

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1607



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Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

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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

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Being Busy

At work, a senior manager asked us: “Are you busy fools?” He qualified the question – it was not meant as an insult. It is very easy to be busy for the sake of being busy; to confuse activity with purpose. He was encouraging us to look carefully at what we do, to be active in the right things.

We live in a hectic world, with so much going on, that we can be too busy to stop and think. The demands of work, family and friends can mean that we never lift our view above that which is immediate. We should take time to do just this, to make sure that we are busying ourselves with valuable, worthwhile, lasting things.

Busy Nature

When we look at the natural world, we see lots of activity, but generally with purpose. The classic example is the ‘busy bee’. On a summer’s day we can see these industrious insects, moving from flower to flower as they collect the all-important nectar. It is amazing to think that a single bee can visit up to 5,000 flowers in a single day. Even more so, it has been estimated that to make one pound of honey, a hive of bees must travel over 55,000 miles and visit two million flowers!

But this is busyness with great purpose. The nectar feeds the bees, allowing them to work, to reproduce, to make honey, to feed their young and to ensure the survival of their hive.

The Bible also points us to nature in thinking about this topic. Speaking about anyone who is lazy and doesn’t do the things they should, the writer of the Proverbs wrote:



Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest (Proverbs 6:6–8).

Again, we see a creature who is hard-working and purposeful, providing for herself and her offspring without the need for management or discipline from others.

We can see that God’s creation, when it is ‘busy’, fulfils its purpose and achieves what it is there for. In doing so, these creatures actually give witness to the hand of God; they are not chaotic but going about their business in structured ways.

Human Busyness

Returning to the ways in which we can be busy, we have to admit that we are not always so clear in our efforts. This is not new, people have always been like this.

Jesus spoke about the world at the time of Noah, totally consumed with activity but oblivious to what God wanted from them:



For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away... (Matthew 24:38–39).

Although we know that Noah's society was thoroughly godless, the things Jesus mentions are not wrong in themselves. The issue is that God was being ignored, people were failing to look up from their busy lives to consider what life is really about.

It is important for us to consider this, as Jesus finished his sentence like this: "...so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." He was warning us about being ready for when he returns to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. We do not know when he will come, so the idea is to keep prepared and to be watching the world and ourselves. He continued:

Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (v44).

Focused Activity

Let's ask ourselves the question – are we busy fools? Do we even keep ourselves busy so that we can avoid the big questions of life? We do not need to, because God has given clear

answers to the fundamental truths we ask about our lives, such as:

- ❖ Why am I doing all this?
- ❖ What's the point of it all?
- ❖ Why am I here?

The Bible tells us the purpose of life:

Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

It tells what things should occupy us, where our priorities should lie:

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

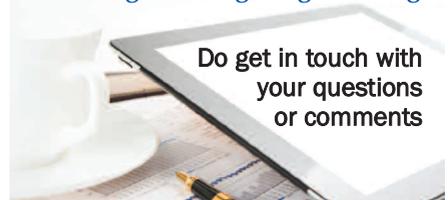
If we get baptised this is what it says about our new status in God's eyes:

You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

We are given the choice: to be busy fools, ignore God and have no hope for the future; or to take the time to read the Bible and have the vital truths about life made clear. Do that and you can live with clarity, purpose and hope.

Editor

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The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ

The Bible makes it very clear there is only one God. To a Jew, brought up to read the Old Testament, it would be clear that God is a single being with supreme power. God is no different in the New Testament, but here we meet his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no one who can compare with God. He is, and always will be, supreme. Jesus Christ is separate and distinct from Him.

God's Son

Jesus is biologically God's one and only Son, born to Mary by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Therefore, the child who was born was himself 'holy'.

The angel answered and said to her, "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).

Jesus made it clear that he had a unique and intimate relationship with his Father, more so than any other human son and father. There were those who accused him of blasphemy because they thought he considered himself equal with God. His reply was:

If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I do, though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him (John 10:37-38).

There is a difference between being God and being *in* God. Jesus is not equal with God, even now. He is described as the 'Word of God', and he is the living expression of his Father in all that he says and does:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Jesus always deferred to his Father and acknowledged that his authority came only from God.

