

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1511



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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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

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Four Different Portraits

Chartwell in Kent, was the family home of Sir Winston Churchill from 1924 until his death, and a visitor will find it in much the same state that it was when he lived there.

It is full of personal mementos: photographs, paintings, books and items associated with the former Prime Minister. Famous as a wartime Prime Minister who epitomised the bulldog spirit of never giving in, as a politician Churchill held many jobs – among which were Home Secretary, Colonial Secretary, First Lord of the Admiralty and Prime Minister, twice.

But as you wander from room to room, it becomes apparent that Winston Churchill was much more than a politician or a statesman.

Multi-talented

Churchill was a talented writer and broadcaster; a family man; an accomplished painter; and a wonderful storyteller. Some of his witty remarks are still quoted and enjoyed, long after his death in 1965. He is not the sort of man who could be easily described as “a politician” or “a writer”. To portray him adequately, as many a painter has discovered, you need to indicate the breadth of his personality and accomplishments. No doubt that is why there have been so many different depictions of him, in various art forms.

Portraiture

There are no known contemporary portraits of the Lord Jesus Christ; no



sculptures; he wrote no books; made no broadcasts. And there is no house full of mementos that we can visit to find out about him. We know about Jesus because four of his followers wrote different accounts which provide word portraits. We call their accounts gospels, because they contain the good news about what Jesus said and did during his brief life on earth. They are no ordinary accounts, for these writings were inspired by God and give us different insights into the life of this remarkable man.

Matthew was a tax collector, a person used to taking careful note of what he had been told and what had been promised by way of payment, or excuse for non-payment! **Mark** was still a young man when Jesus conducted his public ministry. **Luke** was a Gentile, not a Jew like the others, and he had to make a careful investigation to find out the facts and discover all that had happened. **John** was a very close friend of the Master and concentrates his account on things that Jesus said, words which often have a deep meaning and need a lot of careful thought.

None of the writers set out to give a chronological account of all that happened, although John comes nearest to that by describing the many feasts that Jesus attended in Jerusalem. It was not chronology that interested them, but what Jesus did, what he

taught, and how he lived; for he was – and is – a truly remarkable man.

A Man Apart

That Jesus was a man is heavily emphasised in the New Testament, as follows:

*“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, **a man attested by God** to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know...” (Acts 2:22);*

*“For if by the one man’s offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift **by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ**, abounded to many” (Romans 5:15);*

*“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, **the man Christ Jesus**” (1 Timothy 2:5).*

It matters enormously for, as the Bible explains, Jesus came to undo the trouble that the first man Adam had caused. Where he failed, because he chose to do his own thing, Jesus succeeded because he always chose to be obedient. Thus one man brought death and the other brought life.

*“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.** For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).*

Learn about him

Once you understand how important Jesus is in the purpose of God – right at the centre of God’s rescue plan for mankind – you will want to know more about him and that is where the

gospels are of tremendous help. As though they were painting word pictures, the four inspired writers have given us their portrait of a man who was unlike any other who has ever lived. **Matthew** tells us a lot about his teaching, and presents that information in a way that is easy to remember. **Mark** shows how Jesus busied himself doing what his Father commanded. **Luke** gives us an insight into the kindness and compassion Jesus showed. And **John** explains most about the origins of Jesus, at the heart of the Father’s plan, and tells us much about their unity of purpose.

Together the fourfold portrait presents a picture of a man we would all have enjoyed meeting and, no doubt, we would have hung upon his every word. It’s a long time since that was possible in person but, through the Bible account, we can still get to know Jesus and learn from him how best to order our lives and what sort of mind we should try to develop. Jesus is a role model for everyone, for he lived the way that God wanted him to in every respect and the secret of his success was that he always put first things first. Doing the will of God was his daily priority.

None of us can reach his standard of perfection; we all fail. But Jesus gives us something to aim at, and he is always accessible when we fail and need forgiveness and help to keep going. When we have been baptised, as Jesus was, and start to live as members of God’s family, we will be able to come to God through Jesus and find the help we all need. (Hebrews 4:15,16).

Editor

Are Jesus and God Equal?

There are Bible passages which seem to indicate that Jesus and God are equal and have always existed. But is that really so?

