

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Thankfulness (p. 3)

Why We Can Believe in Jesus Christ (p. 10)

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

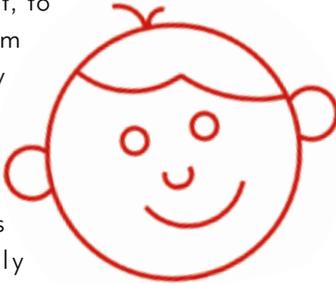
Thankfulness

PSYCHOLOGISTS tell us that being thankful is good for our health. It actually has measurable benefits, from strengthening your immune system to lowering your risk of heart disease. The very act of counting your blessings and expressing thankfulness will boost your wellbeing—even if you don't actually have anyone to be thankful to.

I have to admit, to me it does seem bizarre to say thank you if there's nobody listening. But thankfulness comes easily and naturally when you understand two basic truths: firstly, God is the giver of all we have (James 1:17); and secondly, God is always listening (Philippians 4:6). This is just one of the many ways in which faith in God makes so much sense.

It's no wonder then that thankfulness is presented in the Bible as a fundamental aspect of life:

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!
(1 Chronicles 16:34).



Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
(Psalm 33:2).

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you
(1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

A prayer of thanks can take many forms. It can be silent or spoken out loud, or sung, alone or in company. It can be planned or spontaneous. You can thank God for the view from a mountaintop, or the strength to climb a flight of stairs. A prayer of thanks can be an exclamation of gratitude for the blessings of life, or for a specific event.

Jesus Christ set the example of giving thanks before meals (for example Matthew 15:36, 26:27). And of course, the ultimate debt of gratitude we owe to God is for Jesus Christ himself: *'Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ'* (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Give Thanks for All Things

Think about those words quoted above, *'give thanks in all circumstances'*. They are words of the Apostle Paul. Did he perhaps lead a particularly easy life? You and I know that our lives can be difficult, stressful and painful. Sometimes gratitude doesn't come easily.

Paul did not lead an easy life—but his life, as recorded for us in the book of Acts, is a brilliant example of how to be grateful even when things appear to be going wrong. For example chapter 16 relates how he and his friend Silas were preaching in Philippi. They were arrested, beaten and thrown into prison. What did they do? *'About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them'* (v. 25). There was no self-pity or misery, they praised God in the dungeon. The record goes on to relate how they were miraculously released, and the outcome was the conversion of the jailer and his family to the Christian faith.



Later Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Philippi, who would well remember the example he and Silas set that night: *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God'* (Philippians 4:6).

Their ordeal in the prison was awful—but God used it for good, and so Paul thanked God for it. There's a hugely encouraging verse in another of Paul's letters: *'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). Think about this. If we belong to God, then He is watching over us. Everything that happens to us is under His control. It may well not be pleasant—the Bible abounds with accounts of faithful men and women who endured illness, misery and tragedy, which they would not have understood at the time, but in the end we see how God's purpose worked out in their lives.

James urges: *'Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness'* (James 1:2). And in another of Paul's letters we have the account of another of his ordeals: *'A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me'* (2 Corinthians 12:7). It's unclear exactly what this 'thorn in the flesh' was, but it was a grief to Paul and he begged the Lord to take it away. It was not taken away, and so he accepted it: *'For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong'* (v. 10).

Everything we have is a gift from God. The good things in life, and also its difficulties. One of the greatest benefits of the Christian life is to be able to recognise this, and be thankful for it.

The Journey Begins

IMAGINE THE ATMOSPHERE at school on the last day of the summer term. There is a special air of bubbling excitement as the books are closed for the last time and the sweet freedom of the holiday beckons.

Imagine, then, the feelings of the people of Israel, as Moses led them out of Egypt. All their lives they had slaved under the unremitting burdens of the Egyptians, with not even a break at weekends to make life bearable. To escape from that miserable bondage was living out a dream. Moreover, Moses promised them that before long they would cross the desert and take over a prosperous land, *‘flowing with milk and honey’* (*Exodus 3:8*), where each of them would have their own smallholding and work for themselves. It really was too good to be true. The laughter, dancing, and happiness were a totally new experience for God’s suffering people. On that first memorable night they camped out under

the stars at a place they named Succoth. The great holiday had begun. ‘Succoth’ means ‘shelters’ or ‘booths’. Even today, thousands of years afterwards, Jews build shelters of branches outside their houses once a year and sleep out in the open to commemorate those days in the wilderness. The festival is still called Succoth, after the booths that formed their temporary homes.

