

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

All One in Christ (p. 3)

Being Separate (p. 5)

'I Only Am Left' (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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All One in Christ

WE'RE ALL DIFFERENT. The way the world is, that means we're valued differently. If you're good looking or clever or wealthy you're likely to go further in this life. But that's not the way God sees us. If we're followers of Jesus Christ, we're all equally precious to God.

A Letter to a Friend

Tucked away in the middle of the New Testament is the letter of the Apostle Paul to Philemon. It's only about a page long. It's one of the most delightful letters ever written from one friend to another.

Philemon was a Christian in Asia. Paul at this time was a prisoner of the Emperor in Rome. The letter concerns a slave called Onesimus, who belonged to Philemon but had run away. He had found himself in Rome, where he'd come across Paul and was converted and baptised. The bond grew between them, and Paul came to regard Onesimus as his son. But the time came for him to send Onesimus back to his rightful master. He sent him with this letter, which is a model of courtesy and consideration.

Although Paul might have used his authority as an apostle to command Philemon to forgive his fugitive slave, he didn't. He begged it:

For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord (Philemon :15–16).

Onesimus had fled his master and made a bid for freedom. He had found true freedom, where he didn't expect it, and now he was returning to his master. Whether he continued to be a slave, we don't know—it doesn't matter. Philemon and Onesimus were now fellow-servants of their master Jesus Christ—the man who washed his disciples' feet (John 13:1–14).



Equality and Inequality

Inequality is a fact of life. It always has been. I'm not defending the mistreatment or exploitation of others: how can we mistreat our fellow people if we observe the

basic Bible principle ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18)? And I’m not defending discrimination—the Christian should be more aware than anyone of the need to respect all people, regardless of their situation or status:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place”, while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there”, or, “Sit down at my feet”, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:1–4).



God tells us to treat everyone equally. But also He tells us to accept whatever situation we might find ourselves in. This is Paul again, in his letter to the congregation in Corinth:

Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:21–22).

The point is this: what really matters is our standing before God, not our standing in society. In the world of the First Century there were free people and there were slaves; there were Roman citizens and members of subject nations; there were rich and poor; men and women had very different roles. Neither Paul nor Jesus Christ himself nor any other man or woman of God ever said that we should agitate for equality. Instead, the Bible tells us that there is a much more relevant measure of status—that which has to do with our salvation:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

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Being Separate

IT IS DIFFICULT TO overestimate the importance of Abraham—the father of the Jews and the Arabs, the spiritual ancestor of all the faithful: *‘If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise’* (Galatians 3:29).

We are introduced to Abraham (or Abram, as he was then called) in the early chapters of Genesis: *‘Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you”’* (Genesis 12:1). Note that: he was called to leave the heathens among whom he lived in Chaldea, in order to follow God. And he willingly obeyed: *‘By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going’* (Hebrews 11:8).

In time Abraham’s descendants the Israelites settled in Egypt, where they were enslaved. The time came for God to claim them as His nation. The book of Exodus tells how He set them free, and brought them out of Egypt. Why did He bring them out of Egypt? Because He had compassion on them in their suffering (Exodus 2:23–24), but also for another reason:

I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might

dwell among them. I am the LORD their God (Exodus 29:45–46).

He could not dwell among them while they dwelt in the midst of a land of idolatry. He needed to separate them from it.

A People for God’s Name

In the New Testament we see the apostles preaching the Gospel of salvation. This is how that preaching is described by the Apostle James: *‘Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name’* (Acts 15:14). The preaching of the Gospel was not an operation of mass conversion, it was a process of appealing to individuals to come out of the world in which they lived.

The prophet Amos asked the question, *‘Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?’* (Amos 3:3). The follower of Christ is walking in a different direction from those who do not follow Christ.



The Apostle Paul spells out the implications of this principle for the believer's life:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14–18).



So in the book of Acts we see the Christians separating themselves from the Jewish synagogues and Roman temples, and forming their own community in which they could worship God with likeminded people in the way that God requires. Christian communities are known in the New Testament as 'churches'. That is the Greek word 'ekklesia', and it has nothing to do with a building, rather it means 'a gathering of people who are called out'.

Separate From the World

Believers are not called to shut themselves away from the world. Monasteries are not what the Lord intended. *'I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world' (1 Corinthians 5:9–10).* Separation from those who walk in another direction does not mean shunning them.

