

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1534



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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

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1534



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

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

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One step at a time

Climbing steps is easy enough when you are young and fit but not so easy when you're getting older and a bit stiff. Young people love to race up, partly to show what they can do at their age; older folk have learned that it's surprising what you can accomplish if you take things one step at a time.

Major Challenges

Life can present us with some formidable challenges. We might have a crisis with our health, or with that of someone close to us. We could lose our job; have to move home; make new friends or have to learn a new language. Sometimes we set ourselves these challenges, like wanting qualifications or a change of lifestyle. At other times we have no choice but just have to do the best we can.

Whatever the challenge, it is good advice to take things step by step: not to rush, but to approach the problem steadily. After all, if you were climbing up the steps shown on this month's front cover, wouldn't you want to linger a little and enjoy the blossom and the views?

In Bible times people were sometimes confronted by issues that were hard to resolve. The land of Israel once lay desolate for seventy years, its inhabitants having gone into exile. When their descendants returned, there was a lot to do. The family farms had been neglected and they had families to feed. The cities that had once been occupied had fallen into disrepair and the temple in which their fathers had worshipped had been destroyed by enemy action. They had to attend to first things first.

The Right Time

Building their homes was the first job for the returning exiles, to provide shelter for themselves and their families. Home improvements can consume a lot of our time and money and it was the same in those days, over two thousand years ago. Wanting a bit of extra comfort or making things look more presentable, some householders were lining their walls with cedar wood boarding, only to earn this rebuke from a prophet of God:

"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins? Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" (Haggai 1:4–5).

The prophet's point was that following God was to be their first priority. Unless they put Him first nothing would work out for them. If they attended to God's will as the first thing they did then everything else would fall into place under God's hand. This is exactly the point the Lord Jesus made as well when teaching those who wanted to follow him:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

All the things we really need will be supplied by God provided we make it our first priority to seek God's will and to live accordingly.

Commitment

Some people have difficulty making a commitment about anything. They don't get married because that's too

big a step and they might want to walk away from the relationship if things get tough. They don't get a permanent job because they prefer the option of short-term contracts: they might get bored doing the same job, or something better might turn up. They won't join a church congregation because they might have to get involved.

Such people prefer to be free agents, having no significant obligations or responsibilities. But people on the fringe of things never get to experience the enjoyment of those who have stuck together through thick and thin, good and bad times, happiness and sadness. And when it comes to church membership, they never really share in the fellowship of believers who worship together week after prayerful week.

Deciding!

But how do you make the decision that could prove life changing, when you find decision-taking difficult? You have to take it one step at a time. Making a small decision is the way to considering a bigger one, with God's help. It was so with the exiles who returned to the land of Israel back in Haggai's day. Encouraged by the promise that God would help them to settle back there, they began to build the Temple on its ancient site.

The words of God through His prophets stirred them up and they started to build (Haggai 1:14,15). They weren't especially skilled, but they did their best and when they had finished they were a bit downcast. For the Temple that had been on that site – built in the days of King Solomon – was one of the wonders of the ancient world, and the second Temple they had built was much less grand.

Doing our best

God does not ask the impossible; He only asks us to do our best. He sent Haggai to reassure them that He would see to it that the Temple would become glorious, for He would fill it with His presence. And He sent another prophet with a message which is exactly what we need to know as well. His name was Zechariah and this is what he said:

*“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. **For who has despised the day of small things...?** (Zechariah 4:9,10).*

Zerubbabel was the leader of the infant community at the time and he was overseeing the building work, from start to finish. What God wants us to understand is that our efforts might not amount to much, compared with the achievements of others, but they are acceptable in His sight, and that is all that matters. If God is with us we are bound to succeed.

Come to Jesus

Anyone contemplating establishing a life-changing relationship with Almighty God needs to come first to Jesus, for he is the self-declared way, through truth, to life (John 14:6) and nobody can come to God except by believing and being baptized into the saving name of Jesus. But that's a big step and you may be wondering where to start.

The answer is to start reading the Bible regularly – a bit at a time. Leave the rest to God.

