

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1508



What does God have to say? – page 3
The World's Best Seller – page 9
Bible Reading Tables – pages 10 & 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

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1508



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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What does God have to say?

The remarkable thing is that God has a lot to say to mankind. It would not be surprising if He made no contact with the world He created. No self-respecting sculptor talks to his sculpture and no artist to his painting. And very few gardeners talk to the plants in their garden, to encourage them to grow.

God the Creator

But God did not bring the Universe into existence just for something to do, or as a display of His phenomenal power and wonderful creativity. He is not like a sculptor, or an artist, or even a gardener – although He once created a garden “eastward in Eden” (Genesis 2:8). God is more like a parent who having fathered a family then becomes responsible for their wellbeing and upbringing. How do we know? Because He has told us: that’s how!

From the very outset, God’s sayings were directed to bring things into existence. Ten times in Genesis Chapter One we are told that “God said”, and what He said happened. As the Psalmist observed many years later: *“He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast”* (Psalm 33:9). But that was not all. We know about that creative Word because God then communicated it to mankind, in all probability at first to Adam and Eve.



God the Communicator

Some people are good at making things but can't communicate their skills to others, or can't talk about what they do. God is the Master of every skill and created a world which is wonderfully designed and formed

men and women who are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14), He has also inspired a message to mankind which is the most wonderful revelation of Himself and His purpose.

Read it for yourself and give it the time it deserves and you will come to see that this is a book like no other. For the Bible is no human compilation in which writers were trying to work things out for themselves. Had that been the case its flaws and failings would have been exposed generations ago. The Bible is the Word of God.

“We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19–21).



This series of messages from God – given over more than 1500 years by 29 named writers and several unnamed ones – has one central theme. It tells us about the purpose of God which is anticipated in the Old Testament and realised in the New Testament when Jesus was born. He is right at the centre of God’s purpose and his life and death make possible what was otherwise unattainable. Without the wonderful work achieved by Jesus we would never be able to obtain eternal life. He has made all that possible; but whether or not we are part of God’s purpose is up to us.

God’s Offer

Nowadays we are rightly wary of free offers which look too good to be true. They usually are! Somewhere or other there is a catch and the chances are that we will get caught out. But life is full of opportunities which we can take advantage of if we are prepared to put in the effort, and that is the basis on which God makes His offer to mankind. He could, of course, have done it differently. If God had wanted to, He could have ensured that everybody who ever lived would continue to exist for ever – in happy or less happy circumstances. Curiously some people think that will happen: that we all have the inbuilt capacity to live forever. But a careful look at what the Bible actually says will put us right. God has given us life so that we can make the most of it, either for the present or for the long term. As the apostle Paul once said when debating with philosophers:



“God, who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is he worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath, and all things. And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:24–27).

If we want to find out about God and to have a personal relationship with Him, God is no further away than our Bible. Read God’s Word and you have begun the process of getting to know Him and finding out about His purpose and His wonderful character. God loves us so much that He has given us a remarkable insight into His nature and an invitation to become like Him and to share eternity with Him.

Read God’s Word

In this issue you can find (on pages 10 and 11) a Bible Reading Planner which can help you read through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice every year. You can start it at any time, although the beginning of the year is perhaps the best time. Make the effort every day and let God into your life. Let His Word inform, encourage, transform and direct your life. You will never regret it, neither in this life nor in the life that is to come.

Editor

Part Five

The Bible and Science

In this series **Lawrence Cave** has been looking at the observable facts in Science – things that can be proved beyond doubt. Now he turns his attention to the Bible account of Creation to see if the Biblical account can be reconciled with scientific knowledge.

Observable Facts

We have been looking at the observable facts in science. We now want to see what the equivalent is for the Bible. If we think about it, we'll see that it is the text of the Bible that we can think of as the observable facts. We looked carefully at the observable facts in science, so we must look equally carefully at the text of the Bible. So, let's see what the Bible says about the start of things. These are the first few words of the Bible:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).



