

# Glad Tidings

*Of The Kingdom Of God*

## Featured **Articles**

The Most Beautiful Sight in the World (p. 3)

A Confession of Faith (p. 5)

The Devil (p. 14)

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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# The Most Beautiful Sight in the World

DID YOU KNOW that the word ‘beautiful’ was specially invented for the Bible? When William Tyndale was translating the Bible in the early 1500s, he came across a Hebrew word that meant ‘lovely to look at’ and he couldn’t find an English word that properly expressed its meaning; so he took the French word ‘beau’, which means someone who is handsome or pretty, and added the German ending ‘ful’, and came up with ‘bewtiful’ (that’s the 16<sup>th</sup> Century spelling). It means “full of loveliness to look at”.

## What Would You Say?

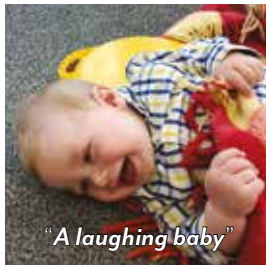
What is the most beautiful sight in the world? We could ask ten people and get ten different answers.

This is one man’s answer: *“Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion”* (Psalm 48:2).

Mount Zion is the hill on which the original city of Jerusalem



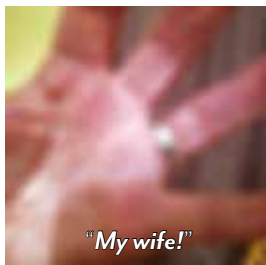
“A sunset”



“A laughing baby”



“An Aston Martin DB5”



“My wife!”

was built. The name ‘Zion’ is often used for Jerusalem. The Psalmist was singing the praises of his beloved city.

It’s not unusual for patriots to view their own home as the best place in the world. This Psalm was probably written after Israel had passed the glory days of the height of its kingdom, but Jerusalem would still have been an impressive place.

Is that all the Psalm is—patriotic hyperbole? Here are its first three verses in full:

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge.*

It’s a wonderful and inspiring Psalm, you might like to read it. It mentions an invasion which has been defeated (verses 4–7); it declares that the city will stand for ever (v. 8); it talks of

God dwelling in the temple and being worshipped throughout the world (verses 9–11); and it proclaims unshakeable confidence in God Who dwells there (verses 12–14).

## A Prophecy

Psalms 48 is not a patriotic song—it’s a prophecy. We can compare it with other Bible prophecies about the destiny of Jerusalem. For example Zechariah chapter 14 describes an invasion of Israel (verse 2), a battle in which God Himself intervenes (verse 3), and physical changes to the landscape which result in the city being elevated (verse 10).

Interestingly, many scholars have wondered what Psalm 48 means by “*Mount Zion on the sides of the north*”—because the fact is, Jerusalem is built on the south slope of the hill, it doesn’t have a north side. Maybe it is that after the city has been lifted up as Zechariah describes, it will indeed be built on the northern slope as well, and that will be the best view!

Psalms 2 looks forward to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. It speaks of the disgruntled rulers of the world’s nations plotting to do



*An artist's vision of the temple at Jerusalem in the Kingdom of God*

away with a new authority that has been imposed upon them (verses 1–3); and God Himself answers them decisively: “*Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion*” (verse 6). The Psalm goes on to reveal that this King is God’s Son—whom we can recognise as Jesus Christ.

Isaiah chapter 2 looks forward to the Kingdom of God, when Jesus Christ sits on the throne, and it also mentions the change in the landscape:

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).*

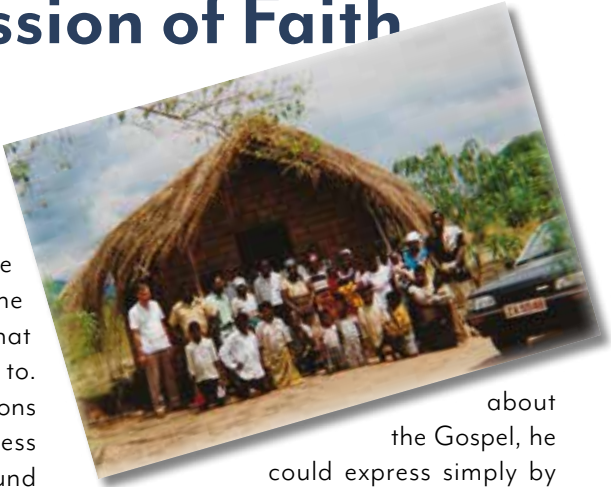
What a magnificent picture—the world finally united, floods of pilgrims pouring into Jerusalem. It will no longer be the chaotic, divided city we know now, and they will be there to learn the ways of God, and to wonder at its beauty.

