

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1553



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The Miracles of Jesus Christ – page 10
The Reign of the King – page 12

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

129th Year

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1553



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 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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Not Made with Hands

In the city of Corinth the apostle Paul was surrounded by man-made objects – buildings, statues and altars.

It was a fine display of Greek architecture in the first century AD and no doubt the Greeks were justly proud of what they had accomplished and how their city looked. Their Temples were spectacular, if the ruins of the Parthenon are typical. But their religion was deficient because it too was man-made.

Mars Hill

Summoned to address the ancient court of Athens which met on Mars Hill and was known as the Areopagus (which is Greek for Mars Hill), Paul had an opportunity to explain about Christianity to a company of Greek philosophers, described as Epicureans and Stoics (Acts 17:18). The court was very select, with perhaps about thirty members, and it had the responsibility of overseeing public morals in the city.

They wanted to check out Paul's message, to see if it was a danger to the public, especially as they thought he was introducing new gods into the city or, as they termed them, "foreign gods". It gave the apostle an excellent chance to explain about Jesus and the hope of resurrection from the dead. He ended his address with this stirring statement:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He

has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30–31).

Not Man-Made

Only a few people believed his message and wanted to learn more. That might have been because Paul contrasted everything he could see about him with the reality of things that could not be seen. Athenians were proud of their beautiful city and all that the architects and builders had achieved. But Paul swept all that aside when he made this comparison:

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:24–27).

Think how that would have been received. They had made every effort to build temples which glorified the gods they worshipped and they had tried to ensure that all the various gods were honoured in that way. Now Paul came along and said two things that were calculated to upset them:

❖ They did not know the one true God, who had made the world and

had arranged everything according to His purpose, and

- ❖ This God did not want a man-made temple but was dwelling in His world and was near to everyone, if they would only seek for Him and find Him.

Divine Handiwork

Look around you at the natural world and see what Paul meant. However startling the architecture, the natural world always surpasses it. Compare the building on this month's front cover with the tree in the foreground of the photograph. Unless the building is carefully maintained it will only have a limited lifespan and as architectural tastes change quite quickly it may soon be replaced by something different.

Yet trees remain beautiful and functional, even when they are old and gnarled. Their leaves enrich the ground when they fall; their seed pods generate new growth and when at last they die, their trunks and branches still serve mankind. And trees are just one feature of plant and animal life which God has given to sustain and enrich life on earth. It is no wonder that the apostle Paul said elsewhere:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse... (Romans 1:20).

We have only to open our eyes and see the world as something that God has created to perceive His majesty and might, His creative genius and His wonderful goodness to the children of men.

God the Deliverer

One Psalmist was so impressed by God's creative power that he penned a Psalm in which he says several times:

Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! (Psalm 107:8).

He reviews the way in which God called out the nation of Israel and rescued them from slavery in Egypt, and then carried on rescuing them as they got into difficulty of one sort or another. Then he broadens his consideration and says that God is always ready to help the person who is in need:

He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness. Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons ... Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! (Psalm 107:9-10,15).

In all the varying circumstances of life, and the Psalmist lists things like drought, hunger, harvests, oppression, affliction and sorrow, the Psalmist is persuaded that God is always near and can help if people will only ask Him for deliverance:

Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord (Psalm 107:43).

It is an eternal truth that the apostle Paul declared in Athens. God does not ask us to build Him a temple in which He can dwell. He wants to live with us, day by day, and He is never far away, if only we turn to Him.

Editor

Evidence for Faith

When discussing a possible treatment with your doctor, which of the two following comments would you prefer to hear?

'We've always done it that way and I think it will work'

or:

'Overall the research carried out on people like you shows that there is a high chance of success'.

Years ago much medical practice was based on traditional belief with little basis in scientific research. Nowadays professionals are supposed to use current best evidence informed by relevant research. Researchers spend hours compiling such evidence. First they search for all the studies that have been carried out on the topic of interest. Then they assess the quality of the studies, examine the settings in which they were carried out and finally combine all the results to make an overall summary of the evidence for a treatment.