Editor

The impact of new Bible Versions on Bible Teaching

The King James Bible is a literal translation and has been available for four hundred years but in the last 100 years many new versions have been produced. This proliferation of Bible versions has caused some confusion in understanding Bible teaching. The number of versions from which to choose has been increased by revisions of some of the new versions. There have been over 40 English language versions published since 1900. Why should this be?

Manuscript discoveries

a. New Testament Manuscripts

In the nineteenth century more Greek manuscripts were discovered and incorporated into a Greek New Testament text produced by Cambridge scholars, Westcott and Hort. The number of New Testament manuscripts now available to translators is well over 5,000. These manuscripts may be sorted into one of two groups.

- ❶ The majority of manuscripts (over 90%) are in agreement with each other and were found over a wide geographical area.
- ❷ A minority group of manuscripts differ from the majority.

The translators of many new Bible versions dip into both majority and minority manuscript sources. This has led to some significant differences in Bible teaching between versions. In addition, modern translation strategies allow a mix of literal and interpretive translation. This makes it difficult for

Bible readers to determine the status of the message being conveyed. Today many translators give high priority to the minority manuscripts which differ from the overwhelming majority of manuscripts.

b. Old Testament Manuscripts

Few Old Testament manuscripts were found before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. Hebrew scholars preparing new modern Bible Versions had the same manuscripts to work with as the King James translators. The Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the accuracy of the manuscripts used for the King James Version. There was also some progress in the understanding of some rare Hebrew words.

The outcome of all these changes is that we should compare Bible versions carefully so that we can be aware of any changes or shifts in Bible teaching that may be introduced by a version. To give an insight into the differences that result we will now compare the King James Version, being a literal translation, with other versions to see if there are changes in the teaching of the Bible.

Comparing Versions

❖ The Lord's Prayer

Many modern versions make significant changes to this much loved and important prayer, which brings together the key points for our understanding of the Christian's way of life and hope for the future.

King James Version	Other Bible Versions	Bible Teaching
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:13)	And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Today's New International Version)	The change of the phrase to <i>"deliver us from the evil one"</i> , introduces the idea that evil is a supernatural power.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matthew 6:13).	...Omitted from ESV, NIV, RSV and some other versions.	Removes from the Christian's prayer the hope for the future Kingdom of God.

The concluding lines of the Lord's Prayer (Matt.6:13) are omitted in some versions. However, the Apostle Paul recognised these words as part of the Lord's Prayer when he prayed:

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18).

❖ The human nature of Jesus

King James Version	Other Bible Versions	Bible Teaching
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2).	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2 ESV, NIV and NKJV).	This changes the Word of God from being His plan and purpose in the beginning to meaning he (Jesus) was with God in the beginning.
No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:18).	No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:18 NIV).	The omission of "begotten" removes the clear Bible teaching that Jesus' beginning was at his birth as recorded in the other Gospel accounts.
Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God (John 20:17).	Jesus said, 'Do not hold onto me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (John 20:17 NIV).	Jesus was to ascend to be with his Father. Returning to his Father implies that he had been with his Father in the past.

King James Version	Other Bible Versions	Bible Teaching
<p>...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God (Philippians 2:6).</p>	<p>He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God (Philippians 2:6 GNB).</p> <p>Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (Philippians 2:6 NIV).</p>	<p>Being in the “form of God” is not stating that Jesus was God. He was made in the image of God because he was the Son of God. These are significant changes that support a doctrine of Trinity that is not to be found in the Bible.</p>

These Bible verses are only a sample of the changes that have been made in some modern versions to promote the idea that Jesus existed with God from the beginning as part of a Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is not Bible teaching. However, each of the versions quoted above agree on one point in their translation of John 1:14. Jesus was born about 2,000 years ago and God’s Word or plan became flesh and he dwelt among the Jews in the first century.

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

Omissions

Translators usually provide a footnote to show where there are differences between the majority group of manuscripts and the minority manuscripts. This is not always the case and the reader may not be aware that some of the text has been omitted.

On the next page some of those omissions are listed and the impact this can have on Bible teaching is noted. The text being used is often a

pick-and-mix between different manuscripts, which sometimes seems a deliberate choice to support the doctrinal preference of the translator.