This view actually minimises the value of the work of Jesus. A review of the way that the Bible speaks of God and the change in Jesus' nature and status at his resurrection clarifies the picture. It will also help us to appreciate why Jesus was a man.

❖ **God has always existed**

When thinking about the Creator of the Universe we realise that He has always existed. The Bible opens with the words *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1) and it follows that God was alive before anything else was made. He is *"from everlasting to everlasting"* (Psalm 90:2) and God differs from man in that He *"cannot be tempted by evil"* (James 1:13).

❖ **Jesus was born and died**

This contrasts with Jesus. He was born at a specific point in time. The Bible describes it like this:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18).

After living on earth for just over thirty years Jesus died. The Bible describes his death in this way *"Now it was the third hour, and*

they crucified him ... And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed his last" (Mark 15:25,37). Jesus died because he was mortal. God is immortal (1 Timothy 6:16), which means that He will never die.

❖ **Jesus shared our nature**

When Jesus was on the earth he suffered temptation. The Bible describes some of the temptations that Jesus endured in Matthew chapter 4. In this respect he differed from God who, as we have seen, cannot be tempted. Jesus was tempted as part of God's plan to deliver us from sin and death. It was necessary for him to demonstrate his absolute obedience to his Father, so he could reverse the crisis brought about by Adam's disobedience.

The prophet describes it like this: *"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned,*

every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5,6). Or again, speaking of Jesus when he was on the earth we read *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15).



❖ **Jesus was raised from the dead to die no more**

Because he had never sinned, unlike us, Jesus did not deserve to die. So God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:32). Notice what the angels said to the women who came to his grave after his death *“He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay”* (Matthew 28:6).

❖ **Jesus has been given power**

Having been raised from the dead, the status of Jesus changed dramatically. Whilst before his death he was *“a little lower than the angels”* (Hebrews 2:9) now we are told that he has been *“crowned with glory and honour”* (Hebrews 2:9). We read elsewhere that:

“God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

It is important to realise that the status of Jesus changed at his resurrection. Before he died his position was lower than the angels. Now he has been raised from the dead he is above the angels. The passages that we read in the New Testament which seem to speak of Jesus as God are passages which are speaking about Jesus after his resurrection.

❖ **God will eventually be supreme**

Notice that Jesus has been exalted *“to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:11). God is always supreme, for

He is the head of all, including Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). Eventually Jesus will bring all things into subjection, when he reigns as God’s appointed king over God’s kingdom. But God can never be made subject to His Son, for it was He who raised Jesus to the glory he now enjoys at his Father’s right hand in heaven.

Jesus will reign on earth for 1000 years (his millennial reign), but this is what the apostle Paul says will happen then:

“Now when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

In Summary

We can summarise what the Bible teaches about Jesus and God and their relationship with each other like this.

- ❖ God has always existed.
- ❖ Jesus was born through the work of the Holy Spirit on Mary, his mother.
- ❖ Jesus shared our humanity before he was crucified – his status was lower than that of God.
- ❖ Jesus shared our nature so that he could reconcile us to God.
- ❖ God raised Jesus from the dead to everlasting life.
- ❖ He was exalted by God who has ‘crowned him with glory and honour’.
- ❖ Jesus will eventually be subject to God, so that God may be *“all in all”*.

Peter Forbes

World Tension Predicted in the Bible

Our world is full of tensions. One major source of tension is the Arab – Jewish conflict. This very conflict was predicted in the Bible, which also predicts the solution.



The picture shows a section of Israel's "anti-terror" wall, built to deter terrorists

The Bible has predicted the past accurately – so we can rely on its promises about the future. Give the Bible a chance to speak for itself and you will see that it is relevant to the 21st century. Don't rely on what other people say about the Bible – have a look for yourself. Check the evidence and see if you agree that the Bible predicted current Middle East tensions.

The Jew – Arab conflict

We are all aware of the problem that exists between Jews and Arabs. It dominates world politics, mainly because much of the world's oil is to be found in the the Middle East. This means that all the world takes sides in this situation. The terrorist problem has its roots in this conflict. Both Jews and Arabs claim a right to the same land. The Jews currently occupy the land in the form of the nation of Israel.

