

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1531



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Bible Versions and Bible Study – page 5
A Thief in the Night – page 16

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

M11

1531



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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Bible Versions

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Keep Hanging On!

Every day we say things which are not to be taken literally. If we're not feeling well, we might say that "We're under the weather" or that we "Feel like death". That's just a colourful way of expressing our feelings, and everybody understands that.

Literal or Figurative?

Sometimes metaphors are used which have a quite different meaning when applied literally. We might say that "My heart stopped when I saw it!", when we really mean that we were very shocked at something we had seen. But in a hospital ward that same phrase would have a crash team running, in the hope they could get the stopped heart working again.

Or take the expression "Keep Hanging On", which is the sort of advice you would give to someone who is thinking of giving up in a difficult situation. It might be that at work their best efforts are not recognised, or they don't get on with the boss. They might respond by saying "I'm hanging on by my fingernails", which means that they are on the point of giving up, but they haven't quite decided to do so.

Apply that language to rock climbing, however, and both expressions take on a very different significance. Hanging

on is of the essence of the sport and when the rock face is difficult, sometimes it might feel as if you are just hanging on by your fingernails. But that is better than the alternative, especially if you are free climbing, without the support of a rope or other accessories.

Trying Times

When God created the world He formed a paradise in Eden and life was good. Everything in the garden was fruitful and it could have stayed like that. Fertility and fruitfulness would have spread much further afield as the population grew and human society advanced. But it was not to be.

Adam and Eve disregarded God's law and made their own choices, so they were expelled from the garden and life became harder for everyone. It was a deliberate act on God's part to make life more difficult because He wanted to help people understand that if they turned to Him they could find a better and more rewarding life. This is how the apostle Paul expresses that in his letter to the believers at Rome:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ... For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now (Romans 8:18–22).



God has engineered a situation which now enables us to look to Him for salvation, given that we can now see that there is no other way out of the muddle, confusion and hardship of life without God. And how has God engineered this situation? He has let mankind loose to govern His world without divine intervention, until that time when God will again take control.

World in a Mess

The financial chaos that now exists is the product of unchecked greed and human recklessness. Individuals, families and nations have been living beyond their means, everyone being encouraged to borrow more than they could afford, and to live on credit. With a crisis in the Eurozone, the dollar under some pressure now that the US credit rating has been downgraded, and with the threat of some nations having to default on their debts, commentators are now warning that another banking crisis is a possibility. And that crisis is one of many around the world as human society staggers on from one disaster to another.

Hard times have been experienced in the past, of course, and if the Lord Jesus remains away there will be worse times to come. But these things only really hit home when they affect us directly. We know how an illness can devastate a continent, just as the AIDS epidemic swept through Africa. But it is when we are told we have cancer, or when someone in our family dies of it, that the problem of illness and disease really hits home. And when medicine cannot help there is only one real answer.

Divine Physician

Jesus was once being challenged by religious authorities in Israel who were

trying to prove him wrong and this is what he said to them:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17).

Those people thought they were cleverer and better than Jesus so did not come to him to be saved from sin. They didn't think they needed help. Instead, they thought he needed their help and guidance! But Jesus had come to save sinners, if only they would recognise their sin and repent. That offer still stands, but so does the precondition. We will only go to a doctor if we think we are sick and we will only come to Jesus if we think we are sinners, in need of salvation. He can heal us from our deepest sickness, the one that is natural to our human condition – the sickness of sin. For God's purpose is to change our natures and to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns to take over the rulership of the world:

Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself (Philippians 3:20–21).

We need to be patient as we await the glorious Second Coming of Jesus; but both the promises of Scripture and the mess the world is in assure us that he is indeed coming to reign. We should not lose heart but need to keep hanging on, believing and acting in a way which is pleasing to God.

Editor

Bible Versions and Bible Study

In the days of the Lindisfarne Gospels monks wrote between the lines of Latin text and those writings are known as 'glosses'.

Photo courtesy: Wikipedia



They were not translating the text but attempting to express in English what the Latin text said. The King James Bible translators produced, as far as they were able, a literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek text. Modern Bible versions have departed from this method of translation.

Different Methods

The methods used by translators fall into three main categories. They may be known as:

- 1 Literal or word-for-word translations,
- 2 Paraphrase versions or,
- 3 Interpretations.

