

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1469

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Feeding the 5000 – page 13



Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

122nd Year

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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 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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Walking Together

Jesus, walking alongside the Sea of Galilee, issued a challenging invitation to some fishermen he met. "Come", he said, "Follow Me!" It is much to the credit of four of those men that they left their nets and their livelihoods and started on a life-long adventure, following a most remarkable man.

It not only transformed their lives; it changed the lives of many more people. For their willingness to walk with Jesus showed that lots of ordinary folk, like us, can do the same thing if we choose to. The invitation still stands; for in every age Jesus invites people to walk through life with him: to follow his steps.

Getting about

In Bible times walking was one of the few ways to get around. On just two occasions of which we are aware Jesus travelled on an ass – once to Egypt when he was a baby under threat of death, and once when he entered Jerusalem. But usually he and his followers walked. Thirty different journeys are mentioned in the gospel accounts and during the three and a half years Jesus went about teaching he is reckoned to have walked over 1500 miles.

He must have been fit and so must those who followed him, and they had a wonderful opportunity to see and explore the land of Israel as they travelled. That's why so many people enjoy walking nowadays, as a leisure activity, so they can experience the pleasure of the outdoors and to get away from the rush and noise of life. But Jesus and his disciples didn't walk for the sake of it. For them it was a necessity – the only way they could travel around – and that is how the work of Jesus was once described:

*"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, **who went about** doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).*

Walking with God

Just as it is said that God was with Jesus, so it is recorded that faithful men in the past had walked with God:

*"Enoch **walked with God** three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters" (Genesis 5:22);*

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

That doesn't mean that they went on a walking holiday with God. It means that they so ordered and arranged their lives that they were in step with God: their lives were in harmony with Him. The prophet Amos once asked: "**Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?**" (Amos 3:3).

Jesus was in perfect agreement with God for, as he often said, he had come to do his Father's bidding. He did not live for himself: he lived for others, and whatever his Father asked of him, he was always willing to obey.

"I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me" (John 5:30);

"I do nothing of myself; but as my Father taught me, I speak these things" (8:28);



Denying Self

None of that came easily to Jesus, any more than it does to us. Jesus was like us in so many ways: he shared our human nature (Hebrews 2:14) and was tempted just as we are (4:15). But he was unlike us too: for Jesus never once sinned, he always obeyed his Father. That was not easy, far from it! But he was willing to deny his natural desires and to live a life of perfect obedience. The watchword of his life was, as he once prayed to his Father:

“Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42);

“In the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, 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 5:7-9).

Notice that we are now being invited to obey Jesus, as we seek to follow his steps and take him as our example in life. He invites us to walk with him, or, as the New Testament describes that

elsewhere, to ‘walk in the Spirit’. We should not live to please ourselves, but rather live so as to please God. Here’s how the apostle Paul put it:

“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-25).

Walking Together

In that last sentence the apostle uses a Greek word that reminds us that the walk to God’s kingdom is not a solitary stroll. The word means that we should walk together – just like the walkers featured on this month’s cover. Jesus called others to travel along with him, and to continue his work, and that was a deliberate plan. Nobody can make it to this journey’s end without the help, encouragement, advice and support that we give one another. We need one another.

God invites us to journey to His Kingdom, to spend our lives preparing for that great transformation. Over the ages many different people have made that choice and have directed their steps accordingly. Now it is our opportunity to heed the call and “Come, follow me!”

Editor

Glad Tidings



Middle East Madness

*The events of the past few weeks have shocked everyone. War broke out between Israel and the extremist Hezbollah faction in Southern Lebanon and hundreds of thousands of people were caught up in the conflict as rocket attacks were answered by bombs, missiles and bullets. In this article **David Caudery** reviews these crazy happenings in the light of Bible prophecy. He shows that this sort of eruption has been predicted as part of the deterioration of relationships as the end of everything draws near.*

Every normal person is horrified by what has taken place in the Middle East. Racial hatreds have boiled over and there is an atmosphere of madness. It seems that finding a good and lasting solution is impossible. What will the ceasefire accomplish?

There is now such poisonous anger on both sides that the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel may only be a lull before the next even greater storm! This area has seen friction for the last 50 years with no sign of a solution. Those with a thorough knowledge of the prophecies in the Bible see this serious eruption of violence, and the potential involvement of powerful neighbours, especially Iran – who boldly say Israel must be destroyed – as a frightening danger signal that Armageddon may not be far away.

What Next?

Although international alarm and resultant pressure forced a cessation of hostilities – one can but ask, “For how long? What next?” Those who know the detail of Bible prophecy will come up with very different views to that of the politicians.

It was in these ancient lands that the Bible was written. While the sceptic may scoff at these remarkable texts from 3,000 and more years ago, in so many ways they have proved true as world events unfolded down the centuries. Those who have studied them carefully see the Middle East scene as marking a significant step forward toward the divinely-ordained climax of human history.

