

GladTidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1466



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***What's so special about
the Bible? – page 5***
***The Gospels or
The Da Vinci Code? – page 9***

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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United Kingdom – Cilla Palmer (Mrs), “Highlands”,
78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs, England
CB7 5NR Tel: (01638) 723959 (24hrs & Fax)
cilla@oldtidings.fsnet.co.uk

Australia – K.G.Quixley, 22 Narallah Grove, Box Hill North,
Victoria, Australia, 3129 gladtidings@optusnet.com.au

**Canada – Vivian Thorp (Mrs), 5377 Birdcage Walk, Burlington,
Ontario, Canada, L7L 3K5**

**New Zealand – Christadelphian Witness, P.O. Box 15-457,
New Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand**

South Africa – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O.Box 50357, Musgrave Road,Durban 4062, South Africa antoost@mweb.co.za

U.S.A. – Pat Hemingray (Mrs), 3079 Kilburn West,
Rochester Hills, MI 48306, USA.

Other Countries – Geoff Maycock, 8 Hale End, Bracknell, Berks.
England, RG12 9YH gmaycock@fish.co.uk

Local information is also available from:

Fiji – Bible Mission, Box 1012, G.P.O., Suva, Indonesia
– Bible Mission, Gereja Saudara Dalam Kristus, Kerten Rt.
01/RW10, Jalan Mundu 3/40, Solo 57143, Indonesia.

**Philippines – Mr Albert Cruz, PO Box 991, Manila,
Philippines 1099**

**Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Pacific Islands, Singapore,
Taiwan, Korea – Bible Mission, PO Box 42, Wallacia,
NSW 2745, Australia**

India – T. Galbraith, G.P.O. Box 159, Hyderabad 500001, India

**Bangladesh – Christadelphian Bible Students, PO Box 9052,
Banani, Dhaka 1213**

Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan

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No Way Out!

If you were driving up the road that is featured on this month's front cover you would be in for a surprise.

The road is going to Blaengarw, one of the former coal mining villages in the South Wales valleys but, unlike most other valleys in the locality, this road ends there. It is going nowhere else. If you want to cross the surrounding mountain you have to go back before you can go forward.

Cul-de-Sac

If you had studied the map, of course, you might never have found yourself on a road like that, and this is a lesson for life. There are many roads that lead into a cul-de-sac, and many people travel along them all their lives. It was the wise man who said:

"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

And an even wiser man said this:

"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).

What a searching thought that is: that many people travel heedlessly and thoughtlessly down a road that leads

to the everlasting destruction of death, having never once consulted a map that would have shown them that their life was heading towards a dead end!

End of the World

Human civilisation is heading in that direction and all the indications are that it is now journeying faster and faster towards destruction. Thinking people all over the world are seriously concerned about many things, the latest being the impact of global warming.

Scientists now predict that it is almost impossible to stop the earth's atmosphere warming up by 2 or 3 degrees, and warn that the consequences

could be devastating, especially for low-lying communities, as sea levels rise.

But nobody wants to change their way of life and developing countries want their share of the extravagant and wasteful lifestyles that have so long been enjoyed by the already developed world. Meanwhile, as people talk, glaciers are retreating and ice fields are melting at an alarming rate. And that is only one of the problems that face mankind.

There are so many other, apparently insoluble, difficulties that people sometimes wonder where it will all end, and how it might be possible to achieve a better future. Politicians



always promise a better tomorrow, but when voted into power they can find it difficult to fulfil those promises: it is always easier to promise than to deliver. Sometimes they launch huge initiatives – to fight terrorism, to improve the condition of the poor, to feed the hungry, or to rescue people in dire distress – only to see their carefully prepared plans come to nothing. So people vote in a new set of politicians and the entire process starts all over again, and ends up much the same.

Perplexity

The Lord Jesus

Christ was the greatest prophet ever and he was once asked about the future and how things would work out. He foretold a string of happenings, including wars, famines and natural catastrophes. The Jewish nation were to be scattered and regathered – an event which has now happened; so his prediction about world conditions turns out to be about our time, and this is what Jesus said:

"There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:25-27).

People, said Jesus, would be distressed and in a state of "perplexity". That's not a word we use a lot these



days but, literally translated, it means "to be without resources, to be left wanting, to be embarrassed, to be in doubt, not to know which way to turn". So Jesus was saying that there would come a time when the nations of the world would find themselves up a cul-de-sac with no way through. They would need to turn back and try another direction – towards God. If only they had read the map, they would never have gone up that road!

Journey's End

The Bible is the map that God has given us to help us plot a safe course through life. If we look carefully at what it has to say, we will find that it directs us to a safe place where all our troubles can be over and we can be at peace.

The Bible points us toward the Lord Jesus Christ, and tells us to take full advantage of what he has done for us, and what he will yet do, when he returns from heaven to rule for God. Jesus will transform the world at his Coming and in his Kingdom. He is going to rule from Jerusalem and make the world a beautiful place once more. He will destroy those who destroy the earth and save those who look for him (Revelation 11:18; 2 Timothy 4:8).

