

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Does the Bible Encourage Violence? (p. 3)

Mighty God, Everlasting Father (p. 10)

Why Does God Allow Suffering? (p. 12)

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.

Table Of Contents

Does the Bible Encourage Violence?		3
The Contest With Egypt		5
Luke		9
Mighty God, Everlasting Father		10
Why Does God Allow Suffering?		12
The Price of Slaves		16
Your E-mails and Letters		18
Bible Reader’s Crossword		19

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Publisher
The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity—Number 248352

Does the Bible Encourage Violence?

YOU HAVE TO ADMIT, the Bible says some difficult things. For example when God brought the nation of Israel into the Promised Land He told them to wipe out the native population: *‘When the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them’* (Deuteronomy 7:2). Some would call that genocide.

The Law of Moses includes the death penalty for certain crimes. For example, *‘Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death’* (Exodus 21:12). Some would call that barbaric.

Because of these things there are those who dismiss the Bible as irrelevant and even dangerous. It’s a genuine concern, and we need to face up to it. The Bible says *‘God is love’* (1 John 4:8). How can this be true, if the Bible contains instructions to kill people?

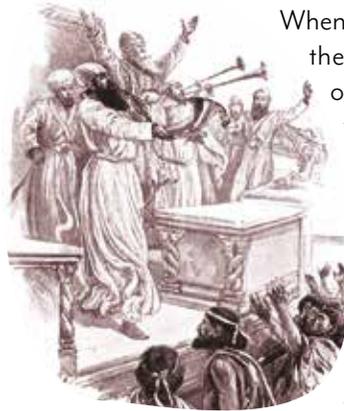
Difficult Questions

The first point we need to note is that if God is our Creator, He has the right to do what He wants. The prophet Isaiah pointed out the folly of those who challenge God: *“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say*

to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’” (Isaiah 45:9).

Nevertheless, we can still ask the question —why did God command people to kill others?

God made a covenant with the nation of Israel, that He would be their God and they would be His people. *‘For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth’* (Deuteronomy 7:6).



When He brought them into land of Canaan, it was with the intention that they would be a nation that was entirely dedicated to Him and His ways.

The native population was decadent and depraved. Israel could not co-exist with them, because they would be a corrupting influence. If you read through Deuteronomy

chapter 7 you'll see how God explains this. The Bible account shows various glimpses of the horrible practices of the Canaanites. There's an interesting detail in the words of God to Israel's ancestor Abraham, years earlier while he was living in Canaan. God told him that his descendants would *'come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete'* (Genesis 15:16). It was only when they had grown so wicked that they were beyond remedy, that God brought Israel to drive them out.



God is just, but also merciful. Even now He was prepared to save those who turned from their evil ways. Joshua 2 contains the account of Rahab, a native of Jericho who turned her back on her own culture and threw in her lot with the invading Israelite army. She and her family were saved, and it's reasonable to assume that there were others who did the same.

The fact that Israel was to be a holy nation helps to answer the second question—the presence of the death sentence in the Law of Moses. In order to ensure a just and stable society it was God's prerogative to require that certain kinds of wickedness should not be tolerated.

What About Us?

So, if God has used force in the past does this mean that God's followers should take it upon themselves to do so now? Should Christians use violence to further God's purpose and enforce His rules? The Bible's answer is clear—*no!*

When God established the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan, He prescribed the use of force to conquer and maintain it. The Old Testament nation of Israel no longer exists.

The Bible abounds with descriptions of the Kingdom of God which is to come, when Jesus Christ will return to earth to rule in righteousness and all the world will live in peace and prosperity. Once more, God's rule will be a physical reality. Zechariah 14 is one such description of the establishment of the Kingdom. It will be set up by force (for example vs. 12–15), and it will be governed by force (for example vs. 16–19).

But while they wait for that time, God's people are not a physical nation, they are a spiritual nation. As the Apostle Peter says, *'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'* (1 Peter 2:9). This means, as Peter continues, the Christian must lead a peaceful life: *'in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect'* (1 Peter 3:15).

