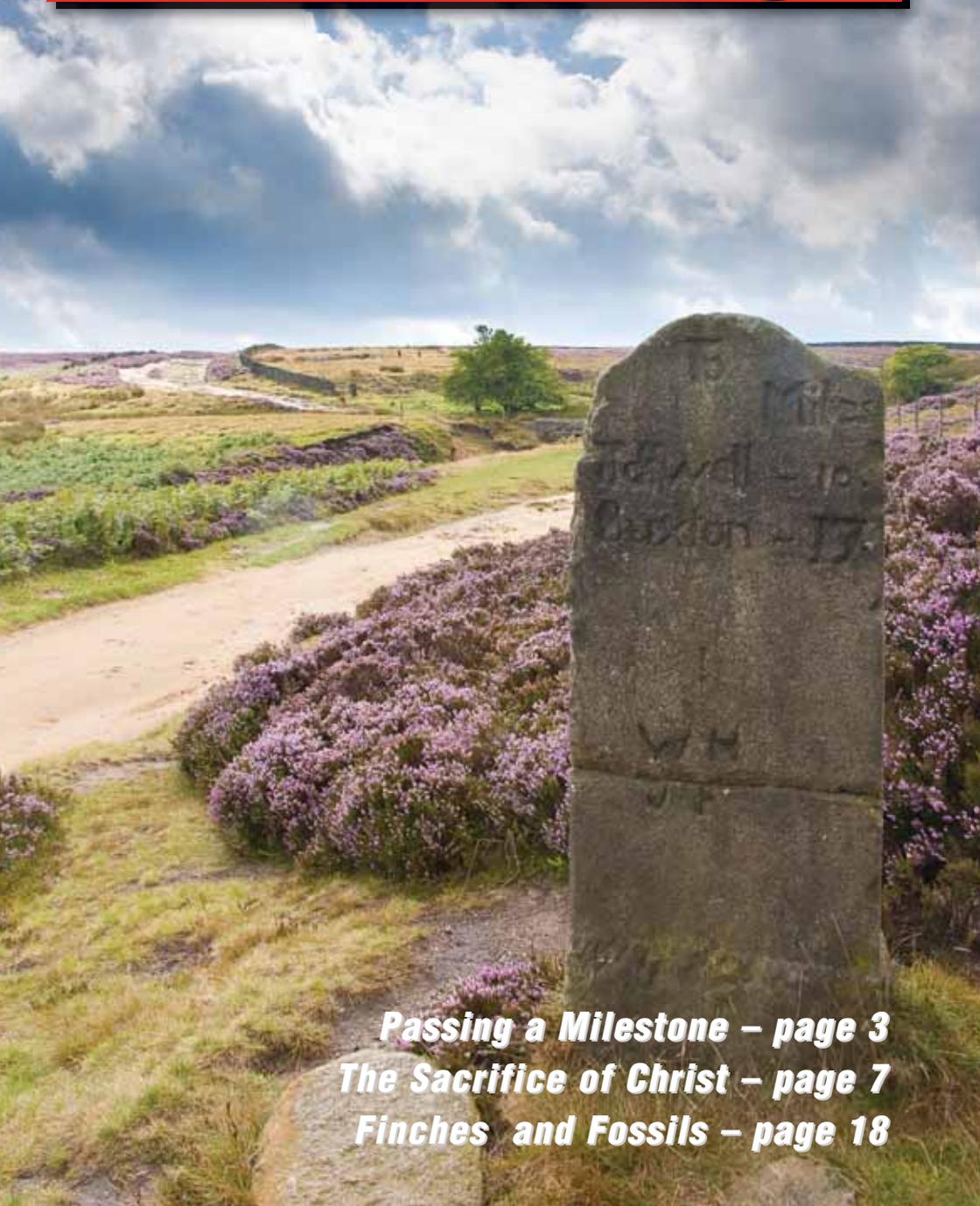


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1542



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The Sacrifice of Christ – page 7
Finches and Fossils – page 18

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

128th Year

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1542



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Bible Versions

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Passing a Milestone

There was a time when milestones or marker stones were very important. If you were driving livestock to market along a dry and dusty road, every milestone you passed would tell you that you were getting nearer journey's end. Or if you had been allocated a parcel of land on which to grow food for your family, at a time well before accurate maps had been drawn, the preservation of the marker stone was vital. If someone moved it, you and your family could starve. That is why the law that God gave to Moses contained the commandment:

You shall not remove your neighbour's landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess (Deuteronomy 19:14).

