

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

'You Have Died' (p. 3)

Justified By Faith (p. 7)

Bible Prophecy (p. 15)

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 humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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'You Have Died'

THAT'S WHAT the Apostle Paul wrote to his fellow believers (Colossians 3:3). Not a cheery message, on the face of it. But actually it's a message of fundamental importance and immense joy, which goes to the very heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

'Christ died for our sins' (1 Corinthians 15:3). The love of God in giving His Son Jesus Christ, and the love of His Son in laying down his perfect life as a sacrifice, are at the centre of God's plan of salvation for you and me. The Christian Gospel is about death—and rebirth. Christ did not just die, he rose to life again—his mortal nature defeated, never to die again. The Gospel's message for us is that we can share in Christ's victory. As the Apostle Paul continues, *'Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Corinthians 15:20).*



Buried With Him

To be a follower of Christ is to share his life. And it begins with sharing his death. Paul explains in another letter how it works:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Romans 6:3).

This is why the Christian life starts with baptism. We come to believe in God and His Gospel of salvation, centred in Jesus Christ. We repent of our past life, and declare that from now on we want to follow Christ, not our own way. Then we are baptised: a simple but hugely powerful ritual, which involves full immersion in water. Baptism is a symbol of death and resurrection. We put to death our old way of life, and emerge from the water a new person, a follower of Christ and a child of God.

This is how Paul describes his own Christian life in another letter: *'I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).* Consider these words. Paul's conversion and baptism were an absolute turning point for him. His old life was dead. He now had a new master, to whom he was so whole-heartedly devoted that he could say, in effect, it's not my life any more but his. Every turn in his life now, every decision he now took, was motivated

by his faith in the crucified and risen Son of God. And of course the Christian life is not an academic exercise—at its core is an emotional response to the realisation that Christ died for Paul, and for you and me.

Hidden With Him

That's why Paul said, '*You have died*'. This is the context:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory' (Colossians 3:1-4).

There are two directions in which we can look—down or up. We can focus on the things 'on earth', the world around us which is largely godless, its preoccupations and entertainments, its philosophies, its worries and its fears. Or we can focus on Jesus Christ. '*Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us' (Romans 8:34).* His work was not over when he died and rose again. He is now in heaven. To those who belong to him he is their friend and master and High Priest:

'Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Hebrews 4:14-16).



Glorified With Him

To 'set your mind on things above' is to have a life with meaning and purpose; to have peace of mind, knowing that you're never alone; and to live in excited anticipation of the future. Jesus Christ will not remain in heaven for ever, but will return to establish God's Kingdom: '*When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet' (Hebrews 10:12-13).*

Those who have died to their old way of life and whose lives are '*hidden with Christ in God*', are waiting for the next phase of their lives to start, when by God's grace they '*will appear with him in glory*'.

Questions? Comments?
We'd love to hear from you!

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Four Resurrections

Lazarus

A look at the four accounts in the Gospels of people who were raised from the dead.

MARY AND MARTHA and their brother Lazarus were friends of Jesus, and he often stayed in their house in Bethany when he was teaching in nearby Jerusalem. One day Lazarus fell sick, and his sisters were sufficiently concerned to send a message to Jesus. The account is in John chapter 11.

At the time Jesus was over the east side of the River Jordan. Rather than immediately travelling to Bethany, he and his disciples stayed where they were. Two days later they heard the sad news that Lazarus had died.

Jesus said to his disciples, *'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him'* (v. 11). This is only the second time this expression is used in the Gospels, and the disciples didn't understand. The first time we read this term is when Jairus' daughter had died, and Jesus had said, *'The child is not dead but sleeping'* (Mark 5:39). To Jesus who has the power of God to raise the dead, death is merely sleep.

Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him" (John 11:14–15).

The raising of Lazarus was to be evidence for the disciples of Jesus' authority.

Dead and Buried

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he found that his friend had been buried four days previously, and there were a lot of Jews who had come from Jerusalem to comfort the sisters. When Martha knew that Jesus was on his way, she went to meet him, saying, *'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'* (v. 21). (And this is probably exactly the reason why Jesus had not travelled to Bethany as soon as he had heard that Lazarus was unwell.)



Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (vs. 23–25).

Jesus obviously meant that her brother was going to be raised that same day, but

she was unable to grasp this, and thought that he was talking about the resurrection that will happen when Jesus returns to earth.

Martha then went back home and told her sister Mary that the Teacher had come, and wanted to talk to her.

So Mary then went out to find Jesus, and said exactly the same words as her sister had said. He asked her to show him where Lazarus had been buried, and we read that Jesus felt so sad that he wept. (One of only two times we read in the Bible of Jesus crying.) But some of the unkind onlookers muttered that surely this man who had given sight to the blind could have prevented Lazarus' death.

When they arrived, he saw that the tomb was a cave with a large stone rolled over the opening. This of course was very much like the tomb in which Jesus himself was to be buried. He asked them to remove the stone, but Martha remonstrated, thinking that the smell of death would be unpleasant. Jesus then said a prayer out loud, so that the Jews would hear him thanking God for giving him the power, and he called out to the dead man, '*Lazarus, come out*' (v. 43).

To the absolute amazement of the crowd the dead man appeared at the entrance of the cave. He was still wrapped in grave clothes, so Jesus said, '*Unbind him, and let him go*' (v. 44).



What joy would come to the household in Bethany that night! The sisters' brother was alive again.

Alive Again

This is not only a factual account, but a story with many lessons for us. In Romans chapter 6 Paul tells us that when we are baptized it is like a

death and a resurrection:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

When we are baptized we start a new life. We cannot walk alone. Jesus told the Jews to free Lazarus from the tightly bound grave clothes. A new child of God needs help from their family as they commence their life in Christ.

David Simpson

To be continued.

Justified By Faith

THEREFORE, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

What does 'justified' mean? As far as the Bible is concerned, justification is the action of declaring or making righteous in the sight of God. It carries the idea of forgiveness of sins. The Apostle Paul puts it beautifully: *'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin' (Romans 4:7–8).*

A Consistent Principle

Teaching about justification by faith is not only found in the Bible's New Testament, but also in the Old Testament.

- In the Bible's first book we read that God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).
- Job sought to justify himself before God, but in the end he renounced his own righteousness and God accepted him (Job 42:1–6).
- King David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), and yet he spoke of the blessing of justification: *'Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Psalm 32:1); 'Enter not into judgement with your*

servant, for no one living is righteous before you' (Psalm 143:2).

- The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the Lord's servant (Jesus Christ) who would *'make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities' (Isaiah 53:11).*
- The prophet Habakkuk teaches us that *'the righteous shall live by his faith' (Habakkuk 2:4).*

The subject is brought into sharp focus by the Lord Jesus, who told a parable of a Pharisee who was self-righteous and a tax collector who recognised that he was a sinner in need of mercy (Luke 18:9–14).



He told the parable to *'some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt' (v. 9).* In conclusion he said of the tax collector, *'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the*

one who humbles himself will be exalted' (v. 14).

Justification by faith is a teaching to be found in the whole Bible, but it is perhaps seen most clearly in the Apostle Paul's letters, and particularly in his letters to the Romans and Galatians. This is how he summarises the theme in Romans:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16–17).



In Galatians Paul contrasts the truth that we are justified by faith, with the idea that we can justify ourselves by following the Law of Moses:

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16).

He goes on to remind his readers that Abraham was justified by his faith approximately 430 years before the Law of Moses was given (Galatians 3:17).

Faith and Works

As a matter of fact, the function of the Law of Moses was not to enable people to be justified—its standards were so high that no one could keep it properly. Its function was to teach what is right and wrong, and therefore to point out that we all fail to meet God's standard of righteousness by our own efforts: *'For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin' (Romans 3:20).*

Justification by faith in Christ is the opposite of justification by our own works of obedience to the Law. Paul continues, *'But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Romans 3:21–24).*

The whole purpose of the Law was to teach our need for salvation. It was never intended to save us. The ultimate reason that we are justified is Christ, *'who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Romans 4:25).*

So if we are not justified by our own efforts, do we need to even try? The principle of justification by faith affirms that acts of love and good works necessarily follow from our faith, as the fruit of our faith. As Paul

says, *'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6)*. And James explains how the principle worked in the life of Abraham: *'You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone' (James 2:22–24)*.

