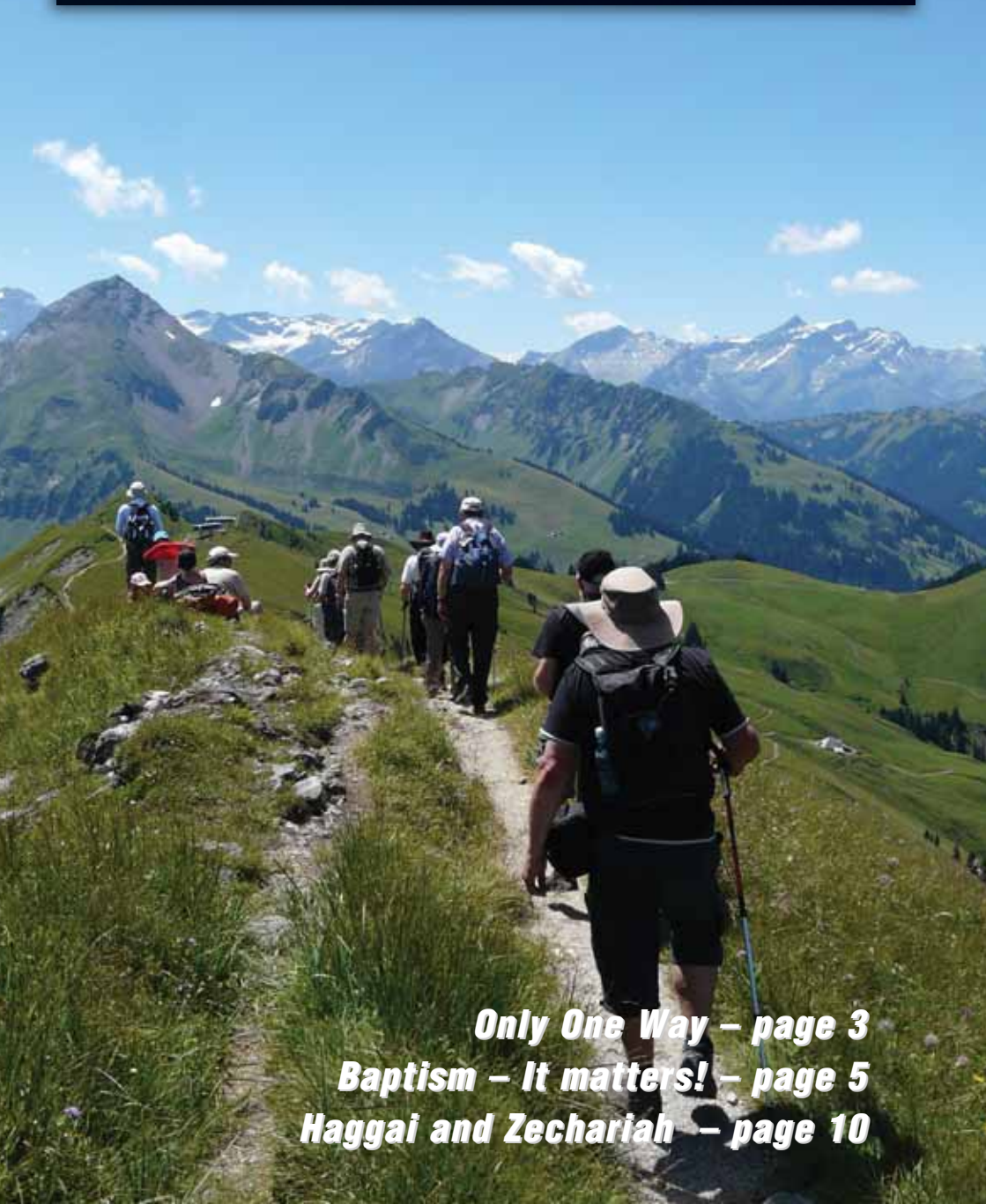


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1547



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Baptism – It matters! – page 5
Haggai and Zechariah – page 10

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 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 worldwide Kingdom.

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Only One Way

People who walk on mountain tops know that the tracks are narrow and that you stray from them at your peril.

