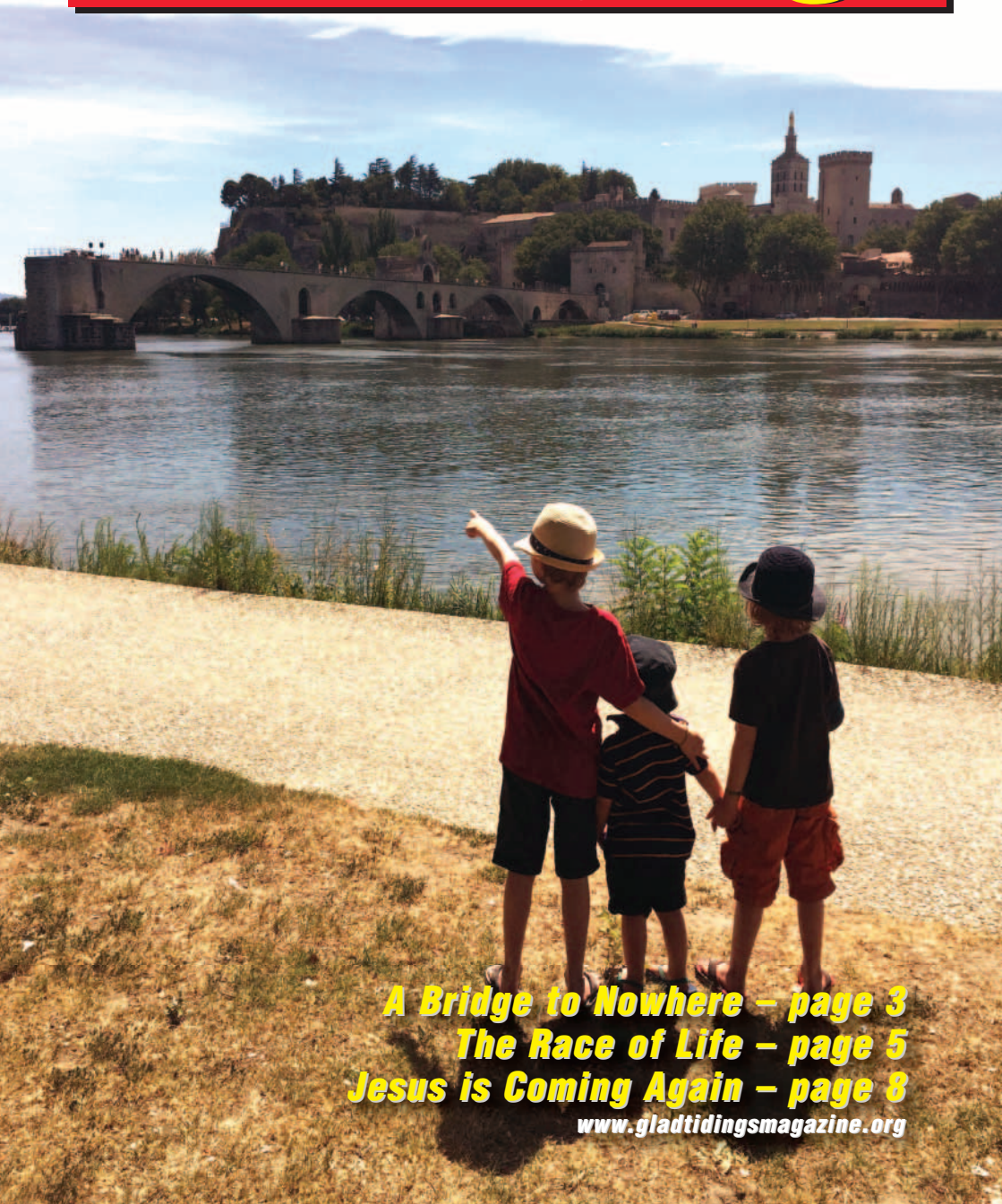


Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1576



A Bridge to Nowhere – page 3
The Race of Life – page 5
Jesus is Coming Again – page 8

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of the Kingdom of God

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

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to 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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A Bridge to Nowhere

Bridges are for crossing over from one bank to another. They may be crossing rivers, railways, canals, valleys or any other obstacles that would otherwise delay a journey and they have been used from ancient times. The bridge on this month's front cover is at Avignon, in the south of France, a city on the left bank of the Rhone river.

It is a city with an interesting history, still with its medieval ramparts and the remains of a once important bridge that spanned the Rhone. In the 14th century the city was the residence of seven successive popes who preferred to live in France rather than Rome.