Enduring

The enduring influence of the King James Bible remains with us today. God’s Truth has not changed. The proliferation of new translations adds very little that is new to our understanding of the Gospel. Rather, there is a blurring of the clarity of the distinctive Bible teaching about the nature of Jesus and his relationship with God. All Versions of the Bible can have a place as aids to Bible study. God gave us His written Word so that successive generations can learn about His plans for the earth. We have a responsibility to preserve this message as faithfully as we can to the original inspired words and to pass it on to others to read and understand.

For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may

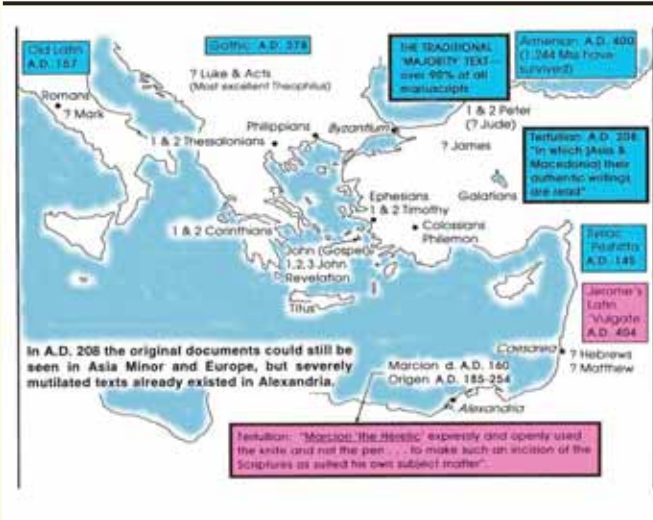
arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments (Psalm 78:5-7).

We pray that many more will read and come to understand the things which God has in store for those who love Him.

Peter Moore

The series is now concluded

King James Version	Other Bible Versions	Bible Teaching
<p>But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able (Matthew 20:22).</p>	<p>Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” (Matthew 20:22 ESV, NIV, RV and others). This omission is done with no apparent reference to the reason.</p>	<p>The link between Jesus’ death and baptism is omitted. The Apostle Paul understood this link when he describes baptism of the believer to relate them to the death of Jesus.</p> <p>Read, Romans 6:1-10.</p>
<p>Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God (Luke 4:4).</p>	<p>Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone (Luke 4:4 NIV).</p>	<p>The KJV translation includes the whole reference that Jesus makes to Deuteronomy 8:3. From this we understand that we must pay attention to every word of God.</p>



This map shows that the Bible texts on which the KJV translation is based come from those parts of the first century world which the apostles visited and the new texts – those used in more recent translations – come, by and large, from the area of Alexandria in Egypt.

Who is Jesus Christ?

There has been much controversy about the nature and character of Jesus Christ. It began in New Testament times when many people were asking who he was and where he came from. Once Jesus asked his disciples the question: “Who do you say that I am?” and it was Peter who answered correctly, that Jesus is the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Since then the question has been asked many times and has been answered quite differently in creeds and confessions.

In this series **Derek Vyse** looks at some of the creedal statements and then explains what the Bible really teaches.

A Brief History

The Apostles Creed (the oldest surviving confession of faith) uses simple language to explain who Jesus is:

1. *I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*
2. *I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.*
3. *He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.*
4. *He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.*

It was much later on that a controversy arose between two priests in the church at Alexandria, in Egypt. Arius and Athenasius worked there together and responded very differently to a sermon they heard. The Arian view was that “If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he [the Son] had his substance from nothing.”

Controversy

That controversy lasted for centuries

and was said to hinge on one Greek letter making the difference between a word meaning ‘of like nature’ (Arius) and another word meaning ‘of the same nature’ (Athenasius). It eventually resulted in the formulation of the Creeds relating to God and Christ.

The Nicene Creed (AD 450) introduced terms like “the Son Incarnate”. The Athenasian Creed (6th century AD) used very complex language to declare the belief that Jesus was “God the Son”. So, in the space of 600 years, a complete reversal of doctrine had taken place compared to the message that had been preached by the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By now the Creeds have been recited many times and are viewed as a fundamental part of established Christianity. But it should never be forgotten that they emerged as the result of great and sharp controversy using the full range of Greek philosophical methods which were applied to the interpretation of the New Testament.

