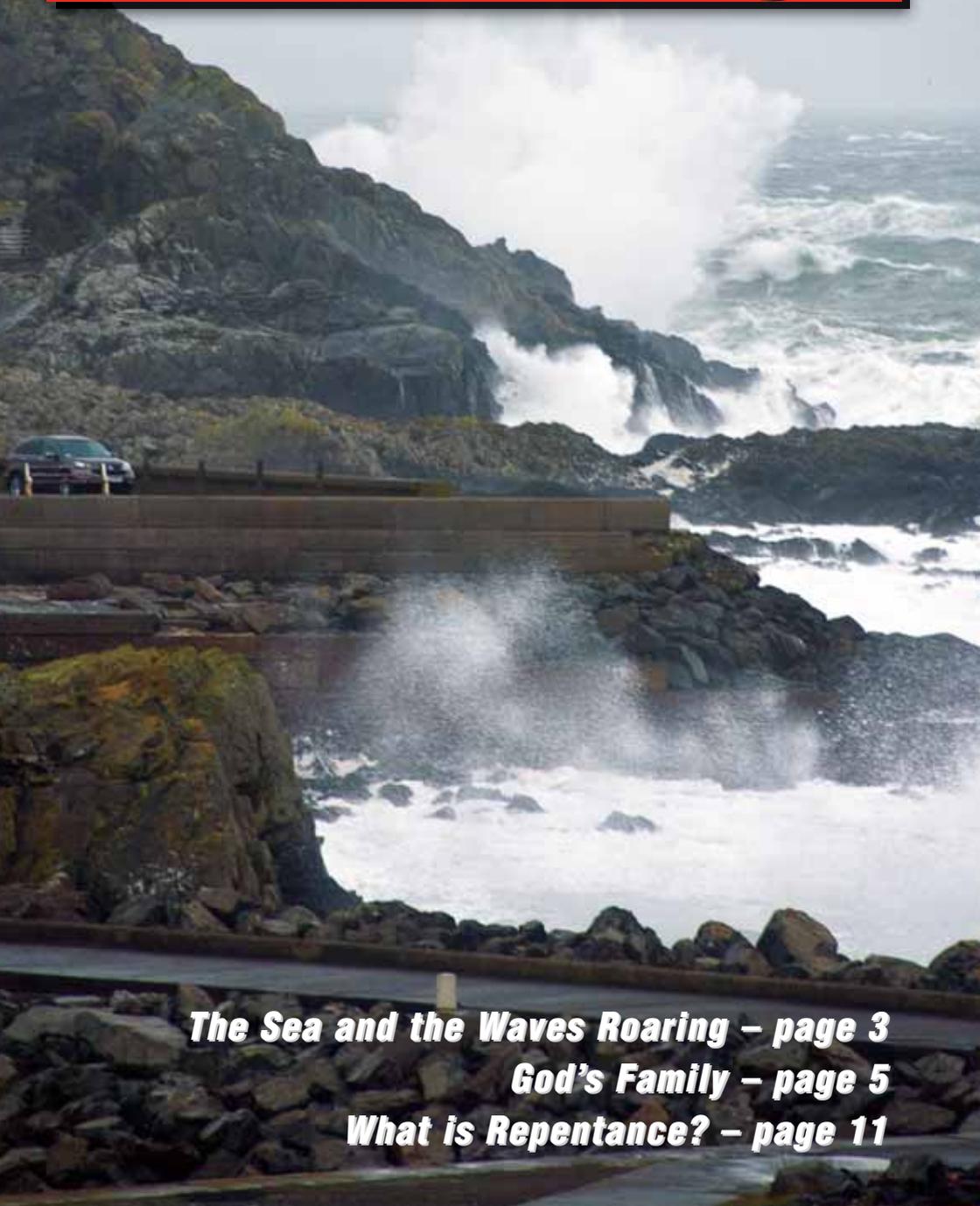


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1544



The Sea and the Waves Roaring – page 3

God's Family – page 5

What is Repentance? – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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The Sea and the Waves Roaring

People who are living now – when the world is about to end – should expect to live in turbulent times, for that is what the Lord Jesus said would happen. And he is the greatest of all the prophets.