They built a palace here, as popes do, and attracted a lot of merchants, painters and musicians, which would have been good for the town. This was a time of great confusion for the Roman church with different claims and counter-claims.

Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1376 but died shortly afterwards whereupon the Italian mob forced the election of an Italian pope, whose election was then annulled and another French pope elected. Rival popes appeared and a schism was created, so that people didn't know who their appointed leader was. Trying to work that out was like trying to cross a bridge that didn't go anywhere.

Confusion and corruption

This upset in the established church is expressive of what has happened to Christianity as a whole. As taught by Christ and his apostles it made perfect sense and enabled the followers of Jesus to journey through life with a clear destination. From reading the Bible people came to understand:



- ❖ That Jesus came into the world, born of the virgin Mary by the power of God his Father, to rescue mankind from sin and death.
- ❖ He died to make it possible for men and women to be reconciled to God, if they believe what God has revealed and are baptised, as Jesus commanded.
- ❖ Their hope is then centred in the Second Coming of Jesus and the promise that when he returns to earth he will establish God's kingdom here, once again.
- ❖ That kingdom existed once, when Israel's kings reigned for God at Jerusalem. Jesus will establish it again and reign there as God's appointed king.
- ❖ All nations will be subjected to his benevolent rulership and the world will once again become a wonderful place in which people will learn how to live with God.
- ❖ Those believers who now sleep in death will be raised from the dead – the true Christian hope of life after death – and those found worthy will work with the Lord Jesus to help transform the world.

Broken pathway

Sadly, that clear and straightforward message has been corrupted by people who have caused confusion and uncertainty about what the Bible really teaches. By muddling things up and mixing in pagan ideas they have created the sort of confusion that existed at Avignon so many years ago. Today there are plenty of people who don't know who or what to believe.

The Lord Jesus was to leave his followers and go to be with his Father in heaven, but he sought to reassure them that in his death he was pioneering a way for mankind to have a proper relationship with God: to become members of His family. This is what he said when asked about the way to his Father:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Jesus is now in heaven as a great high priest to ensure access to his Father for all those who approach God in the way the Bible explains. We have no need of a priest on earth, whether in France or in Rome, for Jesus is the only priest we need:

Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come ... Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption ... how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason he is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death ... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:11–15).



Believing in Jesus and being baptised into his saving name is the only way to cross over from certain and endless death to obtain the promise of an "eternal inheritance". For God offers us eternal life in His coming Kingdom. There is no other way to obtain the life that is life indeed.

A merry dance

The bridge at Avignon that once crossed the Rhone has been damaged many times by the force of this mighty river. It was rebuilt and then repaired, but all to no avail. It fell into disrepair in the 17th century and a catastrophic flood in 1669 swept away much of the structure.

Now only four of the initial 22 arches remain and it has become a tourist attraction, because it goes nowhere and because of the French folksong that memorialises it, "*Sur le Pont d'Avignon*", a song about dancing on (or under) this bridge.

Man-made structures decay and collapse, given time and inadequate maintenance. The great purpose of God never suffers like that. It remains certain and sure until it is accomplished, exactly as He has promised. Jesus is the only way across from death to life and that way will never fail you.

Editor

The Race of Life

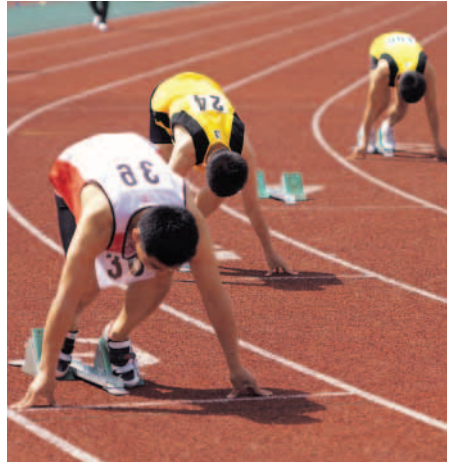
The world of the First Century, when the New Testament was written, was in many ways very much like today's world. For example, people loved to watch athletics and First Century athletes were stars, just like today!

Bible writers often used pictures from everyday life that were designed to catch the attention and make their readers think. One of the pictures that's often used is the picture of life as a race.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:24–25).