Leaving aside for the moment the argument about whether a Creator was involved, this sentence tells us that the universe, including our earth, came into existence at some point called “the beginning”.

The Bible then goes on to say:

“The earth was without form, and void;

and darkness was on the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2).



We are told that at one stage our earth was covered with water, uninhabited and dark. Opinions vary among Bible students over what the text is saying about the beginning of the universe and our earth, and how long it all took. Some Bible students think that there could be a time gap between “the beginning” when “God created the heavens and the earth” and the description “The earth was without form, and void”.

They think the Bible could be saying that the universe was made some unspecified time before planet earth came to be how it is now. Regardless of these differences of opinion about details, we can see that the Bible tells us that planet earth came into existence and was at one stage covered with water, totally uninhabited and dark.

The first two chapters of the Bible then tell us that our world as we know

it today came into being in six stages. The record seems to be the sort of account that someone on the earth would have seen, as events happened, had he or she been present at that time. At each stage God gives instructions, and the record then confirms that the instructions are carried out.

Stage One

The Bible tells us that at the first stage the instruction from God was: *“Let there be light”* (Genesis 1:3). For the first time, light reached the water that covers the earth. We are also told that:



“God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night” (Genesis 1:4,5).

The waters now experience the vital cycle of day and night.

Stage Two

The instructions for the second stage are: *“Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters”* (1:6). We can see what this means when we read that God called the expanse *“sky”* (1:8). The water round the earth is separated to form clouds and sea. There was now a space for life, but with an abundant supply of water, which is vital to sustain life.



Stage Three

At the third stage the instructions were:

“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear ... Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth” (Genesis 1:9–11)

Land appeared together with plant life. Vegetation flourished in the environment provided at this stage.

Stage Four

The fourth stage instructions were:

“Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth” (Genesis 1:14,15).



Probably the clouds separated and the sun and moon appeared. The cycle of the seasons is now established so that life can be supported.

Stage Five

For the fifth stage, the instruction was:

“Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens” (1:20).



Life appeared in the sea and in the air.

Stage Six

The final instructions in this great project were:

“Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind” (1:24).



Then: *“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (1:26).*

So the land animals appear, with man last of all. The record makes no attempt to explain how it is done. So, we have seen that the Bible is telling us that everything came into existence in six stages.

Days of Creation

At the end of the first stage we read: *“So the evening and the morning were the first day” (Genesis 1:5)* and there are similar statements at the end of the other stages. These statements are telling us that the stages are all a day in length. The second book of the Bible – Exodus – supports these statements in Genesis when it says that:

“in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day” (Exodus 20:11).

If we look at how the Bible uses the word ‘day’, we see that it usually refers to a 24-hour period. But if we look carefully at the text of the Bible, we see that occasionally it refers to longer time periods. One example of this occurs in the creation account itself in Genesis chapter two.

The Bible talks about: *“the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (2:4).* This ‘day’ contains the whole six days of creation that we have just been looking at. We use the word ‘day’ in the same way today when we talk about ‘our day and age’ or ‘Queen Victoria’s day’. So we can see that the text is flexible in its use of the word “day” in the creation account.

In the rest of the Bible there are some general comments about the God of the Bible being the Creator. However, none of these comments gives us any more information about the mechanisms involved. The Bible is not a science textbook. It is more concerned about why we are here and the purpose behind our existence.

Summary – the Bible

This is what the Bible tells us about how we got here:

- ✓ *Our earth had a beginning*
- ✓ *At one stage in our planet's history, it was uninhabited and covered with water*
- ✓ *Life then appeared on our planet in stages, with man appearing last of all*

We should bear in mind that there are differences of opinion about how long all this took. It may surprise us, but that's about all the Bible actually tells us about the start of everything.

Is there a Conflict?

We will now look at the observable facts in Science and see if they conflict with the Bible text.