The Contest With Egypt

IN THE Northamptonshire village where we live there are some very unusual walls. Some are garden walls, surrounding flower beds and lawns. Others form the sides of houses. All of them are centuries old. When you look at them closely, you see they are made of mud and chopped straw. In fact, our village walls have a strange connection with the life of the Israelites in Egypt in the time of Moses. They are made of just the same ingredients as the bricks the Israelites were forced to make for Pharaoh.

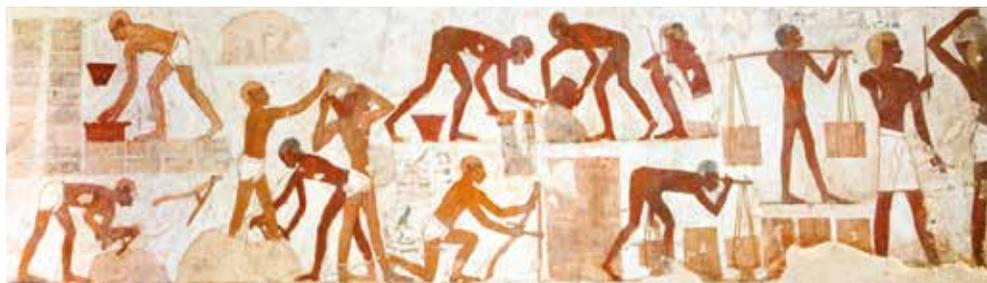


There are examples of Egyptian bricks in the British Museum in London, complete with the official stamp of the Rameses brickworks—bricks which date back to the time of the Exodus and could easily be the very ones handled by Moses' brothers as they bowed under the lash of the overseers. The composition is clearly visible.

You may be puzzled by the use of straw. The subject came to the forefront in the battle Moses fought with the Egyptian

king. When he first asked permission for his people to be set free, Pharaoh responded by increasing the workload of the Israelites. When the Israelite foremen complained, he became angry. *"You are idle, you are idle"* he shouted (Exodus 5:17). Now he directed that instead of straw being provided ready to hand at the brickworks to mix with the clay, the Israelites should go out to find it themselves in the countryside.

Why did they mix straw with the clay? The bricks were made from the mud left behind when the River Nile retreated after its annual flooding. It was trodden underfoot to make it pliable, then the straw was mixed in, and it was shaped in rectangular moulds and left to dry in the sun. There are some fascinating cameos of the ancient Egyptian brick industry on the walls of a large rock tomb at Thebes, showing the whole process, from cutting the clay to building a wall with the finished product. The point about the straw is that when mixed with the mud, it gives a better-quality sun-dried brick. According to the experts, the straw produces gallo-tannic acids, which reduce shrinkage and increase the density, hardness, and strength of the brick. This detail adds life and colour to the Exodus account in the Bible, and shows that the chronicler really knew what he was talking about. He had seen it happen.



Scenes showing slaves making bricks, painted on the walls of the Theban tomb of Rakhmire, 15th Century BC (around the time of Moses)

The Finger of God

Moses' intervention on behalf of the Israelites followed a stormy course. To give Pharaoh a foretaste of the power of Israel's God, he performed one of the miracles God had given him to do. He threw his shepherd's rod on the ground. It promptly turned into a snake. But Pharaoh was not impressed, because his own magicians managed to produce a credible imitation. Moses then stretched out his rod over the Nile and its canals, turning the water a foul blood-red. It could not be drunk until it had been filtered through sand (Exodus 7:20, 24). Again, the court magicians copied the miracle with their enchantments. At the third demonstration, a week later, a vast population of frogs came out of the Nile and crawled or hopped everywhere in the streets of the capital. Still Pharaoh was unconvinced, for his sorcerers achieved the same results. It was developing into a contest between Israel's God, and the powers of Egypt.

We are told the names of Pharaoh's henchmen in the New Testament, in Paul's

letter to Timothy: *'Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith'* (2 Timothy 3:8). Paul was referring to false Christians who were setting themselves up as genuine apostles and leading astray factions in the church. *'But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men'* (v. 9).