In passing, the writer of Exodus singles out a strange but moving sight that impressed him as that great company marched out of the land where they had lived for hundreds of years. He noticed an ancient coffin, carried along in the crowd. Decades before, Joseph, the great Jewish Prime Minister of Egypt, had asked a deathbed favour from his weeping relatives. *“God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob”*, he said. *‘Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely*

visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here” (Genesis 50:24–25). When the time came, they remembered their promise. Joseph's dying faith was vindicated. God had visited His people, and Joseph's descendants carried his remains with them as they pressed eastwards, leaving the land of bondage behind.

Terror at the Red Sea

On the third day, everything started to go wrong. Instead of turning north up the sea coast along the main traders' route to Canaan, Moses swung inland, and pitched camp near the Red Sea. The place where they stopped cannot be identified precisely, but the position was such that they had a broad stretch of water in front of them, and high ground to one side, so that they lay trapped on a wedge of land between the two (Exodus 14:9). By the third day, Pharaoh and his people were beginning to tire of having to do the chores without their Hebrew slaves. *‘What is this we have done’,* they said, *‘that we have let Israel go from serving us?’* (Exodus 14:5). Pharaoh decided to fetch them back. He got ready his war chariot, assembled 600 charioteers together with a strong force of footmen and cavalry, and set off in pursuit. Reaching the encampment late in the afternoon,

he decided to wait until the morning to fight. He knew the Hebrews were trapped in front of him like sheep in a fold. For their part, Moses' people were terrified. Unarmed, strangers to war, encumbered by their families and belongings, they had no chance in a battle with Pharaoh's hand-picked warriors. With the sea and the mountain hemming them in, they could not even run away. Bitterly they cursed Moses for his terrible blunder. *‘Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us,’* they cried, *‘in bringing us out of Egypt?’* (v. 11).

Moses in turn called upon God, desperate for help and advice. The answer he received was a classic one. It rings through the centuries to bring comfort and hope to all who really love God, and who find themselves with no human resources left. *‘Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD’* (v. 13). Following His instructions, Moses stretched out his legendary rod over the sea, and then retired to rest in his tent.

That night a fierce east wind blew up, beating back the water of the Red Sea. By morning, the waters seemed to have turned solid. *‘The deeps congealed in the heart of the sea’* says Exodus 15:8. This exposed

a channel across to the other side. This strange and awe-inspiring sight stunned the shivering Israelites as they crawled from their tents at dawn. Recovering, they hastily grabbed their belongings and followed their bold leader to the safety of the opposite shore.



As soon as Pharaoh's scouts reported that the Israelites had escaped, he sent in his officers after them. But their chariot wheels slithered and stuck fast in the salty mire. When Moses stretched out his rod from the other side, the waters collapsed over Pharaoh's mighty host, drowning men and horses in a maelstrom of foam. *'Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians'*, wrote the chronicler, *'and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore'* (Exodus 14:30).

The dramatic deliverance of the Israelites from their enemies reverberated round the Egyptian empire. Forty years later,

when Joshua sent spies ahead to Canaan to help plan his conquest, the woman of Jericho they interviewed reported *'we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you'* (Joshua 2:10). The news of that deliverance was still keen in people's memory. It became a part of Israelite history, like the Battle of Waterloo to an Englishman. There are at least six references to it in the Psalms, five in the book of Isaiah, and others in Nehemiah, Micah, and Zechariah. It is also mentioned four times in the New Testament.

Deliverance From Sin

Two passages stand out, with a surprising twist to them, and worth our curiosity. One is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he says: *'Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea'* (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). The other reference is in Micah chapter 7, a prophetic passage but with its basis in the past: *'He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea'* (Micah 7:19).