This is what we have seen:

Observable facts from Science

- ✓ *"Red shift" in light coming from space*
- ✓ *Background radiation in Universe*
- ✓ *Animals in fossil record appear fully functional*
- ✓ *The cell is always complete and fully functional*

The Bible text

- ✓ *Our earth had a beginning*
- ✓ *At one stage in our planet's history, it was uninhabited and covered with water*

- ✓ *Life then appeared on our planet in stages, with man appearing last of all*

The fact that the light coming from the universe is different from that which comes from our sun, and that there is a background radiation, doesn't conflict with the Biblical statement that the universe had a beginning. If we accept the scientists' belief that the red shift means that our universe is expanding, this would agree with the Bible statement that the universe had a beginning.

The observable fact that the fossils and the cell appear fully-formed agrees with the Bible statement that life appeared fully-formed in stages, with man coming last of all.

If we consider time periods for the start of things, there is no conflict if we restrict ourselves to observable facts.

When we think carefully about it, all dating methods are based on assumptions. The oldest objects of known age are only a few thousand years old. We have no object which says, "I am 40 million years old – use me as a calibration sample". So we don't have all the facts and without all the relevant facts we can reach wrong conclusions.

We can see enough to judge that whatever view we take of the Bible text regarding time periods, there is no conflict with science because there are no observable scientific facts to enable us to check our theories.

Lawrence Cave

When we consider the observable facts that science has discovered, there is no conflict with what the Bible says

The World's Best Seller

Where is the Bible in your house? Nine out of ten houses have a Bible, but the astonishing thing is that it is claimed that only one in nine people in those houses read the book. Why?

Is it because it is usually bound in black covers, or is in some ways related to Victorian sobriety? Or have we been put off by what other people have said about it? Or could it be that we feel that it has no relevance to the sophisticated twenty first century?

From Afar

Most people are not aware that this book carries the only message from outer space, and that it claims infallibility. It is a remarkable volume consisting of 66 different books bound together to reveal the divine plan of the ages, and has an appeal for everyone who is humble enough to open it, and to reveal its thrilling message.

"Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the LORD. 'But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word'" (Isaiah 66:1,2).

Whatever You Want

If you have the right attitude of mind and heart, the Bible will turn out to be a book that can supply everything you need. If you want:

- * **Drama** – there is plenty of it;
- * **Poetry** – it is there in abundance;
- * **Romance** – there are pages of it;

- * **Tales of courage** – there are enough to inspire us all;
- * **History** – there is a faultless record;
- * **Prophecy** – there is none to be found that is more astonishing than this record.

And if you want to find out about the most wonderful man who ever lived – a man who changed the world and who will change it again at his second coming – then this is the book to read, for it has four separate accounts of the words and works of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He was the very embodiment of God's Word, as the Scripture says:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Try it out

The Bible can have a purifying and stimulating effect. There is no other book that can compare with its beauty. All it requires is a teachable heart. Men may make creeds, but only God dispenses unadulterated truth. Every facet of life is covered in His book. We can sense the delight of the Psalmist when he said, *"Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day"* (Psalm 119:97). Can we not do the same?

Don't just take the Bible off the shelf but put it in your heart as well. You will never regret it.

Ken Clark

Bible Reading

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16	...	33, 34	...	5	...	3, 4
17	Joshua	1	...	6	1 Thes.	1, 2
18	...	2	...	7	...	3, 4
19	...	3, 4	...	8	...	5
20	...	5, 6	...	9	2 Thes.	1, 2
21	...	7	...	10	...	3
22	...	8	...	11	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
23	...	9	...	12	...	4, 5
24	...	10	...	13	...	6
25	...	11	...	14	2 Tim.	1
26	...	12	...	15	...	2
27	...	13	...	16	...	3, 4
28	...	14	...	17, 18	Titus	1, 2, 3
29	...	15	...	19	Philemon	1
30	...	16	...	20, 21	Heb.	1, 2
31	...	17	...	22	...	3, 4, 5