# A Confession of Faith

IT WAS a beautiful African morning and the sun shone down from an azure sky. My companion and I sat in the shade of a eucalyptus tree awaiting our first candidate. Several people had requested to be baptised into the Lord Jesus Christ. It was important that they knew what they were committing to. We were there to hear their 'confessions of faith'—that is, to hear them express what they believed and show a sound understanding of Bible teaching.

Many who would come had never spoken to us before, and so we would be sure first to put them at their ease by chatting about general things; then we'd turn the conversation toward spiritual matters. Most of the candidates were well prepared, and although often somewhat nervous they were able to give a more or less fluent confession of their faith.

I particularly remember Philip. He seemed very young to be taking such a momentous step in his life. I think he was slightly under 14 years old, nevertheless he spoke up well and was soon answering our questions with confidence. To this day I remember that conversation, because all his answers seemed to be coming out of one book of the Bible—Genesis. In fact most of his answers were from its first three chapters. Could this really be so—all that this young man knew



about the Gospel, he could express simply by using the first three chapters of the Bible? Listening to him sharing his beliefs was a wonderful experience.

There was no question as to whether we should baptise him.

That occasion has stuck with me, and it is only recently that I thought again about Philip's confession of faith. I thought I would revisit those first three chapters of Genesis, and use them to express my own confession of faith. You might like to read the chapters now, before we continue...

## "I Believe..."

1. God is the Supreme Being. He created all living things and provides for all, sustaining all life (*Genesis 1:1, Acts 17:24–25*).
2. God has spoken to us. Genesis 1 shows how He created everything by His word. And He has given to us the



Bible, which is the principal record of His dealings with humankind and our only authority for what we believe and teach (2 Peter 1:19–21). All other human learning is at best illustrative of the ways of the Almighty.

3. God created man from the dust of the ground—on the same model as all living creatures (Genesis 1:20, 27; 2:7)—and breathed into him the breath of life. Life is God’s to give and His to take away (Romans 6:23).
4. God made humans, the pinnacle of all creation, and gave to us the responsibility of caring for all life on earth (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:15).
5. God has given to us the basic rules for living. His rule for Adam and Eve was simply not to eat the forbidden fruit. Breaking His rule brought about separation from God and death (Genesis 2:15–17).
6. Woman was created out of man and for man. God gave His rule to Adam before Eve was created, so Adam had a teaching and leadership rôle to fulfil. However, Eve was as ‘responsible’ a person as Adam. Woman is man’s ‘suitable’ or ‘comparable’ helper (Genesis 2:18–23).
7. The marriage between a man and a woman is God’s design for the foundation of family and society (Genesis 2:24–25, Matthew 19:1–12).
8. The serpent was a ‘beast of the field’. It becomes representative of sin at work amongst humankind (Genesis 3:1, 14–15). It was not a wicked supernatural being. Temptation is often presented to us from outside—but it arises from within, and it is our responsibility when we fail (Genesis 3:1–6, James 1:12–18).
9. Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve’s disobedience—and with it pain, sorrow, challenges for living, and death. We all sin therefore we all die (Genesis 3:16–19).
10. The serpent and its ‘seed’ (descendants) became a picture of sin, which was to be destroyed by the ‘seed’ (descendant) of Eve. This is how God brings hope to a dreadful situation. This ‘seed’ is none other than Jesus Christ, Son of man and Son of God (Genesis 3:15).
12. Nakedness is a symbol of guilt, which needs to be covered. Clothing was provided by God through the death of an innocent animal (Genesis 3:21). This was pointing forward to Jesus Christ (elsewhere called the ‘Lamb of God’, John 1:29) who died for our sins.
13. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden—an idyllic place which was a foretaste of God’s Kingdom—and were thus denied access to the tree of life. But the way back to it was ‘guarded’ and not lost (Genesis 3:24). The ‘way to the tree of life’ is later revealed to be by faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19–20).

The fact that there is so much in these first three chapters, which is the basis for belief and a full, working fellowship with Almighty God, surely emphasises the reality of the account. God made it clear from the beginning that it is He alone Who provides the way of salvation, by faith in His grace. He has given us freedom of choice and an intellect that can work these things out.

## Back in Africa

Over the space of a day and a half my companion and I heard 12 good confessions of faith, including Philip's. Overnight there was heavy rain and we had to move inside on the second day to finish our discussions. Then under threatening skies we made our way down a muddy road to the banks of a river. As we walked the local brothers and sisters began singing hymns of praise and thankfulness.

