

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

What Is Your Soul? (p. 3)

Israel and Palestine (p. 9)

Preparing for a Crisis (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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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

Publisher

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What Is Your Soul?

WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS? Why and how are you aware of yourself? This is a question which philosophers and biologists hotly debate. It's such a difficult question that some suggest consciousness doesn't actually exist, it's just an illusion.

As usual, the Bible provides a clear common-sense answer. The first chapters of the Bible's first book contain the account of the creation of the world and life upon it.

The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature (Genesis 2:7).

God is the Creator of everything, including life. It stands to reason that He is the source of consciousness. His name, which most English Bibles print as 'LORD', means something like "I Am That I Am" (see Exodus 3:14). He has given to each of us, and not just humans but all His creatures, a taste of that life which is His.

The reason we live is that we are energised by the breath of God. The Bible describes a direct link between the life of all animals and the breath of God: *'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).*

Don't be confused by that word 'spirit'. In the original Hebrew text it's the same as

the word 'breath' in the previous sentence. It's a word that carries the basic idea of 'wind'.

The spirit of God is a constantly recurring theme in the Bible. It's the power by which He created and maintains everything, and it's often helpful to remember the idea that it is His 'breath'.

God's creative 'spirit' is evidenced in a marvellous way in the existence of animal life. Life begins when He gives His spirit, and ceases when he removes it: *'and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12:7).* Consciousness begins when He gives the breath of life, and ends when He takes it away.

The Soul

We saw that when God created the first man he *'became a living creature' (Genesis 2:7).* That word 'creature' is a Hebrew word, *nephesh*, which can be defined as 'that which breathes'. The word is used in the Bible of all animals: for example, *'And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds"' (Genesis 1:24).*

The word *nephesh* has a complex meaning in the Hebrew Bible. It's



used to describe every aspect of animal life, and is translated into English as (among other things) 'life', 'mind', 'heart', 'body', 'appetite'—and also 'soul'. For example, *'Prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die'* (Genesis 27:4).

There appears to be no particular reason why the translators introduced the word 'soul', except that perhaps they had a certain idea they wanted to convey. There's a popular notion, which goes back at least as far as the ancient Greeks, that there is an essence of life which is independent of the body, and which can go on living after the body dies. This life essence has long been called 'soul' in English.

It's not a concept that's found in the Bible. The Bible is clear: the 'soul' is the living being, it's simply a 'creature': *'Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die'* (Ezekiel 18:4).

Questions and Answers

We've established a simple and profound fact: the life of all creatures happens by the breath of God. We have no idea how this works, but it follows that this is the cause of consciousness. We can now turn to some popular questions people ask.

Will computers ever become conscious?

The answer is that they may get phenomenally intelligent and they may learn to perfectly mimic consciousness, but they will never become conscious.

Does every living thing have a soul?

According to the Bible, souls are associated

with breath—almost everything that lives processes oxygen in some way, although there are some simple organisms such as certain types of bacteria which don't. Again, according to the Bible souls are associated with intelligence—this is not limited to animals, for example it's now known that trees communicate with each other. However, the Bible only uses the word *nephesh* to describe people and animals, so there's no point speculating any further.

And the most important question—**Why am I here?** The Bible provides the definitive answer. God is the essence and the source of life, and the highest purpose of all living things is to acknowledge this: *'Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!'* (Psalm 150:6).

His purpose is that the earth one day will be filled with His glory (Numbers 14:21). This will happen in His Kingdom, after the return to earth of His Son Jesus Christ. He has invited us to be there. When Christ returns, those who have accepted his offer of salvation will be given immortality (1 Corinthians 15:23).

In the Bible we're given a very few tantalising glimpses of what's in store at the culmination of the Kingdom, when the earth and its population have been restored to perfection. This is one: *'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 15:28). We cannot comprehend what is meant by God being 'all in all', but we know that it will include you and me, if we want it.

The Road of Life

AS A YOUNG MAN, late one night I was driving down a country lane. The dim headlights of my old car caught a rabbit—too late for it to move, and a moment later it lay dead in the road. I stopped the car, jumped out and ran back to the spot. There was not a mark on the rabbit. I thought that would taste good in the pot. A few days later we feasted on rabbit stew.

