

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1541



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# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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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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# “Launch out into the deep”

Crowds of people had come to hear Jesus near the Sea of Galilee and, to give himself a bit of space, he asked a nearby fisherman if he could use his boat. It was the morning after a hard night’s fishing and the fishermen were washing and mending their nets. Even so, one of them agreed and sailed his boat a little from the land, so it could be used as an impromptu pulpit.

The bonus was that the fisherman, named Simon, got the best opportunity to hear the Master teaching the crowds. And then something really unexpected happened; for when the teaching had finished and the crowds were dispersing, Jesus said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4).

## Transformation

The request wouldn’t have seemed that welcome at the time, for the fishermen had been up all night trying to land a catch and they were tired and ready to go home and sleep. Knowledgeable about the sea and its ways, they also knew that it was the wrong time to fish, and they had just washed their nets! But Simon responded as positively and politely as he could: “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at your word I will let down the net” (Luke 5:5).

The result was breathtaking! The net was immediately so full of fish that it was breaking. Peter had to call his partners to come and help and the two boats just managed to haul the immense catch ashore. It filled both

fishing boats and quite changed their day! After a fruitless night, they had a miracle catch: indeed it was just that, and Simon knew it. That happening had not just changed the day, it had changed the man.

*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8).*

When he let the net down, Simon may have been a little condescending: just humouring the teacher. After all, Jesus was by trade a carpenter – a local builder – and knew nothing about fishing. But when he hauled the net back, full of fish, he knew a little more about Jesus, and prostrated himself before this man whose teaching was remarkable and whose power Simon Peter had just witnessed at first hand. He had indeed launched out into the deep. That day with Jesus quite changed Peter’s life.

## Unknown Depths

You sometimes hear people saying “I don’t know what she was talking about: it was too deep for me”, by which they mean that they couldn’t understand the conversation. Something similar, with much the same meaning is: “I was out of my depth”. Both sayings illustrate that in many aspects of life you either take a casual interest, or really get involved. To follow the idiom, you can either paddle in the shallows or swim out into the deep.

The prophet Ezekiel was once given a vision of a river flowing out of Jerusalem, to bring life to the Dead

Sea (an inland sea which is renowned for its saltiness). At first, he crossed over the river and it was ankle-deep; a little further out it was up to his knees; further out still it was up to his waist; and then:

*It was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed (Ezekiel 47:5).*

That vision told the prophet two things:

- 1 When God transforms the world, by sending the Lord Jesus to rule on earth, his power and influence will continue to increase.
- 2 People might at first just listen to what the Messiah has to say – just as Simon did. But when they see his miraculous power at work to transform the world, they too will want to find out more, and get thoroughly immersed in his way of living.

But you don't need to await the coming of God's Kingdom to make that choice. It is never too soon to take an interest in the things of God.

## **Time to Think**

Sometimes things happen in life that make us stop and think more seriously. We might have been going along happily, with hardly a thought in the world about serious things, and then we are forced to take stock of what life is really all about. In the early days of Bible history that was what happened to a rich and prosperous man named Job. He was a very good living man, but then everything fell apart. He lost his children and his riches, through a series of accidents. He lost the support of his wife; and then his health broke down. Everyone concluded that he

must have done something very bad for all these disasters to have overtaken him – so he lost his reputation also, and that for him was the greatest loss of all.

When some former friends came to spend time with him, and upset him by their insinuations, Job made this observation:

*“Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven – what can you do? Deeper than Sheol – what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7–9).*

It took Job a while to realize that he couldn't fathom the “*deep things of God*” either. For in fact all that had happened to him was designed to test his faith and to bring him into a closer relationship with the God he worshipped and served. God revealed Himself to Job in a vision that was full of instruction about His sovereign power, majesty and might, then He restored Job's health, family and fortune.

