

Glad Tidings



of the Kingdom of God **1587**

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Glad Tidings

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 mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Acts of Power

One day recently, we awoke to find that the British had voted to leave the European Union. National leaders and other politicians appeared on the news coverage to express joy or anger, surprise, outrage or self-satisfaction about the outcome, depending on their views and how they had campaigned.

The result defied most expectations; even as voting closed, a leading supporter of 'Leave' said that he felt the 'Remain' movement would win, and this was supported by many of the inevitable opinion polls and forecasts.

As the morning wore on, the impact of the decision grew. The British Prime Minister resigned, his counterpart in opposition faced a vote to remove him too. The British currency fell dramatically in value; stock markets around the world suffered great turmoil; businesses were faced immediately with the challenges of uncertainty and currency fluctuation; some holidaymakers overseas found hotels refusing to exchange their British pounds.

Opinion around the world was heated: people said this was a devastating blow to the EU; Britain would be thrown into chaos and recession; older voters had destroyed the future of the young; this was the end of 70 years' peace and prosperity in Europe. How far any of these will prove true remains to be seen. But it was an explosion of panic, uncertainty and perplexity such as one rarely sees, especially among the usually calm British.

Control Behind the Chaos

With the Bible in hand, we were reminded of words of Jesus:

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 (Luke 21:25–26).

These words remind us that behind all the apparent chaos and hopelessness of our world, there is a great power – Almighty God. He knows what is happening, and even more importantly He is controlling events to achieve His purpose – in this case to bring about His kingdom by sending Jesus back to the earth. Look at how Jesus continued:

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (Luke 21:27–28).

Choosing World Leaders

In the time of the Babylonian empire, their King Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world. God sent him a message which applies every bit as much to our own times:

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men (Daniel 4:17).

This is true power. Awe-inspiring power. God decides how world events will turn out as part of His plan for the

earth, and has His angels carry out those decisions. Sometimes this means putting the most unlikely people in power, individuals whom we might find disagreeable, but who unwittingly carry out God's purpose.

A good example of this is found in a king who ruled the empire which followed Babylon, the Medo-Persians. Cyrus was one of their leaders, not especially more God-fearing, but one whom God named through His prophet Isaiah nearly 200 years beforehand:

[God] says of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (Isaiah 44:28).

Cyrus did indeed send the captive Jews back to their land, with instructions and the materials to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. Evidence once more of the Almighty's power at work, moving and shaking the political elements.

Visible Power

That same evening, in Germany, we experienced a storm: rain, thunder and lightning. But rain which turned the streets into rivers and lakes; thunder which threatened to deafen us and seemed to shake the very sky; and lightning which illuminated the whole landscape with flashes, forks and arcs. Exposed to the elements, we felt very small, feeble and in awe of this overwhelming power.

It was another reminder, a physical one this time, of the power of God. He created the earth and the elements and uses them at times to demonstrate His power.



When the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, the people of Israel were gathered at Mount Sinai and witnessed terrific storms, earthquakes and fire.

So terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling" (Hebrews 12:21).

One of God's prophets, Elijah, had a similar experience when God spoke to him in *1 Kings 19:11-18*. He witnessed God's breath-taking might in the elements, but it was in a 'still, small voice' that God showed His purpose and power in the world. Elijah was to carry out God's will, anointing kings and the next prophet.

The God who can send thunder and lightning and shake our physical world is the God who can shake the political world and shape the course of nations.

We do not always know exactly what is each individual step in His plan, but we can take confidence from the fact that He is in control. He will send Jesus to set up His kingdom: world events are steps on the way to that end, and signposts that it will happen. It is a privilege we have that we can read our Bibles, understand God's plan and seek to have a part in His kingdom.

Editor

A Christadelphian's Faith - 38

Forgiveness

A key aspect of coming to God is forgiveness, having recognised that we need it. God is our Creator, so He understands us. In Psalm 103, God compares Himself to a good human father who of course wants all that is best for His children. We are assured that:

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust (Psalm 103:10-14).

Asking to be Forgiven

A good father does not want to be hard on his children but when they do wrong (or neglect to do what is right) he does want them to realise their failure, to 'own up to it', and to try not to make the same mistake again. When they do that, he is ready to forgive. It is exactly like that between God and us.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

This brings us back to the importance of prayer. Many of the Psalms in

the Bible were prayers of confession and pleas for forgiveness. These Psalms can teach us how to speak to God in a way that He will accept. See for example Psalms 32, 38, 39 and 51.