As a young father, I was once again driving along with my two-year old daughter riding in the back. A wood pigeon sat in the middle of the road. It seemed oblivious to the impending danger and too late it decided to try and fly away. There was the tell-tale thump and its feathers flew everywhere. I once again pulled the car over and ran back to the spot where the impact had taken place. There was nothing to be done—just a dreadful mess. I quickly did what I could to clear up and put the remains under a hedge. My stomach turned over. As I climbed back into my seat and drove on a little voice in the back asked over and over, “What happened to the pigeon, Daddy? What happened to the pigeon?”

Trials

Both incidents seemed to highlight the way in which we as humans react to the

trials, difficulties and suffering in our lives, and indeed the changes that take place in us as we develop and our personal circumstances change.

Sometimes we relish the challenge difficult situations present. On other occasions we are appalled by things that happen and feel either helpless or guilty.

At times we seem oblivious to the sufferings going on around us, at others it becomes very personal indeed and we are struck dumb with no answers to a difficult situation. The other thing we try to do is search around for some specific reason—ultimately something or someone to blame. Often the inclination is to blame God.

“Why does God allow it to happen? I thought He was supposed to be a loving God!” “Where was God when that happened?” “What has your God got to say about that?”...

Often when people ask such questions they’re not expecting an answer, and they don’t listen if they’re given one.

Isn’t it odd that many people will only think of God when things are going badly? They don’t acknowledge or thank Him for life’s many blessings.

Faith

In order to make sense of life, we need to start with God. We are told, clearly, that *'without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him'* (Hebrews 11:6).

This Bible verse marks both the beginning and the end of the answer to all the questions about life that we may have. It tells us that there is a rich reward for those who are willing to trust God and deliberately and carefully seek to please Him in their lives. The clear implication is that He, and He alone, can give meaning and purpose to our lives. We have to acknowledge that He is the infinite God and that we are finite human beings. He understands and knows everything. We on the other hand are going to have times when we simply don't know, and certainly times when we don't understand what is going on in our lives. One thing of which we can be certain, however, is that the Bible is true and its truths are basically simple. Jesus said to his followers:

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

Firstly this is challenging. But we do need to stop behaving like frightened rabbits and place our confidence, by faith, in God.

Then there is also the reward. Those words were spoken by the Master, Jesus himself, who probably had the most trying life of

all. They mean that by faith our lives need not be limited to a few decades, but they are placed in an eternal context. Here it seems to me that the Bible really does speak for itself. It contains many glorious descriptions of the Kingdom which will be established when Christ returns. It will be a world that's very different from the one we know now. For example, find for yourself Isaiah 35 and let your mind dwell upon it.

Jesus is Coming Back!

- He will return at a time when the whole world seems burnt out and burnt up—on the brink of total ruin (Luke 21:26–27).
- He will stop a war in Israel and establish a reign of peace in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14).
- He will bring the dead to life again and there will be a judgement (Daniel 12:2–3).
- He will give everlasting life to those who have diligently sought to please God in their lives (Matthew 25:21).
- Then pain and suffering will surely be removed from the earth (Isaiah 35:5–6).
- The earth will be restored to paradise (Psalm 72:16).

What a vision for us! God has given us hope. If we take a realistic view, there is precious little hope in today's world. People look hopefully to their leaders to effect change for the better—and are usually quickly disillusioned.



What is Wrong

There is a fundamental problem with human nature. That's why Jesus came the first time—to open the way of salvation from the problem within each one of us: the Bible calls it sin. Jesus *'gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father' (Galatians 1:4)*. Having prepared a people, his second coming will be to establish the Kingdom: *'Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him' (Hebrews 9:28)*.

So why are there disappointments, frustrations, pain and sadness in our lives? Surely it is to teach us there is something wrong that needs putting right. Because of God, the God of love—we know it can be put right, His way and in His good time. In the meantime we have to learn patience, endurance and trust in Him. He has a plan and it is still on track.

Why are there earthquakes and other natural disasters? They teach us that the whole of creation is caught up in the wilfulness of mankind and is affected by our sin—either indirectly as a result of the curse in Eden (Genesis 3:17–18), or directly because of the way we are despoiling, polluting and abusing it. All creation is suffering with us, and awaiting its own salvation in God's Kingdom:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For

the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8: 19–21).

