

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1525



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Sixteenth Century Bibles Compete! – page 5
Every Word Counts – page 9

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

F11

1525



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 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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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity – Number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained either from one of the Glad Tidings Distributors listed above, or from one of the contact addresses listed on the back cover.

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Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Cover: Just Married!
photos.com

Illustrations:

*Clipart.com, Christian Clipart,
123RF Images and Peter Moore*

Bible Versions

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A Royal Wedding

Two billion people are reckoned to have watched the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton or, as they should now be called, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. It was the social event of the



year and newspapers and magazines followed their every move.

Who would design Catherine's wedding dress; how it would look; what colour the Queen would wear; where the couple would go on honeymoon – all these issues and many more were the subject of prolonged discussion beforehand, and of detailed analysis afterwards. It seems there's nothing like a wedding to get people talking and feeling better about life. Everyone hopes that the marriage will be as successful as the wedding appears to have been.

Disastrous Unions

For, over the years, there have been some disastrous royal weddings. The Bible tells of one union which brought together two nations, which should have resulted in better international relations but which ended in disaster. The suitor was a king of Israel who reigned in Samaria and his bride to be was a Zidonian princess named Jezebel. Today that name has become associated with promiscuity, but in Bible times it was rooted in the notion of idolatry: for, in her native language, Jezebel probably means "*the Lord (Baal) exists*". It's tricky enough when two people from quite different cultur-

al backgrounds marry, but it's much more difficult when they also worship very differently.

Ahab, the Israelite king, was to have been a worshipper of the God of Israel, the God of the Bible. Baal

was a Canaanite god – supposed to be in charge of the weather and the bringer of fertility. Perhaps in those days, over 2500 years ago, there was media speculation about which religion would win out – the worship of the one true God, or the worship of Baal. If there was much doubt about it, the newspaper reporters didn't have long to wait.

Jezebel came with several hundred of her own prophets and Baal worship was soon entrenched in Israel, or it would have been but for the opposition of one of God's prophets, named Elijah. His name meant "*My God is Yah*" – Yah being a shortened form of the memorial name of the God of Israel. A showdown followed on Mount Carmel, when the prophets of Baal were exposed as mere idol worshippers and the power of the true God was displayed in dramatic fashion. You can read all about that in 1 Kings, Chapter 18.

Man and Wife

Ahab was easily influenced by his more determined wife. On one occasion when his palace expansion plans were thwarted by the unwillingness of a commoner to sell him some adjoining land, Jezebel knew exactly what to do.

She advised him to get the commoner falsely accused and then promptly executed, allowing the king to take immediate possession of the now ownerless land. Ahab followed her advice precisely and this is the sad comment in the Scriptural account:

There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up (1 Kings 21:25).

What happened with Ahab was exactly the opposite of what the God-given gift of marriage is supposed to do. God instituted marriage so that a man and woman could be a help and support to one another (Genesis 2:18) and there is much encouragement given to that end. The apostle Paul was not married, but he gave a beautiful insight into what marriage should be like, explaining that it should reflect the relationship that is to exist between the Lord Jesus and the members of his church – the worldwide congregation that he has redeemed and adopted as his own people.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25–27).

Another Royal Marriage

There is another royal wedding due to take place, but it will not be in the UK, and nobody yet knows the date, although the invitations have been issued. The Return of the Lord Jesus from heaven will be the start of the

transformation of the earth, so that it becomes a place fit for God's people to inhabit. For Jesus is going to reign on earth as God's appointed King, over the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament speaks of that Coming as a restoration of the ancient Kingdom of Israel (see Ezekiel 21:25-27) and the New Testament describes it as a Wedding Party, when Jesus calls to him all those who are to be working with him while he transforms the earth.

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” (Revelation 19:7–9).

Your Invitation

The invitations have already been issued because the Bible contains the offer to everyone to be part of the collective bride of Christ. Jesus wants us to be there, but we have got to want it too. Before Prince William and Catherine Middleton wed, people were camping out on certain streets in London so they could just catch a glimpse of the happy couple as their carriage drove by. They so wanted to be part of the day and to share in the couple's happiness! If you want to be there – at the real Royal Wedding – then make regular Bible reading part of your daily routine and thus find out just what God offers and how we can be prepared for the great things that are about to happen.

