

# Glad Tidings

*Of The Kingdom Of God*



## Featured **Articles**

Preserving a Legacy (p.3)

Life, Death and Truth (p.5)

The Holy Spirit (p.10)

A monthly magazine written and 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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# Preserving a Legacy

As human beings, we know that we are mortal, and one day will die. This is why so many people are concerned with the legacy they leave.

That legacy may be money or possessions, which can be left for the benefit of surviving family members, to improve their circumstances. Many charities and good causes depend very much on legacies from their supporters. You can see appeals from many organisations, asking us to leave them money if we can.

For many, the legacy they care about is more about leaving an imprint on history. When an artist or a musician dies, then their body of work is what they are remembered by. On a more spiritual note, many quotations remind us how important it is to leave the world a better place than we found it – perhaps by small acts of kindness. This is a very decent attitude.

## Pride

There have always been more selfish legacies. Powerful men and women have often sought to leave their mark through magnificent buildings. We can visit pyramids in several parts of the world which celebrate dead rulers. Cities like London and Rome have obelisks taken from Egypt, commemorating Cleopatra and other ancient monarchs. If you visit the Taj Mahal



or Franco's mausoleum near Madrid, then the same applies. And almost every city in the world has a statue or similar memorial to a local hero.

The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote the ironic poem 'Ozymandias' on exactly this subject. A traveller through the desert saw the remains of a huge but broken statue, with little left but the inscription: *My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!*

The Bible also records how people have always attempted to make their family's name live on after them. Cain was son of the first two people, Adam and Eve.

*Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the*

name of the city after the name of his son— Enoch (Genesis 4:17).

## Real Posterity

The writer of Psalm 49 identified the problem here, which starts with the assumption many make, that their material goods can help them ‘in the long run’:

*Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother... (Psalm 49:6–7).*

He continued, explaining this desire to leave a mark on history – and ultimately how futile it is.

*...Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish (v11–12).*

The statement is pretty bleak, but very clear. When we die, we cease to exist and eventually we will be forgotten. Thankfully, the Psalmist then strikes a positive note:

*But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me (v15).*

God has power over life and death, and He neither dies nor forgets. He is going to set up a kingdom here on earth, where men and women can live for ever with Him. He will send Jesus back to the earth to raise the dead and judge who should be in that kingdom, and He has promised not to forget those who try to please Him.

*Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him” (Malachi 3:16–17).*

## Creating a Legacy with God

Jesus had a conversation with a very wealthy man who came to him. The man’s question was simple but profound:

*Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? (Mark 10:17)*

Jesus told him that it started with obeying God, quoting some of the Ten Commandments. The man said he had obeyed them since he was young. Though no one is perfect, his efforts and intentions must have been good, because we read:

*Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (v21).*

Sadly, the man found it too hard to let go of his many possessions. But we have here the clear teaching of Jesus. If we want to be remembered by God, then it starts with loving and obeying Him, and then loving and helping our fellow men and women. And the guide to making this legacy is there for us all to follow – the Bible.

# Life, Death and Truth

ROBERT FERRAR is someone whose name most of us will not recognise. Yet in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century he was part of a movement eager to bring the Bible to everyone in their own language. He even died because of this ambition.

## Looking for Truth

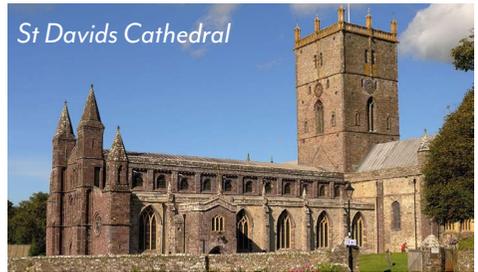
While he was studying at Cambridge, Ferrar was one of many students who were excited by the teachings of people like Martin Luther, Thomas Cranmer and Hugh Latimer. These men were driving the Reformation, questioning the authority and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The Bible was becoming more widely available and many scholars were publishing commentaries and translations. Before long, thinking people realised how far the Church's teaching was removed from what they read in the Bible. This further damaged and enraged the Church.

## A Turbulent Life

Ferrar was excommunicated by the Church in the time of Henry VIII but when, in 1547, the Protestant Edward VI became King, he was released from prison. Immediately Ferrar set about promoting the English Bible and publicly denouncing the superstitious activities of the Church.