Interfere with those fixed points in a person's inheritance and you could bring a curse down upon yourself (27:17), for the arrangements God had made were meant to be permanent. It was not for others to change them.

Unchangeable Things

Milestones have been removed from most roads, especially now that many motorists have satellite navigation systems that pinpoint their location. Road signs like that change all the time. But travelling along life's highway, towards our individual journey's end, hasn't changed at all since God first created man. As we journey through life, people often say that we have 'reached another milestone' – whether that means finishing

our studies, starting work, getting married, having children, or getting older as another birthday arrives!

We change, and can do little about that, but God's purpose never alters: it is fixed and constant. His revealed Word, the Bible, is equally unalterable. Moses warned Israel in these terms, when he was expounding and explaining God's law:

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:1–2).

And the New Testament ends with a similar warning, to indicate that God's revelation was then complete:

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18–19).

Just the Same

God's revelation was complete when the 66 books of the Bible were finished. There is nothing more we need, and it is strictly forbidden to change what God has said, whether by church council, the supposed influence of the

Holy Spirit, prophetic utterance, or papal decree. Over the last 2000 years we might have expected that some changes would occur in heaven, given the vast changes that have occurred on earth through industrialisation and scientific advance. But heaven is not like earth, and the Scripture says of the Lord Jesus that he is: *“the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8).

That is good news indeed. For the gracious Lord that we read about in the gospels, who was always ready to heal the sick, comfort the bereaved, feed the multitudes and teach us how to live, is the same Lord who now sits at God’s right hand in heaven. The promises he made – about an eternal inheritance and a kingdom that is coming – are promises we can still believe. For Jesus is himself the guarantee that everything God promised will be fulfilled absolutely:

“For all the promises of God in him are ‘Yes’, and in him ‘Amen’, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

In that verse, “Amen” means that they are true and reliable, for God will never let us down, even if we sometimes let Him down by our conduct or our attitudes.

Along the Way

How do we know that God’s purpose is progressing and that things are moving forward? We know because we have been given various pointers – like milestones along the path of history. Asked when the end of the age would come, Jesus told his disciples to expect the gradual breakdown of society and he spoke about wars, famines, earthquakes, epidemics and the growth of false religion. All these things have happened many times over as history

has unfolded, each time giving believers hope that the end was near. But one signpost was awaited: one that would be a clear pointer to the end of everything.

Jesus foretold the conquest and collapse of Jerusalem by an invading army and that happened some forty years afterwards, when the Romans sacked the city and the Jewish people were dispersed. He also predicted the regathering of the Jewish people and the repopulation of Jerusalem when *“the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”* (Luke 21:24).

The Jewish nation returned from its long exile in 1948 and the Jews reoccupied the whole of Jerusalem in 1967. Both events were milestones that had to be passed as we near the end of human government and the beginning of divine rulership. For the reign of King Jesus on earth was promised long ago when Gabriel said to Mary:

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31–33).

Jesus Christ is coming to reign on earth and all the milestones along the way are now indicating that we are nearing the end of the long wait. God is about to bring His gracious purpose to its wonderful conclusion. It is a remarkable thing to be living now, even though these are difficult times, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Be sure to be ready!

Editor

The Jews – God’s Witnesses

Whatever we may think of the nation of Israel and its actions among the nations of the world today, there is no denying the fact that Israel and the Jews have a primary role in the plan and purpose of God.