What Job discovered was that God loved him and wanted the best for him, and although he learned that lesson the hard way, the outcome made it all worthwhile. The apostle Paul prayed that the people of God might come to that realization for themselves:

*That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17–19).*

**Editor**

# The Time of the End

The prophet Daniel speaks of the time prior to the Lord's return as a time of trouble such as never has been: a time which will culminate in the resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:1-3). The record goes on to say:

*"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until **the time of the end**; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (12:4).*

There have been many suggestions as to what these words mean. Some take them to mean that there will be an increase in understanding of the Word of God at this time, particularly of the prophecies concerning the last days as world events unfold. Others take them to indicate the hectic pace of modern life and the explosion of knowledge which is a feature of our technological age. The New International Version translates the last part of this verse as "Many will go here and there to increase knowledge".

## Other Predictions

The apostles also speak of this time immediately prior to the return of the Lord. This is what Paul wrote:

*Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1-5).*

How well these words describe our age, for we live at a time when there has been a sharp decline in the standards of morality as well as of religious faith. A large proportion of people seem only to be concerned about themselves and this is portrayed in the way they treat others. Self-centredness is a characteristic of this age, a vice from which all other vices flow. Decline in belief and practice of the Word of God has led to this downward slide, for it removes the standard of behaviour which is acceptable and the responsibility to try to live according to it. Even those who have some sense of godliness in their lives often deny it by the way they live. The Apostle Peter confirms this decline in faith:

*... Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and 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 (2 Peter 3:3-4).*

There are many people today, particularly among the so-called Christian countries, who leave God out of their lives altogether. Some, if not most, of the younger generation have almost no idea of any basic Bible teaching, or Bible stories for that matter. The inroads made by the theory of evolution has to a large extent removed any sense of responsibility to a Supreme Being from peoples' lives. Most treat the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a hangover from another era, believing that the world will continue as it always has done and that

mankind and science will solve all the problems confronting this world.

## **Anti-Semitism**

Another sign that we are in the time of the end is the rise once again of anti-semitism. Sadly, hatred of the Jews has plagued them through their long period of dispersion. Time after time they have been made the scapegoats for many problems experienced by various nations. It came to a head during the Nazi persecution of the Jews prior to, and during, World War II, culminating in the holocaust. After this there was a measure of sympathy among the nations of the world, which was a contributing factor in the re-establishment of the Jewish State.

Once again, however, we see anti-semitism raising its ugly head, particularly among the nations of Europe, with many blaming the Jews for the current turmoil in the Middle East. A lot of this is being fuelled by Middle Eastern immigrants, with many asserting that if there were no Israel there would be no terrorism. This too, is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy, for the prophets foresaw that the nation of Israel would become more and more isolated among the nations of the world, prior to the Coming of their Messiah.

## **Jerusalem - A Heavy Stone**

The last few chapters of the prophecy of Zechariah relate to the time of the end. This is clear from the fact that the phrase “on that day” occurs no less than sixteen times in the last three chapters (12-14). We will consider different sections of these chapters at various times during this series, but for now we will concentrate on one particular sign which God gives through His prophet which will be a feature of the

time of the end. It concerns the city of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, or Zion, as it is also known, has a special place in the purpose of God for He has chosen it for His dwelling place:

*The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: “This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it” (Psalm 132:13-14).*

It is from this city that God’s appointed king will reign in righteousness (Psalms 2:6 and 48:2) and from here His law will go forth to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2). Before this happens however, Jerusalem is to be a sign to the world that the return of the Lord is near. This is what we read in the early verses of Zechariah chapter 12:

*Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zechariah 12:2-3).*



Jerusalem is to be a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples and a heavy stone for all people, and all who burden themselves with her will hurt themselves. The Authorised Version refers to Jerusalem as “a burdensome stone”. Jerusalem will become the focus of all the nations of the earth and it will become a burden to them. And isn’t this just what we see today? Jerusalem is hardly ever out of the world news.

The city was under foreign domination for millennia. Back in 1947 when the recently formed United Nations voted on the partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs it was intended that Jerusalem become an international city. The subsequent War of Independence in 1948 saw Jerusalem divided between Jew and Arab with Israel occupying the New City and Jordan the Old City. This situation changed again with the Six-Day War in 1967 when the entire city came under Jewish control and in 1980 it was proclaimed as the capital of Israel.