Other descriptions are sometimes used to explain the method or methods of translation used, for example, 'complete equivalence' for a literal translation, and 'dynamic equivalence' for interpretation.

We need to be aware that some Bible versions are produced by a mix of translation methods. They may be a mix of two or all three methods of translation. Reading the preface to a Bible can be useful in finding out the translators' brief. Bibles that are the product of paraphrases or the work of interpretive methods distance us from what God recorded for our instruction and learning.

The Word of God

We must be aware that reliance on Bibles which interpret God's Word puts us totally in the hands of those who do the interpreting. Their opinion of what God has left on record may be correct or it may not, but we have no way of knowing for ourselves. On the other hand where the translators have followed a word for word translation strategy of the Hebrew and Greek text, we are nearer to understanding what God has recorded for us through His inspired writers.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the land God promised to them, they paused between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal to hear the Word of God read to them. The Bible record emphasises for us the importance of all the Words of God being read to them, nothing was left out.

Afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them (Joshua 8:34–35).

Jesus confirmed the importance of reading every word that his heavenly Father spoke. In response to one of the three temptations, Jesus said,

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

If it was important for Israel, that all the Words of God were to be read, then choosing Bibles that are the most literal translations means that we will get nearer to understanding the whole of God’s counsel for living our lives.

Which Translation is best?

To compare Bible versions we can group them across a spectrum from

literal to paraphrase. Much of this information can be gleaned from reading the Bible Preface.

We can compare the merits of the methods used by the translators in the chart opposite. The more literal a Bible translation is, the nearer we are to understanding what God actually said.

Bible Study

Different Bible versions have a useful place in Bible study. However, we must be aware of the approaches to translation taken by the translators. If we want to know what God has declared for our learning to prepare for the coming Kingdom of God, then we must recognise the importance and value of a literal word-for-word translation of the Word of God.

The 1611 King James Bible is a literal translation which has been the vehicle for proclaiming the truth of God’s Word throughout the world for 400 years. Today it remains the key to understanding the truth that was preached by Jesus and the Apostles in the first century.

More Literal	←————→	Less Literal
Translate what is recorded	Mixture of translation & interpretation	Interpretation or paraphrase
King James Version (1611)	New American Standard Version (1971)	New English Bible (1970)
New King James (1982)	New International Version(s) (1978 and 2010)	Living Bible (1971) Message Bible (2002)
Young’s Literal translation (1863)	English Standard Version (2001)	Amplified Bible (1964)
Revised Version (1885)	Revised Standard Version (1952)	Good News Bible (1976)

More Literal	Less Literal
Translates what is said.	Translates, interprets or paraphrases what is thought to be the meaning.
Limits scope for translators' bias.	Allows more scope for interpreters' bias.
Retains original language style & idiom.	Adopts reader's language style & idiom.
Enables serious Bible study. Can investigate words, themes and develop our understanding of God's Word.	Can be helpful in initial understanding of Bible narrative but inhibits development of Bible study.

An Example : Abraham

Using some Bible tools we will find out why Abraham was an important person in the purpose of God and the lessons his life holds for us. Useful questions to ask when exploring Bible characters: Who were they? What did they do? When and where did the event occur? And, most importantly, what are the lessons for us? Using a Strong's Concordance, Young's Concordance or one of the freely available PC software packages or online access to a Bible Concordance, we can find the first reference to Abraham in the Bible.

✚ Who was Abraham?

Genesis 17:5

We learn that "Abraham" was the name that God gave to a man called "Abram". Abraham means "father of many nations". When God gives someone a name it is because they have an important part to play in His plan and purpose. We can now look up "Abram" in the Concordance to discover more about his origins and way of life. The first time Abram is

mentioned is Genesis 11:26. He was one of three sons born to Terah.

✚ What did he do?

Genesis 12:1-4

God called Abram to leave his house, country and relatives and to go to a place that God would show him. He set out not knowing the destination! Such was his trust in God's guidance and care.

Abram was a man of great faith, he believed, without reservation, what God said He certainly would do.

Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:5-6).

✚ Where did he live?

