

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1528



Feeding the Children – page 3

The Message and Impact of the KJV – page 5

A Cure for a Terminal Disease – page 17

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

J11

1528



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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Bible Versions

The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) but other versions are sometimes used.

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Feeding the Children

Creatures care for their offspring instinctively, whether it's an antelope that gives birth whilst the herd is on the move, or a bird that sits for weeks on its eggs. The moment the infant arrives the process of feeding begins and, as this month's cover photograph indicates, that feeding process can continue for quite a while. It seems that woodpeckers, like some adult children, can stay around to be fed as long as free meals are still being served!



are hard for everyone at present, people are often generous when they see the desperate state of things in famine-struck parts of the world.

Famine Relief

God has a plan to feed all children everywhere, but it requires a total change in the way the world is run. Instead of human governments being in charge, with their limited ability to

deal with problems, God is to establish a government of His own, ruled over by the Lord Jesus Christ. Long ago the prophets foretold that when there is a righteous king ruling in Jerusalem, he will put everything right.

He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in his sight (Psalm 72:12–14).

Many times we are told in the Bible that then the desert will blossom and even the high places of the earth will be fruitful. The Psalm continues:

There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth ... Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His

Famine!

Not all parents can feed their children, however, as famine conditions spread in parts of East Africa. Heart-rending pictures from Ethiopia, Somalia and Northern Kenya have shown how the absence of rain for several years has changed once fertile ground into dust. Crops have failed year after year and, in the absence of grazing, livestock have perished. The only thing left for anxious parents to do was to trek to refugee camps, carrying their children, in the hope of food and medical help. All too often the help provided was too little and too late.

With governments and charitable organisations warning that the present crisis could become a catastrophe, a huge appeal has been launched to get more relief to the thousands of displaced people who would otherwise have no hope. And even though times

glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen (Psalm 72:16–19).

Not just food

Having enough food will be just one of the wonderful features of God's coming Kingdom, when King Jesus reigns. Other blessings will be that people will live together in peace, for war will be no more; there will be fairness and justice for everyone; and people will learn how to worship God in the right way. It was the prophet Amos who once warned Israel that they were about to experience hardship and deprivation, like famine conditions, but the famine would not be an absence of food.

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11).

A balanced diet, as God provides it, is not just enough to eat and drink. We need to feed the mind as well with things that are good, honest, lovely and of good report. That is something we should be doing every day if we want to be spiritually fit and healthy. It was something that the infant nation of Israel was instructed to do, as they were journeying through arid country, looking for better pastures. Moses told them that they should love God as their first priority and then he added:

These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

A Gift from God

Children are described in Scripture as a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3), and it is natural for parents to want the best for their children, even if that feeling is not instinctive in the way it is in the animal kingdom. Parents care for their children because they love them and what Moses was saying to the Children of Israel was that the greatest good they could do for their children was to properly instruct them in the things of God. That way they would be fed with something that could enable them to live forever.

Of course, children can be choosy eaters and the food their parents offer them might not always be to their taste. Many a child sent to Sunday School, or taken to a religious service on a regular basis, has made a different choice later in life. For the worship of God has to be a matter of individual decision – just as that young woodpecker might prefer a quite different diet when it is finding its own food.

A parent can only do so much. But the example they set and the quality of their own interest in the things of God is likely to be hugely influential. So feed yourself first the things that really matter and don't forget to feed the children.



Editor

The message and impact of the KJV

King James could not afford to fund the translation work or the cost of printing his new Bible version. Parliament controlled the purse strings and would not agree to provide additional resources for printing.

Funding the King James Version

The translators do not appear to have been paid anything for their work. In July 1604 Archbishop Bancroft wrote to the Bishops asking them to assist in finding employment for the translators so, as posts became vacant, they were offered opportunities to advance their careers in the Church. The revisers of the translators' work fared better. They met in Stationers Hall and were paid a generous 30 shillings per week by the Company of Stationers.

The cost of financing the printing fell to the Barker family who had enjoyed the privileged status of Approved Royal printers in the reign of Elizabeth I and then as King's Printer to King James I. It appears that Robert Barker set aside £3,500 for the project and went into partnership to fund the venture, ending his days imprisoned for debt. The first edition published in 1611 was large and heavy being approximately 16 x 11 inches in size and designed to sit on a church lectern. Since then Bibles of many different sizes have been printed. In the early 1900s miniature Bibles measuring only 1 x 1¼ inches were printed to celebrate the tri-centenary of the 1611 King James Bible. You can see the difference here!



