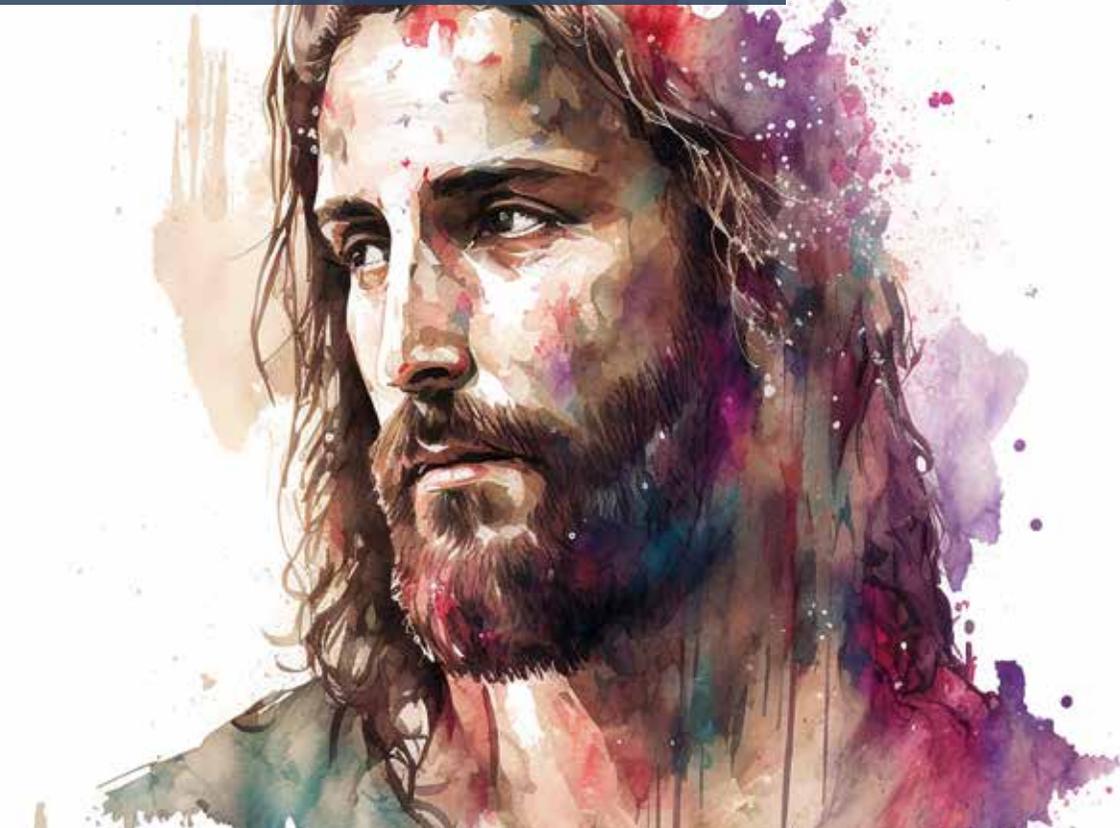


Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Who Is Jesus Christ? (p. 3)

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (p. 7)

Sacrifice (p. 16)

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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Glad Tidings Distributors for orders and payments

United Kingdom
Becky Collard, 7 Lindridge Close,
Redditch, Worcs. B98 0QJ, UK
Tel: +44 (0)7521 079 190 (24 hrs)
orders-uk@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Australia
Ruth Morgan, 41 Dimboola Road,
Warracknabeal, VIC 3393, Australia
gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada
Vivian Thorp, 5377 Birdcage Walk,
Burlington, ON L7L 3K5, Canada
vivianthorp@bell.net

New Zealand
Jenny Luxmoore, 47 Woodfern Crescent,
Titirangi, Auckland 0604,
New Zealand
delux@xtra.co.nz

U.S.A.
Pat Hemingray, 1244 Pennsylvania
Avenue, Oakmont, PA 15139, USA
orders-usa@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Other Countries
Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive,
Hollywood, Birmingham B47 5RJ, UK
orders-int@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Editor
Chris Parkin, 7 Thorntree Lane, Newhall,
Swadlincote, Derbyshire DE11 0LP, UK
editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

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Who Is Jesus Christ?