When the apostle Paul wrote those words to the Christians in the city of Corinth, he was probably thinking of the Isthmian Games, one of the most important athletic events in the ancient world which was held in Corinth. Paul is telling his fellow Christians – you should take your race of life every bit as seriously as the athlete who trains hard and gives everything he's got to achieve that moment of glory.

In Greek athletics the winner was often crowned with a wreath made of laurel leaves – to the athlete this was the supreme accolade, but it only lasted a few days before it started to fade. Whether it's a laurel wreath or a gold medal, sooner or later the glory will fade and be forgotten. But the prize for the Christian is eternal life in God's Kingdom!



Race Already Won!

Let's face it, there are some of us who are athletic and others who just aren't. There are some who are competitive, and some who aren't. This is where the race of life is different from athletics – the race of life is open to everyone, and it's a race everyone can win! Why? Because the race has already been won.

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

The Lord Jesus Christ gave his life as a perfect sacrifice. God raised him to life again, and he now lives for ever. He has won the race of life. It's something nobody else could have done – nobody else was good enough.

The brilliant thing is, Jesus Christ wants to share his victory with you and me! It's not a race we would ever win by our own strength or skill, but it's a race we will win if we follow him faithfully.

In It for the Long Term

The Greek games were held in a stadium. As the athletes ran, the crowds would be around them cheering, and often the winner's wreath was fixed to the finishing post to spur them on. This image of the race is used in the Letter to the Hebrews.

In chapter 11, the writer gives a list of many great faithful men and women of old who ran the race of faith; and at the beginning of chapter 12 he says, think of it as though all those great men and women are now a crowd in a stadium, cheering you on as you run! He says, get rid of anything that weighs you down – you wouldn't run a race with bricks in your pocket, just so you need to get rid of the bad things from your life so you can run unhindered – and look to the prize, which is Jesus, who has already run and already won.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Following the Rules

If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5).

It stands to reason – there have to be rules in any sport, to ensure it is safe and everyone is competing on level terms. If you disobey the rules you're disqualified, that's only fair.

The race of life is like that: God has



set certain rules that He wants us to follow. He's shown us what they are in the Bible. Some people want to live their lives their own way. That's up to them, but if you enter a race and run in the wrong direction you're not going to win!

Discipline

Whether it's a 100-metre sprint, a marathon or a boat race, the athlete needs discipline. If you want to succeed you have to be single-minded, train hard, get yourself in top condition, get your attitude right.

Being a 'disciple' of Jesus is very much like that – a 'disciple' is someone who follows a 'discipline'. The Christian's discipline isn't physical, but spiritual. This is how the apostle Paul put it:

Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:8).

Winning Together

The race track is a lonely place when it's you versus everyone else – but in the race of life you're running together. In his letter to the Christians in the city of Philippi, Paul told them to '*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*' (Philippians 1:27).

Paul wrote his letters in Greek. When he said *‘striving together’* he combined two Greek words – *‘sun-athleo’*. This must have sounded odd to his readers, because *‘athleo’* means *‘to strive to win’*, the word describes the single-minded pursuit of being the best and beating the rest; *‘sun’* means *‘together’*.

So he’s telling the Christians, ‘Put everything you’ve got into winning this race with all the focus and dedication of the athlete who wants to be the best – and help each other so you can all win together!’

The End of the Race

It’s thought that Paul’s second letter to Timothy was written while he was in prison in Rome, awaiting execution. In the last chapter he talks about his impending death:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Here’s a man who has run the race well, and now has the end in view. The end of Paul’s life is not going to be a tragedy – it’s going to be a triumph!



Top class athletics is only for an elite few. They are people of special ability who push themselves to the limit to achieve their moment of glory. But it is only a brief moment, and the glory will be forgotten sooner or later. The race of life, on the other hand, is open to everyone – and the prize is eternal glory.

Chris Parkin

Godly Exercise

The word which is translated ‘exercise’ in the first letter to Timothy is the Greek word *gymnasia*. A man who seeks to be a real gymnast must be a dedicated man. A man who is spasmodic, half hearted, neglectful, or casual, gymnastically is likely to fail. So underlying the ideas of spiritual exercise are devotion, endurance, discipline, self-control and purity. In the end, when all is said and done, proficiency does not come from speculating but from doing. Following the rules in the mind does not do much for the spiritual muscles. It demands active fidelity to the principles of spiritual health. It is faith manifested in sustained doing of the Word.

Dennis Gillett

Jesus is Coming Again

Jesus is alive; indeed, he is alive for evermore, and is now in heaven. God has given “all authority ... in heaven and on earth” to him (Matthew 28:18). He is directing the angels as they guide the nations towards the great events that will at last bring the Kingdom of God to the earth and fill it with God’s glory.