Nor does it mean that believers should feel themselves in any way superior: *'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).*

Rather, to be separate is a discipline for life. It means refraining from taking part in *'the unfruitful works of darkness' (Ephesians 5:11).* It means being prepared to find yourself at odds, even with your own family if they are not believers (Matthew 10:36). It means standing out, even when it would be much easier to go with the crowd. As the Lord Jesus urges us:

Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 10:32–33).

Bible Finger Post No. 12

Galatians

DURING HIS FIRST missionary journey the Apostle Paul established a number of congregations of believers in Galatia, which was the First Century name for what is today central Turkey. He visited them again on later journeys (see Acts 13–18).

Sadly, the Galatian believers were very soon influenced by Jewish elements who wanted Christians to continue observing the Law of Moses. Paul reminds them of the need to keep to the one true Gospel—Jewish rituals such as circumcision are no longer required. His words still apply: *‘As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed’* (Galatians 1:9).

But although Jewish practices no longer apply to those who follow Christ, the Jewish promises—God’s covenant with Abraham in particular—are still valid. We are instructed to follow the example of Abraham, the man of faith: he pleased God by believing Him (Genesis 15:6). We too can only be accounted righteous by faith in God’s promises, through Christ.

Heirs of the Promises

God promised Abraham and his ‘offspring’ an eternal inheritance of the Land of Promise (Genesis 13:15). The ‘offspring’ here spoken of was Christ

(Galatians 3:16). By becoming associated with him, we too can become heirs of the promises God made to Abraham (v. 29). Those who believe the promises and are baptized into Christ change their way of life, curbing their fleshly passions (5:15–21) and cultivating ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (5:22–23).



They have ‘put on’ Christ (3:27) and are thus clothed in his righteousness. Paul may well have had in mind the practice of the time in which a young man would ‘put on’ a toga—an outer garment worn by adult Romans—to mark his graduation to manhood.

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ Galatians 2:16—see Acts 13:38–39; Romans 8:3.
- ◆ Galatians 3:16—see Genesis 13:15.
- ◆ Galatians 3:27—see Romans 13:14.

The Golden Calf

WITH AN OMINOUS clonk the tablets struck the rock. Young Joshua watched in horror. Only that morning they had collected them pristine from the angel of God. The fine inscriptions in economical Hebrew covered both sides of each gleaming stone. Now Moses had deliberately smashed them together on the ground, his face twisted with rage (Exodus 32:19).

Six weeks before, the two men had toiled higher and higher into the cloud-covered mountain, leaving behind the Israelite camp and their families and friends. The days passed quickly. As Moses received each new commandment from God, Joshua probably helped him write it down in a book. Afterwards they were given a detailed plan of the new Tent of Meeting that God wanted the Israelites to build, and instruction in the system of worship to be set up around it. It was thrilling and absorbing, and Joshua would feel elated to be so close to God's messengers on the holy mountain. The martyr Stephen was later to describe the law as *'delivered by angels'* (Acts 7:53). Joshua had been privileged to work with them, and with Moses the man of God.

Now, at last, the task was complete. Moses had been given the two stone tablets, inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

They represented a summary and seal of the covenant promise which the people of Israel had made to obey the laws of God. He carried them himself. As they descended rapidly down the mountainside, the familiar Israelite tents came into view. They seemed strangely deserted. Before long Joshua could make out a crowd of people milling about in the centre of the camp. A stab of fear contracted his heart. It could only mean one thing—the Israelites had been attacked by enemies while Moses was away. *'There is a noise of war in the camp'* he cried, panicking. But Moses' face was clouded: *'It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear'* (Exodus 32:17–18).



Rounding the rocks, they came upon a scene of shame that Joshua would never forget. There in the camp was a glittering, golden bull calf, just like the idols of Egypt they had left behind. The people were

dancing half naked and singing loud praises to this heathen god, while Aaron, Moses' brother, who had been left in charge, stood helplessly before them. On every hand were the remains of an orgy of eating and drinking. Moses hurried down the final slopes and burst into the camp. The dancing stopped, and the Israelites cringed before his wrath. He barked out commands. Soon the idol was purged with fire, broken in pieces, and the fragments ground to a fine dust. He threw the shiny powder into the stream that watered the camp, and made them drink the water as a curse. So assured was his righteous anger, that men and women in their thousands obeyed him.



How Could They Do It?

