

# Glad Tidings

*Of The Kingdom Of God*



## Featured **Articles**

God Is In Control (p. 3)

The Devil and Satan (p. 5)

Is it OK to Laugh at God? (p. 12)

A monthly magazine written and published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to 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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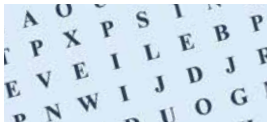
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# God Is In Control

TO THE ATHEIST, existence is random. You're here by chance. Your life has no ultimate meaning. There are many who like that idea, because it means they have no responsibility. If there's no higher authority to tell you what is right and wrong, and who might hold you to account for what you do, then you can make up your own rules and live your life the way you want.

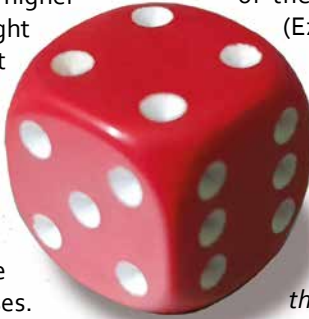
Good things might happen to you, or bad things. They're all a result of random processes. If you lose your job, or your home is wrecked by a storm, or you contract incurable cancer—there's no reason for it, you're just unlucky. The world may be wiped out at any moment by a meteor strike or a nuclear conflagration—it's a risk you try not to think about.

## Made For a Purpose

To the Christian, it's different. A basic Bible principle is that existence has meaning.

*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created (Revelation 4:11).*

God created the earth for a purpose—that it might be filled with His glory in His Kingdom (Habakkuk 2:14). He is actively involved in world affairs, as evidenced by the history of the nation of Israel which



is the focus of much of the Bible. We can recognise the many prophecies which have been fulfilled and are still being fulfilled—for instance concerning the regathering of the Jews to their ancestral land (Ezekiel 36–37). When we witness bewildering political events, we can be assured that they are not accidental. Everything that happens is under God's control as He steers the world towards its destiny:

*The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men (Daniel 4:17).*

And it's not just the lofty matters of national importance that God is concerned with. He is a Father, Who is passionately and intimately concerned with individuals. As Jesus Christ said, '*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*' (Luke 12:32).

Good things and bad things happen to all of us. But the follower of Christ is assured that they are not random, they are being overseen and they are for our benefit:

*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).*



Think about that. God gives blessings: *'For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly'* (Psalm 84:11). He also allows difficulties and hardship: *'Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives"'* (Hebrews 12:5–6). Just as He has a purpose with the earth, to fill it with His glory in the Kingdom, so He will work with us (if we'll let Him), to make us fit to be there.

## Living Stones

Among the many pictures the Bible uses of God's work with His people, is the picture of a builder at work on constructing a temple:

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In*  
*h i m*

*you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit* (Ephesians 2:19–22).

*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house* (1 Peter 2:5).

Stones come from the quarry rough and unshaped, and unfit for use as building components. They need to be cut to size, and sawn smooth so they sit together and are stable. Different stones will be shaped differently, according to their position and function in the building. Some stones will require more hammering and cutting than others.

For the follower of Christ, life is a meaningful process. God is working with us and on us, teaching and guiding us, knocking off our rough edges. He has the end in view, even though it may be difficult for us to see that end, especially during the difficult times. But even in life's hardships, we have the assurance that if we are faithful to Him, He will be faithful to us:

*I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38–39).

Just one more reason why life is so much better when you have faith.



# The Devil and Satan

## IN THE MODERN WORLD

few people hold to a belief in the devil as a supernatural being, although most churches do maintain it as a doctrine. The subject of the devil and Satan is important, because the Bible has much to say on it. But is it really the creature of popular thought—the immortal spirit-being, whose delight is to seduce the human race and preside over the suffering of the fallen in another sphere?

In order to arrive at the truth of this matter it will be necessary for us to look into some of the passages of the Bible in which the words 'devil' and 'Satan' appear, and to judge their meaning from the context.