For I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent me gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told me, so I speak (John 12:49-50).



The Saviour

In God's plan, Jesus was born for the express purpose of saving human beings from slavery to sin and permanent death. In fact, his name even means 'God Saves'.

Being human like us, he was tempted to disobey God in just the same way as we are tempted. But throughout his life, Jesus resisted. He chose the path of obedience and, unlike us, he did not waver from it. It could be said of him, as of nobody else, that he was sinless.

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26).

This obedience was not achieved without cost to himself: it was a real struggle. He overcame sin through sheer determination.

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

God's Representative

God is so powerful and so great, that He can be difficult to comprehend for a limited human mind. This is another way in which Jesus is so special. As God's Son, he has revealed, or represented, his Father to mankind. Jesus said in prayer:

I have manifested [shown] Your name to the men whom You have given me

out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word (John 17:6).

We read of Jesus:

Who being the brightness of His [God's] glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).

He showed us God, not in appearance but in the things he said and did. Children are often like their parents in their character and way of speaking, not just in how they look.



Jesus revealed God to others in word and action. He said of himself:

He who has seen me has seen the Father... Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works (John 14:9-10).

God's Son has God's authority. Even during his mortal life Jesus was able to say, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). He meant that God and His Son were in perfect harmony and that he truly represented his Father. Everything he did, he did in obedience to God and on His behalf. He could pray:

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given me to do (John 17:4).

God is supreme, but Jesus is His representative. When Jesus comes again, he will once more be seen to act on God's behalf in all that he does.

God's Heir

Jesus was completely obedient to his Father so, after his death on the cross, God brought him back to life and made him His heir.

[God] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2).

Children inherit from their parents, usually money and property. In the

case of Jesus, being God's heir means receiving power over the world. Soon he will be seen on the earth again, ruling the world for his Father. The Psalmist wrote of this as a prophecy:

I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to me, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession" (Psalm 2:7-8).

This is not an academic subject, something we should leave to professors of theology and clergymen. Jesus said in prayer:

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

So it's a matter of life and death: not just to know about God and Jesus, but to thoroughly understand their relationship and the role which God has given Jesus. And you can't enter into a relationship with someone, unless you know the truth about them.

Rod Hale

Look out for the new style Glad Tidings from May 2018, God Willing.

A new design and a refreshed look, but the same objectives and the **same focus on God's Word**, His offer of forgiveness and His coming kingdom. Magazines change their appearance, but God never changes and His message is unchanging.



Lessons From the Flood

In recent times, people have struggled to believe in the flood that happened in the time of Noah. Some just deny it ever happened, while others try to downsize it with clever and, apparently logical, scientific theories. It is not our purpose here to prove that it happened, but we would remind you that there is significant archaeological support for the historical accuracy of the Bible.

The careful Bible reader will notice that that flood is mentioned throughout its pages and was accepted as historical by faithful people, who wrote the inspired record. Some of the places where Noah or the flood are mentioned are Isaiah 54, Ezekiel 14 and Hebrews 11. Peter writes about it in both his letters and Jesus himself mentions the flood several times.

The Bible always has a purpose in recording events for us to read, and there are quite a few interesting details from which we can gain spiritual teaching.

Long Lives

Before the flood, people lived for very long periods of time. One reason for this was that God wanted rapid increase in the population, as He first commanded Adam and Eve:

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Perhaps another reason for the long lives of these people was so they could



teach their descendants about God. For instance, Adam who lived for 930 years, (more than half the time between his own creation and the flood!) could teach his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandchildren about what had happened in the beginning and why things had gone wrong. After all, these things were bound to be more convincing when heard from the person who had been there.

God always leaves a witness for Himself and so through Adam the knowledge of God and His purpose was available in a very impressive and personal form for almost 1000 years.

Godly and Ungodly

There are two groups of people mentioned in Genesis 6:2, the 'sons of God' and just 'men'.

Some have claimed these to be actual different types of being. However there is absolutely no evidence for this. These 'men' were merely the ungodly descendants of Cain who broke off from his family and

went and set up cities elsewhere. Just as Cain was not called a 'son of God', neither did he teach his family to be so.