Genuine and active faith must result in good works.

Justification for All

If we are justified by faith, then it doesn't matter who we are—justification is available for everyone. *'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Romans 3:23–24)*.

There were those in Paul's day who were saying that in order to be saved all believers must become Jews. Paul counters this

belief: *'Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith' (vs. 29–30)*. Justification before God by faith results in the creation of a family of faith that includes all believers, both Jewish and Gentile.

Justification by faith brings glory to God. Paul says this of Abraham's faith: *'No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised' (Romans 4:20–21)*. So when we, like Abraham, acknowledge the promises of God are true and trust that God will keep them, we give Him particular glory through Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, we see that this great principle of justification by faith does not draw attention to ourselves and our faith, but rather to Christ and God's great work of redemption through him. *'To him be glory for ever. Amen' (Romans 11:36)*.

Bahar Raesi



Rahab—Faith and Works

THE APOSTLE JAMES is considering faith and works. It is not sufficient to have only faith in God, it needs to be shown by what we do. He draws two examples from the Old Testament. One is the revered patriarch Abraham (James 2:22–24), and the other is an unlikely example—the Canaanite prostitute Rahab. *‘Was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?’ (v. 25).*

Why choose Rahab? Let’s look at the background. The nation of Israel had left Egypt and was about to enter the Promised Land. Their leader Joshua sent spies over the River Jordan into the nearest city, Jericho. The plan to remain undetected involved going to a house where there would be lots of men coming and going. However, the king of Jericho had been informed and demanded that Rahab hand them over (Joshua 2:1–3).

Not being an Israelite, Rahab had no reason to care about the spies. But instead of giving them up, she did something unexpected and incredibly courageous. She hid the spies and lied to her king (vs. 4–7). Why did she jeopardise her own life to save some enemies who were spying out her city? Rahab told them:



I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you... As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath (vs. 9–11).

Rahab had heard about God’s miraculous dealings with Israel and she understood that He had given them the land of Canaan. As marvellous as this is, how does it relate to James’ inspired argument about faith and works?

All the Canaanites saw the advancing Israelite army and knew that their powerful God was with them, and were afraid. But

Rahab recognised their God as the God of the heavens and earth. She had faith. Had she not acted on that faith, two of God’s people would have been executed and the invasion of Canaan would have been compromised, and she would have perished.

She acted upon her faith with courage and determination. She is therefore a tremendously powerful example concerning the vital role of works in the justification of believers.

Stephen Blake

The Right Balance

SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE ill informed about the Bible say that it contradicts itself. It says one thing in one place and in another place the opposite. So it cannot be trusted and is unreliable. They make this charge with a certain amount of satisfaction, because to be able to devalue the Bible has a way of relieving them of the responsibility of taking its teaching seriously.

Their problem is that they confuse opposites with contradiction. Contradiction infers inconsistency, whereas opposites may have the same purpose to illuminate. Be that as it may, it is true that the Bible does say opposite things. It does it deliberately, and when it does it's always good to ask why.

The fact is that two opposite statements may both be true under different circumstances. Tomorrow I may go to the doctor, and he'll say "Take one tablet three times a day". I'll go again in a month's time and he'll tell me to stop taking the tablets. He is not being inconsistent. What is right tomorrow may not be right next month.



But think of some of the opposite things the Bible says:

Jesus Christ says, *'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'* (Luke 14:26). But the Apostle Paul says, *'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her'* (Ephesians 5:25). We will return to this.

Paul says, *'By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God'* (Ephesians 2:8). But James says, *'You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.'* (James 2:24). (Refer to page 8 of this issue.)

The Food That Perishes

There is a particular saying of the Lord Jesus which is very much in this category: *'Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life'* (John 6:27).

Does this mean that for 48 years of my life I was doing something which my Lord told me not to do? But what about Paul's commands: *'Even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat'* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). And, *'If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially*

for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Timothy 5:8).