## **Continuing Controversy**

The decisive victory of the Israelis in 1967 did not, however, end the controversy over the future of Jerusalem. In fact tensions have continued to intensify since that time. Why is it that Jerusalem features so largely in today’s world news? Why are so many nations concerned about it?

Under normal circumstances such a city should be of little interest to anyone; but Jerusalem is no ordinary city for it is sacred to three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

❖ The Jews insist that it is their “undivided” and “eternal” capital and that they will never give it up.

❖ The Palestinians want it as the capital of a Palestinian State.

❖ The Christians want it as an international city.

There have been many attempts to bring peace to the Middle East. All of these have so far failed because Jerusalem is always the stumbling block in any negotiations. It continues to be a ‘heavy stone’ to all those who attempt to bring about a solution.

Tensions will continue to rise and will eventually boil over when world opinion turns heavily against Israel, as is becoming evident today. Nations will act in a united attempt to bring about a permanent solution to the Middle East conflict. When they come against Jerusalem they will initially succeed. Man however is not in control of the future of Jerusalem, God is. This is what the prophet Zechariah says:

*Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle (Zechariah 14:1–3).*

It is God who will solve the Middle East problem and we will consider in more detail how this is to take place in future articles. For now, what we see happening with regard to Jerusalem – the heavy stone that burdens all who concern themselves with her – is a sign that the time of God’s intervention in the affairs of this world is near.

**John Shepley**

# Crying Wolf

There is a fable about a shepherd boy who cried 'Wolf'. He tended his sheep in a grassy area up a mountain. This boy had an odd sense of humour. He liked running down to the village crying "Wolf! Wolf!", and then watching kind people rush up the mountain path to help him.

When they got there and found no sign of a wolf, the shepherd boy laughed at them because they had been fooled by his trick. This happened many times. Then, tragically, one day a real wolf did attack his sheep, and once again the boy ran to the village and shouted "Wolf! Wolf!"

However, the villagers had suffered enough mockery, and despite the desperate assurances of the boy, did not believe him. The expression 'crying wolf' is therefore used about people who repeatedly make false warnings. Quite naturally, once their friends realise what is happening they cease to take any notice.

## Disasters Predicted

For as long as I can remember there have been horror stories about the plight of planet earth. Disasters have been predicted and are still being predicted about over-population, food shortages, nuclear wars, disease epidemics, environmental problems and financial crises. These should not surprise us because the Bible predicts times of trouble prior to Jesus returning to the earth.

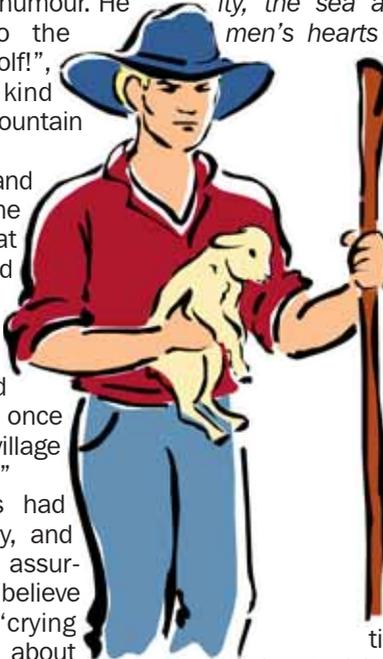
*There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars, and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectations of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Luke 21:25-27).*

## The Danger of Complacency

Years ago the gloomy predictions brought about a great sense of excitement – maybe Jesus was going to come back soon. But time went on, the pre-

dicted crisis did not fully materialise and I heard people saying things like "Oh, we'll sort it – there'll be a solution. There's no need to panic". Moreover, Jesus did not return to the earth. Consequently it was easy to become complacent and to believe that life will just go on in the same way. However, this attitude is very dangerous, as the apostle Peter warns:

*...Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and 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 (2 Peter 3:3-4).*



In fact, things do NOT continue as they were. For example the Jews returned to Israel in fulfilment of Bible prophecy (see Jeremiah 30:10-11). There has been a steady deterioration in moral standards in many countries, and the present world-wide financial crisis is unprecedented. There are real and potential problems in the world, and this is confirmation that Jesus COULD return at any time. However, no-one can predict the actual day when this will happen: even Jesus himself did not know:

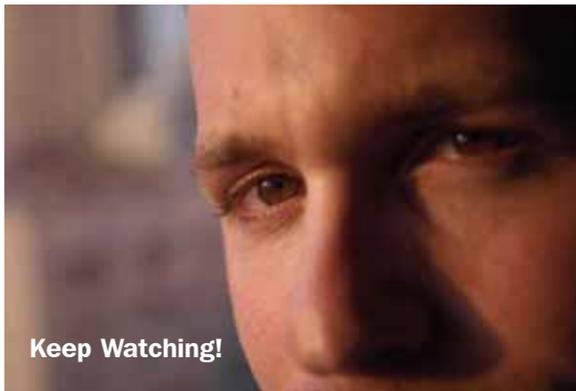
*Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory ... But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is (Mark 13:26,32-33).*

Everyone on earth, including those who are waiting for Jesus, will be taken by surprise when it actually happens. So believers are urged to keep watching, waiting and preparing for this great event.

## **Jesus WILL come back**

The Bible states very many times that Jesus will return to the earth and bring a time of judgement. At this judgement some people will be rewarded with eternal life but others will be rejected and sent away without hope and in great distress.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them*



*one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' ... Then he will also say to those on his left hand 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'... And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).*

For years Bible students have been predicting the return of Jesus, and some sceptics make mockery of them. "We've heard it all before; You've been saying that for years." But one day Jesus will come back and we need to prepare for it right now.

The Bible teaches that we should read God's message to mankind and act upon it. Belief should precede baptism – a burial in water which acts out our identification with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We must do this if we want to be saved.

This is how it is. We are NOT 'crying Wolf'.

**Anna Hart**

# Hosea and Joel

The last part of the Old Testament comprises 12 short books, written by prophets over many centuries. They are not in chronological order so, when summarising the messages they contain, **David Pearce** will relate each one to the books of Kings and Chronicles – Israel’s historical narratives – so that we can see how their message was appropriate to the period.

## Hosea: Unhappy Marriage

The first verse of the prophecy of Hosea explains that he lived in the same period as Isaiah, for he ministered during “the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel” (Hosea 1:1).

Unlike Isaiah, however, Hosea’s work was not with the people of Judah, but with the northern 10-tribe kingdom, during the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. The prophet was specifically instructed from the outset to marry a woman of loose morals. If this seems harsh and unnatural, it reminds us how much these faithful messengers from God suffered to bring home a lesson to God’s people. Isaiah with his girdle, Jeremiah in the dungeon and Daniel in the lion’s den likewise sacrificed their health and comfort. The reason for this strange request was given straight away:

*“Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord” (Hosea 1:2).*

For the next few years, Hosea was to act out – in his relationship with his wife Gomer – the feelings of God Himself as His beloved people broke their vow to serve Him, and went off to worship idols. Things began well as

their marriage was blessed with a baby boy. Hosea was instructed to call him ‘Jezreel’, or ‘Scattering’ – for God’s people were soon to be scattered. But before long Gomer showed her true colours. She became pregnant again, but not by her husband. This time it was a daughter, ‘Loruhamah’ or ‘No mercy’. Then came another child, again not Hosea’s, named ‘Lo Ammi’ which means ‘Not my People’.

Imagine the prophet standing on the doorstep and calling his children in for dinner – “Scattering, No Mercy, Not my People”. What a sad message for everyone who was in earshot! And how his family, friends and neighbours must have mocked the prophet for his big ‘mistake’ in marrying Gomer! God speaks through him, hurt and angry. His people deserved to be exposed and divorced for their ‘adultery’. He would reject them as no longer His people, and no longer have mercy on them. He would scatter them to the winds.

## God’s Love for Israel

So profound was God’s love for the nation He had brought out of Egypt, He could not bear to leave them in misery forever. He would make a new start, as the prophet declared:

*“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her*

vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor (the route Joshua took from Jericho to the Promised Land) as a door of hope ... I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy ... Then I will sow (the Hebrew for 'scatter' also means 'to sow) her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' and they shall say, 'You are my God!' " (Hosea 2:14–23).