But we can't wait until Jesus comes; we have to take action now. If our life is going nowhere, and if we want to find meaning and purpose for ourselves and for our children, or grandchildren, here is a signpost which should help.

Jesus once said this about what he could offer, and you will find no better offer in life:

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

Editor

What's so special about the Bible?

If the Bible really is God's map to help us through this life, as well as being a guidebook to a better life, it would have to be a very special book, and so it is! These are some of the things that some well-known people have said about it over the years.

If you were buying something for yourself there's a fair chance that you would be glad of a recommendation from someone who had already got one. So here are some opinions about the Bible that could help you make up your own mind about this very special book.

Testimonials

 The Bible is not only a book which I can understand; it is also a book which understands me.

Emile Caillet

 Scripture is like a pair of spectacles which dispels the darkness and gives us a clear view of God.

John Calvin

 No man is uneducated who knows the Bible and no one is wise who is ignorant of its teachings.

Samuel Chadwick

 This book outlives, outloves, out-lifts, outlasts, outreaches, outruns, and outranks all books. This Book is faith-producing. It is hope-awakening. It is death-destroying. And those who embrace it find forgiveness of sin.

A.Z.Conrad

 Read it to be wise.
Believe it to be safe.
Practice it to be holy.

Robert C. Cunningham

 Read it through; pray it in; live it out; pass it on.

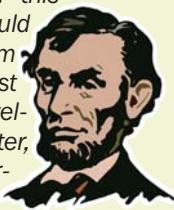
George Gritter



Disregard the study of God and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life, blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you.

J.I.Packer

 *I have but to say, the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.*



Abraham Lincoln

 Priests, atheists, sceptics, devotees, agnostics and evangelists are generally agreed that the Authorised Version of the English Bible is the best example of English literature that the world has ever seen.

William Lyon Phelps

 We have adopted the convenient theory that the Bible is a Book to be explained, whereas first and foremost it is a Book to be believed ... There is a world of difference between knowing the Word of God and knowing the God of the Word.

Leonard Ravenhill

 I have heard a few Greek scholars say that when they first read Plato, they found it a mirror for their souls. That may be. But they never found in Plato salvation from their sins, nor a sinless Redeemer, nor the absolute assurance of eternal life and of resurrection after death. Only the Bible offers you that.

Wilbur Smith

 The Bible does not argue for the existence of God. It reveals Him.

Roy E. Swim

 God's Word is an enemy for depression, an escape from temptation, the promise of the future, as well as a guide, hope, and inspiration for now and always

Al and Brenda Taylor

 The man who doesn't read his Bible has no advantage over the man who has no Bible.

Albert M. Wells, Jr.

 What the Bible does [in the lives of people] makes what it says believable.

Kenneth L. Wilson

 I am sorry for the men who do not read the Bible every day. I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and the pleasure.

Woodrow Wilson

Self-Recommendation

Because the Bible is a book from God it gives us its own recommendation as well, for there is nothing more vital in life than finding out what God offers and what He wants us to do. So, from the very beginning, the Bible communicates His message and tells us what He has done, what He will do, and why.

Its opening words present us with a self-existent God – one who has always been, and who will always be, and He is revealed as a purposeful Creator, who

knows what he is doing and who will see it through to its intended end.

And from its opening words onwards, the Bible makes it clear that it is a book about God which comes from God:



"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3)

God was there from the very beginning, for He is without beginning and end, being self-existent, and He purposes to enlighten the entire created world. He will enlighten us, if we let Him. Notice that the Bible is a book in which God speaks – it captures what "God said" – and that very phrase, or words like it, occurs time and again. Over 250 times we read about the "Word of the Lord," as God communicates His gracious purpose, but none of that will matter to us unless we read God's Word. It can only be a special book to us, if we make it special in our own lives.

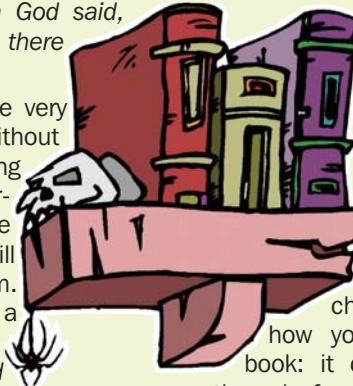
The Holy Scriptures

The apostle Paul once said this to a young man who had worked alongside him and learned much from him:

"But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 3:14-17).

That's what the Bible can do for us, if we let it. But it will do nothing just sitting on the shelf gathering dust:

*Don't leave your Bible on the shelf,
Where days will take their toll,*



Of dust and mould and
mildew,
On your poor neglected
soul.

