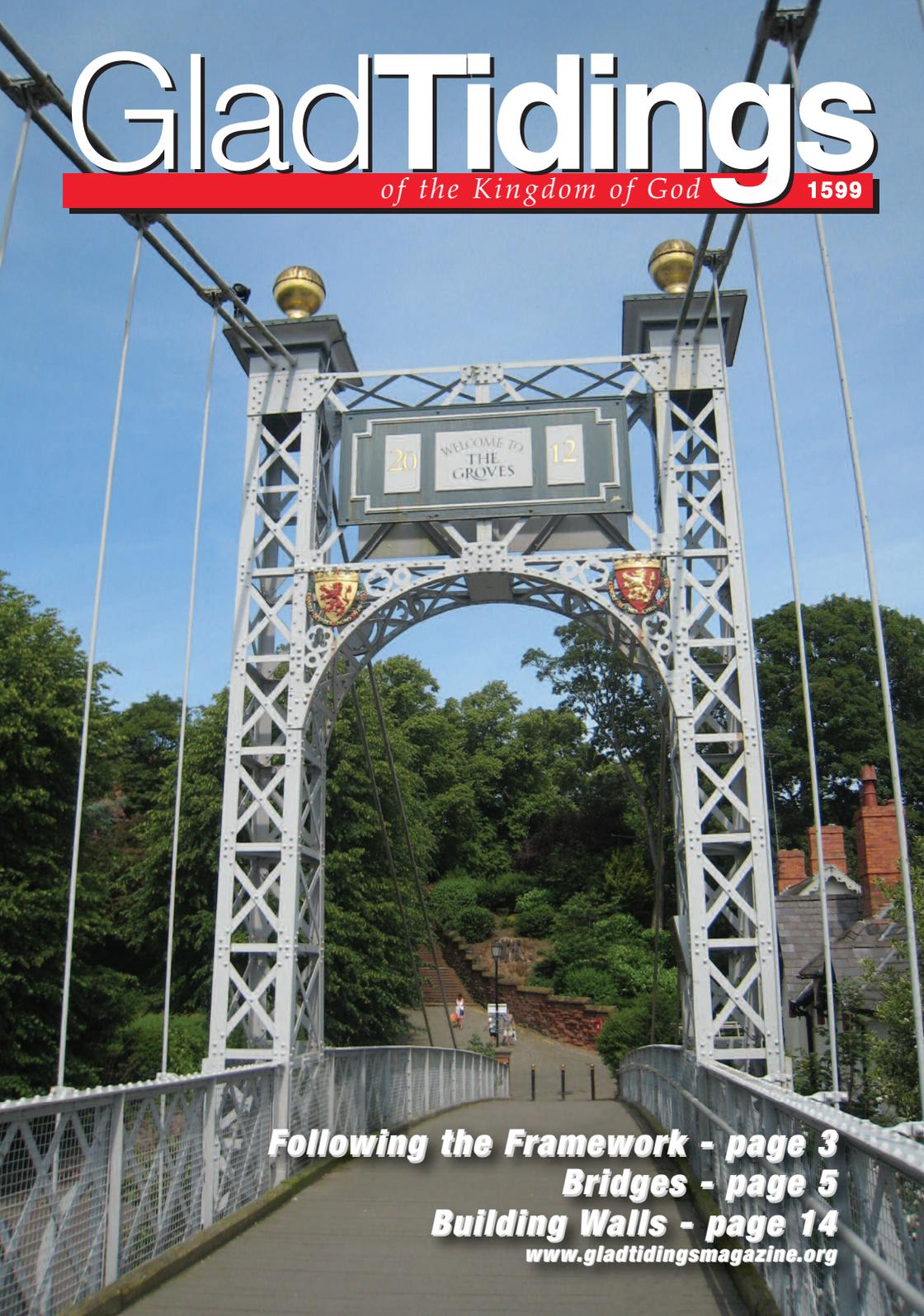


Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1599



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Bridges - page 5

Building Walls - page 14

www.gladtidingsmagazine.org

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

133rd Year

H17

1599



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 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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Bible Versions

The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) and other versions are sometimes used.