These later Creeds were forced upon the established Churches. This is why a Bible scholar could say that *‘The doctrines of the Nicene and Athenasian Creeds find no part in the original Gospel. These Creeds would sound strange in the ears of the apostles Paul and John.’*

Bible Teaching

If we take a brief look at what the Bible teaches we can compare the various propositions that were negotiated in the Creeds with what the Bible actually says.

1. Was Jesus Co-Equal with God?

Nathan the prophet made this remarkable prediction concerning a descendant of King David, and he made it about one thousand years before Jesus was born of the virgin Mary:

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom ... I will be his Father, and he shall be My son (2 Samuel 7:12–14).

Now in the nature of things a father



exists in time prior to a son who is a descendent. And, humanly speaking, a Father is greater and a Son lesser. Was that the case in New Testament times? Listen to what Jesus said to those who suggested that he was making himself equal to God:

“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:29);

“You have heard me say to you, ‘I am

going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

Asked once about the timing of his return to earth as king, Jesus said:

“Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32).

Now in Heaven

If you think that this inferior status was only appropriate when Jesus was living on earth, note that, after his ascension to the Father’s right hand, the apostle Paul could say that the Lord Jesus:

...being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6–7).

And in describing the time when Jesus will return to establish God’s Kingdom on earth, the apostle describes the end of the Millennium in these words:

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

These sayings of Jesus and the inspired utterances of his apostles make it clear that Jesus was his Father’s Son and that he never once tried to claim equality with his heavenly Father but was subservient and obedient in all things. As the unnamed writer to the Hebrews said, Jesus had come to do his Father’s will (Hebrews 10:9) and he did it perfectly, being obedient in all things, even to the

extent of laying down his life (Philippians 2:8).

After his ascension to heaven, Jesus gave a prophetic forecast of events that must come to pass before his return, but notice how he describes this revelation:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants – things which must shortly take place (Revelation 1:1).

And when the apostle Paul explains the God-given order that should exist in a Christian congregation, where men should accept the responsibility for preaching the gospel, he can say without any qualification:

I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3).

So Bible teaching is quite clear. Father and Son are not part of a triune godhead of which they are co-equal parts. God is the Father who brought about the birth of Jesus when His power overshadowed the virgin Mary. Jesus is His Son who never claimed equality with his Father and who never will.

2. Was Jesus Co-Existent with God?

The people of Israel were given a fundamental truth when God spoke through Moses which is still at the heart of Judaism, and here it is:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

This belief in the Unity of God is a profound Old Testament truth and it appears to be at the heart of the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Followers of Islam are also convinced that Allah is One, not many.

Does the New Testament change this teaching, and introduce or make explicit that there is in fact a Trinity, not a Unity? Judge for yourselves when you look at these New Testament passages:

For us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6);

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

Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen (1 Timothy 6:14-16).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Unity not Trinity

These New Testament Scriptures make it clear that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments is entirely consistent. Throughout the Bible the message is that God is One, not three persons in one Godhead.

Derek Vyse
To be continued

The Sabbath

When I travel around various cities and towns I am fascinated on public Holy Days and Sundays to see the way people show their respect for the things they believe in such a prestigious and lavish way. The buildings in which they worship are beautiful and the people do their best to look sacred and silent, to try and capture the right religious atmosphere.

This style of presentation originated from Judaism, when the Sabbath Day – our Saturday – was kept as a holy day. Nobody was allowed to work or trade on the seventh day; instead it was to be a day that was different from every weekday.

Day of Rest

“Sabbath” is a Hebrew word which means “rest”; so the Sabbath day should be a day of rest. This instruction was given in very early times, right from the beginning. For when God created everything in six days, He rested on the seventh day, hallowed it and commanded everybody to honour it and to rest from doing work on that day:

On the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Genesis 2:2–3).

When Moses received God’s detailed law code, it included the command that the children of Israel were to adhere strictly to that idea of rest from labour. Anybody found profaning the Sabbath was to be cut off (Exodus

35:2-3). This law was enforced year after year and it was also applied to Israel’s holy days – like the Passover, Feast of Weeks and Tabernacles, and on many other occasions.