Picture Language

The Bible uses dramatic picture language at times to depict happenings that would have a major effect in the world. For example, the Babylonian Empire controlled the Middle East for many years, often in a harsh and cruel manner. But eventually the time came for their power to end and for another world empire to take over.

Because the incoming Empire – that of the Medes and Persians – took a more conciliatory approach and allowed the exiled Jewish people to return to their land, the fall of Babylon was a cause of great rejoicing and that is reflected in the Old Testament prophecies. Their long-standing enemy would be an oppressor no more and that could either be expressed in straightforward prose, or in a more poetic form. Here is an example where the prophet Isaiah uses both a straightforward description and a more poetic language to describe the same thing – the fall of Babylon.

The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. (Isaiah 13:1)...

Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He

will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible (Isaiah 13:9–11)...

Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it ... And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 13:17–19).

Olivet Prophecy

Following the same prophetic tradition, the Lord Jesus uses similar language when answering the questions posed by his disciples. They had enquired about the time of his Coming and the end of the age and his reply is detailed in three of the gospels and includes straightforward warnings about things that would come to pass:

- ❖ *The rise of false Christianity*
- ❖ *The persecution of true Christians*
- ❖ *Wars and rumours of wars*
- ❖ *Earthquakes, famines and pestilences*
- ❖ *Jerusalem surrounded by armies*
- ❖ *The Jewish nation dispersed*
- ❖ *Jerusalem to be occupied by other nations (not Jews)*
- ❖ *Until Jerusalem back in Jewish occupation*
- ❖ *Tribulation and distress.*

It is at this point that Jesus uses picture language to describe the turbulent times that will then exist, on the very brink of his return from heaven:

...And 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 expectation 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. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:25-28).

❖ **Perplexity**

Because we have seen the way that Isaiah foretold the fall of Babylon, which happened long after his day, we can see what the Lord Jesus is doing. He wanted his hearers to picture the situation in their minds, for this prophecy would not be fulfilled in their lifetime – it was destined to take nearly 2000 years, as we now know.

Just as the fall of Babylon was a world-changing event, which ushered in better times for God's people, so the fall of all human governments will bring about a far better time for all those people who are privileged to live under the rulership of the coming King of the world. And what should we be expecting – now that Jerusalem is again occupied, by a reborn Jewish nation? The answer is turbulence, tribulation and widespread distress.

❖ **Unrest**

The nations of the world are in turmoil. The 'Arab spring' has unsettled many nations in the Middle East, with regular outbreaks of hostility. Israel and the

Palestinians have agreed a ceasefire, at the time of writing, but who knows how long that will last. Egypt is in turmoil and people are again out on the streets, fearing that their hard-won freedom is now under threat.

Civil war rages in Syria and the refugee camps in Turkey continue to grow as thousands flee their homeland. Meanwhile Iran proceeds with its uranium enrichment programme and Israel continues its threatening posture. Who knows what would happen were they to make a pre-emptive strike!

❖ **Financial Anxiety**

Nations who are not at war are deeply concerned about their national finances. Already the impact of the necessary 'austerity measures' has begun to take its toll. Unemployment is rising and welfare payments are falling, and the worst is yet to come as national borrowing really starts to fall. Worry is coming in waves – just as the sea sends its waves crashing against the shore, wave after wave. It seems that there is no end to the problems that now beset some people and some nations.

Something Better

If we are prepared to put our trust and confidence in God, and believe His Word, there is a better way through this time of trouble and concern. God has a rescue plan and everything is on course, just as Jesus forecast all that time ago. When all hope seems lost we should look to God and His rescue mission and place our full confidence in Him. Believe His Word and read it for yourself. That is God's own recipe for a Happy New Year.

Editor

God's Family

Christmas is a time of the year when, in the UK, we try to lift the gloom of cold, grey winter days by getting together with friends and relatives, exchanging news and having family parties. We forget for a moment those cares of everyday living that can so easily add to the gloom of Winter.

But do we ever stop to consider how the celebration of Christmas began and what we should be remembering at that time. For, as someone has said, "Jesus is the reason for the season". And for that family the circumstances were anything but comfortable and reassuring.