But who would want to find a different track when the views are stunning, the company good and the last thing you want to be thinking about is where you can find the next safe foothold? It is far better to know that you can look around in the sure knowledge that this narrow track has been a safe haven for walkers for many generations: that you are following a well-worn path.

Living Dangerously

Journeying through life is much the same, when you think about it. Some people love risk-taking and living dangerously. Not for them the tried-and-tested paths that “more conservative” people choose to take. They like living close to the edge and thrive on the possibility of adventure and mishap, because it gives them a thrill. Others prefer safer options with more security and reliability. Everybody has to choose their own path through life and there are plenty of options, such as where to live, what job we might do, the friends we choose, our leisure activities and our lifestyle in general.

Not everybody has that freedom to choose, of course. You may have been born in difficult circumstances – like a war zone – and might spend the whole of your short life dodging bullets and taking cover. Or you might have been born into a very poor family and spend your days trying to eke out a poor living from land which is drought-ridden and quite incapable of feeding you and

your family. Or there may be other circumstances that demand that you surrender your freedom of action for the greater good.

Single-Minded

The Lord Jesus was constrained in that way. Uniquely, his life history had been written in advance in the Jewish scriptures – the Old Testament. For the prophets of God had been given inspired insight to graphically portray One who was coming – the Son of God – who would redeem mankind from sin and death. They didn’t just say that he would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), or that he would be richly endowed with God’s Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2) to give him wisdom and understanding. Just piece the prophecies together and you will find that the entire work that Jesus was to accomplish was foretold in advance. But how would he respond to that limitation on his freedom?

Jesus was born to save mankind from sin and death: that was why he was born of the virgin Mary and even his name spelled out that commission (Matthew 1:21). For thirty years he prepared for his public ministry which was destined to bring him into conflict with the Jewish religious authorities and to lead to his death. Single-mindedly Jesus focused his entire life upon one thing: doing his Father’s will and acting in perfect compliance with what his Father asked of him. As he read his destiny in the Old Testament prophecies, he submitted himself absolutely:

Then I said, “Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I

delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:7–8 and Hebrews 10:5-10).

Narrow Way

Never confuse single-mindedness with narrow-mindedness. Jesus was remarkably broad-minded, in that he would talk to anyone and eat in anyone’s company, if they would only listen to his teaching and counsel. At a time when religious people kept themselves apart, Jesus intermingled, despite the criticism of people who thought they knew better. Everything that Jesus did was about saving people from sin – people just like us – and he once summed up his mission in these words:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance (Mark 2:17).

The sad thing was that only a few people realised they were in need of the special healing that only Jesus could provide. They were not thinking of themselves as struck by the sickness of sin. Only the down-and-outs who ate with Jesus recognised that they needed his help, and found forgiveness. It has always been like that throughout the history of God’s dealings with humanity: only a few people choose to walk along the narrow way that leads to eternal life.

A Remnant

In the Old Testament we are told repeatedly that not many people chose the right path along which to walk with God.

- ❖ Only eight people were saved by the ark that Noah and his family built (1 Peter 3:20);

- ❖ Only two people entered the Promised Land out of all who had left Egypt (Numbers 14:30);

- ❖ Only a remnant returned from captivity in Babylon (Ezra 9:8);

- ❖ Only some of the Jewish families who went into worldwide exile returned when the opportunity came (Ezekiel 6:8);

- ❖ Only a remnant will be saved when Jesus returns to establish God’s kingdom on earth (Romans 11:5).

This is a paradox, because God wants everyone to be saved from sin and sent His Son to make that possible for everyone. But it is proving to be the case that more and more people are ignoring God’s offer, despising His Word, following their own interests and making their own way in life.

God’s Offer

All around us – as it was for the walkers along that narrow path – there is abundant evidence of the existence of God, if only people will open their eyes and look! And if you consider the way the world is changing, with morality declining, violence increasing, nations in distress and insecurity abounding, you might see that these things are pointers to the ultimate fulfilment of Bible prophecy.

God has a plan for the earth and that plan is working out exactly as predicted, for God both knows and controls the future. He offers each of us the opportunity to walk with Him along the narrow path that leads to life, if we want to. The choice is ours to make.

Editor

Baptism – It matters!