What was the explanation for this dreadful lapse on the part of the people of God, only a few weeks after they had solemnly vowed they would only ever worship the LORD their God? If you consider the facts, it was not so surprising as it seems. When Moses disappeared into the lofty heights, nobody knew exactly when he was coming back. For a week or two life would continue

normally, and Aaron kept the great company of people peaceable and quiet. Perhaps when a fortnight had elapsed and there was no sign of his brother, he began to get worried. The leaders of the tribes hung around his door, waiting for news, concerned at this delay in their journey onwards to the land of promise. When they asked how long Moses was going to be, he had to admit he did not know. After three weeks, he perhaps felt angry with Moses for leaving him with all the responsibility and no information about his plans. By five weeks the Israelites were decidedly restive. Rumours were circulating that Moses was dead, victim to some terrible accident on the mountain slopes, or perhaps consumed by the fire that still burnt on the mountaintop. Moses had clearly told the elders of the people before he went up with Joshua *'Wait here for us until we return to you'* (Exodus 24:14). But he had failed to return.

There is nothing more dangerous to faith than excessive delay. Perilously weak without his single-minded, dynamic brother, Aaron had his back to the wall. *'When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron'* (Exodus 32:1). His heart sank as he faced the sea of hostile faces. *'Up,'* they shouted, *'make us gods who shall go before us.'* He should have stilled them, insisted that they wait longer, and stamped out their treachery to the gracious God who had brought them out of Egypt. But he lacked the courage. Limply he told them to gather together hundreds of gold earrings. Skilled

craftsmen prepared the mould, melted them down, and cast the shape of a calf. The molten gold was allowed to cool and worked over with a graving tool. Aaron proclaimed ‘*Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD*’ (v. 5)—it seems he wanted a compromise, he was still telling himself that they were honouring God. But that was not how they saw it. So it was that on the very day Moses came back, the feast was in full progress. And Moses, disgusted to see that the people had broken their covenant with God, destroyed the tablets which recorded the details that confirmed it.



An Urgent Warning

The golden calf incident shows us an urgent warning. Bible students have always expected that Jesus Christ will come back to the earth. There are hundreds of passages in the Old and New Testaments requiring that he will, and many wonderful prophecies have now been fulfilled, so that his coming seems long overdue. This situation is very like that of Moses, away on the mount. Jesus has gone up into the clouds to be with God, and commanded his followers to wait for his return

(Acts 1:6–11). There is a very real danger that they will begin to wonder what has happened to him, and perhaps to sit back and decide that God’s plan has gone wrong. Jesus frequently warned his disciples how easily this could happen. ‘*Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*’ (Matthew 24:42–44).

Even more pointedly, in his last message to his disciples, the book of Revelation, he seems to draw attention specifically to the tragedy of the golden calf. In a list of signs that will lead up to the great battle of Armageddon, he inserts in brackets a warning note. ‘*Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!*’ (Revelation 16:15). Moses caught the people stripped and dancing around the golden calf, as he descended from the clouds. In the same way Jesus will find out his people, if they have ceased to expect him. The Apostle Peter explains the reason for Christ’s extended absence. ‘*The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*’ (2 Peter 3:9). Once Christ has come, it will be too late to repent. Every extra day gives us opportunity to prepare for the Kingdom

he will bring. *‘Be diligent to be found of him without spot or blemish, and at peace,’* Peter concludes, *‘and count the patience of our Lord as salvation’* (verses 14–15).

The Intercessor

We cannot leave the golden calf episode without noting the reaction of both Moses and God to the people’s descent into idolatry. Moses could justifiably have been insulted at the derogatory way they had spoken of him. *‘As for this Moses,’* they had said, *‘the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him’* (Exodus 32:1). After all he was doing for them! Yet when God was angry with the people, Moses instantly sought to intervene. He climbed back up the mountain and prayed to the Lord. *‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written’* (vs. 31–32).



God listened to his plea. The people would not be cut off. He would punish them, but His plan and the promise He made to Abraham 400 years before would

continue. It was only the first of many times that God would demonstrate His patience and forgiveness, and Moses his humility and his love for his people.

Moses the great mediator was the forerunner of Jesus, the supreme high priest and intercessor for all sinners before God. *‘If any man sin,’* wrote John, *‘we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’* (1 John 2:1). Jesus is alive today at God’s right hand, to speak up for his people like Moses when they deserve God’s wrath. And God is still ready to forgive.