By comparison, the 'sons of God' were the descendants of Seth, a younger son born to Adam and Eve, and who followed in his brother Abel's footsteps as a true follower of God. We read that, as time went on:

The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose (Genesis 6:2).

Here we have an important spiritual principle being shown to us. Namely, if we are trying to please God, then we will benefit from trying to develop any serious relationships or allegiances with people who also believe in God and the Bible.

The reason for this is that our basic nature does not like to obey God, but prefers a way of life centred on pleasing ourselves. The more time we can spend with other people who love God and are trying to serve Him, the better. If we do this, then we are bound to find it so much easier to follow His principles.

Things went badly wrong, as the Genesis account explains.



There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown (Genesis 6:4).

The offspring of these unequal marriages were certainly mighty, but they glorified the strength of mankind, not of God. Again, we see the importance of having connection with people who respect God.

Prayer is vitally important here. God, who can do everything, can help us to make and keep the right friends. He can also help us choose the right partner, although when (and indeed if) this happens is down to His will and purpose.

Responding to God

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:5-8).

The world was in a deplorable state. Yet, even then God's mercy was great. He used Noah to warn people, he was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). He told Noah what His plans were for the earth and gave humankind time to repent – the time it took to build the ark.

Noah and his family were the only people saved when the flood came. We are told that:

Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

It suggests that, in his life, Noah was going in the right direction with God as his companion. As a result, God placed a great responsibility on him of building the ark and trying to convince those around him that their destruction was coming but they could be saved if they changed their ways.

Noah's faith must have been very great. As far as we know, it had never rained before and there certainly wasn't enough water in the vicinity to float such a huge boat. His words must have seemed ridiculous, and we can imagine that his neighbours laughed at him. But the flood came!

It can be the same for us. Jesus is coming back to the earth to set up the kingdom, because God has promised that in the Bible. We can believe this, because God always fulfils His promises. Other people may think it is nonsensical. It is important not to let this damage our faith. Whatever they may think or say, Jesus is coming!

The Bible warns and encourages us:

Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"... For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water... But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:3-8).

The Promise

The occupants of the ark survived the flood. When they once again came to rest on dry land, God promised that He would never again destroy the earth by



flood. He gave the rainbow as confirmation:

I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth (Genesis 9:13).

God has promised us that Jesus will return from heaven to judge the world and to set up God's Kingdom. He gave us a sign of His commitment – Jesus' resurrection:

He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

We can have confidence that God will fulfil this promise too. Let's try to be faithful like Noah, not distracted by the world around us, but trusting God.

Laura Morgan

Baptism - the Entrance to Life

Once upon a time there was a king, who one day felt unwell. He requested that a minstrel be called to sing for him. The king welcomed the minstrel, mentioning a few of his favourite songs. "Oh Your Majesty," replied the minstrel, "those songs are rather old fashioned; I have brought some songs that I am sure you will enjoy." At that he performed the songs he had brought. At the end of the evening, the minstrel approached the king to claim his fee. "No," said the king, "there is no fee. You performed according to your wishes, not mine."

That little story presents an important principle. If we wish to receive God's blessings, we must do as God teaches and not as we want to do.

Obedience and Humility

Naaman was a military leader in Syria but he had a big problem – he was a leper. We meet him in 2 Kings 5. He heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him, so he travelled there accompanied by his servants and taking gifts for the prophet.

Elisha the prophet did not personally greet the man. Instead he sent a messenger telling Naaman to go to the river Jordan and wash in the river seven times. Naaman was outraged! He turned his chariot and entourage around to return to Syria. But then some of his servants urged him to comply:

My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not

have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'? (2 Kings 5:13).

To his credit, Naaman listened; he showed a humble spirit and with all those servants watching, he went into the water – seven times as he had been told. On coming up out of the water after the seventh time he found that the dreaded disease had gone – he was healed!

But notice the point – first of all he had to put pride to one side and show a humble obedient spirit. Otherwise he would have remained a leper.

Washing Away Guilt

The Apostle Paul was initially a zealot who persecuted Christians, throwing both men and women into prison and hounding others to their deaths. He presided over the stoning to death of Stephen (Acts 8:1 and 22:4, 19). But later he himself became a Christian and he understood what terrible things he had done.