Trying Times

It had been a difficult nine months for Mary, trying to convince her family as well as Joseph and her acquaintances that she was still pure and indeed "Highly favoured", as the angel had told her (Luke 1:28).

The immediate past had if anything been even more trying. Theirs had been a long journey without any comfortable means of transport. Then they were refused at every place offering accommodation until, as a last resort, an unhygienic, smelly stable was found. That was the introduction to this world of the Son of God himself.

Later, we find the family settled in Nazareth and for years Jesus' life must have been much like that of most children growing up in a village at that time. Then at the age of twelve we are told that he travelled with Joseph and



Mary to Jerusalem, perhaps for the first time.

Lost Boy!

This was an occasion when Joseph and Mary were given a real fright. On the way home they suddenly realised that Jesus was not with the party. Where could he possibly be? Having been entrusted with the upbringing of none less than the Son of God they must have felt full of fear and anguish.

Anxiously searching, they returned to Jerusalem and eventually found him in the Temple astonishing the teachers with his understanding. His reply to his mother's question must have puzzled her:

He said to them, "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

Jesus was already preparing for the great work the Father had given him to do, but, the record continues:

He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but his mother kept all these things in her heart (2:51).

Thus it was that:

Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men (2:52).

God's Call

Sometime after this it seems that Joseph died, as his name disappears from the record. Now instead of being "about his Father's business" Jesus had to become the mainstay of the family until such time as his brothers could take over that responsibility. He was about thirty years old when he began to preach "*The good news of the Kingdom of God.*" Perhaps all this waiting time was to enable him to develop patience. After all Moses had to wait forty years for his call.

Eventually the call came and Jesus began to preach what Matthew describes as The Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew.4:23) . This was the good news of God's plan for the world He had created and the men and women who live there; all who believe and respond. Jesus was able to back up his claims to be Son of God by many miraculous deeds, but it was not long before opposition began.

Family Concerns

This opposition grew until his own family began to fear for his safety. They decided to try to bring Jesus home before real harm came to him. The sad fact was that at that time his brothers did not believe what he had to say, or apparently who he claimed to be. Perhaps Mary believed, but she too was concerned for his safety. Noticeably in the account of this incident there is no mention of Joseph (Matt.12:46-50).



When his family arrived at the house where Jesus was preaching they could not get in for the crowd. Somebody there did manage to pass the message to Jesus. His reply was astounding. It was a question, followed by a comment:

"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:48-50).

In effect, Jesus was saying: 'These people are my real family'. From then on until now, those who have listened to his words and have believed are his real family. Back in that house we find Jesus in a very difficult situation. He had been brought up to obey the Ten Commandments. The fifth of those was, "*Honour your father and mother.....*" Should Jesus obey that command and consent to his mother's request and go home, abandoning his mission, or obey his real father, God, and carry on? His decision gives prac-

tical guidance for all disciples down the years. Obedience to the Lord God takes precedence over all else.

Brothers and Sisters

Think for a moment about what Jesus said. Those who listen to him and put God first qualify for an immense privilege. They can become brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ and members of the largest family on earth.

That family of believers is made up of those who through the ages have chosen to listen to and believe the words of Jesus. This is what God demands, for on that occasion when Jesus was transfigured in the presence of some of his disciples, we are told that:

a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mark 9:7).

All the followers of Jesus have paid careful attention to what Jesus said and believed. Listening is only the first stage. For, those who believe will have begun a lifetime of faith, trying to live the principles that Jesus carried out in his own life. In his life that faith and obedience brought him suffering and death but, more importantly, a glorious resurrection to everlasting life.

Joining God's Family

We know that the one certainty in life for us is that our lives will one day come to an end. Everlasting life is described for us in many other New Testament passages but the really wonderful thing is that the offer to join that family of brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ is still open to all who will listen to Jesus – just as those people listened in that crowded house so many years ago.

Just imagine living not just for seventy or eighty years with increasing loss of faculties. Instead, living with never failing energy in a world acknowledging God as Creator and in the company of many believers who have lived in past ages: men like Peter and Paul, women like Martha, Mary and Lydia, together with the faithful from Old Testament times.