The royal restrictions on who could print Bibles did not apply to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 1629 Cambridge published their first edition of the King James Bible followed by Oxford in 1675.

Gunpowder Plot 1605

The six companies of translators were still in the early stages of their work when there was a serious threat to the life of King James. James was no stranger to plots against his life having already survived several attempts to remove him.

The plot against James was hatched by Robert Catesby and some of his close friends. They planned to kill the King during the state opening of Parliament by blowing up the building. Guy Fawkes was recruited to do the deed. Fawkes had fought for the Spanish against the Dutch and was sympathetic to the Catholic cause to restore a Catholic monarchy in England. On 5th November 1605 the plot was foiled when Guy Fawkes was arrested

in the cellars under the Houses of Parliament. The English Bible translation project was able to continue without any change in political direction. We can see the hand of God at work in human affairs. God sets up rulers and removes them.

King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of ancient Babylon, learnt this by first hand experience when he was told by the prophet:

“And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (Daniel 4:32).

Authorised?

The ‘King James Version’ of the Bible is also known as the ‘Authorised Version’. There is no record of the King authorising this translation. It has been suggested that any formal record of royal authorisation may have been burnt in the Whitehall fire of 12 January 1618 which destroyed the Privy Council registers for 1600 to 1613. Authorised or not, the King James Bible has played an important role in shaping the English language and of much greater importance, in taking the Gospel message throughout the English speaking world.

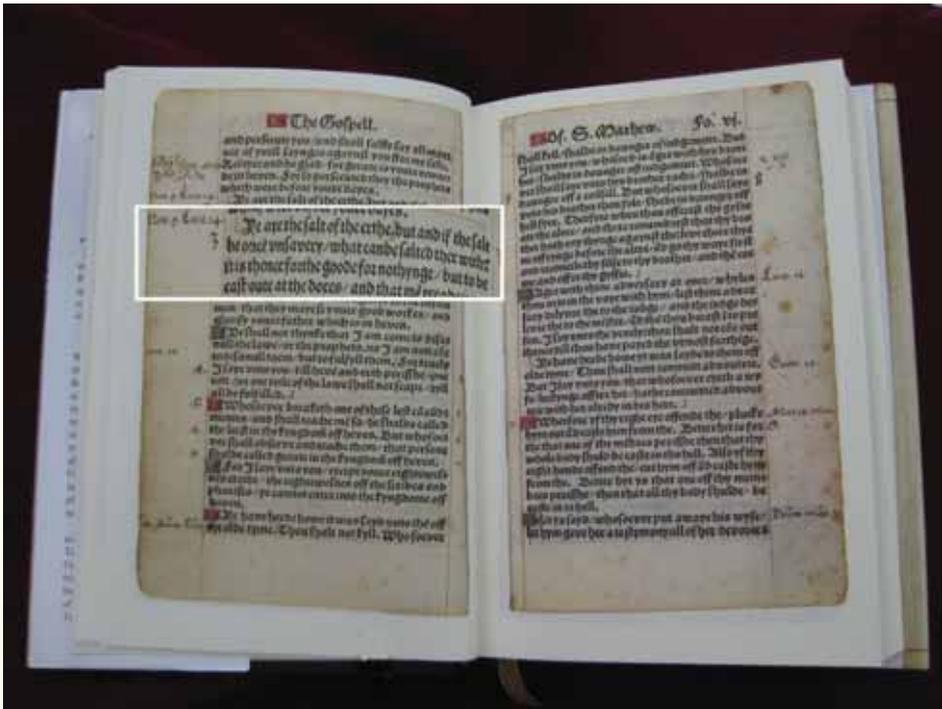
The King James Bible has contributed many sayings, figures of speech and phrases that are embedded in the English language and 400 years later these are still in everyday use. Many of these sayings are from the pen of Tyndale (1526) and some from Wycliffe two centuries earlier. William Tyndale is acknowledged as the most formative influence on the

text of the King James Bible. How often do you quote the Bible without being aware of doing so? Here is a sample of some of the many sayings we use today which have come directly from the pages of the King James Bible.