What could be done? The past cannot be undone, and that burden of



guilt lay heavily on Paul. But a disciple called Ananias came to Paul and told him what to do:

Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

Notice the words ‘wash away’, as if that burden of guilt was like something unclean, like the leprosy of Naaman, that could be washed away.

After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to go and preach the Gospel, and those who did believe had to show their faith by being baptized.

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

More Examples

Philip preached in the region of Samaria. On seeing the miracles of healing that he did, people also listened to his preaching;

When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12).

After these events, Philip was told to go to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian official returning home from Jerusalem. As he rode along in his chariot he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53.

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are

reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him (v30–31).

Philip joined the man in his chariot and explained that marvellous chapter to him, showing that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus had been foretold hundreds of years before. Here are a few words from that chapter:

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities... by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:3–6).

No doubt there were many other passages that Philip explained too. He may have discussed Psalm 22, a Psalm written 1000 years before the time of Jesus (and long before crucifixion had been thought of) but which presents the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in some considerable detail.



Clearly Philip had discussed baptism with the man because:

As they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36–37).

There follows a description of exactly how Philip baptised the man.

Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water... (Acts 8:38–39).

It was not a matter of sprinkling a few drops of water on the man; it is about going down into the water and then coming up out of it. For a few moments the Ethiopian disappeared under the surface of the water and then reappeared again.

A Death... and Life

Why must believers be baptised? God tells us the meaning and importance of baptism, for example here in the words of Paul:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:3–5).

Baptism, therefore, is a 'picture' of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. By that act of obedience and faith we can show to God that we want to be associated with the work of Jesus. We show that we believe Jesus defeated human nature in his own life; that he presented an unblemished life to his Father; that God raised him from the dead to immortality; and that if we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we can stand before God, covered by his faultless life.

Jesus is 'the way'; we can either gratefully accept God's offer or we can ignore it. The choice is ours.

One day Jesus received a visitor; he was called Nicodemus, and this is what Jesus said to him:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

Baptism is a turning point in our lives. We will remember the event and the date. It is the starting point of a life which is God-centred, where each day we try to follow the example of Jesus.

The more we do this, the better our lives will reflect the life of Jesus. This is a life of hope, looking forward to the return of Jesus and life in the Kingdom of God:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2–3).

David Budden

Reading the Revelation

Sandra was reading through the minutes of a meeting. “I don’t see why they decided this!” she exclaimed with some annoyance. Her friend stared at her. “You can’t make sense of those minutes in isolation,” she said. “The background is outlined in the previous minutes. Anyway, I’m not sure you can understand the technical terminology as you don’t work in the team – you’re not really qualified to make sense of it. The minutes are intended for those involved in the work.”

Many people are fascinated by the book of Revelation, maybe because of its reference to Armageddon. They seem captivated by its images that are very graphic and sometimes even scary. However, we must remember that it is the last book in the Bible.

The Purpose of the Book

The first three verses of the book clearly state the following:

- ❖ The message was given by God to Jesus for his servants;
- ❖ It describes events that were going to happen;
- ❖ Faithful servants are urged to obey the messages in it.

Servants and friends of Jesus are those who have responded to the gospel message and who are trying to follow him. Revelation gives these people encouragement, hope, and principles by which to live.

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:14; see also 18:36).



Key Messages

Chapters 1 to 3 contain letters. These are messages from Jesus to seven churches in the Roman Empire in the first century AD. They describe whether these churches were faithful, and how they could improve. Then the apostle John, who penned the book, saw a number of fearful and dramatic visions, culminating in the end of the world as we know it.

While the visions may be difficult to interpret there are several absolutely clear messages that are repeated through the book. They are:

- ❖ Jesus is unique and supreme (Revelation 1:5; 17:14)
- ❖ Jesus is coming back to the earth (1:7; 16:15)
- ❖ He will set up God’s kingdom on a transformed earth (11:15; 21:3-8)
- ❖ His followers are urged to keep the faith pure and to prepare for his coming (chapters 2 and 3; 14:12)
- ❖ There are amazing blessings for the faithful (3:5; 14:3)
- ❖ Most of the world will be unbelieving (17:1-2; 18:2-3)
- ❖ There will be false systems, which seem religious but in reality are

corrupted, which would oppose, try to deceive and even persecute the faithful, trying to destroy their faith (13:7; 20:4)

- ❖ There will be a time of great trouble and judgement before the kingdom comes (15:1,7; 18:8).