A strange party approached, jogging in the opposite direction. It was a group of youths about Philip's age, dressed in garish costumes and carrying sticks and staves. They were running to summon their relatives from the neighbouring villages to witness their circumcision ceremony. The idea was that they would tire themselves out and so the publicly performed operation might be less painful—they must show themselves men and display no fear or pain. What a way to achieve adulthood!

And what a contrast with the simple ceremony which Philip and his fellows had chosen. They were following the example of Jesus Christ in being baptised. It would be a

public witness to their faith, and by it God would be glorified, not they themselves.

As each in turn entered the river water they were asked, "Do you believe the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ?"

"I do," came the answer.



"Then upon this public confession of your faith I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit."

Jesus' instruction was echoed through the gathered throng, "*He who believes and is baptised will be saved*" (Mark 16:16).

Then we returned to the meeting room, singing joyful hymns as we went. Philip had begun his new life as a brother in Christ. He and the others would be welcomed into the fellowship of God's family, and for the first time share in breaking bread and drinking wine in remembrance of their Lord (1 Corinthians 11:24–25).

**David Nightingale**

# Ecclesiastes

The alternative title of this book is “The Preacher”, and the opening verse identifies the writer as “the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”. It was probably King Solomon.

## “All Go to One Place”

Solomon was famous for his riches, wisdom and exploits. He had everything the world could offer, so he was well qualified to talk about the meaning of life. In this book he underlines the emptiness of life without God. Without God’s word, and our response to it, all would be pointless. We would all end up, like animals, in the dust of death; for in the grave all life and consciousness ceases (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20; 9:4–6). This is the consistent teaching of the whole Bible, but in Ecclesiastes it is repeated time after time.



## “Remember Now Your Creator”

Chapter 12 describes in vivid poetic language old age, and the deterioration of the different parts of the body and the

senses. The Divine advice is to remember our Creator while we have life, vigour and opportunity (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

## The Only True Hope

The whole purpose of life is to glorify God (12:13). There is a day of judgement to come (verse 14). In other parts of His word, God offers us hope of eternal life in a glorified body, following resurrection and judgement at the return of Christ. This will enable us to live for ever on a renewed and perfect planet Earth. This great promise rests on our belief and obedience now!

### Norman Owen

*By kind permission of ‘The Christadelphian’*

“ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. ”

*(Ecclesiastes 12:13–14)*

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

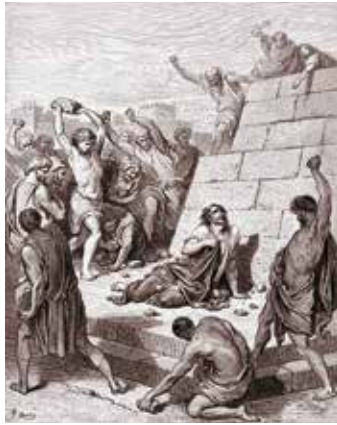
- ◆ Ecclesiastes 3:20—see Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12.
- ◆ Ecclesiastes 7:20—see Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8.
- ◆ Ecclesiastes 12:8—see Psalm 62:9; 1 Corinthians 15:14, 58.



# The Structure of Acts

*This is the third in a series in which we examine this fascinating Bible book. You can catch up with the previous articles at [www.gladtidingsmagazine.org](http://www.gladtidingsmagazine.org).*

IF WE ARE to understand a book of the Bible, it's useful to divide it up into the sections that were intended when it was written. We can then think about what those sections include and what they are there to teach. The Acts of the Apostles can be divided into sections in a number of different ways. Each way of dividing up Acts provides another layer of understanding of the book.



leaders of Judaism, and especially the Sadducees. Acts 3:1–6:7.

**3. The Gospel Spreads:** The Gospel now spreads outside Jerusalem. Stephen is the first person to be killed for his Christianity, Philip takes the Gospel to Samaria and Ethiopia; Saul is converted on the way to Damascus, and changes his name to Paul. There are changes in the working of the community—there are now officials who are not Apostles. Acts 6:8–9:31.

**4. The First Gentiles:** The Gospel is proclaimed to Cornelius, who is not a Jew. This is such a major step that a conference is held in Jerusalem to decide whether a Gentile can be accepted as a believer. Acts 9:32–12:25.