Bible Evidence

The situation is quite different when we consider the evidence for religious beliefs, called doctrines. We could follow traditions or personal convictions; but if we believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, and consequently error-free, we should look nowhere else for doctrine. As the apostle Paul wrote:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

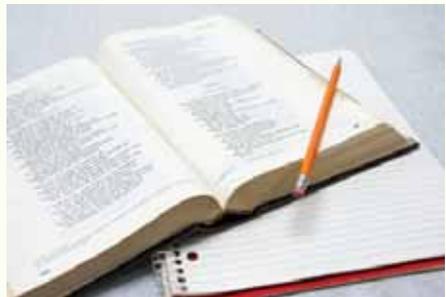
The 'quality' of the evidence from the Bible is not in doubt, says the apostle: all its words are true. Moreover, we do not have to search for obscure journals or reports in foreign languages to find the evidence – it is all in the one book.

Correct Interpretation

Nonetheless it is important to study the evidence carefully. It is not wise to base a doctrine on a single passage. Although in articles like this there may be space to provide only one text of support for a doctrine, it is important to check that any use of a passage is consistent with other passages about the same topic. This is to check that our understanding is correct.

It is also important to examine the context of a passage. None of us likes to be quoted out of context. At Jesus' trial, false witnesses claimed that Jesus had said he would destroy and re-build the Jewish temple (Mark 14:58). But the text in John 2:19-21 makes it clear that Jesus had been talking about the *'temple of his body'* and thus about his resurrection.

Jesus told a parable about a man who was given money by his master to 'Do business' while the master was away. The man hid the money in a



handkerchief, and on his return the angry master said:

“Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?” (Luke 19:23; see verses 12-27).

This parable cannot be taken as evidence for divine approval of any banking system or even advice on how to manage actual money.

The importance of Context

So it is important when studying a scripture to ask who said this, when, to whom, where and why.

- ❖ *Some words are spoken to the Jews under the Law of Moses.*
- ❖ *Some are spoken to disciples during Jesus’ ministry.*
- ❖ *Some are to first century believers who had the Holy Spirit.*

We need to examine the context, comparing with other Scriptures to check if and how they apply to us. That is not to say that the Bible is wrong. Examining context is not like replacing the flat earth theory with the superior belief that the earth is a globe. Some things are true in a context.

For example, it may be true to say in 2003 *“Susan has no children”* and just as true to say in 2013 *“Susan has four children”*. However, fundamental timeless doctrines – such as that God made the earth and all things; and that Jesus is the Son of God – cannot change.

Danger of Traditions

It is critically important to determine what God meant by the words He chose to record.

... Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpreta-



tion, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

It is equally important not to change the words. Jesus was extremely critical of the Pharisees who had replaced God’s law with their own rules.

Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? (Matthew 15:3), and,

Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’ (Matthew 15:7–9).

What do you Believe?

Some sceptics argue that you can prove anything you like from the Bible. If it’s important to have a doctor check the research evidence; it is even more a matter of life and death for us to check the Scriptural evidence for our beliefs.

Anna Hart

The Four Gospels: Luke

Luke was probably not a follower of Jesus during his ministry, for he was a Greek. He enters the Bible story during the second great missionary journey of the Apostle Paul, who became his close friend. It is from a passing reference by Paul in one of his letters that we learn that Luke was a doctor by profession (see Colossians 4:14).

Luke's Aim

Luke defines his task clearly as he sets about his version of Jesus' life:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

We have no idea who Theophilus was. He may even have been a hypothetical character, representing any genuine enquirer, for the name means "Lover of God". But clearly Luke intends to write a chronological account of what happened, and he has taken pains to interview the first-hand witnesses who followed Jesus from the beginning.

His style is painstaking and scholarly, and you get the feeling he was an educated man. As mentioned earlier, we know from elsewhere in the New Testament that he was a doctor.