Next the unfortunate prophet was instructed to pay money to buy back his wife and he then instructed her to stay away from her lovers for many days, simulating the long time of Israel's exile from the land, with no king, and no idols. But there would come a time of recovery:

*Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:5).*

The prophet continues in this way, spotlighting the empty worship of a people that had no heart for God, and the inevitable judgment that would follow. Chapter 11 speaks poignantly of the heartache as God looked down on the infant nation He had brought out of Egypt. He had taught them to walk, and tenderly fed them, only to find (as many parents do) that His sweet little son turned his back on Him when he grew up.

Yet such is God's love, He cannot bring Himself to reject them. He vows to restore them, once they have been punished. It is this abiding mercy of God, "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love", as Moses was taught on Sinai, that gives us all hope.

## **Joel: The Day of the LORD**

Unlike Hosea, Joel gives no clues as to when he lived, launching straight into his message of warning:

*The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? (Joel 1:1–2).*

His warning was about a great and unstoppable invasion of the land of Judah that was about to take place, probably by the Assyrians. So Joel may have been living at the same time as Isaiah and Hosea.

### **Locusts!**



Joel's first chapter depicts a ferocious attack of locusts on the land, stripping the green crops to the stem and leaving the people and their herds without food. Locusts were a real threat in Old Testament times, when a typical cloud of these insects could number 150 million per square mile and each eat their own weight in leaves every day.

That was bad enough, but Joel used this assault as a simile for human invaders who would burn and destroy everything in their path. Too late, he warned, the people would rush to the Temple to pray for deliverance by a God they had neglected to serve. The Assyrian (and later) invasions were to be, he says, nothing less than "the Day of the LORD" (1:15), judgement sent by God Himself.

This theme returns again in chapter two, where the prophet promises that if the people genuinely repented of their bad ways (“*rend your hearts and not your garments*”, he says), God would divert the invading army away and restore their lost crops. The passage assumes this will happen, and ends with an extraordinary prophecy:

*It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls (Joel 2:28–32).*

## **Several Layers**

This is one of those prophecies which has several different fulfilments over the centuries, for the principles of repentance and recovery hold good in every age. In the first fulfilment, we know that Hezekiah’s people did cry to God for help in their ‘Day of the LORD’ when all seemed to be lost. The outcome was that Jerusalem was miraculously saved from the invading army of Sennacherib. But there was no outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that occasion. That part of the prophecy was fulfilled in the first-century, at the Feast of Pentecost. When the Spirit

was given to the believers in Jerusalem, the Apostle Peter told the excited crowds that Joel’s words had been fulfilled in their hearing. And for those who were prepared to believe and be baptised, God was sending them deliverance, not at that moment from enemy soldiers, but from the power of sin and death (see Acts 2:1–21).

This offer of repentance followed by blessing came before a second Day of the LORD, when, 40 years later, Jerusalem was destroyed by Roman armies. Believers who listened to Jesus’ warnings escaped.

The Apostle Paul seized on the same prophecy in Joel and pointed out that it says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved. This means, he says, that Gentiles (non-Jews) are included in the promise of salvation. He had been sent, he said, to ‘call’ people to know the good news. Nor can we rule out a third fulfilment in ‘the last days’ when a humbled Israel, invaded and broken, will turn to Jesus their Messiah and find salvation before the final Day of the LORD bursts upon this world.

That is what the third chapter of this amazing prophecy concentrates upon. In a third Day of the LORD (Joel 3:14), the prophet sees God’s people taken prisoner and desolate. But then the Lord gathers together the armies, not of Assyria but of all nations, for a great Judgment at Jerusalem, a harvest reaping, when He avenges the wrongs done to Israel with earthquake and fire. From that time water flows from Jerusalem to transform the desert, just as we saw in Ezekiel’s last chapters, and God dwells in Jerusalem, His holy city, forever.