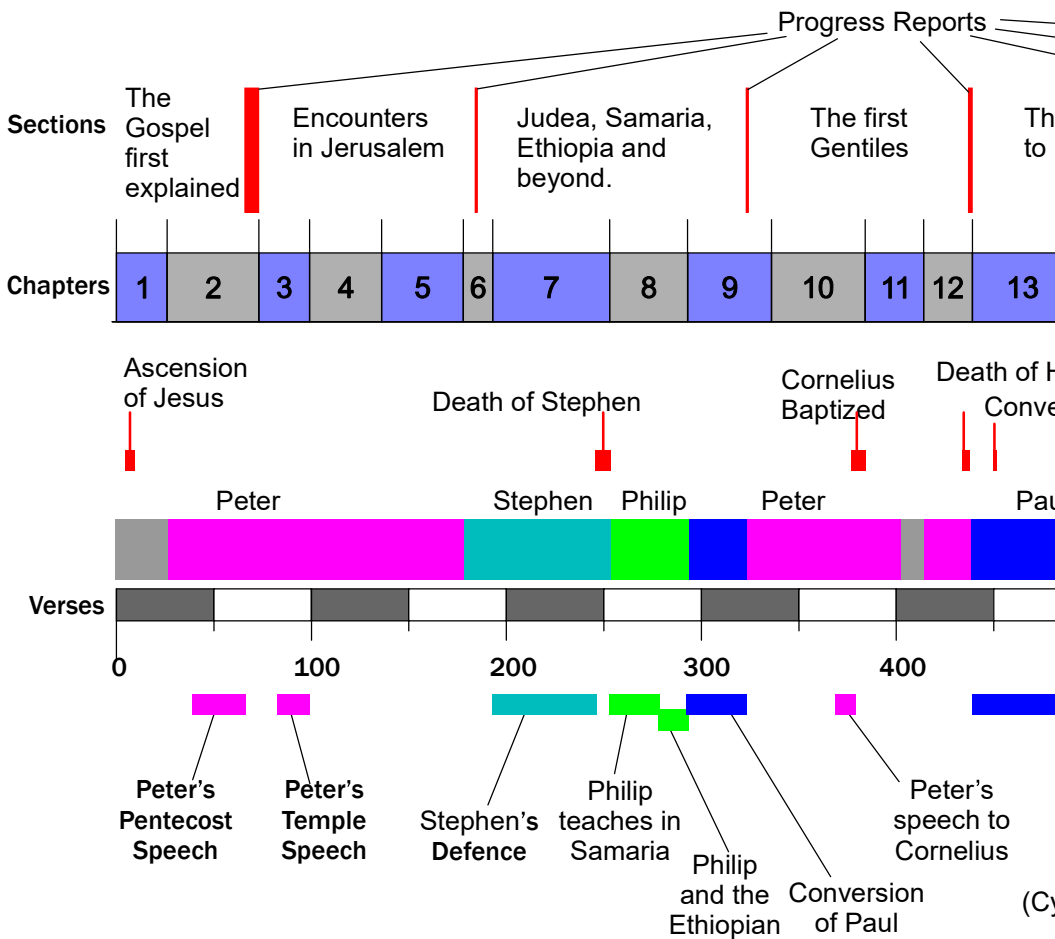
**5. The Mission to Galatia:** Paul and Barnabas travel to Cyprus and, after the Governor believes the Gospel, move on to teach in Galatia. This results in congregations where every member is a Gentile. This generates the need for another council in Jerusalem to decide how Gentiles fit within the Christian community.

## Structure by Progress Reports

Acts contains a number of progress reports which summarise the state of the Christian community at the time. These divide the book into seven sections, each of which has a dominant theme and concludes with the report. The sections are:

- 1. Introduction to the Gospel:** The purpose of Acts and the first proclamation of the Gospel. Acts 1 and 2.
- 2. Encounters with the Authorities in Jerusalem:** The proclamation of the Gospel brings conflict with the