So we are being challenged to ask the question, why did Jesus tell us not to labour for the food that perishes? Evidently it was for the benefit of his immediate audience. If we were to look into John 6 we'd see that the previous day Jesus miraculously fed 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, and now they had come to find him again. Jesus was no bush-beater, he was always perfectly frank. He said, *'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves' (John 6:26).* Following the miracle they had wanted to make him their king (v. 15). Their attitude was entirely wrong. He had fed them well, and anyone who could do that would get their support. So they wanted to make him their king—the loaves and fishes king. This he would not be, so he said to them, *'Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life' (v. 27).*

A Timeless Principle

So although the words come out of the immediate circumstances, they are timeless. Jesus is flashing upon those men and women, and upon all others who will hear his voice down the ages, the light of truth concerning human nature. *Do not labour for the food that perishes.* We know in our deepest heart that it is true, but it needs interpretation. The great thing these words teach us, it seems to me, is the need for balance in life.

If you are a follower of Christ, whether you are conscious of it or not you are always

striking a balance in your life. The vital thing is to ensure that the balance is right. On all kinds of levels we are constantly having to strike a balance between one demand and another in the life of faith. We need to make our living in this world, and we also need to obey the commandment, *'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' (Deuteronomy 6:5).* There is a balance between things on the earth, and heavenly things. And the correct balance will be to be more interested in and enthusiastic about heavenly things:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:1–2).



We should not be indifferent to our duty to provide for ourselves and our dependents. Claims are made upon us in our day-to-day lives which are important and which we must not neglect. But the claims of God are more important.

When Jesus said we should hate our father and mother and wife and children and

brothers and sisters, he meant that there should be no human relationship which is more important than our relationship with him and his Father. The language is stark because the issues are incisive. The need to get our priorities right does not come into play only in great crises. It comes into play all the time, even in the ordinary and commonplace things of life.

It is quite possible to get the balance wrong. Many people do—even people who want to be followers of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the most powerful of *'things that are on the earth'* is money. It is so powerful that the love of it can very easily tip the balance away from eternal things. *'No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money'* (Matthew 6:24).



The Food That Endures

Let's go back to John chapter 6. This is the conversation that took place between the Lord and his audience: *"Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father*

has set his seal." Then they said to him, *"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"* Jesus answered them, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent"* (vs. 27–29).

There is a contrast between labouring for earthly things, and working for God. What is the work of God? It is centred, focused and based upon belief in Christ. The great force which regulates at what point to fix the balance in your life, is the intensity of your belief in Jesus Christ.

Belief In Action

Belief means action. It is not just a frame of mind, a mental outlook, an assent to some doctrines. Belief issues in positive activity. God shows us the reason why an entire generation of Israelites could not enter the Promised Land: *'For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief'* (Hebrews 3:16-19). Faith is the action that accompanies the conviction.

So the strength of our belief will determine the balance between devoting ourselves to that which perishes, and devoting ourselves to that which is eternal. Belief in Christ is not a single act, it is a maintained attitude. The work of God means living by the faith of His Son every day. It is not only intellectual assent, it is moral obedience.

Arising from belief, the power to act is first of all inspirational—if you believe in Jesus

Christ, you will behave in a certain way, you are inspired to obey him. And secondly it is inclusive—that is, it encompasses all things that make up your life, its lows and highs, the crises and the commonplace.

And as we come to know the Lord, we will understand all the better why we should love him above all others, and obey him before anyone else. He is the living Lord, the King of Kings, the eternal High Priest, the Redeemer, and the loveliest man who ever lived. And he is the one who promises to provide *'the food that endures to eternal life'* (John 6:27).

What does it mean to labour for this enduring food, as opposed to the food that perishes? It means bringing to bear eternal principles upon transient things. It means seeing beyond the horizon to the infinite. It means the assurance that you, although a creature of dust, can take hold on the force of eternity.

When we are faced with some temptation to rob God of some time or attention, in order to labour for the food that perishes; when we are haunted by the desire for some material advantage which may dishonour His cause: the only way to deal with these temptations is to flash upon them the light of our belief in Him. To bring it to the test of His Word, the Bible. To measure it against the love of Christ who died for our sins. To feel the searching fire of eternity in our little life. Then we will get the balance right.