The young boy stared at his feet. His bottom lip quivered and there were large tears in his eyes as his mother scolded him.

“I know you did it, but you didn’t do it the way your Dad said, did you?” The boy shook his head. “Your dad gave you very clear instructions, didn’t he?” “Yes ... but I didn’t think it mattered”, the distressed child said quietly.

“Well it does matter. You should know that Dad means what he says, and it is not for you to do things your own way”.

Instructions are important

In many aspects of life the consequences of not following instructions can be serious or even disastrous. This is also true of spiritual matters. God means what He says, and it is not for us to alter His commandments thinking that it will not matter. It might matter very much.

In the Old Testament there is the record of Naaman, a military captain of Syria, who had the awful disease leprosy. Following the intervention of a captive Jewish maid, he visited Elisha the prophet of God in Israel. The instructions from the prophet were for Naaman to wash seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman thought this outrageous.

‘Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in a rage (2 Kings 5:12).

Fortunately, Naaman’s servant was wiser than him, and persuaded his master to do as Elisha had said. So



Naaman bathed in the river and on the seventh time, but not before, he was cured of his leprosy. Of course, it was nothing special about the river or the water that cured him – it was a miracle of God. However, in order for the miracle to take place Naaman had to obey God’s instructions completely.

Disobedience is Serious

It may not be fashionable to show respect or to follow instructions. We are often encouraged to be ‘free thinkers’ and to ‘do our own thing’. However, disobedience to God is extremely serious. The first man Adam disobeyed God’s commandment, with dire consequences:

..as through one man’s offense judgment came on all men ... as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners (Romans 5:18,19).

We are, therefore, all terminally ill because of sin. The first man Adam disobeyed God, and so all his offspring are under sentence of death.

Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death

through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

However, this is not the whole story. In His great mercy God has provided a Saviour and a means by which we can be saved from permanent death and given eternal life. This offer is a free gift, because it is absolutely impossible for us to earn it.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Nonetheless we do have to follow God’s instructions, for:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

And, as Jesus said:

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

Faith is absolutely essential. We are also commanded to be baptized.

Biblical Baptism

Biblical baptism is complete immersion in water. It is the voluntary response of someone who believes and wishes to change their way of life by being ‘in Christ’.



...baptism, (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) (1 Peter 3:21).

Believers go down into the water, die symbolically, and come up to a new way of life in which they try to follow their Saviour, Jesus.

Or 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, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:3–6).

There is no example in the Bible of baptism before belief or of child christening. That practice was introduced long after Bible times. In fact, Biblical baptism always requires ‘much water’ (John3:23; Acts 8:36-38).

It Does Matter!

Much of the so-called Christian world has therefore moved away from Biblical practice in this matter. As always, we have a choice. We can follow the Bible or we can go along a different way, hoping that it will not matter. It is no good imagining that God will not mind if He does indeed mind. It mattered for Naaman that he obeyed implicitly and it matters for us too.

Anna Hart

“What must I do to be saved?”

*This question was once asked by a city jailer, in remarkable circumstances (see Acts 16:30), and it is equally relevant to every one of us. He was told what he must do if he wanted to be saved from sin and death, and he did it. He became a wonderful example of someone who responded to God’s offer of salvation without hesitation, as **Grahame Cooper** now explains.*

Woman at the Well

At Sychar, a village in Samaria, Jesus talked to a woman who asked him whether the Samaritan religion was superior to the Jewish way of worshipping God. The Samaritans had a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim and followed different religious practices to those in Jerusalem. Jesus patiently explained that temples were not the answer because God wanted something else:

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews (John 4:21–22).



Jesus was not scoring points or arguing for the superiority of the Jewish race or religion, for their way of worshipping God was about to change radically – when both temples were destroyed by the Romans. His was a matter of simple fact: that God’s purpose with mankind has been revealed through the Jewish people. They were the ones who God chose to be custodians of His gracious purpose.

The Founding Father

When Jesus explained that “salvation is of the Jews” he wasn’t making a racial comment, for he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan. Far from it! Jesus was referring the woman to the time when God had called Abraham by issuing this challenge, together with a promise:

Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. 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 be blessed (Genesis 12:1–3).