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Following the Framework

Frameworks are extremely useful and powerful things. In building, they make it possible for structures to be light and graceful yet incredibly strong. Climbing frames enable children to climb quickly and safely, exercising their balance and strength. Garden frames are used to help plants grow to their maximum potential, supporting them and their fruit.

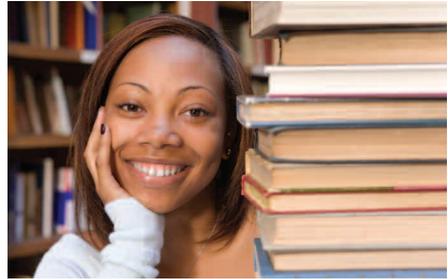
The same thing applies in other areas. Teachers use frameworks to help students grasp ideas. They're a very helpful way for students to see how things fit together, so they can understand the material properly. Companies put frameworks in place to make sure their purchasing and management processes are efficient and risk free. We all need the help that frameworks can give if we are to learn and then apply that learning.

God uses frameworks, for similar reasons. His word is very structured and follows patterns, which mean we can grasp it and respond to it. And His principles of life and death are also very structured, leaving no room for doubt or accidental mistakes. This is all good news for us.

A Structured Book

The Bible looks and feels like a big book, especially when we pick it up for the first time. Yet its structure makes it very accessible and we can view it as a library of books.

The Bible is presented in two parts – the Old and New Testaments – which deal with the time before Jesus (Old) and then the time of his mission and beyond (New). It is made up of 66



books, each of which can be categorised as history, prophecy, poetry, law, or letters.

Each book is broken down into chapters and verses, and the Bible has a 'contents' page to help us navigate the different books, to find the part we are looking for. These sub-divisions are man-made rather than God-given, but they are very helpful!

With this helpful structure, it makes sense to read the Bible in a structured way. If we just start at the beginning and read through, we may well become discouraged and may not find what we are looking for. Starting with the work of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John can be a very good approach.

Then using a Bible reading calendar can help us make progress at our own pace. *Glad Tidings* publishes such a calendar every December, please take a look at past issues on www.gladtidingsmagazine.org to find them. There are others, of course, and you may find one to suit you better; the important thing is to get reading!

Language Structures

One of the amazing things about the Bible is the way it is written. As we read

it, we are struck by how it is harmonious from end to end, despite being written over 1600 years. Not only this, but we find some real ‘gems’ in the structures it uses.

One example is the use of ‘acrostic’ poetry in some places. This means that in the original Hebrew, in which the Old Testament was written, each verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet. Examples are in Lamentations and there are many in the Psalms. You will notice these have multiples of 22 verses, because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

A wonderful example is Psalm 119, the longest chapter of the Bible. In this Psalm, each set of 8 verses starts with one letter, then the next start with the next, and so on. For example, verses 1–8 each start with ‘aleph’ (the first letter in the alphabet), verses 9–16 each start with ‘beth’ (the second letter) and so on to verses 169–176 which each start with ‘tau’ (the last letter). In fact, many Bibles are laid out to show the Hebrew letter for each section.

In a man-made book, this would quickly become contrived and clumsy, yet Psalm 119 is elegant and poetically beautiful. How appropriate then that its subject is the Word of God!

A Framework for Life

In communicating His plan of salvation, God is equally structured. In *Glad Tidings* we often write about God’s plan, set from the beginning and being unfolded even now, towards the ultimate establishment of His kingdom.

The same applies to His message to each man and woman, which is clear and structured in describing why we need to be saved. We will use just Romans chapter 5 to illustrate this.

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (v8).

Why did Christ have to die to save us? Because we all sin, like Adam did, and so eventually we all die:

Just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (v12).

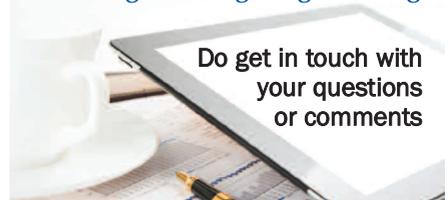
Jesus was sinless. So if we are associated with his sacrificial death then God can forgive us, count us as sinless, and give us eternal life:

For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous... so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (v19, 21).