Sayings	Bible Reference
“Let there be light”	Genesis 1:3
“fell on his sword”	1 Samuel.31:5
“escaped by the skin of my teeth”	Job 19:20
“men of the world”	Psalms 17:14
“the salt of the earth” (see the picture opposite)	Matthew 5:13
“a law unto themselves”	Romans 2:14
“thorn in the flesh”	2 Corinthians 12:7
“the patience of Job”	James 5:11

Accuracy in Translating

The translators of the King James Bible had what we might call, a ‘formal approach’ to translation. They tried to find the nearest English equivalent word to the Hebrew or Greek words they were translating. Wherever possible, they also followed the basic word order of the original text. Each word in



Facsimile of William Tyndale's 1526 New Testament showing the phrase "salt of the earth" that is used in the 1611 King James Version.

the manuscripts they were working from was rendered by an equivalent English word.

Where they encountered rare words or were unsure of the most appropriate English word to use, they provided alternatives in the margin. (Bancroft's Translation Rule No.6 allowed them to do this.) They added words in italics in the text where it was necessary to give clearer sense to the English.

The notations indicated by an asterisk '*' indicate a biblical cross reference, a dagger-like symbol '†' indicates a literal translation and parallel lines '||' indicate an alternative English translation. These ways of annotating the text have been preserved in a modified form today, in some printed editions of the KJV.

Its Message

The King James Version is a literal translation of the Word of God, as close as the English language allows. We can therefore be confident in reading it that the message is accurate. In previous articles, we have seen that the Bible:

- ❖ claims to be the Word of God (2 Peter 1:20-21)
- ❖ tells us God has a purpose with humanity (Isaiah 55:11)
- ❖ invites us to come and drink of the water of life and live (Isaiah 55:1-3)
- ❖ warns us there is no other God upon whom we can rely (Isaiah 45:21)

- ❖ teaches us to pray for the Kingdom of God to come on earth (Matthew 6:9-10)
- ❖ warns us that God has appointed a day when He will send Jesus to judge the world (Acts 17:30-31)
- ❖ tells us that the glory of man will pass away but the Word of God endures for ever (1Peter 1:24-25)
- ❖ tells us we should respect those who rule over us (1Timothy 2:1-4)
- ❖ tells us that Jesus will return to set up God's Kingdom on earth (John 14:2-3)
- ❖ instructs that believing in God and being baptised are essential for our salvation (Mark 16:15-16)
- ❖ exhorts us to strive to do right in our lives and only then will God bless us with true peace (James 3:17)

Competing Versions

The publication of the King James Bible did not meet with immediate acceptance and praise by the population at large. The Puritans were concerned that it included the Apocrypha which originated from Greek and Latin versions, but is not found in the Hebrew Bible.

The King James Version was seen as a Bible of the Church because it gradually replaced their Bishops' Bibles while the Geneva Bible continued to enjoy a wide circulation and popularity due to its extensive marginal notes. Between 1642 and 1715 there was a compromise. At least nine editions of the King James Bible were published with marginal notes from the Geneva Bible.

On the death of King James I in 1625 his son, Charles I, acceded to the throne. Charles, like his father, felt

threatened by the Geneva Bible notes which challenged the divine right of kings. The Archbishop of Canterbury successfully suppressed the market for imported Geneva Bibles by claiming that the imports were threatening the UK print trade and therefore to purchase them was unpatriotic. The supply of Geneva Bibles eventually dried up after 1644.

Its Reception

The take-up of the King James Bible was slow at first. There were some who challenged it, calling for a revision, perhaps for personal or political reasons. A Parliamentary subcommittee was set up in 1657 to consider the issues. Their report to the Grand Committee for Religion on the King James Bible, included the observation that, "some mistakes of the Bible in English; which yet was agreed to be the best of any translation in the world".

The King James Bible was to experience a mixed but increasingly supportive reception over the next 150 years. In the first half of the seventeenth century during the reign of Charles I, it was seen as the Bible of the established Church and the Geneva Bible as the Puritan's Bible.

After a short interval when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector, the monarchy was restored in 1660. Under King Charles II the King James Bible was embraced by monarch, church and state. After this slow start the scene was set for the King James Version (or the Authorised Version as it is sometimes called) to emerge as the key translation which would take the Gospel message throughout the world.