The promise was also saying that God would justify the Gentiles by faith. For, many years later, the apostle Paul had this to say about what that

promise to Abraham really conveyed:

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:7–9).

So, Jesus was explaining to the woman at the well that if she wanted the blessing of forgiveness, she needed to follow the teaching of the Jewish scriptures and share the faith that Abraham had first demonstrated.

Few or Many?

Jesus was asked by someone "*Lord are there few who are saved?*" (Luke 13:23). He replied in the next verse:

Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

This verse reminds us of Jesus' words in Matthew's gospel:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few, who find it (Matthew 7:13,14).

Striving to enter through a narrow gate means that entry into the kingdom of God is not meant to be easy. The easy way of life is a wide gate that requires no effort at all. The narrow way which leads to (eternal) life is said to be difficult because it requires a person to seek to follow and to obey the commandments of God. Only by doing this steadfastly can we be saved from sin and death.

Good enough?

Take the example of the Roman centurion Cornelius. He was "*a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always*" (Acts 10:2). By today's reckoning, we would have classed him as "*a good Christian and saved because he had a personal relationship with God*", but the scriptural account tells us something quite different.

Despite being a very good living and God-loving believer Cornelius couldn't have the hope of salvation because he hadn't obeyed God's requirements. Peter had to be sent to show him what he had to do to be saved and the requirement was that he and those in his household who shared his faith had to be baptised into Christ after they had been taught by the apostles.



Notice what the apostle Peter said when it became apparent that God had accepted them into His family by conferring on them the gift of the Holy Spirit:

Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? (Acts 10:47).

This account shows us how important it is to obey God and the Lord Jesus His Son. We have to do what is required of us, as we are commanded in the New Testament. Jesus once emphasised this when he asked, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things I say?” (Luke 6:46) and this question is just as valid for us today as it was during the Lord’s ministry.

The Only Name

Salvation does not come immediately, it is a gift from God, and is granted at the judgement seat on the last day and, as Jesus illustrated in his parables, the outcome on that day will

depend upon the kind of life we have led as believers in Christ. Salvation also comes through faith – a faith like that of Abraham – and he was a man who showed remarkable obedience.

We need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead. It was the apostle Peter who said this about Jesus:

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 4:12).

So if we want to be saved we must put God and His Son Jesus Christ first in our lives. We must strive to be good and faithful servants “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1: Corinthians 15:58) knowing that it is only the Lord Jesus Christ who can give us victory over sin and death both in this life and, by the grace of God, in His coming Kingdom.

Grahame A Cooper

A Right Spirit

Lord, grant me a spirit of calm and of peace,
When my life becomes fraught with alarm;
A stillness of soul and a firm strong resolve
To believe, and to trust in Your arm.

Please grant me a spirit that prays oft each day,
Giving thanks for the blessings around;
To pray for Your Kingdom, the joy it will bring,
In the fruit of the spirit abound.

Please grant me a spirit that treasures Your Word,
Which sheds light on my path every day.
May each line become part of me – deep in my heart,
That I never from Your love may stray.



Colleen Simons

Haggai and Zechariah

The Books of Haggai and Zechariah are about the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, which was destroyed when the Babylonians conquered the city in 586BC. **David Pearce** wrote about the return from exile when considering the historical accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah. Now he summarises prophetic writings which encouraged the returned exiles to get on with the rebuilding so that Temple worship could begin again.

Hard Times

As we open the pages of Haggai we move on through 90 years since the deportation to Babylon. The people of Judah were then marched off into captivity, had lived there for a lifetime, and now some of them returned under the amnesty of Cyrus king of Persia in 539 BC, following the Persian conquest of the Babylonian empire.

Arriving back at a ruined Jerusalem, they laid with great rejoicing the foundation of a new Temple, glad to be home. But another 20 years have crawled by, and somehow, as we have already seen in the Book of Ezra, the Temple is still unfinished. Enemies obstruct the work. Their own farms and families take priority, and the king's taxes have to be paid. Weeds grow over the foundation stone that was laid with such rejoicing.

Change of Approach

In the second year of Darius the Great, Haggai springs into action. His whole book covers a period of only four months, but in that time he gets the builders back to work. The lethargy of the people, and their preoccupation with their own affairs was, he explains, a reproach to the God who had given them back their land. With the accession of a new king, the political climate is favourable. It is time to start!