As you turned away from the images of widespread destruction shown on the media, you may have thought: “Thank goodness this is all on the other side of the world”. But is it?

We now live in a so-called “global village”. Now you can fly around the world in 2 days if you wish! We have instant access to and coverage of events that happen all over the world. The soaring price of petrol has become a problem in every country; because of Middle East conflicts of one sort and another. Add to this the effects of global warming, pollution, potential world pandemics and it is easy to see why so many people now have serious concerns for the future.



Even flying has become uncertain, even dangerous, thanks to fanatics who have no hesitation in trying to kill as many harmless civilians as they can. The front line in the fight against extremism is now worldwide, for the battle is being fought almost everywhere.

Widespread Distress

Nearly 2000 years ago the Lord Jesus Christ said this about his eventual return to the earth. He predicted that at that time there will be *“on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring: men’s hearts failing them from fear and expectation of those things coming on the earth”* (Luke 21: 25,26). He also said that if there was not divine intervention, no human beings would survive! (Mark 13:19,20). And he mentioned Jerusalem as having a vital role to play in the final events.

Jesus had not come to change what had been already revealed by the prophets of God. He had come to bring those predictions to a fulfilment, so when Jesus said that Jerusalem would have a key role to play, his words echoed predictions already made. For example the prophet Jeremiah spoke of coming Middle East madness, and his words are about 2,700 years old. He was reflecting the anger of the Creator against people who turn their back on Him and even doubt His existence when he said this:

“For thus says the LORD God of Israel, Take this wine cup of fury from my hand and cause all the nations, to whom I send you to drink it! They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them” (Jeremiah 25:15,16).

God also told Jeremiah that His anger

would *“not turn back until he has executed and performed the thoughts of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly”* (23:20).

Then he said:

“Behold the whirlwind of the LORD goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until he has done it, until he has performed the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will consider it.” (Ch. 30:23-24)

Notice that whilst God’s anger was to be expressed in Jeremiah’s time, it was to come to its climax in “the latter days” – just before the end of human government.

Middle East Setting

If you have a Bible, note the nations who are to drink of the fury of God’s anger in these latter days. Jeremiah spells them out with careful detail. The first place to drink of the wine of God’s wrath is Jerusalem (25:18), then follows Egypt; Uz (now southern Iraq); the “land of the Philistines ... Gaza”; Edom, Moab and Ammon (now Jordan), then the “kings of Tyre ... Sidon” (now southern Lebanon). The text goes on to list (in verses 24 and 25) the kings who dwell in the desert and the kingdoms of Elam and Medes (now Iran). Then the net is cast over *“all the kings of the north, far and near”* which would take us up into Russia!

But the “wine cup of God’s fury” does not cease its work until it has spread throughout the whole world, for in verse 26 the message states, “and all the kingdoms of the world which are on the face of the earth.”

Now remember, the prophecy of this



anger of God is that it begins at Jerusalem. This is the city of God, where King Solomon built a magnificent temple to honour God's name. Therefore our interest is further aroused when the prophetic message again refers to Jerusalem:

"For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by my name, and should you (all these other nations) be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth, says the LORD of hosts" (Jeremiah 25:29).

So this is where it begins. Events at Jerusalem will be the trigger, in some form or another, that will spread disaster throughout the world. (If you want to see another similar prediction, read Zechariah 12:2-3; and 14:1-9.)

Frightening Predictions

Two verses further on comes this statement by Jeremiah:

"For the LORD has a controversy with the nations ... he will give those who are wicked to the sword ... behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. And at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth" (25:31-33).

These frightening predictions parallel the words of Jesus we mentioned at the beginning. Jesus challenged his hearers as to whether they worshipped God or Money (Matthew 6:24).

Today, nearly everyone worships money and the things it can buy. If we have no time for God, can we expect Him to have time for us? It is a sad

reflection upon much current thinking that many people do not even believe there is a God who created everything; instead they think that everything created itself. We have never known so much about the wonders of nature and yet we know so little about the wonderful God who designed and made it all.

Madness Everywhere

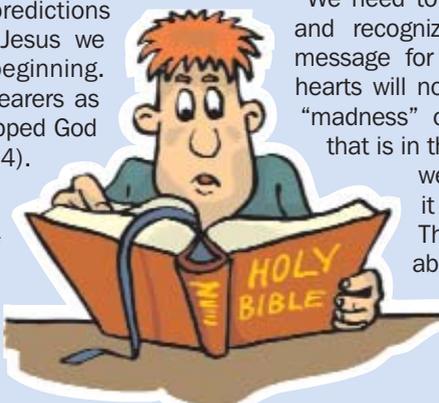
The increasing madness in the Middle East has to be seen as a significant warning to people everywhere that we are running out of time! A spirit of hatred fills the world. The one place in the Bible that uses the word Armageddon (Rev. 16:13-16) has a cryptic reference to "unclean spirits" that play a key role in gathering the world "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." The spirits or minds of men and women and that of the nations (as demonstrated by their leaders) are dominated today by evil thoughts and ungodly aims – to a far greater level than ever before in history.