**David M Pearce**

# Let the Light Shine!

**The Bible starts the very beginning of everything when it announces: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).**

This is a foundation truth which is often repeated, for example: “... *the living God ... made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them*” (Acts 14:15). Those are the words of the apostles Barnabus and Paul, so we know that the apostles believed in God the Creator, and this belief increased their sense of urgency about preaching the Gospel and thus enlightening people about God’s gracious purpose.

## **Light brings Life**

The first recorded words of God the Creator concern light: God said, “*Let there be light*”; and *there was light* (Genesis 1:3), and after that – on the third day – he made grass and herbs and fruit. The latter could not have a hope of living without light, for we now know that the leaves of plants convert sunlight into plant energy (by photosynthesis).

Without light, plants become straggly and eventually die. I recently watched a forestry demonstration of a new machine for cutting down trees in areas of forest so that light could get to the undergrowth and encourage it to sprout. We saw areas where this treatment had been successful, and where heathers were already growing in areas previously unable to support growth, because they had been in the dark.

God has always been associated with light. The pillar of fire at night lighted the way for the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness. When Moses went up into the Mountain to speak with God and to receive the commandments (recorded in Exodus Ch 20) contact with the Divine presence caused his face to shine and the Israelites were afraid to come near, so afterwards he put a veil on his face (Exodus 34:30-33).

## **Visions of Brightness**

When the prophet Ezekiel was a captive in Babylon, he had visions of God and saw a great cloud, and fire enfolding itself, and brightness all about it. His prophecy begins with that



dramatic picture, which might have been something like those bright orange and red colours seen in the clouds at sunrise and sunset, and it was a fitting start to a dramatic prophecy about the future of nations. The vision commenced his prophetic ministry which included important revelations, including the prediction that God would scatter the nation of Israel all over the world and then regather them, when the time was right.



Chapter 37 contains another vision – this time of a valley full of dry bones – and the prophet was told that it represented the nation of Israel whose home of national restitution had gone:

*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).*

When all hope was lost, the prophet was told, God would bring His scattered people back to the land to become a nation once again:

*“Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land” (Ezekiel 37:21).*

Ezekiel was a captive himself as was the prophet Daniel, so the message God gave Ezekiel about regathering Israel would have been very comforting to him also. He must have been sad as a captive, but God’s promise of better things to come would give him hope.

## **Brightness Within**

In the New Testament we find Jesus with some of his disciples – Peter, James and John – up a mountain, when they saw a vision in which Moses and Elijah appeared. As they looked, Jesus was transformed before them; not just his face, as with Moses, but all of him:

*He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him (Matthew 17:2–3).*

Then a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice declared:

*“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matthew 17:5).*

## **Within and Without**

That gives us another indication that where God is there is light, and after Jesus ascended to heaven to be his Father’s right hand man, he too is thereafter described in similar terms.

*I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One*

*like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes like a flame of fire (Revelation 1:12–14).*

It is not surprising therefore that when Saul the Pharisee was stopped on the road to Damascus, intent upon limiting the spread of Christianity; as he journeyed:

*Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:3–4).*

The light was so bright it blinded him. This was the turning point for Saul (later known as the apostle Paul). The light had forced him to realise that he had been going the wrong way! He became an ardent follower of the Lord Jesus, dedicating his life to spreading the good news of the gospel of salvation.

## **Let the Light Shine!**

As we have seen, light is vital if life is to be sustained. But when Jesus spoke about light, he meant the light that illuminates the mind and grants insight and understanding, for the knowledge of the truth leads to everlasting life. That is what Jesus meant when he said of himself:

*“I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).*

*“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46).*

At present there are many things wrong with the world, things that God means to change when His Kingdom is established on earth. With King Jesus

reigning from Jerusalem over a world-wide kingdom, earth will at last have an enlightened ruler who will establish justice and judgement. He will not rule to please himself, or to demonstrate his magnificence, but will rule in the fear of God and the result will be a world which will be full of beauty and glory. This is how the prophets depict that coming day when at last the true light shines:

*He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain (2 Samuel 23:3–4).*

*To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2).*

If you want to be part of that future age of glory, be sure to read and understand God’s purpose revealed in His Word the Bible. Let the light shine within as you come to understand all that God is doing.