The Visions

The visions start with a throne 'in heaven', a lamb, elders and creatures with wings. Thrones and the lamb feature often in this book. There is a scroll sealed with seven seals, which only the lamb can open. Events, including a lot of judgements, are associated with each of the seals as they are opened. They describe conditions that will prevail before God finally judges the world.

The seventh seal leads to seven trumpets each held by an angel, and each associated with events and judgements. The seventh trumpet leads to seven bowls with dreadful plagues — the final judgements. The book closes with a description of the end of all false systems and problems. Jesus and the faithful will live for ever in a transformed world.

Main Players

The main characters in the visions are:

- ❖ Angels
- ❖ The devil and satan
- ❖ A lamb
- ❖ Beasts and animals
- ❖ A red dragon
- ❖ A false prophet
- ❖ Babylon, shown in contrast to a new Jerusalem
- ❖ A prostitute, shown in contrast to a bride.

The book is clearly a book of symbol. For example, Jesus is represented by a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. We cannot assume that any character is described literally.

Visions In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, especially in Daniel, there are prophetic visions of beasts. There are many similarities between Daniel and Revelation.

When Jesus preached on earth he very often alluded back to the Old Testament. He also referred back to Daniel when prophesying about the future (see Matthew 24:15).

Here also, in his last message, he uses images from the Old Testament. The harlot, Babylon, symbolic beasts, the serpent, a sacrificial lamb, angels, false prophets and Satan are all first mentioned in the Old Testament.

Our Response

Sandra could not understand the terminology of the minutes, was unaware of their context, and so could not understand the decisions made by the committee. Similarly, it is impossible to interpret this important book of symbol without first studying the rest of the Bible, including the Old Testament.

There are momentous times coming on the earth. God has warned us and told us what to do. We do not want to incur the anger of God: we want to be faithful servants of Jesus waiting for him. The words of encouragement in Revelation are directed at such people.

We therefore ought to read the Bible and to respond to its message.

Anna Hart

The Solution to World Poverty

It has been said that if you want to know how good a society is, you should look at the way it treats its poorest members.

Look at the world today. At one extreme there are nations which are run by corrupt, powerful elites for their own benefit, and the poor are exploited and abused. At the other extreme there are nations which spend a large proportion of their national income on welfare, with a genuine concern that the poorest in society should be looked after.

When God designed His own nation, He put in place a welfare system which was probably the most enlightened and benign the world has ever seen. The nation was Israel, and its birth is described in the Bible book of Exodus, and its system of government was what we know today as the Law of Moses.

The welfare system under the Law of Moses tackled the issue of poverty on two fronts – it set ways in which the poor were to be treated, and also it provided ways in which people were to be helped out of poverty. Here are some examples:

Laws to Aid the Poor

- ❖ The Law contained a specific commandment to be generous to the poor:

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your

hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).



- ❖ When you harvested your crops, you were only allowed to go through your field once. Anything that you missed was to be left for the poor to harvest (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). This law can be seen in operation in Ruth chapter 2.
- ❖ You must pay your employees at the end of each day for that day's work (Leviticus 19:13).
- ❖ Every seventh year you must leave your land uncultivated (fallow), to allow the ground to rejuvenate. While your land lay fallow, anyone was welcome to help themselves to anything that grew there (Leviticus 25:6-7).
- ❖ You were not allowed to lend to a fellow Israelite with interest (Leviticus 25:36).

- ❖ You were not allowed to have a fellow Israelite as a slave, only as a paid employee (Leviticus 25:39).
- ❖ You must invite your poor neighbours to your feasts and celebrations (Deuteronomy 14:29, 16:11).

Laws to Help People Out of Poverty

Release of Servants

If anyone fell on hard times and was sold as a servant to their fellow Israelite, they would serve for a maximum of six years. In the seventh year they must be released – what's more, their master must send them out with gifts to help them re-start their lives (Deuteronomy 15:12–13).