The Arabs want a Palestinian state on the same land.

Abraham

Both Jews and Arabs correctly claim the man Abraham as their ancient ancestor. Both claim that they should have the land promised to Abraham. The Bible shows us how these tensions started 4,000 years ago. Abraham had two sons – Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac also had two sons – Esau and Jacob. Some Arab nations are descended from Ishmael and Esau. The Jews are descended from Jacob. So we can see the possible tensions when two groups of people believe they have a right to the same piece of land. Thousands of years ago, the Bible predicted that this tension would develop into hatred and cause the international problems that we see today.

As we look at these predictions, we must be careful to keep our own political views out of these considerations. The Bible criticises the actions of both Arabs and Jews. We are looking at the fulfilments of the predictions, not the

An angry political protester raising a fist in the air in a New York march. A "Justice for Palestine" sign can be seen in the background.



rights and wrongs of the people or the politics involved.

Ishmael

Before Ishmael was born, his mother was told:

“You shall name him Ishmael ... his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers” (Genesis 16:11,12, NIV)

4,000 years ago, problems were predicted among Abraham’s children. There are many verses in the Bible which talk of the hatred that the descendants of Ishmael and Esau would have for the Jews, who are Jacob’s descendants. The prophet Ezekiel makes a prediction against “Mount Seir”, which is the area where some of Esau’s descendants settled:

“... Set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it ... you shall be desolate. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword ...” (Ezekiel 35:2, 4-5).

Hatred

This is another prediction of the hatred of the Arabs for the Jews. One of the most amazing comments about this hostility is in Psalm 83. The writer of the Psalm is pleading for help because the Jews are surrounded by enemies:

“They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more’” (Psalm 83:3,4).

The Psalm goes on to list these enemies, which include most of the nations which surround Israel. It would be difficult to give a more accurate prediction of the current situation – the nation of Israel surrounded by enemies that would like to see Israel removed from the map. They are listed in verses 6-8 of the Psalm as Edom, Ammon, Ishmaelites, Amalek, Moab, Philistia, Hagrites, Tyre, Gebal and Assyria.

The areas where most of these nations lived are known and are shown superimposed on a map of Israel’s current borders.

It is clear that the Psalm was predicting a position when Israel would be surrounded by hostile nations. This is exactly the situation we see today.



So, the Bible accurately predicted the tension between Arabs and Jews.

Israel Destroyed?

The destruction of Israel is central to the aims of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement. In recent elections for the new Palestinian parliament, it claimed 76 of the 132 seats, giving it a majority in the Palestinian Authority.

The Covenant (or Charter) of Hamas was published in 1988. The preface to the charter quotes Imam Hassan al-Banna who said:

"Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it".

Article 13 of the charter says:

"There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavours".

On April 1, 2006, Hamas Foreign Minister Mahmoud Zahar said:

"I dream of hanging a huge map of the world on the wall at my Gaza home which does not show Israel on it".

The president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, expressed the same sentiments in October 2005 at a conference in Tehran on the subject, *"The World without Zionism"*: Quoting one of Iran's past leaders, he said:

"Israel must be wiped off the map".

While Iran is not, strictly speaking, an Arab country it does have a significant Arab population and has strong ties with Arab countries. It is clear that the Palestinian Authority as well as Iran wants the nation of Israel destroyed. All this is part of the ongoing fulfilment of Bible predictions which were made thousands of years ago.

Jerusalem

Another aspect of the tension between Jews and Arabs concerns the city of Jerusalem. The picture shows the city of Jerusalem, which Israel confirmed as its capital by passing a special law in 1980. The status of the city has



remained a central issue in the dispute between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. Both sides constantly repeat that there can be no negotiation on this issue. Despite the efforts of many world powers, there seems no answer to this problem for the Bible predicted this very situation several thousand years ago:

"It shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it" (Zechariah 12:3).

This verse makes it clear that

- ◆ Jerusalem is going to be a big problem
- ◆ There will be problems for those who try to resolve the situation
- ◆ The result will be that everybody will be against Jerusalem

We can see evidence of the first two predictions regularly in the media. It is not difficult to imagine how the third prediction could occur. Later on in the prophecy of Zechariah, further details are given about the time when all nations are against Israel:

"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of

the people shall not be cut off from the city” (Zechariah 14:2).