Winnie Andrews

And don't just open it occasionally, to see if there's anything worthwhile that you might chance across. That's not how you would treat any other book: it deserves to be read right through, from cover to cover:

*You who like to play at Bible –
Dip and dabble, here and there,
Just before you kneel, awearied,
And yawn through a hurried prayer;
You who treat the crown of writings
As you treat no other book –
Just a paragraph disjointed,
Just a crude, impatient look –
Try a worthier procedure,
Try a broad and steady view;
You will kneel in very rapture
When you read the Bible through.*

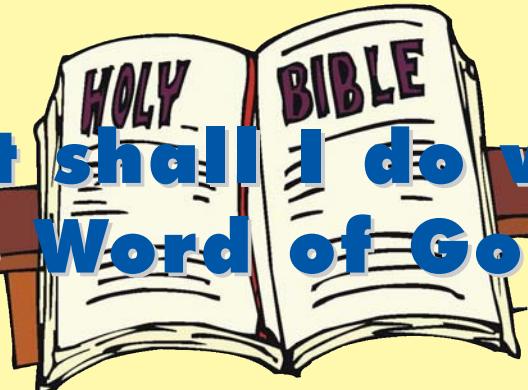
Amos R. Wells

Bible Reading

Reading the Bible right through is much easier than it might seem to be, especially if you use Bible Reading tables, which we feature in "Glad Tidings" from time to time. But the important thing is to be disciplined and determined. Set aside a few minutes every day and patiently work your way through, perhaps starting with a gospel and then sampling an Old Testament book like Genesis, keeping a note of what you have read and ticking books off your list, one at a time.

God has a message for each of us in His Word, the Bible, and it is really important that we seek it out and then live accordingly.

What shall I do with the Word of God?



- Accept and assimilate it 1 Tim. 1:15; Jeremiah 15: 16
- Believe it, and be brave for it John 2:22; Philippians 1:11
- Cling to, and circulate it Titus 1:9; Acts 8:4
- Delight in and defend it Psalm 119:47; Philippians 1:17
- Esteem and expound it Job 23:12; Luke 24:27
- Forget not, neither forsake it Psalm 119:16 and 87
- Get hold of it, and be guided by it Ephesians 6:17; Proverbs 6:22
- Heed it, hide it, and hope in it Psalm 119:9,11,114.
- Inquire into it and be instructed by it 1 Kings 22:5; 2 Timothy 3:16
- Judge your life by, and Joy over it James 1:22-25; Psalm 119:11
- Know it and keep it 2 Timothy 3:15; Luke 11:28
- Love, learn, and live upon it Psalm 119:140; Deut 5:1-3
- Memorise and meditate upon it Deuteronomy 11:18; Psalm 1, 2
- Never neglect it Joshua 1:8
- Observe and obey it Deuteronomy 28:1; Jeremiah 42:6
- Pray for, practice and preach it 2 Thess 3:1; James 1:22-27; 2 Tim 4:2
- Qualify it not, neither Question it Deuteronomy. 4:2; Ecclesiastes 8:4
- Read and remember it 1 Tim. 4:13; Numbers 15:40
- Search and scatter it Acts 17:11; Acts 8:4
- Trust and teach it Psalm Psalm 19:42; Acts 18:11
- Understand and utilise it Luke 24:45; Matthew 4:4-10
- Value and venerate it Psalm 119:72,117
- Welcome and witness for it Acts 2:41; Revelation 20: 4
- Examine and exalt it John 5:39; Psalms 34:3, 138:2
- Yield to it Joshua 1:7
- Zealously contend for it Psalm 119:139

Fact or Fiction: The Gospels or The Da Vinci Code?

There used to be a clear distinction in peoples' minds between fact and fiction.

Factual things were things that had actually happened and fictional things were made up. But nowadays people seem to enjoy blurring that distinction, for whatever reason. Things that were once in the realms of science fiction can become realities as science progresses. History can sometimes be rewritten, so that what actually happened is obscured or concealed. Or authors can pretend that things are real, to make their fictional works seem more relevant or more appealing, which can seriously mislead people.

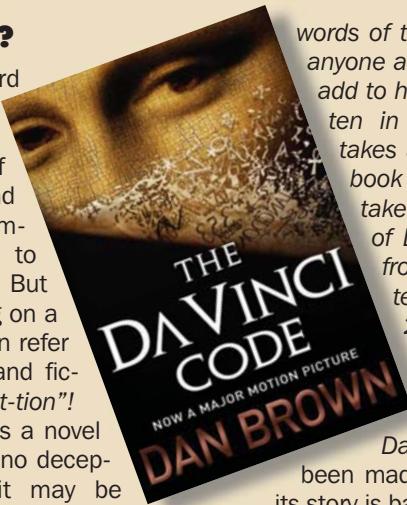
As **Fred Whiting** now explains, this amounts to the creation of a new type of writing – fiction that pretends to be factual.

Fact or Fiction?