Be assured of this: what God has begun to do, He will most certainly fulfil!

## **Roger Churhouse**

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# In Solomon's Portico

One day the Jewish leaders asked Jesus *"How long do you keep us in doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly"* and Jesus replied quite bluntly: *"I told you, and you do not believe"* (John 10:24).

This exchange took place in the part of the Temple described as Solomon's colonnade, porch or portico, an area of the Temple precinct, built by Herod the Great, which could be used for a variety of different purposes.

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus some of the apostles continued to preach and teach in this location as it was passed by people who were going to worship at the Temple. One day they were joined there by a very excited man and a crowd who wanted to know just what had happened to him.

## Lame from Birth

The two apostles – Peter and John – had been walking to the Temple at the time of prayer, the ninth hour. For us, that would be three o'clock in the afternoon. As they entered the Temple, they were solicited by the beggar seeking money or alms. The man had been lame from birth and was carried each day to the Temple Gate called "Beautiful". There he was probably able to collect quite a reasonable amount, as worshippers were likely to be in a generous state of mind. But this time he was about to be first disappointed, and then elated.

He asked for a contribution from Peter and John as they passed, but Peter told him they had no money. The early Jerusalem congregation had

decided to hold everything communally, so this comment fits well with their practice. But before the beggar had time to be disappointed, Peter said:

*"Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength (Acts 3:6-7).*



For the first time ever, that man was able to walk. It was an amazing miracle. Everyone had seen this cripple at the Beautiful Gate asking for money. He would be well known, and many of those in the Temple would recognise him, now walking and leaping and praising God. When he wrote his first letter Peter had this to say:

*You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19).*

## Questions, Questions!

There were many of those to be answered, and doing so provided Peter

with an excellent opportunity to talk again about his beliefs. Some of the crowd would have been shamed by some of the things Peter said.

He told them about Jesus, the Holy and Righteous One, whom Pilate had sought to release, but the crowd had demanded the release of a murderer instead. So, they had killed the Prince-of-life, who God had raised from the dead. It was not by any power of the apostles that the lame man had been healed. Rather, it was faith in the name of Jesus that had given the man perfect health.

Having accused the crowd, that some of them had been complicit in killing the Lord Jesus, Peter now told them what they must do about it.

*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 (Acts 3:19–20).*

## **Sons of the Prophets**

He also quoted Old Testament prophets, well known to his audience, who identified Jesus as the one Moses had said would come. Indeed, Peter asserted, Jesus was the One all the prophets had foretold would come, from Samuel onwards, and those prophets had merely confirmed the promises made to the patriarchs. One such promise was made to Abraham:

*You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ (Acts 3:25).*

This promise is recorded in Genesis 22:18, and it repeats a promise made to Abraham much earlier (Genesis

12:3). It is evident that the early disciples followed the practice of the Lord Jesus in seeing their preaching and teaching as something that followed on from all that happened in the Old Testament. It is not possible to understand the full impact of Peter’s words in Solomon’s portico without seeing them in their historical context.

## **Think Carefully!**

As is so often the case, Peter’s words had a sting in the tail. He now said this of Jesus:

*“To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:26).*

Peter was clearly intent on stirring up his audience to think very carefully about their position. Some of them would have been amongst the mob who had yelled “Crucify him” when Jesus was on trial. They needed to do something about this.

It was a similar message to the one Peter had given on the day of Pentecost, one that was equally designed to warn of the need for repentance and a change of life.

## **Stop Now!**

Peter’s words certainly had an effect on some, for the priests, the Captain of the Temple and some Sadducees came to the apostles, incensed that he was preaching the resurrection of the dead! It was the first of the many conflicts between the young church and the Jewish authorities, as we shall see as we continue to examine the message preached by these early believers.

**Mark Sheppard**

# God's Promises and You

## What do we need to be saved from?

Sin and its final result: eternal death.

## The intention and benefit to us of God's promises

**2 Peter 1:4** God's power and goodness has "*given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*" Hence, our salvation depends on these promises.