Initially appointed as a preacher to support the King's visit to Wales in 1547,



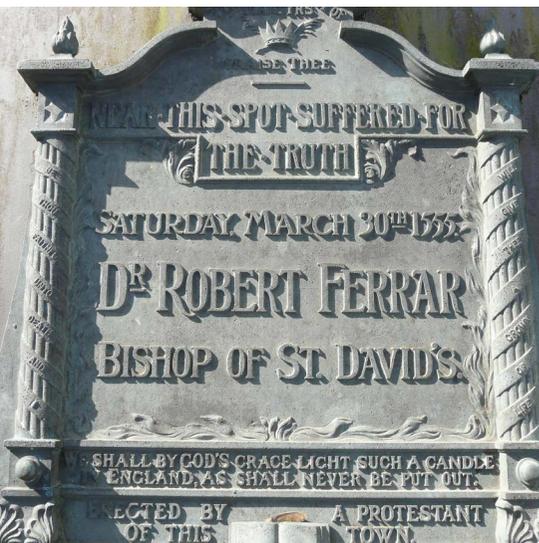
he was appointed Bishop of St Davids in Wales in 1548. Ferrar spent a great deal of effort trying to bring about church reforms and to uphold Bible teaching. One of his main activities was trying to address his congregation directly through biblical preaching rather than simply following the Church teachings.

However, his appointment by the king brought him many enemies among the clergy, who did their best to frame charges against him. The charges were inconclusive and over 124 witnesses had to be called by the Privy Council – still without a real conclusion.

When Catholic Queen Mary came to the throne in 1553, he was imprisoned in Southwark with other bishops, including Miles Coverdale.

## A Violent Death

In 1554 he lost his position as a bishop and on 30 March 1555, he was burned to death on the south side of the market cross in



Nott's Square, Carmarthen. It is recorded that he told a spectator that:

"If he saw him once stir in the pains of his burning, he might then give no credit to his doctrine; and as he said, so did he maintain his promise, patiently standing without emotion, until one Richard Gravell with a staff struck him down."

The poet Ted Hughes wrote about his martyrdom in a poem that concludes: "Out of his mouth, fire like a glory broke, and smoke burned his sermon into the skies."

A memorial to Robert Ferrar lies beneath the statue of William Nott (a British military leader) in Carmarthen. It declares that he 'suffered for the truth'. Words of the famous translator, William Tyndale (also burnt at the stake by the Church) are added: "We shall by God's grace light such a candle in England as shall never be put out."

## Living in the Light

The 'candle' referred to by Tyndale was the light of God's Word, the Bible, much of which he translated into English. His intention was that anybody could read and understand the Bible. Once he told a priest, "If God spare my life, before very long I shall cause a plough boy to know the scriptures better than you do!"

It was that growing awareness of Bible teaching that led people to search out the truth. It was a choice between the authority of the Church and the authority of the Scriptures – the inspired Word of God.

The choice is still ours to make. We must ask ourselves, 'does truth matter?' Do we trust the teachings of men and women or do we follow the Word of God? Even well-meaning people can be wrong about important things, such as life and death, so we need to get to the source of truth – the Bible.

Thankfully, the Bible has been translated into Welsh, English and many hundreds of other languages. This means that we can read it in our own language, and in most countries, when we like.

Let's not miss the opportunity because its message is one of life and hope. As one Bible writer put it:

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).*

**Michael Owen**

# Naaman

LEPROSY was a terrible disease. Not all of the illnesses described as leprosy in the Bible would be called that today, but they are all dreadful afflictions. The people of Israel had strict hygiene regulations to try to halt the spread of any of those diseases. The rules are found in Leviticus chapters 13 and 14, detailed and rigorous laws to ensure that the population was free from such problems. Those afflicted had to dress distinctively and live apart from the rest of the population.

In the time of Elisha, the commander of the Syrian army was stricken with leprosy. It would probably mean that he would not be able to function in his role as commander properly, even though he is described as a ‘mighty man of valour’, and perhaps he would eventually have to relinquish his role. There was no medical help; future life would seem quite bleak.