You might have thought that baptism was a New Testament concept, reserved for Christians. How then were the Israelites baptised into Moses in the Red Sea? The second reference gives us a clue. The Israelites, says Micah, left their sins behind in the Red Sea. That is very much a part of Christian baptism. For example, when the men of Jerusalem repented at the apostle Peter's preaching, and asked him what they should do, he told them *'Repent and*

be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:38). 'Rise and be baptized', Saul of Tarsus was likewise commanded, 'and wash away your sins' (Acts 22:16). These writers seem to be saying that the crossing of the Red Sea was not just an eleventh-hour rescue. It had a deeper symbolic meaning as well. It marked a point of departure from the evil and darkness of their old lives in Egypt, and a new beginning as the people of God.



When Moses first came to deliver the Israelites, they worshiped idols (Acts 7:43). Their faith was dead. By his preaching, and the wonders he worked, they began to believe in God. They yearned to be set free from their slavery, and Moses prepared the way —through the blood of the Passover lamb, and the path through the sea. The parallel with Christian baptism is perfect. As would-be disciples, we come to realise our slavery to sin, and we desire to be released. Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered his own blood for our redemption. We must believe in him, and break with our old life in the water of baptism, washing away our sins. Baptism is the answer of faith. The decision takes courage, as it did for the

Israelites when they set off through those towering walls of water. They put their lives in God's hands, as we do with our future when we decide to go through with that vital immersion. 'By faith the people crossed the Red Sea' (Hebrews 11:29). But once on the other side, like the Israelites, we can sing and dance for joy. Our slavery has ended. In Jesus' stirring words, 'Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:34-36).

David M Pearce

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Acts

THE WRITER IS Luke, who reminds us that he has previously written—in his Gospel—of ‘*all that Jesus began to do and teach*’ (Acts 1:1). The book of Acts starts with Jesus’ ascension to heaven (1:9), and shows how Jesus was still at work after his ascension in the spread of the Gospel by his followers.

Chapters 2–12 show how, with God’s power (the Holy Spirit), Christ’s apostles preached the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. The preaching was so effective that thousands believed and were baptized (2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24). In Jesus’ name the apostles also performed miracles. Their message always concerned ‘*the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*’ (8:12; 19:8; 28:23, 31). It was a message rooted in Old Testament history and God’s promises to the fathers of Israel, but it was now based on the work of Jesus Christ and not the Law of Moses. Moreover, it was a faith that was open to Gentiles as well as to Jews. Die-hard Jews opposed the preaching of this Gospel; even among Christian converts there were some (‘Judaisers’) who wanted to combine their new faith in Christ with adherence to Jewish practices.

Apostle to the Gentiles

Paul, an educated Jew, began as a zealous persecutor of Christ’s followers. He was converted after seeing a vision of the

risen Christ on the road to Damascus (chapter 9). Having believed and been baptized, he became Christ’s appointed apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8).



His three ‘missionary journeys’—preaching campaigns in Asia and Europe—and his subsequent voyage to Rome are vividly related in chapters 13 to 28. Acts stops short at Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. (Perhaps Luke intended to write a sequel, carrying on from where Acts leaves off.) From his letters we can piece together some of the later events of Paul’s life.

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ Acts 3:22; 7:37—see Deuteronomy 18:15.
- ◆ Acts 1:3; 3:21; 8:12; 28:31—see Mark 1:14; 11:10; Luke 11:2.
- ◆ Acts 17:31—see Psalm 96:13; Daniel 7:27; Revelation 11:15

Why We Can Believe in Jesus Christ

MOST SERIOUS HISTORIANS agree that Jesus of Nazareth really did live in Israel, some 2000 years ago. His life and work are well recorded in contemporary historical records. Here we will consider two sources of evidence: the records of the Bible's New Testament, and the writings of secular commentators. We also want to consider why his resurrection from the dead changed the world.

The Gospels

The four New Testament Gospels were written in the years following Jesus' life on earth, and in all probability before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. We can see this from the local landmarks they mention, from the ruling figures they mention, and the events they reference which are well documented elsewhere. The Gospels are eyewitness records, written well within the lifetimes of people who experienced Jesus' work first-hand. Some of these people would have been friendly to the cause of Christianity, most would have been hostile to it. Yet they did not challenge the Gospels because they were demonstrably accurate

accounts of what Jesus did. Let's consider them one by one.

