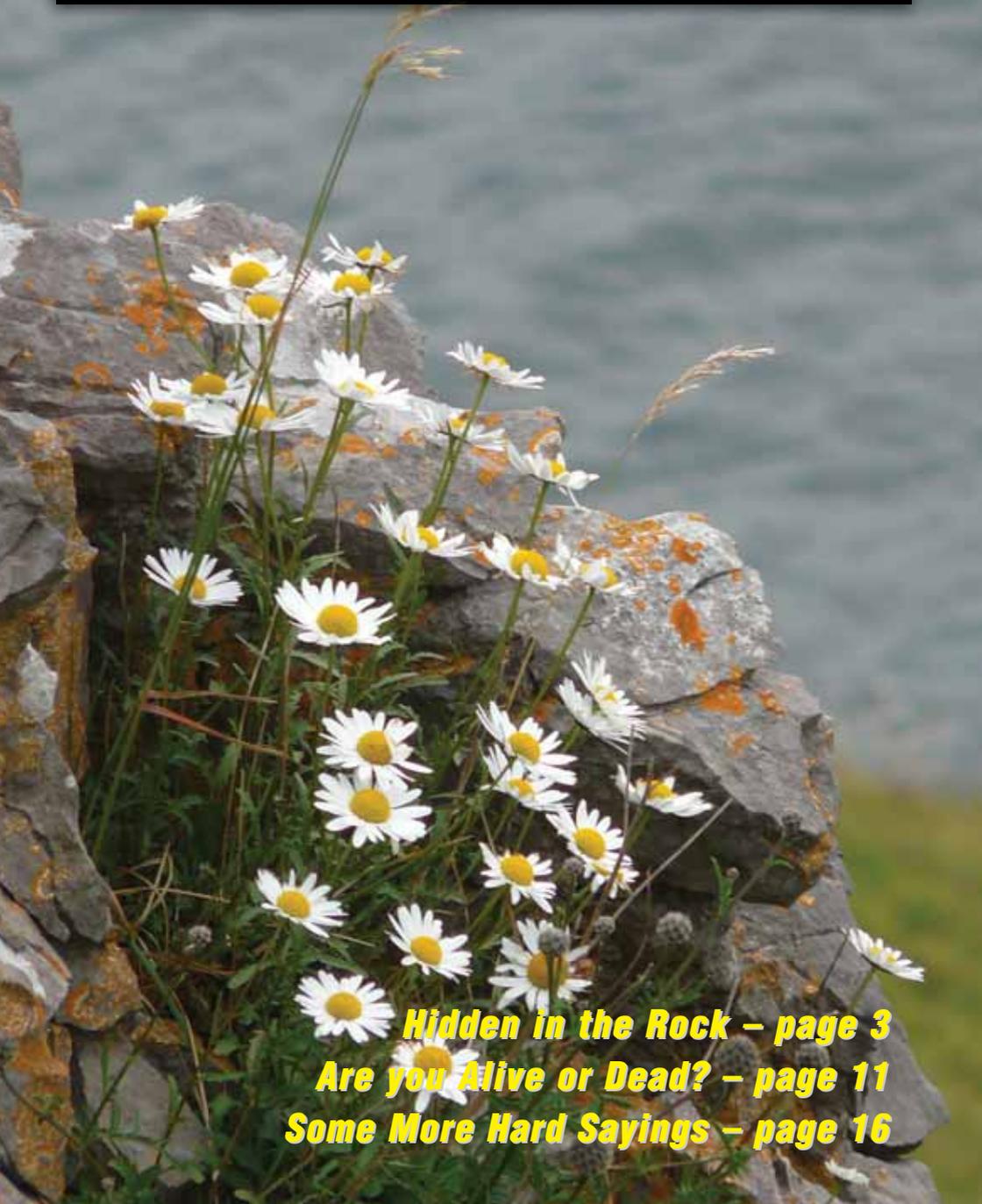


# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1538



***Hidden in the Rock – page 3***  
***Are you Alive or Dead? – page 11***  
***Some More Hard Sayings – page 16***

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

128th Year

G12

1538



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

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# Hidden in the Rock

Even the most exposed places can sustain plant life provided there is somewhere the roots can penetrate and some shelter, however meagre. Buffeted by the wind that sweeps across high places; frozen by cold winter nights and baked by the unrelenting sun, plants have an amazing ability to survive, even to thrive.