From experiences in our own families we can understand what an insult it is to God if we refuse to admit when we are wrong.



If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:10).

We must understand that our sins will only be forgiven if we regret them and are willing to confess them to God. He helps us by giving the wonderful blessing of a living Saviour: Jesus himself experienced all the trials and difficulties that we go through. Although he overcame them all, he knows how difficult it can be, and he sympathises with our weaknesses. How wonderful it is, therefore, to know that Jesus is our High Priest in the presence of God. Paul says:

Christ Jesus... is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us (Romans 8:34).

There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5–6).

When it is Our Fault

We must confess our sins to God because it is His law that we have broken. Sometimes our sins also affect or even injure other people, and when that happens we have a duty to them as well as to God. We should show that we are really sorry by doing our very best to repair any damage that we have done. This may mean repaying something we owe, or apologizing and explaining why we did whatever it was that upset them. Jesus tells us this:

If you are offering your gift at the altar [which for us means when we pray or worship] and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23–24).

When Someone Else is at Fault

When the situation is the other way round and someone has sinned against us, Jesus also tells us what to do. He says we should go to them and explain what has upset us. The reason



is that otherwise they may not realize that they have done wrong:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother (Matthew 18:15).

The Way of Christ

It is important to read the whole of Matthew 18. Jesus describes an attitude and way of life that is very different from how we naturally think and behave.

It is Christ's way, the way that he showed us. It led him to the cross, and even then he managed to gasp a prayer for the men who were driving the nails through his hands and feet (Luke 23:34).

Think what happened three days later! He was raised back to life, no longer to be suffering or mortal but now with the God-given blessing of eternal life

The immortal Lord Jesus promises to return in power and glory to raise the faithful dead and save all who are watching for him. Shall we be among them?

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:9-13).

John Woodall

Bible Quotations from the English Standard Version

Concluded

A Christadelphian's Faith - Conclusion

Baptised Believers

This issue contains the final instalment of John Woodall's series 'A Christadelphian's Faith' that has appeared since the beginning of 2013. To accompany that article about forgiveness, Tecwyn Morgan, former editor of 'Glad Tidings', looks back over the series and draws some overall conclusions.

Belief and Baptism

Among the last words spoken by the Lord Jesus before his ascent to heaven was this command to his disciples:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15–16).

Belief and baptism are two things that mark someone out as a true follower of the Lord; but what must they believe?

From the time that God created the world, He took the trouble to explain what He was doing and why. What God wanted from His creatures was a loving response and Adam and Eve were to show that love by a simple act of self-control – not eating the fruit of one particular tree. Later, when God had rescued a great company of people (Israel) and called them His people, He asked them to show their love by keeping His laws. Those laws were designed to do them good, to keep them safe and well, and to help them establish a society that was caring and considerate for everyone.

As the Bible unfolds its revelation of God's gracious purpose, the careful reader discovers that everything God did was designed to help mankind and that it was directed towards rescuing them from the consequences of their disobedience.

Read just a few chapters of the Bible (from the first book – Genesis) and you will discover how quickly everything spiralled out of control and how desperately mankind needed to be saved from self-destruction.

As John Woodall's series traced the Bible story, God was revealed as a purposeful Creator with a rescue plan, something He revealed to faithful men and women and has carefully written down for posterity. Great promises were made about the formation of a nation who would be His people; a land they would inherit; and a king who would reign over God's Kingdom on earth. All this happened as promised and kings ruled in Jerusalem for over 400 years – from King Saul to King Zedekiah.

Everything Went Wrong

Deep-seated in the human mentality is a desire to please self, regardless of what God tells us is best for us. This tendency prevailed once again, this time with disastrous effect for God's people. King Zedekiah lost his throne and his kingdom and his people were deported to far-off Babylon. It was seventy years before their children returned to re-establish the nation, but this time they were under the control of other nations: Persia and Greece.

They would achieve self-government again for a few years but then the Romans became their masters for 133 years, before they were forcibly removed and sent into worldwide exile.