“Faction” is a word that used to refer to those who held a very different point of view from others and who formed themselves into a group to promote their views. But nowadays it is taking on a new meaning – it can refer to a blend of fact and fiction, to become “fact-tion”!

When the writing is a novel accepted as fiction, no deception is intended; it may be merely a way of adding romance or credibility to the story. But when a novel attacks the origins of Christianity and seeks to undermine the gospel accounts, it cannot be treated lightly and the record needs to be set straight. For the Bible makes it clear that what God revealed in His Word is both clear and complete, and nothing should be added to it. Here are the words of Jesus:

“I testify to everyone who hears the



words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18,19).

Secret Romance?

Dan Brown's novel "The Da Vinci Code", which has now been made into a film, suggests that its story is based upon a set of facts, listed at the start of the novel. They include information about "The Priory of Sion", said to have been founded in 1099 (but actually established in the 1950s in France!), which is said to have numbered people like Leonardo da Vinci and Sir Isaac Newton among its members. But they were long gone before it even came into existence. And it includes the sweeping statement that "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and

secret rituals in this novel are accurate”, something that turns out to be very far from accurate!

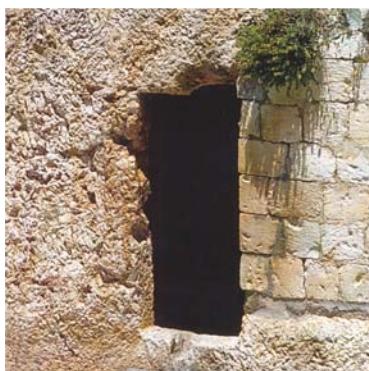
For among the documents referred to in the novel are extracts from the so-called gospels of Philip and Mary, both of which are much later than the New Testament and probably date from the early 3rd century AD. Yet the author alleges that these Gnostic writings – so called because the writers believed that they alone had a true understanding – give a more accurate portrayal of the life of Jesus than that given in the gospels that were written shortly after the events they describe.

In particular he alleges a secret romance between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, resulting in a continuing family line related to Jesus, which happening he says the Church has been trying hard to keep secret.

Historical Fact

To the non-Christian this may make a good story, even if it is said to make a fairly boring film, with a lot of tedious detail. But to the believer this represents a severe distortion of Biblical truth. For the historical Jesus is a fact of history. He was described by Mr H G Wells, himself an unbeliever, as “the dominant figure in history” and his life divided history into B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (After Christ), both initials being derived from Latin.

Whilst secular history – both Jewish and Roman – confirms his crucifixion, it is only the historical gospels that explain the marvellous things that happened next. He was miraculously raised from



the dead, an event which transformed the situation. The frightened disciples became changed men because of this great event, men who were ready to defy their rulers and keep teaching even when they were told to stay silent. They could not but speak the things that they had learned: it was such good news for humanity. Despite punishment and even death they continued to preach the message which turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), because it was a message of hope and deliverance from both sin and death.

Empty Tomb

The empty tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ offers the very thing that human philosophy lacks – a message of hope beyond the grave: God’s offer of everlasting life. This is why it really matters that we should not be confused or even distracted by novels which paint a fanciful and fictional portrayal of what Jesus was like, and of what he said and did.

Those Gnostics, who developed their own wrong ideas in the second and third centuries A.D., did so because they wanted to lure people into their sects and societies, where they could gain influence over them. From the outset, these wrong ideas were challenged and shown to be wrong because they wrongly represented the work and teaching of Jesus.

This was no secret that the Church tried to suppress; it was false teaching that the Church needed to correct and refute, because it would lead people astray. It is truth that saves, and wrong teaching can lead people seriously

astray. Conspiracy stories and cover-up theories might sell books, but they do nothing more than arouse our curiosity and leave us with theories instead of proven facts.

A Man Apart

The Jesus of the four gospels was a man apart who, in life and teaching, revealed a better way of life – a godly way, which can make us right with God. To diminish him, as Dan Brown does, is to challenge the whole purpose of that exceptional life and his redeeming death. But why is it that many people prefer to read such things rather than read the gospels themselves? Why would they prefer fiction to saving fact?

The answer to that question exposes the sickness of our 21st century society. To accept Jesus and his message we need to face up to the challenge that he posed. Among many other things he said:

"Whatever you want men to do to you,

do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Jesus challenges us to change our lives and to model them on the way he lived. In modern terms, he asks us to face up to our responsibilities to our Maker, not to fritter our lives away in the vain quest to please ourselves and safeguard our own rights. He asks us to face the very facts of our human existence and then to reach out to God for forgiveness and salvation.

The man apart offers us a life apart, and invites us to become related to him, by faith and baptism. We can become sons and daughters of God but that is not because Jesus had a child when he lived on earth – he certainly did not! Jesus wants us to live as he lived and to share the great hope of salvation he brought, so that we can become his brothers and sisters, both now and in the age to come.