## Lessons for Us

We are now living in a period which has been predicted for a long time by the prophets of God – a time of difficulty and uncertainty unparalleled in human history. Of course there have been many turbulent times before, both in Old and New Testament times, as well as in the years following. People have often had cause to fear for their personal safety and to wonder if things would ever get back to normal.

But now we are beginning to see things unravel on an international scale. Whatever you think about – the world economy, politics, the growth of terrorism, increasing warfare, the breakdown of morality and family values, the godlessness of the 21st century, or the increasing vulnerability of society because of mass computerisation – all of these issues make things more critical than ever before.

What happens on one side of the world can easily spread. Bluefin tuna which were contaminated by Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant catastrophe, following the earthquake and tsunami in 2011, have recently been caught in California. Scientists had thought that ocean-going fish like tuna would have cleared themselves of such contamination over their 6000 mile journey.



But they found levels of radiation ten times higher than the amount measured in tuna off the California coast in previous years. It is no wonder that thinking people are concerned about what the future holds, and rightly so.

## God's Purpose Revealed

Bible readers can take comfort from the fact that this present situation was accurately foretold some two thousand years ago when our era was described as "the time of the end". Putting Bible prophecies together, we know that when the Jewish people returned to their land – something that began to happen in 1948, under the auspices of what is now the United Nations – the Second Coming of Jesus would follow shortly.

He will come, as promised, to rescue the world from itself and to put right the many things that are now going wrong. And all the indications are that his Coming is imminent. But what will it be like when the Son of God returns? And is he the sort of man we want to rule the world?

Thousands of years ago the Jewish leader Moses was facing a similar dilemma. He had spearheaded the rescue of a nation from slavery in Egypt and had brought them, under the hand of God, into the Sinai Peninsula, en route to the Promised Land. He could never have done this by

himself and was utterly dependent upon God's miraculous help. On one occasion, when he was on a mountain side, he asked for some assurance about the nature of the God he worshipped, for he wanted to know Him better. He asked if he might see God's glory and was told that no human could look upon God and live, something that is still true today (see 1 Timothy 6:16).

## **God's Character Revealed**

To reassure him, and to explain a little more about the person and character of God, Moses was told that he was to be hidden in a rock, for his own safety, so that he was not unduly exposed to the glory of God as He passed by.

*The Lord said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:21-23).*

All the indications were that Moses was about to witness something awesome and spectacular; but it turned out that what he *heard* was more important than the glory that he saw. For, as the LORD passed by, Moses heard a rehearsal of the character and nature of Almighty God:

*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation"*

*(Exodus 34:6-7).*

The reassurance God gave his faithful servant, which is thus extended to us, is that the God we worship is a loving and compassionate Creator whose enormous power is tempered by His great and abounding love. He is a God of goodness, who shows mercy and extends forgiveness. And He is a God of truth, which means that we can rely completely upon His Word of truth – the Bible – and need to come to Him frankly and fully confessing our sins and asking for His forgiveness.

## **Son of God**

Jesus was born at a time in Israel's history when some people were administering God's law in a way that stifled it and masked its real purpose. There were rules and regulations for everything, for people had added explanations and safeguards that specified the tiniest details of how to live. Jesus dismissed these as "*the traditions of men*" (Mark 7:8) and interpreted God's law in a quite different way, explaining its real intention (Matthew 23:23). It was said of him that:

*... the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared Him (John 1:17-18).*

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and he is now in a hidden place, sitting in glory at his Father's right hand, waiting for that time when he will come again, this time to rule on earth. We need to be ready for that wonderful time, when the grace and truth of God will be fully revealed.

**Editor**

# Will the Earth be Destroyed?

**As the prophet Daniel foretold, there is a time of trouble coming on earth that will bring it to the brink of destruction.**

*At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and **there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.** And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:1-2).*

## Survival or Destruction?

Will the earth survive or will it, and every living thing upon it, be destroyed? Some people think that the earth's days are numbered and fear for its future survival, but they need have no such concerns.

Although there is a time of judgment coming on this earth, the Bible is quite definite that the earth itself will not be destroyed; that it will survive. And as this is a promise that God has made in His Word, the Bible, we can be absolutely sure about it. Here are some of those promises:

- ❖ *One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but **the earth abides forever** (Ecclesiastes 1:4);*



- ❖ *For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, **who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited:** "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18);*
- ❖ *The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but **the earth He has given to the children of men** (Psalm 115:16);*
- ❖ *Blessed are the meek, for **they shall inherit the earth** (Matthew 5:5).*

Notice the last passage in particular, for it is a promise made by the Lord Jesus to all faithful believers. This is the promise of an everlasting inheritance here on earth, not a promise of life in heaven.