So there is the good news: we have the Word of God in a structured form, which makes it easier for us to read and understand it. He has given us a simple framework for life – believe Him, be associated with the sacrifice of Jesus (this is through baptism). God’s framework is strong, elegant and attractive: let’s use it.

Editor

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Bridges

I see bridges every day, living in the beautiful Roman city of Chester in England. There are bridges of all kinds, spanning the railway, the canal, and especially the River Dee which meanders through the city. There are only three bridges over the Dee in Chester, and each was built in a different century and for a different purpose. That said, ‘getting from A to B’ would sum up all three of them!

It is interesting to consider these bridges, and why and how they were built, as they help us to reflect on how we humans behave. Although we all have the same physical make-up, have similar needs and live on the same planet, we all have different reasons for acting in the varying ways that we do. These are sometimes our long-term goals in life, and at others just what is happening to us at the time.

Unless our motivation is God-guided, we can lose our focus and go the wrong way. We may even question what we are doing on the planet in the first place and, whether there is a purpose to it all anyway. Thinking about these bridges may help us stay ‘on track’.

Follow a Pattern

Those who constructed the Old Dee Bridge in 1387 were well aware that their task was dangerous. There was a constant menace from the other side of the border, as this was the main crossing to Wales. At this time, the Welsh and the English were bitter enemies, fighting skirmishes up and down the border. There had actually

been a bridge here since Roman times, so the choice of site had already been made for them.

In our own lives, it is also sensible to keep alert in adverse circumstances, be they specific difficulties or the general threat of wandering away from God. The Bible shows how to follow the ways chosen by faithful people of old, and how God guides His people:

So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them (Deuteronomy 28:14).

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 30:21).



Go the Right Way

In 1833, a second bridge was built as the main crossing to Wales, and it still serves that purpose. The Grosvenor Bridge is busy and often congested. It brings to mind Jesus’ words:

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).

In our modern busy lives we can find ourselves hurtling along, without giving ourselves time to reflect on what life is really about. The pressures of our everyday lives can become overwhelming, and we would do well to find space to think properly and take pleasure from the beauties of God's creation.

Appreciating God's Handiwork

This reflection would be most likely to happen were we to make use of Chester's third bridge, the Suspension Bridge (see our front cover). Constructed in 1923, this footbridge replaced an earlier bridge, linking leafy suburbs with the city itself. I actually used this bridge on my daily walk to the railway station for my first job, and it was lovely to breathe in the fresh air, watch the swans on the river and see the flowers in nearby Grosvenor Park.



If we can keep our minds and hearts unpolluted in this stressful, often artifi-

cial world, taking time to wonder at the beauties of nature, we should feel refreshed and able to cope with the daily pressures of life. Being inspired by the natural world around us and seeing it as God's creation is one of the best therapies we could ever try!

These thoughts came back to me as I was preparing to run some puppet shows of Bible stories. Although these are aimed principally at children, the underlying messages can help us at any stage of our lives. I particularly remember the lines at the end of the puppet show about the wise and the foolish builders:

Nowadays not many of us build houses but we do build lots of other things like friendships and hopes. If we build them on a firm foundation, then we will always be able to weather the storms of life. God and His teachings are a strong foundation to base your life on.

Jesus put it like this:

Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock (Matthew 7:24–25).

Building is a positive activity; it cannot ever be seen as passive. If we build a secure foundation in our lives by placing our faith in God, we are doing something positive to give our lives a purpose rather than just sitting back and hoping for the best. This is definitely a message for all ages!

Pam Adams

Miracles of Jesus - 2

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

When they tell you someone you love has died, your heart contracts in pain. You see at once the dear familiar face of the one who has gone, and the memories rush swiftly backwards through the years. You know that nothing in your life will ever be the same again.

When they told Jesus that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been brutally killed in prison, he would feel an extra pang of fear. He would know that before long it would be his turn to die, alone before the fury of wicked men. Jesus had always respected John, and John's death marked a turning point in his mission. John's work as the Lord's messenger was complete. Now Jesus was on his own, committed to finishing the task that John had predicted: Jesus was to give his life as the Lamb of God for the sins of mankind.