What should be our reaction when we're faced with natural disasters? This was Jesus' response when he was told of people who had lost their lives in a disaster: *'Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:5)*.

The Right Response

Climate change may indeed be the result of our own greed and folly, but it is in God's hands! Of course we should treat this world with respect and care, but first and foremost should be a reappraisal of where we are and what we are doing in our own lives. Let's start with the need for repentance—being genuinely sorry about the world situation and also our own flaws.

Repentance really means an about-turn in our personal way of life. In practical terms it means being realistic about ourselves and the world in which we live, and awakening to the fact that God has graciously allowed us to choose whether we acknowledge Him or not.

Acknowledging that both in our individual lives and in the wider world there is something fundamentally wrong; we live in a world of death. It is a world that has natural disasters, climate change, poor commercial systems, unjust governments,



international conflict, inter-personal strife—but ultimately all these are in God's hands and will be overruled by Him.

So face the reality that you, as a human being, need help. Pray, ask God to help you sort out the difficulties whatever they are, in your own life and in the world around you. Seek out, through His Word the Bible, what He wants you to do. Belief and repentance lead to baptism, a symbolic washing away of sins and the start of a new life with God (Romans 6:4). Seek in your life a closer relationship with Him, which will lead ultimately to the great reward He has promised when Jesus comes again.



The first thing I urge you to do is pray—however imperfectly you may feel you do it. Praying is not a matter of flowery words from a prayer book. The important thing is that you mean what you say and say what you mean. Nor is it a matter of a special place or time. Do it whilst what you wish to pray about is in your heart and mind, with no preconditions, no barriers. You can then go on your way looking for the answer, because you believe that Someone, God, has been listening and has the power to help.

Often answers are to be found in the Bible, the Word of God, itself.

Remember that building a relationship with God is about faith. It is largely

experimental, about life, about doing it, starting with reading the Bible as a regular part of your daily activity and allowing it to lead you. In other words give God an opportunity to be heard—by you. You have my personal assurance that it has worked in my life. If things don't seem to be working out it's usually because I have forgotten to seek God's guidance or because of my impatience—certainly not because He has failed.

One dusky, dusty evening I was driving along an African road, probably going too fast, when in the headlights I caught sight of a huge ditch stretching right across my path. Of course I tried to brake, but on the dirt track the car entered a prolonged skid. At the last second it slewed around and came to rest with its nearside wheels on the very brim of the ditch. We cautiously climbed out, all of us through the offside doors! All I could say was,

"God must have had us in His hands. Thanks be to Him and Him alone!"

We cautiously drove on our way—thoughtfully thankful and with a little more caution.

David Nightingale

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

e-mail editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

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Israel and Palestine

IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE that the current hostilities between Israel and its neighbours were foretold in the Bible.

For instance, Psalm 83 is a plea to God by its Jewish writer because of the threat to his country by a range of neighbouring nations. If you compare a map of the ancient nations described in the Psalm, you'll see a remarkable correspondence to the enemies of the modern nation of Israel.

Psalm 83 begins:

*O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God! For behold, your enemies make an uproar; those who hate you have raised their heads. They lay crafty plans against your people; they consult together against your treasured ones. They say, "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!" (vs. 1-4).**

* Christadelphians recognise the Jews as God's people (for example Isaiah 43:10), and the Jewish state in the land of Israel as a fulfilment of Bible prophecy (for example Ezekiel 38:8). We take a keen interest in Middle East events because they show Bible prophecy being fulfilled. We are not in any way supporters of the modern political state of Israel.

Implacable Hatred

This animosity is readily seen in the attitude of Israel's principal enemies. For example, Hezbollah is the political party and paramilitary group based in Lebanon. Its manifesto states:

The Necessity for the Destruction of Israel

We see in Israel the vanguard of the United States in our Islamic world. It is the hated enemy that must be fought until the hated ones get what they deserve. This enemy is the greatest danger to our future generations and to the destiny of our lands...

Hamas is the political and military

organisation which governs the Gaza Strip. Its covenant states:

Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.





The Jihad for the liberation of Palestine is an individual duty.