As the Bible traces the history of Israel as a nation it diagnoses the root problem as sin. That in-born tendency is variously described in the Bible as disobedience, lawlessness, the devil or, when this behaviour challenges God's will – the satan tendency.

God made mankind with a nature that would enable people to form a loving relationship with Him, but through the ages only a very few people have wanted to know Him and to love Him. But He has never stopped loving; so much so that God sent His only-begotten Son – the Lord Jesus Christ – to save us from sin and from death, the punishment that overtakes us because of sin. Jesus was right at the centre of John Woodall's series about faith, because Jesus is right at the heart of God's plan of salvation.

God's Rescue Plan

Although a man like us, Jesus lived a perfect life, learning obedience by the things he suffered (*Hebrews 5:8*), and although he was sorely tempted he never sinned (*1 Peter 2:22*).

He led a perfect life and voluntarily gave his life to rescue mankind from sin and death. It was all part of God's rescue plan, for Jesus' sacrificial death was the means whereby people can be saved and can become members of God's family.

They then await His new world, when Jesus will return to Jerusalem to rule as king of the whole earth. At the time when King Zedekiah was removed from the throne of God's kingdom, this promise was made:

Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him (Ezekiel 21:26-27).

It is the Lord Jesus Christ "whose right it is" to rule from Jerusalem, just as God has promised, and we can be there with him if we make that choice.

Time to Act

All the jigsaw pieces of God's purpose are fitting together. The Jews are back in Jerusalem after centuries of dispersion and the nation of Israel has been reborn. They are surrounded by enemies, just as predicted; and world affairs are in tumult. Nobody on earth can solve these global crises.

But there is a God in heaven and He has a rescue plan. That plan will take effect shortly and a king will again rule from Jerusalem, but we don't need to be onlookers or bystanders. God wants us to be part of the process of recovery and restoration. He wants us to get involved as members of His team, to take an active part in everything good that is about to happen.

This is why baptism is such a key act of obedience. Believe what God has done, is doing and will do for our salvation, and show that you believe it by being baptised – by full immersion – into the saving name of Jesus. That's the way to find salvation and to begin that never-ending relationship with God, made possible for all of us by His grace and outstanding forgiveness.

Tecwyn Morgan

Thinking About God - 5

God Revealed Through Jesus

Some years ago I was shown photographs of an event at work. I remembered the occasion, but looked long and hard at one of the people in the picture. I was positive my father had not been there, although he had visited on more than one occasion.

Then it suddenly dawned on me, I was not looking at my father at all; I was looking at myself, a picture taken from an angle I would not see in a mirror. It was a bit of a shock; did I really look that old? I began to realise the truth of what people had told me for a long time, that I was just like my dad, a real 'chip off the old block'!

The tale has its funny side, and could be repeated many times over, but it also helps us to understand how we can appreciate God through His son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Showing the Father

Philip, one of the twelve disciples, asked Jesus a question. *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us"* (John 14:8).

Jesus had been telling the twelve that he was going to his Father. The crucifixion was getting near, the resurrection and ascension would not be far away. So the reply Jesus gave to Philip's question is very interesting:

Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (v9).

Jesus seems almost surprised. Philip and his fellow disciples had not realised that they did not need to ask to see his Father. All they could understand about God had been shown to them by the Lord Jesus himself. Jesus continues:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does His works (v10).

Jesus is not saying that he and his Father are one person; but he is explaining that they are so alike that when you have seen one, you have seen the other. This is just as with human fathers and sons.

A Close Relationship

This closeness of Jesus and his Father is a theme which runs throughout John's gospel. It is there at the start.



In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God: and the word was God... And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw the glory of it, as the only begotten son of the father, which word was full of grace and verity (John 1:1, 14; Tyndale's Translation).

Note that John is very careful in what he says and does not say. He emphasizes that the Lord God and His Son, Jesus Christ, are so alike that to see one is to see the other. He does not say that they are the same person, or both are part of a trinity of persons. Such ideas are totally foreign to the gospels.

This fits with what Jesus himself says about their relationship:

I and the Father are one (John 10:30).

Again, he is not suggesting that he and the Lord God are the same person, but that they are 'at one'; they have a unity of purpose, a oneness of mind and spirit which is the sort of unity he would also like his disciples to have.

I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one... That they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:11, 21).