Different Contents

Thanks to Luke we have a detailed description of the remarkable birth of John the Baptist, the only son of aged parents, and one who was set apart for God from his birth. He was to be the herald of Jesus, preparing men's hearts for the appearing of their promised King.

Luke also lays down the events which led up to the birth of Jesus – how the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in Nazareth, and told her she would bear the Son of God, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. He emphasises the solemn declaration by the angel that the baby must be named "Jesus" (which means "God Saves"), and that he was going to fulfil the promise to King David that his descendant would sit on his throne for ever (see Luke 1:31-35).

It is also from Luke that we learn that although Mary came from Nazareth, her baby was born in Bethlehem. It so happened, he explains, that Augustus Caesar decreed that all his subjects must attend their ancestral homes to be registered for taxes, just when she was due to be delivered. Being descended from David, Mary was obliged to go to Bethlehem. Hence the dramatic irony of the King who is to rule the whole earth, arriving into the world, not in a magnificent maternity wing attended by famous physicians and a sea of reporters, but cradled in a cattle stall, his only visitors a bunch of shepherds.

Unlike the other gospel accounts, Luke gives us one tiny glimpse of the

childhood of Jesus. It is a snapshot of a particular weekend when Jesus, Mary and Joseph – his stepfather – went up with the family to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. He was twelve. Mary and Joseph lost track of him, assuming he was with other people from the village, then found he was missing. Desperately worried, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him and found him, after three days, in the Temple, deep in discussion with the experts in the Law of Moses. Notice what he said when they found him, for it shows how seriously he took his Father's commandments:

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' Ministry

Around 25 AD (Luke defines the date precisely – see chapter 3:1-3), John the Baptist began his work in the wilderness of Judea. He had come to prepare the hearts of the people for the appearing of the Messiah, Israel's long-awaited king. He preached a necessary change of lifestyle, a need for cleansing, symbolised by baptism in the River Jordan. Luke carefully records how Jesus himself joined the queue, and dedicated his life in service to God. At this point he adds his version of Jesus' genealogy, which follows the line of descent from King David by another route, so that both from Mary and through his legal father Jesus' credentials were impeccable as 'Son of David'.

After his baptism, Luke records the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, a final test of his readiness to begin his life's work. Then he begins his chronology of the Ministry, starting in Galilee.

This account is the most comprehensive of the four gospels, and includes many of the parables omitted from the other records.

It is fascinating to see Luke, as a medical professional, noting carefully the symptoms of the people that came to Jesus for healing. There was a man, for example, who was 'full of leprosy' and a woman who had been bent double with osteoarthritis for 18 years. Another woman had suffered a haemorrhage for twelve years and had spent all her savings on doctors' treatments, without being cured. In all these cases, Luke observes, Jesus could bring about an instantaneous cure.

Prophetic Forecast

We can be grateful to Luke for a detailed record of one of Jesus' most dramatic prophecies. (Jesus, like the Old Testament prophets, was frequently inspired by the Holy Spirit to make predictions.) This one was delivered on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem, a few days before he died. He had warned the apostles that the magnificent buildings of the Temple, just across the valley, would all be destroyed. Asked when this would be, Jesus told them that before it came to pass they would preach the gospel to kings and rulers, and would suffer persecution in consequence (see Luke 21:5-19).



When they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies that would be the signal for them to flee for their lives. They could then be sure that the destruction of the city was imminent. After that the Jews would be scattered as captives amongst all nations, and Jerusalem would be trodden underfoot by the Gentile nations, “until”, he said, “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

Then Jesus spoke about that distant time – distant in the first century but imminent so far as we are concerned – when the sands in God’s hourglass would be running out. This is what Jesus said the world would be like just before his return from heaven:

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.

Then he spoke to them a parable:

Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near (Luke 21:25–31).