Editor

Part Five: The Bible, Appointed to be Read ...

Sixteenth Century Bibles Compete!

Since May 1884, there has been a bronze statue of Tyndale in the Victoria Gardens on the Thames Embankment in London.



A plaque at the foot of the statue plinth bears the following inscription:

William Tyndale

First Translator of the New Testament into English from the Greek.

Born A.D.1484.

Died a Martyr at Vilvorde in Belgium, A.D.1536.

*“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” – “The entrance of Thy words giveth light.”
Psalm CXIX. 105, 130.*

“And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” 1 John 5:11

The last words of William Tyndale were “Lord open the King of England’s eyes.” Within a year afterwards, a Bible was placed in every parish church by the king’s command.

Tyndale’s prayer was indeed answered. Before Tyndale was executed Henry VIII had declared his break with Rome (1531) and Henry became self-appointed sole protector and Supreme Head of the Church of England. In 1534 the Convocation of Canterbury had petitioned for an English translation of the Bible. It was therefore timely for a new Bible version to be produced: one which could be dedicated to the King!

Coverdale’s Bible

Miles Coverdale was invited to produce a new translation and in 1535 published the first complete printed English Bible. Coverdale was the most important successor to Tyndale, whom he had known at Cambridge University. Coverdale had been in exile in Antwerp but was later to become a protestant Bishop of Exeter.

Coverdale's Bible was, mainly, a compilation of the work of other translators which he put together according to his personal preferences. On the title page Coverdale admits to his dependence on "five sundry interpreters". The greatest of them was of course Tyndale. Tyndale had not published a complete Old Testament before his martyrdom. For this reason, Coverdale consulted Tyndale's Pentateuch and the work of Latin and German translators of the Bible. It is said that Coverdale's Bible was favoured by Queen Anne Boleyn, known for her Protestant sympathies. When she fell from favour and was executed in 1536, Coverdale's version lost its appeal to the King.

The title page shows King Henry VIII enthroned and distributing Bibles to his Bishops with the laity kneeling in attendance. There is, however, no depiction of any papal figure between the King and the name of God!

The Matthew Bible

In 1537 John Rogers combined William Tyndale's printed New Testament with Miles Coverdale's work, to create the Matthew Bible. This was the first English version to be authorised by the monarch. Little did Henry VIII realise that this Bible version contained much of Tyndale's work. John Rogers was a friend of Tyndale and used the title "Matthew's Bible" to protect his identity. The Old Testament text was sourced from Tyndale's published and unpublished Old Testament manuscripts. The remaining text was that of Coverdale's Bible.

The unpublished manuscripts had been produced while Tyndale was awaiting execution in the Castle at Vilvorde. The title page of Matthew's Bible declares that it was printed "with



the King's most gracious license". 1,500 copies were imported but this was insufficient as there were more than 8,000 parishes in England.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, sent a copy of the Matthew Bible to Thomas Cromwell commending it in these words. "As for the translation, as far as I have read thereof I like it better than any other translation heretofore made".

Cromwell, a Member of Parliament and a man with business experience as a trader was now principal secretary to the King. He was in a good position to influence matters at Court. However, the Matthew Bible contained marginal notes written by Rogers which did not meet the approval of senior churchmen.

The Great Bible

So on 3 September 1538 Henry VIII commissioned another new version of

the Bible. The royal injunction required that, “*ye shall provide...one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English...set up in some convenient place...your parishioners may commodiously resort to the same and read it...*”

Miles Coverdale was tasked to do this work. What he did was to revise the Matthew Bible and remove the marginal notes. It became known as “*The Great Bible*” since it was to be a “*Bible of the largest volume in English*”. Its dimensions were approximately, 15 inches x 9 inches (337mm x 235mm). In November 1539 the Great Bible was published, coming off the presses of Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch. This is why it is sometimes known as Whitchurch’s Bible. The title page shows a large Henry VIII distributing Bibles to both clergy and laity alike.