Peter Moore

Next: Manuscripts and Translations

The Prayer of Zachariah

Each of the four gospels has a particular emphasis. Though they all tell of the life of the Lord Jesus, there must be a lot we do not know.

His public ministry covered over three years, yet all four gospels can be read without difficulty in only a day or so. What has been revealed is all we need to know about Jesus' life and teaching. Luke wrote his gospel for a man called Theophilus and told him that he was writing:

"that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4 ESV).

Luke selects several topics which clearly interested him in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. One of them is prayer. He includes prayers by the Lord Jesus which are not in the other gospels and he has teaching about prayer, including parables, which is not mentioned by the other writers. And he records four prayers which are not found elsewhere. It is with one of those that we begin.

Zachariah the Priest

Zachariah, one of the priests who served in the Temple, was chosen by God to be the father of John the Baptist. Zachariah's wife Elisabeth was related to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both of John's parents were old, childless, and well past the time when it might be expected they would have children. Whilst Zachariah was serving in the Temple at Jerusalem, it was his duty to burn incense and whilst he was doing so he was visited by an angel.

The angel, whose name was Gabriel, later visited Mary to announce the birth of Jesus. He told Zachariah of the birth of a son, though the priest did not believe what he was told, and so was struck dumb until the baby was born. For nine months he could only communicate by signs or in writing, until they came to circumcise John when he was eight days old.

Naming the Baby



Elisabeth had insisted that the baby was to be called John, though it was not a family name. Zachariah, when consulted, wrote *"His name is John"* on the writing tablet he had asked for. Then his speech returned, whereupon he uttered a most beautiful prayer. It is full of allusion to and quotations from the Old Testament, Zachariah's Bible. My Bible lists 11 different Old Testament quotations in the first verse alone. This is another of those pointers that shows we cannot really understand the New Testament without the Old.

Zachariah takes us back to the time of King David, the ancestor of the Lord Jesus, and talks of the mercy promised to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob, the ancestors of the whole Jewish people. He remembers God's covenant with Abraham, and ponders the way God can be served in holiness and righteousness without fear. Here's an extract:

*"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, **that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant** (Luke 1:68–72).*

Prophetic Words

Although this is a prayer, it is also a prophecy. Zachariah, the father of John, talks of the way that John would go before the Lord Jesus to prepare his way. This prediction comes from the prophet Malachi, who said: "I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1). John's special role was to point to the Lord Jesus as the One who should come, and he did so in the clearest possible terms when, early in his ministry, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

So this elderly first-time father continued his prayerful meditation by declaring the role that his son John would fulfil when he had grown to manhood:

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:76–79).

John's work would be as a herald, to introduce the Lord Jesus and between them the message of God's salvation would be declared to the world. Though he had not believed the angel's message at first, this prayer shows that Zachariah had thought long and hard during those silent months when he could not speak. Here was the message of "the forgiveness of sins", a great work of redemption which was to be accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ, John's successor.

Mark Sheppard

Coats of Arms



In Issue 1527, the photograph of the coat of arms printed alongside the article on page 9 ("Upon this rock...") was not the one for Peterborough. That was the Royal coat of arms which is displayed on the Guildhall, a photograph of which also appeared on the front cover of that issue, shown above (left).

The Editor apologises for that error and will try to brush up on his heraldry! The correct coat of arms for Peterborough is shown above (right).

Samuel - Prophet of the LORD

Samuel's mother had been childless for years. She prayed for God's help, bargaining that if God gave her a son, she would give him back to the Lord.

It is easy to forget a vow like that, made in extremity, but Hannah faithfully kept her word, and young Samuel entered the service of the Tabernacle under Eli, the high priest. The little Levite was a breath of fresh air in the decayed atmosphere of Israel's idolatry. Accepted as a prophet of the Lord, and later a Judge, he began a reformation after the death of Eli that would eventually result in the reign of godly David, Israel's greatest king.

But there was trouble ahead! The Philistines, a tough warrior people living on the western border of Israel, fought them and captured the holy Ark, symbol of God's presence. They had superior weapons, and oppressed the people for many years. Eventually the Israelites came to Samuel and asked him to appoint them a king. They had previously had God as their ruler (a government known as a theocracy) but now they wanted to be like the nations around them with someone who would lead them in battle.