John

John was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. He was called towards the start of Jesus' work and was with him throughout. In fact, he was one of Jesus' closest three disciples, and along with Peter and James was even

privy to events that none of the others saw (see Mark 5:37, 9:2, 13:3). He explained that his record was an eyewitness account, for example:

He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe (John 19:35).

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things,

and we know that his testimony is true (John 21:24).

In the second quotation we see his fellow disciples confirming that his eyewitness account was true and accurate. This makes for compelling evidence. What is more, we still have fragments of the Gospel



Portrait of Mark

of John which date back to earliest times. In the John Rylands Library in Manchester, there is a papyrus fragment of the Gospel which was copied within 100 years—maybe less—of John writing it.

Matthew

Matthew was another of Jesus' twelve disciples. He was called part way through Jesus' ministry (Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27). This means that he was with Jesus for most of his work; from the time of his calling he lived and worked with those who, like John, were with Jesus throughout. When he wrote his Gospel, he had access to these people to supplement his own experience and was able to write a comprehensive account.

Mark

Mark played a small part in the Gospels. He was not one of the twelve but he was there for some of the events, especially in Jerusalem. He was a young man during Jesus' ministry, he became a Christian and would spend his life in the early church with those who saw all of Jesus' activities. Just like Matthew, he could use these eyewitnesses and compare their accounts to write his Gospel.

Luke

Luke does not feature in the Gospel records and it seems he became a Christian after the time of Jesus' work. He also lived

and worked with those who were direct eyewitnesses, and he used his scientific training to write a forensic account:

...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (Luke 1:3–4).

So, in the Gospel records we have four independent accounts. As well as being inspired by God, they were written either from personal experience or with reference to eyewitnesses. They corroborate each other and were not challenged by those who witnessed the events. They are reliable accounts of Jesus' life and work.

Secular Historians

Jesus lived during the Roman empire, a period well documented by writers of the time. This means that we have several writers from outside the Bible who record the existence of Jesus and his followers. These were not supporters of Christianity, in fact they were generally

opposed to it, so they had no reason to make up evidence to support Jesus' existence.

Josephus

Flavius Josephus was formerly a Jewish military commander who turned historian



Portrait of Josephus

when captured by the Romans. He wrote several historical works which have been proven accurate through archaeological work and other records of the time. His *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. 93AD), mentions Jesus, John the Baptist, and James the brother of Jesus who led the early church in Jerusalem. There has been some debate about what he said about Jesus (it's suggested that it may have been censored by Christian scribes), but Jesus is undeniably present in the record.

Now, there was about this time, Jesus... a doer of wonderful works... a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure; Pilate... condemned him to the cross... Christians named from him... Book XVIII, III, 3.

John the Baptist... Herod slew him, who was a good man... Book XVIII, V, 2.

...the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James... Book XX, IX, 1.

Tacitus

Publius Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman historian and politician who wrote a great deal, and is regarded by many modern scholars as the greatest historian of Roman times. He wrote the following in about 116AD, about the Christians in the Roman empire:

...called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered

the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus (Annals 15.44).

Pliny the Younger

Formally named Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, Pliny the Younger was a lawyer, author, and magistrate in Rome. In a letter to Emperor Trajan in about 112AD, he wrote the following about the Christians:

They were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ... When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—ordinary food.

There are other references from the time, but these secular historians make clear, consistent references to Jesus, to other characters from the New Testament, and to the practices of Jesus' followers, which were established in the New Testament.

Why It Matters

The Gospel records and the secular historians we have considered all concur that Jesus was a real person,

whose life and work are well documented in history. That's why his existence is not doubted by serious historians today. But is that all, and does it matter to you and me?

The Gospel writers all record very clearly that Jesus rose from the dead, on the third day after he was crucified. Their accounts



Portrait of Jesus Christ

are very detailed, covering the events of the resurrection and people meeting Jesus afterwards. You can read these in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 21 and John 20–21. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, the Apostle Paul mentions these eyewitnesses—on one occasion there were over 500 at once! This was no illusion or mistake.