## Saved How?

It is God's intention to stop the present decline which now affects most

aspects of human existence, before it goes too far. He will send His Son to save His people from destruction and to set up His kingdom on this earth. The establishment of that Kingdom will, in time, restore this earth to the condition it was at the time of creation. This is what the apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost to those Jews who were willing to listen:

*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that **times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:19–21).*

## **Glorious Future**

The physical earth will survive the time of trouble that is coming on this world and will yet have a glorious future. There are many descriptions of this time which is spoken about by God's prophets and they are written to give us great hope and encouragement. For example, God says through His prophet Isaiah:

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).*



*A new temple is to be built in Jerusalem when the "restoration of all things" takes place*

## **God's Gracious Purpose**

We will consider more of these things in due course, as this series continues. For now, we can satisfy ourselves with the knowledge that, even though we are living through the beginning of a time of trouble such as never has been known before, God has a plan for this earth and He will surely bring it to pass. For it is God's ultimate and declared purpose to fill this earth with His glory.

*But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord... (Numbers 14:21);*

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9);*

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).*

**John Shepley**

# On the Mount of Olives

When J.B. Phillips published his translation of the Acts of the Apostles he entitled it *"The Young Church in Action"*. It was an excellent title, for that describes so well what is contained in the book. The apostles were commissioned by Jesus as follows, given just after his resurrection:

*"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15)*

In the Acts we read how they went about carrying out that instruction. It follows that the book of Acts shows exactly what first century apostles taught and believed and if we want to be sure that our Christianity is well-founded, we need to check our beliefs against the things the apostles believed and taught.

## **Exit Jesus**

The Lord Jesus makes only a short appearance in the Acts, but it is nevertheless an important one for it was just before his ascension. Jesus was with the eleven disciples on the Mount of Olives near Bethany, when they asked him an important question:

*"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).*

Evidently the disciples hoped that now that the crucifixion was over Jesus would be able to become "King of the Jews" in reality. For those were the very words inscribed over the cross on which he had died and although the Jewish rulers had tried to get Pontius Pilate to change it, on this point he had stood firm.

They must have thought that the kingdom would be established now, knowing all about the history of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament. For both King David and King Solomon had claimed to sit on *"the throne of the LORD"* over Israel (1 Chronicles 29:23). The Kingdom of God came to an end, however, when God spoke to the last king of Judah in these terms:

*"Remove the turban, and take off the crown ... Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him" (Ezekiel 21:26-27).*

## **Times and Seasons**

If the question is interesting and important, then the answer is even more so. Jesus replied: *"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"* (Acts 1:7). He does not say that he was not going to restore the Kingdom, but that he could not tell them when that was going to happen.

This message about the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is absolutely central to the book of Acts. It forms the backdrop to all of the preaching that took place. The book concludes with the apostle Paul in prison in Rome where he was:

*"... preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31).*

Not long after the disciples' question to the Lord Jesus he was taken up in to heaven. They were watching until he was covered by a cloud, when two men

in white robes stood by them with this message:

*“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).*

The proximity of this statement by the angels is also important. It comes quickly after the question the disciples had asked Jesus and just after his somewhat enigmatic answer about the timing of the Kingdom. What we learn is that before Jesus restores the Kingdom to Israel he will return from heaven to the earth and the angels also explained how that coming is to take place.

His coming will not be invisible, but evidently visible, for the words “in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” are both emphatic and crystal clear. As the rest of Acts shows, the disciples were looking for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel in some way, and fully expected that it would again be on earth.

## **Replacement**

The eleven disciples went back from the Mount of Olives, without Jesus, and remedied the loss in their numbers by appointing Matthias to replace Judas, who had betrayed the Lord Jesus. They wanted one to join them who was also a “witness to his resurrection”, which shows us what importance the book of Acts places on the teaching of the resurrection. Matthias appears to have been one of the larger group of disciples who had followed the Lord Jesus from the time of John’s baptism until the crucifixion and resurrection.



Although we do not hear about him again as an individual, there is nothing to suggest that he was not counted as one of the Twelve. Even when Saul of Tarsus later became the Apostle Paul, he apparently lacked the qualifications to be one of the twelve, not having been one who had:

*“accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21).*

Peter thus indicates that this was a prime requirement for membership of the Twelve. Later Paul describes himself as “one untimely born” (1 Corinthians 15:8), showing that he did not regard himself as one of the twelve, even though he had been specially called by the Lord Jesus for his work of preaching.