Luke’s Gospel describes how Jesus was taken into heaven. Jesus led his disciples to the far side of the Mount of Olives, just out of sight of Jerusalem, “and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while he blessed them, that he was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50–52). Christians call this the Ascension. But something else of importance happened then.

The Promise

In Luke’s second book, the Acts of the Apostles, he tells us what happened next:

And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10–12).

It follows that whilst Jesus has been in heaven ever since his ascension, he will return. He said so to his followers before his death when cataloguing the things that were to happen before his coming, saying:

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

Jesus said so again to the Jewish High Priest, at his trial:

“I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).

Son of Man

This term ‘Son of Man’ was the way that Jesus usually referred to himself: it stressed the truth we emphasized earlier in these articles, that Jesus truly shared our weak nature, although he always overcame it. However it was not a designation Jesus made up. It comes from the books of Psalms and Daniel in the Old Testament. We looked briefly at Psalm 80 earlier in these studies. In it the writer admits that unaided human beings never solve the problems that human nature had created, and asks God to send “the son of man



whom You made strong for Yourself” (Psalm 80:17). When Jesus called himself ‘the Son of Man’ he was telling everybody that he was the one made strong by God – God’s anointed King and Priest – the long-awaited Messiah.

In chapter 7 of his prophecy, Daniel describes a vision in which he saw four wild animals. It was a prophecy of the empires that would rule the Middle East from his lifetime onwards. Daniel saw a lion, followed by a bear, then a four-winged leopard, and finally a dreadful dragon-like creature that he could not find words to describe.

Then ‘one like a son of man’ appeared who took control away from the dragon and ruled the world in its place. To understand this properly, the whole of Daniel chapter 7 needs to be studied, but verse 27 gives us the conclusion:

Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him (Daniel 7:27).

This takes us further, for it tells us that when the Son of Man (the Lord Jesus) returns, he will not rule alone. He will invite ‘the saints’ (that means all the men and women who have pleased him in their lives) to help him make this troubled earth into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is Coming

The writings of Christ’s apostles are full of references to his return to the earth. Here are a few examples.

❖ *The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Romans 11:26);*



Michelangelo's depiction of the last judgement when Christ comes in glory

- ❖ *In Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at his coming (1 Corinthians 15:22–23);*
- ❖ *Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20);*
- ❖ *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:4);*
- ❖ *In both of Paul’s letters to the Thesalonians, the return of Jesus is mentioned in every chapter; and*
- ❖ *The entire Bible ends like this: He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. **Even so, come, Lord Jesus!** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Revelation 22:20–21)*

John Woodall

No Right of Appeal

Tom's friend was talking to him about Jesus returning to the earth and the hope of life in God's kingdom. Tom was a sceptic, angry with God about the state of the world and things that had happened in his family. "If you are right and Jesus does come back I'll have something to say to him!" exclaimed Tom.

Thomas was Silenced

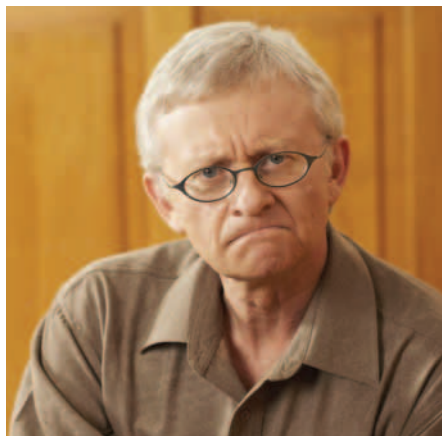
Although not angry with God, Thomas the disciple had serious doubts. Thomas had not been with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection. Jesus had shown them the wounds in his hands and side (John 20:19–25). Thomas, however, could not believe this, saying:

"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

Thomas had probably decided what he would say to Jesus in order to check his credentials, but he never got the chance. When Jesus reappeared to the disciples including Thomas, he just said:

"Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27).

Jesus often knew what people were thinking (e.g. Matthew 12:25; Luke 6:8) and answered Thomas before he had had chance to speak. Thomas could only acknowledge Jesus as Lord – any rehearsed speech was gone.



God's Appointed Judge

What do we imagine we would say to Jesus if he came back tomorrow? Do we think that we could argue with him? Many passages of Scripture indicate that Jesus will return to the earth as a judge (e.g. Acts 17:31; Romans 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). This judgement will not be pleasurable for everyone, as there will be two groups of people: those who are accounted faithful and those who are rejected. Jesus said the following words about himself:

"Then he will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' ... And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:41–46).