For months, every day had been packed with action: endless queues of ill people hoping to be cured; disciples needing warning and instruction; and always the Jewish rulers to be considered, waiting in case he should let slip a treasonable phrase they could use in evidence against him. Jesus was tired. The disciples were tired. He desperately wanted a break, a breathing space to sit quietly and think, to mourn for his lost friend. He said to his disciples:

"Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat (Mark 6:31).



Seeking Solitude

They set off across the Sea of Galilee in their fishing boat, heading towards the deserted northern shore. With the wind in the hollow sail, white water creaming along the planking, and the hot sun baking brown, outstretched limbs, they could relax and enjoy a rare peace. It took some time to reach the coast. Perhaps they deliberately dallied on their way, savouring their freedom. When at last, the boat turned to land, the sun was high in the sky. They were looking forward to a stroll on the beach, perhaps a quiet picnic in the shade.

But as the beach came into view, the sharper eyed disciples were puzzled and disturbed to see tiny heads and bright fluttering cloaks where they had expected nothing but smooth green turf, fresh from the rains. With growing dismay, they realised at last they were not going to be alone.

What had happened was that the morning crowds, gathering as usual to greet the master at Capernaum, had discovered he had left before them. The quicker witted ones had noticed

the direction the tiny sail was taking over the lake, and read correctly the intention of Jesus to spend the day at Bethsaida. Not to be cheated of his company, they had set off overland on the long trek round the coast, and had arrived before him.

The multitudes saw them departing, and many knew him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to him (v33).

With cheerful grins, they were all ready to drag the boat up the beach and help Jesus and the disciples to disembark.



A Graceful Response

We can imagine the apostles with tight, angry lips and dark, pained eyes as they saw their brief rest about to be rudely cancelled. They would long to get back into the boat and sail away again. Nobody would want to escape more than Jesus himself. All his human fibres would cry out for a rest. He deserved a break. He could easily justify a getaway, if not for himself, then at least for the sake of the apostles. The challenge of the wilderness temptations came back again, flashing across his weary mind as it does for each of us every day. “Look after

number one” it said. “Go on, spoil yourself! Have a good time while you can.”

Once more the mighty Saviour rose to his feet, and rebuked the human thinking that would deflect him from his duty. Once more, that all-consuming love that drove him opened his arms to respond to their cries for help.

He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing (Luke 9:11).

Jesus would never let them down. They had made such an effort to be with him, he would forget his own tiredness, and take them to his care like the shepherd with his lambs. And so, the apostles found themselves back at their customary task of marshalling the crowds and waiting upon the Master.

Practical Matters

When the day began to wear away (v12), the apostles were irritable, worn out and ready to go home. All twelve descended on Jesus. “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.”

With a hint of a rebuke, Jesus brought them back to their duty. It was tough, being an apostle, and they were only beginning to learn the depths of self-sacrifice he would show them. “*You give them something to eat*” he continued. They did a quick sum. Five thousand hungry men, plus women and children, say eight thousand people in all. It would

cost them over six months' salary! They just did not have that sort of money. But Jesus directed them:

He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish" (Mark 6:38).

It was late in the day, and most people had already finished what they had brought from home. They found a lad with five loaves and two fishes – perhaps he had been sent from the nearest village to find the members of his own family. At any rate, he gladly volunteered what he had, to give to Jesus.



The Miracle

The next few minutes are etched indelibly into all four gospel records. No-one who saw it could ever forget. Tidily, Jesus organised the people into manageable groups, seated on the grass. Looking up to heaven, so that even those too far away to hear would see where the bread had come from, he gave thanks. How many of us,

today, still follow his example? *"Give us this day our daily bread"* we may pray. But do we say, *"thank you"* when it comes? An open example, even in this small way, can show our faith in God.

When he had finished, he broke the bread and fish in his hands, and gave the pieces to the disciples. Patiently, they trotted to and fro, as more and more came from his lap, until every man, woman and child had eaten all they could. By this time, it was nearly dark, but still he had not finished.

When they were filled, he said to his disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost" (John 6:12).

Backs bent, the disciples stuffed the crusts into baskets until each of them had as much as he could carry. It was a stupendous miracle. No wonder John records that the people who stayed behind wanted to take Jesus by force and make him king.

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he departed again to the mountain by himself alone (v14–15).