The contest ended with the disgrace of Moses' opponents. The next miracle beat them. When Moses turned the dust of the earth into an epidemic of lice, crawling miserably and irritatingly over the flesh of every man in the court, Jannes and Jambres bowed out. *'This is the finger of God'*, they said (Exodus 8:19).

This remark is revealing. Many have managed over the centuries to persuade their contemporaries that they have supernatural powers. Simon the Sorcerer in the Acts of the Apostles is an example (Acts 8:9–10). Usually there are strong financial reasons for their deception. In his prophecy of the condition of the earth at

the time of his second coming, Jesus three times warned his disciples not to be taken in by deceivers. *'For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect'* (Matthew 24:24). God's greatest miracles are beyond the cleverest of conjurers. The disasters that He brought upon Egypt in quick succession are the only explanation possible for the fact that a nation of slaves escaped from their owners in one night, laden with booty. Pharaoh had come up against the finger of God.



Another miracle lies at the heart of the Christian's faith in God—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the only explanation possible for the dynamic spread of the Gospel within weeks of his crucifixion. If we patiently and lovingly keep His commandments, God will permit us to taste and feel His powers. *'They who wait*

for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint' (Isaiah 40:31). It is the wonderful promise of eternal life.

More Plagues

The distressing epidemic of lice was followed by five more disasters which struck at the economic wealth of Egypt. Flies polluted the land, a plague attacked the cattle, and boils broke out on people and beasts. After terrible hailstorms had devastated the crops, the regrowth was devoured by locusts that swarmed in from the eastern desert. These disasters, or 'plagues' as they are usually known, were not remarkable for their nature, or even their ferocity. Taken separately, they would happen again over the years. The miracle lay in the timing. Such a concentration of catastrophes could not be due to chance. However much the Egyptians prayed to their many gods, there was no stopping the God of Israel. The country was crippled. Years of maltreatment of Abraham's descendants were being paid for. *'They will be afflicted for four hundred years,'* God had told Abraham, *'but I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve'* (Genesis 15:13–14).

Soon Pharaoh's advisers were begging him to let the Israelites go free. *'Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?'* (Exodus 10:7). But he refused to listen.

Pharaoh's obstinacy was not entirely voluntary. The Bible says that God

'hardened his heart' (Exodus 10:20). Some people find it difficult to accept that God can manipulate a man's will. The fact is, Pharaoh had already proved himself an obtuse, selfish ruler without any regard for his fellow humans. From the start, he had set his merciless heart on getting every ounce of work he could from his Israelite slaves. It is understandable, then, that God should later freeze his attitude in a tight grip so that he could not change his mind. God is our Creator, and he can do with us as He wills. We none of us deserve life, or any of the blessings He grants even to the most wicked and rebellious people. By prolonging Pharaoh's resistance, God made the Israelites, the Egyptians, and the surrounding nations aware of His power, His care for the oppressed, and the uselessness of false gods.



In a telling passage in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul considers this very case—the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He comes to this conclusion: *'Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out*

of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use?' (Romans 9:21).

He teaches that we have free will to choose whether to obey or disobey God, but only by His permission. It is not our right. If He has given us the opportunity to read His Word and obey it, we must be grateful for this mercy, and seize it with both hands. There is no profit in questioning His treatment of others. God's wisdom and experience of human clay is far beyond our own. We shall find it is hard enough to imitate His patience and tolerance toward the undeserving. *'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,'* said Jesus, *'so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'* (Matthew 5:44–45). Those Egyptians had had long enough to repent. Now the day of reckoning had arrived. God was going to deliver His people from their chains.

David M Pearce

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Luke

LUKE WAS A DOCTOR (Colossians 4:14). As well as his Gospel he wrote the Acts of the Apostles. He records names, places and events with meticulous care, showing Jesus as both Son of God and Son of man.

His birth in Bethlehem was announced by the angels as ‘good news of great joy’ to all (Luke 2:10). Jesus was also proclaimed by the angel Gabriel as the heir to the throne in Jerusalem where David once ruled (1:32–33). He will bring peace among men (2:14). But before he takes his throne Jesus had to become a Saviour from sin.