Jesus is quite specific, that the oneness he claims for himself and his Father can also be achieved by his followers: indeed he prays that they will reach that same level of unity. He is

not by any stretch of the imagination suggesting that he and his Father are the same person.

God is Greater Than All

Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus had said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise (John 5:19).

He stressed this again later:

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent me" (v30).

Elsewhere he declared:

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:29).

He is including himself in this. God is greater than all, even than Jesus. But the Lord Jesus reveals what his Father is like. This is reflected in the teaching of the apostles after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, as they preached his message:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3).

A Living Picture

The New Testament paints a picture of Jesus as the revelation of his Father. If we see him, we see all we can compre-

hend about the Father, and like Philip we have no need to see God Himself.

What does the picture show? One who was kind and compassionate, yes, but one who consistently upheld the standards of behaviour expected by his Father, prepared to suffer a cruel death on the cross to provide a way of redemption for his followers. One whose main motivation during his life was to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God.

All that Jesus did shows what his Father is like, so that reading the gospel accounts of his life can bring us nearer to a true understanding of the Lord God. This message is continued

by the apostles later on. The Apostle Paul writes to believers in Colosse:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15, 19-20).

Mark Sheppard

*Bible Quotations from the English
Standard Version*

Like Him

“We shall be like him.” O how rich the promise;
What greater could the Father’s love prepare?
Few are the words, and softly are they spoken,
But who shall tell the blessings hidden there?

“We shall be like him” – pure in heart, and sinless;
But his redeeming mercy ends not there;
These bodies like to his shall then be fashioned,
And we his resurrection glory share.

“We shall be like him” – raised above all weakness,
For ever past all weariness and pain;
Even death itself shall have no power to reach us
When with our risen Lord we live and reign.

So in the hope of bearing his bright image,
Rejoicing in his present gift of grace,
His love shall keep our hearts in patient waiting
Till we in glorious beauty see his face.

Charles Joseph Caldicott

By courtesy of ‘The Christadelphian’

God's Kingdom is Coming

The Kingdom of God truly is a wonderful prospect, a real hope for the future. It presents us with good news that surpasses all else.

This hope can help you to deal with that most fundamental of personal fears – the fear of death. As we put loved ones in the grave, or scatter their ashes over the rose beds, it is easy to feel that our lives are shattered, and the end is final.

It is not so with the real Christian faith. The believer's firm belief is that there will be a resurrection, as the apostle Paul wrote:

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

A Hope to Hold On To

What a stimulating thought! The dead are to be roused from their sleep by a heavenly call, to summon the faithful to stand before the Son of God. There is nothing in the world to equal that hope. The apostle John saw a vision of the kingdom which he described in the following way:

I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor

crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3–4).

As first century Christians were thrust into the arenas to face wild beasts, or burnt alive on Caesar's orders, this was their cherished hope. Nero is now but dust and ashes, without any hope for the future. Those persecuted will come forth to a superb era where their Saviour will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It was no wonder that they clung tenaciously to their hope.

John's description of the vision records the divine proclamation which followed:

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son (v7).

That is the superb honour we look to, despite the turmoil of today's world. Even today, in parts of the world, it can be hazardous to proclaim a Christian faith. Many believers have lost homes, livelihoods, even families and their whole way of life – even their actual lives. But in the coming kingdom every thought which opposes God will be silenced and the Lord Jesus will reign supreme, with righteous judgement.

This should encourage us to take hold of this hope, to seek to overcome the selfishness and the sin that is in the world. We can do it through faith and with the guidance that comes only from the Lord God in heaven. We must believe in the kingdom of God and the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.



Signs that It Is Near

When will all this happen? We are given a number of signs to look for. In Luke 21, Jesus is telling his disciples about some of the events in the world which act as signs that his coming is getting near.

Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

Jerusalem was overrun by the Romans in 70 AD, and occupied by various Gentile (non-Jewish) powers until 1967. An important signpost!

Jesus goes on in verses 25–26 to describe great distress and uproar amongst the nations of the world, fear amongst the population and terror about what will happen to the world.

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (v27).

The language here is just like the prophets of the Old Testament as they forecast the future happenings relating to Israel. Let us make no mistake, the terrible things we see in the world reflect Jesus' warnings that it will be a time of trouble such as never was. It is only right that we are aware of these things. There will be no apparent way

out, but the generation that faces the bad news is the one that will see the good news brought to fruition. The Master continues:

Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near (v28).