There is something compelling about those twelve baskets of crusts. They emphasise the super-abundance of the provision, so that even the left-overs weighed more than the original loaves. In response to prayer, God had been more than generous. They also confirm, in a very positive way, the authenticity of the miracle. The whole story hangs together: the remote location, the late hour, the hunger of the

crowds, and then those baskets of leftovers, noted by all four of the Gospel writers, including the two who were actually present at the event and so were first-hand witnesses.

A Far-Reaching Meaning

This brings us to the last, and perhaps the greatest significance of the feeding of the multitude. Like the apostles, we can have every confidence, today, that if we seek first His Kingdom, God will provide for us. Jesus commanded specifically:

Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:31, 33).

But there was a deeper meaning to the shared, divided bread, and the fragments that must not be lost, which we must understand. It became apparent the following day, when the crowds came back, hoping for more free bread. Jesus deliberately set them thinking:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this



bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world (John 6:51).

Like the loaves of bread, he was to be 'broken' on the cross. His all-consuming love for us all, that shaming self-sacrifice, would drive him to suffer a death he did not deserve, so that he might set free his followers from the power of eternal death. Jesus said:

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst... This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day (v35, 39–40).

But to share in that feast, we must take Jesus unreservedly into our hearts and lives. We must make ourselves one with him, first by faith and baptism into his name, and then by daily discipleship, with the same love and self-sacrifice that he himself taught.

That great news of God's Kingdom, the promise of living for ever, has been shared with us through the writings of the apostles, like the pieces of bread they carried to the crowds. It is the good news of Jesus, the bread from heaven, that sends us home rejoicing, each praising him as king. And these miracles he worked, attested by honest witnesses, are the proof he really was and is the Son of God.

David M Pearce

God's Grace in Creation

In Genesis chapter 1, we read that God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless, void, chaotic, and darkness covered it until God said, *"Let there be light"*. The process of creation of the world as we know it began. Everything was transformed, order introduced, optimum conditions for plant and animal life were established. At the end of each stage we read that *"God saw that it was good"*. When all was completed, He saw everything that He had made and it was very good.

God, our Creator, has given us powers of observation and senses by which we can appreciate all that He has made so that we too can find pleasure in it. We might consider God modest in His appraisal of His work; perhaps we would have chosen words such as 'excellent' or 'wonderful'.

In our everyday lives, we experience and depend on the precise conditions He has provided – air to breathe, water to drink, light and darkness to give us work and rest, the crucial gravity between earth and other objects in space that keeps everything in balance, and many other things. Every day we can observe something of His love in creation and at special times have the opportunity and privilege of seeing more of His created works – mountains, lakes and seas, forests, the great plains, the beauties of wildlife both plant and animal, so that our senses are overwhelmed.

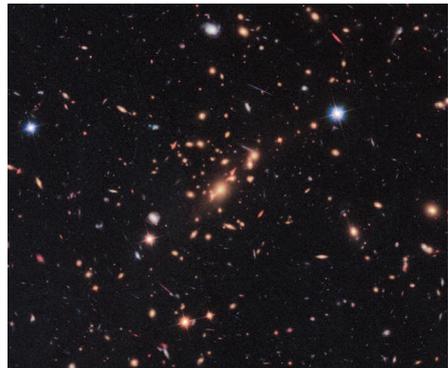
Beauty Reflected in the Bible

We may sing of God's love in creation and it is part of His grace that He

created such a wonderful environment for us. It could have been very different, just functional, adequate but nothing else. Instead we see that it fulfils our needs and much more: we can share the pleasure of the Creator in what He has made. We can let the Psalms express this for us:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? (Psalm 8:3–4).

Don't we look in wonder at the sky on a clear night and see the moon, planets and stars shining in all their magnificence? With the naked eye we can see only a few thousand stars but we are told there are millions in just



our galaxy and trillions beyond. Yet how modestly we are told about their creation!

He made the stars also... (Genesis 1:16).

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat (Psalm 19:1-6).

All creation is a silent witness to the Creator, although so many refuse to acknowledge Him. As we read in Paul's letter:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [mankind] are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

God's Care

We also see the care of a loving Creator, who created a beautiful world and everything that we need to live:

He sends the springs into the valleys; they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their home; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that He may bring forth food from the

earth, and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart (Psalm 104:10-15).