When Jesus rules the world all the inhabitants of the world will be free from want, oppression, disease, injustice and all the other ills that are the experience of so many people in today's world.

The door of opportunity is still open and the appeal from God is that we



should look into these things now and join His wonderful family while the opportunity is still there.

J. Michael Buckler

The Man from Ethiopia

*In the last article in this series **Mark Sheppard** considered the preaching of Stephen, the first ever Christian martyr, who gave a remarkable exposition of God's purpose just before he was killed. So it was not just the apostles who were preaching the message of salvation. All the believers were witnesses of the great things that God had done, as we shall see.*

Philip the Evangelist

In Acts chapter 6 we are told of a grievance that existed about the distribution of welfare help to widows, which the apostles resolved by appointing seven men who were to oversee matters. Stephen was not the only one of the seven who was also an enthusiastic preacher, for Phillip also became involved, and he moved beyond the confines of Jerusalem, perhaps because of what happened to Stephen. Following the death of Stephen, Saul of Tarsus had become a zealous persecutor of the young church, and many early believers scattered from Jerusalem.

Philip's first visit was to Samaria and he seems to have been very successful there and moved on to preach in many Samaritan villages before being selected for a special mission. He was directed by an angel of God to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, running across the desert.

An Ethiopian

We are not told how Philip knew who to contact, but he found a man from Ethiopia there. We are told quite a lot about this man, although we are not given his name.

- ❖ He was a eunuch – not unusual for a high official in the court of eastern monarchs at the time.

- ❖ He was a servant of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. Candace may well be her title, rather than her name.
- ❖ He was “in charge of all her treasury”, clearly a responsible role.
- ❖ It appears that he was a Jewish proselyte, having been to Jerusalem to worship.

On his way back he was sitting in his chariot, an obvious sign of status and wealth, and was reading one of the books of the Bible. This is a further indication that he was well off, for every book of the Bible would need to be meticulously copied out by hand, as the materials and labour would both be expensive.

Problem Passage?

It is interesting to think about what this Ethiopian had been doing. He seems to have purchased the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in Jerusalem. If he had started at the beginning he had read a lot of, for he was already at chapter 53 (though there were no chapter divisions at the time). Perhaps he was just reading bits here and there and had come upon a piece which intrigued him. We can deduce from what is said that he had actually obtained a copy of the Greek Septuagint translation, rather than an original Hebrew text. For this is what he was reading:

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Acts 8:32).

This is not exactly the same as the original Hebrew text, which reads:

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

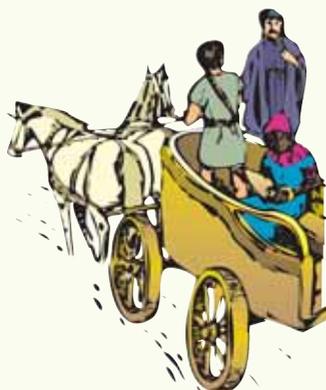
The text may be slightly different (which is how we know it was a translation into Greek), but the meaning is the same.

Bible Reading

The Ethiopian had the same problem that many have when they open a copy of the Bible: he did not understand what he was reading. Philip sensed this which made it easy for him to intervene:

Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30).

The response was: "How can I, unless someone guides me?" which gave Philip the opening he needed. Joining the eunuch in the chariot he began with Isaiah chapter 53 and spoke about the Lord Jesus.



Bible Class

We cannot be sure about all that Philip would have said, but he would certainly have explained that Jesus is often referred to as the Lamb of God. That Bible-long theme began when Abraham was asked to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. God did not allow him to make that sacrifice, but Abraham's reply to Isaac's question about why they did not have a lamb with them is interesting, for he said:

"My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8).

That terminology continues right through the Old Testament into the New, for John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus to the world with these words:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

That title of the Lord Jesus occurs throughout the New Testament, most noticeably in the book of Revelation. On their journey Philip continued to explain about the Lord Jesus Christ, telling the Ethiopian about the sort of life he had lived and about his preaching, culminating in his sacrifice on the cross. This so affected the new believer that he felt he too had to make changes in his life, to become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Baptism

Philip must have talked about baptism to him, but in that desert region it would almost certainly have to wait a while. Then, unexpectedly, and perhaps miraculously, they came to a pool of water.