First Haggai insists they needed to change their approach. They had been earning wages, only to put them into a bag with a metaphorical hole in the bottom (Haggai 1:6). If they put God's business first, then God would see that their crops flourished, and they would have plenty for themselves. It was a matter of putting first things first. This is the same message Jesus taught when he said:

Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you (Luke 12:31).

Of course, it takes faith to trust that God will look after us, but faith is what the gospel is all about. Twenty three days after Haggai made this appeal the people started work on the Temple (see Haggai 1:15).

One month later (see chapter 2:1) Haggai was back again. Some of the people were complaining that the

Temple they were building was a poor imitation of the magnificent one that the Babylonians had destroyed. Their morale was dropping. Was it really worth continuing? The prophet's comforting reply is a lesson for all ages. Gold and silver mean nothing to God, he said. Whatever we give to Him belongs to Him anyway. It is the fact we are labouring for Him that matters.

For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the Lord of hosts (Haggai 2:6-9).

More Glorious?

However, could the latter glory of the house they were building be greater than the glory of Solomon's Temple? The answer is that whatever we do for God is filed away for the Day of Judgment. When our lives are reviewed, it is not how much money we donated that will be important, but the fact we left God's house better than it was before we came along.

God's real house, as the Apostle Peter explains, is made up of living stones:

Coming to him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5).

The Temple in which God will dwell

for ever is not made of bricks and timber. It is a living church, with his Son as the cornerstone. As we labour for Him now, we are preparing for the glory that will fill our bodies with eternal light in the day when Jesus will come to shake all nations.

Zechariah Inspires the Builders

God is wise. When the situation is critical, He steps up the action. So it was that the people of Judah who were rebuilding the Temple were blessed with not one but two prophets. The two prophets carefully recorded the dates when the word of the Lord came to them. You can see that Haggai kicked off with his first two visions, then, just when the work was about to stop, along came Zechariah to add his weight to the effort. A month later Haggai has two more visions, and Zechariah rounds off the series two months after that. We know from the chronology of King Darius that the actual date was 520 BC.

By comparing Haggai and Zechariah's dates with the parallel record in Ezra, we can see why an extra impetus was essential at this time. Ezra agrees, in his chapter five, that the rebuilding commenced under the inspiration of Haggai and Zechariah. He says that Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest were in charge of the work. But he adds something we do not find in our two prophets. He says that the local officials appointed by Darius came along to question the right of the Jews to build a temple, and reported their activity in a letter to the Emperor, naming the two leaders:

Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which

is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building ... This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent: The governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who were in the region beyond the River, to Darius the king. (They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus) To Darius the king: All peace. Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" (Ezra 5:2-4,6-9).

Trouble Ahead?

We can understand now why the builders were afraid. Big trouble could be brewing for them! But Ezra notes that with great courage they continued to build, knowing that God was with them:

But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter (Ezra 5:5).

When the reply came from His Majesty, it was to give his blessing, and command the local officials to let

the builders have whatever materials they needed free of charge from the King's stores. The crisis was over. It is intriguing to see how Zechariah's visions are based on a motif of builders and temples. For example, in chapter one he sees four carpenters (you can almost see the pencils stuck behind their ears) driving away four freestanding horns. A horn in the Bible is a symbol for power, since a bull pushes with its horns, and these horns, (v 21), represent the Gentile powers that have scattered Israel – Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome.

Similarly in chapter two he sees a workman with a measuring tape in his hand. He is going off to measure the dimensions of Jerusalem. God, the prophet is told, is a wall of fire round the city, like the chariots of fire that Elisha's servant saw surrounding his city when he was afraid (see 2 Kings 6:15-17). With His presence, the builders need not fear the enemies who were trying to stop the work.