The Geneva Bible

In 1553, Catholic Queen Mary came to the throne. She banned the printing of English Bibles and forbade their use in churches. Protestants fled abroad to escape from fiery persecution.

Many gathered in Geneva and it was there that the refugees produced the Geneva Bible of 1560. The Geneva Bible adopted a system of chapter divisions into verses (which were first introduced in 1448) and numbered verses (these were developed in 1551).

Chapter Divisions

In the original texts there were no chapter or verse divisions. Numbered chapters and verses are invaluable for refer-

ence and Bible study but we need to remember that they come from unbroken manuscript text and they are not always quite right. For example, the last verse of Acts 21:40 requires that we read on across the chapter division:

So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, (Acts 21:40).

This verse obviously has to be read in conjunction with Acts 22:1 in order to make sense of what follows. Another example of the importance of not reading selected Scriptures in isolation is found in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 of which begins:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

What do we know about this “cloud of witnesses”? Nothing, unless we read the previous chapter, where they are listed for us. These are faithful men and women called out by God across the generations who died in faith and will be in God’s Kingdom when it is set up on earth.

Reading in Context

It’s important to read the passage or setting of any one verse. For example, if you just read this verse in isolation you would think that God has NOT revealed important information about the future:



“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

But the next verse says:

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10).

God’s Spirit has caused many prophecies to be written about God’s Kingdom on earth (for example, Psalm 72; Isaiah 35 and Revelation 21). So we are, in fact, very well informed about God’s gracious plans for the restoration and recovery of the earth, and can be part of it, if we want to be.

Proper Bible reading matters if we are to understand God’s message. Read just one verse of John’s gospel, and you would get quite a wrong impression, for Jesus once said:

“In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

That sounds as if Jesus was promising believers that they would live with him in heaven, but the very next verse explains:

*“And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also**” (John 14:3).*

Read the two verses together and you will see that Jesus is telling us that after his departure to heaven, to prepare things, he will return to earth – where God’s kingdom is to be established.

Bishop’s Bible

On the accession of the protestant



Queen Elizabeth I in 1558, the right of the public to read the Bible was restored. However, the popularity of the Geneva Bible continued as it was regarded as a good translation, better than The Great Bible.

The Geneva Bible was very popular among Protestants, because it contained marginal notes, maps and tables and was intended for private study. It remained in

print with 70 editions over a period of 80 years, until 1640. The 1560 Edition was even dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I. But it was the marginal notes that later gave King James I cause for concern so that he forbade the inclusion of such notes in the King James Bible.

What the Anglican Bishops now decided to do was to revise the Great Bible. This revised version, published in 1568, became known as the Bishops Bible due to the large number of Bishops on the revision committee. It was placed in cathedrals in England and was purchased by many parish churches; but the Geneva Bible continued to be used in the home.

Tyndale’s dying prayer had been answered: God had opened the eyes of the King of England.

Now that these Bibles had been sanctioned, or at least tolerated by the State and the established church, everything was in place for a new version of the English Bible: one that was to endure for the next 400 years.

Peter Moore

Next: Commissioning the King James Bible

Every Word Counts

“Fools!”

Do you fancy being called a ‘fool’? Most of us would be distressed if someone we loved called us foolish. But this is precisely what happened to two of Jesus’ disciples after the resurrection.

Jesus called them foolish for a very good reason. They were upset that he had been crucified, and did not realise that the man talking to them was actually Jesus himself. No wonder he said to them:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25).

Then ‘beginning at Moses and all the Prophets’ Jesus proceeded to explain to them how the Old Testament Scriptures prophesied about details of his life and death (Luke 24:27). Do take note that Jesus believed the Law of Moses and the prophets and also that they contained accurate details about him which had been written many, many years before he was born.

Matthew Looks Back

The New Testament often refers back to the Old Testament. In particular, the gospel of Matthew contains many phrases like this one: ‘...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophets...’. This shows that when the prophets were writing Scripture they were not using their own words but the words of Almighty God Himself.

The first such example is in the first chapter describing the conception and birth of Jesus. Matthew says:

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold the virgin shall be with child...” (Matthew 1:22-23).