A Holy People

This is what was said about the children of Israel when they first became a nation following their remarkable and awe-inspiring deliverance from slavery in Egypt:

You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).

God’s Conditions

In Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28, God told the nation how bountifully He would bless them if they were faithful to Him and what ter-



rible curses He would bring upon them if they turned away from Him and served other gods. Here are a couple of passages from Deuteronomy 28 about what would happen to them if they turned away from their God:

You shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you (Deuteronomy 28:37).

...Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known – wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were morning!’ because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see (Deuteronomy 28:64–67).

Witnesses

Because of their unfaithfulness, all the appalling things written about what would happen to them have come upon them throughout their long and

gruelling history. In all this they bear witness to the veracity of the Word of God and to the One from whom they turned away. Sadly, today many Jewish people do not even acknowledge God's existence. Yet the Scripture speaks for itself:



be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).

This promise became just as true of the nation as it did of Abraham himself and it is still not totally fulfilled. All throughout history we have seen the fulfilment of this. Many nations have risen and fallen all because of the way they treated the people of God.

“You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no saviour. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “that I am God” (Isaiah 43:10–12).

On many occasions, nations were used by God to bring His judgements on His people, but they were always excessive in delivering those judgements and as a result they too were punished. On other occasions, nations have suffered judgements from God because of their harsh treatment of His people.

They are indeed God's witnesses that He is God, reluctant and unknowing as they may be. All throughout the Old Testament the Jewish people are referred to by God as “My people” and that is still the case today. The apostle Paul in his letter to the believers in Rome says:

In the 21st century, this ancient promise of blessing and cursing still applies, and we see it at work in the world today. Israel and the Jews, at the time of the end, are still a potent witness to the reliability and truthfulness of the Word of God, and to the fact that He is still active in the affairs of this world.

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1).

God's Promises

John Shepley

Centuries before Israel became a nation, God made wonderful promises to their forefather Abraham. This is part of what God promised him:

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“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall



The Sacrifice of Christ

Jesus died to save mankind from sin and death and that is a central part of the Christian gospel. But how and why does that make any difference? Why did Jesus have to die, and was his death instead of us, or on our behalf? Those are the issues that **Graham Cooper** considers in this article.

“For” or “Instead of Us”?

To find the answer from the Bible, and not from human reasoning or church teaching, we need look no further than the apostle Paul:

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, **Christ died for us** (Romans 5:8);

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3).

A dictionary would show us that doing something “on behalf of someone” is not the same as doing something as a “substitute” or “in place of” someone. And of course it follows that if Jesus really died *instead* of each of us, then we should no longer need to die.

What did Jesus Say?

In Luke’s gospel we have the record of Jesus instituting the Breaking of Bread, a way of remembering his sacrifice:

He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given **for you**; do this in remembrance of me.” Likewise he also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed **for you**” (Luke 22:19–20).

Once again the language is quite clear. Jesus died “for us”. His sacrifice on the cross, was for his disciples and

for all who choose to come to him in faith, recognizing that they are sinners in need of salvation. The apostle Paul told Timothy:

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Timothy 1:15).

Old Testament Atonement

An examination of the meaning of the sacrifices offered during Old Testament times will help us understand the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection replaced all such sacrifices (Romans 10:4).

The various sacrifices are detailed in the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament. Animal sacrifices were provided by God as a means of bringing people to a realization of their sinfulness and their need for forgiveness and Leviticus chapter 4 gives details of the Sin Offering.



if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering (Leviticus 4:3).

Sacrifices were specified for all sinners – for three classes of people mentioned in the chapter – the difference being the animal to be offered. A bull had to be offered for the High Priest and for the Nation and a male goat kid for a ruler. When “the common people” required atonement for their sins, their sin offering is specified as a female goat (4:28) and all these animals had to be “unblemished”.