As in the days of Jesus, the religious leaders have largely lost their vision. Yet, when the Christian Church first developed, they had clearness of belief and conviction – so much so that their faith captured the thinking of men and women so that in just 300 years their message had overwhelmed paganism to become the major faith in the world.

We need to get back to the Bible and recognize the wonder of its message for all ages so that our hearts will not be overcome by the "madness" of thought and action that is in the world today. Indeed,

we will start to see what it is all heading towards. The Creator has not abandoned His creation.

We are not spectators of this drama – we are



all involved – and it is a life and death involvement.

A King is Coming

The Bible contains at least 300 promises about God sending Jesus Christ back to the earth in “the last days.” Here is just one of them:

“It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation ... when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord ... “ (2 Thessalonians 1: 6-9).

When a King rules for God in Jerusalem everything will change for the better and sanity will at last prevail. The presence of the Lord will bring peace and the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray will be fulfilled: “...*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth*”.

Do you dare to believe that this is about to happen? If not, what can you believe?

David Caudery



If you would like more information about the Bible, try the Bible Education Centre website at:
<http://www.dandenongbec.org.au/>

Days that Changed my Life – 3

Saul who was also called Paul

The impact has remained with me for the rest of my life and what a difference that day made. Now I sit here in the cold damp dungeon: old Paul, my life to be ended shortly almost certainly at the hands of a Roman soldier. But I have time to reflect as I write my last letters.

Saul the Pharisee

Then I was a determined young zealous Pharisee in a hurry. After an exceptional university education with the famous Rabbi Gamaliel I put my learning into practice working with the Sanhedrin. I had heard a lot about the new Jewish sect called “Christians”, even met a few of them, but they were trouble makers dividing Jewish society. They failed to

keep the laws properly and claimed that their leader, Jesus of Nazareth, was the expected Messiah. There had been a lot of talk about Messiah being imminent thirty years previously. Nothing had come of it.

It made me angry to see Christians seemingly ignore the precious laws Moses had passed to us. God had exiled us for doing that in Nebuchadnezzar’s time. If I had anything to do with it no sect would develop that might lead to further exile from God’s land. The relationship between our Jewish leaders and the Roman occupiers was fragile at the best of times and what might happen if a sect arose who thought that King Jesus was our leader.

Spreading Sect

The problems had seemed resolved when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. He'd gone the way of other rebels. However, shortly after his death the debates erupted again when his followers claimed that Jesus had been resurrected to life and that he was in heaven with God, until the time for the Kingdom of God to be re-established in Jerusalem. What blasphemy! The trouble was worse because no-one could find the body of this Jesus. Most Jews thought his friends had stolen the body, but there were also amazing stories about miracles being done in his name.

The authorities had tried to stop the spread of this group. I had worked with them, bringing to trial any Christians who could be identified. I believed that the safe plan was to completely destroy this group. I worked hard to achieve it, and was the legal leader when Stephen the Christian was stoned to death for blasphemy against the Temple.

Life-Changing

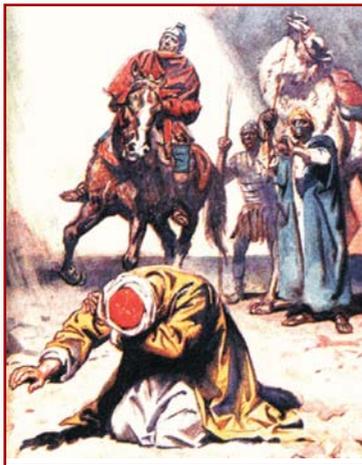
It was nearly mid-day on my journey to Damascus to deal with yet more Christians that it happened. In spite of the intense heat I was determined to finish my journey quickly. There was work to do and I had letters of introduction from the High Priest. Suddenly a bright light shone straight into my eyes. It wasn't the sun; too bright for that and anyway I was used to the sun. It hurt and

it blinded me completely. I fell from my horse, but it was the voice that was so penetrating. Others with me heard a noise but could not identify any conversation. I could. The voice identified itself as Jesus and accused me of persecuting him.

I had three days without my sight, time to think and re-assess my understanding of the Scriptures. It was the shock of a direct revelation from Jesus that made me realise how foolish I had been. He really was alive and he was *our* Messiah. I had been persecuting and killing those who had been trying to tell us the truth, hurting him badly in the process! How wrong my actions and beliefs had been. When Ananias came to restore my sight he had no lingering doubts to deal with before I was baptised.