Opposition Overcome

In the third chapter Zechariah sees Joshua the High Priest, who has been busy labouring on the construction work with his own hands for his clothes, not surprisingly, are grubby. The prophet sees him accused by Satan (the word 'satan' in the Old Testament simply means an adversary). This simulates perfectly the way the local officials sent their report to the King. But Joshua was justified. "The Lord rebuke you!" the angel cries to the adversary. And he changes Joshua's dirty overalls for clean clothes, and sets a priestly cap on his head. Then he proclaims that the foundation stone of the temple on which Joshua was busy building had an inscription, as such stones do. It had

an engraving of seven eyes. These were, he said, the eyes of the Lord, that oversee all that we do in His name.

The prophecy continues, with a great lampstand in chapter four, an essential piece of Temple furniture, and two olive trees, resembling the two olive wood cherubims in Solomon's temple that once stood in the Most Holy place, in the presence of the Lord. The next chapter has a flying scroll, exactly the dimensions of the old Tabernacle, with a warning message. This is followed by a basket with a lid of lead and two storks, one at each end – a parody of the Holy Ark with its winged cherubim and lid of gold. Inside he saw not the Ten Commandments, but a defiled woman, who set up her rival temple in the land of Shinar, or Babylon. Perhaps we have a hint here of the apostasy that would create a church in Rome, that great city that ruled over the kings of the earth.

Multiple Fulfilments

You see, Zechariah's visions, like the other prophets before him, span more than one fulfilment. They encourage the people of his own day, but they also look on through time to the latter days, and the coming of Christ. Indeed chapter six sees Joshua the High Priest with a crown on his head. This seems odd, because priests and kings were separate roles in the Old Testament, but it makes sense when you remember that God's Son, Jesus, (in Hebrew 'Joshua' is the same as 'Jesus') will be both a king and a priest on his throne. "Behold the man", runs verse 12, echoing the words of Pontius Pilate, "whose name is The Branch". Jesus came from Nazareth, which means Branch Town. "He shall build the Temple of the Lord". So he will – a

house of living stones, in which God will dwell forever.

Amazing Detail

The closing chapters of this gripping prophecy concentrate on the work of Jesus in amazing detail. Take a look at chapter eleven. Here we jump to the first century where we see foretold the way that Jesus was rejected by the rulers, the official 'shepherds' of Israel, right down to the thirty pieces of silver that they would offer to Judas Iscariot to betray him, and the giving of the money to buy the Potter's Field for burying strangers. Chapter twelve speeds on to the end time, with Jerusalem surrounded by many nations. Zechariah sees the inhabitants looking upon "him whom they have pierced".

In the prophecy, God has sent Jesus back to the earth, but now the Israelis realise with shame that he is the one their forefathers crucified. A fountain will be opened for them, says the last chapter, to wash away their sins. The Lord Jesus sets his feet on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem – the very place from which he ascended centuries before – and with earthquake and fire God's enemies are destroyed. And the outcome?

And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be "The Lord is one," and His name one (Zechariah 14:9).

The Lord Jesus will then reign as king over all the earth, and there will be one common religion for all nations. When that happens, it will be because the Kingdom of God has been established on earth.

David M Pearce

The Battle for Jerusalem

In the latter days, Jerusalem is to be a heavy stone for all people, and those who burden themselves with her and try to solve the “Jewish problem” will suffer hurt. Jerusalem, or Zion as it is also known, is the place where God has chosen to place His name, as the Psalmist explains:

His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loves the gates of Zion More than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God! (Psalm 87:1–3).

For 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).

Jerusalem

This city is God’s special place in the land which He loves and there is still a great future in store for Jerusalem. All through its turbulent history, however, Jerusalem which means “city of peace” has been a centre of conflict; and it will be so again before its glorious future is finally realised. It is to this city that we must continually look, for when it is once again in turmoil, the end of this age is near. To consider this time and the battle for Jerusalem, we must return to the prophecy of Zechariah, for this God-guided prophet 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 (Zechariah 14:1–2).

These verses suggest a final occupation of the city and the land of Israel at the time of the end, as we briefly considered in the previous article in this series. These words conjure up terrible images for Israel and its people at this time. We can also imagine the united joy of all those who are opposed to the state of Israel, and the rejoicing that will occur when this takes place.

Final Phase

These verses apply to the time of the end for the prophecy goes on to say:

Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with you (Zechariah 14:3–5).