In chapter 2 the chief priests and scribes are able to tell King Herod that Christ was to be born in Bethlehem:

“for thus it is written by the prophet” (Matthew 2:5).

Throughout the gospel Matthew refers back to prophecies regarding:

- the work of John the Baptist,
- the miracles of Jesus,
- the disbelief of the Jews,
- Jesus’ triumphal ride into Jerusalem and
- the crucifixion.

There are at least 15 such direct references and other indirect ones.

Marginal References

In many cases a Bible with a margin will indicate the location of the prophecy in the Old Testament. For example:

... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Matthew 21:4-5).

The number six, as a superscript against the word, “tell” refers to the margin, where the reference is to Zechariah 9:9, a prophecy given some 400 years earlier.

Remarkable Details

It could be argued that Jesus deliberately set out to fulfil this prophecy by sending his disciples to fetch the animals and then riding into Jerusalem. However, there are other prophecies that were fulfilled without the knowledge of the people involved. A remarkable one is about the crucifixion. Matthew records:

Then they crucified him, and divided his garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Matthew 27:35).

The Roman soldiers had no reason consciously to fulfil prophecy, and anyway were unlikely to be familiar with it.

Again, this prophecy from Psalm 22 is remarkable. It too was written hundreds of years before Jesus was born, when crucifixion was unheard of. So the details are amazing:

All those who see me ridicule me: They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue him"... (Psalm 22:7-8).

Details of what crucifixion was like follow in verses 14 to 17, just before the reference to the parting of the garments of Jesus:

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to my jaws ...They pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones....

Lessons for Us

This teaches us that Jesus held the Old Testament in high regard. He reprimanded the Jewish leaders for poor understanding of their Scriptures – the Old Testament (Matthew 22:29). Although they knew that the Messiah would come, and where he would be born, they refused to recognise Jesus as that Messiah (or Christ), even though prophecy about him was being fulfilled before their very eyes.

Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, used the fulfilment of prophecy to authenticate Jesus as the promised Christ. It is not just the general idea or themes of the prophecies that are important but the details of individual words. This is how inspiration works.

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Inspired Scripture

The Old Testament is important – we too would be foolish to ignore it. It is God's Word leading the way to the Saviour Christ.

We need to pay attention to all of God's revelation to us – the Old Testament and the New Testament. Prophecies about world events are being fulfilled in our lifetime and are signs that the return of Jesus is near. We do well to try to understand these things so that we can be ready for him.

When Jesus comes we don't want to be called 'foolish ones'.

Anna Hart

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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



Reaching Malta!

*As the storm drove them about in the Mediterranean all on board must have been very afraid. They had thrown the cargo overboard and lightened the ship in every conceivable way, while strengthening it to try to stop it breaking up. And they had fasted whilst calling upon their various gods, all to no avail. But, as **John Hellowell** now explains, all of a sudden there was some good news.*

No Loss of Life!

It was the apostle Paul who had the good news. Just as he had been right about the folly of continuing their journey, he now assured them that there would be no loss of life, only the loss of the ship. By now the master and the owner would have come to the conclusion that the ship was doomed. If so, they must also have assumed that loss of life, including theirs, was an inevitable consequence.

That good news must have been hard to credit and yet Paul had been proved right so far. However, he now stressed that this was not his personal opinion but he had received it by means of an angelic messenger.

Credible Message

It is possible, if not probable, that Paul's background would have become known to some of the crew and perhaps also to some of the prisoners. In the confinement of the ship it could hardly be otherwise. Knowing Paul, we cannot imagine that he would not attempt to preach the Word.

It may have come as some comfort to the ship's company to realise that, although they did not know their position at sea, God's angel knew exactly where to find Paul.

Paul now relates the substance of the angelic message.

➤ He was assured that he would stand before Caesar and so no permanent harm would come to him and he would complete his journey.

➤ God had graciously granted him the lives of all those who were sailing with him. This must mean that Paul had requested this in prayer and is indicative of Paul's concern for all men. While they had struggled to keep the vessel afloat, Paul had sought the mercy of the One who controlled the wind and the waves.