What to Do?

Having described the signs of his coming, Jesus adds his warning and advice:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (v34–36).

It is a powerful call to this generation. We live in an age of 'couldn't care less', where moral warnings are derided. But we would be foolish to ignore this outspoken counsel. God has given prior notice of what is to happen, and it would be suicidal to ignore His message.

The Bible is a wonderful book. There is no finer. It tells us of the past, the present and a joyful future for all who respond. The Lord is the answer to every person's need, and he asks for our trust until he comes. His blessings be with you.

Ken Clarke

Sarah: Faith in God's Promises

When we read the list of great people of faith in Hebrews chapter 11, some of them seem quite unusual to us. This is because they are chosen and viewed from God's point of view. In the case of Sarah, the wife of Abraham, her inclusion in the list is because she believed God's promises and had a son. But there is a whole story to this.

Beauty and Deception

Sarah was married to Abraham and played an important role in his life. The family group left Haran when Abraham was 75 and Sarah was 65. Arriving in the land of Israel (then called Canaan) Abraham was driven down into Egypt by a famine.

Sarah was beautiful, even in old age, and Abraham was afraid that he would be killed so that someone could take his attractive wife. They made a pact that they would describe Sarah as his sister (she was in fact his half-sister) rather than his wife.

So in Egypt, because the couple carried out the deception, Sarah ended up in Pharaoh's harem. God brought great plagues on Pharaoh's household as a consequence. When eventually the ruler found the cause of his trouble, he confronted Abraham about his deception.

Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?" (Genesis 12:18).

Sarah must have been very beautiful, and by now, very embarrassed.

We get the impression that Sarah was a very strong-minded person, and knew what she wanted. She was happy to lie about her relationship to her husband and when they make that arrangement, the text reads as if Abraham is pleading with Sarah, as if she is the stronger character (Genesis 12:12-13).

God promised a child to Abraham and Sarah, and Abraham was told that he would father a great nation and a special descendant, who would be a blessing to the whole world.

Yet in Genesis chapter 15, we read of a crisis of confidence for Abraham. Well into his eighties, and still with no child to carry on the family name, Abraham suggested to God that his head steward take on his name and the family business. God refused Abraham's request and sent him outside to count the stars:

Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them... so shall your descendants be (Genesis 15:5).



To believe a promise like that takes a lot of faith, especially when you are approaching 85, and childless!

Eventually, frustration and disappointment got the better of Sarah, and she suggested to Abraham that he take a concubine from among their slaves: Hagar the Egyptian (Genesis 15). When they put this plan into action, things really went wrong.

Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham as a wife, not just a concubine. The problem was that, according to the custom of the land, if a man had no children, and took a younger wife who then gave birth to a child, this child became the family heir. Then the junior wife took the place of the senior wife in the household.

Hagar began to scorn Sarah for her childlessness, and to usurp her place in the household; Sarah was having none of this. Abraham and Sarah had a fearsome argument, where Sarah blamed Abraham for everything that had gone wrong, and insisted that Hagar be thrown out of the house to make her own way in the world.

This was most distressing to Abraham. But God is not unkind, and an angel met Hagar to comfort her and promise that her son would prosper. He sent her back to be obedient to Sarah, and bear the child she was carrying. When Hagar's child was born, Abraham called him Ishmael. Sarah was now 76 years old.

The Princess and Her Son

Some years later she was given the name 'Sarah' by God (she was known as Sarai up to this point). Sarah means 'princess' and was very appropriate as she was to be the mother of Abraham's descendants, the princess of his dynasty. Like Mary, the mother of

Jesus, we can imagine her asking, "How shall this be?"

One day (Genesis 18) God sent three men to visit Abraham as he sat in the door of his tent in the heat of the day. This incident is really more about Sarah than about Abraham. She was working just inside the tent, while Abraham greeted his visitors and offered them food and drink, according to the custom of the day.