It is very unusual for only half a city to be taken in war. But that is what the Bible has predicted will happen to Jerusalem. The Palestinians repeatedly make it clear that they want East Jerusalem as their capital, which Israel took from Jordan in 1967.

The Bible correctly predicted:

- ✓ tensions between Arabs and Jews
- ✓ surrounding nations would want Israel destroyed
- ✓ Jerusalem would become a major problem
- ✓ problems for those who try to resolve the situation
- ✓ half of Jerusalem would be in dispute .

Whose Land?

When Abraham was promised the land under dispute, which of his descendants were to be included? The Bible answer to this question has far-reaching implications.

God’s first promise to Abraham says:

- ◆ *“I will make you a great nation;*
- ◆ *I will bless you*
- ◆ *and make your name great;*
- ◆ *and you shall be a blessing.*
- ◆ *I will bless those who bless you,*
- ◆ *and I will curse him who curses you;*
- ◆ *and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2,3).*

Looking carefully at this, we see that lands are not mentioned. Abraham was promised that he would be the father of a large nation, be blessed and protected by God. But note carefully the last part of the promise – that

everyone could be involved. So all nations, Jews, Arabs and any people from any other nation, can be included in the good things promised to Abraham.

The Disputed Land

Abraham was promised the land on a later occasion. This is what he was told when he was at a place called Beth-el, a few kilometres north of Jerusalem:

“Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are - northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Genesis 13:14,15).

But Abraham had a problem – he had no child. Naturally speaking, as he grew older it became highly unlikely that he would have a child. But he continued to have absolute confidence in the promise. The New Testament confirms that this was the case:

“He [Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was ... fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Romans 4:20,21).

The New Testament also tells us that the good things promised will be given to those who have the same kind of confidence or faith as Abraham. This includes others as well as Abraham’s descendants. It also tells us that Abraham was promised much more than the land under dispute – he is called the “heir of the world”:

“Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world... through the righteousness that comes by faith ... Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring – not only to

those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham” (Romans 4:13,16).

So, the land currently under dispute will be given to those who, like Abraham, have confidence in the promises God has made. It will not be possessed by people who want to take it by political or military means.

We want you to have the same confidence in God’s Word that Abraham had.

- ◆ The land of Israel was promised to those who have confidence in what God says;
- ◆ This includes anyone from any nation.

World Tension Resolved

The good things promised to Abraham will resolve the present world tension. To understand how this will happen we need to look at another verse which talks about the promises to Abraham:

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

Here we are told that the promises to Abraham are centred on the Lord Jesus Christ. Before he was born, the Bible promised that Jesus:

“Will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1 v 32,33).

The Bible is quite clear that Jesus Christ will return to the earth. When he went to heaven, his followers were told:

“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

There are many Bible verses that talk about the just and fair worldwide government that Jesus Christ will set up when he returns. We are told that he will have the wisdom and power to resolve all disputes.

- ◆ The Bible predicts that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to set up a worldwide government
- ◆ He will have the wisdom and power to resolve world tensions
- ◆ The “anti-terror” wall will not be required when Jesus Christ has resolved all disputes

Summary

The Bible correctly predicted:

- ✓ Tensions between Arabs and Jews
- ✓ Nations surrounding Israel calling for its destruction
- ✓ Jerusalem would become an international problem
- ✓ Problems for those who try to resolve the situation
- ✓ Half of Jerusalem would be in dispute
- ✓ Based on the Bible’s track record we can trust promises not yet fulfilled:
- ✓ Jesus Christ will return to the earth
- ✓ He will have the wisdom and power to solve international problems.

Lawrence Cave

**Look at the website
www.theevidence.org.uk
for more evidence**

Take Now Thy Son...

Abraham was told by God to take his son Isaac to a place that God would show him and there offer him as a sacrifice. It was a huge test of Abraham's faith in God which he responded to remarkably and, as **Dudley Fifeild** now explains, this event pointed forward to another sacrifice that would take place in the same locality some 2000 years later.