## The importance to us of God's promises

Having an understanding of God's promises affects:

- 1 Our attitude to the Old Testament.
- 2 Our belief about life after death.
- 3 Our understanding about the place and timing of reward for faithful people.
- 4 Our appreciation of the future role of Jesus Christ.
- 5 Our understanding of God's ultimate plan for this earth.

So, understanding and believing in the promises of God has a profound and positive effect upon the whole structure of our religious faith.

## Why we can have confidence in God's promises

So many of God's promises have already been fulfilled. Details of Christ's birth, life, death and resur-

rection were accurately predicted in the Old Testament. They confirm the Divine truth of the Bible.

## Jesus Christ is the focus of God's promises

**Acts 13:32,33** God has confirmed the good news of His promises "made to the fathers" by raising Jesus from the dead.

**Romans 15:8,9** Jesus has confirmed the "promises made to the fathers" for the benefit of Gentiles as well as Jews.

**2 Corinthians 1:19,20** "For all the promises of God in him (Jesus) are Yes, and in him Amen..."

## 1. God's promise in Eden

**Genesis 3:15.** The seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, and in the process he himself would be bruised in the heel. This foreshadowed the mission of Jesus Christ, a very special "seed of the woman", who would deal sin and death a mortal blow, and so reverse the process begun in Eden. This would not be without cost to himself.

## 2. God's promises to Abraham

**Genesis 12:1-3&7**

**Genesis 13:14-17**

**Genesis 15:1-7** Note. Abram's belief was counted for righteousness (15:6).

**Genesis 15:13 and 18**

**Genesis 17:1-8**

Note. Abram's name was changed (v5)

to “Abraham” (father of many nations). His personal possession of the land will be everlasting (v8).

**Genesis 22:15-18** Note: The promise was confirmed with an oath. A singular seed in v17 (the AV, RV and ESV translations are correct; other versions incorrectly pluralise it).

- ✓ All nations will be blessed in Abraham and his seed.
- ✓ Abraham and his seed are to possess the land for ever.
- ✓ Abraham is to be the father of an innumerable seed.
- ✓ Abraham is to be the father of a singular seed who will conquer all enemies.

### Abraham - an important New Testament figure

Abraham is mentioned in the New Testament no less than 74 times – a good deal more than most of the apostles.

**Hebrews 6:12-19** The unchangeableness of God’s word was confirmed by His promise being combined with His oath (Genesis 22:16).

**Hebrews 11:8,9,13** Abraham died in faith without receiving the promises but saw them “afar off”. (See also Acts 7:4-5.)

**Hebrews 11:39,40** All the Old Testament worthies mentioned in this chapter died in faith without receiving the promises “that they should not be made perfect apart from us”.

**Romans 4:1-3** Abraham’s belief was counted by God as righteousness.

**4:13,16** The benefit of the promises is for all who share Abraham’s faith.

**4:20-25** Abraham took God at His word (understanding that resurrection would need to precede his reward). God will regard us as righteous, as He

did Abraham, if we believe in Him as the one who raised Christ from death.

**Galatians 3:6-9** Those who have the faith of Abraham will share his reward.

**3:14,22** The blessing of Abraham extends to all (Jew or Gentile) who believe in Christ.

**3:16,17** The singular seed (Genesis 22:17) is Christ. The promises were not superseded by the Law of Moses that came 430 years later.

**3:26-29** Those baptised into Christ become Abraham’s seed and heirs of the promises.

### 3. God’s promise to King David

**2 Samuel 7:11-16** and **1 Chronicles 17:11-15**

David’s seed will:

- ✓ Be the Son of God.
- ✓ Build a house for God’s name.
- ✓ Reign for ever from David’s throne (Luke 1:30-33).
- ✓ David himself will witness these events.

### If we DON’T accept Bible teaching about God’s promises, what about US?

**Ephesians 2:12** Estranged from God and His promises and with no hope (of salvation).

### If we DO accept and take the required action, where do we stand?

**Ephesians 2:13; 3:6** Near to God and partakers of the promises (and thus “heirs of salvation”).

**Mark Sawyer**

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