Israel's First King

With God's permission, Samuel anointed Saul, a tall, vigorous man who successfully defeated the Philistines in a number of skirmishes. Unhappily, power went to his head and he became proud and self-centred, more concerned with the adulation of the people than the praise of God. It

was a disappointing start to Israel's monarchy. Eventually Samuel had the sad duty of informing Saul that he would be replaced by someone else, a man closer to God's heart. This made Saul intensely jealous, looking out for anyone who might challenge his office.

The choice of his successor was instructive. God sent Samuel to Bethlehem, the city of Ruth's grandson Jesse, telling him to anoint one of Jesse's sons. When the firstborn stood before him, tall and handsome, Samuel was sure this was the one. But God told the aged prophet:

"Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

This is an important principle and even after years of experience of human nature, Samuel had been caught out. For God chose David, the youngest son, because his heart was humble, and he had a living faith in God.

King in Waiting

David was destined for true greatness, but first had to suffer years of frustration and hardship at the hands of Saul. He came to public attention at the battle of the Valley of Elah, described in 1 Samuel chapter 17. The Philistines had a gigantic champion, Goliath, who challenged any Israelite to come across and fight him single-



Illustration from clipart.com

handed. David, though only a youth, was incensed to hear him shout curses at the God of Israel. Armed only with his sling and staff, he set off across the valley, confident that God would give him victory. With a skill honed by years of shepherding, he selected the one gap in Goliath's armour and sank a large stone deep into his forehead.

Promotion

David's valour propelled him to the position of head of the army, and he became the star of the day, to the envy of Saul, who now feared him as a rival. After several attempts on his life David was forced to flee, dodging Saul's spies and soldiers with a band of rebels who joined his ranks, hiding in caves and valleys in the mountains.

The story of his escapades, and his undiminished faith in God, occupies the last thirteen chapters of 1 Samuel. It is as gripping as any fiction writer could invent. At last the day came for God to fulfil His promise. Saul and his sons, including Jonathan, David's best friend, fell dead in the disastrous Battle of Gilboa, and the way was open for David to return from exile and take the throne.

The Second Book of Samuel begins

with David's coronation in Hebron by the people of Judah, his own tribe. His rule was constrained by the fact that some tribes were still loyal to Saul's son Ishbosheth, and his commander Abner. But after seven years the power struggle was resolved by the assassination of Ishbosheth, and David became king over all Israel. His first move, to unify the tribes, was to create a new capital in the centre of the country.

Jerusalem was well guarded by deep valleys and with a good water supply but David conquered it. Here he built a palace, and to his new capital he brought up the Ark from its long exile. The Philistines had left him alone while the country was divided, but now, perceiving him to be a real challenge, they launched a pre-emptive strike against his new capital, forcing him to flee. With God's help, David won two decisive conflicts in the Valley of Rephaim, ending permanently the ambitions of his fierce neighbours.

God's Covenant with David

The seventh chapter of 2 Samuel is really important. It contains a vital promise made by God to David, ranking alongside those earlier made to both Abraham and Eve. 500 years before, Moses had told the people that when they reached the Promised Land God would choose one of their cities as a permanent place of worship. Naturally, David hoped this would be his new capital, Jerusalem. To start things moving, he told Nathan the prophet he wanted to build a splendid temple for God.

Nathan told him that God was pleased with his offer, but it would be his son – a man of peace – who would be entrusted with the task. However, Nathan added, God had decided to

build David a house – not one made of wood and stone, but a kingly house or dynasty. One of David’s descendants would sit on his throne, he said, who would be not only David’s son, but God’s son too, and he would reign over God’s people for ever. The solution to this prophetic conundrum had to wait until the birth of Jesus, who was to be both David’s descendant and the Son of God.

Personal Tragedy

The record continues with David’s military successes against the surrounding nations, by which he came to control a huge area – from Lebanon to the border with Egypt. From this mountain top of human achievement, David was to fall very low. Lazing about on his palace balcony one night while his army was away attacking Moab, he saw a beautiful woman bathing herself outdoors, and desired to have her. To his dismay, she became pregnant and, having failed to cover up his actions, David callously wrote a letter to Joab, commander of the army, bidding him place her husband in the front line.

When Uriah was killed, David married his widow, Bathsheba. This certainly did not escape the eyes of the Lord. Months later Nathan the prophet trapped David into confessing by means of a parable. The depths of the King’s remorse are graphically penned in the words of his psalms:

“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight” (Psalm 51:2-4).