Despite desperate efforts by the United Nations and the international community, the deadly hostility between Israel and its opponents shows no sign of abating. Bible readers are not surprised at this. In fact, we know that the situation will get much worse before it is resolved.

If you read to the end of Psalm 83 you will see the Psalmist's confidence that Israel will finally be delivered from its enemies—not by its own military prowess, or for its own glory, but *'that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth'* (v. 18).

Israel Facing Catastrophe

The prophecy of Zechariah provides some more detail:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zechariah 14:1-2).

The attackers this time will not be one nation only, but all nations will be represented in the invading force, with

considerable initial success. Israel's very existence will seem threatened, as though its enemies are about to triumph. But the massed forces will face unforeseen opposition, as the following verse shows: *'Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle'* (v. 3).

Again we see that Israel will finally be delivered—not by its own military efforts and not for its own glory, but by God Himself. What does Zechariah mean when he refers to God fighting on a day of battle? Here are some past occasions:

- When God brought the nation of Israel into the Promised Land, they fought with its previous inhabitants. There was a pivotal battle: *'And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword'* (Joshua 10:11).
- Later, Israel was attacked by various enemies. One of them was Jabin king of Canaan. Through the prophetess Deborah God instructed the commander of Israel's army: *'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of*



Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand' (Judges 4:6-7). The account goes on to describe the Israelites' victory over Jabin's army. Deborah's song of triumph reveals how God fought for them: *'The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon' (Judges 5:21).*

- One of the deadliest threats the Israelites faced was the invasion of Assyria, which destroyed the northern part of the nation and laid siege to Jerusalem. King Hezekiah sought help from God. *'And that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies' (2 Kings 19:35).*

This is only a selection of the ways in which God has changed the outcomes of conflicts in favour of the Jews. Open the Bible and see how many more you can find.

Divine Intervention

Zechariah's prophecy continues:

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall

be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northwards, and the other half southwards (Zechariah 14:4).

This is a clear reference to the return of Jesus Christ to the very place from which he was taken into heaven 2000 years ago (Acts 1:11). God will intervene at the very point of catastrophe in the Middle East crisis, by means of sending His Son.

Zechariah 14 describes the cataclysmic events surrounding the return of Christ, and the final establishment of God's Kingdom on earth: *'And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one' (v. 9).*

Whether the present conflict will escalate into the situation described in Zechariah, or whether it is like the preliminary rumbles of a volcano warning of the main event, we dare not predict, but the final outcome is certain. The Middle East conflict will be resolved. It will be achieved not by human efforts, but it will be imposed by God. Israel, its neighbours, and the whole earth will at last enjoy true and lasting peace: *'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2:14).*

Peter Banyard

Preparing for a Crisis

IN MANY PARTS of the world poor people have insufficient food and can only live from day to day. Other nations are far richer, where most people usually have access to shops with plenty of food and other supplies. The normal routine is to go out shopping to get what is needed for the next few days. But this can change. When there is the threat of a crisis people tend to 'panic buy', stocking up with a vast supply of things they think they may need over the following weeks or months. This famously happened in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, and again in the oil crises in 1972 and 1979, and recently in the coronavirus crisis.



Natural Reactions

As the coronavirus lock-down approached in the UK some people hoarded food and some people had to go without. In the following weeks there was still plenty of food in the shops, and those who had panic-bought were throwing it away. This sort of behaviour may seem selfish and foolish. But it is the result of our instinct to

try to take control of our lives and also to survive. So it is 'natural'. In fact, many of the elderly who remember the rationing in the Second World War seem to have a natural inclination to stockpile things for survival. It has been known for an old person to have dozens of tins of fruit stored in a bedroom. While this seems silly when life is 'normal', it makes more sense to us when we start to experience the fear of an imminent crisis.

Spiritual Attitudes

But what of the believer? What is the Bible advice? As is often the case, it is a matter of balance. Jesus warns very strongly against worrying too much about matters of this life, saying that we should concentrate on the Kingdom of God:

Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:31–33).