So the initial work of the early church shows that the close followers of Jesus were determined to follow the example of their Lord, and that their teaching was firmly based on his. This is something which continues throughout the book of Acts. It is a powerful reminder that the teaching, beliefs and practices of followers of the Lord Jesus must be firmly based on his example. There is no authority to change it.

**Mark Sheppard**

# Could It Be Heaven or Hell?

If you have sat and watched a funeral go by, or have had to attend a funeral of a friend or colleague, you are bound to have wondered about life after death, even in these godless times.

## **Confusion**

I remember the words of an organist at a Crematorium who once said “People only seem to know the words of the hymn ‘Abide with me’ and the hymn tune ‘Crimond’”, and I was forced to face the fact that regular churchgoers seem to be in the minority and even those who do attend seem to know little of Bible teaching.

I once attended a colleague’s funeral when, in the middle of the vicar’s sermon, the widow stood up and screamed, much to everyone’s dismay. Very calmly he said, “Please don’t distress yourself my dear. Your husband is smiling down on you from a garden of flowers and will be distressed by your tears.” She quietly resumed her seat.



## **Clear Bible Teaching**

That was a comforting thing for the vicar to say, at an uncomfortable time, but was it true? The Bible is explicit. Every life must end, as did that of our Lord, but what then? Is it a choice between Heaven or Hell? The answer might surprise you.

The Bible says that everyone goes to Hell. This is not a place of torment, for “hell” is quite simply a word for “the grave”. We all go there. And here’s the second surprise: nobody goes to heaven. Previous Archbishops of York and Canterbury wrote that the Bible teaching is that we all go to the grave, and are raised on the glorious day of the Lord’s return. We all affirm this if we utter the Lord’s Prayer when we say:

*“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...”*

Of course there is bound to be heartache when a loved one falls into the sleep of death, yet what superb comfort is given us by God if we believe these promises

## **Asleep in Death**

The word ‘sleep’ is so important. It takes the sting from our sorrow. It means that there will be a time when we will be woken up from the unconscious sleep of death and be called to Jesus, at the resurrection of the dead. For Jesus has promised to return and the Bible says that he will return in glory:

*"Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should strike the nations. And he himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he has on his robe and on his thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:15–16).*

What a description of coming glory! It resonates in my mind, because the Bible paints a wonderful picture of tremendous changes under the all-embracing rule of King Jesus.

- ✓ Paradise will be restored.
- ✓ He will do what no politician can, and make sure that everyone has a safe and secure home.
- ✓ No one will be hungry. Corn will even grow on the tops of mountains, for the earth will be so fertile.
- ✓ The need for hospitals will disappear.
- ✓ Sorrow and sighing will cease.

✓ Wars will be no more.

We will retain one good thing — teachers. For those Bible believers who act upon their beliefs now will be sent forth to share the good news of salvation to the unbelieving nations.

What a transformation! What harmony! The ancient hymn writer expressed it so well:

*Joy cometh! for the Lord doth come  
To wake the song that now is dumb!  
All righteous tongues shall find employ  
In songs of everlasting joy.*

To those who may be hesitant God makes a great appeal to respond. The great God of the universe is calling out to you:

*"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).*

What an invitation! Will you accept it now? Tomorrow could be too late.

**Ken Clark**

## **Come to Jesus**

Christ calls and says, "Come unto me",  
For he knows what is best:  
The heavy laden, weary ones  
With Jesus will find rest.

To take the yoke of Jesus Christ  
And learn of Him we'll find  
He has a meek and lowly heart:  
He'll give us peace of mind.

Christ's yoke is easy, helping us,  
His burden being light:  
He offers us a rich reward  
His grace gives us delight.



**Gwen Marley**

# Are you Alive or Dead?

The couple held hands as they gazed at their beautiful daughter. She looked so peaceful lying in bed, eyes closed, with her hair moving gently in rhythm with her steady breathing. However, the parents' faces were tense as they glanced across the room.

The girl looked as though she was sleeping, but the reality was somewhat different. She had been declared brain dead, and was only breathing because of the life-support machine to which she was attached.