I have spent the rest of my life trying to make up for my mistake. I think in

my heart I knew at the time that the Lord Jesus' claims were true but was too proud especially of my status in Jewish society to acknowledge it even to myself. How hard-hearted I must have been for Jesus to have to appear to me personally. At least now others can learn from my mistake. Events that change our lives come in many forms. Mine was pretty dramatic, a day never forgotten, but Jesus has promised me that because I responded to his love and sacrifice, put aside my pride and repented of my past there will be a crown waiting for me in his Kingdom. It won't be long now till I rest, waiting for the Kingdom when I will meet him again.



Cynthia Miles

Part Eight

God's New Society

In this series Tom Barling is tracing the gradual formation of God's new society as He recruited members from differing parts of the Roman Empire and bringing together men and women of varied ethnic backgrounds who had practised various forms of pagan religion. He now interrupts his survey of the spread of early Christianity to give special consideration to the letter Paul sent to the church at Philippi, for this epistle has features which focus on the hope and responsibilities of the members of God's new society.

Letter to the Philippians

All Paul's letters possess a special interest for those who are tracing the history of early Christianity. They were, of course, written at varying periods in the career of the Apostle. Often they dealt with problems which had arisen in the various churches and this we can well understand as frequently the converts had a pagan background and sometimes were subjected to unsettling Jewish influence.

Some brief notes on the background of Philippi itself are essential to a proper understanding of features in Paul's letter to the Philippians and it is on these we shall now concentrate.

First, and foremost, the city itself was a Roman colony; there had been a town there for some considerable time. Its name reflected that of Philip the Macedonian king and father of Alexander the Great; he greatly enlarged the town. Coming down to Roman times, a decisive battle was fought west of the city; this brought into conflict the forces of Antony and Octavian (later Augustus) on the one hand, and the champions of republicanism on the other hand, Brutus

and Cassius.

The republican cause was decisively defeated in BC 42; at the command of Antony, some retired Roman soldiers were settled there and Philippi thus became a Roman colony. After Octavian defeated Antony in their power struggle,

Augustus as he came to be known from BC 27, gave the colony a high-sounding title associated with his own name. Briefly then, by the time Paul and Silas visited the city in about AD 49, it already had a long history as a

Roman colony, an outpost of the mother city of Rome itself.

Roman Colony

As we read Luke's truly fascinating record of the activities of Paul and Silas, in the Acts of the Apostles, certain features strike us. Thus, although this was by no means the first Roman colony to have been evangelized by Paul, Luke expressly calls our attention to the fact Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12).

There can be little doubt that this passing mention is intended by Luke to be a clue to the understanding of what



The Forum (or market place) at Philippi

follows. As we have already noted, when Paul cured a deranged maiden whose “magical powers” were exploited by her masters, the latter made much of the fact that Paul and Silas were Jews (16:2). They were falsely accused of teaching customs unlawful for Romans “to accept or practise” (v. 21). A mob had come together and joined in the summary punishment to which the two were subjected. This was carried out by the “magistrates” (v.22, NIV). Luke uses in the Greek the correct term for these Roman magistrates: “praetors”.

We pass over the extraordinary way in which Paul and Silas reacted to their brutal treatment, for it was mentioned in our last article. For reasons about which we have already speculated, the praetors ordered the release of the missionaries, whereupon Paul and Silas were looking for an apology:

“They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out” (v.37).

When these words came to the ears of the praetors, they must have looked at one another with embarrassment. They were well aware of the circumstances in which the two had been arrested and beaten and they knew they had yielded to mob pressure and the interests of the masters of the previously deranged girl. These men who enjoyed such prestige in the eyes of their fellow citizens had now to eat humble

pie, an exercise to which they were scarcely accustomed.

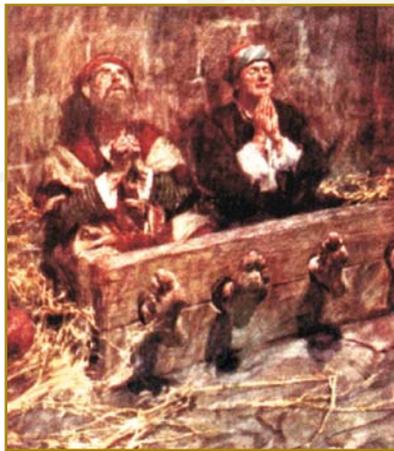
What they now feared was that Paul and Silas might exploit the situation. If the report of the abuse of their authority reached Rome, they could indeed be in hot water. However, they were not dealing with ordinary Roman citizens but with men who were members of God’s new society. So when the magistrates had tried to make amends, and pleaded with Paul and Silas to leave Philippi, they acceded. The evidence was, as we have already indicated, that they left Luke, a truly noble character, in charge of this new Christian community.