➤ The ship would be wrecked on an island where all the men would come ashore.

Land Ahoy!

Later (Acts 27:31) we learn that Paul was also informed that in order to be saved all must remain in the ship until it grounded. Paul believed God and was confident that all would be as the angel had revealed. This should raise their spirits. For fourteen days they had been adrift in the Adriatic when, around midnight, the sailors sensed that they were not far from land.

It may be that seasoned sailors develop a 'sixth sense' about such matters. They sounded the depth and found it to be twenty fathoms (120 ft) and when, a short while after, they sounded once more it was fifteen (90 ft). This confirmed that they were nearing land. The shore could not be

seen but there was the possibility that it was rocky and that the ship would founder and break up. Four anchors were dropped from the stern in an attempt to stop, or at least slow, the progress of the ship. Now they prayed for daylight to come so that they could see the shore and assess the situation.

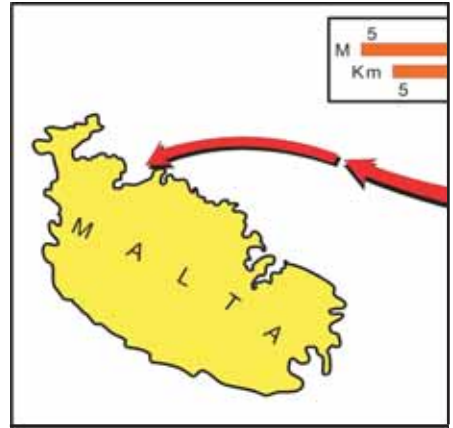
Abandon Ship!

Some of the crew decided that it was now time to abandon the ship. Under the pretence of putting out further anchors from the prow, they lowered the boat which they had formerly raised at the start of the storm (Acts 27:16) intending no doubt to row to shore. It seems probable that these sailors were only part of the crew who saw the opportunity to escape, as the boat was probably small, holding only twenty men at the most. Paul informed the centurion that this course of action would be disastrous:

Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved (Acts 27:31).

All Hands on Deck

It seems that Paul's concern was not for the sailors who intended to escape, although that is possible. More likely, he was concerned that the loss of these experienced seamen would put the lives of the rest of the crew and prisoners at risk, since there would be fewer hands to undertake the action required to bring the ship to shore. The centurion did not question Paul's advice but gave immediate orders for the soldiers to cut the ropes and allow the boat to fall into the sea. Paul had been right all along and one would imagine that the centurion had wished that he had listened to Paul from the beginning.



As daybreak came, Paul urged everyone to have something to eat. They had not eaten, at least not properly, for fourteen days. He was concerned that they would need all their strength when the time came to abandon ship. He assured them that no one would be harmed. There would also be a psychological advantage in doing this: Paul was imposing a degree of normality. So he took the bread and gave thanks to God before all the ship's company, broke it (possibly handing portions to his neighbours) and began to eat. No doubt Paul's prayer included thanksgiving for their safety as well as for the food itself.

This had the desired effect and with spirits raised, they all began to eat. The total of those on board was 276, a number that some commentators have challenged as exaggerated. It appears that some manuscripts omit the 200 and give only 76. It seems probable that these have lost the 'two hundred' as a copyist's error rather than a later addition to the original text. Assuming that 276 is the correct total, it is evident that this vessel was indeed a large Alexandrian grain ship (Acts 27:6).

Final Preparations

Once they had eaten sufficient food, they began to lighten the ship by throwing the cargo of wheat into the sea. Since this was always valuable in Rome they were, no doubt, reluctant to jettison it earlier, hoping that they might eventually complete their journey. Now such a prospect was impossible and so, by lightening the ship they would be able to educe the draught and approach closer to the shore before they foundered.

When day finally came nobody on board could recognise the shore, probably because they were now well off the 'normal' sea-lanes from Alexandria to Rome. Seeing a bay with a beach they discussed the possibility of driving the ship towards this point. They cast off the anchors from the stern, probably by simply cutting the ropes, and loosing the rudders.