Genesis 11:31

Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees. He was called by God to leave his home comforts and start on a journey that would lead him to the

land that God promised him. He journeyed north following the river Euphrates to Haran. When his father Terah died, God guided Abraham down into the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to him and his children. He continued his travels and went further south into Egypt (Genesis 12:9-10). God then called him out of Egypt to settle in the land of Canaan.

✚ What did God promise?

God promised Abraham that he would live for ever in the land that God would give him.

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "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).

Using a Concordance we can find the Bible references to the places where Abraham lived and mark them on a map. We can then see that Abraham obeyed God, he never again left the land God promised him. He did literally walk the length and breadth of the land living a nomadic life in tents to the day of his death. He now rests in the grave until the day of resurrection when God will give him the land promised to him.

Now, how do those things affect us, if at all? In the next article in this series, God willing, we will see how the promises God made to Abraham really matter to us.

Peter Moore

Next month: God's Word and You

Genesis 13:3,14-17	Abraham was between Bethel and Ai when God told him to walk the length and breadth of the land He had promised to him for ever.
Verse 18	He moved (South) to Hebron or Mamre.
Genesis 14:14	He pursued Lot's captors to Dan (North) and rescued him from an invasion force that descended on the land.
Genesis 18:1	The LORD appeared to Abraham at Mamre.
Genesis 20:1	Abraham moved (South) between Kadesh and Shur. Then moved to Gerar (West).
Genesis 21:33	Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba (South) then in land of the Philistines (West)
Genesis 22:2, 19	Went to the land of Moriah (Jerusalem-see 2Chronicles 3:1) to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord then returned to Beersheba (South)
Genesis 23:2	Went to Hebron again where Sarah died.
Genesis 25:6-7	Near the end of his life Abraham sent his sons Eastward. He died and was buried at Hebron with his wife Sarah.

Preparations

Towards the end of every year many people are busy making some kind of preparations for Christmas.

They may be preparing to visit or entertain relations or friends. They may be engaged in decorating the house, or busy buying and wrapping presents. In the midst of all this hustle and bustle, how many people spare a thought for the event that really lies at the heart of Christmas?

Unique Event

Luke tells us more about the birth of Jesus than any other gospel writer, including the timing of the event:

It came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered (Luke 2:1).

To comply with this requirement Mary and Joseph had to journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a round trip of some 130 miles undertaken when Mary was in the last stage of her pregnancy. From her knowledge of the Scriptures she would realise that this was the hand of God and the way in



which the prophet Micah's words would be fulfilled, for he had said, some 600 years earlier:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

Tough Conditions

The only transport was a donkey – hardly a comfortable ride at the best of times and the journey would take over a week.

- ❖ Could Joseph afford that time away from his work?
- ❖ Were there relatives on the way who would provide a night's free lodging? Perhaps they had heard rumours concerning Mary and Joseph and would be unwilling to welcome them.
- ❖ What other preparations would they have to make?
- ❖ Would they have to take their own food?
- ❖ Could the donkey forage enough along the way?
- ❖ Suppose the baby was born, had they enough clothes?

We know from the gospels that the journey did take place and so did the birth. But this was no ordinary birth, as the gospels and many Old Testament prophecies make abundantly clear. This was the most significant birth of all time. It was nothing less than the gift of the Almighty Creator, God



Himself, of His only begotten Son. The very purpose of his birth was to bring to mankind the knowledge of God's plan and to provide the means of carrying forward that purpose.

Christ's Mission

How many people in their preparations for Christmas have this purpose in mind? Jesus began his public ministry at about the age of 30. In the synagogue he was asked to read and chose a passage from Isaiah which explained the work he had come to do, the very reason for his birth and life:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

The whole ministry of Jesus was about putting those words into practice. But at the end of his life his work had still hardly begun. There were still many broken-hearted people; many poor who hadn't heard the gospel; many captives waiting to be set free; many blind people wanting to see; and many who were oppressed. And there still are many such people.

Did that mean that the whole life of Jesus had been wasted? Did it mean that it was all a colossal hoax, or a

monumental failure? Emphatically NOT!

Victory Achieved

Three days after his appalling murder Jesus was raised from the dead and his despondent disciples were reinvigorated. Commissioned by Jesus to preach the gospel in all the world, they spent the rest of their lives doing just that – preaching a gospel that is needed today as never before. Many earnest believers nowadays pray for a time when mankind will recognize and accept the way of Jesus and through this gradual spread of the gospel the promised Kingdom of God will gradually come about. A little reflection on the history of the world and the current state of world affairs is enough to show that something far more radical is needed to solve the problems that face us.