## The Devil in the Old Testament

The word 'devil' is nowhere found in the Old Testament. The obvious reason for this is not that evil was non-existent in those far-off days, but because people understood that God is omnipotent and good, and that sin is simply the result of the indulgence of their own passions. For example, *'Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD,*

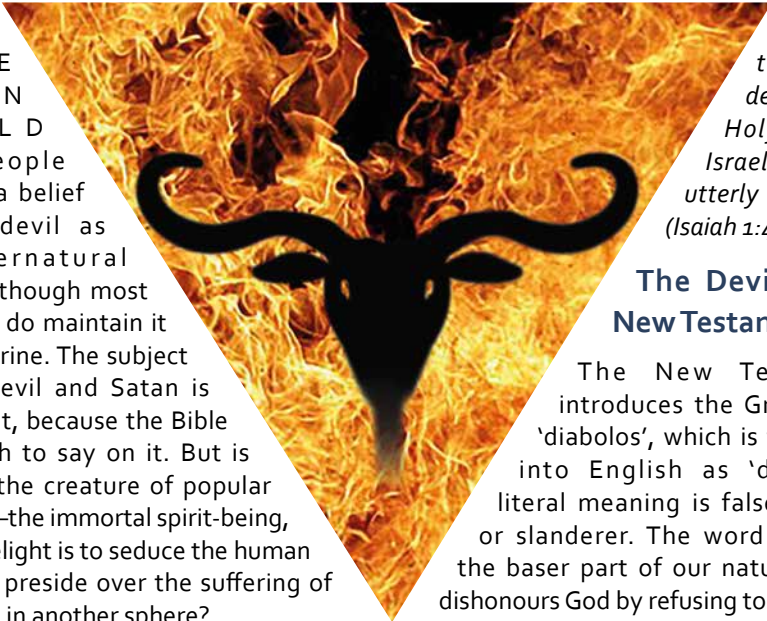
*they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged' (Isaiah 1:4).*

## The Devil in the New Testament

The New Testament introduces the Greek word 'diabolos', which is translated into English as 'devil'. Its literal meaning is false accuser, or slanderer. The word refers to the baser part of our nature, which dishonours God by refusing to accept His Word. It is primarily a disposition of mind and not a person.

It may be asked, why then does the Bible present the devil as though it is an actual being? For example, *'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil' (Luke 4:1-2).* The answer to the question is that the fairest reading of the narrative of Christ's wilderness temptation is that it was an inward struggle; a subtle yet powerful assertion of the natural sensual propensities of the mind against the nobler effort to obey God's will.

Understanding the word 'diabolos' as expressing an evil state of mind, the



forcible correctness of the statement in 1 John 3:8 becomes apparent: *'Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.'* Ever since Adam and Eve's first sin, sinful impulses have been indulged.

In several instances the word 'diabolos' is used in reference to an ordinary person or persons who have slandered God or opposed His revealed Truth, and in whom the evil state of mind rules. The word in this connection is applicable to either one person or to a multitude. Referring to Judas Iscariot, Christ once said, *'Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil'* (John 6:70). Similarly, *'Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour'* (1 Peter 5:8) is an obvious reference to the enemies and slanderers of God who so bitterly persecuted the early Christians and who, in the words of Revelation 2:10, threw some of them into prison. The word is in this case applied collectively to all those who were responsible for the death or imprisonment of the disciples of Christ.

## The Cause of Temptation

Such is the Bible evidence on the use of the word 'diabolos'. Perhaps no clearer statement on the first cause of temptation could be made than that given by the Apostle James. *'Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived*

*gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death'* (James 1:14–15). There can be no doubt that James believed that whatever was wrong, did not come from a supernatural source but that it was the result of allowing the evil state of mind to predominate, and so to result in sin and death.

The Lord Jesus himself identified the source of defilement—it is internal, not external:

*What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person"* (Mark 7:20–23).

## Lucifer

It is generally thought that the devil's name is Lucifer. This is because of a single occurrence of this name in the Bible, in Isaiah 14:12: *'How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!'*

That name 'Day Star' is the Hebrew word 'Lucifer', and that is how it appears in some Bible versions. A reading of the chapter reveals that it is a poetic description of the king of Babylon, and not any supernatural being.

## Satan in the Old Testament

The word 'satan' is found many times in the Old Testament. It is a Hebrew word, and it means 'adversary'. Usually it is translated, and its meaning is plain. For example, *'He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us'* (1 Samuel 29:4); *'The LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. He was of the royal house in Edom'* (1 Kings 11:14); *'God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary'* (Numbers 22:22).