The Lord Jesus spoke of the perfection of creation when he compared the ordinary flowers of the field with the best clothes that man could design:

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:28-30).



The flowers give glory to God just by being as He created them. The birds neither sow nor reap and yet God's grace is shown in the fact that He provides for all of His creation. Plants

grow by scientific processes He devised, providing food for those that feed on them.

Designed with Purpose

Any appreciation of creation would be incomplete without realising its ultimate destiny. God created the heavens and earth with a specific purpose, one which He has shared with us in His Word:

For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).

He created the world to be filled with people who will praise and worship Him for the wonderful love and power He has shown.

Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath (v22-23).

This will be fulfilled in His kingdom, ruled over by the Lord Jesus Christ. Reading Psalm 72 is a wonderful experience, seeing how the wonders of creation will be turned into a perfect world of justice, peace and contentment – all to the glory of God. As an example:

His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed.

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory (Psalm 72:17-19).

With our finite minds we cannot take in the vastness of space and of the universe, of which our solar system is a tiny part. What we can and do know is that God was there from eternity, bringing it about, and we can marvel at its beauty, its order and the joy it gives to us.

Only people by their actions spoil it, and as we are aware could bring about its destruction. Thankfully that was never the intention of God Who created all things. Through the grace of God in Christ we have the opportunity of sharing in the great future of this world.

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He Who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:4-5).

John Boulton



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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org

Building Walls

If you are among the millions of people who travel to work on public transport, you will no doubt be familiar with the scene on a bus, a railway carriage or in a tube station, where the attention of your fellow travellers is fixed on scanning their mobile phone or tablet. You could be forgiven for thinking that each exists within their separate, virtual world.



Of course hundreds of years ago, long before the invention of mobile devices and social media, many still wanted to live in their own physical space. To do so meant surrounding oneself with the protection of a physical barrier such as an earth embankment, or a stone wall.

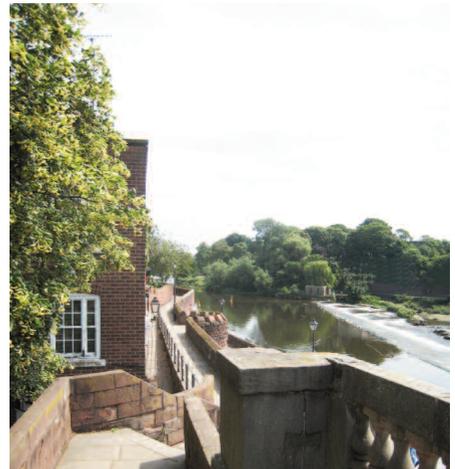
Walls Through Time

A good example is the city of Chester, which for almost 2,000 years has been enclosed by walls. Originally it was a fortress made up of earth ramparts topped by wooden palisades, with wooden gates and towers at regular intervals. By the end of the 1st Century, the sandstone walls were under construction and the Romans completed the circuit some 100 years later.

Regular repairs were carried out on the walls throughout history, including Chester's re-fortification in 907 AD by the Saxons, who it is believed extended the walls. If you travel to Chester today you can see the full circuit of the walls, as they were completed by the end of the 12th Century. Repair of the walls was an ongoing problem during the medieval period, and some of the Roman altars and tombstones were used as materials.

During the English Civil War, Chester was besieged between 1644 and 1646 and some of the walls and towers were damaged. The walls had outlived their defensive purpose by the 18th Century, and they now served as walkways for visitors to promenade.

The circuit of the walls of Chester extend for 3 kilometres and rise to a height of 12 metres in places. They have been designated as 'buildings of exceptional interest' and in a year the city attracts 8 million visitors from all over the world.



This figure exceeds Jerusalem with around 3.5 million visitors a year, yet Jerusalem's history goes back further and is even more colourful. The discoveries of archaeology trace the records of the Israeli capital for over 3,000 years. During that time, the city walls went through many changes, falling into disrepair and ruin particularly when the land of Israel was invaded by her more powerful neighbours. The word of God, the Bible, describes many such circumstances and we are going to look at just one situation to see what we can learn from this, for our lives today.