TWO THOUSAND years ago, the Roman Empire was at its height. In a small hill village in the minor province of Galilee lived a carpenter. When he was around 30 years old he set out on a preaching mission which took him around Galilee and the neighbouring provinces. He upset some powerful people, and three and a half years later he was executed. A small and insignificant life by most standards—but as it turned out, Jesus of Nazareth has had a greater impact on the world than probably anyone else in history. Who was he, and why was he so influential? And why is he important for you and me?



The Bible is the account of God's dealings with humankind, and Jesus made a very bold claim: *'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'* (John 14:6). Jesus is the central figure in the Bible—that is, both the New Testament which deals with his life and the story of the Christian community

in the First Century AD, and also the Old Testament which was written many years before Jesus came into existence, but which anticipates his birth and work in many different ways.

Prophecies of Christ

For example, back in the first book of the Bible God gave the faithful man Abraham a promise: *'Your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'* (Genesis 22:17–18), and the New Testament confirms that this was a prophecy of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16).

A thousand years later God gave Israel's King David a promise: *'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom'* (2 Samuel 7:12). The angel Gabriel told Mary that this was to be none other than her son, Jesus (Luke 1:32).

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the man who *'was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed'* (Isaiah 53:5). The Apostle Peter showed that this was again a prophecy of the saving work of Christ (1 Peter 2:22–25).

The Law of Moses which God gave to Old Testament Israel revolved around the

worship in the Tabernacle, in which priests brought the people's sacrifices to God. The New Testament's Letter to the Hebrews is largely concerned with demonstrating how all the details of this worship—the Tabernacle, the priests and the sacrifices themselves—were actually pictures pointing forward to Christ, the *'great high priest who has passed through the heavens'* (Hebrews 4:14).



The whole of world history was focused on the coming of Jesus Christ: the offspring of Abraham who would bring blessing to all nations; the future king of Israel who will rule the world; the man who gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins; the High Priest who brings his people into God's presence.

Life Through Him

One of the most succinct summaries of the identity and purpose of Jesus Christ is given by another of his apostles: *'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him'* (1 John 4:9).

Think about this. Firstly, the gift of Jesus Christ was a display of God's love for you and me. We are sinful, dying creatures,

but God wants to give us life. He showed us the enormity of our sinfulness, and the enormity of His love for us, by giving His Son to die as a sacrifice to heal the breach between us and bring us back to Him.

Secondly, through Jesus Christ we can live. What does this mean? He lived a perfect spiritual life, which is displayed throughout the Bible, most vividly in the biographical accounts of the four Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament. He showed us what it is to *'live according to the Spirit'* (Romans 8:5).

'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death' (Romans 8:1–2).

And following from this, it means that if we have been baptised into Christ and are trying in our lives now to live the life of the spirit, we can look forward by the grace of God to overcoming our sinfulness once and for all and living for ever when he returns: *'We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'* (v. 23).

The carpenter from Galilee was far more than an interesting historical figure. He is the focus of world history, past, present and future; the living sacrifice by which humankind can achieve reconciliation with God, and the future king of the world. For those who embrace him as their Saviour, he is their master, high priest and king, and their lifelong friend: *'Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'* (Matthew 28:20).

The Messiah

JESUS OF NAZARETH incensed the Jewish leaders of his day by claiming that he was the Son of God. His amazing miracles failed to convince them (John 5:36, 12:37), and this claim was a major factor in his illegal conviction (Mark 14:61–64). The Old Testament scriptures stressed that there is only one God. Jesus never claimed to be equal with God, but his claim to be God's Son went too far for the Jews who considered it to be blasphemy. They were looking for the Messiah to come. "Messiah" means "anointed" (in the sense that a king is anointed). It is another word for "Christ" (Luke 2:26; 3:15). Jesus once met a woman in a Samaritan village:

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:25–26).



But the Jews did not recognise him, because he did not fit their idea of the

Messiah. They did not expect (just as many Jews who are still waiting for the Messiah do not expect) that he would be the Son of God.

Jesus told his disciples that the scriptures spoke of him (Luke 24:44). This raises the question: where in the Old Testament are the ideas of 'Christ' and 'Son of God' linked together? This is a valid question, because in at least eight verses on four different occasions in the Gospels the ideas are explicitly linked; notably at Jesus' trial (Matthew 26:63, Mark 14:61, Luke 22:67–71), and Peter's confession of faith:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:13–17).