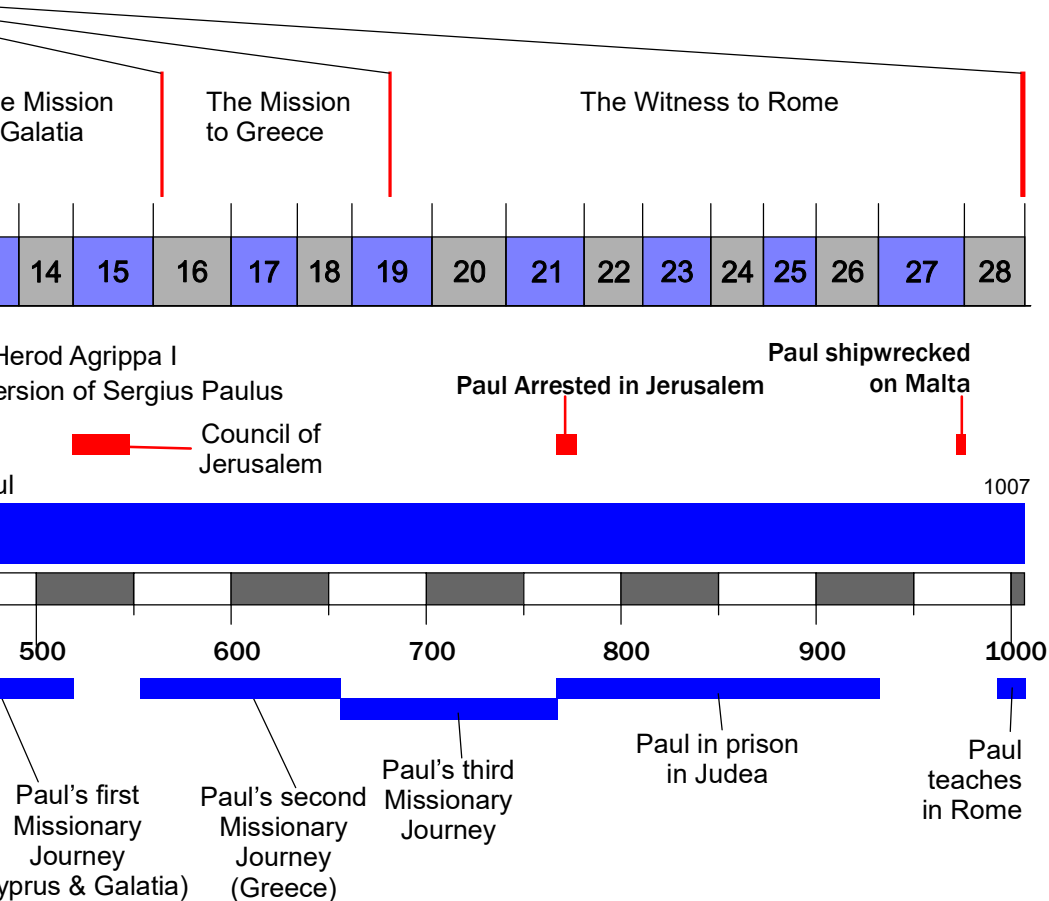
(Continued on page 12.)



## Overview of the Book of Acts

The chart represents the book of Acts from the beginning (verse 0) to the end (there are 1007 verses altogether). It shows where the various events fit into the book.

- The top of the chart shows Acts' **seven sections** divided by progress reports.
- The next line shows the **chapters** of the book.
- Below this are shown some **major landmarks** in the book.
- The next line shows the **main person** in that portion of Acts.
- Next, the **number of verses** from the start of Acts.
- At the bottom of the chart are the **main events** of the book: speeches, teaching and journeys.



## Some Key People and Events

**Stephen**—the first follower of Jesus to be killed for his faith. **Cornelius**—the first Gentile (non-Jew) to be baptized. **Paul**—converted by Christ on the road to Damascus and sent to preach to the Gentiles. **The Council of Jerusalem**—where the Apostles decided that Gentiles who wished to become followers of Jesus did not have to follow the Jewish Law.

The colours on the bar show the main person in the narrative:

- Peter
- Paul
- Philip
- Stephen
- others

6. *The Mission to Greece*: Paul crosses into Europe and proclaims the Gospel in Macedonia and Greece.
7. *The Witness to Rome*: Paul returns to Jerusalem where he is arrested and finally sent to Rome.

## Structure by Main Character

Another way of looking at Acts is to think about the main character in each part of the book. The book begins with events where the narrative is mainly about Peter. There are then sections where the main action concerns Stephen and Philip, followed by the conversion of Paul and then the action of Peter again. The last section of Acts, which is well over half the whole book, concerns the activities of Paul as he takes the Gospel to the various parts of the ancient world: Galatia, Europe and the Roman province of Asia (western Turkey) and then finally on to Rome.

Paul's progress can be conveniently divided into journeys:

1. *The famine relief journey*. This is a short Journey from Antioch to Jerusalem to bring assistance to disciples affected by a famine.
2. *The First Missionary Journey*. Here Paul goes with Barnabas to Cyprus, but after his success in teaching the Gospel to the governor of the island he goes on a further journey through Galatia.
3. *The Second Missionary Journey*. In this journey Paul sets out from Antioch to Galatia, but then goes on to Troas,

from where he crosses into Europe, founding congregations in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) before moving on to Athens and Corinth. On his return he briefly calls in at Ephesus, where he leaves some of his companions to proclaim the Gospel.