JUNE

1	Joshua	18	Isaiah	25	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	19	...	24	...	8, 9
3	...	20, 21	...	26, 27	...	10
4	...	22	...	28	...	11
5	...	23, 24	...	29	...	12
6	Judges	1	...	30	...	13
7	...	2, 3	...	31	James	1
8	...	4, 5	...	32	...	2, 4
9	...	6	...	33	...	3
10	...	7, 8	...	34	...	5
11	...	9	...	35	1 Peter	1
12	...	10, 11	...	36	...	2
13	...	12, 13	...	37	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	14, 15	...	38	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	16	...	39	...	3
16	...	17, 18	...	40	1 John	1, 2
17	...	19	...	41	...	3, 4
18	...	20	...	42	...	5
19	...	21	...	43	2 & 3 John	1
20	Ruth	1, 2	...	44	Jude	1, 2
21	...	3, 4	...	45	Rev.	1, 2
22	1 Sam.	1	...	46, 47	...	3, 4
23	...	2	...	48	...	5, 6, 9
24	...	3	...	49	...	7, 8
25	...	4	...	50	...	10, 11
26	...	5, 6	...	51	...	12, 13
27	...	7, 8	...	52	...	14
28	...	9	...	53	...	15, 16
29	...	10	...	54	...	17, 18
30	...	11, 12	...	55	...	19, 20

OCTOBER

1	1 Chron.	15	Ezek.	27	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	28	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17	...	29	...	3, 4
4	...	18, 19	...	30	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	31	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22	...	32	...	3, 4
7	...	23	...	33	...	5, 6
8	...	24, 25	...	34	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	26	...	35	...	3, 4
10	...	27	...	36	John	3, 1
11	...	28	...	37	...	2, 3
12	...	29	...	38	...	4
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	...	39	...	5
14	...	3, 4	...	40	...	6
15	...	5, 6	...	41	...	7
16	...	7	...	42	...	8
17	...	8	...	43	...	9, 10
18	...	9	...	44	...	11
19	...	10, 11	...	45	...	12
20	...	12, 13	...	46	...	13, 14
21	...	14, 15	...	47	...	15, 16
22	...	16, 17	...	48	...	17, 18
23	...	18, 19	...	49	...	19
24	...	20	...	2	...	20, 21
25	...	21, 22	...	3	Acts	1
26	...	23	...	4	...	2
27	...	24	...	5	...	3, 4
28	...	25	...	6	...	5, 6
29	...	26, 27	...	7	...	7
30	...	28	...	8	...	8
31	...	29	...	9	...	9

NOVEMBER

1	2 Chron.	30	Dan.	10	Acts	10
2	...	31	...	11	...	11, 12
3	...	32	...	12	...	13
4	...	33	Hosea	1	...	14, 15
5	...	34	...	2	...	16, 17
6	...	35	...	3	...	18, 19
7	...	36	...	4	...	20
8	Esra	1, 2	...	5	...	21, 22
9	...	3, 4	...	6	...	23, 24
10	...	5, 6	...	7	...	25, 26
11	...	7	...	8	...	27
12	...	8	...	9	...	28
13	...	9	...	10	Colos.	1
14	...	10	...	11	...	2
15	Neh.	1, 2	...	12	...	3, 4
16	...	3	...	13	1 Thes.	1, 2
17	...	4	...	14	...	3, 4
18	...	5, 6	Joel	1	...	5
19	...	7	...	2	2 Thes.	1, 2
20	...	8	...	3	...	3
21	...	9	Amos	1	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
22	...	10	...	2	...	4, 5
23	...	11	...	3	...	6
24	...	12	...	4	2 Tim.	1
25	...	13	...	5	...	2
26	Esther	1	...	6	...	3, 4
27	...	2	...	7	Titus	1, 2, 3
28	...	3, 4	...	8	Philemon	1
29	...	5, 6	...	9	Heb.	1, 2
30	...	7, 8	Obadiah	3, 4, 5