In every case the same actions were to apply. The worshipper was to lay his hands on the animal, before it was killed. The priest then took some of the blood of the sin offering and daubed it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, before pouring the rest at the base of the altar. The fat was burnt upon the altar, and then:

The bull's hide and all its flesh, with its head and legs, its entrails and offal – the whole bull he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire (Leviticus 4:11–12).

Act of Association

By laying his hands on the head of the animal before it was killed, the worshipper would associate himself with the animal, so the animal would die on behalf of the worshipper, or as his representative. And the blood that was shed represented the life of the worshipper, for the Scripture makes that connection:

The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11).

It would be wrong to think that forgiveness was conferred because of these ritual acts of sacrifice. They were an important means of teaching vital spiritual truths, as the New Testament explains, and were designed to bring the worshipper closer to God, who alone can forgive sin.

The shedding of blood was at the heart of the atonement (Hebrews 9:22). The worshipper had to realise that sin could not be forgiven without the shedding of blood, and by killing his offering the sinner was to recognise that he was himself under the sentence of death. It was only by observing the ritual God had provided – of sacrifice and the shedding of blood – that a person could be atoned for and reconciled to Him.

Christ's Sacrifice

The apostle Paul explains this about the sacrificial death of Jesus:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:13–14).



The Lord Jesus took the Old Law and nailed it to the cross, so his death and subsequent resurrection had the effect of superseding, and replacing it with the New Covenant.

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason he is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:12–15).

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden – because of their disobedience to the commandment of God – we read that:

For Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).

Their sinfulness was covered, or atoned for, by the shedding of the blood of animals – so that tunics of skin could be made to cover the bodies of Adam and Eve. The death of the animals, whose skins were used, was the consequence of sin and was necessary so that sin could be forgiven by the LORD God, and atonement made.

Propitiation for our Sins

The Lord Jesus Christ was sinless – his was an unblemished sacrifice, the only means by which true forgiveness and reconciliation could be brought into the world. The apostle John says this about that sacrifice:

He himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

The word “propitiation” is translated as “expiation” in modern versions – something that satisfies the righteous demands of God. Jesus is “*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). By his sacrifice and the shedding of his blood, Jesus became the means by which we can be reconciled to God and have our sins forgiven. But we must believe what God has revealed in His Word:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Act of Association

The Lord Jesus did not die in the place of anyone, but he died on behalf of everyone who is willing to put their faith and confidence in him, and to be associated with him in the way he has appointed.

When sacrifices were offered at the Tabernacle or Temple, that association was made by placing hands on the animal to be offered. That physical contact is no longer possible, for Jesus died nearly 2000 years ago. Now if we want our sins forgiven we need to be baptised, by full immersion, as an act of association. As the apostle Paul explains:



Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with (Romans 6:3–6).

Once for All

Sacrifices under the Law of Moses had to be offered year by year to remind worshippers that they were sinners in need of forgiveness. But the sacrifice of Jesus was a once-for-all event. It signifies that the righteous demands of God have been met in full and that if we acknowledge our sins and come to God through Christ, asking for forgive-

ness, we can be forgiven whatever we have done. Baptism into Christ is the means of starting a new life with God. Knowing that our sins are forgiven gives us a new relationship with Him and makes us members of God's family, as we await the Return of His Son from heaven:

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that he should offer himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another – he then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation (Hebrews 9:24–28).

Furthermore, Christ died to declare the righteousness of God – to show that God was right to condemn sin, because sin could now be seen for the terrible thing that it really is. The apostle Paul explains this in Romans chapter 3, verses 25 and 26.

Once we accept that God is righteous in all His ways, we can then receive His forgiveness. God is willing to count us righteous if we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and seek to obey His commandments, beginning with baptism. To say that Jesus died instead of us negates God's forgiveness. Jesus died on our behalf, to bring us to God.

Grahame A Cooper

Amos and Obadiah

The last part of the Old Testament comprises twelve 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.

Amos – The Farmer Prophet

Amos tells us that he prophesied, like Hosea, in the reign of King Jeroboam the Second. He explains in chapter 7:14 that he was not a professional prophet, but was called from his normal farming job to go across the border from Judah, where he lived, to deliver a message from God to the Northern Kingdom.