## Unexpected Hope

There was one ray of hope. Naaman’s wife had a servant girl, carried off from Israel, and she knew all about Elisha the prophet. She said to her mistress:

*If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:3).*

Anyone with leprosy would grasp any chance of a cure, and Naaman was swiftly

talking to the king, telling him what the girl had said. The king of Syria quickly recognised the benefit of having his army commander restored to full health once more, and wrote to the king of Israel, seeking a cure for Naaman.

The letter was bound to cause problems. It was not the king, but the prophet who would be able to effect the cure. But there is protocol, and kings talk to kings. Generous gifts were also required: ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. It was a large amount, as a talent is about 75 pounds (34kg) weight and a shekel is 0.4 ounce (11.5 grams). So Naaman took with him 750 pounds (340kg) of silver, and 150 pounds (69kg) of gold. It was a very large sum.

Naaman arrived in Samaria and presented the letter from the king of Syria.

*Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy (v6).*

The king of Israel suspected that this was a plot by the Syrians to try and gain some advantage, to score a point. He protested that he was not a god, able to kill and make alive, able to heal the



most loathsome disease. He was sure the king of Syria was seeking a quarrel with him.

Strangely he did not seem to know much about Elisha, even though the prophet had already performed some notable miracles.

## A Real Cure

Elisha heard that the king had torn his clothes in his anguish over the letter, and sent a message to the king suggesting that he send Naaman to see him. It was important that Naaman and the Syrians should know that there was a prophet in Israel.

So it was that Naaman arrived with his entourage, horses and chariots at Elisha's house, and stood at the door. He must have expected that Elisha would invite him in, showing due respect to such an important visitor, but the prophet did nothing of the kind. Elisha simply sent a messenger to Naaman with instructions.

*Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean (v10).*

It was brief, and easy to do, but Naaman was not in a mood to take the easy option. He had expected a great show of healing, and there was none.

*Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are*

*not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage (v11-12).*

Naaman seems to have known something about the Lord God of Israel, as he uses the special name by which He was known to Israel. Fortunately, he had servants who had more wisdom, and were calmer. They suggested that if Elisha had asked him to do something great, he would have done so, but all he wanted was for him to wash in the river Jordan seven times: why not wash, and be healed?

Their advice prevailed, and they went down to the river. There Naaman dipped



River Jordan

himself under the water seven times, and his leprosy was gone. His skin was like that of a little child; he was clean once more.

## Different Futures

If the account had ended there, it would have been a happy ending, but sadly it did not. Naaman went back to thank Elisha, now recognising the status of the Lord God of Israel.

*Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel (v15).*

He asked Elisha to accept a present, but the prophet refused even when pressed. Then Naaman made what seems to be a strange request:

*So Naaman said, "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD (v17).*

We might wonder about this, but it is probable that he would use this to enable him to worship the Lord God of Israel on soil from Israel.

He also asked that when he went into the temple of the Syrian idol, Rimmon, in his duty to support the king, he would be excused. Naaman now recognised that the God of Israel was the only true God, but the king would not do so. He asked in advance for pardon for this, to receive Elisha's response "Go in peace".

So Naaman left, but sadly, Elisha's servant Gehazi was tempted beyond his capacity.

How could he allow such wealth to escape him? He followed Naaman and his attendants, and asked for a gift, declaring that Elisha had two visitors and would like a talent of silver and two changes of clothes.

Naaman, not realising the deception, urged him to take two talents of silver as well as the clothes.

Gehazi returned, thinking he had got away with that. He should have known that he worked for a man of God. Elisha knew exactly what he had done!

*Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow (v26-27).*

The prophet's servant would be marked for ever and know that this disease would progress until his death. Was it really worth it?

We do not read any more about Naaman, but presumably he remained faithful to what he had said, worshipping God in Syria, and supporting the king when needed.

Once more the Lord God had demonstrated that He had a true prophet in Israel.

**Mark Sheppard**

# The Holy Spirit

MANY individuals and religious groups claim that they are able to speak in 'tongues', and perform miracles, just as the Bible tells us the apostles and early Christians did. They refer to Bible verses such as 1 Corinthians 12:3: *"No one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit,"* and conclude that unless we possess 'gifts of the Holy Spirit' we are not 'real' Christians or are just 'beginners'.

This is an important subject, and is a matter of authority – does the Holy Spirit speak directly to us, does the Holy Spirit influence the church, or is the Bible the principal authority in the Christian's life?