## Death in the Bible

Sadly, we are all familiar with death, and we know that it happens to young as well as to older people. Clinical death is defined as the cessation of all physical and chemical processes in a person, and in many countries a doctor is required to certify a death. The Bible is quite clear that in the normal course of events we all die:

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).*

In the Bible, however, the term 'dead' can be used in a different way. Some people who are obviously alive – walking and talking – are described in the Bible as being dead. For example, a man asked for time to go to bury his father before following Jesus. In response Jesus said

*'Let the dead bury their own dead'(Matthew 8:22).*

Obviously, dead people can do nothing: Jesus is talking about being spiritually dead.

## Asleep in Death

The converse is also true: Jesus sometimes referred to people who were clinically dead as being alive. When the daughter of a ruler of the synagogue had died, Jesus said *'she is not dead but sleeping'* (Luke 8:52).

Later in Jesus' ministry a man called Lazarus had been dead for four days and buried in a cave. Jesus acknowledged that Lazarus had died:

*"Then Jesus said to them plainly 'Lazarus is dead'" (John 11:14).*

But only a little earlier he had said *'Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up'* (John 11:11).



On both of these occasions Jesus performed the miracle of resurrection from the dead. The girl and Lazarus came back to life.

In similar language the apostle Paul describes baptised believers (i.e. those

‘in Christ’) who have died as being asleep:

*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins. Then also those who have **fallen asleep in Christ** have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits **of those who have fallen asleep** (1 Corinthians 15:17-20; see also 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16).*

### **God’s View of Us**

So as far as God is concerned there are some people living full lives who are spiritually dead, and others whose bodily functions ceased millennia ago who are still ‘alive’ to Him. This explains why Jesus says ‘if anyone keeps my word they shall never see death’ (John 8:51) and ‘Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die’ (John 11:26).

The message is the same as in John 3:16:

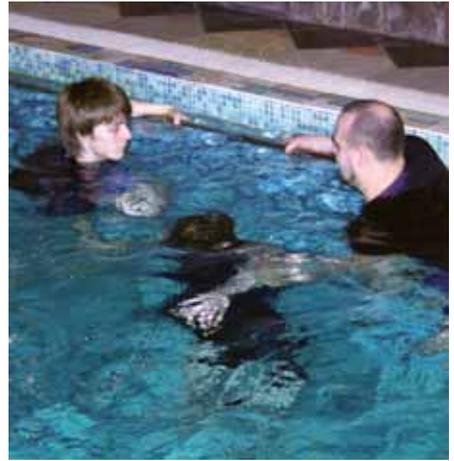
*“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

### **We have a choice**

If we have not made a commitment to follow Jesus we are effectively dead already – we are certainly under a death sentence:

*... He who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).*

Moreover, we have no control over how long we keep breathing, because God could end our life at any time.



*“You hide Your face, they are troubled: You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Psalm 104:29).*

In contrast, when we make a total unconditional commitment to Jesus, starting with baptism, we pass ‘from death into life’ (John 5:24). Provided that we try our best to obey God then it does not matter if one day we cease to breathe: Jesus will raise us from the dead to receive God’s wonderful gift of eternal life, in the Kingdom of God.

*“And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).*

Therefore, as was the case with the girl on the life support machine, the fact that we are breathing is not the most important thing. Each of us is either spiritually dead or spiritually alive. There are only these two groups and we need to decide which one we are in.

**Anna Hart**

# Ezekiel - Prophet to the Exiles

While Jeremiah was enduring the privations of the siege of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was 600 miles away as the crow flies and was busy in Babylon. He had been taken prisoner in 597 BC, along with thousands of other Jews, and was forced to settle in the land of the enemy. Here, at the age of 30, the young priest had been appointed a prophet of the Lord.

## Heavenly Vision

Ezekiel, much like Isaiah, was granted an opening vision of the Lord in glory, in which he saw One enthroned on moving chariots of fire, with four cherubim, like those in the Temple and Tabernacle, and giant wheels full of eyes. Then he was told he was to be a watchman for the exiles and was to warn them of spiritual danger. He would be made dumb, unable to speak except when God had a message for the people, so that when God's message did come, it would have extra significance and authority.

Ezekiel's prophetic role was to counter the hopefuls who were convinced that the exiles would soon return to Jerusalem. Perhaps Egypt would conquer Babylon, they thought, or King Nebuchadnezzar would change his mind and let them go. Instead, Ezekiel explained by ingenious models and mimes – for he could not speak – that Jerusalem was doomed.