Imagine being called 'cursed' by the Lord Jesus. This should be a terrifying prospect. What could we say in our defence? In many competitions the rules state that the "judges' decision is

final". In some legal disputes there is a right of appeal where the decision of a court can be challenged. Nowadays people are accustomed to arguing with decisions and asserting their supposed rights. Let us never imagine that this could happen in our judgement by Jesus.

Jesus will Judge Fairly

Human appeals are made to a higher authority, but there will be no such higher authority. For Almighty God:

"raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:20–22).

We will not be able to claim that Jesus is not in full possession of the facts about what we have or have not done, or indeed why, because God knows everything about us, and consequently so will Jesus (Psalm 139). And he will be fair and just (Isaiah 42:1–4).

Moreover, we cannot even make the excuse that Jesus does not understand our problems and temptations. He himself has suffered in the same way, in fact in worse ways, than any of us:

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Finally, ignorance of a law is generally no excuse. In the UK a motorist who breaks a speed limit cannot claim that he or she was unaware of it. It is true there have been some cases where a

law was obscure and people were excused. However, the fact that we are reading this magazine and have access to God's words in the Bible means that we can never claim that God's warnings and message have been inaccessible to us.

We Need to Respond

It is therefore critically important that we read the Bible and try our best to please God, accepting rather than challenging what He gives us in life. He wants us to be saved:

"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).

Nonetheless, although He is not willing that any should perish, the Scriptures do not talk of everyone being saved; only those who repent – those who do something about it. Let us not be like Tom who thought that God's ways were in some way unfair. Instead, prepare to meet the Lord when he comes. For in that great day the decision will be final – we shall have absolutely no right of appeal.

Anna Hart

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Letters of James and Peter

These three letters, sometimes called “General Letters” were all written to Jewish believers but have important instruction for believers in all ages.

The Letter of James

It begins *“to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad”*, that is, to Jews living outside the land of Israel. There is some argument as to which James wrote this epistle.

- ❖ There was a James amongst the 12 apostles. He was the brother of the John who wrote the gospel, and sadly was martyred by King Herod early in the history of the gospel, before the great work of preaching to Gentiles began (see Acts 12:2).
- ❖ Then there was James the brother of Jesus. This James had a private visit from Jesus after the resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:7), and later became an important leader of the Jerusalem church. For example, he had the last word at the great conference held to decide whether or not Gentile Christians should keep the Law of Moses (see Acts 15:13–21).

Either could have been the author. The style is forthright, and reminiscent of the teaching of the Master himself, with memorable lessons.

❑ Wisdom

In the first chapter James says we can ask God for wisdom, and it will be given to us, if we have faith to believe it. There are many situations in life



where we do not know what to do for the best. James is saying we must ask God for advice, and then be prepared to follow the lead He sends, without doubting. He then makes an important statement about human nature. He says that we cannot blame God when we sin. Temptation springs up inside us, and our evil desire grows in our hearts like a baby in a womb. Eventually, if unchecked, the baby is born as sin. The infant then grows up and, as an old man, dies.

❑ Pure Religion

James asks ‘What is pure religion?’ (1:27). This is an important question. Does it require cathedrals or mosques, long pilgrimages and holy days? No, he says. It is very simple. It means to care for the poor, and keep yourself unstained from the world.

He addresses his readers as ‘brothers’, which shows they were believers, but he admonishes them for being unequal in their treatment of their poorer brothers. God, he insists, has generally chosen to work with the poor,

not the rich. We have to show practical love by caring for those less well off than we are. It is not enough to pretend to have faith in God, if we do not back it up with deeds of love.

❑ **Speaking**

His third chapter warns of that most dangerous organ of the human body – the tongue. A few waggles of that pointed piece of flesh, and men are executed, or married, or saved. Taming the tongue is a tough task for the Christian. It lets him down so often with its hasty words, and yet it can bring such blessing and joy when put to good use.

❑ **God Willing**

We cannot be sociable with the world, James says, if we want to be God's friends. We need to come near to God in humility, and make all our plans with the words "God willing", putting our lives in His hands. The last chapter hits out at wealthy Jews who cheated their employees. James counsels patient endurance in times of trial, and concludes with the thought that we should pray, not just for our own needs, but for those of others.