In ancient ships, these took the form of two large paddles on each quarter of the stern. It is not clear whether they had been roped up out of the water while the ship was at anchor and they were thus lowered to help steer the vessel or that they were now loosed so that they simply trailed in the water thereby allowing it to come further inshore.

They then hoisted the foresail to catch the wind and so drive the ship onto the beach. These plans were thwarted when the ship reached a point "where two seas met", which



probably indicates a shoal. Here the ship ran aground and the bow stuck fast. The powerful waves began to break up the stern and it became clear that the ship was about to disintegrate.

All Overboard!

The soldiers considered that their best course of action was to kill the prisoners in case they escaped by swimming from the ship. Soldiers were held accountable for their prisoners and were liable to severe punishment, often death, if they allowed them to escape (cf. Acts 12:19; 16:27).

The centurion was anxious that Paul should not suffer this fate and so gave orders not to kill the prisoners but to allow those who could swim to do so, while the rest should take whatever they could find to use as buoyancy aids and endeavour to reach the shore. By these means all those on board were able to get to land safely.

They were now shipwrecked on the island of Malta and, once more, it seemed that Paul's desire to go to Rome had been thwarted.

John Hellawell

Joshua – The Book of the Wars

It is difficult to step into the shoes of a great man. Moses was dead and Joshua, desperately lonely as he took charge of the nation, was encouraged, first by God Himself, and then by the people, to be strong and to press on.

Joshua's first task was to cross the River Jordan and advance into the heartland of the Canaanites. The ancient city of Jericho barred the way. Sensibly, he sent two spies to reconnoitre, and they reported that the morale of the inhabitants was at rock bottom. But the Israelites were on one side of the river and Jericho was on the other side.

Crossing the Jordan

How was Joshua to get the whole nation across the Jordan, which at this time of year was in full flood? The instructions came from his angelic Advisor. After three days, the priests were to lead the way, carrying the Ark into the centre of the river. Miraculously, as their feet came to the bank of the Jordan, the water dried up, and it became possible to cross dry-shod. Hours later, with everyone safe on the western side, the floodwaters resumed their course.

This was an incident full of rich symbolism. The record says that the water was cut off (perhaps by a landslide) further north at a place called Adam. As the ark, a potent symbol of Jesus, held back the flood that would have swept Adam's descendants down to the Dead Sea – which is so salty that nothing can live there – the people

crossed over into the Promised Land. In the allegory, it was as though they had entered the Kingdom of God.

The Battle of Jericho

Jericho was the first Canaanite city to be conquered by Joshua. Once again, the angel – the “*captain of the Lord's host*” as he is styled – issued his commands. The victory would not be by man's military genius, but by the power of Israel's God.

For six days the Israelite army tramped in silence round the walled city, no doubt to the amusement of the inhabitants. On the seventh day they completed seven entire circuits. And on the very last of those circuits the walls of Jericho fell outwards (probably



as the result of an earthquake), so that the city lay wide open to the sword and fire. It was a great victory, thanks to the power of God at work (Chapter 6).

Southern Campaign

Next Joshua led the army in an advance into the central mountain range to capture the south of the

country. He was aided by the decision of the Canaanite kings or chieftains to band together and launch an attack on Gibeon. The leaders of this important city had tricked Joshua early in his campaign into signing a peace treaty with them, whereby they had become subservient. The other Canaanites were annoyed about this and decided to teach them a lesson! So Joshua felt obliged to honour his pact with them and to come to Gibeon's defence.

Actually, a battle in the open field was just what was needed – attacking walled cities one by one would have taken months, even years. Ascending from the main camp at Gilgal near Jericho by night, a climb of 3000 feet (900 metres), Joshua took the enemy by surprise in the morning light, and defeated them roundly. This was a long day, in which God sent a devastating hailstorm that mowed down the fleeing troops, and gave Joshua extended daylight to complete the rout. You can read all about it in Joshua chapter 10.