Psalm 2

While there are several Old Testament passages where the link between 'Christ' and 'Son of God' is implied, the most explicit is Psalm 2. This is a commentary on the opposition which Jesus Christ will initially encounter when he returns to establish God's Kingdom:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us... I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (vs. 1–3, 7–8).

The inspired comment of the apostle (Hebrews 1:4–5) removes any doubt that Psalm 2 is about Jesus. This passage argues powerfully for the unique supremacy of Jesus the Christ, and the implications for our faith and salvation.

Promise to David

God made a promise to King David of Israel that he would have a special descendant who would be a ruler (and so anointed), and this descendant would also be Son of God:

When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be to him a father, and he shall

be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever, and his throne shall be established for ever (1 Chronicles 17:11–14).

Teaching about Jesus Christ as the Son of God is a key message of the Gospels. Mark's Gospel opens with the statement (v. 1), and John's Gospel closes with it: 'These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31).

All this shows the critical importance of the Old Testament. It contains fundamental revealed truth about God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ the Son of God. We do well to believe it, and to learn the lesson which is urged upon the inhabitants of God's Kingdom:

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:10–12).

Anna Hart



The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

MOST CHRISTIAN CHURCHES teach the idea that God is a Trinity: that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three co-equal and co-eternal persons in one godhead. This idea is absent from the Bible.

The Father

God is one. *'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might'* (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). Jesus Christ referred to this as the most important commandment (Mark 12:28–30).

God said through the prophet Isaiah, *'Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour'* (Isaiah 43:10–11).

The Apostle Paul wrote, *'For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist'* (1 Corinthians 8:6). And, *'There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus'* (1 Timothy 2:5).

It is clear that there is one Power in the universe, one Creator, one God. As He declares again through Isaiah, *'I am the first*

and I am the last; besides me there is no god' (Isaiah 44:6).



The Son

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was miraculously born to the virgin Mary. His birth was foretold by the prophets, and God said to his ancestor Abraham, *'Your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'* (Genesis 22:17–18). The Apostle Paul confirmed that this promise centred on Abraham's descendant: *'Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings", referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring", who is Christ'* (Galatians 3:16).

The Psalmist foretold Christ's coming and his Kingdom: *'I will tell of the decree:*

The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Psalm 2:7–8).

Abraham and all the prophets of the Old Testament looked forward to the one whom God was to send. The time would come when God would visit His people. God sent the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary. *'And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus"' (Luke 1:30–31).* And so it happened.

Throughout his life on earth Jesus was dependent on his Father. Entrusted as he was with God's power, he constantly affirmed that his works and words were from God: *'The word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me' (John 14:24).* He was in prayer to God at every turn of his life: *'In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God' (Luke 6:12).*



When he was accused of making himself equal with God, he answered, *'Truly, truly,*

I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise' (John 5:19).

The distinction between God and His Son is clear, as Paul recognised: *'There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5).*

Describing events at Christ's return to establish God's Kingdom, Paul makes clear the distinction between the Father and the Son:

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection", it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:25–28).

The Holy Spirit

The spirit of God is His power, which emanates from Him and is the basis of all things that exist. The Psalmist says, *'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm' (Psalm 33:6, 9).*

In the beginning God used His spirit power in His creative work: *'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters' (Genesis 1:2).*

Another Psalm speaks of God's concern for all His creation: *'When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground'* (Psalm 104:29–30).



When the spirit of God is used for a particular purpose it is called the Holy Spirit. For example, when Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrection, he told his disciples *'to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now"'* (Acts 1:4–5). Acts 2 relates how the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, and they were guided to preach to the people who were gathered in Jerusalem.

It was the Holy Spirit which caused the Bible to be written: *'No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'* (2 Peter 1:20–21).

This power of God was with the Lord Jesus: *'For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure'* (John 3:34). Early in his ministry Jesus quoted an Old Testament prophecy: *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor'* (Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah 61:1). Jesus was able to perform miracles because of the power which God had given him. As Peter said later:

You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10:37–38).

Bible teaching is clear and simple: God is the Father; Jesus Christ is His Son; the Holy Spirit is His power.

Paul Downer

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The Blessings of God's Grace

SAUL OF TARSUS was a man of destiny. He was persecuting Christians, hunting them down from house to house and from their hiding places (Acts 9:1–2). He was determined to stamp out these dangerous people who believed that Jesus of Nazareth, the troublesome preacher who had recently been put to death, was the Messiah and was alive.