Luke portrays Jesus as a man of prayer and records how he ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem’ where he was to die (9:51; 17:11; 19:28, 37, 41, 45).

Jesus foretold that the temple and the city of Jerusalem would be overthrown, which happened in 70 AD—yet he will return as King in a time of ‘distress of nations’ (21:25–28).

The resurrection of Christ was a bodily one. Luke records some of the meetings of the risen Lord with his disciples, including his appearance to two disciples as they walked to the village of Emmaus, west of Jerusalem (24:13–35). After his resurrection Jesus had ‘flesh and bones’—a real body (24:39)—and he ate with his disciples (24:41–43).

God’s Messengers—The Angels

Luke’s Gospel contains many accounts of appearances of angels: 1:11–19, 26–38; 2:9–15; 4:10; 22:43; 24:4, 23.



Angels always looked like men—there is no justification for the popular idea that they have wings!

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ Luke 1:32–33—see 2 Samuel 7:12–16; Isaiah 9:6–7.
- ◆ Luke 17:26–27—see Genesis 6:1–7; 7:1.
- ◆ Luke 21:27—see Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7.

Mighty God, Everlasting Father

LOOKING FORWARD in time to the life of Jesus Christ, the prophet Isaiah wrote:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his
shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of
peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his
kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this
(Isaiah 9:6–7).*

Among these majestic titles there are two which sometimes cause confusion. Why is it that Jesus is referred to as ‘Mighty God’ and ‘Everlasting Father’? This passage is often

used to support the idea that Jesus Christ is part of the Trinity—that is, he is God.

Mighty God

‘The Mighty God’ is a title of God Himself, as the following passage indisputably declares: ‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts (Jeremiah 32:17–18). As the title ‘Mighty God’ is given to Jesus, this could mean that Jesus is God. Or it could simply mean that the child to be born would be given divine status, God making him Mighty and Godly.

In the same way there have been occasions when angels have acted on God’s behalf and with His authority, and the Bible describes them as bearing God’s name. For example ‘Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for

he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him' (Exodus 23:21).

Everlasting Father

Again this title seems at first reading to be declaring that the son to be born will be the Eternal Father (God) in some way. There is an interesting note in the New English Translation of the Bible: *'This title must not be taken in an anachronistic Trinitarian sense. (To do so would be theologically problematic, for the "Son" is the messianic king and is distinct in his person from God the "Father").'* The Trinity teaches that God the Father and God the Son are distinct persons within the same Godhead, and the two have separate names, so one would not be given the name of the other. The New English Translation was produced by Trinitarians, and they acknowledge that this passage does not support the idea of the Trinity. Enough about what the passage does not mean; what does it mean?

When we read the term 'father' we are likely to think it is referring to God. This is understandable as common descriptions and titles of God involve the term 'Father'. However, consider how the term is used later in Isaiah: *'In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him,*

and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah' (Isaiah 22:20–21).

This passage is referring to the father-like qualities which Eliakim would show to God's people Judah. These are the same qualities which Jesus will show to God's people when *'the government shall be upon his shoulder'*. Jesus will be like this perpetually, which explains why he is described as the *'Everlasting Father'*.

The true relationship of Jesus Christ with his Father is summarised in 1 Timothy 2:5: *'There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'*

Isaiah 9 is a wonderful description of the majesty of Jesus Christ, which will be fully realised when he returns to earth to reign over the Kingdom of God. This is how the Apostle Paul puts it:

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11).

Stephen Blake

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

AT THE OUTSET, we need to realise that God loves the world with an everlasting love: *'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'* (John 3:16).

Salvation has come to humanity by means of Jesus Christ. It is the gift of God: *'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself'* (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Human Wickedness

God has given everyone the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. He has promised everlasting life to those who choose to follow His way. Sadly, we often make the wrong choice. We ignore God's principle of love.

Down the centuries, millions have died in countless wars. Wars start because of human pride and greed (James 4:1-3). God is not to blame.

Hunger, too, has brought suffering to millions. Yet one nation selfishly hoards food while people starve in another. We are responsible for this, not God.