His opening words would be appreciated by his audience, for he spoke of God’s judgments falling on the enemies of Israel for their cruelty. Syria to the north, the Philistines on the west, Ammon and Moab eastwards, and Edom in the south – each felt the lash of his tongue. Next he condemned his own people, Judah, and warned that the people of Jerusalem would be punished for lies and lawlessness.

We can imagine his listeners solemnly nodding their heads in approval at all this. But then their faces darkened, because he swung round upon them, and for the next seven chapters he poured out God’s anger on the Ten Tribe kingdom of Israel for their open immorality and idolatry. They were prosperous. Many of them had enough money to enjoy two houses each – one for summer and one for winter – fashionably decorated with ivory. They lay on couches and listened to the latest pop songs



and anointed themselves with anti-wrinkle cream. But they had no time for the God who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

Farming Background

The figures of speech used by Amos are drawn from his farming background, and illustrate what life was like in Israel 2500 years ago. He sees a man escape from first a lion and then a bear, but when he runs into his house a snake bites him. He follows a lion running away from a shepherd with the legs of a lamb in its mouth.

He watches locusts descend to gobble up the precious pasture that was just starting to grow again after the king had taken the first mowing. He is shown a basket of late summer

fruit. Each theme is used to illustrate God's coming judgments on Israel.

"Go Home!"

Before long the priest in charge of King Jeroboam's idol worship attacked the prophet. "Go home to Judah", he said. "Do your prophesying there!" (Amos 7:10-13). Amos replied that he was not a professional preacher, but a farmer, taken from his herds and orchards and sent by God to prophesy against the Ten Tribe kingdom.

"I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.' Now therefore, hear the word of the LORD..." (Amos 7:14-16).

God had seen the way that in Israel they oppressed the poor; their greed to get on with business the moment the Sabbath was over; and the undersized weights on their shop scales. A time of judgment was coming when the divine judge would drop a plummet into their cities, and take out all that were not upright. Then there would be a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. In one of his most powerful statements, Amos declares

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," says the Lord (Amos 9:8).

That is a principle. God looks down on the nations of the earth, and sor-

rowfully measures the depths of their depravity, until the time comes when He can stand them no more. That day is very near for our society, and His plummet will go through the millions who mock at His words, separating out for His Kingdom the few who love Him.

Typically, Amos at once looks ahead to the Kingdom, a time when King David's capital will be restored, when Gentile nations will be called by God's name, and farmers like Amos will rejoice. For, he says, there will be such heavy crops that the ploughman will overtake the reaper. As for Israel, shaken among the nations like grain in a sieve (9:9), Amos concludes:

"I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God (Amos 9:14-15).

Obadiah & the Fall of Esau

The Hebrew name Obadiah means 'Servant of the Lord', but he tells us nothing of his background or when he lived.

His theme concerns the neighbouring kingdom of Edom (Esau), to the south of Israel.

Esau was the twin of Jacob (later renamed Israel), and there was a perpetual rivalry between the two men and their descendants. King David conquered the people of Edom and

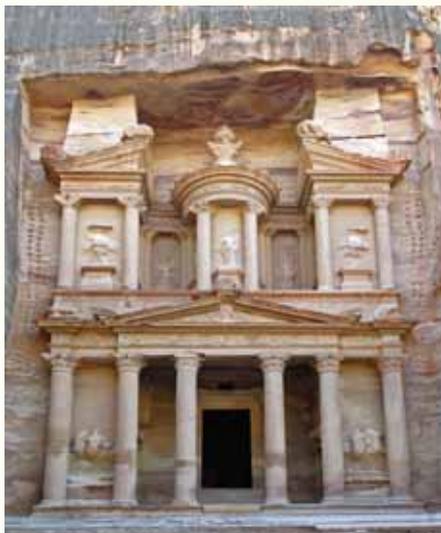


brought them under tribute, but in later times they rebelled and became independent.