Bitter Aftermath

The baby died and, as Nathan had predicted, bloodshed tore apart David’s family from that day onwards. But his sin was forgiven. David was not normally an adulterer or murderer. We can take warning from the way power corrupts morals, and take comfort from the abiding mercy of God.

The next seven chapters of 2 Samuel spotlight the curse David had brought on his own house. His eldest son was murdered by Absalom, second in line to the throne. Absalom then plotted a coup against his own father, which he sprang without warning, forcing David to flee for his life. The rebellion almost succeeded, but ended when Absalom died in battle, allowing the grieving king to return to his throne.

The climax of 2 Samuel comes in the last chapter. David had been persuaded to take a census of his subjects, perhaps to be able to boast of his achievements. But God was angry with his people for their ungodliness, and sent a devastating plague. Dismayed, David called down the punishment upon himself, just as Jesus his descendant in later years would bear the sins of the people.

Fittingly, in that hour God revealed to the aged king the place where His altar and Temple were to be built. It was not in David’s city, as he had once hoped, but a little to the north on Mount Moriah. This was the place where long before Abraham had been prepared to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. And it was close to the spot where, much later in time, Jesus would be crucified, outside the city walls. Such is the precision with which God’s great purpose works out towards its planned outcome of grace and mercy.

David M Pearce

Part One

What Happens when you Ignore God?

There are all sorts of reasons why we ignore some people and pay attention to others.

Perhaps we're more interested in someone or something else; or we find some people boring, difficult to get on with, or too demanding. For whatever reason we decide some people are best avoided.

For Emergency Use Only!

In just the same way it is all too easy to ignore God. It is often very convenient to forget about Him altogether. Most people choose to do just that except... Yes, except when a member of the family is seriously ill; or the country is threatened by terrorists; or when something else goes seriously wrong. Then some people use God like a fire extinguisher! They regard religion as something which is: *"For use in case of emergency"*.

All of a sudden such people go to church! For the believer, however, God is the Creator and the continuing Sustainer of life. His power and majesty were, still are, and always will be, without equal. And He is the One who lovingly gave His only Son so that mankind might not perish but come to share God's immortality. Even some

believers forget God in the heat of the moment and behave as if they had never known Him, but when they come to their senses they know these things to be true.

Ignoring God

For many people today God just doesn't exist and never has. Life goes on quite well without having to bother about Him. They just accept the old saying: "God is in His heaven – if He's there at all! – and all's right with the world". The inference is that He should stay there and not interfere with their lives, thank you very much! One 19th century writer – Gerard de Nerval (1808-1855) – said rather poignantly:

"God is dead! Heaven is empty – Weep, children you no longer have a father".

For when people no longer believe in God they have no prospect of any future life and no hope of a benevolent Father who can help them through life.

Mankind is rather like the field mouse of the fable who thought that the cornfield, that happiest of environments for such a creature, had been made just for him. It came as a great surprise and a huge shock when in the distance he heard the whirring of the combine harvester and he realised for the first time that his comfortable world and indeed himself were about to meet what was for them an untimely end. Yes, you're right – the cornfield belonged to the Reaper.



At Your Peril!

The Bible tells us very clearly what happens to people who ignore or forget God. We will just look at a few Biblical examples of such persons and try to take to heart some of the lessons for ourselves.

❖ Noah's Ark

We begin in the first book of the Bible – Genesis. The men and women who God had created turned their backs on Him and His ways and followed their own interests and passions instead. God had warned them of the consequences (Genesis 2:17 & 3:17-19), but they took no notice. The earth should have been a paradise, like Eden, but sin had spoiled it and mankind lost it. Yet instead of trying to recover the situation by seeking to learn about God, things had gone from bad to worse until, at last, the earth was full of violence:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth ..." (Genesis 6:5-7).

The exhortation had always been, still is and always will be, to think of things that were true and honest, just and pure, lovely and of good report. We should think about God and try to think as God Himself thinks.

All however was not lost even then (see Genesis 6: 8-9). God chose a man whose life was indeed in step with His ways. That does not mean that Noah was faultless but that he did endeavour to think godly thoughts and

to live an upright life in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. God recognized this man as one of His and graciously, He made him and his family an offer of salvation from the universal destruction of the flood that was to come. Noah built an ark which saved eight people alive and a representative sample of animals, so that life on earth could start again.