Fred Whiting

Jesus at the Door

*Open the door for Jesus!
He who would be our guide,
Not his place to receive us:
The latch is on our side!*

*He waits from us a welcome
A Royal one it must be,
He will not force an entry,
On our side is the key.*

*He knows the heart's own pleasure,
The mind that seeks his face;
To such he brings the treasure
Of heavenly love and grace.*



*He comes! And we are ready
With hands on latch and key
With eyes alert, yet steady;
Oh Lord! We Welcome Thee!*

Mary Bellamy

Part Seven

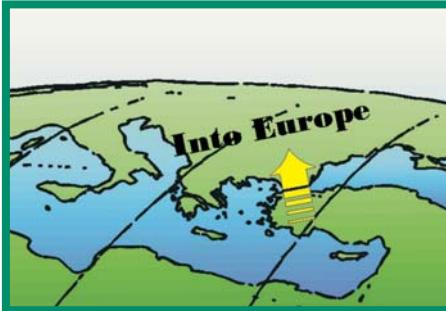
God's New Society

Tom Barling previously explained how the first Missionary Journey of Paul and Barnabas had achieved great success. A large number of converts with a totally pagan background had been baptized into the saving name of the Lord Jesus purely on the basis of their faith and were thus incorporated into God's new society. Now he shows how their preaching work and so did the new community.

Second Missionary Journey

While the scruples of some believing orthodox Jews were understandable, they were not allowed to prevail. The great task of evangelising the heathen world had to proceed, and so we read the record of The Second Missionary Journey (Acts chapters 16-18). As before, the leading figure was Paul, supported this time by Silas, and later also by the young Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). Paul's first responsibility was to revisit the communities brought into being during the previous journey: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch (see Acts 16:1-5).

After a period of indecision as to where they should next preach the gospel, Paul and Silas received clear guidance at Troas, on the western coast of modern Turkey. There they were instructed to pass over the sea to the opposite shore. Notice an interesting detail at this point in the Acts record – the use of “we” (in 16:10), indicating that Luke is now a member of Paul’s party. He was the author of the Book of Acts and he arrived with Paul in Philippi (v.12). Thus the Aegean had been crossed and the Gospel was being preached on soil which we now regard as European.



Into Europe

There the first European ecclesia – or congregation – came into existence. Prominent among the new converts was a wealthy lady called Lydia (v.14-15); both she and her household were baptized and formed the nucleus of this community. Here Paul encountered a new kind of opposition: he healed a young woman whose “special powers” were exploited by her owners. They had made her a soothsayer, or fortune teller, but really she was mentally unstable and when her sanity was restored she was unsuitable for that purpose, a detail from the ancient world that suggests you have to be crazy to rely on fortune tellers!

In Jail

When the girl was useless to those who exploited her, the men were determined to get their own back (Acts 16:16-18). They took advantage of the fact that Paul and Silas were Jews and affirmed, falsely, that the two were preaching customs unlawful in the eyes of Romans. Without further ado, the missionaries were seized, severely flogged and bundled into prison (v.22-24), where their response was quite extraordinary. Instead of bemoaning their fate, they prayed and

sang hymns in the middle of the night. If ever we needed evidence of the influence of the Lord Jesus upon his followers, here it is. We are here granted some insight into the way members of God's new society can behave in what we can rightly regard as very trying circumstances.

It was a violent earthquake which shook the prison and freed the two and the other prisoners from their shackles. The quake roused the jailer who was distraught to see the prison doors open. If those in his charge escaped, he knew he would be held guilty of an unforgivable dereliction of duty. Rather than wait to suffer shame and execution, he was about to take his own life. A similar situation is recorded in two other places by Luke: after Peter's escape from prison, his unfortunate warders were executed by the angry Herod (Acts 12:18-19; see also Acts 27:42).

At Philippi, when Paul saw the distraught jailer was about to take his life, he swiftly intervened and shouted: "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" (Acts 16:28). The poor man could hardly believe his ears; he had doubtless heard about the two prisoners, Paul and Silas. In a small town like Philippi he would have learnt something about the circumstances in which the two had run foul of the owners of the girl, and probably had heard it reported how Paul had healed her. It is by no means impossible also that he knew Lydia, a wealthy member of the community and was aware also that she had connections with the Jewish faith (see v.14) and that she had embraced the faith preached by Paul and Silas.



The Jailer Freed

While much of this attempt to reconstruct the jailer's background must be considered speculative, what we know for certain is that as the result of the night's unforgettable events he put a direct question to the two missionaries: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v.30). Such a question from a rational man makes sense only if he had some understanding of the implications of his question. He did not ask, "What do you preach and please give me some instruction", but he put a simple direct enquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" The key word here is "saved"; surely we cannot miss the connection here with the words of the slave girl:

"These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved" (v.17).

If the grateful jailer had some knowledge of this and of the previous activity in Philippi, then his request begins to become understandable.