But Moses’ concern for the fate of those who had insulted him is also the example for all people of God. Their duty is not to answer an insult with a blow, or to stop speaking to someone, or go off in a huff, but in love to forgive and forget. *‘I say to you who hear,’* commanded Jesus, *‘love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you’* (Luke 6:27–28). Such grace is a hallmark of the children of God.

David M Pearce

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The Atonement

FIRST, a thrilling statement of the Apostle Paul: *‘In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation’* (2 Corinthians 5: 19). Think about that. The message of the Gospel is not about the appeasement of a God who is angry at our failings: it is about a God of love, in His mercy providing a way for us to be reconciled, after our failings have alienated us from Him.

Now the Apostle John: *‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’* (1 John 1: 9). What does that mean? We are sinners, by our nature we are unrighteous. But God wants to cleanse us from our unrighteousness. Clearly it does not mean that God will make us into sinless people, because we cannot be that (this side of God’s Kingdom). It therefore means that He will reckon us, or count us, as sinless.

Covering for Sin

After the incident of the golden calf, *‘Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD;*

perhaps I can make atonement for your sin”’ (Exodus 32:30). What does that word ‘atonement’ mean? The Hebrew word the Bible uses essentially means ‘covering’. Its meaning is brought out in Psalm 32:1: *‘Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.’* Those whose sins are covered are ‘blessed’—that is, supremely happy.

Note that the Psalmist does not say *‘blessed are all mankind’*. Blessed are those who will avail themselves of the offer of atonement with God.

Jesus Christ was the divinely provided human being who, of his own free will, reversed the choices which our ancestors made in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3). He was the only one who has ever lived a perfect, sinless life. And he laid down his life, giving himself as a sacrifice on the cross (1 Corinthians 5:7). You and I have no righteousness of our own, but we can be counted as righteous. We do this by being baptised into Christ, and pursuing the vital relationship with him which is life in Christ. This is the atonement: we are then ‘covered’ by the righteousness of Christ.



Of course, none of this means that sin has ceased to matter. How much it matters to God is shown by what He did in order to provide atonement for us. The cost to the Son and the Father was awesome. But it was undertaken for each of us personally, and shows the length that the Father and Son were prepared to go to for you and me. So, sin can never be treated lightly.

Grace and Truth

This is how the Gospel of John describes the birth of Jesus Christ: *'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth'* (John 1:14). Those two words 'grace' and 'truth' reveal a great deal of God's loving purpose. But at a simple level: if God were to ignore our sinfulness and extend unconditional grace to all humankind, the good and the wicked, that would be but a sorry foundation for eternity. If, on the other hand, grace were eliminated and only the claims of truth were pressed, there could be no salvation for anyone. But, uniquely in Jesus Christ, God wonderfully combines grace and truth, bringing His salvation to His followers by means of Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

When we belong to Christ, we may say that when God looks upon us He sees not our unrighteousness, but the righteousness of the One who covers us. This is God's arrangement, and it is very wonderful. And the more wonderful we see it to be, the more it calls to us for a continuing response. For example, in Matthew 5:3–9 Jesus lists seven qualities of life which

contribute to 'blessedness'. These qualities can only come genuinely by response to the atoning grace of the Lord Jesus, not by any deliberate attempts to cultivate them.

In proportion as we embrace the God-provided atonement in Christ it will awaken a response in us of worship and delight. The grace of God and of the Lord Jesus will produce gratefulness in us, affecting our outlook towards everything and everybody.



The mission of Jesus Christ is described as to *'deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery'* (Hebrews 2:15). The writer does not mean that people who are without Jesus live in constant fear of death, but that, aware that life is limited, they spend their time in a kind of slavery to the things of this life; whereas Jesus has opened up the way to new and eternal life, to which this present life is a mere brief introduction.

For believers who have been baptised and belong to Christ, life is transformed: *'there is great gain in godliness with contentment'* (1 Timothy 6:6). They have *'a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul'* (Hebrews 6:19).

Denis Jackson

‘I Only Am Left’

THE PROPHET ELIJAH had a very important role to play in the purpose of God. He was involved in great spiritual victories and possessed many godly qualities which are an example for us. However, he was not perfect, he was just like us: ‘*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*’ (James 5:17). There was a time when Elijah reached a point of loneliness and despair in his life. He felt that his life was no longer worth living. In order to help him through, God gave him a powerful, hard-hitting lesson. There are no doubt times in our lives when Elijah’s desperate cries of ‘*I, even I only, am left*’ resonate with how we are feeling. Thankfully, the chastening lesson which God taught Elijah has been left on record for us to learn too.