But that does not mean that we should leave everything to God and do nothing ourselves. Pharaoh in Egypt was advised by the faithful man Joseph to store up supplies of grain in years of plentiful harvest because God had warned that seven years of extreme famine were coming (Genesis 41:28–36). A wise wife and mother makes adequate preparation for her family:

An excellent wife who can find?... She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens (Proverbs 31:10–15).

But we are told not to trust in ourselves or in what we can do:

Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish (Psalm 146:3–4).

God is in control, not us, and we have little ultimate power over our lives (James 4:13–15). Jesus told a parable about a man who dedicated his energies to building bigger and bigger barns in order to set himself up for a lavish retirement. Before he could benefit from his investment he died. Jesus described him as a ‘fool’ for his self-reliant, selfish attitude (Luke 12:16–20), ending with the following warning:

So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God (Luke 12:21).



Preparing to Meet Jesus

Unnecessary stockpiling is an over-reaction. But in another situation it may be

wrong to ignore a warning of a shortage. Jesus told a parable about ten bridesmaids waiting for a bridegroom to arrive at a wedding. The bridegroom delayed, so the bridesmaids all fell asleep and his arrival took them by surprise. Five of them had taken sufficient oil to replenish their lamps, and they accompanied him into the wedding. But the other five had run out of oil—a real oil crisis! They rushed out in panic to try to buy some, but when they returned it was too late. The door was shut and the bridegroom said, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you’ (Matthew 25:12).

This parable is clearly about the return of Jesus, whether or not we are ready for him, and the dire consequences if we are not. Jesus instructs us: ‘Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour’ (v. 13).

Watch!

‘Watch’ implies both action and preparation. This is not natural to us, because the return of Jesus may not seem imminent, or even real. But it is a clear message in the Bible, and deserves our full attention.

So we do need to make provision for our lives now, but always acknowledge our utter dependence on God and so trust in Him. Our natural instinct is to try to preserve our life. But God has offered us eternal life in His Kingdom. This is ultimate survival. So we need to focus on the return of Jesus and whether we have made adequate preparation for that awesome event. We can never stockpile too much understanding of the Bible or faith in God.

Anna Hart

The Battle at Michmash

IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR the British army was fighting the Ottoman Turks in Palestine. A British brigade had received orders to capture a village that stood on a rocky prominence on the other side of a deep valley. The village was called Michmash. The brigade major recognised the name, and that night he searched his Bible by candlelight. He found 1 Samuel 13:16: *'And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.'*

The account goes on to relate how the Israelite prince Jonathan with his armour-bearer attacked the Philistine encampment. It details the route they took: *'Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba' (1 Samuel 14:4–5).* The two men climbed the rock, and there ensued a fight: *'And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armour bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land' (v. 14).*

The brigade major reflected that this narrow passage through the rocks to the flat acre of land should still exist. He woke the commander and they read the passage through together. Patrols were sent out.

They found the pass, which was thinly held by the Turks, and which led past two jagged rocks—obviously Bozez and Seneh. Up on top, beside Michmash, they could see by the light of the moon a small flat field.

The brigadier formulated his plan of attack. He sent one company through the pass under cover of darkness. The few Turks whom they met were overpowered without a sound, the cliffs were scaled, and shortly before daybreak the company had taken up a position on the flat field. The Turks awoke, and believing they were being surrounded by the British army they fled in disorder.

Three thousand years after Jonathan's victory over the Philistines, his tactics were successfully copied due to the accuracy of the Bible record.

Adapted from the reminiscences of Major Vivian Gilbert in 'The Bible as History', Werner Keller, Hodder & Stoughton, 1956, ps. 179–180.



The First Murder

CAIN WAS CONSUMED with anger because his vegetable offering had been rejected, and his temper showed in his face. 'Cain was very angry, and his face fell' (Genesis 4:5). He had brought to God what he thought He would receive with gratitude, while Abel had brought the lamb that God had asked. Abel's gift had been received with favour, and Cain's had been refused. It galled him. He was not really in the right state of mind to stand before the God of all the earth, and God administered a rebuke.



From this conversation and the one that followed, it seems likely that the angel of the Lord stood there at the gate of the Garden of Eden, as the representative of God, to receive the offerings, and to speak on God's behalf. Similar examples can be found in Genesis 18, and in Exodus 23:20–23.