Northern Campaign

The second phase of the conquest was in the north of the land, where again the chieftains decided to join forces to combat the Israelite threat. This battle took place by a small lake north of the Sea of Galilee. Joshua's victory was followed by the systematic destruction of the capital city, Hazor. Excavations by the Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin, in the 1970's, found traces of the fire with which Joshua burned Hazor, and stone idols that were beheaded by his soldiers as they threw down the pagan shrines. This confirmed the statement that

Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms. And they

*struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing. **Then he burned Hazor with fire** (Joshua 11:10–11).*

Thus it was that Joshua led the Israelite army to conquer the whole land – the land that God had promised to give to Abraham's descendants, as a place in which they could live, under God's direction:

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war (Joshua 11:23).

This initial breaking of the military power of the Canaanites was essential. With the armed forces subdued, the Israelites could begin to live in the land that God had promised them. The next stage was to draw detailed maps of the country. Mountains, the River Jordan and the seas were used to define boundaries, and then the countryside was divided into family-sized inheritances. These were then apportioned to the people on the fairest possible basis: by drawing lots. This exercise is described in Joshua chapters 14 to 19.

Entitled?

Critics of the Bible often question the morality of the Israelites killing the Canaanites and taking over their lands. In today's culture, it would be regarded as 'genocide'. However the Bible makes it plain that God is the ultimate owner of all lands. He decides who will live in a country and for how long. The prophet Amos has a revealing statement:

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will

destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,” says the Lord (Amos 9:8).

God’s eyes had been upon the Canaanites for centuries. Long before the conquest He had told Abraham that his descendants would return to the land and take possession of it, “*for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*” (Genesis 15:16).

“*The Amorites*” is a general term for the people then inhabiting the land of Canaan, the land we now know as Israel. God had waited patiently. He had permitted four more generations of Amorites to consider the evils their fathers had committed, and repent; but to no effect. Now the time had come for them to be replaced by the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham. This matches what Moses had told the people:

It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 9:5).

The lesson from this is that when civilizations such as ours reach the same depths of depravity as that of the Canaanites, where violence, homosexuality and oppression abounded, a day of judgment will inevitably fall. That is an essential part of the Christian gospel. We are responsible to God the Creator, who is going to send His Son Jesus to judge the world in righteousness (see Acts 17:31).

Priestly Inheritance

The last task of Joshua, described in chapters 20 to 21, was to provide

accommodation for the tribe of Levi, who were to be full-time priests: teaching and administering the law. To ensure that justice and guidance was readily available to the population, they were apportioned 48 towns, which were scattered evenly through the twelve tribes. Of these, six cities were set aside as special ‘cities of refuge’.

If you accidentally slew someone, for example when the head flew off your axe, the kinsmen of the dead man might assume you had murdered him. This could easily lead to a hasty revenge killing, and even start a blood feud between families. By running to the nearest city of refuge, you could take sanctuary until your case could be properly heard in a court of law. If you were found not guilty of murder, but guilty of manslaughter, you were required to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. After that you could go free. This ruling emphasized that even an accidental killing was still the taking of a precious life, which belonged by rights to God.

Final Warning

The Book of Joshua concludes with a description of a great national assembly called by their aged leader, in which he warned them to hold fast to their promise to serve the Lord their God. He reminded them that they had made solemn undertakings to worship God “*in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served*” (Joshua 24:14).

He erected a stone monument to remind them of their solemn covenant and died at the great age of 110 years, being mourned by all the people.

David M Pearce

Invasion of the Body

Every now and again there is a panic about an epidemic or a pandemic that threatens to bring death and disaster. It might be a new strain of influenza – something like swine flu – and a possible scenario is sketched out in the media.

Doom and Gloom!

The forecast is that the infection will spread across the northern hemisphere, engulfing Europe. The chances are that the World Health Organisation will declare a level six pandemic and this is what that will mean:

- All forms of travel will be restricted.
- All congested places will be cleared in an effort to contain the spread.
- It will reach its peak in week six, by which time 1 in 10 people will be infected.
- Doctors will find it difficult to cope and hospitals will only meet 25% of the growing demand for beds.
- Pharmacies, surgeries and hospitals will become short-staffed.
- Selective closures and staff pooling will take place, to maintain even a reduced service.
- The supply chain for all products will be affected as people stay home to recover.
- Those remaining in work will be under extreme pressure, which in turn depletes their immune systems.
- About 160,000 people will die out of a possible 750,000 infected.