There are occasions when the Hebrew text intends the word as a proper name, and translators leave the word as a proper name, 'Satan'. Most are in the book of Job, where Satan is an individual who wreaks tragedy on the man Job. The fact that Satan converses with God (chapter 1) and uses God's power to do his work (4:2:11) indicates that whoever he was, he was not the supernatural fiend of popular thought.

Another passage in which Satan appears is 1 Chronicles 21:1: *'Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel'*. Again, whoever Satan was, he was doing God's work, as is shown in the parallel account: *'The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah"'* (2 Samuel 24:1).

## Satan in the New Testament

It now remains to discover whether the use of the word 'satan' in the New Testament is consistent with that in the Old, or whether the application of the word to an invisible, antagonistic and super-human personality

is warranted. An interesting example of the use of the word is given in Matthew 16:23, where Christ rebukes Peter with the words *'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me.'* Why did Christ call Peter 'Satan'? It was because Peter was opposing a fixed determination of the Lord to suffer, and as such, was an adversary to him and a potential cause of stumbling.



When we recognise the connection between Satan and adversity, much misunderstanding will disappear. We have for example in the Lord Jesus' message to the angel of the church in Smyrna, *'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan'* (Revelation 2:9). Here 'Satan' refers to an assembly of men who were adverse to the disciples and to the progress of the church.

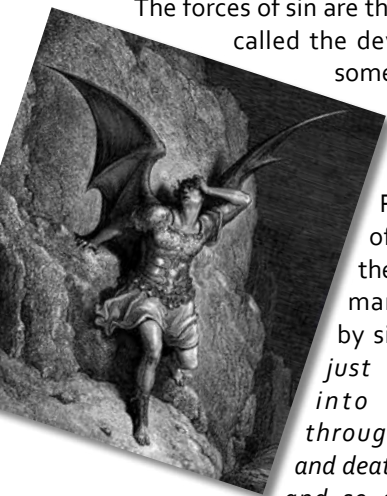
These observations on the subject would be incomplete without reference to the Bible's reference to the end of Satan. This is the account in the Bible's last book of the events at the return of Jesus Christ to earth:

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the*



*bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while (Revelation 20:1–3).*

Revelation is a book of symbols, and this is evidently a pictorial representation of sin being restrained for a thousand years—that is, for the Millennium, the first phase of God’s Kingdom. As has already been shown, sin can be called both the devil (the carnal rebellious mind), and also Satan because it is directly antagonistic or adverse to the righteousness of God.



The forces of sin are thus sometimes called the devil, and again sometimes spoken of directly. For example, the Apostle Paul speaks of sin entering the world by one man, and death by sin: *‘Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death spread*

*to all men because all sinned...’ (Romans 5:12).* The writer to the Hebrews describes this same conquest of evil as the conquest of the devil: *‘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’ (Hebrews 2:14).*

This victory of Jesus was a victory, not over a person, but over the power of evil and its consequences, death. Ultimately all that is antagonistic to God and opposed to His righteousness, the devil and Satan, will be destroyed: *‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8).*

We have attempted to deal fairly with the principal Bible passages which are commonly quoted as favouring the idea of the personal devil, and our conclusion is that the idea is wrong. Indeed, to entertain it would render many passages of the Bible absurd. To suppose that there is a supernatural being who challenges and frustrates God would be to question God’s omnipotence. And we cannot blame anyone or anything else for the things we do wrong. The Bible makes it clear that these come *‘out of the heart’ (Mark 7:20).*

**RTW Smalley**

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# Baptism—Entrance to Life

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a king who felt unwell, so he summoned a minstrel to sing for him. The king mentioned a few of his favourite songs. “Oh Your Majesty,” replied the minstrel, “those songs are rather old fashioned; I’ll sing some better ones that I’m sure you’ll enjoy.” So he sang. At the end of the evening the minstrel asked for his fee. “No,” said the king, “there is no fee. You performed according to your wishes, not mine.”

That little story presents an important principle. If we wish to receive God’s blessings, we must do as God teaches and not as we want to do.