Add to this the facts that no body was ever found or produced (the Romans and the Jews who were doing their best to defeat the new religion of Christianity would have produced it if they could), and that those who met the risen Jesus were prepared to suffer and die for what they knew. The resurrection of Jesus is attested by history and by many eyewitnesses.

This is where it becomes important to us, living some 2000 years later. The Bible tells us about the important implications of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. For example:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:21–22).

He [God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, so

God will raise his followers from the dead, and will grant the faithful eternal life. Jesus will return to set up God’s Kingdom on the earth, which he will rule for his Father as king and judge. This is why he is described as both Lord and Christ (‘anointed’), and his resurrection is the guarantee that God will make this happen.

We can believe in Jesus Christ, a real person who lived and worked, was crucified and who rose from the dead. He is coming back to rule God’s Kingdom on Earth. He invites us to live for ever in that Kingdom—read more to find out how!

Andrew Hale

g l ea n ing s

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The Bombardier Beetle



A BOMBARDIER is a type of soldier. The bombardier beetle was given its name because of the intricate and deadly mechanism in its tail with which it defends itself.

At the end of the beetle's tail is a tube ¹, which is basically a gun barrel. Behind the barrel is a chemical factory. A pair of glands ² manufacture hydroquinone and hydrogen peroxide, which are stored in

reservoirs ³. When the beetle wants to open fire these chemicals are loaded into a combustion chamber filled with water ⁴, and mixed with two other chemicals—catalases and peroxidases—which are secreted by glands in the transfer duct ⁵. This causes a reaction which instantaneously heats the water in the combustion chamber and causes it to be ejected as a boiling spray of noxious steam. The spray can reach to 200 times the beetle's length, and can be aimed in any direction with pinpoint accuracy.

It is a superbly designed weapon. It only works because all four chemicals are kept apart under normal conditions, then mixed in exactly the right order and exactly the right proportions when the beetle wants to fire. If any part of the mechanism did not function precisely as it does, either the weapon would not work—in which case, what's the use of having it?—or the beetle would blow itself up.

Desperate atheists have invented ingenious and implausible explanations as to how the bombardier beetle might have evolved by chance. For me, I think it makes much more sense to believe what God says in His book: *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). How about you?

Ken Clark

Saving Your Life

CONSIDER THIS: if you were suffering with a life-threatening illness and you were offered a medicine which was a known cure—would you not take it?



The Bible offers a cure that will save your life. And more than that, this cure can give you eternal life.

How can this be, you might ask? Let's look at how the Bible, the Word of God, promises eternal life in a perfect world. To do this we must examine a few passages to see what this entails.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not

believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:16–18).

Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to save people. People are sinful, that is they are naturally inclined to disobey the commandments of God. The Gospel message which Jesus preached consists of the good news of God's coming Kingdom on earth, the forgiveness of sins, resurrection from the dead and the hope of eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

God's plan for humankind could only be realised through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He himself said so: '*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*' (John 14:6). All who hear his message and desire to follow him must take his words into their hearts, and obey his commandments.

The Rich Young Man

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16–17).

The man asked which commandments, and in the next verse Jesus gave him a list, which was distilled from Exodus 20:12–16 and Deuteronomy 5:16–20. But he omitted

one of the principal commandments: *'You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's' (Exodus 20:17)*. His reason for doing so was because he knew that this was the problem of this particular man. So when he said *'All these I have kept. What do I still lack?' (v. 20)*, Jesus told him: *'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (v. 21)*. The man could not do this (v. 22). His riches were a stumbling-block in his life, which was preventing him from obtaining the eternal life he sought.



To obtain God's gift of eternal life, we must be willing to obey Him. We see it is a constant refrain throughout the Bible. Sadly, people throughout history have found this hard to do—because our natural tendency is to 'go own own way' and do what we want to do rather than what God wants us to do.

Few Are Chosen

Not everyone will be saved. In Matthew 22:1–14 Jesus told a parable about a wedding feast. The invited guests did not want to attend, so the invitation went out to all and sundry (v. 10); then there was a guest who was improperly dressed, he should not have been there, and was ejected from the feast (vs. 11–13). *'Many are called, but few are chosen' (v. 14)*.