Spiritual Victory

The great spiritual victory for which Elijah is famous is the ‘contest’ between the prophets of God and the prophets of the Canaanite god Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).

This involved the LORD convincing the nation that He is the only God (1 Kings 18:37); it involved the execution of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40), and culminated with the LORD sending rain upon the land for the first time in three and a half years (1 Kings 18:45,

James 5:17). Throughout all this, Elijah was God’s faithful servant, obediently carrying out His purpose in exemplary fashion. It was all going so well!



However, when King Ahab reported what had happened to his wife Jezebel, the situation changed dramatically:

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow” (1 Kings 19:1–2).

Jezebel was a very powerful woman so her threat against the life of Elijah was by no means hollow. She had killed other prophets of the LORD (1 Kings 18:4) so Elijah had good reason to feel the way he did about her threat. ‘*Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life*’ (1 Kings 19:3). This fear drove Elijah to hide from Jezebel

in the wilderness, where his spiritual state of mind took a turn for the worse: *‘But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers”’* (v. 4). In such a short space of time Elijah’s life had changed from triumphantly taunting the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:27) to hiding in the wilderness and asking God to take his life. How did God respond to His prophet’s despairing plea for death?



Spiritual Crisis

And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you” (1 Kings 19:5–7).

God sent an angel who comfortingly touched Elijah and invited him to eat and drink. Elijah had miraculously been provided for previously at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:4–6), and now God graciously provided for His prophet again. God had

planned a journey for him. It was too great for Elijah to undertake in his own strength, so God provided sustenance. As the Apostle Paul said, *‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me’* (Philippians 4:13). Elijah *‘went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God’* (1 Kings 19:8). Mount Horeb is none other than Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Law from God.

These details are the first indicators that Elijah was going to follow in the footsteps of Moses: the phrase *‘forty days and forty nights’* points us back to Moses (Exodus 24:18, 34:28), as does the phrase *‘Horeb, the mountain of God’* (Exodus 3:1, 24:13). What Moses-like experience awaited Elijah at Horeb?

Firstly, God asked Elijah the question, *‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’* (1 Kings 19:9). When the all-knowing God asks a question, it is not because He doesn’t know the answer! This was for Elijah’s benefit—to give him an opportunity to voice his complaint to God:

He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10).

Elijah’s first statement was indeed accurate—who could deny that Elijah had been very zealous for the LORD? However, what followed involved distancing himself from his brothers—instead of saying *‘we have*

forsaken your covenant and thrown down your altars...' he said *'they have forsaken your covenant and thrown down your altars...*' This is authoritatively interpreted for us by the Apostle Paul as *'appealing to God against Israel'* (Romans 11:2). An excellent contrast to Elijah's negative spirit is found in Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:4–19). Daniel prays to God about the sins of his people (in which Daniel has had no part), but the words "we" and "us" occur repeatedly. Daniel implicates himself in the sins of the people—his people—whereas Elijah does not. How did God answer Elijah's complaint?

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind



tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.

And after the fire the sound of a low whisper (1 Kings 19:11–12).

Elijah and Moses

In this experience, there are distinct echoes of an experience Moses had in the same wilderness, a thousand years previously. Exodus 33–34 relates how Moses had a crisis of confidence as he was leading the Israelites towards the Promised Land. He asked to see God, and God showed him.

It's fascinating to compare that incident with this one.

God told Elijah to *'stand on the mount'*; likewise, when Moses asked to see God's glory, he was told to *'stand on the rock'* (Exodus 33:21). The LORD passed by Elijah, just as He did when He declared His name to Moses (Exodus 33:22). Truly this was Elijah's 'Moses moment', but what was the lesson God was teaching him? It is heavily implied (though not explicitly stated) that the LORD was in the 'low whisper'. This is so powerful because He was not in the wind, earthquake or fire. Perhaps God was teaching Elijah that being His servant, executing His will and showing people the meaning of His name is not solely about epic displays of His power and zeal (such as had happened at Mount Carmel); sometimes it is about quieter, gentler tasks. What effect did this experience have on Elijah?

And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:13–14).