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:36–37).

The Ethiopian had clearly decided that the changes he needed to make in his life must begin with the step of baptism, showing that figuratively he too was dying as the Lord Jesus had done, and would rise to a new life. The record then informs us that the chariot was commanded to stop and they both went down into the water. There Philip baptized Candace’s treasurer, and again the record is very specific, it says “when they came up out of the water” as if to emphasize the fact that they had gone right into the water, and the eunuch had been fully covered by the water.

As far as we know, that was the end of their encounter. Philip was caught away and came to Azotus and then worked his way up the coast until he came to Caesarea. He seems to have stayed there, because we discover he was still there years later when the



apostle Paul passed through on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 21:8). Of the Ethiopian we are told simply that he “went on his way rejoicing.”

Mark Sheppard

Testing Times

When our faith is tested as life’s storm clouds grow,
When our hearts are weary, and our hope is low,
When our strength has vanished, and we’re frail and weak,
God can do most for us, if for Him we seek.

When we’re at rock bottom, that’s when we can show
In patient, quiet assurance, that God’s help He will bestow.
For He sees the weak and humble, is responsive to their call
He will never ever fail us, but will raise up all who fall.

Colleen Simons

What Is Repentance?

Anyone with even a small amount of Bible knowledge realises that God is looking for us to 'repent'. However we might wonder what 'repentance' actually is.

What does one do when one 'repents'? Rather than simply defining the word, a Biblical example will help to demonstrate the meaning of repentance and more importantly how God responds when someone repents.

King in Trouble

2 Samuel Chapters 11 and 12 record a very sad period in the life of a king of Israel. The man was King David. Whilst his army was away at battle he committed adultery with the wife of one of his army generals. Then, when he learnt that she was pregnant, David arranged for her husband to be murdered. Summarising the two chapters which speak of this event we see the following:

2 Samuel	Event
11:1-4	David commits adultery with a woman called Bathsheba
11:5	Bathsheba told David she was pregnant – with his child
11:6-13	David tries to get Bathsheba's husband Uriah to sleep with his wife so that the child would appear to be his
11:14-25	David arranged to have Uriah murdered
11:26-27	David married Bathsheba
12:1-4	About 9 months later God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David about what he had done in committing adultery and murdering Uriah. He did this by telling David a story – much like the parables we find in the New Testament
12:5-6	David correctly identifies what should be done to the man who has done what the prophet Nathan talks about
12:7-12	The prophet Nathan then explains to David that he was the person in the wrong in the story that he had just told David. He then went on to tell David that he would be punished for what he had done
12:13	David repents – he actually said 'I have sinned'

Repentance Defined

So we see that repentance means acknowledging that we are sinners. The example given is to teach us that in general terms we are sinners. It does not mean that we should confess to being adulterers or murderers, unless of course we are! The encouraging thing to notice is that when David repented, God forgave him. The Scripture explains it like this:

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. (2 Samuel 12:13).

But the matter didn't end there for David wrote a number of Psalms about this whole incident, Psalm 32 being one of them. In the Psalm he speaks of the turmoil in his mind before he confessed his sin. He said:

"When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long" (Psalm 32:3).

He was in such distress that David decided to repent before Nathan came to see him. For the Psalm continues:

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin (Psalm 32:5).

The outcome of that repentance is seen in the words of Nathan: *"The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die"*. That gracious act of forgiveness is what David was referring to when he said: *"You forgave the iniquity of my sin"*.

What about Us?

What we have been looking at is not simply a Bible story. The New Testament says David's experience can be ours. For in Romans chapter 4 the

apostle Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2 to describe the wonderful position of those who have been forgiven by God. Paul takes the personal experience of David *"the man"* (in Psalm 32:1) and shows it has a general application to all who would repent saying *"those"* (in Romans 4:7).

David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin" (Romans 4:6-8).

We noticed that God waited almost a year before sending Nathan to speak with David. Why did He wait so long? After all if God had intervened immediately Uriah would not have been murdered by David. In the way that He waited for David to repent we see how God works. The New Testament explains it like this:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

So the question we need to ask ourselves is how far are we along the road to repentance? How much longer will God have to wait for us?