Forward Look

- 1 In the events of Genesis chapter 22 we see foreshadowed, in a most remarkable way, the love of God in giving His only begotten Son to die. We must remember that Isaac, the child of promise, was the only son of Abraham and Sarah and three times in that chapter God speaks of Isaac as "your son, your only son" (verses 2, 12 and 16).

The words rendered 'your only' are the Hebrew equivalent of 'beloved' for thus he was Abraham's 'beloved son'. And we remember that God said of His only begotten Son: "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

- 2 Although God tried Abraham's faith, He never intended that he should offer Isaac as a sacrifice, for God does not delight in human sacrifice. Thus, at the decisive moment, Abraham was prevented from making this supreme sacrifice and Isaac was spared. Not so with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, however: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31,32).
- 3 The important thing about Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac



is that all God's promises depended on Isaac living and himself begetting children. Here is a faith that is breath-taking in its implications. God had promised and Abraham believed that He would fulfil His Word. God had commanded him to sacrifice Isaac and God must be obeyed. Abraham's conclusion was that if he offered Isaac, as God commanded, then God would raise Isaac from the dead, so that His promises would be fulfilled. That is just what the New Testament says about how Abraham thought:

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' accounting

that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Isaac’s deliverance was a symbolic resurrection and pointed forward to the manner in which all God’s promises would be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus through his resurrection from the dead (see 2 Corinthians 1:20). It is the Lord Jesus, by his victory over sin and his deliverance from death, who has made possible the fulfilment of all that God has promised.

Willing Sacrifice

- 4 We should not forget the part played by Isaac in these events for *“the two of them went together”* (Genesis 22:6). If translated literally, the Hebrew would be ‘they both, as one, went together’. Isaac too believed and was prepared to submit both to his father and to



God’s command. They were of one mind in this matter.

So it was also with the Lord Jesus and God, his Father. In a passage often misunderstood, he said *“I and My Father are one”* (John 10:30). He was one in mind and purpose with the great work that God had given him to do. Thus he could say, even when under great pressure, *“Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done”* (Luke 22:42).

- 5 This great test of faith – when Abraham showed himself willing to offer Isaac – resulted in all the promises God had made to him being reiterated and confirmed (see Genesis 22: 15-18). The Epistle of James, referring to the relationship between faith and works, quotes two instances from Abraham’s life. He says:

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God” (James 2:21-23).

The second thing that James refers to is the occasion (detailed in Genesis 15:5-6) when God promised Abraham that his seed should be as numerous as the stars and Abraham believed what God promised. The record says that God counted that belief to him for righteousness.

That Scripture, says James, was fulfilled when Abraham offered up

Isaac. In other words, the faith of Genesis 15 was shown to be a real and an abiding faith, by the works of Genesis 22.

- 6 It is faith that saves us too. Yet, as James explains, *“faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20). We must demonstrate our faith by our works. We must show our trust in God’s Word by our willingness to obey it. Nothing better illustrates this than the act of baptism. The Lord Jesus said:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16: 15,16).

Belief is faith in action. The words are directly related: *“belief”* is the verb (Greek: pistos) and *“faith”* the noun (Greek: pistis). Our faith must be shown to be a true faith by our willingness to associate ourselves with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ in baptism. As the apostle Paul explains:

“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ

Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3,4).

- 7 Because he showed himself willing to sacrifice his son, Abraham was called *“the friend of God”*. A friend is someone with whom we share the same values and experiences. It is someone we can relate to in a very special way. So Abraham, because he offered his son, is able, as no other, to explain God’s act of love and to identify with it. They have a shared experience that, in a sense, binds them together. Both know what it means to offer up their only begotten son. Thus it is Abraham’s privilege to be called *“the friend of God”*.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Dudley Fifield

Trusting God

For those who trust in God there is a joy awaiting
Which will surpass the present trials that we face
For God is love, and He is all embracing,
To those who come to Him and seek His grace.

For those who trust in God, this present life’s fulfilling
For there’s a plan in which we play a part,
And we will find our journey really thrilling
But only when we’ve given God our heart.

Colleen Simons



Why Resurrection is our Only Hope

We will never understand the Bible if we approach it with mere human thinking as our guide. The Bible is the Word of God, so it tells us about things we could never work out for ourselves.