We believe that most claims to possess Holy Spirit gifts are made by sincere people – but they are mistaken. We believe this because when we read the Bible, we see that Christians did once possess the Holy Spirit gifts, but that God withdrew these powers within a few years.

## What is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit – His energy or His power. Psalm 104:4 says *"He makes His angels spirits"*, so the angels are embodiments of that Spirit. But usually His power is invisible, although the effects can be dramatic.

At the start of the creation of the world *"the earth was without form, and void... And the*



*Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters"* which originally covered the planet (Genesis 1:2). By the end of the sixth day (verse 31) the earth was transformed.

*He has made the earth by His power (Jeremiah 10:12).*

*By His Spirit He adorned the heavens (Job 26:13).*

Other actions of the Holy Spirit include the birth of Jesus, for God's Son was conceived without the aid of a human father. Mary was told:

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).*

On occasions God caused men and women to be filled with His Spirit to carry out for Him tasks which required superhuman abilities.

## The Holy Spirit at Work

Sometimes it is thought that the Gospel begins in Matthew chapter 1 but this is not so. It is rooted in the Old Testament, and if we only read the New Testament, we know only half the story.

As we read God's record of His dealings with the people of Israel before Jesus was born, we see the history of a people who were chosen by God but who usually let Him down. This was despite the fact that they were led by rulers who had God's Spirit specially given to them and prophets who shared messages from God.

Moses and Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Saul (1 Samuel 11:6) and David (1 Samuel 16:13) are just some of the men who spoke and acted with God's authority and were given the Holy Spirit to guide their decisions as they ruled the nation.

Both the Old Testament (Nehemiah 9:30) and the New Testament (2 Peter 1:21) refer to God, through chosen prophets, warning and teaching His people by the process of 'inspiration'. He gave messages to the prophets that they should relay to their hearers.

People like Samson, Elijah and Elisha are recorded as having God's Spirit to perform miracles and acts of healing. What many regard as a New Testament phenomenon turns out to be not so 'new' after all. God at certain times and for specific purposes gave His Spirit to particular people well before the time of Christ.



The Old Testament prophet Isaiah (61:1) said "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me*"; and after Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism he taught that these words applied to himself (see Luke 4:17–21).

What was different about Jesus was that, as the apostle John says, "*God does not give the Spirit by measure*" (John 3:34).

In other words, Jesus spoke and acted on God's behalf as no one has ever done before, because he is God's Son. His words carried authority and his miracles were evidence that what he said was true (John 5:36). This was always the purpose of miracles, that they should support, not replace, the preaching of the Gospel, because it is God's will that people should be persuaded to believe His message. But the Jewish leaders did not want to be persuaded and they put Jesus to death.

*He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father (John 14:12).*

In these words Jesus described the legacy and the work that he was giving his followers – that they should carry on where he left off when he went to heaven, and preach the Gospel to all who would hear.

## The Comforter

When Jesus spoke these words, the apostles had already been preaching and had received the Holy Spirit to help them in that work (Matthew 10). Now, as he prepared them for his heart-rending departure, he promised them “another Helper” (John 14:16) that is, the Holy Spirit.

In John chapters 14–16, the ‘Helper’ is described as ‘the Spirit of Truth’, showing that this was its purpose. The ways in which Jesus’ disciples would be ‘helped’ may be summarised as follows:

- ◆ Chapter 14:26 and 16:13 – to teach, remind, guide them “into all truth”, so they had a proper knowledge and understanding of the things of God.
- ◆ Chapter 16:8–11 – to give them words (‘inspire’ them) to preach the Gospel.
- ◆ Chapter 15:26 – to “testify” (provide evidence) about Jesus by miraculous acts – see for example Acts 14:3.

After Jesus had ascended to heaven the apostles were “filled with the Holy Spirit” at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). They were supernaturally aided to preach the Gospel in foreign languages to the people from different countries who had gathered for the feast.

For some listeners it had the desired effect and 3,000 were baptised. The apostle Peter said to them that they would “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you (i.e. these new Jewish converts) and to your children (i.e. the next generation of Jewish believers), and to all who are afar off (i.e. Gentiles who would come to believe and be baptised), as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39). See also Ephesians 2:11–18.