Scripture has this wonderful promise for all of us:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Peter Forbes

The Resurrection of a Nation

*In this series, **John Shepley** has shown that the rebirth of the nation of Israel is a clear sign of the nearness of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and a key pointer that we are living in the Time of the End. This national rebirth was also foretold by God’s prophets and he now examines one such remarkable prophecy.*

Ezekiel’s Predictions

God said this to the last king of Judah, through His prophet Ezekiel:

*“Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord GOD; remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! **It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is; and I will give it to him**” (Ezekiel 21:25-27).*

These words were spoken just prior to the final onslaught on the nation of Israel by the Babylonians, in 586 BC. This time the Babylonians destroyed the city and took all its surviving inhabitants into captivity. It was the end of the Kingdom of God on earth, after more than 400 years – ever since King Saul was appointed to rule over God’s people.

There would never again be a native king ruling over the nation of Israel until, as Ezekiel prophesied, one came whose right it is to rule when God will give the kingdom to him. This, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ for the kingdom has long been promised to him, as the angel said to his mother Mary:

*“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And 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 1:30–33).*

National Resurrection

Even though the Jews returned from Babylon 70 years after the first wave of captives was taken away, for the rest of their time as a nation, apart from a brief period following the Maccabean revolt, they were subject to foreign powers until they were overthrown again by the Romans in AD70. When Jerusalem was destroyed again the Jewish people were dispersed into all countries of the world and that dispersion lasted for nearly 2000 years.

Ezekiel was one of those taken captive to Babylon, and God gave this exiled Jew a remarkable vision of a national resurrection of Israel that would take place in the latter days. This remarkable prophecy is in Ezekiel Chapter 37. He sees a valley which is full of very dry human bones and then something quite remarkable happens:

The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the



open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” So I answered, “O Lord God, You know.” Again He said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord””’” (Ezekiel 37:1–6).

Bone to Bone

The prophecy goes on to describe how Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded and with a great rattling sound the bones came together, bone to bone, and then they were covered with sinews, and then flesh, and then skin. But there was no breath in them. He was then told:

“Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.”’” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an

exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:9–10).

It must have been quite a sight. In verses 11 to 14 the prophecy is explained in precise detail. It shows in very graphic picture language the revival of the nation of Israel in two distinct stages.

Then 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. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,” says the Lord”’” (Ezekiel 37:11–14).

One Nation

This prophecy began to be fulfilled with the return of the Jews to the land. They are now once again a nation in the land of their forefathers. As we have already seen in this series, the rebirth

of the nation of Israel is something which is unique among the nations. No other nation on earth has maintained a national identity after more than 1800 years of exile. In this the Jews are an incredible witness to the accuracy of Bible prophecy and the truth that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of the Living God. But God's spirit is not yet in them.

Verses 15 to 20 go on to describe how the divided nation would become one in the land. This division occurred during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam (in 931 BC) after which there were two nations: the ten-tribe nation of Israel in the north of the land and the two-tribe nation of Judah in the south. Now Ezekiel was told that this long established national division would come to an end, for:

Thus says the Lord God: "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; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their child-

ren, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever (Ezekiel 37:21–25).

Not Yet

Israel is not as yet a repentant nation. Its people do not generally seek after the God of their fathers nor do they, as a nation, accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. That is still to come as we shall see later in this series. The very fact that the first part of the prophecy has been fulfilled, against all odds, is a guarantee that the second part will also be fulfilled in exact detail.

We know that this extraordinary prophecy applies to the time of the end, and not to the return of the captives from Babylon during the reign of Cyrus the Persian, for a number of reasons, including that:

- ❖ The people knew that they were to be in captivity to the Babylonians for a period of 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11,12; 29:10). In no way does the dry and hopeless position referred to in the prophecy describe such a relatively short period of time.
- ❖ When this national resurrection eventually takes place they will dwell in the land forever.
- ❖ Never again will they turn away from the God of their fathers.
- ❖ They will have a king over them who will reign forever.

It is truly a remarkable prophecy which demonstrates to us that we are indeed living at the Time of the End and that the Coming of the Lord Jesus, – when he returns to rule over the world – cannot be long delayed.