Forecast not Fact

Of course such scenarios are just possibilities, but such media coverage is based on the government's worst case scenario, and underlies the need for mass inoculations and the huge stockpiling of vaccine that has to take place – just in case – despite the cost of such precautions. But even as that is being done, scientists warn that each new flu strain has different characteristics, and the vaccines might not work! So nature might outsmart man, however hard people work.

A flu virus is smaller than the eye can see; it's microscopic. It has a remarkable propensity for survival, reproduction and mutation. Being spread via a cough or sneeze, it spreads easily in our congested cities, planes and trains. Scientific brains are just beginning to better understand this clever little organism.

It is able to invade our bodies at will, where it can wreak havoc with our immune systems. Our body's defences move into overdrive to combat the



invasion. We cannot see the battlefield, but we sure feel the effects! Isn't it amazing that right down to the cellular level God's remarkable designs do exactly what was intended.

Disease Everywhere

Influenza is just one of many diseases prevalent in today's world. Tuberculosis is back. The AIDS virus sprang out of nowhere 30 years ago and has made a massive impact, for this killer disease has travelled from one generation to another via genes. No truly effective medical cure is available. Cholera and Diphtheria attacks are increasing. Dengi and Ebola viruses are still of great concern for they are virulent and can be lethal. Mutated streptococcus bacteria remain a cause for concern. Whilst Smallpox is thought to have been eradicated, it is still around and could pounce at any time.

Then there are parasites: Malaria being the best known. The parasite is transmitted through mosquito saliva into the blood stream and invades our red blood cells. The superbug, MRSA, is of great concern to hospitals all over the world as it becomes immune to traditional treatment regimes. In addition, military scientists have been adept at creating untold viral mutations (biological weapons) as extremely effective killers. Who knows when they will be used?

Why so Many?

There seem to be four main reasons for the growth of these communicable diseases.

- ① The growth of city population densities;
- ② The ease of global travel;
- ③ Antibiotic resistance, and

④ Global Warming.

The first two problems are lifestyle related. We don't *have* to live so closely together, but we choose to do so in order that we can be close to work, amenities or other people, or perhaps because we can't afford not to.

The next two problems are the result of the impact of human life upon our environment. We are changing the way things are naturally, because we are imposing our own choices, regardless of the harm that might do in the long term. So what can be done about all this, and what hope is there for a better future?

The Solution

Whenever a new threat appears, the pressure is on scientists to work out what is happening and what might prevent widespread infection. Health Authorities and Pharmaceutical Companies try to find cures to combat these infectious organisms, including targeting cells and even using human genome experimentation. However, lasting relief will not come from taking a tablet or from a vaccine. There will always be another infection, another



strain, another failure.

The priority has to be to find out why all this trouble has come on mankind and whether it is part of God's plan for mankind. Certainly it was foretold that illness and disease would be a long-term part of human experience. Jesus even advised his disciples that this problem would get worse and worse, as the time for his Return from heaven drew nearer and nearer.

He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:10–11).

These are some of many signs in this chapter that are to be seen before Jesus returns to this earth to establish his everlasting Kingdom, and when he returns to earth to rule as king all these problems will be resolved. For we are told that then:

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

The Root Cause

God never wanted His world to be in this state, with such widespread disease and death. But the invasion of sin into the world has spoiled the world as it was originally created. It has infected the minds and therefore the behaviour of people who would otherwise have lived in a way that pleases their Creator. Now, to a large extent, the world has abandoned a belief in the one true God, and has followed its own man-made course. Long ago the wise man said:



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

And the apostle Paul explains that the world is suffering because people don't turn to God for the relief that He alone can provide:

We know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:22–23).

So the apostle, who experienced a lot of ill health himself, was looking for a time when all will be put right. And the wonderful thing is that he could describe the pains now experienced in the world as the birth pangs of a better age.

When that age – of the rulership of Christ – comes, virulent infectious diseases will be consigned to the pages of history. What a wonderful promise that is for all of mankind.

David Bilton

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