Philippian Baptisms

Whatever the background to the incident, Luke makes it abundantly clear that the jailer asked for enlightenment on the way of salvation. Nothing could give Paul greater pleasure than to respond to such a request. What emerges from what follows is that the man was evidently a godly individual; not merely the warder himself but his family also listened to what Paul and Silas had to say. They divided the responsibility of teaching the assembled household, who would listen most intently (v.32). We do not know how long this period of instruction lasted but Paul and Silas would

leave their listeners in no doubt as to what was required of them.

Whilst the jailer and his family expressed their desire for baptism, this is not what immediately happened. The one who was now their host revealed he was a caring individual, for he attended to the wounds inflicted on Paul and Silas by the blows they had received (v.33). Then, and only then, did the baptisms take place.

It appears from Luke's condensed record that the baptisms took place outside the warder's home for it was after Paul and Silas had had their wounds dressed, and the baptisms had been carried out that the warder received them into his home (v.34). In Philippi there is a river not far from the town, the Gangites. It was there, incidentally, outside the city gate that Lydia and her fellow worshippers assembled on the Sabbath (see v.13).

But it is highly improbable that while it was still dark, they would have gone so far. It is much more likely that sufficient water was available in the courtyard, or somewhere near. It is when we bring together the various items of information provided by Luke that we begin to appreciate the truth of his account. He would, in any case, have been familiar with the facts for he was there, in Philippi, at the time.

Unforgettable Events

What a night this was, unforgettable for all those present. A meal was prepared for the family and their guests; to quote Luke's words:

"The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to



believe in God, he and his whole family" (16:34).

But what was happening in the rest of the city? The earthquake must have brought everyone out of their beds and a report of what happened at the prison must somehow have reached the city magistrates. Either they had learnt something of the remarkable behaviour of Paul and Silas, or they were just intending to send their prisoners on their way, having taught them a lesson, as they thought. For when it was day, and unimpeded movement could take place, they issued instructions to the jailer to set the two free (v.36). This would have given the jailer much pleasure, but it was not without incident.

Romans!

It is now that we learn for the first time that Paul and Silas were both Roman citizens (v.37). If we wonder why this had not been disclosed on the occasion of their arrest we need to remind ourselves they had been summarily seized and dragged into the market place (v.19). They were subjected to mob behaviour and those engaged in it do not normally listen to reason or protestations on the part of their victims.

Yet Roman citizens had rights that were never to be violated, and when the jailer passed those details to the magistrates, they knew at once they were in trouble, so they came themselves to beg them to leave Philippi, no doubt apologising that Roman citizens had been treated in such a way.

Believers in Philippi

We may well wonder why the establishment of the church at Philippi occupies so much space in the Book of Acts and there are two answers. The Lord Jesus, with his unique insight had announced that the gospel was to be carried to all nations (see Matthew 28:19-20), and before his ascension to heaven the Lord told the faithful eleven they were to be his witnesses “*to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

Paul, after his conversion was to be the Lord’s witness to the Gentiles (see Acts 9:15). As we have seen in this Second Missionary Journey, the Apostle, accompanied by Silas, Timothy and Luke crossed the Aegean and penetrated into another continent. This was a major step forward in the spread of the Good News. Furthermore Luke was an eyewitness of all the dramatic events which then took place and this emerges in the living quality of his record.

Finally, there is evidence that when

Paul, Silas and Timothy moved on from Philippi, Luke was left in charge of the young community. For while the term “we” features in the narrative of the departure from Troas and the arrival in Philippi (see Acts 16:11,12,13), it disappears when Paul and his associates move on from the city (see Acts 17:1). So it would seem that Luke had not merely been involved in the formation of the Philippi church but that he was left in charge of the young community. And we cannot doubt that he proved a fine shepherd of the flock.

The letter which Paul later addressed to the Philippian believers has a special interest, for it gives us an insight into what Paul expected of a Christian community which constituted a part of God’s new society. This we hope to demonstrate in the next article.

Tom Barling

Days that Changed my Life

The Ethiopian Eunuch

In this series Cynthia Miles explores the feelings and reactions of men and women whose lives were changed by their encounter with the gospel message.

Man Apart

I was different in so many ways. I am black, from Ethiopia where there are different cultures and religions. As a eunuch, I was unable to marry and have children and as a non-Jew I stood out in Jewish society. However, Jewish people were considerate and my status as Queen Candace’s chief finance minister helped. I had long accepted Israel’s God as the true creator of Heaven and Earth and once I had

obtained scrolls of the Law and the prophets I was able to study and understand something of how He wants men and women to live their lives. I admit though, there were still scriptural teachings that puzzled me.