DECEMBER

1	Esth.	9, 10	Jonah	1	Heb.	6, 7
2	Job	1, 2	...	2, 3	...	8, 9
3	...	3, 4	...	4	...	10
4	...	5	Micah	1	...	11
5	...	6, 7	...	2	...	12
6	...	8	...	3	...	13
7	...	9	...	4	James	1
8	...	10	...	5	...	2
9	...	11	...	6	...	3, 4
10	...	12	Nahum	1	...	5
11	...	13	...	2	1 Peter	1
12	...	14	Hab.	1	...	3, 4, 5
13	...	15	...	2	...	6
14	...	16, 17	...	3	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	18, 19	Zeph.	1	...	3
16	...	20	...	2	1 John	1, 2
17	...	21	...	3	...	3, 4
18	...	22	Hag.	1, 2	...	5
19	...	23, 24	Zech.	1	2 & 3 John	1
20	...	25, 27	...	2, 3	Jude	1, 2
21	...	28	...	4, 5	Rev.	1, 2
22	...	29, 30	...	6, 7	...	3, 4
23	...	31, 32	...	8	...	5, 6
24	...	33	...	9	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	34	...	10	...	10, 11
26	...	35, 36	...	11	...	12, 13
27	...	37	...	12	...	14
28	...	38	...	13, 14	...	15, 16
29	...	39	Malachi	1	...	17, 18
30	...	40	...	2	...	19, 20
31	...	41, 42	...	3, 4	...	21, 22

By courtesy of The Christadelphian

Lot goes to Sodom

Abraham and his nephew Lot and their respective families and servants had travelled together from Ur of the Chaldees into the land of Canaan, at God's command. Finding grazing for their flocks and herds was not easy, so they decided to part, and that brought Lot into a difficult environment, as **Dudley Fife** now explains.

Parting of the Ways

- 1 The very name of Sodom has passed into the English language as a byword for infamy and human wickedness. How Lot came to dwell in this city teaches us how we should live our lives. In Genesis chapter 13 we read of the strife between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham. Finding adequate pasture was creating unbearable tensions, so Abraham graciously allowed Lot to make the choice as to where his flocks should graze. This is what we are told:

“Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere ... Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other” (Genesis 13:10,11).

- 2 Lot's name means 'a veil'. Some have described him as *“the man with a veil over his face”*. Notice the emphasis; it is a play upon his name. He lifted up his eyes and looked – but his spiritual perception was clouded. He saw only the immediate advantages from the well-watered plain of Jordan. He was not far-sighted enough to see the dangers of living in the vicinity of such 'sinks of iniquity' as Sodom and Gomorrah. At first, we are told, he *“pitched his tent even as far as*

Sodom” (13:12) but when the events preceding the destruction of the cities are recorded, we find that not only had Lot moved into Sodom, but he actually *“sat in the gate”* (Genesis 19:1). That means that he had become a judge or ruler in that city, for they were the people who sat in the gateway to hear and decide matters.

- 3 Two angels visited Abraham to tell him that God was going to destroy the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness and Abraham pleaded with them in the hope that he could spare Lot and his family (Genesis 18:23-33). Knowing the righteousness of God, he asked them: *“Would you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”* (18:23) and then he tried to bargain with them. Perhaps, he said, there would be fifty righteous there. The angel assured him that if that were the case then the city would be spared. Abraham persisted and pleaded that if there were 45, or 40, or 30, or 20 or even 10 righteous among the inhabitants of Sodom, the city should be spared. He was given the assurance that even for 10 righteous people the city would be spared.

This is a remarkable insight into the mercy of God, that He would not destroy the city even if ten righteous were to be found there, but that He

would then suffer the wickedness of the majority. It speaks volumes to us about the forbearance of God in the face of the wickedness of the world in which we live. Without that grace and mercy mankind would have been obliterated generations ago. Indeed, the reality is that God will always deliver the righteous, for “just Lot” (2 Peter 2:7) was saved when the two cities were destroyed.



at the very last, she lingered and looked longingly back towards it.

⑤ The record says that she was turned into a pillar of salt. It has been observed that in the area of the Dead Sea, there are many pillars of salt, some as high as 40 feet. Her fate was to be engulfed in the cataclysm that overtook the cities of the plain. She was literally entombed in a ‘pillar of salt’ that afterwards stood as a monument to her unbelief.