This prophecy refers to nothing less than the return of Jesus Christ to this

earth, for God will act to save His people by sending back His Son to take control. But he will not be alone, for it appears that the redeemed will be with him. The redeemed (described as “the saints”) are those who are the faithful of this age and who will then have been immortalised by God, following the return of the Lord Jesus and the resurrection.

Repercussions

The prophecy goes on to say what will happen to those who attack Jerusalem at that time.

This shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the Lord will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand (Zechariah 14:12–13).

Again, this conjures up terrible images in our minds, but this is what happens when people fight against God and His people. There are many examples in Scripture of how God fought in the day of battle. For example, the Egyptians were destroyed in the Red Sea when God delivered His people from Egypt (Exodus 14). And God's angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrians in one night when God delivered His city Jerusalem from an invasion (2 Kings 19:34,35).

It is from Jerusalem that God will once again save His people. Earlier we looked at Joel chapter 3 which speak of God's judgement with the nations. The prophecy goes on to say:

Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’” Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord. “Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow – for their wickedness is great.” Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. “So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again” (Joel 3:9–17).

here are many connections between the above verses and the ones we previously looked at from Revelation 16 which speak of God gathering the nations to a place called Armageddon. Following this awesome display of God's power, Jerusalem will at last become a city of peace.

John Shepley

The Bible is True

Perfect Harmony

The Bible is made up of 66 sections called 'books'. These were written over a period of more than a thousand years, by all sorts of people, in different countries and in three languages, and yet they tell one consistent story. They reveal a God who made everything and has a plan to make it all perfect.

These Bible books describe how God gave freewill to one of His creatures – a human being – and show how we human beings misused that freedom. They also explain how God is working with that freewill to achieve His purpose. The harmony and consistency of these messages proves to me that the writers were being guided by Someone who knew the whole Plan from beginning to end. No other book or person does that.

Accurate History

To test the truth of the Bible we can apply practical tests such as the test of history. Did the events that the Bible describes really happen? When the Biblical records are compared with the writings of the ancient historians, such as Herodotus, they usually fit together exactly. In some places there are gaps, but as the archaeologists find more facts, the gaps get filled in. For instance, the accepted history of ancient Assyria and Babylon confirms the truth of the Bible.

There once were problems in seeing how Egyptian history fitted in the Bible. But at the end of the 20th Century younger Egyptologists worked out a different chronology. They argued that the



usual view of Egyptian history had been 'stretched out', and that once that is corrected the match with the Bible is perfect, and other problems are solved at the same time. This move from doubt to agreement has happened repeatedly over the past 200 years. Sadly though, many people do not realise how strong the evidence is.

Amazing Prophecy

Of course, proving that the Bible is true historically does not prove that it comes from God. But the next argument does, for the Bible foretells the future. Unaided humans cannot do that. This was illustrated by the financial crisis that started in 2008 (the 'Credit Crunch') for instance. Bankers, Regulators and Governments alike did not see it coming and they blundered into it.

By contrast, the Bible tells us about what would happen to many nations, especially the Jews and other peoples of the Middle East, for thousands of years in advance. Isaiah chapters 40

to 44 are good examples. Those chapters say that Jews would be scattered across the world because of their sins, but at last they would be rescued by God and returned to their land (Isaiah 43:5-6).

Over a period of 2000 years that has indeed happened. Then comes the challenge to other religions and beliefs: 'Can you do that? – if you can, we will believe you!' (Isaiah 41:19-24; 43:9-10). They can't, of course, but the Bible writers did just that. So it is very reasonable to believe the other things that they say, too.

The Life-Story of Jesus

Another wonderful example of Bible prophecy is the way in which the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus were foretold. These events were all described in detail hundreds of years before they happened. Because past promises were fulfilled, it is reasonable to believe that Jesus' promises to return will also be fulfilled (for example John 14:3,28; Revelation 22:20). But more than that – Jesus' whole life was a miracle.

He lived for about 33 years and never sinned (never fell below the perfect behaviour that God sets before us all as the ideal). And then when



The Shrine of the Book in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem now houses many of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

wicked men executed him by cruelly nailing him to a cross and leaving him to die, God raised him to life again. Although the grave was sealed and guarded, three days later it was empty, and his enemies could not produce his body! His apostles, who had panicked when Jesus was arrested, spoke out boldly in the city of Jerusalem:

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

(You) killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses (Acts 3:15).