4. *The Third Missionary Journey*. Paul sets off to Ephesus where he stays, before moving off into Macedonia and as far as Illyricum (modern Croatia) before visiting Corinth and finally returning to Jerusalem.
5. *The Journey to Rome*. Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and compelled to appeal for trial before Caesar in Rome. After two years captive in Caesarea he is sent to Rome, where he spends two years before the completion of Acts.

The journeys of Paul are interspersed with various other events: there is a council in Jerusalem after the First Missionary Journey and a prolonged period of captivity in Caesarea while Paul waits to go to Rome. During this captivity Paul is called on to witness to some of the most important people in the area: two Roman governors (Felix and Festus) and the young future King of Judea, Herod Agrippa II (known in Acts as 'Agrippa').

The chart on the previous pages plots the structure of Acts on a bar. There are 1007 verses in Acts, and the distance along the bar represents the position of the event in the book.

**John Thorpe**

# The Palace at Shushan

ON THE outskirts of the city of Shush in western Iran lie the remains of Shushan, winter palace of the kings of Persia and the setting of the Bible book of Esther.

Esther was the Jewish queen of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Persian kings had various names, it's generally agreed he was Xerxes I who reigned approximately 486–465BC).



*The king's apartments, Shushan*

Some modern scholars have dismissed the book of Esther as a work of fiction which bears no relation to historical facts. However, excavations at Shushan have provided fascinating evidence that the book is actually highly accurate in its descriptions of the royal city and palace—indicating that we can also be confident of the other historical details. For example:

- Chapter 2:11 describes Esther's confinement in the 'women's quarters' to which the public had no access. Archaeologists have identified the harem, containing a series of apartments each with its own small courtyard.

- A lot of the action in the book takes place in the 'king's gate' (for example 2:19–21, 3:2–3, 4:2–6). The massive gateway has been discovered. It was separated from the palace by a large public square.
- The palace was entered through a series of courtyards. The outer courtyard is mentioned in chapter 6:4.
- Chapter 5:1 gives precise details of the layout of the heart of the palace: "*Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.*" Excavations have revealed the throne room, immediately in front of the royal apartments. The throne room was on a raised platform, accessed from the inner courtyard by a long ramp so the king would be able to see anyone entering the inner courtyard.

The French archaeologist Jean Perrot, former Director of Excavations at Shushan, said: "One today rereads with a renewed interest the book of Esther, whose detailed description of the interior disposition of the palace of Xerxes is now in excellent accord with archaeological reality."

**Mike Clark**



# The Devil

ALTHOUGH there is a lot of good in the world, nobody would deny that there is also a lot of evil. Have you ever asked yourself where all the evil comes from?

Jesus of Nazareth gave us the answer: “*Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts...*” (Matthew 15:19). Evil deeds come from evil thoughts and evil thoughts arise in the hearts of people like us.

The same message is found throughout the Bible. For instance, not far into the history of the world a thoroughly rotten and corrupt society had developed:



*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth (Genesis 6:5, 11–12).*

Many years later the prophet Jeremiah said, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*” (Jeremiah 17:9). And Jesus denounced the hypocritical Pharisees of his day, “*Why do you think evil in your hearts?*” (Matthew 9:4).



The ‘heart’ in the Bible stands for our thinking, our hopes, intentions, emotions—all that makes us what we are.

It’s not a popular fact, but the Bible teaches that we are not basically good—we are basically evil. The Bible says we are ‘sinners’. And when we give in to the evil in our hearts the Bible calls it ‘sin’.

In his letter James spells out the matter: “*Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death*” (James 1:14–15).

## The Struggle Within

Only one man ever successfully overcame temptation at every turn, and that was Jesus Christ. He had human nature just like us, and like us he was “*tempted as we are...*” but there was a big difference: he was “*tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). Not only did he resist sin—he defeated it. The writer to the Hebrews explains: “*Inasmuch then as the children (that’s us) have partaken of flesh and blood (that is, we possess sinful human nature), he (Jesus) himself likewise shared in the same,*

that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

Jesus struggled with his human nature just as we do, but with one big difference—he never gave in to temptation, he never sinned. And when he laid down his perfect life, he effectively defeated the human nature he had which was prone to temptation. In the words of Hebrews, he ‘destroyed the devil’.