Esau's people were warriors, preferring the sword to the plough. When enemies attacked Judah, the Edomites waited in the wings like hyenas and plundered where they could. Their base in Mount Seir made them feel impregnable. But Obadiah warned that God was unhappy with their pride, and their savage treatment of their blood relatives. He would open up their mountain retreat to the enemy.

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the Lord ... For violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. In the day that you stood on the other side – in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem – even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress (Obadiah 3–12).

History shows the truth of this prediction. At some point after Judah returned from captivity in Babylon, the Nabatean people invaded and took over the territory of Edom, and Esau's people disappeared for ever. The red rock temples and caves of Petra, popular on the Jordanian tourist trail, are monuments to their conquerors.



Facade of Al Khazneh, Petra, Jordan, built after Edom had been conquered by the Nabateans.

However, like all the prophets, Obadiah has a view of the time of the end. Esau, the red one, the man of the earth (in Hebrew 'Edom', 'Adam', 'red' and the word for 'soil' are similar) comes to represent mankind – in all its pride and rebellion against God. The prophet sees a Day of the Lord fall upon all nations. Like the Edomites centuries before, nations will occupy Jerusalem, and drink to their success on God's holy hill. But that success will be short-lived for, as Obadiah says:

Then saviours shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's (Obadiah 21).

The time is coming when the Kingdom of God will be established, with its capital in Jerusalem, and then all nations will learn to worship God and rejoice in His salvation.

David M Pearce

Resurrection from the Dead

Peter and John had attracted attention in Solomon's Portico in the Temple by healing a man lame from birth, as Acts chapter 3 describes. This gave Peter an opportunity to preach about the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go..." (Acts 3:13).

Temple Trouble

Understandably, this attracted the attention of the Temple authorities, for they were hostile to this new group of believers who had sprung up following the death of Jesus. After all, it had been the religious leaders who had instigated his death in the first place, thus hoping to silence his teaching. That they had not succeeded was fast becoming a real issue for them. They might also have thought that their business interests would be damaged (for the Temple had become a commercial concern) and even that their livelihood could be threatened.

*As they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus **the resurrection from the dead** (Acts 4:1-2).*

Peter and John had only gone to the Temple at the ninth hour, about three

o'clock in the afternoon, and so it was late when this happened. The outcome was that they were put into custody overnight in the Temple precincts.

Too Late!

In some ways it was already too late. Many had been convinced by what Peter said, helped no doubt by the miracle which had been performed, and already about five thousand Jews now believed the gospel of salvation (Acts 4:4). No wonder the Jewish rulers were anxious.

The next day the temple authorities, including the chief priest and his influential family, met together. We are told the names of four of them (4:6). Annas had been High Priest, but had been removed from office by the Roman authorities. He had been followed in turn by each of his five sons and Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, was the current High Priest.

This group of Jewish leaders took Peter and John, apparently uneducated fisherman, and demanded of them: *"By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:7).*

They ought to have been more circumspect, for they had asked the Lord Jesus a similar question and, as so often happened, it had rebounded on them (Matthew 21:23).

Peter's Witness

Peter might not have been educated at the feet of a well-known Jewish teacher, but he had spent three years with the Lord Jesus, listening to and

absorbing what he taught. He now demonstrated that he also knew the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures. He sets out his case quite bluntly.

*“Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, **whom God raised from the dead**, by him this man stands here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).*

This was not designed to pacify Caiaphas and his fellow-priests, for Peter had as good as accused them of murder. He had also shown the folly of what they had done. They had attempted to eliminate Jesus, and not only had they failed, but now Jesus’ followers were also preaching the same message, with equally impressive miraculous results.

Next Peter quoted one of the Psalms: *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:22–23).*

He did not quote the whole Psalm, nor did he need to, for his audience would have known it well. So Peter went on to say that the Psalm was a prophecy about Jesus, whom they had rejected. The prophet Isaiah also speaks of such a stone: “

Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily (Isaiah 28:16).