With the Holy Spirit inspiring their preaching and providing evidence of the truth of their message about the Lord Jesus, assemblies of newly baptised believers grew and the gifts of the Spirit were needed for other reasons.



These early assemblies needed guidance in their administration and development; the Old Testament pattern of Spirit-guided ruling and prophesying was repeated in these communities. Paul’s letters were addressed to these developing communities.

## The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 we have a list of the supernatural abilities in use in the

continuing task of preaching the Gospel, as well as the new one of strengthening the believers. Verse 28 extends our view of the different ministries and offices employed. We know also that there were elders, bishops and deacons, who had the Holy Spirit to help them perform their roles. Paul in his letter warns that no one should become proud because of the things he could do and say with the help of the Spirit.



In chapter 13, Paul says that a Christian's behaviour, in showing love, was more important to God than displaying the abilities given by the Holy Spirit (verses 1 and 2). Love, he says, is the enduring quality, a standard that is eternal – unlike the gifts of the Spirit, which, though dynamic and impressive, would fade away (verse 8). He describes this early stage of Christianity, despite its display of miracles and inspired messages, as childhood (verse 11), which passes as maturity is acquired. Why does he say this?

Remember the lesson from the Old Testament: that God gave His Spirit to particular people at particular times for particular purposes. 1 Corinthians 12:7 tells us that in those days possession of the Holy Spirit was very widespread; but 13:9 tells us it was given *"in part"*. Paul foresaw the coming of *"that which is perfect"* (13:10), which would mean that *"that which is in part"* (the distribution of various spirit gifts) would be no longer necessary.

In 2 Timothy 3:15–17 Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of the scriptures, the

written Word of God, and the many purposes that they achieve. Shortly afterwards the Bible as we know it, consisting of Old and New Testaments, was completed. It was the work of the Holy Spirit, *"given by inspiration of God"* (verse 16), the Holy Spirit in writing, if you like.

This is the form in which we can 'possess' the Holy Spirit today – the written Word of God which can be absorbed into our minds and direct our words, our behaviour, our lives.

As before, in its dynamic form, it is the source of all truth; it teaches us the Gospel and provides the evidence for its genuineness. It achieves all the purposes that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were designed to achieve; but it is available to everyone.

Let the written Word of God 'fill' us. Let it be absorbed into our minds. Let it direct our minds, our behaviour and our lives. For, as Psalm 19:11 says, in keeping God's Word there is great reward.

**Rod Hale**

# 2 Chronicles

THE SECOND Book of Chronicles narrates Israel's history as a kingdom. In particular, the reigns of Solomon, and of the later kings in Judah, emphasise the blessings received when the Jews gave glory to God and were faithful.

## The Nation Needs God

2 Chronicles parallels much of 1 & 2 Kings and continues the theme of the first book, showing how the Jews found their greatest blessings when they worshipped God truly and tried to obey His laws.

Instances are highlighted in which the religious zeal of the king, or the people, resulted in victories and in a period of peace, whereas wickedness led only to defeat and trouble. By such means God sought to teach His nation (see for example, 20:22; 26:5; 30:9).

Two kings who were particularly energetic in restoring the true worship of God were Hezekiah (chapters 29–32) and Josiah (chapters 34 and 35).

## The Temple

The early chapters provide details of the small but perfect temple, built to Divine plans, which was erected in the reign of Solomon and lasted 430 years – the period covered by 2 Chronicles.

When it was first built, the temple was temporarily filled with the “glory of the LORD” (7:1–3).

This remarkable event pointed forward to the future Kingdom of God, when His glory will fill the whole earth:

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

When there is glory to God then, too, there will be peace on earth:

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men! (Luke 2:14).*

**Norman Owen**

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### Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ 2 Chronicles 7:1–2 – see Ezekiel 43:4,5; Isaiah 11:9.
- ◆ 2 Chronicles 20:17 – see Exodus 14:13; Psalm 46:10.
- ◆ 2 Chronicles 36:16 – see Jeremiah 25:3,4; Matthew 23:34–39.



# Three Times in a Nation's History

YOU'RE quite right – the title does need explanation! The nation is the nation of Israel. The word 'times' has two senses: the number of occasions, and also periods or epochs. So, we're going to consider three occasions, each in a different epoch in the life of the nation of Israel.