The one event that will bring this about is what was promised all those years ago: namely the Second Coming of Jesus to this earth. When he comes again it will not be as a baby in a manger, but as the risen, immortal, authoritative Son of God. He will come with power and great glory to overthrow the tyrannical and oppressive regimes of men and to establish the justice, righteousness, and peace which this troubled world so sadly needs.

So in the midst of all the frantic preparations for Christmas, just stand back and ask yourself if you have got your priorities right? What sort of preparations should we be making for that most momentous event of all time – the return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ?

J. Michael Buckler

Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther – The Restoration

Judah and the surrounding nations groaned under the control of Babylon. To outward appearances, the gods of Babylon had proved stronger than the God of Israel. But the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah had insisted that the fall of Jerusalem was God's punishment for the unrepented sins of His people. And they promised that a merciful God would one day restore them to the land again. Jeremiah actually named a time period:

“Thus says the Lord”, he wrote “after seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. (Jeremiah 29:10).

Exile and Return

Nebuchadnezzar helped his father destroy the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 612 BC. He became sole ruler in 605 BC. His mighty kingdom stretched from Egypt to Iran. But it collapsed overnight with the capture of Babylon by Cyrus king of Persia and Darius the Mede in 539 BC. That is pretty close to 70 years. And guess what? In his first year Cyrus issued an amnesty, permitting the Jewish captives in Babylon to go home, as described in 2 Chronicles 36:21-23. If you wish to confirm this, his decree which authorised the return of captives can be seen in the British Museum in London. Bible prophecy is amazingly accurate!

The next two books – Ezra and



Nehemiah – describe the Return. There was great joy and excitement among the exiles as the families listed in Ezra chapter two agreed to go back and rebuild the Temple. But the hardships that faced them when they got there – ruined houses and fields overgrown with decades of weeds – dampened their enthusiasm.

They laid the foundation of a new temple, but then the work stopped. In the Book of Ezra, chapter four lists the opposition they faced from Gentiles (non-Jews) who had enjoyed the use of their land during their absence. It was twenty years later, and it was only with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah that the temple was completed.

Ezra's Visit

Ezra himself came on the scene for the first time in the seventh chapter of the book bearing his name, some 58 years later still (around 458 BC). He led a second wave of émigrés from Babylon.

His mission was to improve their spiritual state by teaching them the Law of Moses, and persuading the Persian king, Darius, to back his mission.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel (Ezra 7:10).

His enduring phrase is *“The hand of the Lord my God was on me”* (7:28) as he went about trying to improve the spiritual state of the nation. Religious reform was urgently needed as there was the danger that Israel’s understanding of God’s purpose would be mixed up with the false worship of the nations around. This was made more likely because many Israelite men had married women from those nations. Ezra encouraged them to end those relationships and return to the worship of the one true God.

Nehemiah the Governor

Eighteen years after Ezra arrived at Jerusalem, Nehemiah, an important Jew in the court of the Persian king, learned of the dilapidated state of Jerusalem and like Ezra, begged leave to go there and rebuild the broken walls and gates. This was during the reign of Artaxerxes, in 444 BC. Answering his prayer, God softened the heart of the king, and he set off with authority to buy materials and complete the repairs. His short book is a gripping read, written as an autobiography. It records his tenacity and courage as he overcame one obstacle after another.

Jerusalem was cluttered up with a century of accumulated rubble. There were plenty of Gentile enemies who did not want to see Jerusalem rebuilt. They tried every way of stopping the work, including threats of assassina-

tion, and there were the inevitable grumbles from the builders. It is good to see Ezra working alongside Nehemiah on the Day of Atonement following the completion of the walls, leading the worship, and teaching the Law of Moses.

“They read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God”, says the chronicler, “and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading”g (Nehemiah 8:8).

It is a good example of the importance of public Bible reading, and a tribute to the faith of the two men. It shows that with God’s help we can accomplish great things.