## An Old Testament Illustration

Naaman the Syrian was an eminent man, but he had a big problem—he had leprosy, a disease that was incurable and fatal. His story is in 2 Kings chapter 5. He heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him and so he travelled to Israel accompanied by a retinue of servants and taking many gifts for the prophet. But Elisha the prophet did not even greet Naaman personally; instead he sent a servant to tell Naaman to go to the river Jordan and wash in the river seven times. Naaman was outraged! He turned his chariot and entourage around to return to Syria. But some of his servants urged him to swallow his pride. To his credit, Naaman listened; he showed a humble spirit, and with all those servants watching, he went

into the water—seven times. On coming up out of the water after the seventh time he found that the dread disease had gone. He had been healed! But notice the point—first of all he had to put pride to one side and show a humble and obedient spirit. Otherwise he would have remained a leper.



## New Testament Examples

Saul (later known as Paul) initially was a zealot who persecuted Christians, throwing both men and women into prison and hounding others to their deaths. He presided over the stoning to death of the Christian Stephen (Acts 22:4, 19–20). But later he himself was converted and he understood what terrible things he had done. What could he do? The past cannot be undone and that burden of guilt lay heavily on Saul. But Ananias came to Paul and told him what to do: *‘Why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name’* (v. 16). Notice

the words 'wash away', as if that burden of guilt was something unclean, like the leprosy of Naaman, that could be washed away.

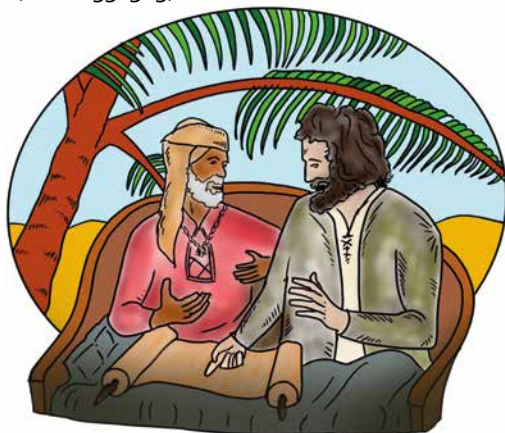
After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:15–16). Of course, anyone who did not believe would not want to be baptised, but those who did believe must show their faith by being baptised.

The apostle Philip preached the Gospel in the region of Samaria. On seeing the miracles of healing that Philip did, people also listened to his preaching: 'When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women' (Acts 8:12).

Later in the same chapter, Philip was told to go to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian man returning home from Jerusalem. As he rode along in his chariot he was reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 53. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked. The Ethiopian replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:30–31). So Philip joined him in his chariot and explained that marvellous chapter to him, showing that the coming of Jesus had been foretold hundreds of years before. Here are a few words from that chapter:

*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;*

*and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he 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: 3–5).*



No doubt there were many other passages that Philip explained too; he may have discussed Psalm 22, which was written 1000 years before the time of Jesus and long before crucifixion had been thought of but which presents the sufferings of the Lord in detail; he may have discussed the sacrifice of Isaac as a 'picture' of the sacrifice of Jesus (Genesis 22). Eventually they came to an oasis. Clearly Philip had discussed baptism with the man because on seeing the water he said, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?' (Acts 8:36). And he was. They went down both into the water and Philip baptised him, then they came up out of the water (vs. 38–39). It was not a matter of sprinkling water on the man. There would

have been plenty of water to hand in the Ethiopian's retinue. His baptism involved finding a pool, and being dipped under its surface.

## How It Works

But why must believers be baptised? Well, first of all, we have no right to go to the Almighty demanding an explanation. Nevertheless, God does tell us the meaning of baptism:

*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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:3–5).*

Baptism, therefore, is a 'picture' of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. By that act of obedience and faith we can show to God that we believe that Jesus defeated human nature (the devil) in his own life; that he presented an unblemished life to his Father; that God raised him from the dead to immortality; and that if we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we can stand

before God, not in our own merit but in the all-sufficient merit of Jesus. Jesus is 'the way'; we can either gratefully accept God's offer or we can ignore it. The choice is ours.

One day Jesus received a visitor, Nicodemus, and explained to him what we must do to be saved: *'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:5–6).*

There are, therefore, three births for those who will follow the Lord Jesus Christ: first, our natural birth. Second, our birth of water—through baptism. Third, birth of the spirit. Baptism is a turning point in our lives; we remember the event and the date. Being born of the spirit is a daily, life-long effort. Each day we must try to follow the example of Jesus so that our lives reflect his life. If we have been born again, then finally there will be another change, by God's grace when Jesus returns: *'Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him' (1 John 3:2).*



**David Budden**

# Is it OK to Laugh at God?

IN A SPEECH to an audience of comedians Pope Francis said, "Can we laugh at God? Of course, we can, and this is not blasphemy, we can laugh, just as we play and joke with the people we love. The Jewish wisdom and literary tradition is a master in this!"\*

Let's see what the Bible says.