While the men were enjoying the meal, with Abraham playing the role of host, the men asked where Sarah was. Abraham told them that she was there in the tent. The men told Abraham that Sarah would have a son, and she heard from inside the tent door, just behind them. She was incredulous – she was at least 89, after all! She laughed inside herself – but the messenger (actually an angel) heard and rebuked her:

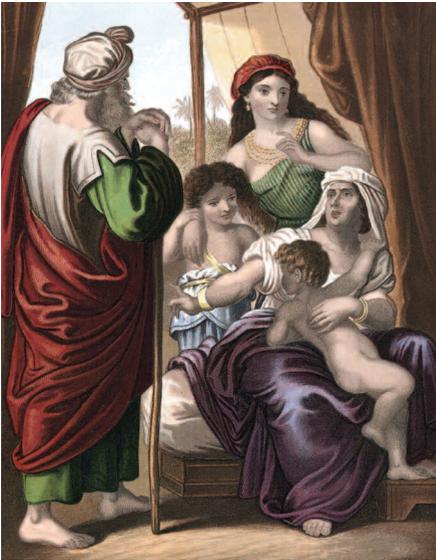
Why did Sarah laugh, saying, "Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?" Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:13–14).

Sarah was really frightened, and tried to deny that she laughed; but the angel knew that she did, and repeated his message that Sarah would have a son, at about the same time next year.

And so it happened, at the age of 90, she was given strength to bear a son, a child of promise – promised by God (Genesis 21). The child was aptly named Isaac, meaning ‘God has made me laugh’. Isaac was extraordinarily special, the son of promise they had waited for, over so many long years.

Trouble in the Household

Soon we find a clash between the two boys, Ishmael and Isaac, at the big celebration when Isaac was weaned. It was a celebration for Sarah, and Hagar and her son, now a teenager, found all the attention focused on the younger child. Since the birth of Isaac, the position of Ishmael as potential heir of the family had been seriously diminished, if not removed altogether. Along with it went Hagar’s importance as a ‘senior wife in waiting’.



So, during the celebrations, Ishmael mocked and derided the interloper, taking Abraham’s attention away from Isaac, and drawing it to himself.

Sarah was enraged: Hagar and Ishmael must go, and go now! Sarah called Ishmael “*the son of this bond-woman (slave)*”; she would not even speak his name. Her son was not going to be a joint-heir with Ishmael: the inheritance must be Isaac’s, and Isaac’s alone!

The Promises

So, was Sarah right, or just hurt and angry? She was right, for God told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, “*for in Isaac your seed shall be called*” (Genesis 21:12). From Isaac, through a long line of direct descendants, we eventually reach the Lord Jesus Christ. So, for Sarah, God’s promise came true in a wonderful way.

The Letter to the Hebrews provides commentary and a summary of Sarah’s story:

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised (Hebrews 11:11).

Sarah believed that God was ‘faithful’, that He would fulfil the promises He had made. This applied in the first instance to the birth of Isaac as we have read. But God’s promises go further, speaking about the nation of Israel who were descended from Isaac, and pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all men and women can have a special relationship with God.

Jesus will soon return to the earth and set up God’s kingdom, where faithful men and women will live for ever. If we want to be there, we need to show the same faith that God will fulfil His promises – and He always does.

Peter Hale

The Reliability of the Gospels - 4

Linguistic Fossils

In previous articles we have seen that the Gospels were written against the background of the Eastern Roman Empire, which developed considerably over the first couple of centuries AD.

One very significant event was the Jewish War of 66–73 AD which reached a climax with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This allows us to carry out various tests to see whether the Gospels are a reliable record of the time of Jesus. We have already seen that the Gospel descriptions of people, places, events and customs match the picture built up by archaeology. Now we can look at the linguistic basis of the Gospels.

The Languages of the Gospels

The Gospels were written in Greek, but they show signs of Aramaic and Hebrew language in places. This has led to the strange idea that the Gospels were written in Aramaic, but the reality is that the language structures found in the Gospels indicate that they were written between 30 and 70 AD by people with a good memory of the actual wording of what Jesus said.

In the first century AD, the common language of the Eastern Roman Empire was Greek. There were people who spoke Greek (known as Hellenists or Greeks) throughout the area and most trade was carried on in Greek. However, there is strong evidence of a widespread use of Aramaic in Galilee, and both Aramaic and Hebrew in Judea as well. Many of the inhabitants of Galilee would have been bilingual in

Greek and Aramaic. As Hebrew was used in synagogue services most people in Galilee would have been familiar with Hebrew as well. There would have been an even greater familiarity with Hebrew in Jerusalem, where the temple was.