As a devoted Pharisee, Saul was waiting for the appearance of the Messiah, the descendant of the great King David (2 Samuel 7:12) to save the Jewish nation. He did not know that by persecuting Christians, he was persecuting the Messiah!

But Jesus knew Saul. He knew the destiny that awaited him. There are notable prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the spread of the Gospel throughout the earth—there would come a day when it would no longer be the preserve of the Jews, but it would be preached to the Gentiles too. For example:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will

make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

Apostle to the Gentiles

Saul of Tarsus was not going to be just another Christian convert, he was to be the principal preacher to take the Gospel to the nations. God would now expressly extend the call of salvation to all the world, regardless of race.

The Lord explained to Ananias whom he sent to baptise Saul: *'He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name'* (Acts 9:15–16).

Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle. Half of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is concerned with Paul's ministry, and he was to write around half of the books in the New Testament.

After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ gave his followers a commission to preach the Gospel:



All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18–20).

The word “apostle” means someone who is sent on a mission. Jesus gave his apostles the power and authority to preach the Gospel. We never read of him personally converting or preaching the Gospel to anyone else after his resurrection from the dead and his ascension to heaven—except Saul. Thus Paul became an apostle, alongside Peter and the Lord’s other close followers. In his own estimation Paul was *‘the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God’* (1 Corinthians 15:9)—but in the Lord’s estimation, he was a *‘chosen instrument’*.

This background will help us understand the overflowing grace that was bestowed upon Paul, and will help us see how deep is God’s grace and willingness to love and forgive us, despite our sins.

Why Are You Persecuting Me?

Let’s return to the account of his conversion:

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:3–5).



This precious moment of the Lord’s encounter with Saul of Tarsus makes me very emotional whenever I read it. Think about it. The Lord Jesus Christ, though now glorified and exalted, considers each and every Christian as himself. When anybody hurts, or belittles, or abuses, or kills one of his followers because of their faith—they are attacking Jesus Christ himself. Because his followers are *‘the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood’* (Acts 20:28).

In one of his letters Paul writes:

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15–16).

Those who belong to Jesus Christ are members of his body. They are all precious to him, he nurtures them, and when they suffer he feels their pain. It follows that he knows when they are abused, and also should they ever behave improperly towards each other:

And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin. Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent', you must forgive him" (Luke 17:1–4).



Overflowing Grace

Back to that scene on the Damascus road. Saul was seeking to destroy Jesus—the Son of God, to whom had been given all authority in heaven and earth. Jesus could have extinguished him—but instead he reached out to him in love. This experience profoundly changed Saul. It was not just the blinding light and the voice from heaven—it was the experience of God's grace. Grace in the Bible can be defined as 'undeserved favour'. It is the basis for every person's relationship with God, and few people have ever felt the privilege of God's grace as keenly as Paul.

Writing many years later to his young friend Timothy, Paul recalled this moment:

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:12–14).

That word 'overflowed' is the only occurrence in the Bible of an emphatic Greek word, which other translations render 'exceeding abundant' and 'superabundant'. That was how Paul saw the grace that had been extended to him.

We learn from the story of Paul's conversion that God is not ready to give up on us, no matter how terrible our life has been. God is a God of overflowing grace.

In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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 3:26–28).

Peter Ojike

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

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Jude

THE WRITER OF THIS LETTER was Jude (sometimes called Judas), who was a step-brother of Jesus. During the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, his brothers did not believe in him (see John 7:5). After his resurrection, however, they became faithful followers.

Now Jude wrote as *'a servant of Jesus Christ'* and he addressed his fellow-believers as *'called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ'* (v. 1). This means that they were set apart, separated and distinct from the beliefs and practices of the world around them. They will be preserved as God's people, his 'saints' through Jesus Christ, if they remain true to their calling. They will look confidently for mercy at the return of Christ if they have been faithful.



The congregations to whom Jude wrote were being undermined by false teachers who had *'crept in unnoticed'* (v. 4). He knew it was urgent to remind his readers to *'contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints'* (v. 3). The language is very similar to 2 Peter 2. He reminded his readers of Old Testament examples of false teachers and of the judgements reserved for such

(vs. 5–15). Against such apostasy true saints, such as Enoch (v. 14), had spoken out.