Scaled-down reconstruction of Noah's Ark in Schagen, Holland

Photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia

Noah warned men and women of the coming destruction but sadly no one heeded his message. His contemporaries had completely turned their backs on God, living self indulgently: all just for the moment. In fact the situation was very much like today in the western world. People didn't want to know and they perished because of that ignorance. We should learn from their failure.

❖ Lot

Later in the same book we read of Abraham who, despite his faults, is described in the New Testament as "*the friend of God*" (James 2:23). He had a nephew named Lot who lived in the city of Sodom the remains of which, together with that of its twin city Gomorrah, are thought to lie beneath the waters of the Dead Sea. The citi-

zens of Sodom were even worse than Noah's contemporaries and reaped their own reward (2 Peter 2:6,7,9). Their immoral behaviour was such that the name "Sodom" has entered the English language to describe unnatural acts amongst men.

When Abraham was told that God was going to destroy the city where his nephew was living he pleaded with the angel for the people of the city, finally requesting that if there were ten righteous people living there, the city should be spared. But there were not even ten people who had turned their faces towards God, so those cities were destroyed by what we believe was some form of earthquake and landslide (see Genesis 19:24-25). Lot and some of his family were saved from the conflagration. Sadly, his wife looked back with longing at her home town and was caught up in the destruction. Again it was a case of some finding grace in God's sight, as had Noah, and others looking in the wrong direction.

❖ **Israel**

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation and its history is full of examples of men and women who sadly turned their backs upon God. Individual kings like Saul and Ahab were spiritual failures and even priests, like Eli's sons, were sadly lacking. Eventually the whole nation turned away from God:

Our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and turned their backs on Him (2 Chronicles 29:6).

Moses had warned their forefathers when they were about to enter the Promised Land that they must be obedient or suffer the consequences

(Deuteronomy 28:1-5,63-67). It was clear enough – that they could either choose blessing or cursing – and that the gracious mercy of God would still be extended towards those who repented of their evil ways and turned back to Him:

For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him (2 Chronicles 30:9).

Things were repeating themselves and the same pattern was emerging. Yet the Old Testament prophets always spoke of some who would return to the Lord (see Ezekiel 6:8-10). The punishments of God were never thought up at the last minute in a fit of rage as it were, as with man's thoughts of vengeance, but were the natural consequences of disobedience coming from God's sense of righteousness and holiness.

No Compromise!

There can be no compromise between righteousness and unrighteousness, between holiness and profanity. The punishments came as a consequence of the curse upon mankind made in Eden, but they were always intended to encourage some to turn back to God, and often some people did just that.

Now the challenge has come to our generation. Will we pay God and His message the attention they deserve, or will we turn away, as so many have before? It's a vital issue for each of us.

Trevor A Pritchard

To be concluded

A Cure for a Terminal Disease

All children are naughty from time to time, and parents sometimes struggle to conceal their amusement at a child's disobedient behaviour. In contrast, the Almighty Father does not find it amusing when we do wrong.

God Hates Sin

The Book of Proverbs contains a list of things which God hates:

These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

- ✓ a proud look,
- ✓ a lying tongue,
- ✓ hands that shed innocent blood,
- ✓ a heart that devises wicked plans,
- ✓ feet that are swift in running to evil,
- ✓ a false witness who speaks lies, and
- ✓ one who sows discord among brethren

(Proverbs 6:16–19).

This is very strong language to say that God hates something. Today, when society tends to emphasise the inherent goodness in people and the desirability of self-expression, some items on this list may not seem very serious. But the Bible teaches that sin is extremely serious.

Sin is 'falling short of the mark' – not doing what God wants, whether or not this is deliberate. The idea is expressed in Romans, where the apostle Paul says that:

all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

As he states later in the same letter: *"The wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23).*

Terminal Illness

It follows that, because of sin, we are all terminally ill. If we had a close friend or relative with a terminal illness we would be sad. We would look for ways to help them, and if we could find them a cure we would. Then we would be at great pains to ensure that the instructions were followed to the very last detail. As terminally ill sinners we do not know how long we have to live, but we all know that unless the Lord Jesus returns first, we will surely die. The Bible makes this very clear. It also has lots of lessons to teach us about how God views sin.