## Fear God

When God rescued His people Israel from their slavery in Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai in the desert of Arabia, and there He met with them in order to introduce Himself, deliver His law and make His covenant with them. It was an awesome experience, which was intended to impress upon them His majesty.

*Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin" (Exodus 20:18–20).*

\* Friday 14th June 2024. The transcript is on the Vatican website.

The relationship between God and Israel was based on their appreciation of the greatness of their Creator and Redeemer.

It's not necessarily an easy principle to understand. God is love (1 John 4:8). He showed His absolute and unfathomable love for us by giving His Son to die for us (John 3:16). It's not only a New Testament characteristic, He has always been the same. Love was the reason He did what He did for Israel: *'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son' (Hosea 11:1).*

His love, pity and forbearance towards His wayward people shines through the story of the Exodus. And yet there was no familiarity in the relationship. His holiness is continually stressed (for example Leviticus 11:45). When the priests Nadab and Abihu decided they'd make an offering in an irreverent way, He killed them. Their shocked father Aaron was warned, *'This is what the LORD has said, 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified' (Leviticus 10:3).*

Are you getting the impression that actually there's a difference between our relationship with God, and other relationships we have?





## Taking God's Name in Vain

In Exodus 20 we see the Ten Commandments—the fundamental rules which were at the heart of the Law which God gave to govern the national and religious life of Israel. The first commandment was, *'You shall have no other gods before me'* (v. 3). The second commandment was that they must not make themselves images to worship (vs. 4–6). The third commandment was, *'You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain'* (v. 7). What does that mean? Basically it means to misuse it—for example this might be by using it irreverently, or as an oath to reinforce an empty promise, or using it as a casual exclamation.

The Old Testament's 'wisdom' books stress the absolute importance of treating God with reverence. The Proverbs of Solomon begin, *'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge'* (Proverbs 1:7). And drawing together its treatise on the meaning of life, Ecclesiastes concludes: *'The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man'* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## The Example of Christ

As in every matter of behaviour, Jesus Christ of course provides the ultimate example. Jesus was God's Son—he enjoyed a relationship with God which is beyond what we can experience or even imagine. Throughout the Gospels we see him continually at prayer, and frequently conversing with angels. He said, *'I speak of what I have seen with my Father'* (John 8:38).

Every human father enjoys playing and joking with his children, and most can take a joke at their own expense. Is that the kind of relationship Christ had with his Father? Jesus evidently had a good sense of humour (for example Matthew 23:24). But there's no indication, in his prayers and in his teaching, that he approached God with anything but the utmost reverence. And he instructed his followers to do likewise: *'Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"'* (Matthew 6:9).

God is love, and the only appropriate response to the love He has shown to us is that we return it with all our being. But He is not a man. He is the Creator of heaven and earth. This is how the Apostle Paul expressed his love for his heavenly Father:

*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen* (Romans 11:33–36).

Laughter is a gift from God. The ability to make people laugh is a wonderful thing. Some of the best comics are those who laugh at themselves, and invite their audience to laugh with them. It's OK to make comedy out of others, as long as they're happy with it. Otherwise, it's not: *'Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets'* (Matthew 7:12).

It's absolutely not OK to laugh at God.

Doug Potts

# The World's First Children



THE FACE OF THE WORLD'S first baby crinkled with laughter, as he cooed and gurgled at his mother. The little boy brought her intense joy, as she marvelled over the perfection of his fingers and tiny toes, and rejoiced in his faltering steps and his mimicry of her voice. Fortunately, Eve knew nothing of the tragedy that would one day pierce her soul. Her lovely Cain would turn out to be the world's first murderer. Those infant fingers would one day shed blood, and those laughing eyes turn cold. For like every other baby, Cain began innocent. Only as he grew did he reveal the symptoms of that ugly disease of sin. Adam and his wife would recognize, with minds that now knew good and evil, the stubborn, rebellious pride and selfishness in Cain that disrespected God and led him at last to hate his brother.