The need to keep to the original gospel as taught in the Bible is underlined in this letter. It is particularly apt, coming as it does almost at the end of the Bible. Those who guard the truth and try to live by its principles can look for mercy and eternal life at the time of Christ's return. They will form the faultless bride to be presented to Christ in that day (as the language of v. 24 implies).

Jude's name can also be written as Judah—a name which means 'praise'. It is fitting, therefore, that the letter ends in a doxology of praise: *'To the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen'* (v. 25). To give God glory and praise is the ultimate purpose to which God's saints are called.

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ Jude v. 3—see Philippians 1:27; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 1:13.
- ◆ Jude vs. 9, 23—see Zechariah 3:2, 4.
- ◆ Jude vs. 24–25—see Romans 16:25–27; Acts 20:32.

Four Resurrections

A Widow's Son

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

ONE DAY Jesus and a large crowd of followers went to a town called Nain. Today there is a small village with a very similar name a few miles south of Nazareth, the place where Jesus grew up. This is the only time in the Gospels where this place Nain is mentioned.

Just as he was entering the town he was met by a very sad sight. A funeral procession was leaving the town, obviously on the way to a burial. This was a particularly unhappy funeral, because it was a young man who had died, and he was the son of a widow. In those days of course there was no government financial help for widows, or funerals, and so the mother would now be totally destitute.

Compassion

The Lord Jesus immediately recognised these facts, and when he saw the mother weeping it touched his heart, and we read that *'he had compassion on her'* (Luke 7:13).

Some other versions of the Bible say, *'his heart went out to her'*. Jesus, the Son of God, understood the way ordinary people thought and behaved, and he demonstrated the power and the love of God in showing sympathy for such unfortunate folk. Of course Jesus is still

the same today. He has not changed, and we can be sure that he understands us and appreciates our problems just as he did when he was on earth.

Jesus approached the bier and touched it, and the bearers stood still. He said, *'Young man, I say to you, arise'* (v. 14). And to the amazement of everyone, the dead man sat up and started to talk. And amidst huge astonishment from the onlookers Jesus then gave him back to his mother.

The people were both afraid and stunned. The result? *'Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"'* (v. 16).



Fame

The little town of Nain was in the northern province of Galilee, and the Gospel account says *'this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country'* (v. 17). Judea is the province in the south, so this marvellous news of another resurrection soon spread throughout the land of Israel.

And marvellous news it was! Death is the ultimate punishment which has overtaken mankind, ever since the first man and woman Adam and Eve.

It was right back in the Garden of Eden when God sentenced man and woman to death because they had sinned. God would not allow sinners to live for ever—and I'm sure we can understand that, it means that horrid and treacherous people do not continue their crimes indefinitely.

We all know that we have a limited life span, so we really must make the best of

every moment we have, for we never know exactly how much time we have left. In this story of the widow of Nain's son there is no hint given as to whether this young man had done good or bad, but death shortened his life many years before he would have expected it. On this occasion it also left his widowed mother alone in the world.

A Fresh Start

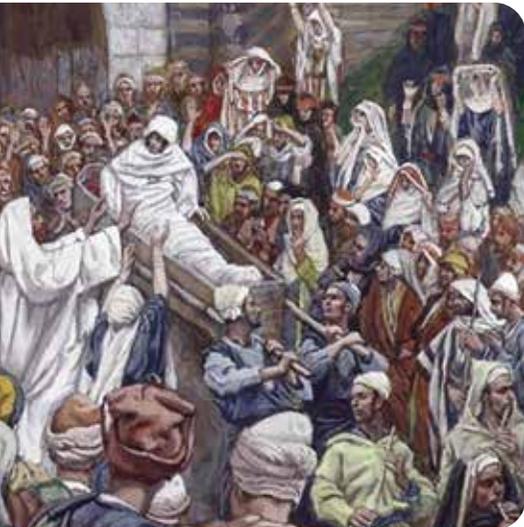
The Lord Jesus was able to resurrect this young man, and so both he and his mother were given a fresh start. Neither the Lord God nor His Son have changed over the last 2000 years, and so if Jesus was able to raise the dead when he was on the earth the first time, surely when he returns to earth he will be able to raise from our graves those of us who have died. Indeed his own words bring this exactly into focus for us:

An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out (John 5:28–29).