Esther the Queen

The last of the historical books is Esther, the story of a young Israelite girl who married Xerxes, a famous king of Persia. Her time period fits into the middle of the book of Ezra – around 486 BC. Xerxes (or Ahasuerus) is best known for his prodigious wealth, and for a disastrous expedition to subdue the growing menace of Greece. The opening chapter describes a six-month long festival in his palace at Shushan to entertain the governors of his 127 provinces (possibly to prepare for the military tour).



At the end of this time he fell out with his wife and was advised to divorce her and find a replacement. It was during a nation-wide search for suitable young ladies that Esther came to his attention, and was chosen to be queen. She was an orphan, brought up by her older cousin Mordecai, who worked in the king's service. He warned her not to reveal her family and her nationality.

The story progresses with delicious ironies. Mordecai rescued the king from an assassination attempt, but then fell out with the king's favourite, Haman, who was descended from Israel's long-time enemies the Amalekites. In revenge, Haman persuaded the king to annihilate a group of awkward subjects (he failed to mention they were the Jews). Mordecai called on Esther to use her influence with the king to save her nation, for this would also have led to the destruction of the community of returned exiles in Jerusalem.

Royal Invitation

Fearful, Esther asked the king to a private banquet where she could do something to help her people. Haman came too, bragging to his family of the great honour to have been invited to

the Queen's banquet. Esther invited them to return the next evening, when she promised to tell the king her request.

Overnight, the king discovered that Mordecai had not been rewarded for saving his life, and turned to Haman to ask him how to reward a good friend of the king. Haman, mistakenly thinking he was the man in mind, found himself leading his greatest enemy on the king's horse round the city, with people bowing before Mordecai. That evening Esther revealed she herself and her people had been condemned to death by Haman! Furious, Xerxes had him executed, and promoted Mordecai to be his second-in-command.

The decree that Haman had issued could not be revoked under Persian law. But with a second decree, Mordecai and Esther effectively countermanded the first by giving the Jews, normally a subject people, the right to take arms to defend themselves against any enemies on the very day chosen for the holocaust. Jews celebrate the victory over wicked Haman to this day all over the world in the Feast of Purim.

David M Pearce

MORE HISTORY MILESTONES

Here are some more landmarks for the Bible story:

1000 BC	586 BC	539 BC	522 BC	486 BC	458 BC	444 BC
KING DAVID	FALL OF JERUSALEM	FALL OF BABYLON AND CYRUS' RETURN	TEMPLE COMPLETED	ESTHER	EZRA RETURNS	NEHEMIAH RETURNS

The Example of Jesus

One of the characteristics of Luke's gospel is that he focuses our minds on the way in which the Lord Jesus was a man of prayer. He records incidents which also appear in the other gospel accounts, but adds detail to show how often the Lord Jesus prayed.

Jesus' Baptism

The first time that occurs is at the time of Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan. Luke tells us:

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).



It would appear that Jesus was still in the water, praying to his Father, when there was a highly visible answer. He received the gift of the Holy Spirit in a

way which made it obvious to all who were there, and also this special commendation by the Lord God. He had always been God's Son, of course, but now he was commended for his obedience to God's will. We are not told the subject of his prayer, but his baptism came at the start of the ministry of Jesus. It would be very likely, therefore, that his prayer was that his ministry would be blessed by God, that God would be with him and watch over his work during the next three years.

Jesus' Ministry

The rest of his ministry was clearly punctuated by prayer. We are not told of all the occasions, but Luke reports enough for us to realise that prayer was a constant part of Jesus' life. That is not really very surprising. The Lord God was Jesus' Father and that they would wish to talk to one another is only natural. Once, after Jesus had healed a leper we are told that this provoked great crowds to come and hear him, no doubt expecting to see another spectacular miracle, but his action became typical: He himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16).

In those lonely parts he would be able to pour out his heart to his Father, to seek and receive guidance for all that he was doing and for what lay ahead. These were moments he treasured, but he had to work hard to find them. Not for him the excuse that he did not have time to pray, rather a steely determination to pray whenever it was right to do so, and whenever he needed to listen to his Father.

Messiah!

A little later Luke says:

He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12).

There is no record of which mountain, but a little later he delivered the Sermon on the Mount, so it is perhaps the same one. This particular prayer was just before Jesus selected twelve of his followers who were to be the twelve apostles. It would have been a difficult choice.