The Two Letters of Peter

There is no doubt who wrote the next two letters. Peter was one of the three apostles closest to Jesus. Although he had his bad moments, he was always a fearless preacher. Once the church had been founded, and the apostle Paul began his journeys to teach the Gentiles, Peter saw his own work as being with the Jews. Paul writes of the agreement they reached:

He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the

Gentiles (Galatians 2:8).

It is not surprising, then, to read that, like James, Peter sends his letters to "the elect exiles of the dispersion" (1 Peter 1:1). He particularly addresses his correspondence to the Jewish Christians living in the territory we now call Turkey.

Peter's First Letter

The Apostle bids his readers rejoice in the hope of salvation that God has given them through the sacrifice of His Son. But he warns they must expect their faith in God to be tested through trials, just as gold is melted down and purified in a furnace. Its true worth will become apparent only at the return of Christ.

❑ **Old Testament Prophecies**

He recalls the many Bible studies Jesus gave on the subject of the Old Testament prophecies about himself, predicting both his suffering and his resurrection to glory. Now the good news about Jesus has come to his readers, and they have been born again, not by human agency, but through the living word of God. As Christian babies, they need spiritual milk, so that they will grow up unto salvation.

Peter's letter is full of quotations from the Old Testament, applying them to the believers. He calls them living stones, chipped and smoothed for assembly in God's Temple, of which Jesus, as the Psalmist wrote, is the cornerstone (Ps.118:22). They are God's people, to whom he has shown mercy, just as Hosea prophesied. They are pilgrims, like Abraham, aliens in society, but still obliged to keep the law, and honour the emperor. Slaves must endure harsh treatment, even

when they do nothing wrong, just as Jesus did before his captors. Wives should avoid expensive clothes and hair-dos, and adorn themselves with a humble spirit, submitting to their husbands. All believers should be kind and forgiving, copying the example of Christ.

❑ **Suffering and Affliction**

Finally, Peter anticipates the calamity that will fall on the Jewish State in AD 70. He tells his readers to prepare to face suffering and insults for their faith in Jesus, like their brothers in other lands. He closes with a greeting from “*she who is in Babylon*” (1 Peter 5:13), along with Mark, “*my son*”, which leaves us wondering, for Babylon is far away in Iraq. Maybe he uses the name of the Old Testament enemy of Israel as a cipher for Rome, about to persecute the Christians? And is Mark a blood relation, or the John Mark we already know from Jerusalem? We can only guess.

Peter’s Second Letter

Peter writes again to the same readership (see 2 Peter 3:1), not this time to prepare them for persecution, but to warn them against evil men infiltrating the Church and leading innocent believers astray.

❑ **Christian Virtues**

He opens with a beautiful string of virtues to aim for – faith, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, etc., culminating in love, the most desirable quality of all (2 Peter 1:5–8). We need to practise these, he says, like a pianist on his piano, for thus we will secure our entrance into God’s kingdom.

Peter is expecting to die soon (he reminds us Jesus warned him he

would be martyred for his faith), and he wants his last message to be remembered by the next generation. He insists the gospel he has taught is not myths and fables, but based on solid eyewitness evidence of the glory of Christ, and backed up by the inspired teaching of the Old Testament prophets – an important point today, when people sneer at the Bible.

❑ **Old Testament Examples**

The second chapter picks out examples from the Old Testament of evil men who eventually met their day of judgment – Noah’s generation swept away by the Flood, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Balaam the soothsayer who tried to thwart God’s blessing of Israel. Similarly, he infers, evil men who have now entered the Church, seeking for money and power over others, will also meet their doom.

❑ **Second Coming**

Peter’s last chapter is important. He looks ahead, and sees a time when, because of a long delay, people will begin to question the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. We can see just that attitude today! But he explains that the delay is only in our minds, not in God’s. God waits patiently, putting off the Day of Judgement on our evil society in case one or two more might respond to the gospel and repent and be saved from eternal death.

Eventually, that patience will expire, and our world will be shaken to its foundations in a fiery judgment that will bring in the new age of God’s Kingdom. So, we must be patient, he says, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world, ready to meet our judge.

David M Pearce

Keeping Track

In a fast moving world it is difficult to keep track of everything and computers offer a way of monitoring and controlling lots of events or happenings. A shopkeeper will want to know which stock is selling, and for how much, and which items need to be replaced, but keeping a written record would be impossible.