The early church, however, was mainly a Greek speaking community. The New Testament is written in Greek, and later writings from the Apostolic Fathers were also in Greek. If the Gospels had been invented by the church, or were the result of long creative tradition by the church, then their linguistic background would have been Greek. But the reality is different; there is good evidence that the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels come from an Aramaic background.

Evidence of Translation

It is sometimes easy to tell that a sentence was originally written in a foreign language. For example, the made-up sentence *“I have, to the horse, over the hedge, some hay thrown”* was originally produced in German and shows evidence of this by its sentence structure. The phrase *“It hit me on the head and I saw thirty-six candles”* originally comes from French because it uses a French idiom – *“to see thirty-six candles”* is equivalent to the English idiom of *“to see stars”*.

Evidence of underlying Hebrew or Aramaic in the Gospels is seen in a number of ways. The most obvious of these is the inclusion in the Gospels of various phrases and sayings in Aramaic. For example, Jesus refers to

Peter as 'Cephas' (the Aramaic word for a stone) in John 1:42, and raises the daughter of Jairus with the words 'Talitha cumi' ('Little girl, arise') in Mark 5:41.

More Subtle Evidence

- ❖ Jesus often uses parallelism in his sayings, for example: "*Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine*" (Matthew 7:6). Saying something twice in slightly different ways is called parallelism and is typical of Hebrew poetry.
- ❖ Jesus sometimes uses very Hebraic sentence forms, such as "*Let these words sink down into your ears*" (Luke 9:44). This sentence form would never have been used by someone from a more Greek part of the ancient world.
- ❖ The Gospels contain names with Aramaic components, such as Bartimaeus, Bar-Jonah and Barabbas; "Bar" means "son of" in Aramaic.
- ❖ Jesus sometimes makes word-plays which work in Hebrew or Aramaic but not in Greek. For example, he described some of his adversaries as "*blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*" (Matthew 23:24). The Hebrew word for a camel is *gamla* and the Hebrew for a wine-midge is *qamla*. This saying would be all the more memorable because it uses such similar words.

All Greek

It is clear that the Gospels were written in Greek. For example, look at some of the words of Jesus from the cross:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" is an Aramaic translation of the first words of Psalm 22. It is not credible that this saying would have been invented by the early church. First, the early church would probably have invented the saying in Greek, as they were Greek speakers themselves. Had they decided to put the saying in some other language they would probably have chosen Hebrew, the language in which the Psalm was originally written. The choice of a translation into Aramaic is uncharacteristic for the early church.

However, the fact that the statement is translated into Greek for the benefit of the reader shows that the Gospel was originally written in Greek for use by a Greek-speaking community.

Reliable Records

These items of evidence which show underlying words in Aramaic are called "Linguistic Fossils". The Gospels contain linguistic fossils which show that some of the words of Jesus were originally delivered in Aramaic. This means that the sayings of Jesus were not invented by the early church, which spoke Greek. What we have is more evidence that the words of Jesus are reported accurately in the Gospels.

For a more detailed look at this subject, please visit the internet site below and follow the links from its homepage:

<http://www.biblethink.org.uk/>

John Thorpe

Where is the Promise of His Coming?

People have been asking for centuries whether Jesus will return to the earth. Not only this, but when will it happen? More than two thousand years have passed since it was first promised and here we are – in the 21st century – and the world is in a worse mess than ever!

In Peter's second letter he prophesied that many 'in the last days' would actually use these words to ridicule the idea of the second coming:

Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

No Doubt

We do not know if he could have foreseen that his words would still prove true two thousand years later. There was no doubt in Peter's mind that he would see the Lord Jesus on earth again because he had been witness to his ascension and had heard the announcement of the angels:

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 1:10-11).

Peter compared the second coming of the Lord and the judgement of God on the world to the flood in the time of Noah. That catastrophic event actually happened. It isn't just a children's story about animals going into a wooden ark. It is a record of the fact that God will not allow man to go his own way for ever.

For this they wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water (2 Peter 3:5-6).

A Promise Coming True

It may seem improbable to many that these promises will ever come true after all this time, but Peter realised this when he wrote:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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 (v8-9).

In view of the certainty of God's promise, are we preparing now for the second coming of the Lord Jesus?

Marion Buckler

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