The priests would know that prophecy also, but might not have expected Peter’s next forthright declaration:

“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other

name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11–12).

Clearly Peter knew his Bible well. In fact he could see the way that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament in a way which they could not. And his statement about the exclusiveness of salvation through Jesus alone was a direct challenge to the assembled company.

Irrefutable Proof!

The priests had their backs to the wall. They could not deny the miracle, for the lame man was there, walking and praising God, and the people knew about it. So they did what they could. They forbade Peter and John and the other apostles to preach in the name of Jesus. It was a futile attempt to silence men who had been commanded to preach by the Lord Jesus. Their response was simple and forthright:

“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Luke tells us at the end of this account that the lame man was over forty years old. His healing was an impressive miracle which, like the miracles of Jesus, was irrefutable. Returning to their fellow believers on their release, the apostles took their concerns to God in prayer:

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word” (Acts 4:29).

The continuing account of their work shows how the Lord God answered that prayer, as the good news of the resurrection of Jesus spread further and further afield.

Mark Sheppard

Are You Ready?

Adam was frantically busy – cleaning and tidying his parents’ house in preparation for their return from holiday. Adam’s parents always tidied up regularly and made sure that everything was in order each day. But Adam’s philosophy was rather different.

He preferred to have fun and leave the housework. So the house was temporarily looking rather awful while he cleared up. Then, at the worst possible time, when the house was in a real mess, his parents came home!

Big Trouble!

Adam was devastated and his parents were furious. They would not listen to his excuses – they had not said they would stay away any longer, how dare he let their house get in such a state...

Adam knew that his parents were coming home – he had absolutely no doubt about it. Nonetheless they took him by surprise by arriving earlier than he had, rather foolishly, imagined. They had not actually told him the date of their return, and of course they had expected that the house would be clean and tidy: ready for them whenever they chose to come back to it.

Similar Parables

Jesus warned that, in a similar way, although we might know the approximate time of his Coming, the actual time will probably be a surprise. So he gave this advice:

“... be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and



knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants” (Luke 12:36–38).

The second and third watches of the night are around midnight – the time when you would least expect a master to turn up. However, the master asks his servants to be ready at all times. The tragic consequences of not being ready are described later in the parables.

“That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luke 12:47).

Those who have not prepared themselves for the return of Jesus may not be physically beaten, but Jesus will not be pleased with them.

Wedding Preparations

In a different parable in Matthew chapter 25:1-13, Jesus talks about ten virgins waiting for a bridegroom. All ten slept while they waited, but five



wise virgins had previously obtained oil for their lamps in preparation for when the bridegroom came. The other five foolish virgins had no oil – they were not ready at all. The five wise virgins were accepted by the bridegroom, and went into the wedding. The door was then shut.

The foolish five virgins tried to make up for lost time by going and buying oil, and then going to the wedding. The next words are chilling:



“Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you!’” (Matthew 25:11–12).

The bridegroom is obviously Jesus at his return to earth, and the virgins are those professing to follow him. Jesus then adds the moral to be drawn from this story:

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13).

We have been Warned!

Jesus has told us that He will return to the earth. He has made it perfectly clear that then there will be two types of people: those who are accepted and those who are rejected.

“... these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

Moreover, he has told us the way to be saved.

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

There is no more for Jesus to do for us. He has told us what he wants us to do. Like Adam, we are without excuse. It is now up to us to obey him; to be ready and waiting.

Don’t delay!

It is no good thinking that we can ‘leave it until later’, as Adam did. The consequences for the young lad Adam may have been unpleasant, but for us delay could be a matter of life and death. Consequently it is foolish to be half-hearted: a full commitment to discipleship right NOW is the only way. Jesus spelled out the challenge in these words:

“He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37–38).

How about you? Are you hesitating, prevaricating or disbelieving? Or are you committed, ready and waiting for him?