And the lesson for us is obvious. Let us make our peace with God, and ask for our sins to be forgiven through Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ described himself as *'the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'* (John 14:6). So if we come to the Father in the way He requires—by belief, repentance and baptism—then the Saviour of the world will become our Saviour, and we can look forward to being raised to a new and wonderful everlasting life.

David Simpson

To be continued.



Sacrifice

SACRIFICE IS NOT a pleasant topic. It might remind you of giving what you are reluctant to give. It has overtones of slaughter, blood and burning. In some heathen cultures it involved humans—children and adults—to placate angry gods who withheld harvests, or brought violent storms if offended, or who were thought to gorge themselves on the victims and drink their fresh blood. A travesty, a horror, repellent to all right-thinking people.

God caused His psalmist to prevent men thinking of sacrifice in heathen terms by these words: *'If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?'* (Psalm 50:12–13).

God did indeed require sacrifices in Old Testament times. It is clear that they played a very important part in the lives of the faithful from the very earliest days.

When Adam and Eve realised they had sinned by disobeying God they were ashamed of themselves, and attempted to hide, both from each other and from God. *'Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths'* (Genesis 3:7). The fig leaves were adequate for the purpose, as seen by Adam and Eve, but not for the purpose of God. They had brought upon themselves the sentence of death through

eager misuse of their imagination and abilities. They were inextricably in debt to God for seizing and appropriating to themselves what He had not given them. They had trespassed by leaving the way of life and crossing over into territory forbidden to them for that time.

For God it was not a simple matter of smiling benevolently on their foolishness and saying, "Well now, don't do it again." They had rebelled against their Creator by not taking His word as truth. It was vitally important they should learn a lesson which would remain with them as a constant reminder of the seriousness of sin.

'And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them' (Genesis 3:21). There was nothing they could do for themselves. *'Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin'* (Romans 5:12); *'The wages of sin is death'* (Romans 6:23). Those are two New Testament statements on the situation.

Atonement

They were given the privilege of witnessing how God proposed sin should be dealt with, and how **at-one-ment** with Him would be established. An animal died, and they were clothed with its skin (Genesis 3:21). Doubtless it horrified Adam and Eve that the innocent should suffer for the guilty. It is hardly likely that the skins were tailored to fit them. They were not

intended to decorate their bodies, but to be a continual reminder of the reason why they were being worn. We can't say if they wore them all the time, or only when they came before the presence of God at the east of the garden of Eden (v. 24).

In Genesis 4 we are told their son Abel was a shepherd. Why did he keep sheep? For their wool for clothes? For milk? Or to provide the skins for those who sinned? (Only later, in Genesis 9:3, do we read that animals were permitted to be eaten.) So people would—or could—have learned their dependence on the animals for the continuation of their life. Alive or dead, the animal should have been a reminder to them of their fallen state.

This, surely, ought to have regulated our relationship with the animals in our care, but cruel and arrogant people would not wish to be reminded of this. They ruthlessly slaughter animals for sport, and deny them the kindness to which they are entitled as God's creatures.

Under the Law of Moses which God gave to Israel, a system of animal sacrifices was established. Animals did not die "instead" of people, as substitutes for them so they could escape punishment for their sin. However many sacrifices someone offered, they still died. The animal represented the sinner. The sacrifice could only cover the sin for which it was offered—it could not take away the result of being a sinner.

Some sacrifices were wholly burnt, to illustrate the full price a person would pay when they eventually died and perished as a sinner. Some parts of some animals which

could be eaten by the offerer and the priest were first "offered" to God. They were not to be thoughtlessly slaughtered and greedily devoured without thankfulness to God for His provision. Every action involved in sacrifice was to teach a lesson—not to appease an angry god, as the heathens thought.

'It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Hebrews 10:4). The animal was not a willing sacrifice, nor did it have any concern for those it represented in dying. Animal sacrifices were but shadows, or parables. They all pointed forward, right from those in Eden, on until the final offering, when the Lamb of God willingly gave his life to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Jesus Christ was our perfect representative, provided by God. When we accept him as our sacrifice we are covered by his perfect, sinless life. We die with him symbolically in baptism. We are raised with him to a new relationship with God, and we are given hope of the resurrection, from our own "death", through him. God raised him from the dead to be a Prince and Saviour; through him we have the forgiveness of our sins; and living in him is eternal life. Now he represents his people in the presence of God (1 Timothy 2:5), and one day he will return to earth as their King (2 Timothy 4:1).