Jewish Influence

It is then, when we look back upon these events familiar to all the Philippian believers that we begin to understand some of the passages in the delightful letter Paul wrote to them. Clearly our purpose now cannot be to provide a detailed commentary on the epistle to the Philippians; our object will be more modest, to concentrate on Ch.3 because of its special relevance to our main subject.

Early in the chapter, the Apostle warns his readers to be on their guard against “those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh” (v.2). Here, in severe and ironic

language, Paul is speaking of those Jews who demanded circumcision of baptised believers; hence, in the Apostle’s eyes, they were striving to undo the saving work of the Lord Jesus. The word “dogs” is a deliberate use of the abusive term the Judaisers used of the Gentiles.

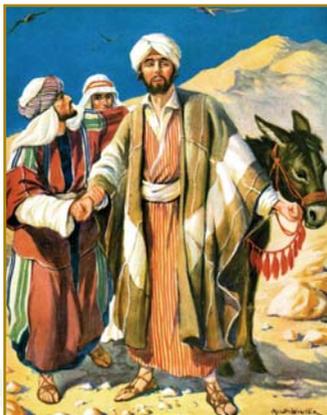


It may seem extraordinary that Jewish influence could threaten Philippi, so remote from Jerusalem, the great stronghold of Judaism. However, in their Diaspora, or scattered state, the Jews were nearly everywhere and they had no problem in being fully informed about Paul's activities.

To counteract the influence of the Jews seeking to disturb the church at Philippi, Paul embarks upon one of those occasional passages in which he speaks of his own background and his life before he was converted by the revelation on the Damascus road. Yes, he too was a Jew, circumcised the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew speaking Hebrew, a Pharisee, whose zeal for the law of Moses had driven him to persecute the Christian church, and as far as the law required, he had been "faultless" (v.4-6). Briefly, the Apostle is declaring if these defenders of the law and circumcision are boasting of their Jewishness, I can take on any of them. At the same time, he is all too conscious that his zeal had led him to be a ruthless persecutor (see Acts 8:3 and 9:1-2).

New Life

But for him all had changed as the result of the revelation on the Damascus road. His unworthy past as a persecutor and champion of legalism, he now renounced and regarded the advantages he enjoyed as a brilliant young Jew, as "rubbish" (v.8) and he goes on to speak of being found in Christ, a simple but comprehensive way of saying that he had found a new life through his relationship with the Lord Jesus, the one who had opened up



for him the way of salvation and eternal life. The whole of his new life arises from his relationship to the Lord Jesus; in him he had found forgiveness, all his previous sins had been wiped out. He was now called to a life of love and dedication, with high ideals. He was making every effort to live worthily this new life in Christ but, although he had made great progress, he did not regard himself as perfect

but he was going on to make real the heavenly call he had received from his Lord. There is unity now in his life, a lofty idealism, which he commends to the Philippians, and indeed to all members of God's new society.

New Citizenship

This is indeed a part of Paul's writings to be studied by all who seek the way of salvation and desire to understand what is required of them. Towards the end of the chapter, he reverts to the subject of those who were endeavouring to turn them away from Christ: they are enemies of the cross of Christ, their glory is in their shame, for their mind is on earthly things (v.19-20). "But", says Paul, and there is great force in this word: contrasting now with those whose interests and whole life is concerned with earthly things is the life of those who have accepted the Lord Jesus. For Paul the Apostle can say: "our citizenship is in heaven".

The force of this would not be lost upon his readers: they knew all about Roman citizenship and its privileges and they knew Paul enjoyed this status. There was something far more enduring: that was to be citizens of heaven, to be members of God's new society. The king,

the emperor of that realm was none other than the Lord Jesus and while he was then away in heaven at God's right hand, he was to come back. Paul can therefore state:

"And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power which enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (v.20-21).

Kingdom Hope

Here, briefly but eloquently presented, is the contrast between the status of all forms of earthly citizenship, in all ages, and the status and hopes of those who have accepted the Lord Jesus as their king. Some of the Roman emperors were remarkable men, notably the first, Augustus. However, they have been dead for a long time and will continue dead. The Lord Jesus Christ is, however, alive

for evermore and at the time appointed he will return to earth, assume his power, and raise to life his servants, his citizens.

Thus, although living at different periods in history and belonging to different nations, the members of God's new society are nevertheless united by the same hope: they share a common citizenship. But how can the claims of the land in which they live be reconciled with the obligations they accept when they come to Christ? This question we hope to answer in our next study.

Tom Barling

All Quotations from the NIV



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Miracles of Jesus 4

Feeding the 5000

The feeding of the five thousand men took place on a mountainside where Jesus and his disciples had gone for a temporary rest from their activities.