There were probably others whom he might have chosen, good men who would be faithful, but he worked through the decision with his Father. They included Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. Jesus knew one was required, and if it had not been Judas, another would have been needed. But that cannot have been an easy decision. The guidance and support of his Father would have been essential.

The disciples must have wondered sometimes about this preacher they had agreed to follow. Sometimes they interrupted his prayers, seeking reassurance.

It happened, as he was alone praying, that his disciples joined him, and he asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" (Luke 9:18).

Man Apart

This seems a little strange, if the disciples were with him, he was not truly alone. It suggests that Jesus was apart from the crowds, and that later he was a little way apart from the twelve. The answers they gave show that the public understanding of him was quite confused. Some thought him to be John the Baptist, others thought he was Elijah, others another of the

Hebrew Prophets. Peter knew who he was. He was, he said, the Christ – or Messiah – of God. Peter had watched and listened, and knew. It would not be long before it was fully revealed to him in a special way yet again.

It was about a week after this incident that again Jesus went up to a mountain to pray. This was the occasion of the transfiguration. Luke documents for us that it was “as he was praying” that the transfiguration took place. This seems to have been a moment to witness to the disciples who were present that this really was the Christ of God. It was also to provide an opportunity to strengthen Jesus himself for the work he was to do. Again there was another answer to prayer:

A voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear him!" (Luke 9:35).

The authority of Jesus was again established and we should pay careful attention to those words and listen carefully to what this man of prayer has to say to us.

Mark Sheppard



A Thief in the Night

Abi's new house was burgled. The thieves broke a window to get in. They stole all her jewellery, including her most treasured possession – an exquisite pearl ring which she had been given by her husband only a few weeks before he died.

She was devastated. Night after night she cried herself to sleep and even gave herself jaw ache by grinding her teeth in her extreme distress. It was impossible to get the ring back, and no amount of money from the insurance company would make up for the loss of something with such sentimental value.

Better Security

Most of all Abi was cross with herself because a workman had warned her that she needed better security on her windows. She should have understood this because – much to the surprise of her husband and herself – the house where she had previously lived with her husband had also been burgled, several years earlier. She had kept telling herself to get the problem fixed on her new house, but as time went on she became less concerned, almost complacent, and never got round to sorting it out. Now it was just too late.

Of course Abi knew that she could be burgled. She even knew that in this house she was at higher risk of that happening, but she never thought that she would be burgled that particular day. How she would have acted differently had she known!



Like a thief in the night

The apostle Paul says that when Jesus returns he will come like a 'thief in the night'. So he urges believers to watch and to be prepared:

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

Jesus himself gave a similar warning in a parable about his return. He says we shall be taken by surprise when he comes:

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched

and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:42–44).

Waiting!

We cannot know the day when Jesus will return. Jesus himself said that: “of that day and hour no one knows” (Matthew 24:36). He told a parable about ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). All ten were going to meet the bridegroom so they could escort him to the wedding, but only five had enough oil in their lamps. All ten slept and were taken by surprise when the bridegroom finally arrived. Five had spare oil to top up their lamps; the other five did not and those foolish ones were actually locked out of the wedding.

This means that some people who claim to be waiting for Jesus’ return have not actually prepared themselves enough and will be rejected by him. What a fearful prospect! Jesus says that for such people there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (see Matthew 24:51), and urges us to “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man [Jesus] is coming” (Matthew 25:13).

Treasures in Heaven

Abi’s pearl ring was her treasure, and it was lost. What is our treasure? Jesus says that the kingdom – the hope of eternal life – is the most precious thing we can have. He likens it to a pearl of great price for which a merchant sold all that he had.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he

had and bought it (Matthew 13:45–46).

Absolutely nothing can be more important than preparing ourselves for the return of Jesus. Moreover, Jesus assures us that no-one can steal this hope from us. He tells us to focus everything on pleasing God:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19-20).

Preparing Now!

When Jesus was here, the people wondered who he really was. They knew that the Christ (the Messiah), promised in the prophecies of the Old Testament, was due at about that time (Luke 2:25, 26 and Luke 3:15). But so few people recognised him as Christ and believed on him. We do not always learn from history. A German philosopher once said “*The one thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history!*”. Abi did not learn from her earlier experience and the same thing could happen again.