Having business in the Israeli region that year, I had gone to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. As a Gentile, admittance was restricted to certain areas, but at least I was in God’s house and among His people. I felt refreshed by my meditations and a bit

reluctant to return home. The journey would be long and tedious. However, I had acquired a new scroll of the prophet Isaiah and as we travelled I settled to read a section about someone in much trouble. He was described as being humiliated, without true justice and being led like a lamb to the slaughter. Much of that sentiment I could readily appreciate having often been despised as a eunuch, but this person seemed to be in great distress.

A Helping Hand

As I was considering the prophet's description a man ran towards my chariot. He came alongside my seat and called up. He must have recognised the scroll because he asked me if I understood the section. Readily admitting my ignorance I invited him to join me. Within seconds we were deep in discussion. Philip, for that turned out to be his name, began to explain that Isaiah was describing the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. He told me that Jesus is God's Son and described how he had come to the Jewish people to teach them the ways of God. Philip used the scroll to explain their rejection of him and of his crucifixion by the Romans. He helped me to understand that because Jesus had lived a perfect life, his Father had raised him from the dead and that now he was in Heaven as a mediator for all men's sins until the time that he would return to the world to get rid of all sin and death.

I was horrified to hear of the death of an innocent man, especially as I could see that it was as much for me as for anyone else that God had allowed this to happen to him, but all that I had learned previously about the Jewish

religion and what the prophet was now saying, suddenly fell into place.

Joined with Jesus

I knew immediately that I had to be associated with Jesus. What did I need to do to demonstrate repentance of my sins and to join my name to that of Jesus? I wanted to be part of God's full

purpose. When Philip explained that I needed to be baptized for the forgiveness of my sins and to have a hope of being resurrected myself.

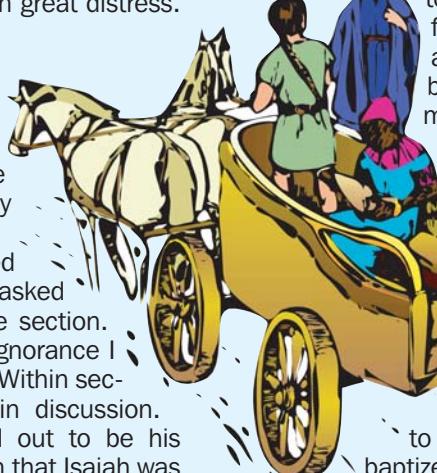
I realised at once that it was a matter not to be delayed. We passed a large water hole; clearly we needed plenty of water for a symbolic death and resurrection. I ordered the chariot to stop and then I was baptized. I felt wonderful as

I came out of that water. I was now whole in a way I had never been before.

I didn't see Philip again, I learned later that God had taken him to Azotus, but I went home so happy. I now understood that God wanted me as I was in his Kingdom and that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and my baptism had made that possible. I am different again now. I belong to a family who love and care for each other, I have a Father and a Lord who understands my thoughts, hopes and worries.

I still have her Majesty's accounts to balance, but that day in the desert with Philip has given me new hope and a real future.

Cynthia Miles



Bible Sarcasm

That great Victorian writer, Thomas Carlyle, called sarcasm "the language of the devil" and so it often has been: but not always.

There are many instances where the inspired writers of the Bible used sarcasm with telling effect to rebuke the wilful and the unrepented sins of their contemporaries.

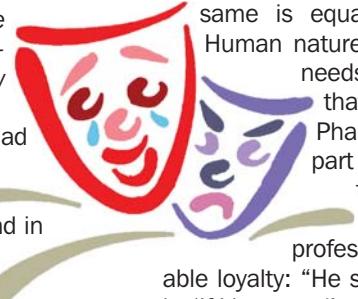
Jesus Himself found it a powerful weapon against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. On one occasion they criticized him for eating with ordinary people – “tax collectors and sinners”, they called them; whereupon Jesus issued this stinging rebuke: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick ... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:12,13).

These religious play-actors had succeeded in persuading themselves that they were spiritually thoroughly healthy and in need of help from nobody. So Jesus takes them at their own estimation. He could give them nothing if they had need of nothing.

Cutting Comments

It is very easy to miss the force and sting of other remarks Jesus threw at these hypocrites: “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry...?” (Matthew 12:3), or, “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:13).

These were addressed to men who were the world’s leading authorities on the Bible (the Old Testament, of course).



They had spent all their learned lives studying every detail of the Holy Books, and it was to these people that Jesus addressed these withering remarks. He treated them as though they were untutored ignoramuses who had never really read the Scriptures and, compared to him, that is exactly what they were.

Jesus always did and said the right things at the right time, so those caustic comments must have been needed. For these men read the Bible but failed to learn its most elementary lessons and there is a moral here.

Supportive Comments

If those Pharisees could feel so certain about the things which were actually their most marked shortcomings, the same is equally possible with us. Human nature hasn’t altered. Yet It needs to be remembered that what was true of the Pharisees had its counterpart in the experience of the disciples.