A great multitude of people had followed them there because they were fascinated by the way Jesus was performing miracles; nothing like this had ever been seen by them before. You can read about the event in John chapter 6, verses 5-14, and in the other three gospel accounts. It was such an important miracle it is

featured in all four of the inspired records.

Loaves and Fishes

The crowds had been following him all day and by now they were hungry so Jesus decided to provide a meal for them all. First he asked Philip how he thought this could be done, asking "Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?" (John 6:5). Philip didn't realise it was a test. All he could think of was the likely cost of feeding such a multitude, even if it was possible to get the money and then get the necessary food. It was a huge catering task and



would be very expensive – he suggested a cost of at least 200 denarius, and he must have known they didn't have that sort of money in their communal money bag. For a denarius was the normal wage paid to a labourer for one day's work (see Matthew 20:2). If you know how much people get paid for a day's work nowadays, you can get an idea of how much it would have cost in today's prices.

It was Andrew who told Jesus about a lad who had brought some food with him, but that was just five barley loaves and two small fish. But he recognised that wasn't going to go very far, and he said so. But Jesus can work with whatever it is we have to give, however little or however much; and that is what happened here. Jesus gave instructions for the people to sit down on the grass in readiness

to get something to eat. Mark, who described the same incident, said that Jesus commanded to make the people sit down in groups: *"in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties"* (Mark 6:40). This arrangement would allow the disciples to move around as they distributed the food. For now Jesus "took the loaves and when he had given thanks he distributed them to the disciples and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted" (John 6:11).

Reflections on the Miracle

This was an amazing miracle. Jesus was not only able to create food but to provide it in huge quantities. The amount

of food required, assuming that each person ate on average four ounces, would total about one thousand two hundred and fifty pounds – over eleven hundredweight. It was a huge quantity! And the disciples would each have had to serve over four hundred people; that would have taken some considerable time. It was a vast enterprise and all was done to satisfy the hungry and to meet their needs.

Notice that Jesus first gave thanks.

This example of Jesus offering thanks to God for the food before he actually performed the miracle is one that we do well to follow when we share a meal in our own homes. Ultimately it is God who provides the food that we need to keep ourselves alive. Another example he gave was to avoid wasting food. He said to his disciples, *"Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."*

Therefore they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten (v.13). These fragments could well have been used later to let animals have a share of the miracle!

Jesus the Prophet!

Some of the people saw the miracle as the fulfilment of Bible prophecy, for they said, *"This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world"* (v.14). They no doubt remembered that Moses had written:

'I (God) will raise up for them a Prophet like unto you (Moses) from among their brethren, and will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all



that I command him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear my words, which he speaks in my name, I will require it of him." (Deuteronomy 18:18,19).

Deeply impressed by this remarkable miracle in which they themselves were involved, they felt that they were now in the presence of someone very important; a spokesman for God – a prophet! They had a duty, then, to listen attentively to what he had to say, take note of it and put it into practice. Of course, this conclusion applies equally to us in these last days of the Gentile times, as the writer to the Hebrews so majestically states, "God has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:1,2).

King Jesus?

No wonder the people wanted to make Jesus a King (and, no doubt, the disciples his nobles). If only they could persuade Jesus to accept this role. Look what wonderful powers he possessed! They would rally round him and support him and do whatever he commanded!

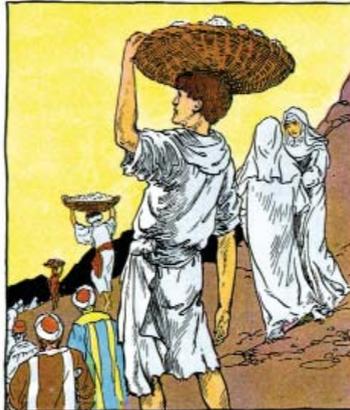
And he could feed them every day with next to nothing.

What a temptation it might have been to yield to the popular acclaim – a temptation that Jesus had to resist. There will come a time when he will be King of the earth, but 'Not Yet!' Such a

role at that time would have been quite inconsistent with the essential redemptive work God had already marked out for him to accomplish. The cross had to come before the crown.

Jesus quietly disappeared from their midst. He sent the disciples away by boat and sought the solitude of a mountain retreat where he could communicate with his Father in prayer and seek His guidance and encouragement. This action shows how closely Jesus lived with his heavenly Father and demonstrates his need to receive His guidance at all times. This is another example in the life of Jesus that we do well to copy in our own lives.

Ralph Green



Our Future

We came into this world with nothing
And we'll leave taking nothing away;
Our money and all our possessions
Will be given to others some day.

But if we put God first in our living
We'll be counted as children of worth
For only the meek and the godly
Will be those who inherit the earth.