John Shepley

Two Prophets and Two Cities

In this article **David Pearce** looks at the message from God given through Micah and Nahum. They prophesied at different times and in quite different ways, but their message is what matters. Both prophets were strikingly accurate, for their message was not theirs but God's and He both knows what is coming and controls it! But they spoke about cities that were vastly different then: cities which were to experience very different outcomes.

Micah and Jerusalem

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and prophesied in the reigns of bad King Ahaz and good King Hezekiah. He came from Moresheth-Gath, a town near the Philistines, to the west of Judah. His opening chapter warns that the Ten Tribe Kingdom in the north was about to collapse because of God's judgment on their sins. Sadly, he protests, their evil ways have already infected Judah in the south. But he puts over his message in an amazing series of wordplays that would have riveted the original Hebrew readers. Here are some examples:

In chapter 1 he lists the towns of Judah that would fall into the hands of the invaders.

- ❖ In verse 10 he says *"Tell it not in Gath!"* English readers would not realise that the word for Gath in Hebrew sounds like "tell".
- ❖ *"In Beth Aphrah roll yourselves in the dust"*, he continues. Beth Aphrah means – guess what – "House of dust".
- ❖ *"The inhabitant of Zaanan does not go out"*. Zaanan means literally "going out" in Hebrew.

❖ *"The houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel"* – Achzib means "dried up", like a stream that has no water when you badly need to drink. And so on.

Clear Condemnation

The next chapter condemns those who lay awake at night planning how they could grab land and houses from the poor. They did not want to hear prophets like Micah. *"Do not prattle, you say to those who prophesy (chapter 2:6).* Their favourite sermons, Micah concluded wryly, were about wine and beer!

If a man should walk in a false spirit and speak a lie, saying, 'I will prophesy to you of wine and drink,' Even he would be the prattler of this people (Micah 2:11).

Micah's rivals, God said, *Make my people stray; who chant "Peace" while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths (chapter 3:5).* It is a familiar story. Church leaders who seek to be popular weaken their message and leave the country without moral guidance. Micah predicted that princes and priests who were motivated by the love of money would leave Jerusalem ploughed like a



field. This judgment fell on the avaricious religious leaders of Jesus' generation centuries later, when the Roman army under Hadrian ploughed up the ruins of Jerusalem and changed its name to Aelia Capitolina.

Better Times Ahead

By contrast, Micah continues in chapter four with a recitation from Isaiah (his contemporary) about the last days, when a restored Jerusalem will become the centre of worship for all nations. In a remarkable word play on the return of their forefather Jacob from his exile with his uncle Laban in the north, Micah saw that the nation of Israel would be brought back to their land, albeit limping (4:6), and in travail like Rachel their matriarch (4:10). Like her they would weep for sorrow, but be comforted by the birth of a son at Bethlehem (chapter 5:2, 3 – the place near where Rachel died in childbirth) who would be ruler in Israel.

We know that this remarkable prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as Micah had foretold:

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

And Jesus, who was indeed born to be the judge of Israel, fulfilled this prophecy in every respect. For the chapter begins with this prediction:

Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; they will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek (Micah 5:1).

Jesus was indeed smitten “with a rod on his cheek” during his trial when the Lord was rejected by the very people he had come to deliver. Yet in due course he will deliver them from their enemies, and rule to the ends of the earth, when the Kingdom of God is established on earth.

Latter-Day Exodus

The prophet concludes with a vision of a latter-day exodus for the Jewish people. Their sins will be washed away in the waters of the sea by a merciful God:

He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).

At that time God will fulfil His promise to Abraham to give him and his people the Land of Israel for ever. How remarkable it is that Jerusalem, once destroyed by the Romans, is still there today, and God's people, limping like Jacob in their rejection of their Saviour, have been returning from the lands of their dispersion, ready for him to save them from their enemies and from their sins.

