To give words of comfort is the best thing to do, knowing that the patient will soon be in safe hands although the outcome could be serious.

## Real Reassurance

In the verse quoted above from Romans chapter 8, we have a different scenario. Paul is giving 100 per cent assurance to Christians.

Unlike ourselves at the scene of an accident, Paul spoke with authority. He was a man called by God, and well aware of the blessings brought about through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of this knowledge, he could make the statement above with absolute confidence.

The assurance that Paul gives cannot apply to everyone. It is directed at those who love God, and to those who are called in line with His purpose. If you love God then there is a real relationship:

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (v14).*

What does it mean to love God? It means to be obedient to Him and to obey His commandments:

*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:6).*

Throughout his life, Paul was no stranger to suffering, persecution and hunger. He accepted these things because he loved God and through his conversion he had been called to God's purpose. This purpose is that all the earth should be filled with God's glory in a divine eternal Kingdom. So, for those who are called by God and are baptised into the saving name of the Lord Jesus, all things do work together for good. 'Good' is both the objective and the reward.

## A Living Reality

However, it is wrong to think that our life will be without difficulties and disappointments. Let us look at some passages from the Bible:

*[Paul was] strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).*

*These things I have spoken to you, that in me [Jesus] you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).*

The 'good' in Romans 8:28, is not how much wealth we have, or our comfortable home or good health. It is conformity to Christ and acceptance by him to a place in the kingdom of God. Elsewhere in the chapter, Paul writes:

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

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (v29-30).*

We also have examples in the Bible of the glory still to come in the kingdom of God. Consider the last words of David:

*He shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain. Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase? (2 Samuel 23:4-5).*

There are two especially important words in verse 5: 'although' and 'yet'. We know that David sinned before God and that he was punished. So, he says that although his house was not perfect, yet God still made a covenant with him. So, to this man who loved God, all things were working together for good.

## **A Living Pattern**

In the Letter to the Hebrews we find the greatest example of all things truly working together for good. This is in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

In summary, the writer is exhorting us to prepare ourselves properly as if in a race. In doing so, we copy and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer lists just some of the dreadful things that the Lord endured, when he was put to death on the cross. And he did it by faith in the promise of God, by which (in faith) he saw the joy before him, and encouraged by this prospect he was sustained and triumphed, and is now at his Father's side in heaven.

We may not be asked to give our lives, but we do have the example of the Lord Jesus to follow. If we do this faithfully, then when the Lord returns to establish his Father's kingdom, we may be invited to share in the glory that will follow.

We will then be able to fully appreciate just how all things really will have worked together for good, to those who love God.

**Roy Soffe**

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