That's why barcodes have been invented. The simple expedient of scanning the barcode shows what was sold, allowing the computer to work out the bill and manage stock control simultaneously. The barcode might only appear to comprise a few lines but it contains a lot of valuable information.

Barcodes everywhere!

You don't just find bar codes on shop products, of course. They're everywhere we go, they are used to keep track of rental cars, airline luggage, nuclear waste and parcels. They're on tickets for sports arenas, cinemas, theatres, fairgrounds and transportation. There's no escape from them, but who invented them?

The designer was Norman Woodland who, as a boy scout, learned Morse Code – a message system which comprises dots and dashes in various combinations. This way of coding messages inspired Mr Woodland to create a graphical version of the dot-and-dash system. The idea for the barcode came to him on a Miami Beach when he casually poked his four fingers into the sand and pulled his hand toward him, thus drawing four lines. This was the start of something big – a bar coding process.

Trial Run

In 1979 the BBC announced “a momentous event” – the first trial run of the barcode from America in a store in the UK. Barcodes made their British debut at the Keymarkets superstore in Spalding, Lincolnshire. And, very appropriately for Britain, the very first product to have its barcode scanned by an optical reader was thought to be a box of teabags!

The trial must have been a success for, as we have seen, barcodes are now used everywhere. Their main purpose is to record everything that is being sold and to link that sale to the supply chain, so that re-ordering can take place to maintain stock levels. But they can also be used to track goods in transit; for once the information has been captured it can be used for all sorts of purposes. Knowledge is a key commodity in business, and in all aspects of life for everyone.

All-Knowing

God doesn't need barcodes, computers or scanners to know about us. He is an all-knowing God who knows exactly where we are, what we are doing and what we are thinking! He knows our thoughts and hears our prayers. Jesus once gave us this insight into the Father's knowledge and loving care:

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Matthew 10:29).

Then, on another occasion, he said:

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God” (Luke 12:6).

Notice the going rate. If you were in the market for sparrows, you could get two for a penny but five for two pennies. It was a case of buy five and get one free! Yet even the fate of the free one was known to God: that’s the extent of the Almighty’s knowledge. And then the Lord added this astounding detail and words of great comfort:

“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7).

So, without computerised tracking or any other aids, God knows all about the created world and cares for those who are His children, to ensure that nothing but the best outcome will ensue. As the apostle Paul once said:

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Amazing Complexity

We might look at a barcode and marvel at the amount of information it contains but just think how much more information there is in a single cell of our bodies. Since the discovery of the DNA structure in human cells people have become aware of its amazing design and complexity. With a double helix structure, rather like a ladder, the vital information is stored that can build and maintain an organism. Long before this was known, the Psalmist marvelled at the obvious complexity of his body and declared:

You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully



and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:13–14).

The DNA structure is amazing evidence of a great designer who not only designed and created all things but is also the sustainer of life. God knows each one of us through-and-through, He is an all-seeing all-knowing God who hears our prayers if we turn to Him in sincerity through His Son.

Seek the LORD

God is always on the lookout for His people, as the Bible explains:

The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

And it’s the Psalmist David who reminds us of God’s mercy if we turn to Him, for he shares this experience with us:

I sought the LORD, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to Him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them (Ps. 34:4–7).

Turn to God in sincerity and He will turn to you. Seek Him, find Him and learn to live with Him, for evermore.

Ben Weston

Hezekiah Restores Temple Worship

In the kingdom of Judah, Hezekiah stands out as the greatest of the kings. His story is recorded not only in the books of Kings and Chronicles, but also in the prophecy of Isaiah. Some have called him “Hezekiah the Great”, though he is never so called in the Bible. He stands out as a man who tried to follow the commands of the Lord God, often prospering because of that. Like everyone except the Lord Jesus, there are occasions when he forgot to consult God, and suffered.

Bad Start: Good Start

The prospects were not good. Hezekiah was the son of King Ahaz, one of the worst kings of Judah, a man who was offered a sign by God, and refused it. We are told that his mother’s name was Abijah, and maybe Hezekiah learned godly ways from her. Ahaz desecrated the Temple of God, and erected pagan idols in “every corner of Jerusalem”. He was so wicked that they did not bury him with the other kings of Judah.

Hezekiah became king aged 25, and reigned for 29 years. Right at the outset he is commended. *“He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done”* (2 Chronicles 29:2). Initially he focussed on bringing back the Temple of God to its earlier magnificence and restoring the worship of God in the right way, which was accomplished early on in his reign and remarkably quickly.