Building Confidence

These days there are no end of self-help books or web sites where you can find out how to lead and develop the skills of a team. Yet there is at least one of the books of the Bible – called Nehemiah – that can give us better guidance than all the books that you can buy.

The book was named after the Jewish cupbearer to the King of Persia in about 446 BC. Being a cup-bearer was a very responsible position, because not only did he have to taste everything that was poured into the king's cup, but by doing so the cup-bearer was putting his own life at risk. Because of his position, Nehemiah was held in high regard by the court and at the same time he had special access to the King.

After 70 years' exile in the Babylonian and then Medo-Persian empires, some of the exiled Jews returned to the land of Israel from Babylon (in modern day Iraq). This was the result of a decree by King Cyrus in 536 BC allowing them to return and rebuild Jerusalem.

However, those resettling in the land found they faced fierce opposition and as a result the walls of Jerusalem had been left to fall into ruin. Nehemiah received the message:

The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:3).

The scene is set, and in the rest of chapter 1 we read how Nehemiah, in great distress, prayed to the Lord God about this, and that he might be able to play his part.

“O LORD, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king's cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:11).

We can learn from Nehemiah's confidence in God. Despite the fact that he and many of his people were still a long way away from their homeland, he believed that God was in control and would answer his prayer. There are times in our lives when life is not easy and yet if we believe that there is a God and we have faith, He will answer our prayers.

Organising the Work

We have already seen Nehemiah as a man of prayer, and we find that he demonstrated his leadership skills in the way that he organised the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Although he did not initially involve the people in

creating a plan, he did involve them in the construction itself to make the best use of resources.

Firstly, he subdivided each stretch of the wall according to the amount of work required. So the more repairs that were needed, the shorter the length of wall that was allocated to them. Secondly, Nehemiah chose those people who had the strongest reason to complete each part of the wall. Generally, the families or small businesses who were located nearest the wall being repaired were allocated to carry out the work.

From goldsmiths and perfumers to nobles and priests, all were involved. Each section of the wall was not necessarily completed by highly skilled builders or craftsmen, but where there was a shortfall in technical skills, this would be made up for by the enthusiasm and motivation to complete their task. They would have shared ideas on how to complete the stonework to adjoining walls. Perhaps there are still lessons here for many of us who work in teams today.

Rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem was not just a largescale construction project aimed at protecting the city from attack. It was also a way of restoring the national pride which had been so crushed by the invasions of Israel and Judah and the subsequent captivity led by the Babylonians.

The groups involved with the work also came from different levels of society, both rich and poor, male and female. It is no accident that Eliashib and the priests head the lists of

builders, which reflected that the work involved was not only physical labour but it had a spiritual significance too.

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel (Nehemiah 3:1).

Dealing with Setbacks

Nehemiah's leadership was not only challenged by the size of the task. His resolve was tested in other ways. Firstly there was the reluctance by some to take part in the rebuilding work, and this included some of the rulers.

The Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their LORD (Nehemiah 3:5).

However, Nehemiah was able to get the other Tekoites to work hard and even to complete a second portion of the wall, even though their nobles opted out:

The Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel (v27).

The second challenge came from those who had settled in the land of Palestine while the Jews had been in captivity in Babylon. Their leader, a man called Sanballat, had heard via his spies in Jerusalem what Nehemiah



had been doing. He came with his accomplices to mock and threaten the rebuilding work.

He spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish – stones that are burned?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall" (Nehemiah 4:2–3).

In the face of such withering comments, it would have been tempting for Nehemiah to strike out and give Sanballat the opportunity to attack Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he endured this criticism by praying to God for help:

Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders (v4–5).

Here is another important thought for us, to think and pray before reacting, especially when we are under pressure.

The work continued, and the next attack from the local opposition would be with weapons, rather than words. They planned a surprise attack, relying on the Jews being distracted by their work and the amount of rubble preventing them from seeing the ambush.