Failure!

As time went by, Israelites started to lose the true meaning of the Sabbath. For them the seventh day became the only religious day to be observed. Then they would try to serve God, but for the remaining six days they forgot all about religion. This prompted Almighty God to become angry and often He warned them about their behaviour and its unavoidable consequences. For example, He once sent this message:

I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her New Moons, her Sabbaths – all her appointed feasts” (Hosea 2:11).

If His people were not willing to keep the Sabbath and the feast days whilst they were in the land that He had given them, then God would allow their enemies to take them captive and they would then have no opportunity to keep any of them!

The prophet Isaiah conveyed a lamentation from God in which he said that the people had left serving Him in truth and were making plenty of sacrifices and offerings, but they were in vain. So, God said:

Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I

am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:13–17).

What God Wants

God does not want empty ceremonies when people look pious and make a show of their religion. What He wants is for people to be different so that they show by their behaviour that they believe what He has revealed and try to live in the right way before Him. In the same way, God does not want beautiful churches built, if the people who worship there do not read and understand the true message of the Bible. The prophet Amos condemned people who were just making a show of their religion, when their hearts were far away from God:

"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savour your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings (Amos 5:21–22).

What Jesus Said

It was the Lord Jesus who made the position absolutely clear. God did not institute the Sabbath because He needed rest but because we need to rest. Challenged by religious leaders who had made the keeping of the Sabbath nonsensical, by prescribing all sorts of manmade rules and regulations, Jesus said this:

"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28).

Jesus worked miracles on the Sabbath to demonstrate that what God wants for mankind is freedom from sin. This roused a lot of opposition but he did it to demonstrate that there is something more important than just keeping one day a week different. God wants us to find rest from Sin, and that was the great work that Jesus had come to accomplish. Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, calls people who are heavy laden and burdened by sin, so that he can give them rest. For Jesus is able to forgive us when we fail and to present us faultless in the presence of His Father:

"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Since Christ as "Lord of the Sabbath" can bring us rest, it follows that there is now no requirement for Christians to go on celebrating days; instead they should be serving Christ their Lord. The real meaning of Sabbath rest is that we should find our rest from sin in the saving work of Jesus.

Apostolic Teaching

The apostles all teach that rest from sin matters most and that the day on which we worship God is no longer important. The writer to the Hebrews says this about the rest that really matters:

We who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the

seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; and again in this place: “They shall not enter My rest.” Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience ... There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:3–11).

It is the rest from sin that matters not the observance of the day itself, as these Scriptures explain:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4);

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years (Galatians 4:9–10);

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (Colossians 2:16–17).

Divine Reality

The law God gave Moses no longer applies to followers of Jesus Christ because Jesus fulfilled that law. It is not necessary for Christians to keep strict Sabbath observance because every day should be a day when we rest from sin and follow the law of Christ, by loving one another. There were many things in the law that

looked forward to the coming of Jesus – the Sabbath included – but now that Christ has come we can see what these things were pointing to.

The Sabbath rest was intended to show mankind that we cannot achieve salvation by our own efforts, but that while we were helpless and inactive, because of sin, God sent His Son to save us. Jesus died and rose again to bring salvation from sin and when we are baptized into his saving name, we can be free from sin and death. That salvation is the gift of God and it is something we could never achieve for ourselves.

That is why first century Christians began to meet together on the first day of the week, not the seventh day. They met on Sundays to commemorate the death and the resurrection of Jesus, on the first day of the week:

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight (Acts 20:7);

On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come (1 Corinthians 16:2).

It's not the day that matters, but what we understand about God's salvation that really counts. For when Jesus returns he will bring perfect rest from sin and establish a worldwide Kingdom that will display the glory of God and bring peace and righteousness to our troubled world. That is the rest we should all be working hard to find, by the grace of God.

John Wabwile
Chelumuli, Kenya

To the very end

The prayers at the end of the Lord Jesus' life are particularly poignant and powerful in what they teach.

In the Upper Room Jesus inaugurated the remembrance of his death, known as the Lord's Supper. As he took bread, before he gave it to his disciples, we are told that:

When he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body' (1 Corinthians 11:24).