'Why are you angry,' he asked Cain, 'and why has your face fallen? If you do well,

will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it' (Genesis 4:6–7).

Even now, Cain could still put things right, if he 'did well' and offered the lamb he should have offered at the first. But with penetrating insight, the Lord knew that the very sin that the offerings were intended to remove, was bubbling up at that moment in Cain's dark heart. The ugly thoughts that sprang into his consciousness were like the serpent that tempted Eve, a snake crouching at the door ready to strike his heel.

There was still time to trample the temptation under foot, as the 'seed of the woman' was going to do in the words of the prophecy made to Cain's mother Eve (Genesis 3:15). Otherwise Cain would succumb to the deadly poison of sin, and its outworking would bring death that day.

The course of history poised uncertain on the brink, then plunged headlong. Cain considered, and dismissed, the warning voice. His face set hard with hate, and he turned his back on the angel of the Lord.

Two Very Different Men

The contrast between the two brothers at this point is picked out in the New Testament. There is an instructive comment on Abel in the letter to the Hebrews:

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts (Hebrews 11:4).

Abel, says the apostle, offered 'by faith'. He believed in God's purpose to redeem the sins of humanity through a perfect man, and offered the gift that foreshadowed that sinless redeemer. Cain offered without faith, and so his sacrifice was unacceptable. It did not make him righteous.

No one has ever been able to purchase the favour of God with a gift. He only counts us righteous when we first have faith. Unfortunately, that is a commitment which many people will not risk. They are prepared to give up pleasures, to support charities, and to do all sorts of good turns, but to have to admit that they are sinners, and have offended God, and meekly to seek His forgiveness in the way He asks, is too much for them.

And that is what was wrong with Cain. Cain lacked faith. He thought he had done enough already. He knew what he ought to do now to make amends, but it meant humiliating himself before Abel and the angel of the Lord. He would have to go to Abel and beg or buy one of his sheep. He would have to light the fire on the altar, and start all over again, admitting he had been wrong. This his pride would not allow him to do. His frustration found outlet in a burst of hatred for Abel, that gentle, oh-so-perfect brother who always did everything right. Abel's goodness had spotlighted Cain's own shortcomings, and Cain's reaction was to blot out and smother the light.

Again, the New Testament comments on the spirit of Cain.

This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous (1 John 3:11, 12).

The Seed of the Serpent

Cain, says John, was 'of the evil one'. He was literally the son of Adam and Eve. But in the moment of his hatred, he had become the 'seed of the serpent', slave and child of the sin that had mastered him. Jesus too, with bitterness in his voice, denounced the scribes and Pharisees. They were the seed of the serpent like Cain, and they were plotting to kill him for the same reason:

You seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:40, 44).



Cain's faults of indifference and pride are easy to indulge. We may not carry envy of our brother or sister to the lengths of

violence that Cain did, but we can still murder their character effectively behind their back. We can harden our heart and stubbornly refuse to admit to God and before others that we are at fault. Jude in the New Testament warns us not to go *'in the way of Cain'* (Jude:11) to our own destruction.

So the first murder was committed. *'Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him'* (Genesis 4:8).



The Blood of Abel

Afterwards Cain returned to the presence of the Lord as if nothing had happened. *'Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?"'* To complete his catalogue of sins, Cain lied, like the serpent. *'I do not know,'* he said. *'The LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground"'* (vs. 9–10). Cain could not conceal his deeds from God. Life is God's prerogative to give or take away, and Cain had usurped that right. The offence demanded justice.

Again, we can turn to the New Testament for a lesson from this case. The Apostle in Hebrews chapter 12 contrasts the deaths of Abel and the Lord Jesus. Abel and Jesus were both righteous. Both were struck

down by wicked hands. Both spilled their blood. But, he insists, the blood of Jesus *'speaks a better word than the blood of Abel'* (v. 24). The blood of Abel cried out for vengeance for the death of another man. The blood of Jesus was to bring life, life for us all, life even for those who slew him, if they came afterwards to repent.

The Apostle John saw in his last vision a Lamb *'as though it had been slain'* (Revelation 5:6). He heard a multitude of the redeemed sing a new song to the Lamb: *'You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth'* (vs. 9–10).