The hard fact is that the teachings and interpretations of man, whether they are eminent religious leaders or experienced statesmen, count for nothing. What really matters is what the Bible teaches. That means that you and I are as well placed as anyone to read the Bible and work out what it teaches. So let's do that, by examining Bible teaching and at the outset we must be willing to accept what it teaches, however hard that might be.

Death means Death!

The Psalmist was once inspired by God to write these words:

"Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God" (Psalm 146:3-5).

Whatever people think, or hope might happen, counts for nothing. Everyone is in the same boat, and the belief that we are all going to heavenly bliss after death is just wishful thinking. It has no substance whatsoever. Unless we have the God of Jacob for our help, says the Psalmist, we are going nowhere but the grave. Death will be a trip to oblivion. At death the

human race returns to the ground from whence Adam was originally created, and all our plans and thoughts cease. It's grim but true. Here's the Psalmist again:

"In death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" (Psalm 6:5);

"The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men. The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence" (Psalm 115:16,17).

No Hope?

If that's all there is, then we could legitimately say "What's the point? We might as well make the most of the opportunities of life: Let's eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." For the Bible teaches that we have no immortal soul or eternal spirit: that idea is mere wishful thinking. Mankind was formed from dust and God's breath sustains us still. Lose that breath and we cease to be. As wise King Solomon explains it:

"Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

When the Bible talks about a soul, it just means 'a living creature'. Even animals are souls; even the spider lurking in some recess of your room is a soul, as the Bible terms it. In time all souls die and cease to be: *"The soul who sins shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:20). The soul then is the person, when he

or she dies, the soul dies; for it's the very same thing. In that respect there is no difference between men and animals in that they both have the same breath and both die the same. But there is a vital difference. Man and woman were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26,27). This is not said of the animal creation: God has given mankind a superior mind and a capacity to understand and obey. As another Psalmist expressed it:

"Man who is in honour, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:20).

Understanding the purpose of God makes all the difference. A person who does not try to understand and who chooses to live without God is no different from the animal creation. When that life is over the person will cease to exist: will "perish".

Understand What?

The Bible is God's revelation of His gracious purpose and His invitation to mankind. Find out what it teaches and what God wants you to do about it and you have something upon which to base your life. If you don't bother, or if you don't want to know, then God gives you the blessing of this life and nothing else. Death means death: the end of all existence; complete oblivion; total irreversible destruction; an endless sleep – the end of everything.

But it doesn't have to end like that, if you want to be part of the future that God has planned. The prophet Daniel foretold many things that would happen after his day and so far all have come about exactly as prophesied, for God knows the future and controls all that is happening. So note this prediction:

"There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:1,2).

The time of which Daniel speaks is the time of the final conflict of nations – Armageddon – when all the nations confront God at Jerusalem. That will be when God intervenes to put right all the present wrongs. It will also be the time of resurrection for those who are to begin a new life in God's kingdom on earth. Notice that the population of that new age are not in heaven. They are sleeping "*in the dust of the earth*"; they are dead, they have returned to the dust from which Adam was first created. But they will awake at the time of the end: God will re-create them from the dust. The New Testament term for this is "resurrection".



Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Daniel 12:2)

New Testament Truth

The New Testament builds upon the Old and fully endorses its teaching. In fact you cannot understand either Testament properly without the other: they are designed by God to complement one another. Notice what Daniel says about the resurrection at the last day:

“... Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2).

Not all who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, for those who choose not to know about God will sleep on forever and know no more. Those who understand and know the ways of God will be raised to judgement. Sadly there are some that will have only brought upon themselves shame and rejection and they will return to oblivion. But those whom God finds worthy will be given the priceless gift of everlasting life; they will be made immortal.

The Lord Jesus fully endorses that Old Testament view of the death state, and this part of Daniel’s prophecy. For he said:

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28,29).

Notice that the dead are, “in the graves” – they “sleep in the dust of the earth” as Daniel expressed the same

truth. But they will come forth when Jesus bids them do so, either to “life” or to “condemnation”.

Believe or Perish!

The Bible presents us with a stark choice, but not an unfair one. A verse that is widely regarded as the best known of all New Testament verses puts the issue like this:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).



What is being said here is that those who do not believe in Jesus will perish, or cease to exist. There is no hell fire awaiting them, just the oblivion of death. But those who understand who Jesus is and what he teaches and thus believe in him, will “have everlasting life”.