Some of these are in the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. This was the God-given law for the nation of Israel. Since the death of Jesus we are not required to follow its regulations, but many of its lessons are still important today. As the apostle Paul said:

Whatever things were written before were written for our learning... (Romans 15:4).



Leprosy

The Law of Moses, specifically Leviticus chapter 13, contains detailed instructions about leprosy. There were several types of skin disease, some of which would heal, but chronic leprosy was a terrible affliction for which there was seldom any hope of a cure. Someone with such leprosy was considered unclean or defiled. A case of suspected leprosy had to be inspected by the priest, and a detailed set of examinations by the priest yielded a diagnosis. If the disease was confirmed the person had to tear his clothes, bare his head and cry *'Unclean! Unclean!'* (v45).

Lepers had to dwell outside the camp of the Israelites away from non-lepers whom they could contaminate (v46). Consequently, they lived away from their families and could not take part in the religious ceremonies of the nation. In effect they were separated from God himself. It is difficult for us to imagine the implications of this verdict. The person was repulsive to himself and to others.

Leprosy was like a living death. In the rare event of a leper being healed there was a detailed ritual to be followed to restore the person to the congregation of Israel (Leviticus chapter 14). In the New Testament, Jesus did miraculously heal some lepers, and told them to go and show themselves to the priests (Luke 17:14) so that they could be declared 'clean'.

A Permanent Cure

Leprosy teaches us about sin. Sinfulness is at least as repulsive to God as leprosy was to Israel. In God's sight, sinners are unclean and defiled, under a death sentence, are able to contaminate other people and are alienated

from God. If we do nothing about our condition then we have no hope – we are effectively without God in the world. We ourselves are powerless to remove the sentence of death, but God has provided a way by which we can be saved.

This is a remarkable offer of complete remission from our terminal disease: a hope of eternal life instead of death. Here's the apostle Paul again: *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life"* (Romans 6:23). We cannot earn this gift and we have to accept the terms under which it is offered. God has told us that we need to believe on the Lord Jesus and try to live as he did. The apostle Paul describes this as killing the *'old man'*; putting on a *'new man'* (Colossians 3:9-10) and living *'in Christ'* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"Read all about it!"

We are all dying but the cure is available; it is real and genuine. The terms are very clearly laid down in the Bible. As the apostle says when comparing the Old Testament law and the gospel in Christ:

We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, (Hebrews 2:1-3).

We are foolish if we ignore any detail of God's offer. It is a matter of life and death.

Anna Hart

Bible Symbolism

People who are new to the Bible often ask “Why does the Bible use so much symbolic language?” What they really mean is “Why doesn’t it just say what it means?”

These are interesting questions that have equally interesting answers. The fact is that we are so familiar with symbols of many kinds that we may not even realize that they are symbols. For example, all the letters on this page are symbols, and before we were able to read we had to learn the meaning of each of them – A B C and so on. In a similar way, all numerals are symbols, yet we are so familiar with numbers that we do not often think of them as such.

Picture Language

But you may say: “Why does the Bible use such symbols as wild animals, or trees or rainbows, when something quite different is intended?” Think for a minute about your own use of language. You may remember saying to a friend: “Don’t be a cheeky monkey!”, or “He eats like a horse!” This is symbolism as it is used today, and we don’t have any real difficulty in understanding what is meant.

Now think of the lovely symbolism used by Jesus when he said:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

This sort of symbolism is a sort of pictorial shorthand, which conveys a lot of ideas in a few words. The word-picture describes Jesus as a leader, and his followers as his sheep. A good shepherd cares for his sheep, leads them to good pasture, rescues those

in trouble, and keeps predators at bay. Compressed into the simple symbol of a shepherd is a very comprehensive message about the character of Jesus, and his relationship to his followers, without spelling it all out in detail.

Another Picture

Another symbol used by Jesus was something that everybody knew about.



I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

His hearers would know that a grapevine is only grown for one purpose – to produce fruit. But the grapes are all formed on the branches, while the branches all receive their sap and nourishment from the main stem of the vine. The vine is not grown for any other purpose than getting lots of juicy fruit.

Jesus was pointing out that the branches must keep their attachment to the vine or they would die and never produce fruit. Again this simple symbolism says a lot in a few words and, as we have seen, the use of such language in the Bible makes Bible study quite fascinating.

John V. Collyer

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