Colleen Simons

Growth of the Gospel -18

The Council in Jerusalem

The apostle Paul and Barnabas have returned from their first Missionary journey in Asia and have told the ecclesia at Antioch about all the Gentiles who have accepted the gospel and have been baptized into the saving name of the Lord Jesus. But, as John Hellawell now explains, by spreading the gospel in this way they had deeply unsettled some Jewish believers, especially those who lived in Jerusalem.

Dissent in Antioch

The peace of the church in Antioch was disturbed when visitors arrived from Judea insisting that converts to Christianity must keep the Law of Moses and, in particular, be circumcised. Put simply, they were claiming that Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians.

This event is almost certainly the same as that which Paul mentions in his Letter to the Galatians. This letter, which deals with this very problem, must have been written before the Council in Jerusalem, discussed below, otherwise Paul would have used its ruling as a major part of his argument.

In Galatians, Paul says that before these men arrived the Apostle Peter was at ease eating with the Gentiles, as might be expected since he had been instrumental in the admission of the first Gentiles into the church (Acts 10:47,48). He had eaten with them

(Acts 11:3) but when the party from James (the Lord's half-brother) arrived he withdrew and separated himself from the Gentile Christians, as did others. From what James writes in Acts 15:24, it is certain these men from Judea were not authorised by him to promulgate their views but since they came from his group it may have been assumed that he concurred.

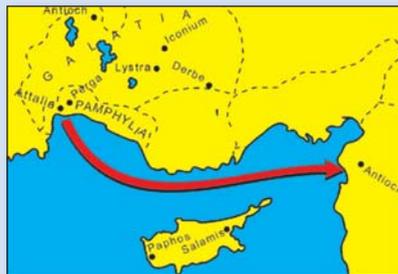
Not unexpectedly, Paul and Barnabas could not accept these claims although Barnabas seems to have been affected temporarily by them (Galatians 2:13). Paul, however, was quite forthright and having roundly condemned Peter's hypocrisy by asking why, if he now lived like a Gentile and not like his fellow Jews, was he demanding that the Gentiles should change their behaviour and live like Jews?

Peter's regression is difficult to understand when we recall how he had defended his induction of the Gentile Cornelius and his family into the faith before

critics of his action when he went up to Jerusalem (Acts 11:17). It is also strange that, having at that time accepted the clear evidence of divine approval (Acts 11:18), the Jerusalem disciples should now be unwilling to accept Gentiles without their submission to the Law of Moses.

Resort to Headquarters

The argument in Antioch could not be resolved locally and so it was decided



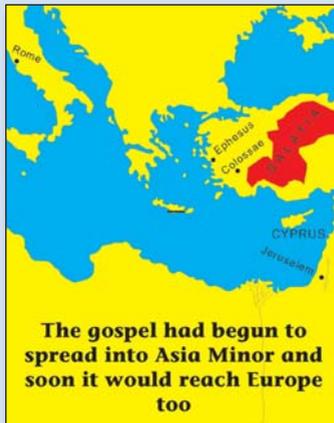
that a delegation should go up to Jerusalem and put the question before the Apostles and elders. Paul and Barnabas were selected to represent Antioch and, as they travelled to Jerusalem, they took the opportunity to visit the churches in Phoenicia and Samaria. They told them of their experiences during the First Missionary Journey and how the Gentiles had been converted, which was a source of great joy.

These experiences were also recounted to the Apostles and the elders in Jerusalem but the news caused resentment from some disciples who had previously been Pharisees. These reiterated the views of the party from James, declaring that it was essential that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.

Intense Arguments

Now that the Jerusalem disciples were divided over this question it was essential that the Apostles and elders should meet in order to settle the matter once and for all. Yet it is evident that these leaders of the churches could not agree initially for the record says *“And when there had been much disputing...”* the Apostle Peter stood up and rehearsed his experiences in the case of Cornelius and his family and friends.

Paul’s criticism had been effective, for now Peter was willing to return to his earlier position by stressing that God had chosen him to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles and God had given clear evidence of His approval by giving these Gentiles the Holy Spirit gift of tongues



(Acts 10:45,46), just as He had given that gift to the Apostles themselves at Pentecost (Acts 2:4).

The key part of Peter’s address was that God had *“made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith”* (Acts 15:9) and then went on virtually to reiterate Paul’s comments to him:

“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples

which neither our forefathers or we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they ” (Acts 15:10,11). [This can be compared with Galatians 2:14-16.]

Now Barnabas and Paul addressed the assembly, relating how they had been able, under God’s hand, to perform miracles for the benefit of the Gentiles amongst whom they had worked, thereby providing further evidence of divine approval. Although the text does not mention this, no doubt they also recounted the wonderful response of the Gentiles to their preaching.