It was only a simple meal, but it was preceded by thanks. Jesus gave thanks again before he passed them the cup of wine. We should always give the Lord God thanks for all that he gives us, even the most basic of meals.

Intercession

A little later Jesus spoke to Peter and explained that he was going to deny that he knew Jesus. Then he added:

"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32).

Jesus knew that in those difficult moments at his trial Peter would deny that he never knew him. He also knew that later on Peter would be abjectly repentant for what he had done. So Jesus made it a matter of prayer that:

- ❖ Peter's faith would not fail, and also
- ❖ that Peter would recognise, when he had come through all his heartache, that he could use his experience to strengthen his brothers.

Peter's work for his Lord, recorded in the book of Acts, and his two letters which form part of the New Testament, show that Jesus' prayer was positively answered in this respect.

Gethsemane

After the meal, Jesus and his disciples left the Upper Room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. John's gospel records some of the conversation on the way, and another wonderful prayer by Jesus, both for his disciples and for those who followed them (John chapter 17). Luke only records the prayer on the Mount of Olives, when they reached the garden. Jesus went a little way from the disciples, and began to pray. The prayer clearly shows the conflict which was in his mind. He wished to be a dutiful and obedient son to his Heavenly Father, but he also dreaded the coming crucifixion.

"Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Jesus was not afraid to pour out his heart to his Father, to tell Him what he



would wish but having told his Father what he wanted, he then subjected his own desires to those of the Lord God. It seems one of the clearest demonstrations that, however alike they were, the Lord God and His Son, Jesus Christ were two totally distinct beings, and that like us, Jesus had to work desperately hard to bring his mind into subjection to God's.

The Lord God answered that prayer. He sent an angel to strengthen His Son, even though Jesus continued to pray that the cup would be removed. Presumably Jesus realized at some point during the prayer that the answer was "No": the cup could not be removed, and the only way he could fulfill his Father's will was to be crucified. But having been strengthened by the whole process, he was now ready for what he had to face.

On the Cross

So it was that the whole plan of God proceeded for our salvation. There were various sham trials – before the High Priest and the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate – but eventually Jesus was brought to the place of crucifixion. Even as they did so, Jesus continued to be a man of prayer and the prayers he then uttered are like a window into his spirituality.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

These words show an incomparably deep compassion for his fellow man. At a time when most people would have been thinking about themselves and their desperate situation, the Lord Jesus was thinking of others and praying for them! When he was about to breathe his last, Jesus prayed:

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last (Luke 23:46).

Everything in the life of Jesus was subject to the will of his Father and, having subjected his will totally to his Father's, he committed all things to Him.

Answered Prayer

On the third day the Lord God raised His Son. It was a glorious answer to his last prayer on the cross. Yet in his resurrected state, the Lord showed that he was in many ways no different from how he had been before. Sitting down to a meal with two of his disciples, it was only natural for him to give thanks to God:

It came to pass, as he sat at the table with them, that he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them (Luke 24:30).

It was when he did this that those two disciples realised who their companion really was. He had spent the best part of the day with them, talking about the prophecies of the coming of Messiah, even though they had not recognised him. When he prayed his prayer, they knew him, for Jesus always was and is a man of prayer.

That makes the original request of the disciples all the more urgent for us. Do you remember their request? It was: *"Lord, teach us to pray."*

Mark Sheppard

Choosing a Wife

Choosing a wife – or a husband for that matter – is not an easy choice nowadays. Even when moral standards were higher, there was no guarantee that marriages would be successful and happy.

The Bible has got quite a lot to say about marriage and about the proper behaviour of wives and husbands – some of it not readily acceptable to many people in these modern days! In some societies, marriages are arranged, so there's little exercise of choice on the part of the partners. Indeed, the very first marriage of all was an arranged one. When God created Adam he was alone; all the other animals having been provided with partners and God said that he needed a companion:

“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him ... And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:18-24).