Anna Hart

Finches and Fossils

*It is widely supposed that a study of finches and fossils convinces naturalists that all life has evolved. In this article, the late **Malcolm Edwards** reviews the evidence and comes to some helpful conclusions.*

The Galapagos Islands comprise a group of 15 major islands and dozens of smaller ones, all of volcanic origin. They are situated some 1000km west of Ecuador in South America. At some earlier time in history they were colonized by finches from the mainland.

Natural Selection?

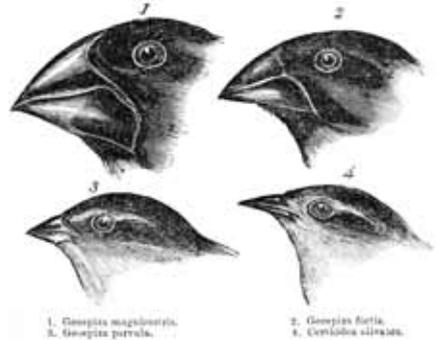
It was here, in 1835, that Charles Darwin noticed that on the larger islands of the group, the finches, in their isolation, had developed noticeably different characteristics. Some had large beaks for cracking nuts, some had small beaks for probing for insects; others had seed-eating beaks, while some had beaks for cacti-eating. The birds also varied in size and colour.

Darwin named these changes “Natural Selection”, which became the basis of his well-known theory of the evolution of the species, which proposes that all life has evolved from one single source.

Right or Wrong?

Has his theory ever been proved? The answer is both Yes and No. Yes, in that it has long been known that within their species, creatures and plants may adapt slightly to suit conditions. So, what Darwin observed was not proof of the development of species into other species, for the Galapagos finches were, genetically, still very much finches.

This small development is called micro-evolution, and is a phenomenon that creationists have never doubted.



For what nature changed in those Galapagos finches, man has achieved for centuries, in animals and plants, by selective breeding. This is a means of producing different varieties of dogs, horses, cattle, pigeons, roses and orchids – to give but a few examples.

However, the Darwinian concept of the evolution of the species themselves, often called macro-evolution, is not a fact. For it has long been known



that nature will not allow cross-breeding between similar species

This is borne out by the example of the mule, which is bred from

crossing a horse with a donkey. A mule is a useful animal, but is always a sterile hybrid. Nature does not allow any further breeding with these animals, and this seems consistent with all other forms of life. For example, after thousands of mutation-experiments carried out with the fast-breeding fruit fly *drosophila*, scientists have produced many bizarre varieties, but they stubbornly remain genus *drosophila*.

The Fossil Record

The same is true with fossils of once-living creatures. When discovered, they are always 100% complete, with no closely-related species around to suggest an evolutionary change. The giant flying lizards, found in part of North America, and elsewhere, named pterodactyls, are always found to be 100% pterodactyl, with no close relatives from which they might have evolved. This is consistently true of all fossil creatures. One must therefore ask:

- ❖ Why are there always these huge gaps in the fossil record?
- ❖ Why are the closely related fossils always missing?

No Evidence!

It may be answered that the converging black lines drawn in books on Evolution, linking one fossil to another show an evolutionary trend. But a little thought will reveal that such drawn lines prove the very opposite. They show that throughout that lengthy period of time, no evidence for evolution can be found.



Thus, the fossil evidence confirms what we found to be true with living creatures: the species are stable. Nature will not allow macro-evolution to happen. Varieties of finches remain finches, and all fossils creatures remain distinctly unrelated.

“According to its kind”

Whereas this absence of intermediate species is a huge problem with Darwinian evolution, it is not a problem for people who believe in Creation. This lack of intermediaries is exactly what a creationist expects to find: that all creatures remain firmly in their own family groups. We are told in the Book of Genesis that God created all forms of life *after their kind*:

And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:25).

So, looking at finches and fossils, the two principal lines of evidence used by Darwinism, the Genesis account is in perfect accord with what the evidence shows. God created each different species “*according to its kind*”.

Malcolm Edwards

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