## The Experiences of Paul and Judas

The Apostle Paul was a human like us, prone to temptation and sin. He recognised



that there was a battle going on inside him between right and wrong, good and evil:

*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Romans 7:22–23).*

He doesn’t use the word ‘devil’, but what he is describing is the battle between the part of him that ‘delights in the law of God’, and the part of him that is the devil.

Jesus once said to his disciples, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). The devil was Judas Iscariot.

Judas lusted after money. It was an



overwhelming urge. Perhaps he became a follower of Jesus because he saw a potential income, should Jesus accept money from those he healed. Jesus knew of Judas’s weakness, and that his apparent concern for the poor was a sham. His devil was his lust for money, and it drove him to betray Jesus: “And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him...” (John 13:2).



If there was a struggle going on in Judas between the part of him that ‘delighted in the law of God’, and the part of him that was the devil—the devil won.

## The Experience of Jesus

We all experience temptations of various sorts—to do and say hurtful things, to take what is not ours, to pass on bits of gossip, to spend excessively on our own pleasures and turn blind eyes to poverty we see around us... We all know the long lists that confront us in various ways. Sometimes we resist our selfish inclinations and then ‘good’ wins, but sometimes we yield to them and then ‘evil’ wins.

The Apostle James gives sound advice for all disciples of Jesus: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7–8).

**David M Budden**

# A Little Can be Fatal

“A LITTLE BIT won’t hurt me—it looks lovely,” Ian begged. “No!” insisted his father. “You’re allergic to it and even a little bit could hurt you a lot.”

Some people are intolerant of certain foods and eating them makes them ill. Others are allergic to even the slightest trace of a food (for example nuts). They have to learn, like Ian, to be constantly on the look out and to avoid them. This involves reading food labels and asking about possible cross-contamination in kitchens. Carelessness could be fatal. Although symptoms can usually be relieved if action is taken quickly, there is no cure for the actual allergy.

Sometimes small amounts of something can have large effects. Things like mould, germs and cancer cells spread quickly. A little leaven (yeast) will cause a whole batch of dough to rise, and the Apostle Paul says that bad influences can corrupt our lives like leaven spreading through dough (1 Corinthians 5:6).

## Sin

Unpleasant though these are, we all face a far greater problem: sin. Sin is disobedience to God. This includes crimes like murder, rape and stealing. But it also encompasses things we regard as less serious such as selfishness, envy and uncontrolled anger (Mark 7:21–23; Galatians 5:19–21).

Moreover, any and all sin alienates us from God; sin is sin whatever it is—even one sin. Adam and Eve ‘just’ ate the forbidden fruit which looked lovely (Genesis 3:6) and the consequences were catastrophic. Any ‘good’ we do cannot make up for our sins. If we have broken one small part of the law we have broken it all (James 2:10). And because we are sinners we deserve to die: “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23).

## The Solution

But there is one solution. God offers us forgiveness, but on His terms. God is merciful and kind (Exodus 33:18–19, 34:6–7). He wants to forgive us. But as a God of truth He cannot forgive those who rebel. So He tells us to repent, to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus and then to focus on Him and on His offer of eternal life. Then even when we fail we can still be forgiven.

Baptised Christians have acknowledged their plight and renounced their old way of life (Romans 6:1–6). Like Ian, they need constantly to identify and avoid situations that are spiritually dangerous, even those that are not immediately obvious. The Bible gives guidance on how to do this. They need to become intolerant of sin—to hate it and to avoid it. Sin is fatal, but unlike food allergies there is a cure.

**Anna Hart**

# Writing in the Dust

JESUS had many enemies, and they were frequently trying to catch him out and get him into trouble. One such incident is recorded in the first 11 verses of John chapter 8.

Let's put on our cloaks, load up our donkeys and take ourselves back in time to the temple court in Jerusalem, and mingle with the crowd.



It's daybreak, the coolest part of the day, and already a large number of people have gathered to listen to the teacher and healer from Nazareth about whom we've heard wonderful things.

Suddenly there's a scuffle, and a band of men push to the middle of the circle, dragging a sobbing woman. They stand her beside Jesus and turn her around to face the crowd.

"Teacher!" one of them shouts, making sure everyone can hear. "This woman was caught

*in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?"* There is malice in his voice.

To commit adultery is to have sex with someone to whom you're not married, and the penalty under the Law of Moses was death.