Two thousand years have passed since Jesus was on earth, and we can



easily become complacent and persuade ourselves that life will go on just as it always has. Nearly 2000 years ago the apostle Peter predicted that people would think like that, saying:

“Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: ... (2 Peter 3:4–5).

However, you should be in no doubt. Jesus will come!

Be Ready!

We cannot afford to be complacent. Tomorrow may be too late in what is a matter of life and death. Today is the day to start putting our lives right with God and for being ready for Jesus and the coming Kingdom of God. Abi lost her ring, but we do not want to lose our most precious hope. The list opposite shows the similarities between Abi’s experiences and our waiting for Jesus’ return.

Belief is not just an acceptance of Bible teaching. It requires us to do something (Matthew 24: 44). Jesus gives a severe warning about the effects of non-active belief. In another parable (Matthew 24:45-51), he says that the servant who says in his heart (i.e. as a secret doubt) ‘My Lord is delaying his coming’ will start to behave in an unacceptable way and then, Watch out!

The master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:50–51).

Abi was not prepared, even though she believed that she could be

burgled. She wept and gnashed her teeth at her loss. How much greater will be the distress of those rejected by Jesus at his return. We need to prepare ourselves – today!

The Parable Decoded

Abi had experienced burglary before, and was taken by surprise. The first time Jesus came many people did not recognise him as Christ, even though they knew that prophecies indicated that he was due about then.

- ✓ Abi had been warned that she was at risk of burglary. Jesus told us many times in the Bible that he will come back.
 - ✓ Abi knew she could be burgled at any time. We know Jesus could come any day
 - ✓ Abi did not believe she would be burgled that day. We may not believe that Jesus WILL come today, but we should be ready in case he DOES come today.
 - ✓ Abi lost her precious ring, and could not replace it. Those who are not ready for Jesus are rejected by him and lose the pearl of great price.
 - ✓ Abi was distraught. Jesus says that those rejected will weep and gnash their teeth.
 - ✓ Abi knew that it was her own fault. We will only have ourselves to blame if we are not ready for Jesus.
- Don’t let Abi’s mistake be yours. It was a Spanish philosopher who once said: *“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”.*

Anna Hart

The Jews in God's purpose

"You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "... that you may know and believe Me ... that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed..." (Isaiah 43:10).

God's ultimate purpose is to fill the earth with His Glory (Num 14:21). He chose the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, to play a special part in ensuring this will happen. Abraham was told that through him all families in the earth would be blessed. Abraham's descendent, the Lord Jesus Christ – a Jew – brought that about by taking away sin in his death and resurrection.

Special Nation

The Jewish nation had a vital part to play in executing God's plan. They were to be witnesses to God's existence and, as a nation, were to live in such a way that would demonstrate God's goodness and grace to all nations. To help this happen Moses was given a code of laws by God. By keeping those laws, Jews would reflect God's glory and righteousness for themselves and others. Sadly Old Testament history demonstrates that they did not properly carry out their part of the plan. They became such poor examples that eventually God removed them – for 70 years – from Israel to Babylon.

God said that He would exile the people for disobedience, but only for a while. He would also regather and restore them to their land. The New Testament gives the same message. (See Luke 21:24 and Romans 11:25-27.)

The nation was regathered at the end of the Babylonian period and again in 1948. This latest regathering was after an exile that lasted for almost 2000 years, an exile that was accompanied by consistent and appalling anti-Semitism and abominable attempts to annihilate them.

The continued existence of Jewish people in such circumstances bears powerful witness to the existence of God and to the fact that He always keeps His promises. The Bible also says that the re-establishment of the State of Israel is a precursor to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, for Jesus is to return to Jerusalem. When he takes over the rulership of the earth, by setting up God's Kingdom, he will progressively remove sin and death and make the earth a paradise once again. This, in turn, will bring about the fulfilment of God's glory in the earth, just as He has promised.

Promised Messiah

Jewish people have always believed that God would send them a Messiah. This Jewish Messiah can be the saviour of us all. Jesus was, and is, that Messiah. Today the Jewish nation is restored with Jerusalem as its capital city, but the role of the Jewish people in God's purpose is not yet finished. Watch the people of Israel and the Jews worldwide. They witness still to the existence of God and the certain coming of our salvation.

Cynthia Miles

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