No-one disproved them. No-one could. Jesus is alive for evermore. This gives him unique authority, and as he said *"the Scripture cannot be broken"*(John 10:35).

The Bible: Preserved

Although written between 3,500 and 2,000 years ago, the Bible has survived many attempts to destroy it. Besides the traditionally accepted texts which scholars use to translate our modern-language Bibles, we have copies written before 500 AD of all the books in the Bible. In our great libraries there are parts of New Testament books dated before 200 AD. Many scrolls of the Old Testament found in the Dead Sea Caves were written about 150 BC – more than 100 years before the birth of Jesus.

These ancient copies confirm that the text of the Bible that we use today is amazingly accurate and has been carefully preserved by God. Thus we can be sure that no important errors have been allowed to creep in.

John Woodall

All Nuts

There were hundreds of them, all over the grass and spilling on to the road. I grabbed a handful. They were all very smooth and shiny; each about 5cm long and thicker than one's little finger. They were acorns. There are perhaps many thousand oak trees in the world and some of them very massive, with trunks up to 3 meters in diameter, and every one grown from one of these nuts. I took a few home and kept them in a cardboard box for a few months, but after all that time in darkness they had not germinated. Why not?

Well-Grounded

Go to an oak tree and study the ground beneath it. Notice those giant roots that have bored deep down into the earth, searching for what? Here is a tree, made of solid hardwood: wood from which huge galleons were made, and superb furniture that lasts for centuries. Dig down a little and the soil shows nothing unusual. What is in it that has produced such a massive tree? If we said nutrients and water we would be right, but what have we learnt about this remarkable development of fine-grained oak wood? Very little except that it grows very slowly by thin layers just beneath the bark. But how and why?

Little Acorns

Let's turn to the acorn for an answer; what lies inside an acorn that can produce a monster tree exactly like the one from which the acorn fell? The answer is information. Somehow the acorn contains coded information



which instructs it when to germinate by way of sprouting roots and a stem, to initiate the whole long building process.

Well I guess we knew all that, but in what form is this information stored? To find out, we could take a sharp knife and slice the nut in half or in quarters, yet however much we probe within, we cannot see it. The acorn has the same



sort of interior as most other nuts. They all contain specific information, about bark, branches, leaves and nuts, which no amount of searching can reveal, yet each nut is programmed to produce a tree exactly like the one from which it fell.

Intelligence

Computer message sticks are similar in size, and contain a huge amount of information called Gigabytes, but if we break one open we shall see copper strips and other tiny objects which reveal the storage method. Yet if we plant one in our garden we would not expect it to produce the device from which it was manufactured. But one thing we know for certain; an intelligent mind has placed that information within it.

Whether we call them nuts or seeds this same amazing phenomenon of nature is within each of them. Is it not

therefore perfectly reasonable to conclude that an intelligent mind is behind the information placed within them? In other words, they witness to the creative power of God.

Thousands of different nuts and seeds each faithfully producing plants and trees exactly like the one they came from cannot be explained by unintelligent forces acting by chance. Information does not just happen. So those unbelievers who may think of the Bible as 'all nuts' might prefer a different term if they thoughtfully explored the miracle within nuts and seeds.

The Bible is a book of stored information that can lead to eternal life. That information was placed within by a supreme intelligence, via His prophets and apostles, and is there for your salvation and mine.

Such is the lesson of the Nut.

Malcolm Edwards

My Jewels

I find my diamonds in the raindrops glistening after summer showers
Sparkling on the petals of the many garden flowers.
I find my emeralds in the grass of gentle sweeping fields of green
And sapphires from the bluebells in a rustic woodland scene.

I find my gold in buttercups, the simple meadow flower,
And rubies from the dark red rose that climbs a lady's bower;
I see the colour sparkle in every flower I see
For in my garden all the earth is clothed in jewellery.

I'm sure God loves the colours too that His great hand has made
Surrounding us with gems that are so beautifully portrayed,
And when dark clouds surround us and I see the drops of rain
It's then I see my flowers become sparkling jewels again.

Peggy Rawson

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