Abel, Eve's second son, was different, just as no two children are ever the same. His interests were different, his manner was

gentler, and he showed a deep reverence for the Creator. The contrast between the two boys epitomised the difference between sinner and saint, so that they were to become representatives of two classes of humankind. Adam had many other children besides Cain and Abel, as we saw in part 1. That is why he called his wife *'the mother of all living'* (Genesis 3:20). But the terse record of Genesis, spanning the first 1600 years of human history in five brief chapters, focuses upon these two men. *'Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground'* (Genesis 4:2).

It was a sensible arrangement to divide the responsibilities, each specialising in his own branch of husbandry. The domestication of cattle and the adoption of a nomadic way of life appear to have been later developments in the history of humanity (Genesis 4:20). The earliest system of agriculture described here—the keeping of sheep in combination together with crop husbandry—conformed with sound ecological principles, and was essentially practical. Sheep yield milk to be drunk or turned into butter and cheese, as well as wool and leather for garments and household goods. They need sensitive and compassionate handling if they are to thrive, a care that Abel was prepared to give. On the other hand, the produce Cain grew would provide energy and vitamins for the growing household. The arrangement worked well, until the day

the two boys quarrelled over the offerings. That quarrel ended with the first murder, the first grave, and the break-up of the family home.



## The Two Offerings

The record in Genesis at this point is a masterpiece of compression, and unless we follow with care, we may jump to mistaken conclusions.

*In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard (Genesis 4:3–5).*

On the face of it, we might be disposed to feel Cain was hard done by. After all, he had spent many hours of labour in cultivating those fruits of the ground, and to give them up to God was just as much of a sacrifice as for Abel to offer one of his sheep. Why was God not pleased? The answer is to be found through a close study of the text. The brothers brought their offerings '*in the course of time*'. The original Hebrew literally says "at the end of days". There

may well be a hint here that there was a specially appointed day for offerings. We are told, too, that Cain brought his offering '*to the LORD*'. Where would this be? Again, there is more than a hint here and in what followed, that offerings had to be made in a prescribed place. We are told that Abel brought '*of the firstborn of his flock*'. It was not any old lambs that he brought, but the firstborn from each ewe. Once more, this fits with the laws of offering given later in the Old Testament, where God specially requested the firstborn animal in sacrifice. Finally, Abel offered '*of their fat portions*'. Again, we are forced to conclude that the reason God approved of Abel's offering was because it was offered in the way that He had asked. Under the Law of Moses, centuries later, the fat, the richest portion of the animal, was to be especially set aside for God:

*Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the LORD, the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the LORD's (Leviticus 3:14–16).*

## What God Approves

This leads us at once to an important lesson, with grave implications. It emerges, right at the beginning of the world, that God is not always pleased with what we think He ought to like. He requires us to approach Him with great humility, and offer him the sacrifices that He says He wants.

Jesus had much the same teaching. At the judgment seat, he warned, *'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness''* (Matthew 7:21–23).

Harsh though it sounds, sincerity and good works alone are not enough to merit the approval of God. Saul, king of Israel, considered he was doing God a good turn when he saved alive some of the cattle belonging to the Amalekites which God had commanded him to destroy. He thought they would make a sacrifice with which God would be pleased. But it was a sacrifice that God had not asked for, and the voice of Samuel rang out the doom of Saul: *'To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams'* (1 Samuel 15:22).

Like Adam and his sons, we are all sinners before God. We are in the wrong, and He has laid down the terms on which He is graciously prepared to take us back to Himself. We must be careful to find out what He requires, and bring only this before Him in our worship and our lives.

## Sacrifices

We must now consider why God called for sacrifice to be made in a particular way, and indeed why He asked for sacrifice at all. You may well have dismissed the offering of animals as cruel and barbaric, something Christianity has left well behind,

and you may be surprised that we should spend time considering it at such length. Jesus Christ, after all, replaced sacrifice for the Christian. In the words of the apostle, *'by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified'* (Hebrews 10:14). That, of course, is absolutely true. But it provides in a nutshell the answer to our problem. The offering of animals in Old Testament times as a condition for the forgiveness of sins, was to point forward to the way God would at last take away sins for ever through the death of His Son.