Nahum and Nineveh

Nahum prophesied at the time of Jeremiah, towards the end of the Kingdom of God on earth. The whole of his short book is devoted to the

graphic description of a world-shaking event – not the fall of Jerusalem (which was imminent) but the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which took place in 612 BC. The prophet Jonah, whom we have already considered, had reluctantly visited the same city over a century before. Then God had spared His judgments on the city, because the Assyrians repented. After that, in the time of King Hezekiah, Jerusalem had narrowly escaped being conquered by Assyrian armies, when that good King prayed to God and God rescued the city.

Arrogant Nation

But now the arrogance and heartless cruelty of the Assyrians was to be brought to an end. God, who watches and judges nations, had decided their time had come. As verse three of the first chapter intones, the Lord is slow to anger. But He will not clear the unrepentant guilty. If you like poetry, this is a book you cannot miss! Listen to this graphic description of the sacking of Nineveh:

The chariots rage in the streets, they jostle one another in the broad roads; they seem like torches, they run like lightning. He remembers his nobles; they stumble in their walk; they make haste to her walls, and the defense is prepared. The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved. It is decreed: she shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up; and her maidservants shall lead her as with the voice of doves, beating their breasts. Though Nineveh of old was like a pool of water, now they flee away. "Halt! Halt!" they cry; but no one turns back. Take spoil of silver! Take spoil of gold! There is no end of treasure, or wealth of every desirable prize.

She is empty, desolate, and waste! The heart melts, and the knees shake; much pain is in every side, and all their faces are drained of colour (Nahum 2:4–10).

The noise of a whip and the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots! Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses – they stumble over the corpses... (Nahum 3:2–3).

Nahum's message came true. The destruction of Nineveh was complete. The city was never rebuilt, and the site was unknown until the English adventurer Sir Henry Layard came to the Middle East and, in 1845, began to excavate a large mound near the Tigris. Here he found clay tablets and inscriptions which proved beyond doubt that he had found the remains of this once great capital, buried under the sand. Many of the giant sculptures and bas-reliefs which once graced the throne room of the palace can be seen today in the Assyrian Galleries in the British Museum and the Louvre. How are the mighty fallen!

David M Pearce

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Thinking about Art

Many pieces of art are representational. Fine paintings may reflect an exact view of a place, person or object and demonstrate beauty, power, authority, wealth or depict parts of creation rarely seen. Impressionist artists offer additionally a creative interpretation and many modern artists may look to the viewer of their work to interpret it.

Beauty in Motion

I recently saw a piece of modern moving, steel artwork, perhaps twenty feet high which seemed to symbolise aspects of creation and the relationship that exists between God and mankind.

Two moving paddle-shaped arms, mirror images of each other, were mounted on an elongated stem. Each arm moved independently in diverse, even totally opposite, directions. Occasionally they returned to each other creating a whole shape, which then for a short time, moved in perfect rhythm together with the stem. The turning of this artistic creation in the sunlight seemed to hint at the relationship of men and women with God.

Attached to God

Whether or not we acknowledge our Creator, all men and women are attached to him, as the giver of life. Equally, all except the Lord Jesus Christ, have rotated imperfectly – moving quickly or slowly in varying directions. Our movement may depend upon personality or values. Some of the time we move in harmony with other people and hopefully with God.

In a good marriage we find someone with whom we can get the different

aspects of our life and characteristics to move as one holistic creation. Neither partner loses his or her distinct identity or the ability to move differently, but the meeting of minds creates a unit that moves together in harmony and symmetry.

Living with God

The Bible states that marriage is meant to symbolise how the relationship between people and God should be. Husband and wife bring separate and differing personalities to their union, but work together in harmony, sometimes moving in different directions, sometimes working as one piece, but always anchored together.

Our relationship with God, through the Lord Jesus, may move in diverse ways, depending on the characteristics and skills given to us by Him, and the tasks He wishes us to complete in our lives. But it should always lead to harmony and oneness.

The Apostle Paul uses the body to make a similar analogy. No one part of the body is totally independent of the other parts. Each bodily part needs another part to ensure it can function properly, but each has individuality and a place in making the body work correctly. Jesus described himself as a vine (John 15:1-6) and his followers as branches who will only be fruitful and useful if they remain connected to him. If that happens the outcome should be fruitful and beautiful to behold. That is life properly lived to the glory of God.

Cynthia Miles

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