Fulfilled Prophecy

As we have come to expect, Jesus was absolutely right. After he ascended to heaven, the apostles did preach the gospel throughout the world, and suffered imprisonment, cruel beatings and even death for their pains. But in A.D. 70, only forty years after Jesus’ prophecy, the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem, and razed its buildings to the ground, including Herod’s beautiful Temple. You can still see the Roman victory inscription with bas-reliefs of the Roman soldiers sacking the city, on the Arch of Titus in Rome. The Jews were scattered throughout the nations, as Jesus said they would be, and Jerusalem fell under the control of Gentile powers (Saracens, Crusaders and Turks) for many centuries.

Like the parable, Israel became a fig tree without leaves. However, in the course of the last century, life has returned to that ancient tree. The leaves are coming out. Israel has taken her place amongst the nations, and millions of scattered Jews have gone back to the land of their fathers. This, Jesus said, is a great sign that his Coming is near. So we can be glad that, though the world is full of fear and trouble, Jesus the King will soon be here to take over the government of the nations, and reward those who have served him faithfully while he was away.

Luke ends his gospel with the trial, crucifixion and resurrection. He leaves his readers with the most detailed account of the ascension from the Mount of Olives, paving the way for the beginning of his next work, the Acts of the Apostles.

David M Pearce

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Nowadays the word ‘miracle’ is used in a variety of ways:

- ❖ *When some great exploit has been achieved, such as sailing round the world single-handed or climbing a seemingly impossible mountain, we hear it said, ‘that was nothing short of miraculous’.*
- ❖ *After a tragic event such as an earthquake and when, after many days someone is dragged alive from the rubble, we will read a newspaper headline such as ‘Miraculous Survival’.*
- ❖ *Every moment of every day there is the continual wonder of the birth of a new birth. The expression, ‘the miracle of birth’ still seems the only way to describe what is happening.*

So the word “miracle” is used to describe remarkable events that happen about us and in our own lives. At the same time it is also used to describe even more remarkable events. These are happenings which are so remarkable that, as humans, we cannot control or bring them into being. Such events are supernatural: outside our capabilities or our control.

Jesus and Miracles

When we read about the life of Jesus Christ it is not long before miracles loom large. He went about Israel as a preacher and teacher, but he also became known as a performer of miracles. These were miracles of the supernatural sort, for Jesus was able to do things that no one else could. We

do not know the total number of miracles performed by Jesus but in the gospel records of his life we are given details of about 34 which are summarised in the following table:

| Type of miracle | Number |
|---|--------|
| Miracles of provision (e.g. Water into wine; Feeding of 5000) | 6 |
| Raising the Dead | 3 |
| Controlling nature (e.g. Stilling a storm) | 3 |
| Miracles of Healing (e.g. healing the blind, lepers, the dumb, and paralytics) | 22 |

Clearly, these miracles are outside our experience. In the New Testament they are also described as acts of power, mighty works, wonderful works, wonders and signs. On some occasions we are told that Jesus was moved with compassion at the needs and distress of others and responded by relieving that distress with a miracle. However, it is clear as we read through the life of Jesus that there was one very important reason why he performed so many miracles.

Why Miracles?

In the gospel of John the miracles of Jesus are very often described as

signs. That designation tells us something about the man performing them. Just have a look at the following list of verses in John's gospel and see where the signpost is pointing.

*John 2:23 – “Now when he (Jesus) was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in his name when they saw **the signs** which he did.”*

*John 3:2 – “...Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do **these signs** that you do unless God is with him.”*

*John 6:14 – “Then those men, when they had seen **the sign** that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’”*

John 10:25 – “...The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me”

(see also John 7:31; 10:38; 11:47-48 and 14:11).

Signposts

These miracles had a very clear message. Every time Jesus performed a miracle, the signpost carried the message, “Here is the Son of God.” Jesus could perform these miracles because he had received power – the Holy Spirit – from God his Father. It was equally clear that if people wanted to hear the true message from God, then the Lord Jesus was the man to go to. Not only did he have God's power to heal people, he also had a message from God that would give them life instead of death. People who had been healed were also signposts – living and continuing witnesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

As Matthew recorded in his gospel:

Great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and he healed them. So the multitude marvelled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel (Matthew 15:30–31).