"Why?" you might ask. Well, the remarkable survival of this little nation is living proof that God is in control. In around 600 BC, His prophet said:

*Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night... "If those ordinances depart from before Me," says the LORD, "then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever" (Jeremiah 31:35-36).*

## The First Time

The first time is around 598 BC. The kingdom of Israel has split in two, the northern kingdom is no more but the southern kingdom remains. The southern kingdom is called Judah and its capital is Jerusalem. Jehoiachin is the king, reigning on the throne of his ancestor David.

The little kingdom of Judah has been caught in the middle of a great struggle for power between the two great power blocs

*The Ishtar Gate from Babylon*



of West Asia, Babylon and Egypt. In 605 BC Egypt was defeated at the battle of Carchemish and power passed to Babylon. Judah had been a kind of independent frontier nation, but with the victory of Babylon Judah became a puppet state and its king served Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon as a vassal.

In 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar mounted a full-scale invasion of Judah and in three months Jehoiachin was forced to surrender. He was taken captive and sent to Babylon, along with many of the nation's leaders.

The temple and the royal treasuries of Jerusalem were ransacked. Nebuchadnezzar replaced Jehoiachin with his uncle Mattaniah, whom he renamed Zedekiah.

Zedekiah swore to serve and submit to the King of Babylon. But he was a weak and vacillating man. He was influenced by all kinds of people, and he betrayed his pledge by making an alliance with Egypt.

This provoked the king of Babylon and he sent his army to destroy Jerusalem. The siege of the city lasted some two and a half years, and finally the city was taken.

The king abandoned the city and tried to escape with some of his chosen men, but they were overtaken and captured, and Zedekiah was brought before king Nebuchadnezzar.

His sons were killed before his eyes, and he himself was blinded and taken to Babylon. There he died in prison. His warriors and court officials were executed.

The Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The temple was looted and burned. The walls of the city were levelled. The city's palaces were all burned down.

The captivity and degradation of the nation of Israel was complete, and the exile of God's people from their land began.

The dynasty of David, the royal line of kings, ceased. Zedekiah was the last king to sit upon the throne of David. Israel's hope was gone.

## 70 Years' Exile

The Babylonian exile lasted 70 years. During that time, Babylon itself fell to the Medes and Persians.

At the end of the 70 years, Cyrus the Persian was king of western Asia. Within a year of his entry into Babylon, he was issuing an edict allowing the Jewish exiles to leave Babylon and return to their homeland, to rebuild their ruined city and restore the holy temple.

The exiles came home and restored the nation of Israel. The city walls and gates were rebuilt, the new temple was dedicated. A new era began. The people agreed to enter into a solemn covenant to renew their life before God and to observe His law. The land and the people of Israel were restored and renewed. This then is the first time or period.

## The Second Time

We must now pass on some 300 years. The Persians have given way in western Asia to the next dominant force – the Greeks. Alexander the Great is said to have captured the world with 32,000 infantrymen and 5,000 cavalry. He died at the age of 32 and his empire was divided between his generals. The nation of Israel endured an uneasy existence in a period of warring dynasties around the Mediterranean coast.

Then came the expanding Roman power, which collided with the little nation of Israel. It began in 65 BC when the Jews

succumbed to the domination of Rome and the oppression grew worse as time passed.

The people clamoured for a Messiah, a saviour to rid them of the Roman oppression. They had puppet kings ruling over them by the permission of Caesar. These kings were called Herods and were not in the royal line of David – they were not Jews at all, but Edomites.

In 66 AD the Jews staged a revolt against Rome. It was a bitter struggle, and it culminated in the long and horrific siege of Jerusalem. At last in 70 AD the city fell. Many of its people were killed – the remainder were taken captive and sold into slavery in the Roman empire. The temple was destroyed and robbed, just as it was under Nebuchadnezzar. Not one stone was left standing upon another. The holy city once again was put to the sword and to the flame. The oppressors, bruised from having to wait four years to accomplish their design, were especially cruel when once they triumphed.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the last few Jewish rebels held out for two years at the fortress of Masada, but in 72 AD the fortress was stormed. The Romans found the bodies of 906 men, women and



children who had all committed suicide. Rebellion smouldered here and there for a while, but for a second time the holy city and its people had been captured, enslaved and destroyed, and scattered into exile throughout the world. Babylon first, Rome second.