The firstborn lamb stood for the firstborn of God: *'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'* (John 1:29). The animal's sudden and ugly death was a grim symbol of Christ's crucifixion. Human nature would rise up to strike down the perfect man. His life, in all its richness, would be freely given to save friends and enemies from the curse. If sacrifice repels, it underlines the repulsiveness of sin, which festering in the hearts of his enemies brought about the death of the Lamb of God. Christ's followers are freed from the necessity to purchase lambs to offer to God. But they must still confess and renounce the



darkness of their guilt, and praise the love of God in taking it away.

## The Cherubim

One last point we can make, reading between the lines of the record. When Adam and his wife had sinned, they were driven from the Garden of God. To seal off the gate, God *'placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life'* (Genesis 3:24). We are not told what these cherubim were, or what they looked like, but we do find cherubim mentioned later: in the fabric of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 26:1), and the temple built by Solomon (2 Chronicles 3:14). They were figures woven into the veil that hung from ceiling to floor, barring the way into the Holy of Holies, that inner chamber where stood the ark, the throne of God.

The tabernacle and temple were the centre of worship for the people of Israel. Their sacrifices had to be brought to an altar which was set in front of the door. This is what it says in the book of the Law: *'If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD'* (Leviticus 1:3).

Putting these facts together, it seems reasonable to conclude that Adam and his family would bring their sacrifices to the gate at the east of the Garden. There they would offer them, in front of the cherubim. They would be able to see, stretching back through the trees, that forbidden path which could restore them to the paradise they had lost, where was the tree of life

which could make them live for ever (Genesis 3:22–24).



They would understand that the way which had been forfeited through sin could only be regained through the death of the Lamb, the Son of God. With faith in God's promise, they could live in hope that one day, by God's grace, they might share in the victory of their offspring over that of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), and taste the joys of a new fellowship with God.

That hope can be ours. It is Jesus' own promise. *'To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God'* (Revelation 2:7). *'Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates'* (22:14).

**David Pearce**  
(to be continued)

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

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**YS** We can see stars that are billions of light years away—that means their light has taken billions of years to reach us. So how come the Bible says the stars were only created 6000 years ago (Genesis 1:16)?

**Ed** THE 'DISTANT STARLIGHT problem' is perhaps the most popular objection to the Bible's account of creation. Actually a number of solutions have been proposed. Here are some:

- Time is relative—we know that it passes at different rates to observers in different conditions, for example dependent on the strength of the gravitational field they're in. What if, in the beginning when God was creating the universe and the laws of physics, He made billions of years of cosmic time to occur within the space of one day on earth?
- Time appears to pass more slowly the faster you're moving. The speed of light is understood to be the fastest speed in the universe. Theoretically, time would stand still if you could travel at the speed of light. So a beam of light leaves a star, spends a million years travelling across space and arrives in a telescope on earth—if you were riding on that beam of light, you would think you'd arrived at your destination at the same time as you left the star. What if the Bible is using this time convention?

- It's generally assumed that the speed of light is the same in all directions. This cannot actually be proved. There is a theoretical possibility that light actually travels instantaneously towards earth. This is consistent with observation and impossible to disprove. What if this is the case, and therefore starlight from all over the universe arrived on earth instantly on the fourth day of creation?

- What if God simply accelerated starlight during the creation week?

- The Bible starts, '*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*' (Genesis 1:1). Then it continues, '*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep*' (v. 2). What if verse 1 is a general statement that God created everything; then verse 2 commences the account of the creation (or re-creation) of the heavens and earth as we know them? In which case, the creation of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day refers to their appearance to the observer, and the stars may indeed be billions of years old.

People with much larger brains than mine are occupying them with the 'distant starlight problem'. For me, I'm content to know that it does not present an obstacle to acceptance of the Genesis record as God's true account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

# Christian Baptism

THE GRID contains the names of the six men who are listed below. Five of them baptised others. The sixth was baptised by one of the others, but did not himself baptise anyone.

In the grid there are also two words (one of six letters and the other of seven letters) describing what someone should do before being baptised.

ANANIAS

JESUS

JOHN

PAUL

PETER

PHILIP

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

References:  
 John 4:1-2; Acts 3:28, Acts 8:12  
 BELIEVE REPENT  
 The two words:



Anna Hart



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