Illegal 'hard' drugs are sweeping the world, with terrible consequences for millions. Money rules. The Bible says *'the*

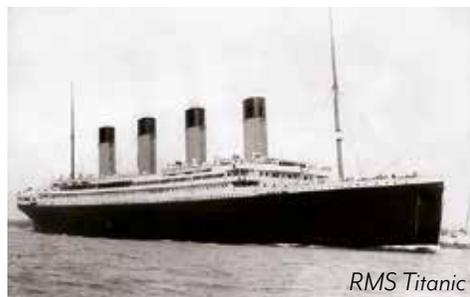
love of money is a root of all kinds of evils' (1 Timothy 6:10). Human greed is the cause.

We live in a violent age. The old are attacked, the young are abused, the helpless are exploited. We must acknowledge that we ourselves play a major part in the cause of suffering. But we are not solely responsible.

Acts of God

The power in nature is awesome. You cannot experience an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, a raging sea or a hurricane without feeling helpless.

Yet many accidents which are glibly called 'acts of God' could be avoided. For example, the 'unsinkable' ship Titanic hit an iceberg and sank on its maiden voyage in 1912. Hundreds of passengers drowned. It was tragic, but surely we cannot expect God to move icebergs out of the way?

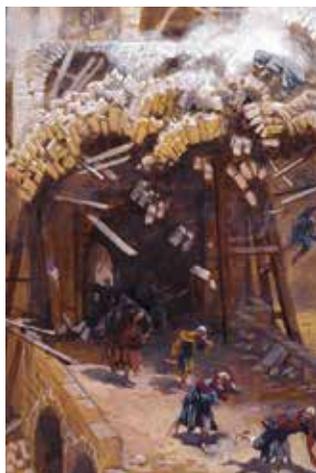


We live in a world of cause and effect. We know that we can drown in water or get burned in a fire. The universe is governed by natural laws. When we challenge these laws we shall not always escape. If God kept changing the laws of nature to protect us from ourselves, life on earth would be impossibly unpredictable.

It is generally agreed that natural disasters are increasing in frequency and severity, and it is generally believed that this is at least partly due to the effects of our own pollution on the planet.

However, there are disasters which we cannot foresee, and for which we can't be responsible. For example, sometimes rainfall fails, and harvests fail with it. God is the master of the universe, not humans (Job 38:1–4). We shall not, in this present age, fully understand God's mind. But we are all part of a common humanity. Just as God *'sends rain on the just and on the unjust'* (Matthew 5:45), so also natural disasters affect the innocent and guilty alike. God's power is great and we are weak. He does not give anyone a guarantee of security in this life.

It is sometimes assumed that when evil happens to someone, they must somehow deserve it. Jesus firmly refuted that notion. When innocent people died after a tower collapsed, he said *'those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish'* (Luke 13:4–5).



Collapse of the Tower of Siloam

When you experience or see suffering, don't wonder whether it was deserved, and don't feel helpless—let it remind you how vulnerable you are, and take the opportunity to search out the meaning of life.

Suffering and Sin

It is easy to assume that suffering is always evil. However, a universal principle is at work. The Bible teaches that suffering in itself is not evil. It is the outworking of a much deeper problem: suffering is the result of sin (the breaking of God's law). *'Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned'* (Romans 5:12).

When sin came into the world in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the perfect harmony between God and humans had been broken. We have been paying a heavy price ever since. Sin and death are the real problems we face. They help, in part, to explain the problem of suffering.

When Adam sinned, death became universal. There are no exceptions to it. There has only been one man who never sinned: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Because he was sinless God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:24).

But Jesus suffered terribly, and died an awful death. Why did God allow His Son to go through that? Jesus, the best of men, did not deserve to die. The answer to this question is at the very heart of the problem of suffering.



The
crucifixion

God allowed Jesus to die in order to save you and me. Because humankind had fallen away from God, we had to be reunited with God through the life and death of a sinless man.

The victory of Jesus over sin made everlasting life possible for all who seek forgiveness for their sins, and who keep God's commandments. The suffering of Jesus in obedience to God was the price of our redemption.