Nehemiah heard about the plot, and instructed that a watch be set day and

night. Each builder was to be accompanied by a guard with weapons, ready for an attack on the walls. A trumpeter would summon reinforcements for those resisting an attack. But despite these preparations, he was not self-confident, but he encouraged the people to have faith in God:

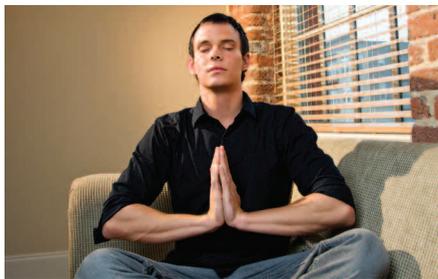
Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses... Our God will fight for us (Nehemiah 4:14, 20).

Confidence Justified

The threatened attack never materialised, and Nehemiah's confidence in God was vindicated. By facing his challenges in faith, he had led his people to rebuild the city walls.

At the completion of his task Nehemiah made a request which he echoed at several points in the record:

Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people (Nehemiah 5:19).



We too can seek God in prayer for guidance when we face challenges. If we do, He will not forget us.

Chris Martindale

I Don't Want It!



Jessica's elderly aunt had died. In contrast to Jessica, who was very poor, the old lady had been extremely rich. In her will she left Jessica her lovely house and enough money to be able to live there comfortably for the rest of her life. The only condition was that Jessica should live in the house while her health permitted.

"I can't possibly accept that", said Jessica. "I did not visit Auntie that much and I don't deserve it. I would rather stay poor." So the estate was divided among distant relatives who had not even heard of the old lady.

What do you think about Jessica? Was she selfless and noble, or ungrateful? If the aunt had known about Jessica's decision how do you think she would have felt?

God's Offer

Some people who know the gospel message say that they 'do not want to live for ever' or that they do not want to 'seek a reward'. They claim to be content with this life, maybe believing that this is honourable. This, however, is in conflict with the Bible message,

and certainly not what God wants for the men and women He created.

By the death of His only Son, God is offering us eternal life in His kingdom on earth. This is compared to living in His house for ever, as stated in the famous psalm:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:6).

In comparison with this amazing gift, God asks us to do relatively little in return. However, it is NOT the primary purpose of the kingdom of God to reward us all with a lovely place in which to live and enjoy ourselves. It is not the 'holiday that never ends': nor is it a prize for our being such good people. It will be an amazingly wonderful place, but the purpose of God, as stated in the Bible, is to fill the earth with His glory:

But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD (Numbers 14:21).

It will be a place where God's will is done, as we are told to pray:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

This has always been God's ultimate plan, even though people tend to ignore it. This was often the case with the Jews, who God took as His people. He pleaded with them to obey Him.

Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers (Jeremiah 7:25–26).

Pleasing God

People who serve God, and only those people, give Him pleasure, as we see in both the Old and New Testaments:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy (Psalm 147:11).

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9–10).

“For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the LORD God. “Therefore turn and live!” (Ezekiel 18:32).

In fact, God commands (and this is a very strong word) us to repent (see Acts 17:30). So we simply cannot please God by refusing a place in His kingdom.

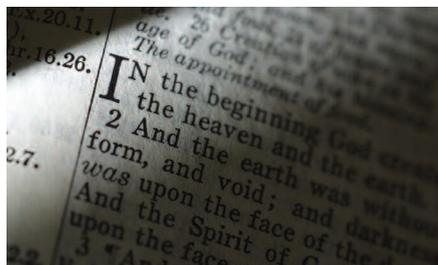
The Gospel Call

Many people argue that they do not feel ‘called’, or that God has not called them. If they are saying that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ cannot save them then this is totally unbiblical.

Most certainly no one can be saved without God and the gospel, but people are called by the gospel message (2 Thessalonians 2:14; see also Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 1:21). Anyone who has heard it can respond to it. So if people do not feel ‘called’ then the problem is with them and not with God or with His offer of salvation.

To turn down God’s offer consciously and deliberately may be less an act of selflessness and more one of gross ingratitude. Never imagine that it is noble or pleasing to God to say that you wish just to perish.

Of course, you do not have to please God. You do not have to accept His gift, for you most certainly cannot earn it (see Ephesians 2:8–9, also Romans 6:23).



By having a Bible you have access to this generous gift of life. The gospel message is calling you. Whatever you think about Jessica, think hard about refusing the offer of life from the Almighty God.

Anna Hart

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