Before we continue, note that these accusers are not strictly adhering to their Law. In cases of adultery both the man and the woman should have been brought for judgement. Also, they should have brought the accused to a priest. But these men have a plan—they intend to trap Jesus into saying something that will get him into trouble.

A hush descends. All eyes are on Jesus. But it's as though he hasn't noticed them. He stoops down, and starts to write in the dust on the floor.

It's suggested that there was a custom in those days that if a priest was called on to make a judgement in the case of one of the Laws of Moses, he would write the law which had been broken for all to see. The writing must not be permanent—for example on parchment—it must be capable of being erased.

So Jesus writes in the dust. The account does not tell us what it is he writes, but I

think it's a quote from the Law (Exodus 20:14): "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY."

Their voices rise and they start to press him, growing impatient. He straightens up and looks around at the woman's accusers, then at the whole crowd. The hush falls again. He looks us each in the eye, steadily and with that peculiar way he has of making you think he can see right inside you. Then he speaks: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And with that he stoops down again and continues writing in the dust.

Again we're not told what he writes. But perhaps he's writing the names of the people in the crowd.

As Jesus is absorbed with his writing it's as though he doesn't notice what's going on—but something extraordinary is happening. The venerable old scribe sitting in the corner hoists himself to his feet and shuffles away. Then another leaves, and another. The audience is dwindling. Those who dragged the woman in, wanting to trap Jesus in his words; those who were looking on wanting to see a confrontation; those who were just curious. They all melt away into the crowds in the temple court.

The record says simply that they are 'convicted by their conscience'. Perhaps they have each realised that this man, who knows what is in people's hearts, knows that they each have guilty secrets. The woman standing before them has committed her crime openly, and she's been caught—that's the difference between them and her.

When Jesus straightens up again, there is only the woman there, standing beside him.

The day has been growing warmer, but she has never felt so cold. Surrounded by the crowd, she's never felt so alone. She's guilty, and numb at the thought of what's going to happen to her.

Jesus has given the crowd time to disperse, and the woman time to reflect on what she has done.

He fixes her with his gaze and says, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, Lord," she mutters.

He smiles. "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Can you feel the surge of emotion that she feels? Her sin has been forgiven, swept away like the scratches in the dust at her feet. She has been given her life back, and she goes out, determined to start it anew.

This is forgiveness, and it's what Jesus offers to all who come to him—no matter what they have done, what kind of people they have been.

**Colin Smale**

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**Across**

- 1 Jesus referred to Judas Iscariot as this (*John 6:70*)
- 6 Peter's reply when Jesus asked whether he loved him (*John 21:15*)
- 8 The Ethiopian eunuch was reading from this book (*Acts 8:28*)
- 9 Bar-Jesus was this kind of prophet (*Acts 13:6*)
- 10 In the past (*Acts 15:7*)
- 11 Mordecai's cousin (*Esther 2:8*)
- 14 Mary's son would do this for his people (*Matthew 1:21*)
- 15 An angel was described as this (the original word is 'satan') (*Numbers 22:22*)
- 18 Esau's alternative name (*Genesis 36:1*)
- 20 Baptised the Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts 8:38*)
- 23 Unwell (*2 Samuel 13:5*)
- 25 \_\_\_ heirs inherit together (*Romans 8:17*)
- 26 A proconsul at Achaia (*Acts 18:12*)
- 27 The first woman (*Genesis 3:20*)
- 28 Jesus was tempted to turn 7 down into this (*Matthew 4:3*)

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**Down**

- 1 Evil things from within do this to you (*Mark 7:23*)
- 2 "More \_\_\_ than many sparrows" (*Matthew 10:31*)
- 3 An untruth (*Matthew 4:2*)
- 4 Given to Israel through Moses (*John 1:17*)
- 5 Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 \_\_\_ (*Mark 2:19*)
- 7 Jesus was tempted to turn these into food in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:3*)
- 10 He was diseased in his feet (*1 Kings 15:23*)
- 12 A wicked city (*Genesis 13:13*)
- 13 All this will be filled with God's glory (*Numbers 14:21*)
- 14 Sarah's original name (*Genesis 17:15*)
- 16 Temptation by this leads to sin (*James 1:15*)
- 17 Jesus did this in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:2*)
- 19 Mary anointed Jesus' feet with this (*John 12:3*)
- 21 "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the \_\_\_ of life" (*1 John 2:16*)
- 22 The first man (*Genesis 2:19*)
- 24 A priest in the time of Samuel (*1 Samuel 3:1*)
- 25 A blameless and upright man (*Job 1:8*)

(These clues use the New King James version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

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