Not everyone who hears the Gospel responds positively to it, as illustrated by another of Jesus' parables in Luke 8:5–8:

"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

People had difficulty hearing and understanding his words, so he explained (vs. 9–15): the seed is the word of God. The path is a hard heart where the seed cannot germinate; the rock is a place where the soil is shallow, and the seed germinates but then withers because it doesn't have good roots; in the thorny ground there is too much else going on, and the seed fails to bear fruit. But the good ground is an *'honest and good heart'* where the seed can germinate, grow and bear fruit.

A true believer must be right with God in their life. It is all too easy to merely pay lip service to our faith. When King Saul had made a half-hearted attempt to serve God, the prophet Samuel said to him *'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams'* (1 Samuel 15:22).

The Narrow Door

Someone asked Jesus, *'Lord, will those who are saved be few?'* (Luke 13:23). He replied, *'Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able'* (v. 24). The word "strive" here is translated from a Greek word which means "to agonise": the true Christian life is not easy to live. To



emphasise this further, Jesus said anyone who chooses to follow him must *'take up his cross'* (Luke 9:23).

He also warned that discipleship should not be taken on lightly, it needs commitment:

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish' (Luke 14:28–30).

The Reward of Endurance

Despite the hardship which can be part of the life of a disciple of Christ, there is the prospect of great rewards if they endure to the end, the greatest being everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul says that there are very great and wonderful prospects ahead for believers who attain eternal life: *'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him'* (1 Corinthians 2:9). The Lord Jesus Christ declared *'Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates'* (Revelation 22:12–14).

Eternal life, immortality in the kingdom of God, is the ultimate prize. We must strive for it, but we cannot earn it—it will not be attained by our own merit, but it will be given by the grace of God—*'For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God'* (Ephesians 2:8).

Grahame A Cooper

AW

In issue 1650 you asked the question 'Does the Bible encourage violence?' Yes it does. Proverbs 23:13: 'Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.' The Bible encourages violence against children!

Ed

WHY IS IT THAT parents and carers—those who should be looking after children—become violent towards them? There may be various reasons. Life can be stressful, and sometimes people will vent their frustration on their children (because they're an easy target). Children can be exasperating and can drive their parents to lash out at them. There are some people who simply take satisfaction in bullying those who cannot retaliate. Whatever the reason, violence against children is always horrible.

The Bible advocates physical discipline. (Often this is known by the general term 'smacking'.) This is entirely different from violence, and it is unhelpful when the two are confused.

Children have certain fundamental needs. Among these are the need to feel safe, and the need to know that they are loved unconditionally. Another fundamental need is to know the boundaries of behaviour: this is essential for social development (not to mention spiritual development). In order to be able to operate in a family or any other social environment, we need to know what is right and wrong, and the earlier in life we learn



these standards the easier our experience will be. The fact is that for some children at least, physical discipline is a very good way of learning. Whether or not you like this, we have it on the authority of our Creator: *'Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him'* (Proverbs 22:15).

Physical discipline is not an adult lashing out in anger or frustration. It is not administered in order to make the adult feel better. Its purpose is not to dominate or humiliate the child. If any of these are the case, then it might justifiably be termed violence. Physical discipline is the measured and consistent enforcement of rules.

When a parent disciplines a child they are following the example of God, Who is a father to His children. The letter to the Hebrews contains encouragement for First Century Christians who were enduring trials in their lives:

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?... 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 12:7-11).

Were They Real People?

THE NAMES OF SOME Bible characters sound odd to us. Here is a list of 14 such names. Only eight of them refer to real

people: the other six are names of false idols. The names of the eight real people are in the word search. Identify them.

BAAL	K S Z L L P H	MOLECH
BEL	B U F B U Z A	MUSHI
BUZ	M D R A P Y M	NEBO
DAGON	P O H I E F N	PUAH
DODO	C D H C O N E	PUL
ENOCH	I O L K A A B	URI
HAM	M U S H I S D	ZEUS

Anna Hart



A panel from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III which is in the British Museum. According to its inscription it depicts Jehu king of Israel giving tribute to the king of Assyria. It's thought to be the only contemporary portrait we have of an Israelite king. Jehu's life is recorded in the Bible in 2 Kings 9 & 10.

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