Chapter four of his prophecy explains how he constructed an elaborate model of the city of Jerusalem, complete with siege mounds and battering



rams. For over a year he lay on his side in front of the model, growing daily thinner as he rationed his food and water to represent the inhabitants of Jerusalem, away across the desert. Then, in chapter five, we read how he cut off his hair and chopped it with a knife or burnt it in the fire, to represent the bloody end to the siege and the destruction of the city and many of its inhabitants. Then he tucked a tiny amount of hair into his cloak to simulate that only a minority would survive the siege, but that God would take care of them: the remnant of His people.

## Another Vision

Chapter eight describes the time when the prophet was taken by the Spirit to Jerusalem to see at first-hand the evils that were bringing God's judgments on the city. In vision, he saw the elders of the city worshipping idols in the Temple, and men bowing down to the

sun. He watched the glory of God, enthroned in the cherubim, departing from the city. It was a vivid depiction of the fact that God could no longer dwell there.

In another episode (this time described in chapter 12, verses 6 and 7) the dumb prophet blindfolded himself, then dug a hole through the mud wall of his house and crawled through it at dusk with his possessions in a bundle. You can imagine his audience trying to work out what this mime signified! With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that he was acting out the desperate attempt of Judah's vanquished king Zedekiah to escape from Jerusalem, only for him to be trapped and then blinded by Nebuchadnezzar, who was heartily sick of Zedekiah's many rebellions. The Lord said:

*"I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there (Ezekiel 12:13).*

And that is exactly how it turned out.

## **Burnt Dry!**

In one of his more dramatic dramas (chapter 24:3-14) Ezekiel set a pot of stew on the fire in his kitchen and allowed it to boil dry and then burn red hot. Imagine the smoke! When his lips were unsealed, he explained that this very day King Nebuchadnezzar of



Babylon had begun the siege of Jerusalem, and that God would purge the city of its filth by an unquenchable fire of judgment.

Shortly after this message Ezekiel's wife died, and the prophet was told not to mourn for her. The sad thing was that this was how it would be in Jerusalem. So many people there would perish in the war with Babylon that there would be no time to be sad.

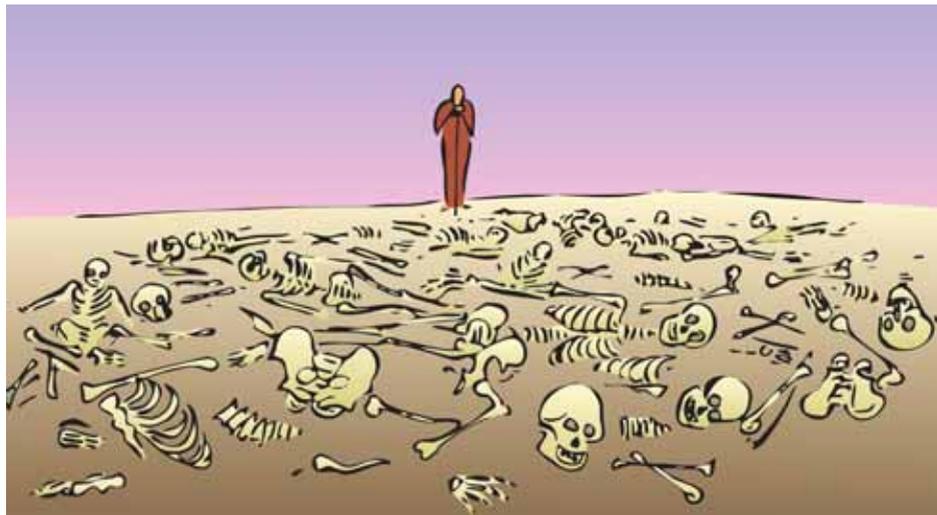
## **Other Nations**

From chapter 25 to 32, the prophet explains why there was no hope of any other country coming to rescue Judah from the army of Babylon because they too were going to be under attack. Ezekiel predicted the downfall of Judah's neighbours also: Ammon, Moab, Edom, Tyre and Egypt. Again, history shows that he was absolutely correct. One by one those nations also fell into the hands of Babylon. There was no escape for anyone.

Yet the last part of Ezekiel's prophecy is full of hope. Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, he looks down through the centuries to a time when God would restore and forgive His people, bring them back to their land, and give them a king. You may have heard of the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, or might know the negro-spiritual about bones coming together.

Chapter 37 contains a vision of the prophet surrounded by a battlefield of ancient skeletons, which represented, he was told, the people of Israel. It looked as though their hope was gone and that they would never again exist as a nation.