Hezekiah re-opened the Temple in the first year of his reign, and then he called all the priests and Levites to the square on the east of the Temple to talk to them about the work which needed to be done. He coupled the poor state of the nation with their neglect of the worship of God.

“For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken Him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs” (v6).

Hezekiah wanted to renew the covenant the people had made so long before with the Lord God, with the hope that God would again treat them as His favoured nation. So he urged them *“do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in His presence, to minister to Him and to be His ministers and make offerings to Him”* (v11).

Excellent Response

The Levites responded immediately. Fourteen are listed by name who applied themselves devotedly to the work. They cleansed the Temple from top to bottom, carrying all the rubbish to the brook Kidron. This took 16 days, and then a further eight days were needed to consecrate God’s house. So 24 days after they started they could report back to Hezekiah that the task was finished. The king arranged a great sacrifice to mark the occasion. It was also an act of unification, for the invi-

tations didn't only go to the people of Judah, but to the northern kingdom of Israel as well:

For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel (v24).

It was a very joyful event, they sang praises to God using the words of David and Asaph. King David was a prolific psalmist, and Asaph was involved in the music and worship of the nation, there are twelve psalms attributed to his family. A little later there is a hint of some tensions among the priests. There were many animals to sacrifice, and there were not enough consecrated priests for the task.

The Levites had to help with this and it is said that the Levites were more upright than the priests. Eventually the work was done. *"And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly"* (v36).

Trouble Ahead

There were dark clouds on the horizon. Sennacherib and the armies of Assyria were advancing towards Judah. Hezekiah continued to restore true worship to the people of God. The Passover had not been kept for many years, despite the fact that it was such an important event – to remember the time God's people had come out of Egypt. They realized that they would not have the Temple cleansed and re-consecrated in time to keep the Passover at the correct time, but there was a provision for it to be kept a month later in some circumstances (Numbers 9:10–11). They invited members of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and then the rest of the nation of Israel, sending messengers

throughout Israel and Judah.

Couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria ... come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you" (2 Chronicles 30:6-8).

Sadly the couriers were not always well received, and some of the people were not ready in time; but others came in the right spirit. They kept the feast for the prescribed seven days, but felt it so helpful that they all agreed to keep it for another seven days as well. Hezekiah gave a large number of animals for sacrifice, it was a time of great happiness.

There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:26).

So, the early years of Hezekiah's reign were well blessed because of his determination to put the true worship of God first. *"Hezekiah did ... what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered"* (2 Chronicles 31:20-21).

Mark Sheppard

Quotations from the ESV

To be continued

A Thrilling Funeral

At my age I often seem to attend funerals, as dear friends come to the end of their mortal lives. So once more we attended the cemetery chapel. The congregation filled the place, surely a tribute to the one we remembered. We were welcomed and were reminded about the purpose of our gathering before uniting in the opening hymn. It was so appropriate, for the first verse helped us to look back over the years as we sang:

*In the bud of early Springtime,
In the days of early youth,
When the heart is fresh and tender,
Lord, impress us with Thy truth.
Teach us how to shun the evil,
Teach us how to love the right;
Ere the days of evil sadden,
Lead, oh lead us in the light.*

Those grand thoughts led to the opening prayer and then a reading from Paul's vigorous portrayal of resurrection in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 51–58. Those exciting words have invigorated Christians over centuries of time.

Family Member

We recalled that, as angels had rejoiced at our brother's baptism, so they will greet him with joy at his resurrection. Note I called our friend a "brother", for true Christians are part of Christ's family and call each other 'brothers and sisters'. Isn't that a lovely thought: to be members of God's own family?

The service ended with a rousing singing of the well-known hymn, "Abide with me". There followed a most beautiful prayer, thanking God for our



brother's life, and looking forward to a grand reunion, when all Christians will rejoice eternally in God's kingdom.

Graveside

As we went outside the rain was torrential, yet most of the congregation went to the grave to hear a further stirring Bible passage, followed by another heartfelt prayer. It reminded us of the grace that a loving God has offered to all sinners. Some shed tears. Who would not after a dear relative or friend has been taken away? Yet we all went away fortified by the thrilling hope that had been imprinted on our hearts. For our final hymn had said:

*Where is death's sting?
Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still
If Thou abide with me.*

We went on our way, thoughtful, knowing that the power of the grave has been broken, and that on God's chosen day the great trumpet call will awaken the dead so they can join the living in everlasting praise and gratitude. What a hope that is: one that is there for every one of us!

Ken Clark

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