Release of Debts

One of the main reasons why people are trapped in poverty is debt. It's a vicious cycle – you don't have the means to buy what you need, you have to borrow to live. Very easily you can find that all your spare earnings are spent repaying your debts. The Law dealt with this problem very neatly – every seven years there was a Year of Release, when all debts would be cancelled (Deuteronomy 15:1–2).

Year of Jubilee

Every fifty years – approximately once per generation – was a special year called the Year of Jubilee. The Jubilee Law is described in Leviticus 25.

On this year, all land which had changed hands would revert to its original owner, and all Israelite servants would be set free.



Perhaps the biggest cause of wealth inequality is the fact that wealth is accumulated through generations. So someone does well and becomes rich, they build on their wealth and pass it on, and dynasties form. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer – it's a fact of life. Except that the Law of Jubilee effectively blocked this from happening. Every fifty years the 'playing field would be levelled': both those families which had fallen on hard times and those which had amassed property would make a fresh start.

What Happened to the Law of Moses?

When God gave His law to Israel, He said:

This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people' (Deuteronomy 4:6).

Sadly, this did not work the way it should have worked – being people just like you and me, Israel neglected and misused their Law. Their history was largely one of disobedience. The Bible records the decline and then the

destruction of God's nation because of its godlessness.

The Law of Moses, as it is described in the Bible, no longer operates as a national law. However, the principles of attitude and behaviour it laid down – principles of a life which is centred on a love and respect for God and works out in love and respect for other people – are very much at the heart of the Christian life today.

After the Law of Moses

The New Testament is the second part of the Bible, which deals with the life and teachings of Jesus and his followers. The letter to the Galatians explains that it's not necessary for the Christian to keep the Law of Moses with all its commandments, but the principles it taught still apply:

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

This was what Jesus taught, and the way he lived. For example, he said to one rich man who came to him:

If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me (Matthew 19:21).

The accounts of the activities of the early Christians abound with references to their generosity. For example, Paul writes with huge fondness about the believers in Macedonia:

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their



extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people (2 Corinthians 8:1-4, New International Version).

If everyone lived by this simple Bible principle, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', what a different place the world would be!

We saw that the Law of Moses did not just command generosity to the poor, it also provided solid workable measures to help people out of poverty. In the New Testament we find the same principle.

Sometimes poverty is not entirely due to external factors. The fact is there are people who are just lazy and would prefer not to work, letting others support them. This can lead to poverty for themselves and their dependants. Paul recognised and addressed this:

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

It is a Bible principle that those who have must help those who have not –

and those who have not must do what they can to help themselves.

The Solution to World Poverty

In 2005 a coalition of charitable and other organisations was formed under the banner 'Make poverty history'. It's a noble statement, and much good work has been done in its name. But will it ever work?

Jesus said, "You have the poor with you always" (Matthew 26:11). The reason? Human nature – whilst there is opportunity to act selfishly, people will always do so, and there will always be others who lose out! Despite the best efforts of governments, charities and hard-working individuals, the scourge of poverty is still with us.

However, the Bible does promise a time when poverty will really be history. That will be in the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom will put an end to all the ills and evils of this present age of human misrule. It will not be by human efforts, however well-meaning and hardworking we may be – but by the ultimately wise and powerful rulership of the King – Jesus Christ, of course. Here are some glimpses we're given of society in the Kingdom of God:

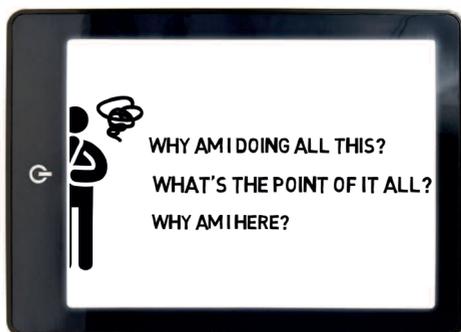
He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken (Micah 4:3-4).

Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor (Psalm 72:1-4).

The Bible gives us the promise that this will happen. And it extends to us the invitation to be there and to be part of it. Will you accept the invitation?

Chris Parkin

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