Dennis Gillett

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
What man is there who desires life
and loves many days, that he may see good?

Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Turn away from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it. 

(Psalm 34:8–14)

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Bible Prophecy

A VERY LARGE PART of the Bible is concerned with foretelling the future. First of all, there are the 'books of the prophets': no fewer than 17 out of the 39 books of the Old Testament. There are, in addition, those parts of other books—for example, Balaam's prophecy (Numbers 22–24), and Jesus' Mount Olivet prophecy (Matthew 24)—which are prophetic.

But besides those chapters or books that can be called prophecies, there are a large number of statements in other parts of the Bible which are prophetic—for example God said to Abraham '*You shall be the father of a multitude of nations*' (Genesis 17:4); and He told David of his descendant, '*I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever*' (2 Samuel 7:13).

The Purpose of Prophecy

What is the purpose of prophecy? It is usually thought of as the prediction of future events, but in fact prophecy in the Bible sense has a two-fold meaning:

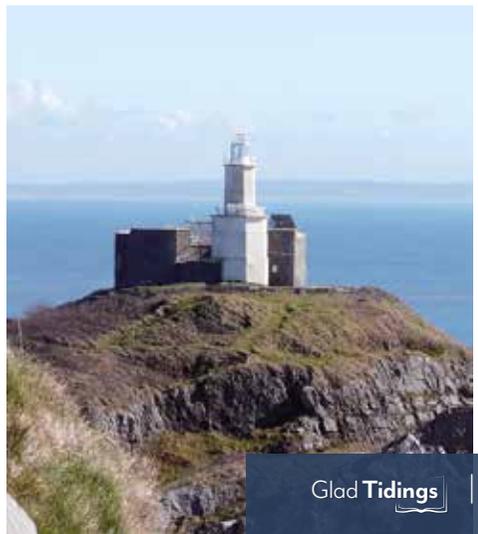
- (1) forthtelling (speaking forth, or speaking out, on God's behalf—not necessarily predicting events);
- (2) foretelling (showing forth events destined to happen in the near or distant future).

Isaiah, for example, writes forthtelling Israel's place as God's witnesses (chapters 42 & 43); he also foretells the sufferings of the Messiah (chapter 53). There are a few

Bible prophecies in the form 'This or that will happen so many years from now': Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years' captivity in Babylon (25:11) is an example of this.

Most 'foretelling' prophecies, however, are presented in a way that makes it impossible to predict exactly when they will be fulfilled; and in relation to the events of the last days, and Christ's coming, we are clearly told that '*concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*' (Mark 13:32). Foretelling future events in exact detail is, in any case, not the object of most Bible prophecies: time and again, prophecies were given as warnings so that people had an opportunity, before it was too late, to be on the look-out and to mend their ways—to make sure that they would be ready for whatever was going to happen, whenever it happened.

Norman Owen



Revelation

REVELATION is a book of prophecies about the future, given by Jesus Christ to the Apostle John who wrote it down for the benefit of Jesus' followers in his day and in all subsequent ages.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John (Revelation 1:1).

The phrase 'made it known' means 'signified' (i.e., in symbolic form). For example, 'heaven' means the ruling powers, and 'war in heaven' refers to conflicts in human governments.

Revelation is also known as the Apocalypse—the Greek word 'apocalypse' means 'to reveal'.

As the last of the divinely inspired writings, Revelation has many links with the first book, Genesis. The Bible begins with paradise in Eden and ends with paradise restored (Revelation 22). The prophecy is a 'revelation' of events affecting Jesus' followers from the time of John, until Christ returns to be revealed in glory.

A Book of Symbol

Revelation is full of symbols, including many with which we may be familiar from the visions and prophecies of the Old Testament. It is given to us, not to provide precise dates for future happenings, but

so that believers down the ages could be warned that cataclysmic events were about to happen, and be ready—and to give reassurance that all the while God is in control.