*He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry,*



*our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel”’” (Ezekiel 37:11–12).*

As the prophet speaks, the bones come together, bone to bone. Then flesh appears on them, and the breath of life fills their lungs. They stand up again, a great army. As the prophecy continues, the nation of Israel is back in their ancient homeland. The ten tribes and the two tribes are re-united, and David (in Hebrew, ‘the beloved’, – a title of Jesus) rules over the whole nation as one kingdom for evermore (chapter 37:21-28).

## **Nearly There!**

Part of that prophecy has already been fulfilled and that constitutes a modern miracle. After being dispersed into almost all nations, the Jewish people have recently been regathered by God into their ancient homeland. Having been cast down for much of the last

two thousand years, they are now able to stand up as a nation, with a state of their own and an established identity.

Representatives of all the tribes are back in the land but as yet they have no king, for Jesus has not yet returned. Ezekiel proceeds to tell us of other events that have not yet happened, but which are destined to happen, now that the Jews are back in their land.

But there is trouble ahead! In chapter 38 Ezekiel tells how a giant confederacy from the north will sweep down into the land that has become newly inhabited. All might seem to be lost. But God, at the last moment, will intervene with earthquake and fire, and the enemy hordes will be knocked out, leaving a people thankful and obedient.

The final chapters describe the construction of a magnificent new Temple. Fresh water flows like a river from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, bringing it new life, and the cherubic glory of God that departed over two thousand years before, now returns to God’s holy hill.

**David M Pearce**

## What did Jesus Mean?

# Some More Hard Sayings

*There were times when the words of Jesus confused and puzzled people, and Jesus meant that to happen, for he was a wonderful teacher. He wanted people to think about what he was saying and the meaning was not always immediately obvious. In this second article **David Budden** looks at some more of these sayings and shows how the words of Jesus still challenge us and show us what is best.*

**“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away...” (Matthew 5:29).**

Jesus is not to be taken literally here otherwise there would be a lot of one-eyed people about! Jesus means that if there is anything which leads us away from God we should take drastic action to put the situation right.

Is there a TV programme which you cannot resist and which is swallowing up an inordinate amount of time? Could that time have been used more profitably, such as spending time with your children, visiting someone in hospital, or thinking about worthwhile things? The possibilities are legion.

“If that is the case”, Jesus counsels, “take drastic action.” That might mean being out when the offending programme is being broadcast. An even more drastic remedy would be to take the TV to the local car-boot sale! Perhaps your garden is becoming your ‘god’ – that is, if it is allowed to come first before your commitment to follow the Lord. A less than immaculate garden would be a small price to pay for a clear conscience!

Zachaeus was a Bible character who had a problem. It was his wealth, a nice enough problem you might think! But one day this reformed man reflected on the fact that much of his wealth had been ill-gotten and that his



life was not right with God (read Luke 19:1-10). In his heart he knew what he had to do – but he lacked the resolve to do it. Then, when Jesus came into his life, the resolve was there and he did what his conscience had been telling him all along. Metaphorically speaking, “...he plucked out his right eye.”

**“Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53).**

Vast crowds had been following Jesus and he had miraculously fed over five thousand of them. Many of these followers were hoping for more free meals and they urged him to provide (John 6:26-27). So Jesus described himself as “the bread of life” and he went on to say that unless people ate his flesh and drank his blood they would be lifeless.

It is hard for us to appreciate how any Jew would react to such words. Drinking blood was condemned under the Law of Moses and the very suggestion would be anathema to them. The crowds were bemused by this hard saying and some who had been counted as disciples of Jesus turned away from him. Jesus never pandered to the masses and once again his words separated those who were merely interested in free meals from those who really wanted to understand his teaching.

So what DID Jesus mean? Perhaps he meant that those who want to be his should seek to absorb the very essence of his life into their own lives also. They could do this by feeding upon his inspirational words and meditating upon the very example he gave of his personal conduct. In that way, his very being should become a part of us.

**“If any man will come after me, let him ... take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).**

Did Jesus really mean that any would-be followers of him must be prepared to face crucifixion? If not, then what did he mean? Before coming to

that, let's try to clear up a common misunderstanding. For example, one might say:

“I've been dogged by illness all my life; that is the cross that I have had to bear”, or

“My family life has been ruined by my alcoholic spouse; that is the cross that I have had to bear”.