Lessons for Today

We are intended to take several



lessons from this:

- ❖ *Man needed a mate.*
- ❖ *God provided “a suitable helper” – someone who was compatible with himself.*
- ❖ *Because of the manner of her creation, she was to be sympathetic to him, a part of himself: “one flesh”.*
- ❖ *She was to be a counterpart of him.*
- ❖ *They were to create a separate unit or household together.*

How did this arranged marriage work out? Not very well, it has to be said! The ideal was correct, but in practice failed, because:

- ① Eve became the instrument of their joint downfall,
- ② Adam didn't oppose his wife's suggestions, as he should have done, and
- ③ Their failure was to have left God out of account in their marriage.

Incompatible?

“Incompatibility” is often the reason given when marriages break down today. The prophet Amos acknowledged this when he asked: *“Can two walk together, unless they are*



agreed?” (Amos 3:3)

How carefully do we think of the relative backgrounds of our intended spouse and ourselves? Abraham was very aware of this when his son Isaac was to be married. He sent his servant to Syria, where God-fearing members of his family lived. Abraham instructed his servant (in Genesis 24:1-8) not to go back to idolatrous Ur, but to find him a wife from Abraham’s family. It was just like that too with Isaac, when his children grew up and when Esau married into an idolatrous Hittite family we are told: *“they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah”* (Genesis 26:35).

Isaac instructed his son Jacob (in Genesis 28:1-2) to go to Paddan Aram (in Syria), to the house of his grandfather and to take a wife there, *“from among the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother”*. This was because they came from the same God-fearing family and when Jacob went there he fell in love with the beautiful charms of Rachel, and wanted to marry her.

By trickery, but perhaps also by God’s intervention, her father Laban substituted his older daughter Leah instead of Rachel in the darkness of the tent on the marriage night. It’s clear from the description given that she wasn’t quite as good-looking as her younger sister Rachel but the subsequent account shows that Rachel

could be deceptive, and perhaps still retained something of the idol-worship practices of her ancestors.

Jacob’s Realisation

When eventually the time came for Jacob to die, it seems that he recognised that Leah was the real true wife, the more spiritual one that God intended. Rachel had died on the way to the Promised Land and was buried near Bethlehem, but Jacob instructed his family,

“I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah” (Genesis 49:29–31).

There is no mention of him wanting to be buried with the favourite wife, Rachel, who had appealed to the human side of his nature! At last Jacob recognised the spiritual qualities of Leah!

Important Qualities

If we have the same attitude as these worthies of old, and seek in a wife or a husband the qualities that they looked for, we will acknowledge with the wise man that:

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord (Proverbs 18:22).

Hamilton Wilson

To be concluded

The Prophets of God

The section of the Bible we call the Prophets comprises the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel plus 12 shorter or “minor” prophets.

Definition

Throughout Old Testament history God raised up individuals – men and sometimes women – who would speak and write His messages to mankind. These people were the prophets of God and they were driven by the power of God – the Holy Spirit. They spoke or wrote in their own words, but the result was what God wanted them to say. The prophets often made predictions that are outside the ability of unaided human brains, so that the speaker was authenticated as being inspired by God. Here is what Peter the Apostle said about them –

Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Sometimes the prophets were loath to continue with their work because of the hostile reception they got when they condemned the evil ways of their countrymen. At one point in his ministry Jeremiah said: “...the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily” (Jeremiah 20:8).

He wanted to go away and hide. But, he continued:

Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jeremiah 20:9).

He was simply compelled to speak the Word of the Lord. Sadly, many of the prophets of the Lord met their death because of their unpopularity, and false prophets speaking smooth things took their place.

Prophetic Silence

The long line of prophets came to an end after the second temple was built by Zerubbabel in the restoration from Babylon, and for four hundred years before Christ “*the sun went down on the prophets*”, as Micah predicted. There was no more direct word from the Lord. Then, dramatically, everything changed.

With the birth of Jesus a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit began. He came not only to speak but also to live out in full the ideals set out in the Law of Moses and the Old Testament prophets. This is how the Letter to the Hebrews puts it:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2).

Jesus was the greatest of all the prophets. After he ascended to heaven he passed on to the early church the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, there was a whole class of gifted men and women in the First Century who are called prophets or prophetesses. The New Testament writers are among them, having the same divine inspiration as the prophets of old.

David M Pearce

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