Peter made a loud profession of his unquestionable loyalty: “He spoke more vehemently, ‘If I have to die with you, I will not deny you!’ And they all said likewise” (Mark 14:31). Yet within a few hours all the disciples turned and fled and Peter, who tried his very best, fared worst of all.

But Jesus directed no sarcastic comments towards these men, his disciples, because they had the grace to be sorry for making such a mess of things. So the sarcasm that could have bitten deep into Peter’s soul was silent. Instead, with words of encouragement, Jesus bade him: “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17).

Harry Whittaker

Have You Read?

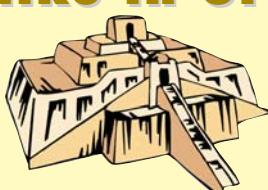
About Abraham

Who is it about?



Abraham was born in Ur in Chaldea (modern day Iraq). His family were pagan and he may have originally been a high priest of the moon goddess. If so, he would have regularly ascended ziggurats (tall worshipping towers) to serve the city's gods. At some point Abraham turned to the true God who called him to leave his home and immediate family. He did so, in faith, giving up his comfortable city life to wander with his wife, Sarah, in the Promised Land (Israel) for years. God made him many promises that at the time seemed impossible to fulfil, yet Abraham proved himself faithful to what he was told. His story starts in Genesis but is yet to be completed.

What was life like in Ur?



An ancient Ziggurat or Temple

Archaeological discoveries show that Ur was a place of culture and high civilisation with democratic government, beautiful art work and sophisticated waterways, though its religious life was far from the worship of God.

When did it happen?

About 4000BC

Where will I find it?

The story of Abraham's life is in
Genesis 11:27-25:11.

What should I look out for?



What were some of the Promises God gave Abraham?

- ❖ That he would become a great nation and through his descendants all nations on earth would be blessed (Gen.12:1-3; 22:18). Those who blessed him would be blessed, those who cursed him would be cursed (Gen.12:3)
- ❖ God would give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants for ever. They would be countless in number and defeat their enemies. The inherited land would cover a large area (Gen:12:7; 13:14-17; 15:5,18; 22:16-18)
- ❖ God would give Abraham and Sarah an heir (Gen.15:3-5)

What should I look out for?

- ❖ His enormous faith. Asked by God to sacrifice his only son, Abraham trusted God completely; his arm was raised to kill Isaac before he was offered an alternative (Gen.22:1-14)
- ❖ The promises made to Abraham were not just for him and his immediate family but for all people who put their faith in God (Rom. 4:16)
- ❖ The promises to Abraham shaped the lives of all the Old Testament men and women of faith (Ex.6:8; 32:13; 33:1; Lev.26:42; Deut. 1:8; 2 Kings 13:23; 1Chron.16:16-18; Neh.9:7-8; Ps.105:42; Is.41:8; Jer.33:25-26; Micah 7:20)
- ❖ Abraham is mentioned in the New Testament too. See how early he appears in the first gospel, Matthew, and how often '*the promises*' come up in the New Testament letters (Matt.1:1-2; Lk.1:54-55, 72-73; John 8:56; Acts 3:13, 25; 7:2; Romans 9:4-9; 15:8; Gal.3:6-9, 14, 16; Heb.6:13; 11:8-12, 17; James 2:21-23; 2 Peter 1:4)

What does it mean for me?

- ❖ Jesus (a descendant of Abraham, Matt.1:1) died so that God could forgive our sins. Forgiveness of sins means a future resurrection to eternal life so that all those faithful, past and present (like Abraham, David and people today,) can live for ever. That's a real blessing to the world (Gen.12:3)
- ❖ Jewish or not, we can all become 'children of Abraham' and share in the same promises as he did (Gal.3:14, 27-29; Rom. 4:12; 9:6-8). We can look forward to:
 - ♦ *The return of Jesus (Abraham's most important descendant, Gal 3:16) to permanently restore the promised land to faithful Israel (Gen. 17:8; Exodus 32:13; Acts 1:6) and rule the world with justice (Lk.1:32-33; Psalm 72; Isa.2:1-5; 32:1; 2 Tim.2:10-12.)*
 - ♦ *A renewed life on the earth, shared with the resurrected Abraham and all the faithful, in permanent peace and security: '...many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.' (Matt. 8:11, NIV)*
 - ♦ *All the promises made to Abraham will be completely fulfilled at Jesus' return.*

Joan Lewis

Two Free Offers

Land of Promise

God made promises to Abraham which are at the very heart of the Christian Gospel. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians 3:8 that God "preached before the gospel unto Abraham". Those promises were about the nation of Israel, the land of Palestine and about one descendant in particular. That descendant is Jesus Christ.

Stephen Palmer

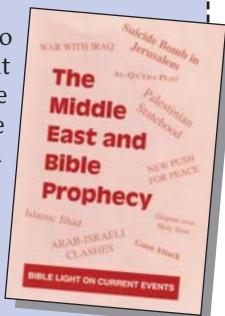
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