God also suffered as He watched Jesus die on the cross. If God and His Son both suffered, and yet were innocent, we should learn two things:

- a we should not expect to escape suffering
- b suffering is not just something bad: it can also have to do with victory over sin, and God's gift of everlasting life.

The suffering of Jesus is at the heart of our salvation. Because he died, we can live. The way to become a Christian is to repent of our sins and turn away from them, and then to be baptised, which is to be immersed in water. This is a symbol of Christ's death. When we are baptised, we declare that we want to join Christ in turning away from sin, and being raised to a new life. We want to be restored to harmony with God. We are grateful that he suffered for us, and we want to respond to his love.

It may be that we will suffer for our faith, but if we do then we are sharing in Christ's sufferings. It is thought that these words of the Apostle Peter were written to disciples who were undergoing the fearful persecution of Nero:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Can Suffering Have Value?

Yes, it certainly can. The suffering of Jesus had value: *'For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him' (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10)*. We are more likely to grow spiritually when life is hard than when it is easy.

The important thing is not living a long life, free from suffering. It is to follow God's way, even if it means suffering, so that we do not perish eternally. Faith in God and acceptance of suffering can lead you to everlasting life and eternal fellowship with Him. That is the ultimate reality of life, if you are a follower of Christ.

For the disciple of Christ, life's ups and downs are not random. Whatever life might throw at you, even the unpleasant things, you have the assurance that God is in control. *'And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28)*. The Bible compares God to a good parent:

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:10-11).

Rather than blame God for the suffering in a world which is not yet perfect, Christians will thank God that He has provided a hope

of a better life, and that He is preparing them for that better life.

Will Suffering Ever End?

Yes, suffering will end. God is the architect of the universe. He has a masterplan for humankind. He plans to cleanse the earth of sickness and sorrow, sin and suffering, disease and death. He will send Jesus back to the earth to make *'all things new'* (*Revelation 21:3-5*). God plans to fill the earth with His glory (*Numbers 14:21*).

The Apostle Paul told the Christians in Rome: *'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us'* (*Romans 8:18*). An understanding of the problem of suffering can help you towards God's Kingdom, if you give your life to God.

Truly, *'if we endure, we will also reign with him'* (*2 Timothy 2:12*).

Adapted from a Christadelphian Bible Mission leaflet



The Price of Slaves

WE ARE ALL PRETTY FAMILIAR with 'price inflation'. Generally the price of an item (a bottle of milk for example) will rise over time. It's not a universal rule—you can also get periods of stagflation or deflation, but in general prices rise.

You might be surprised to know that inflation has been around for a very long time. It was operating in Bible times. And you might be more surprised to learn that we can use price inflation to check that the Bible narrative is true and accurate. That it was written when it claims to have been written, and that the events fit the period to which they relate.



The Price of Milk

Let me illustrate how this works. Suppose for example I shared with you a newspaper article claiming to have been written in Britain in the 1960s and covering

events from that period. In this article it is mentioned in passing that milk cost £1.50 for 2 litres. It would be easy to show that this article was a fake—in this case on three counts. Firstly, in the 1960s decimal coinage had not been introduced into Britain so the price should have been quoted in pounds, shillings and pence. Secondly, at that time Britain was using imperial measures so milk was sold in pints not litres. And thirdly, the price is too high: a pint of milk in Britain actually cost an average of around nine pence in the 1960s. The price of milk in the purported article is very much higher than it should have been.

In the same way we can compare information on prices contained in the Bible with those from other texts and documents from the same era, and check whether they fit with these other external sources. This way we can confirm whether the Bible accounts were indeed written when they claim to have been written.

Silver Shekels

Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt for a price of 20 shekels of silver (Genesis 37:28). That's around 220 grams. We can check this against contemporary historical accounts. From the laws of Hammurabi, details of real life transactions at Mari in northern

Mesopotamia, and other old Babylonian documents, we learn that the average price of a slave in the Middle East around the time of Joseph (1600–1700 BC) was in the range of 15–30 shekels of silver.