The Rejected Signpost

Although the signpost was so clear and large, not everyone wanted to see it. We read that, “although he (Jesus) had done so many signs before them, they did not believe on him” (John 12:37). There were some people living in the time of Jesus who would not believe the evidence of their eyes. They had shut their eyes, their ears were stopped and they had hard hearts. Nothing would persuade them that here was the Son of God – with God's power and with His message. They just did not want to go in the direction to which the sign pointed.

The crucial question is: *What effect are these miracles going to have on us?* Can we see the signpost and understand what the miracles are leading up to? The miracles that Jesus performed, the words that he spoke, and the perfect life that he lived: all point in one direction. Jesus is the centre of God's purpose. This man brings life to a dying world. This man brings salvation, where otherwise there would be no hope. This man is the future King of the whole world.

That is where the signpost points and we need to have the faith and trust to follow that direction.

John Parry

The Reign of the King

The reign of the Lord Jesus Christ has long been foretold in the Scriptures of Truth. David, who was Israel's greatest king, was promised by God that he would have a son who would sit upon his throne, and his house and his kingdom would be established forever:

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12–16).

Coming King

Of this son we read:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Then the angel said to her, “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).

There is absolutely no doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ will reign as king on David's throne in Jerusalem. As we have already seen in this series, there are many Scriptures which corroborate this. In the book of Revelation Jesus is referred to as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (19:16).

Kingly Virtues

The prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah give us a glimpse into the characteristics of the coming King:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked (Isaiah 11:1–4).

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS' (Jeremiah 33:14–16).

Righteous Ruler

What a blessing this will be for the peoples of the earth. No longer will there be those oppressing others and

trying to impose their will by force for their own selfish ends. The terrible tribal conflicts in Africa, and the oppressing rules of dictators, will be a thing of the past. Man's mismanagement of the needs and welfare of the most vulnerable in society will also be gone, and in its place will be a ruler who genuinely cares for his people. Occasionally there may have been a ruler in this world who had the welfare of his subjects truly at heart, but this was only for a short time, for he could not continue by reason of death. This, of course, will be no barrier to the Lord for he is now immortal.

Psalm 72 (reproduced below) also gives us a wonderful insight into his beneficent reign. This is a Psalm of

Psalm 72

Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before him, and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him. For he will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in his sight.

And he shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to him; prayer also will be made for him continually, and daily he shall be praised. There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; his name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

David, written for his son Solomon, but it most certainly has a greater fulfillment in the enduring reign of the Lord Jesus.

Working with the King

The Lord will not be alone. He will be assisted in his administration of the kingdom by the saints. These are the faithful people, from all ages, who have been immortalised following the resurrection when the Lord returns. Of them it is said:

They sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, And have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9–10).

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6).

The above verses suggest that it will be the responsibility of the saints to teach and guide the mortal population in the way of righteousness. In this way the mortal nations of the kingdom age will come to understand more and more about the ways of God. What a privilege this will be.

The Millennium

It seems that this initial phase of the Kingdom of God will last for a thousand years, following which the Lord Jesus will deliver up the Kingdom to his Father.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when

he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under his feet." But when he says "all things are put under him," it is evident that he who put all things under him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24–28).

So, at the end of the Millennium the Son will hand over the earth to his Father and will himself be subject to his Father's overrule.

This passage clearly indicates the proper relationship between Father and Son and is quite clearly different from what is suggested by the various Creeds which were devised long after the New Testament was written by faithful people who were inspired to write, by God.

For when at last the Son of God – the Lord Jesus Christ – has handed over the renewed earth to Almighty God, God's plan for this world will be complete. For long ago He declared this divine intention:

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

What a glorious time that will be, when God Himself dwells on earth among His glorified people. It was the apostle John who received this glorious vision:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people ...(Revelation 21:3).

John Shepley

We Die because we Sin

Despite other views that are widely held in different parts of the world, the Bible clearly teaches that Death is the end of life, not the doorway to another existence either in paradise, heavenly bliss or eternal torment.