Jesus was definitely not speaking about such problems when he said “... let him take up his cross ...” Nobody willingly takes up a cross of illness or unhappiness in the home; such burdens may befall us just as they befall mankind in general. Jesus was talking about “taking up” a cross as an exercise of our own free will. So what might he have had in mind? First of all, notice the omission in the quotation, marked by the “...”! The omission consists of two vital words: “deny himself”. Here's the full quotation:

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone desires to come after me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).*

So, the ‘cross’ of which Jesus speaks, and the one we can either choose to carry or ignore, is a cross of self-denial, for the Lord's sake. For



Jesus himself, the 'self-denial' was absolute. He knew nothing of the warmth and love of a family. Had Jesus taken a wife and had children, he would have been subject to divided loyalties. But the call of his Father involved commitment to the life of an itinerant preacher who would finally go to Golgotha and there suffer an early death. Like many men, Jesus might have enjoyed sport or gardening or any other hobby but the call of self-denial meant that his commitment to the Gospel would leave no time for such activities. He might have set his heart on a chosen career, but that too was rejected.

So, in our own lives, we each must examine our priorities and make sure that nothing is being allowed to supplant the call of the Gospel. Of course our Maker knows our frames; He knows our limitations and no one is stretched beyond their capacity. Let none of us imagine that what we can do is so little that it isn't worth doing at all.

**"If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Matthew 5:41).**

It is not easy to think of an example of this happening in New Testament times. However in the Old Testament there is the example of Joseph. A boy of 17, he had been sold into slavery by his own half-brothers and taken to Egypt where he was sold to Potiphar, an eminent man. A natural response would have been,

"I have done nothing to deserve this. I will do as little work as I can get away with and I will be as disruptive as possible."

But that wasn't the attitude of

Joseph. Joseph's attitude was quite different:

"I trust in God; this is the situation I find myself in. Very well, I will serve my owner to the best of my ability and I will be absolutely trustworthy and reliable."

Very soon Potiphar learned that he could trust this young man implicitly so he was prepared to leave all his personal affairs in Joseph's hands (Genesis 39:1-6). The Bible tells us that, "*The Lord was with Joseph*", and no doubt Joseph's life became a lot easier than it might have been as a result of God's blessing.

Let us note how Joseph played his part. He had been required to serve as a slave; he did so in a way that far exceeded normal expectations. He had been required to "go one mile"; in fact he went two!

We need to ask ourselves whether all that we do is the very best of which we are capable, be it the Lord's work, or our duties to an employer? Whatever we do, we must do it "...as unto the Lord."

May God bless us all in our endeavours to place our feet in the footprints of His son.

## David Budden

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# The Resurrection

**The basis of Christianity is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that after giving his life as a sacrifice for sin, he was raised from the dead and went to heaven to be with his Father.**

If the resurrection did not happen, Christianity is an irrelevant religion. The people who followed Christianity in the First Century A.D. recognised this fact and discussed it on a number of occasions (the best account is in 1 Corinthians chapter 15).

## Historical Account

The Gospels record how, three days after Jesus had been publicly executed, some of his followers went to his grave, only to find it empty. There they saw angels who told them that he was alive for evermore. They took some convincing, but they were eventually convinced.

- ❖ Many of them saw him alive – five hundred at once on one occasion.
- ❖ Jesus appeared to different people on various occasions and times. He ate meals with them and discussed how the Old Testament showed that, as the Son of God, he had to die for sin.
- ❖ He instructed his disciples to go out and preach the good news of his resurrection and to explain its implications for people the world over.

When you think about it, so many people were involved in the death and burial of Jesus that any mistake about

him actually dying was impossible.

- ❖ Roman soldiers had been present at his death.
- ❖ Jesus' enemies alleged that the disciples had taken the body (they never suggested that he had not died).

However they could not produce his corpse and, in any case, with a detachment of hard-nosed Roman soldiers guarding the cave in which he was buried, how could anyone have removed the huge stone that was sealing it, without being challenged?

## Alive and Well!

The good news is that the Lord Jesus Christ is alive forever, in perfect health and is living with his Father in heaven. Why should that be important to you? There are three reasons.

- ① Through association with Jesus and his resurrection you can have your sins forgiven and become part of God's family.
- ② If you have been baptised as a believer and have become a brother or sister of Jesus, you can be assured that when you die you will only be dead until the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth.
- ③ Perhaps most importantly, you can live confident that you too can have eternal life when the Lord Jesus returns to earth to set up God's everlasting Kingdom.

I hope to see you there.

**Cynthia Miles**

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