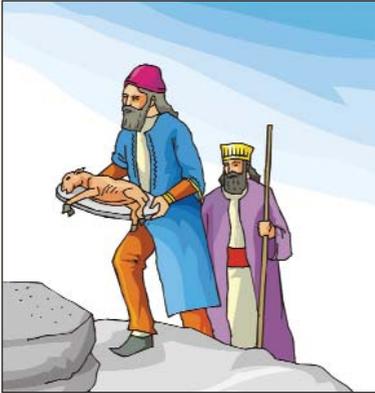
The assembly then fell silent. One would imagine they all recognised that the evidence for Gentiles being acceptable to God without circumcision and observance of the Law was indisputable, but both sides were reluctant to say anything further. Those who supported the need for circumcision were unable to counter the evidence while the others were, no doubt, wondering why God had required strict observance by His chosen people but demanded less from the Gentiles.

John Hellawell

Have You Read

About Sacrifice?

What is it about?



Following God's commandment, the Israelites began to sacrifice bulls, goats and sheep etc. in a portable tent, the Tabernacle, while they travelled through the Sinai desert (about BC1490). Sacrifice did not cease until the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. Surrounding heathen nations would sometimes offer human sacrifice or an animal as nourishment for their god. As Maker and Creator of all things the God of Israel did not require either. He asked His people to give the best of their flocks and herds.

Where will I read about it?



Animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law are described most fully in *Leviticus 1-9*.

Some other sacrifices: *Gen 4:1-5; 8:20; 46:1; Ex. 18:12; Jud.2:5; 1 Sam.1:21; 6:15; 11:15; 2 Sam.6:13; 1 Chron.21:28; 29:21; 2 Chron.5:6.*

Jesus' sacrifice: *John 1:29; Hebrews 9 & 10*

Why ...couldn't the Jews offer a wild animal to God?

Sacrifice should be something that costs the offerer something. A wild animal wouldn't do this but a lamb from your own flock would be a financial and emotional loss. God asked the Israelites to give their best to Him. This still applies today.

Footnotes (to page 19 references)

- ¹ Ex.12:5; Lev.1:3,10; ² 1 Pet.1:19; ³ Heb.8:5-7; ⁴ Heb.2:14-18; ⁵ Lev.4:24; ⁶ Ex.29:16; ⁷ Lev.17:14; ⁸ Gen.2:17, Gen.3:3; Rom.6:23; ⁹ Heb.9:12,22; ¹⁰ 1 Sam.15:22; Psalm 51:16-17; Hosea 6:6 (cp. Matt.9:13); ¹¹ Heb.10:1-4; ¹² Heb. 9:15;10:11-12; ¹³ Gal.3:24, KJV; ¹⁴ Rom.6:3-10; Col.3:3

Some more Questions



Why...

... had the animal to be perfect, 'without blemish'¹?

In itself a 'perfect' sacrificial animal had no value. But it was important because it pointed to something greater: the perfect sacrifice of Jesus². He was the sin offering Moses' Law spoke of³. Though he experienced all the temptations that come to people, Jesus never gave in. He then offered this perfect, obedient life to God as the ultimate sacrifice for sin⁴.

...did the offerer sometimes place his hand on the animal's head before it was sacrificed⁵?

By doing this the offerer was identifying with the animal to be killed, in effect saying 'sin deserves death'. The animal became a representative of the offerer, just as Jesus was representative of sinful men and women in his death.

...was the blood of the animal so important? (Sometimes it was poured round the altar or sprinkled on it.⁶)

"The life of every creature is its blood...⁷", so blood is symbolic of life. From the beginning God said sin deserves death⁸. If blood is heavily shed, death occurs, so when the people poured out blood as part of a sacrifice, they were acknowledging that God was right. Sacrifice reminded them that sin leads to death. God's remedy to the dilemma of death was to require a perfect sacrifice; in Jesus the process was reversed so that through the shedding of his blood forgiveness of sins came⁹.

...did the Old Testament have these sacrifices, if they could never take away sin?

The Old Testament itself points out that animal sacrifice was not enough to gain anyone salvation¹⁰. The fact that the people and High Priests, day after day and year after year, had to go on offering animal sacrifices made it clear that such a form of worship was never going to eradicate sin¹¹. However, the Old Testament did point in many ways to the coming of a Redeemer. Faithful people who recognised in the animal sacrifices a pointer to something greater (Jesus), were forgiven when Jesus himself made his sacrifice on the cross¹². The Law of Moses served a purpose in being a 'schoolmaster' to lead people to Christ¹³.

What does this mean for me?

Nowadays the idea of 'sin' is not much considered. The sacrifices required by God in the Old Testament show just how abhorrent sin is in His sight. There were sacrifices for different kinds of sin, from the slightest to the greatest. God's attitude to sin has never changed, but the way we can be forgiven has.

The forgiveness Jesus achieved through his sacrifice can be ours by baptism into him. Our lives are then bound up in his, the representative man, God's Son¹⁴.

Joan Lewis

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