It may at first seem a daunting book. It often speaks in strange language; and yet much of its mystery is clarified if we refer back to earlier prophecies—particularly Daniel's prophecies, and also the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy. In particular, many of the symbols in Old Testament prophecies—heavenly bodies, beasts, trees, etc.—reappear in the visions of Revelation; and we can generally assume that such symbols have a similar significance in this final prophecy.

The number seven appears many times in the book. Seven is often used in the Bible in the sense of completeness, and this is fitting as Revelation completes the Bible record.

A Prophecy for Us

As we read Revelation, we realise that this last book of prophecy, this last book of the

Bible, is very relevant to our own times—and to us personally! The time is close when God shall 'send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago' (Acts 3:20–21).

Structure of the Book

The Apostle John was a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos when he received the prophecy at the end of the First Century AD.

Jesus' first message is to seven congregations in the province of Asia (chapters 2–3), representative of his followers throughout the world.



Patmos and the seven churches of Asia

According to the widely accepted 'continuous historic' interpretation of the book, the unfolding purpose of God is revealed to John in the following way:

- a seven-sealed scroll (chapters 6–8)—various stages in the Roman Empire until it becomes Christianised

- seven trumpets sounding warnings (chapters 8–11)—the overthrow of the Roman power: in the West by the Barbarians, in the East by Saracens and Turks
- seven bowls containing plagues (chapter 16)—aimed at the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire (West) and the Ottoman Empire (East).

Each of these seven-fold sections is introduced by a vision of God's coming Kingdom, to which the events move forward relentlessly and in increasing detail.

In a separate but parallel sequence (chapter 17), world political and religious systems are depicted as frightening beasts which make war on the Lamb—the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:29).

The events in the prophecy lead to the climax of the overthrow of all these systems by Christ at his 'revelation' (that is, his return), and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth (chapters 19–22).

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ Revelation 1:7—see Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 24:30.
- ◆ Revelation 11:15—see Daniel 2:44, 7:27; Zechariah 14:9.
- ◆ Revelation 22:18–19—see Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6.

NA

Abraham and David had multiple wives. Does that mean polygamy is OK for Christians?

Ed

HUMANS ARE UNIQUE among God's creatures in many respects. One is the way in which they were created. God did not create a male and a female together, He created Adam and then He created Eve out of Adam, and in doing so He designed a lifelong partnership:

The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:21–24).

Jesus Christ repeated and reinforced this principle in his teaching (Mark 10:1–9).

The Apostle Paul reveals that this special human relationship is actually a picture of Jesus Christ and his relationship with believers: *'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without*

spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Ephesians 5:25–27).

It's therefore clear that men should have only one wife, and women should have only one husband.

It's interesting then that a number of great men of faith in the Old Testament had more than one wife, for example Abraham, Jacob and David. There is no record that God reprimanded them for this, in fact He evidently accepted it (for example 2 Samuel 12:8). Although when you read the accounts of their lives it becomes clear that for these three men their polygamy was a direct cause of stress and disharmony in their families.

It's not clear why God permitted polygamy in the Old Testament. Perhaps one reason is that, as the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the multitude of believers, it's not spoiling the picture for a man to have more than one wife. (There are no examples of faithful families in which women had more than one husband.)

However, it's clear that polygamy is not what God designed, or what He wants. If a member or members of a polygamous relationship come to Christ, they must work out their relationship as best they can according to Bible principles. But it would be wrong for believers to deliberately enter a polygamous marriage.

Justified By Faith

THIS IS A fundamental Bible teaching. The three words in the title are in the grid.

Also in the grid are the names of eight people who are in the article on pages 7–9.



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

- a) said that nobody is righteous before God.
- b) criticized people who trusted in themselves and thought that they were righteous.
- c) tried to justify himself when suffering, but afterwards relented and acknowledged God's superiority.
- d) believed God and so was accounted to be righteous.
- e) prophesied that the servant of God would make many to be accounted righteous, and bear their iniquities.
- f) said that the just live by faith.
- g) wrote inspired letters explaining about justification and faith in Jesus Christ.
- h) taught that true faith shows itself in actions.

Anna Hart

Answers: (a) DAVID (b) JESUS (c) JOB (d) ABRAHAM (e) ISAIAH (f) PAUL (g) HABAKKUK (h) JAMES

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