## The Third Time

At the time of the first assault by Babylon, Israel existed as a sovereign nation. God had given them their land when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt (this is recorded in the Bible book of Exodus).

At the time of the second assault by Rome, Israel was again a sovereign nation, and this came about by being delivered from Babylon, under the decree of Cyrus and through the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah.

We have seen how as a result of the second assault the Jews were scattered throughout the world, without a land, without a government and without a nation. For nearly 2,000 years the people of Israel were in exile, but then on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948 the nation of Israel was restored, established in their own land and constituted a sovereign nation once more.

That third time is still to come and is the subject of part 2. But we see already that God has been in control all along. The sun, moon and stars are still there, and the nation of Israel, against all odds, exists too.

**Dennis Gillett**

*(to be continued)*

# Some Hard Sayings of Jesus

MANY sayings of Jesus are well known and well loved, but some of them are more challenging and harder to understand. This is deliberate. Jesus did not want his teaching to become simply a book of rules, he wants us to think for ourselves. If we sincerely try to grasp his teaching, praying for guidance, then understanding will come. Maybe not instantly as in a flash of light, but gradually over a period of time (Luke 11:9).

***Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).***

We often hear words like “We all have our cross to bear”, usually about someone who has suffered problems in life. This is not what Jesus meant. Those burdens, heavy as they may be, are not burdens which we willingly take up. They happen to us and we have to cope with them.

But here Jesus is talking about ‘self-sacrifice’, about choosing to deny ourselves something we have cherished, and doing this for him. It means that we need to check our priorities. For example, we may find that enthusiasm for a hobby takes up our time when we could be doing some kindness or other work for Jesus. The call is to ‘take up our cross’ – to be prepared to sacrifice our own inclinations and to follow God’s will, just as Jesus himself did.

***Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Matthew 5:39).***

Jesus practised what he preached; he was no hypocrite and his actions illustrate his message. For much of the time when Jesus stood on trial for his life he kept silent (Luke 23:9–11; 1 Peter 2:21–24). However, when being questioned by the high priest an officer gave him a tremendous swipe across his face. While still submissive (Isaiah 53:7), Jesus spoke to the man. He did not escalate the situation by asking him to hit his other cheek, but said “*If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike me?*” (John 18:23).

We should never seek revenge, that is not the Christian response. Instead we should ‘turn the other cheek’. It may be necessary to speak firmly about a matter, in a Christ-like way, but the urge to seek revenge should have no place in our thinking (Romans 12:17–21).

***Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matthew 5:44).***

Jesus certainly did this! An example is the relationship between Jesus and Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew from the outset that Judas was stealing from the shared money and that that he would betray him. On one



***If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26).***

Does Jesus really want us to hate those closest to us? Not literally – this would contradict his teaching about love. Jesus was saying that our desire to serve him should be greater than our desire to please relatives and even ourselves. He certainly did this.

Joseph and Mary had quite a large family after the birth of Jesus. His brothers and sisters were very sceptical of Jesus' claims to be the Son of God (John 7:1–5). They did their best to silence him, saying that he was mad (Mark 3:21). But Jesus refused to be silenced; he had been sent to preach the Gospel and he would not be deterred.

The brothers persuaded Mary to join them in seeking to physically remove Jesus for his own safety. Jesus responded, “*Who is my mother or my brothers?... whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother*” (Mark 3:33–35).

How heart-rending for Mary! But we see here an example of Jesus putting his supreme love for God before his love for his mother and even before his care for himself.

We do well to read Jesus' words and to think carefully about what he meant. After all, Jesus said “*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63).

**David Budden**

occasion a valuable gift had been given to Jesus personally and Judas commented that it could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. The inspired disciple John, writing some years later, commented “*This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it*” (John 12:4–6). Jesus knew all about it yet refrained from exposing Judas.

Even in the Upper Room, hours before the crucifixion, when Jesus humbly washed the disciples' feet, he showed no discrimination and treated Judas equally. He never said a bad word about Judas. What an incredible example of self-control!

Later, when arrested, Jesus healed a man injured by one of the disciples who tried to defend him (Luke 22:49–51). And Jesus went on to die for us while we were ‘enemies of God’ (Colossians 1:21) showing the greatest love ever (John 15:13).