Much more could be said about the Bible promise of resurrection to a new life in God’s Kingdom on earth. The apostle Paul gave a lot of information about it in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 in which he contrasts the resurrection state with our present mortal existence. But the key issue upon which to focus is the choice that lies before all of us. Long ago Moses put the same challenge to the people of his day:

“ I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Barry Dray

Famine!

The Book of Ruth contains a fascinating story which has valuable lessons for the way we should live. It is another link in the history of the people of Israel leading up to the Lord Jesus. There were hard times, but it all worked out for the best.

Leaving Home

Famine is still with us, and it still drives men and women to move to new places in search of food. This was what Elimelech did in moving from Bethlehem into the land of Moab. It seems strange that he and his family should do so. Moab had not been very cooperative when Israel had escaped from Egypt and travelled through the wilderness.

Forsaking Bethlehem, the village where they lived near Jerusalem, and leaving Israel altogether seems an almost faithless action on the part of Elimelech, whose name means "God is my King". "Bethlehem" means "the house of bread" and now they were leaving it in search of bread elsewhere. Perhaps it is more an indication of how desperate people can become when they are faced with starvation.

It was not a good move for Elimelech, who was not to see his homeland again; he fell sick and later died in Moab. It seems that the famine continued after that for, rather than returning home, his wife Naomi stayed on, and their two sons married women in Moab. This was an unusual thing for an Israelite to do in those days for the law that God had given to Moses said this:

"An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee." (Deuteronomy 23:3,4)

Inadvisable Action

Although it does not appear that it was specifically forbidden to marry a Moabitess, it would seem to be quite unwise in view of the specific instructions that Moses was given by God. As it happened, Elimelech's two sons – Mahlon and Chilion – both died in Moab, so they were never required to account for their actions. But they left the three widows to ponder their future. Naomi, Elimelech's widow, elected to return to the land of Judah, and at first both daughters-in-law said they would go with her and they accompanied her as she travelled homeward.

At the border of the land Naomi sought to persuade both Orpah and Ruth to return home, as she said there was no prospect that she would be able to give them husbands. After further weeping Orpah took her advice and returned to her home. We hear no more of her, but Ruth refused to leave. She had learned a little of the Lord God of hosts in her new family, and she had new allegiances. As she put it:

“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God”.

That was to come true in a most remarkable way.

Sad Return Home

Suffering can show in faces, and it clearly did for Naomi. Her name meant “pleasant”, but she no longer felt like that:

“Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?” (Ruth 1:20-21).

Perhaps Naomi felt the hand of God had been against her because she had gone with Elimelech to Moab. She said that she had gone out full and returned home empty. How wrong she was. She had left Bethlehem with Elimelech, who seems not to have understood the way he should have dealt with famine, and they had taken with them Mahlon and Chilion, their sons. She came back with Ruth, admittedly a Moabitess, but as it turned out she was to prove her worth far more than had the men folk. The record carefully notes that they came back to Bethlehem at the time of barley harvest, which would be the time of Passover.

Finding Food

The problem of what they would eat still remained; but unlike so many countries today, there was a wise provision in the law that God had given Israel. There were no State handouts as such, but the law said:

“When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 24:19).

For those prepared to go out and glean, there would be enough. Was it a reminder of the time when Israel had depended on the same method of gathering for every meal? They had gathered the manna. The LORD had then commanded them to: *“Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent” (Exodus 16:16).* They had always been given; but they had needed to work for that food. There are lessons for us in this: God provides all that we need, but He expects us to do our part as well.

Naomi would have known the provision contained in God’s law, and it seems that she explained it to Ruth. She seems also to have told her about a near relation named Boaz. He was a kinsman of Elimelech, and she suggested that Ruth go to glean in his field. It would have been permissible to do so in any field in the area, but perhaps Naomi felt that Ruth might be safer, as a stranger in Bethlehem, if she had some family tie to hold on to. The record seems to suggest that she was not sure exactly where Boaz’ field was but “she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.” Now we begin to sense the hand of God at work. Things start working out for these poor people in great need.

Mark Sheppard

Quotations from the ESV

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