It all began in Eden when the first man and woman chose to please themselves instead of pleasing God. God gave them a simple law –

Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:17).

But Adam, at Eve's prompting, disobeyed and so they both died. They did not die on that day, so it seems that Adam and his wife were forgiven, but sins have their after-effects, even when they have been forgiven. So it was with Adam and Eve. They lived a long time (Genesis 5:5), but then they died.

Death comes to all

Adam had at least three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth. They inherited their parents' nature, so at some time they would die also. Abel had faith and tried to live in the way that God wanted him to live, but Cain the eldest did not. He envied his brother Abel and killed him (Gen 4).

Seth was a better man, more like his brother Abel but, in course of time, he died also (Gen 5:8). That is how it has been ever since: some people are wicked, others try to be good, but everyone 'misses the mark'. Nobody obeys perfectly the instructions that God gave us: put another way – we all

sin. As a result, everyone dies in the end. It started with Adam and Eve, but we all make similar mistakes, and we all die. The Apostle Paul in the New Testament summed it up like this:

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

The Reality of death

Many people are reluctant to believe that we really die. They see that the body dies, of course, but they think that the real personality lives on after death. They think that people who serve God go to be with Him in heaven, but that others are punished. Some ideas about this are extreme and very crude, but almost all religions cling to this belief in some form. The Bible is almost alone in teaching that death simply means the end of life.

Genesis tells us about the creation of Adam in these words:

The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

Equation

We can think of it as a simple equation, like this:

Dust plus God's 'breath' (or spirit, it's the same word in Hebrew) = a living being.

Death is the opposite condition:

A living being minus God's breath or spirit = dust again.

Bible Teaching

The men whose inspired words are recorded in the Old Testament understood this, as you can see:

❖ Old Testament

If He (God) should set His heart on it, If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust (Job 34:14-15);

For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:5);

Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave ... But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me (Psalm 49:14-15).

❖ New Testament

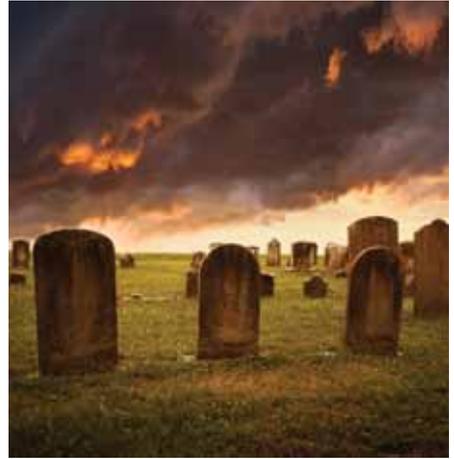
Here are three more examples to show that the New Testament says the same thing:

No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13);

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).

Here the choice is between living for ever, and perishing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand' (Acts 2:34).



There is a Remedy

This might seem to be grim news indeed, especially if you have always believed that when you die you go to heaven. But let us end on a happy note. The man who wrote Psalm 49 was very confident that God would rescue him from the grave: he knew that one day God would raise him from death to a new life on earth with a resurrected body.

“God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave”, he said, adding “For He shall receive me” (Psalm 49:15).

He was sure that he would be an exception to the sad rule that men and women just die and decay like animals. As another prophet said:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

There is a real and living hope in the Bible which we can all share. The key thing is to find out about it and to make it our own, with God's help.

John Woodall

The Anchor of the Soul

We have all seen an anchor: a heavy lump of metal with a vertical shaft and a curved base, with arrow-shaped hooks. It is secured to a boat with a chain or rope fixed in a ring at the top. Its purpose is simple – to give the moored boat a secure fixing on the sea or river-bed. In a gale this mooring can be severely tested.

Security

Life is like that. For us to remain healthy in body and mind we need security – a safe mooring. Most folk like a good framework for life with regular habits in the home and their daily activities. Once meals and daily routines are interrupted, life can become stressful. Over a long period this can make us ill, maybe depressed.