Perhaps, however, she did more than look back with longing for what she had left behind. In Luke 17, the Lord Jesus refers to the destruction of Sodom and likens that event to the circumstances that will prevail in the earth at the time of his second coming:

“... Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed” (17:28-30).

It is remarkable that, as in the days of Noah (verses 26 and 27), it is not the gross immorality of the people that is emphasized but rather their obsession with the everyday things of life. Those are things that in themselves are perfectly legitimate but, once God is neglected, pursuing those things lead to all manner of evildoing (see Ezekiel 16:49,50).

Destruction!

④ The dreadful events that occurred in Sodom are recorded in Genesis chapter 19, verses 1-29. We may wonder whether the visit of the two angels was the final test. If the men of that city had behaved differently, would God have destroyed them? But there was no remedy and so taking Lot, his wife and his two daughters, the angel led them from the city. (See verses 16-22 for a further example of the compassion and condescension of God.) The chapter tells us that Lot’s wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (verses 17 & 26). Verse 17 makes it clear that ‘looking back’ did not mean an inquisitive glance over the shoulder. They had been warned to turn their backs on Sodom and everything associated with it, or they would perish with it. It seems that Lot’s wife had left her heart in Sodom. She loved it there; that was where she belonged and,

- 6 This warning concerning the day of the Lord's second coming gives us another insight into the fate of Lot's wife. For Jesus said this:

"In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:31,32).

The implication is clear. She did not just look back but she went back and perished with the wicked of that place. The incidents stand therefore as a warning to us in this generation how we should behave if we would escape the judgements of God when He sends the Lord Jesus Christ back to the earth.

Another Lesson

- 7 We can, however, learn a little more from the example of Lot. In his Second Epistle, the apostle Peter describes the life to which believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are called (1:4-7).

Encouraging believers to live Christ-like lives, he says:

"...For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:8,9).

They would then be like Lot – the man with the veil over his eyes!

Chapter 2 of that Letter goes on to speak of Lot specifically. He describes how God eventually took action at the time of Noah, and then

he says this about the destruction of Sodom:

"... turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)" (2 Peter 2:6,7).

Note it was "day to day" that Lot vexed (lit. tortured) his soul with their unlawful deeds. We might say there is no suggestion of this in the Genesis record, but the words of the Sodomites in Genesis chapter 19 bear witness to the testimony of Peter. They said: *"This one came in to sojourn, and he keeps acting as a judge" (19:9).*

Why, they said, he's only a sojourner (i.e. a temporary resident). He's not one of us, yet he is always criticising our way of life.

- 8 The words of Peter open up a view of the attitude of righteous men and women towards human wickedness that we might not have considered. So Lot, his wife, the inhabitants of Sodom and the events surrounding them, speak to us of both the goodness and the severity of God (Romans 11:22). They warn us of the need to hate wickedness in all its forms, and to dissociate ourselves from it, if we would be found worthy to inherit eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Dudley Fifield

“In My Father’s House are Many Mansions..”

This is a passage of Scripture, in John chapter 14 verse 2, which causes some people to believe that Jesus was offering a place in heaven but, as **Mark Buckler** now explains, the Lord had something quite different in mind.

Jewish Book

Many of us easily forget, when we read the Bible, that it is a Jewish book, written mainly by Jewish writers about Jewish people. It is so easy for us to read it with two thousand years of ideas and interpretations in our minds that we forget to ask a simple question: What did the writers of this passage understand by it when they wrote it and what did their readers or hearers understand?

So, when Jesus talked about the many rooms in his Father’s house, what did he mean by this and what would his hearers have understood? Incidentally, this is a passage that is often read in church funeral services and today it is thought to promise an inheritance with God in heaven. Is that what Jesus meant?