God asked Elijah the same question as He had asked him before, and Elijah stubbornly gave the same answer as he did before! Again he stated his conviction

that 'I only am left'. This may have been how Elijah felt, but was it true? Elijah was aware that the prophet Obadiah had hidden 100 prophets of the LORD from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:13), so there were at least 101 others like Elijah who had remained faithful. It transpires that there were far more than 101. As God said, 'Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him' (v. 18). From Elijah's distorted perspective he was the only one left. From God's all-seeing perspective there were 7,000 who were left! In time, Elijah was going to be replaced: 'Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place' (v. 16). God's purpose would continue with his successor—the ultimate disproof of Elijah's argument that he alone was left—and meanwhile Elijah would have a companion who would work with and learn from him.

Lesson For Us

The point of this exercise is not so we can sit back and think "Elijah really got it wrong, didn't he!" We should recognise that he was just like us. The baptised believer is a member of God's family. 'We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another' (Romans 12:5). Sometimes, inevitably, fellow believers do wrong things. It's tempting to stand back and say "They have done this, they have done that..." But this is to be in danger of 'appealing to God against them'

(Romans 11:2). A better attitude is the one Daniel had: 'We have sinned and done wrong...' (Daniel 9:12).

Sometimes the circumstances of life have such an impact upon us that we can get blindsided with regards to the reality of the situation. Elijah's life was under threat and, as if that wasn't enough, he was understandably despondent with the spiritual state of his nation. But God assured him that there was still a remnant who shared his faith. That will always be the case (see Malachi 3:17-18). And beside that, God Himself would always be with him.

Stephen Blake

g l ea n ing s

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AM **Can you give modern equivalents of the weights and measures we come across in the Bible?**

Ed THE ACTION of the Bible spans 4,000 years and many different civilisations. It contains many references to weights and measures. Sometimes units of measurement might vary between different cultures and different periods in history, and to add confusion there were sometimes 'royal' measures and 'common' measures which were different. Here's a selection of weights and measures with equivalents about which we can be fairly certain:

An **omer** is around 2 litres. An omer of manna was enough to feed someone for a day (Exodus 16:16).

An **ephah** is 10 omers, that is around 22 litres. So when Ruth gleaned in Boaz's barley field and he told his reapers to leave a bit extra for her, she went home laden with 10 days' worth of food (Ruth 2:17).

A **cubit** is based on the length of a man's forearm, and is around 50 centimetres. Noah's ark was therefore around 150 metres long (Genesis 6:15), and would be the biggest ship the world had seen until the colossal treasure ships of the Chinese Ming Dynasty in the 15th Century.

One of the more obscure measures in the Bible is the account of a Syrian siege of Samaria in the days of the Kingdom of

Israel, when they sold 'the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver' (2 Kings 6:25). A **kab** is around a litre; 'dove's dung' was probably the colloquial name for a cheap vegetable pulse.

The **shekel** is the basic unit of currency in modern Israel. The Hebrew word 'shekel' means 'weight' and in Bible times it was a weight of valuable metal, usually silver. Archaeological evidence suggests that a shekel was about two weeks' wages for a labourer. In the Law of Moses there was a 'poll tax'—when a census was taken, they paid half a shekel per person. It's called the 'shekel of the sanctuary', suggesting that the priests were in possession of a standard weight against which offerings were checked (Exodus 30:11–16). The poll tax was still being collected in New Testament times (Matthew 17:27). By this time the shekel was a silver coin weighing around 11 grams.

In Matthew 18:21–35 Jesus told a parable in which a man refused to forgive his fellow a debt of 100 denarii (a **denarius** was a Roman coin which represented the standard daily wage for a labourer). He ignored the fact that he himself had been forgiven a debt of 10,000 talents (one **talent** was worth around 20 years' wages). The message of the parable is that if God is prepared to forgive us our unimaginably large debt of sin against Him, we must be prepared to forgive our fellows when they sin against us.

The Fruit of the Spirit

GOD ASKS US to believe in Jesus Christ, and to transform our lives by trying to follow his example. **BAPTISM** is a sign of this, and in this way we can be included with those believers who are 'in Christ'.

We start a new life in **FAITH**, and must then develop Christ-like characteristics which are described as the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22–23): **JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS,**

FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL.

The ten words in blue capital letters above are in the grid. There is also another important word hidden in the grid: it is the quality which heads the list of the fruit of the Spirit (v. 22); is a characteristic of God (1 John 4:8); and is the supreme hallmark of those who are in Christ (1 Corinthians 13).

S	T	H	L	C	T	B	E	S	S	O	P
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Anna Hart

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