Every man and woman in that great company will be there through faith in Jesus' blood, that symbol of life poured out in pain. Those who despise this arrangement of God will remain in the darkness of the grave.

David Pearce
(to be continued)

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Why was it necessary for Judas to betray Jesus? Surely those who arrested Jesus knew who he was?

Ed

JESUS' ENEMIES needed to be very careful—in the highly charged atmosphere of the Passover celebrations, when Jerusalem would be packed with pilgrims, there could be a real risk of a riot if they tried to arrest him openly. He was still popular with the ordinary people, as was shown by their reaction when he rode into Jerusalem a week beforehand (Mark 11:8–10, 18). If the priests had been heavy-handed, the people might have risen up in support of Jesus and he could have become a 'martyr'. So they needed to arrest him quietly, condemn him in court, and then they could turn the people against him—which is what they succeeded in doing (Mark 15:13–14).

Where did Judas come in? His main role was to give them the opportunity to arrest Jesus quietly: *'Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him' (Mark 14:10–11).* The perfect opportunity was in the middle of the night, in the garden of Gethsemane.

But Judas did more than just lead them to Jesus. He also helped them to identify

him when they got there (Mark 14:44). Why was this necessary? It was dark, but they had torches. You might expect that those who arrested him would know who he was, but evidently they didn't. Those who came to arrest him were *'a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders' (Mark 14:43).* It would probably have been a hastily assembled rabble consisting of temple guards, people's servants, possibly various thugs recruited from taverns around the city, and others—not necessarily people who would have known Jesus.

There was a lot at stake, and the authorities wanted to be absolutely sure that they got the right man with as little fuss as possible. That's why Judas was invaluable.

There's another reason why Judas's betrayal was necessary—it was God's will. Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him, before Judas knew himself (John 6:70–71). It was foretold in prophecy (John 13:18). Judas provides a reminder of what our sinful human nature is capable of. We see in his failure a stark contrast with the victory of Jesus Christ, and an urgent challenge for everyone who comes to Christ:

'By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers' (1 John 3:16).

Across

Down

2 He offered the fruit of the ground (Genesis 4:3)

5 God did not have this for the offering in 2 across (Genesis 4:5)

7 Conclusion (Genesis 6:13)

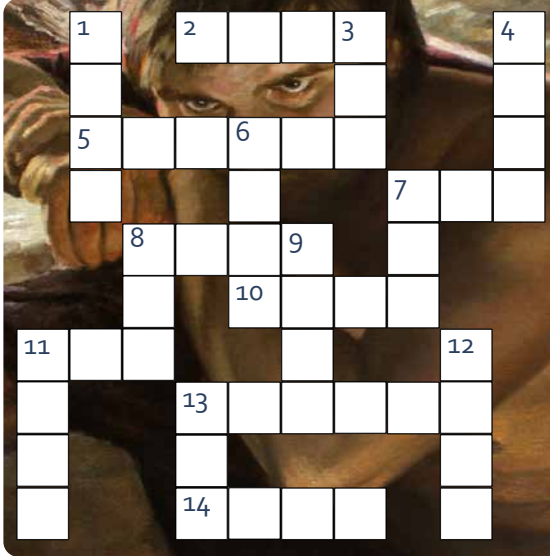
8 3 down was to the east of here (Genesis 4:16)

10 The Apostle John said we should do this, and not be like the man in 2 across (1 John 3:11–12)

11 6 down offered the firstborn of his flock and these portions (Genesis 4:4)

13 Take notice! (Genesis 4:14)

14 God told 2 across that if he did not do well, sin would be crouching at this (Genesis 4:7)



1 God put this on 2 across (Genesis 4:15)

3 2 across went away and settled here (Genesis 4:16)

4 The ground received his brother's blood from this of 2 across (Genesis 4:11)

6 He offered the firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:4)

7 The mother of 2 across and 6 down (Genesis 4:1)

8 God told Adam that he could do this of any tree in the garden except one (Genesis 2:16–17)

9 He and his family were saved through building an ark (Genesis 7:7)

11 When his offering was not accepted, 2 across was angry and this fell (Genesis 4:5)

12 The father of 2 across and 6 down (Genesis 4:)

13 Not good (Genesis 24:50)

(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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