God’s House

The expression “My Father’s house” as used in the gospels always refers to the Temple in Jerusalem. For example, when Jesus visited the Temple as a boy of twelve, his comment to questioning parents was: “Why were you searching for me? ... Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). Or when Jesus cleansed the Temple, he

said: “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” (John 2:16).

So Jesus was saying to his disciples, in John chapter 14, that there were many dwelling places in the Temple, and that he would come back and live with them on earth in a similar way to how the priests lived close to God, because they lived in His Temple – in God’s House. But did they? Was the Temple a House for people, or just the House of God?

Temple Structure

In the description of the building of the first Temple by Solomon, we are told of the construction of rooms built on three stories on three sides of the temple:

“Against the walls of the main hall and inner sanctuary he built a structure around the building, in which there were side rooms. The lowest floor

was five cubits wide, the middle floor six cubits and the third floor seven” (1 Kings 6:5,6).

These rooms were for the Priests to live in when they were on Temple duty, so when Jesus referred to the “many rooms” in his “Father’s House”, the disciples would have been able to visualise the many rooms built on the



side of the Temple, and would have understood at once what he meant.

“I will come again...”

This is what Jesus promised.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:1-3).

He was about to die as a sacrifice for sins, but he would rise again and, in due course, would go to heaven, to sit at his Father’s right hand. But when the time is right, he will come again to earth, to live with his people – as in a temple. Were there any similar situations the disciples might think about that matched what was about to happen?

Thinking about the activities that took place in the Temple, the disciples would be reminded that daily the Priests went into the Holy Place and that once a year the High Priest went through the second veil into the Holy of Holies as the representative of the people. After making his offering he went out again to the people, having made atonement for them.

Great High Priest

Jesus was going to do the same thing for his people – but more so! He was going into the actual presence of God, not just into a representation of His presence, which was what happened in the Temple. This is a theme fully developed by the apostle Paul when writing to the Hebrews, who says:

“Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the

true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:24-26).

In the case of Jesus, when he died God showed His total approval of his sacrifice by tearing the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem from top to bottom – to show that a new way had thus been opened into His presence, and that we are no longer dependent upon an earthly priesthood.

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Again, the picture the disciples would have from words like these would be based on their own experiences of life in their times. What a different meaning we get when we look at a passage of Scripture and consider the background of the times in which it was written. If we don’t do that we are always in danger of imposing our own ideas, from later times, thus trying to make Scripture teach what we would like it to say!

Mark Buckler

Paul in Great Danger

The apostle Paul was on trial before the Sanhedrin – the Jewish Council – and things were not looking good when he managed to set one group of his accusers against the other by saying that he believed in the resurrection of the dead. As **John Hellowell** now explains, that brought the trial to an unexpected end, but worse was to come.

Resurrection!

*“When Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; **concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!**’” (Acts 23:6).*

This statement was absolutely correct: the central message of Paul’s preaching concerned the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, an event which provided overwhelming evidence that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. At this declaration, the Pharisee faction began to dispute with the Sadducees. Luke explains that major differences between the two groups concerned belief in resurrection, angels and spirits. These were acknowledged by the Pharisees but denied by the Sadducees.

Whatever the Pharisees thought of Paul, his claim was supported by prominent Pharisees who went so far as to declare him innocent and to raise the possibility that he had experienced an encounter with a spirit or an angel. The Sadducees could not concede that this was possible and so they vigorously countered the arguments of the Pharisees.

Eventually words became inadequate and violence was resorted to, so much so that the Roman Commander thought that Paul would be torn in

pieces. This suggests that the Sadducees were attempting to seize Paul while the Pharisees were doing their utmost to prevent their doing so. All this must have seemed reminiscent of the first occasion when the Commander encountered Paul. So he gave orders for the Roman troops in the Antonia Barracks to rescue Paul by force and take him into the barracks for his own protection.

Back in the Fortress

With Paul once more under arrest in the barracks, the following night the Lord Jesus came to encourage him and give him an assurance that his witness in Jerusalem would lead, in due course, to his witnessing in Rome also. This experience is paralleled by that which occurred during Paul’s second and final imprisonment in Rome, when he was left virtually alone:

“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Timothy 4:17).