Inflation was operating in these times too, and it seems to be the case that before this period slaves were cheaper and afterwards they got steadily dearer. In the 3rd dynasty of Ur (around 2200 to 2000 BC), 10 shekels was the commonest price for a slave. A few hundred years later, around 1300–1500 BC, documents from the Mesopotamian regions of Nuzi and Ugarit show that the regional slave price had risen to around 30 shekels. This fits perfectly with the Bible's Law of Moses which was written at this period, and according to which 30 shekels was the cost of replacing a slave (Exodus 21:32).

By 1000 BC male slaves in Assyria were fetching 50 to 60 shekels. This sheds light on an episode from the life of Menahem

king of Israel (around 750 BC), which is recorded in 2 Kings 15:20. When the king of Assyria invaded Israel Menahem bought him off with a gift of silver, which he paid for by raising a levy of 50 shekels each on the rich men of the land. It seems that each man was required to pay the price of a slave.

So the Bible's information in each case matches the relevant average for the time period. These are incidental facts and figures, which are irrelevant to the main narrative. If the accounts had been manufactured long after the time in which they were set (as critics of the Bible claim), it is very unlikely that the

figures would be accurate. They are further evidence that the Bible gives a true and accurate record of real people and events.

John Bland

This article is adapted from *On the reliability of the Old Testament* by K. A. Kitchen. published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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AM

According to the Gospels Jesus was crucified, but in Acts 5:30 Peter says that he was hanged on a tree. Did Peter get it wrong?

Ed

JESUS CHRIST died by crucifixion. This was a form of capital punishment which the Romans tended to use for the lowest criminals, and is possibly the most excruciating method of torture ever invented.

The victim of crucifixion was hung on a 'cross'. This is traditionally understood as a stake fixed upright in the ground with a cross-piece to which their hands were fixed. Actually when our English Bibles use the word 'cross', they are translating the original Greek word 'stauros' which simply means a stake or post. Some historians believe that crucifixion involved just the stake, without the cross-piece.

The cross is at the heart of the Gospel message. Not the object itself—that was not important, and anyway no one knows what it looked like—'the cross' is used as shorthand for the sacrifice of Christ: *'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God'* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

There are a few occasions in the New Testament on which people refer to the cross by a different Greek word, 'xylon'. English Bibles translate this word pretty consistently as 'tree'. So in Acts 5:30, 'The

God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.'

The Bible does not use words carelessly, there must be a reason why the cross is called a tree. The reason is explained in Paul's letter to the Galatians: *'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Galatians 3:13)*. He is referring to a clause in the Law of Moses: *'If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God'* (Deuteronomy 21:22–23).

No doubt one of the reasons why Jesus' enemies wanted him to be crucified was so that they could point to this clause and claim that he was cursed by God. But God used their dastardly scheme to bring salvation. When Jesus hung on the tree, the Law cursed an innocent man. In that third chapter of Galatians Paul is demonstrating that the Law of Moses has now been fulfilled—the way for you and me to come to God is to believe in the saving power of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again to bring life to the world.



Angels

HERE ARE THE NAMES of ten people who saw angels:

**MOSES, CORNELIUS, DAVID, GIDEON, HAGAR, JACOB, LOT,
MANOAH, MARY, NEBUCHADNEZZAR**

These are the places where
they saw the angels:

BABYLON

BEERSHEBA

CAESAREA

JERUSALEM

MAHANAIM

NAZARETH

OPHRAH

SINAI

SODOM

ZORAH

D	A	S	B	B	S	Z	L	F	V
G	J	B	A	J	W	O	Y	X	Z
H	E	Z	E	Q	B	R	D	M	K
T	R	B	R	H	E	A	A	O	U
E	U	D	A	Z	S	H	H	I	M
R	S	X	S	B	A	R	A	K	I
A	A	K	E	N	Y	N	E	E	I
Z	L	O	A	F	I	L	F	E	J
A	E	I	C	S	E	I	O	D	B
N	M	O	P	H	R	A	H	N	T

1. Find the place names in the grid.
2. Match the people with the places.

The following references will help: Genesis chapters 19, 21, 32; Judges chapters 6, 13; 1 Chronicles chapter 21; Daniel chapter 3; Luke chapter 1; Acts chapters 7, 10.

Anna Hart



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