God gave His Son for us; the Lord Jesus gave himself for us; that was the sacrifice through which God gives eternal life to all who believe and accept that salvation.

Leslie Johnson

RF

If Jesus did not sin, he must have been divine. He can't have been human like us.

Ed

THE BIBLE SHOWS US what is righteousness, and what is sin (for example Romans 7:7). As we read the Bible it becomes clear that God's standard of righteousness is unattainably high—we cannot be righteous by our own efforts, we're all sinners and in need of God's mercy (Romans 11:32). This is the starting point for our relationship with God.

Sin comes so naturally to us that it's difficult to even begin to imagine how Jesus lived his whole life without committing any sinful act, word or even thought. I know that I can't manage half a morning.

It's tempting to suppose that he must have been somehow fundamentally different from us. But the Bible insists that he had the same nature as ours:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:14–18).

He was a mortal human like us. But he was very well equipped to succeed. It's reasonable to assume that he inherited an excellence of mind and character from God, his Father. Maybe it had to do with what we now understand as his genes. When you consider the way he behaved and spoke, it's clear that he had a magnetic personality and a brilliant intellect.

His formative years were spent in the very best environment—he was brought up in the godly household of Joseph and Mary, and there are also indications that he was in the habit of speaking to angels (for example Isaiah 50:4).

We should not underestimate the power of God's Word. Very obviously, Jesus' mind was steeped in his Bible—his conversation was peppered with Bible quotes and references, and even at the age of 12 he displayed astonishing understanding (Luke 2:46–47). As the Psalmist said, *'I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you' (Psalm 119:11).*

Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, and so was able to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice. He had qualities—we might call them advantages—which enabled him to accomplish this. But he was most definitely a man, with the ability to sin and die just like you and me. His temptation to sin, and therefore his victory over it, would have had no meaning if it was not a real temptation with the ability to fail.

Across

Down

1 Saul of Tarsus asked for letters to these at Damascus (Acts 9:2)

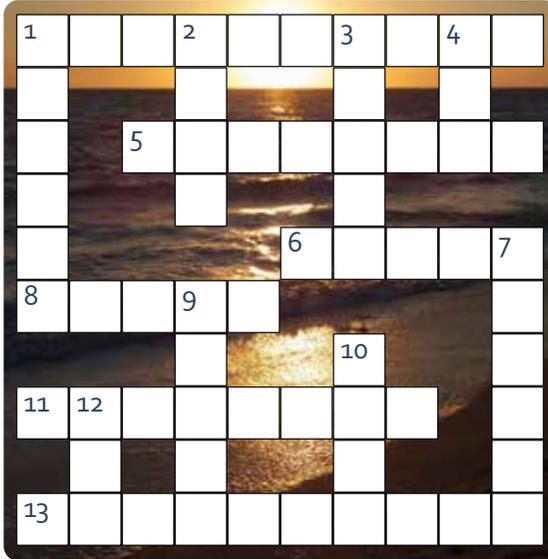
5 Following his baptism, Saul was taken to this sea port (Acts 9:30)

6 He spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:5)

8 Saul was three days without this (Acts 9:9)

11 This man took Saul to the apostles (Acts 9:27)

13 Before his baptism, Saul was this (one who speaks profanely) (1 Timothy 1:13)



1 Following his baptism, these fell from Saul's eyes (Acts 9:18)

2 The first man (Genesis 4:1)

3 That of the Lord overflowed for Saul (1 Timothy 1:14)

4 The first woman (Genesis 4:1)

7 Saul would do this for the sake of the name of Jesus (Acts 9:16)

9 Ananias laid these on Saul (Acts 9:17)

10 Saul preached in that of the Lord (Acts 9:28)

12 The number who heard Saul preach and were amazed (Acts 9:21)

(These clues use the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

Colin Jannaway

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cbma.treasurer@gmail.com

Caribbean

CBMC, Box 55541, Unit 119, 15280,
101 Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada V3R 0J7
philsnobelen@shaw.ca

India

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500001, India
tim@galbraithmail.com

South and East Asia

ACBM, PO Box 152 Cobbitty NSW,
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