The appearances of the Lord, or his angel, to Paul all occurred at crises in his discipleship. Another is recorded during the voyage to Rome when, humanly speaking, all seemed hopeless and the ship would founder with the loss of all on board (see Acts 27:23).

Assassination Plot

Thwarted by the failure of the hearing to convict Paul of a capital offence, the Jews fell back on their favourite tactic – violence! Some forty Jews took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They sought approval and assistance from the chief priests and elders, that is, from the Sadducees who would, of course, be sympathetic to their decision. Explaining that they had taken a solemn oath that they would not eat anything until they had killed Paul, they sought help.

In order to facilitate the assassination they asked that the Sanhedrin should petition the Roman Commander to bring Paul before them once more in order that they might examine him more specifically. Given that the last examination had ended without any resolution of the case it was possible that Claudius Lysias might accede to their request for a further hearing since he would be anxious to resolve the issue once for all. While Paul was being transferred to the court they would arrange for his death.

Somehow Paul's nephew came to hear of their intentions. It is intriguing to learn that Paul's sister was a resident in Jerusalem and that her son was able to discover the plot against Paul's life. He immediately went to Paul in the barracks and informed him of what was intended. Perhaps the family were able to visit Paul regularly. Paul then asked one of the centurions to take his nephew to the Commander, indicating that he had something important to tell him. This was probably more effective than Paul talking directly to the Commander. So the centurion took the young man to his superior officer explaining that Paul had requested that he listen to what

he had to say. The Commander took the young man on one side and asked him what it was that he had to tell him.

He explained how a number of fanatical Jews had bound themselves under an oath to kill Paul and that they had obtained the complicity of the Sanhedrin who were about to request a further hearing on the pretext that they had further questions which they wished to pose. He asked that the Commander should not accede to their request, for the Jews had arranged an ambush in order to kill Paul. The fact that they had taken an oath not to eat or drink until they had accomplished this showed the seriousness of their intent. The Commander then sent the young man away with the request that he should not tell anyone that he had reported the plot.

Transferred to Caesarea

In order to prevent any attempt to kill Paul, the Commander decided that he should be sent to the Judean Governor at Caesarea. So he called two centurions and ordered them to prepare a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to be ready to depart for Caesarea that evening at nine. In addition they were to provide mounts for Paul and his associates so that they might be conveyed safely to Felix, the Governor. The size of the escort shows how seriously the Commander consid-



ered the threat on Paul's life. A guard of 470 soldiers to protect one man from 40 assassins shows how fanatical the Jews were regarded by the Romans.

The Commander then drafted a letter which he intended to be conveyed to the Governor. The text was as follows;

"Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him worthy of death or chains. And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

(Acts 23:26-30)

Note how Claudius Lysias is not quite accurate in his account of what actually happened. He transforms the serious error of binding an uncondemned Roman citizen for scourging into a heroic rescue from the murderous Jews! But he is correct in his assessment of Paul's alleged "crime" – it was not a capital offence nor even one which merited imprisonment, but simply a religious dispute. On learning that the Jews had conspired to assassinate Paul, Claudius Lysias had sent

him to the Governor in order that his accusers should present their case, such as it was, before the highest court in the Roman province of Judea, since Paul enjoyed the protection of his Roman citizenship.

One can only sympathise with the Roman Commander in Jerusalem; he had done his best to ascertain what the problem was regarding Paul. His attempts to deal with the problem had come to nothing. One can reasonably assume that he wished to ensure that Paul had a fair hearing, especially on learning that he was a Roman. Yet there was fierce antagonism from the Jews and he had tried to understand the reasons for this, to no avail. Therefore, almost in desperation, he had consigned Paul to his superior. It has been suggested that Claudius Lysias was anxious to ensure that Paul, a Roman citizen, was fully protected from the Jewish conspiracy since, had he been murdered, there would have been a suspicion of complicity through bribery on his behalf which would have been difficult to disprove.

John Hellawell

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