In the Bible we find all sorts of people with different characters and situations. God knows that people need stability. Children especially like to know where they stand and what things are acceptable in society. Without some regulation in life people can become anti-social and a burden to others.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught his hearers to build their lives on him. In one of his parables he said he was like a rock upon which a life could be based:

Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock (Matthew 7:24–25).



Uncertainty

The storms of life come in all forms, like unemployment, sickness or death in the family. Jesus is saying that to weather these storms successfully the wise need to build their lives on his teaching. Just when he had finished this parable, by describing the terrible crash of the fool's house that was built on sand, we are told that the audience marvelled at Jesus' teaching – because it came with such God-given authority. He was offering stability and security in a world which was anything but safe.

On occasions, Jesus showed his mastery of actual storms, by stilling the wind and calming the waves. But

there were times when his followers experienced shipwreck and near disaster.

The apostle Paul was shipwrecked several times (2 Corinthians 11:25) and another of those occasions is described in detail in the Acts of the Apostles. Nor was it unexpected, for Paul was forewarned, saying to his fellow travellers on board ship:

Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives (Acts 27:10).

Four Anchors

The situation was dire, and the crew decided to throw overboard the cargo and tackle of the ship, hoping that a lighter craft could be manoeuvred to shore. But still the storm raged and all hope was lost until Paul received another message from God and reported as follows:

I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me (Acts 27:22–25).

He then told the crew that they would be shipwrecked on an island. Although the ship would be lost all the passengers and crew would be saved. As the ship continued to be driven by the storm they sensed land was close as they were able to measure the water depth and discover it was getting shallower.

They cast four anchors out of the stern to slow the ship's progress



Part of the sculpture of a Roman ship showing how it was steered from the stern

towards the rocks. The conditions were so fierce that the ship started to disintegrate. Paul urged them to take some food to strengthen them and survive in the sea. He prayed to God in their presence, giving thanks for their meal and seeking strength in their efforts to reach shore alive.

Although we would have expected the ship's captain, or the centurion in charge of the prisoners on board to take charge, it was Paul who gave the orders. For both centurion and soldiers were inadequate when faced with the unbridled power of the sea.

Paul was given strength by God and he told the ship's company what to do. By now they all knew that shipwreck was inevitable. There was a small mutiny amongst the soldiers, who wanted to release one of the ship's small boats and try to escape to safety. Paul's advice was sure and authoritative:

“Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31).

Safely Ashore

In the event they all reached Malta safely and were welcomed and fed by the locals. The inner strength of Paul and his prayers had encouraged all the passengers and crew. Paul knew he would be preserved alive because, as a prisoner of the Roman Empire, and destined for judgement by Caesar, their journey to Rome was all part of God’s plan to get the gospel to the capital city.

The ship’s four anchors had provided some security overnight and had ensured they were not driven onto the rocks. But by far the most significant thing in this whole episode – the sole factor that gave them real security – was Paul’s utter faith in the God of heaven who controlled the winds and seas as well as the lives of the soldiers and sailors who travelled with them.

We can share this immense feeling of security by developing a deep well-founded faith in the God of the universe. God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, had this faith, and lived by it day after day. Even though he died an excruciating death on the cross, Jesus believed in the mighty power of God his Father. That saving power raised him from the tomb on the third day, just as God had promised!

Anchor of the Soul

We do not really know how our lives will work out on this earth. Our plans and ambitions may not be realized. There may be some life-threatening circumstance or illness that overtakes us. However, if we have the Lord God as the anchor of our soul, we have real comfort. For the Lord Jesus has promised to remain with his people always:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For he himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Grasp hold of this ‘*anchor of the soul*’ every day, by reading the Word of God regularly and by growing in your understanding, appreciation and application of its wonderful message of salvation.

This is what the writer to the Hebrews says about the true Christian hope, centred in the Lord Jesus Christ:

*This hope we have as **an anchor of the soul**, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19–20).*

Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and he will never fail you, for he is both “*sure and steadfast*”. Now in the presence of God, he will come again to fulfil his destiny and to save his people.

Andrew Tennant

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