

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Make the Days Count! (p. 3)

Our God is a Consuming Fire (p. 6)

The Dionysus Delusion (p. 13)

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.

Table Of Contents

Make the Days
Count!



3

Terms and
Conditions
Apply



5

Our God is a
Consuming
Fire



6

Great Grace



8

Life is In the
Blood



12

The Dionysus
Delusion



13

Your
Questions



18

Bible Reader's
Crossword



19

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
The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity—Number 248352

Make the Days Count!

IT WAS NOT ONLY SAD, it was desperately unfair. George and Mandy had been looking forward to their retirement for years. They'd scrimped and saved and made detailed plans. They'd bought a campervan and kitted it out. George's 67th birthday was going to be his last day at work, and then they'd be off to see the world!

Two weeks before his birthday, George had a heart attack and died on the way to hospital.

Those who are left are washed by torrents of emotions in the wide long days that follow a bereavement. For Mandy there was grief, and also anger. And regret, that they had been so preoccupied with their plans that they had not enjoyed the time they had together.

Looking Forward

It's good to have things to look forward to, whether it's a morning coffee or a weekend with the family or a hard-earned retirement. God understands this human need. He has set before us a reward that is more stupendous than we could possibly imagine:

No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The Bible abounds with prophecies and promises of God's Kingdom, when Jesus

Christ returns and *'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2:14)*. It's a prospect which has encouraged God's people throughout their lives, throughout history, through good times and bad times.

But He has deliberately not told us when the Kingdom will come. As Jesus himself said, *'Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father' (Mark 13:32)*. He's given us pointers to look for in the Bible's many prophecies (which are frequently explored in this magazine), and on the strength of those we believe that we here now are on the very cusp of Christ's return—but one thing of which we can be certain is that when it comes it will take us by surprise.

'For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night' (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Why has God not told us the date of Christ's return? Because He knows what we're like. There's a huge amount of work for His servants to do—growing their characters (1 Peter 1:16), looking out for each other (Galatians 6:2), preaching the Gospel (2 Timothy 4:2), doing good in the world (Galatians 6:10). If we had a date in the diary on which Christ would arrive, there'd be a temptation to slacken off and lose focus. So He keeps us in constant expectation. There's a maxim which some

people live by, which is particularly valuable for followers of Christ —“Live each day as though it’s your last.”

Use Your Talents

Jesus told a parable to illustrate how his followers should occupy themselves as they await his return. *‘Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away’ (Matthew 25:13–15).*

A ‘talent’ was a unit of currency in the Roman empire in Jesus’ time. The modern English definition of ‘talent’ is different, it means a natural skill or ability. Interestingly, the modern word is actually derived from the Bible word: in old English, the word was lifted straight out of Jesus’ parable and it meant a gift committed to someone by God, for use in His service. When you think about it, that’s an excellent definition of the word ‘talent’!

A talent was an enormous sum of money in the Roman world. It’s been calculated as the equivalent of 20 years’ wages for a labourer. This means the employer was entrusting his servants with a big responsibility, which would keep them fully occupied as they awaited his return.

The parable continues. The man returned from his journey and called his servants to give an account of the business they’d done with his money. There were those who had invested and grown their talents, to whom he said, *‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I*

will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

But there was one who had done nothing with his talent.

The parable ends, *‘Cast the worthless*

servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (v. 30).

The parable has a timeless message for all Jesus’ followers. We all have talents of one kind or another. We need to identify them, and use them. Following Christ is about being busy in his service. Don’t count the days, make the days count!



errata

Thanks to those who have been in touch to point out errors:

In issue 1689, the picture caption on page 14 says “Abraham haggles with the angels”. A careful reading of Genesis 18:2 and 22, and 19:1, indicates that two of the angels departed so he was only speaking to one angel (18:22–33).

In issue 1690, page 16, is the statement that Herod was not a Jew. He did actually practise Judaism. However he was not ethnically Jewish, and not of the royal line, and so was not the king of Israel in the terms of Ezekiel 21:25.

Terms and Conditions Apply

ANGELA WAS FURIOUS. "I thought it was free," she complained. "Look at all these payments they've taken!"

Her friend was trying to be patient. "Did you read the terms and conditions? You don't often get anything for nothing."

We can be misled when we ignore information in an advertisement, especially any terms and conditions.

More importantly, if we take verses out of the Bible and ignore the context we can be misled. Consider the following examples:

	Extract from Bible verse	Reference
1	Each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.	Exodus 32:27
2	You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed.	Leviticus 19:19
3	You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.	Matthew 19:28
4	Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues.	Matthew 10:17
5	We shall all be changed.	1 Corinthians 15:51

Which of these verses would you like to apply to yourself or to your family? Could you go into a Bible bookshop and buy a notecard with one of these verses on it?

All of them are genuine Bible quotes—words spoken to believers. However, in order to understand them it is essential to

look at the context. As the Bible translator Myles Coverdale said over 400 years ago:

"It shall greatly help you to understand Scriptures if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after."

For example, number 1 followed a disastrous incident in the Israelites' wilderness journey; number 2 is part of the Jewish Law of Moses, numbers 3 and 4 were spoken by Jesus to his 12 disciples, and number 5 was written to baptised Christians.

It can be comforting to apply an encouraging Bible verse to ourselves, but it is false comfort if we change the original meaning. While the whole Bible is given for our benefit, it cannot all be applied directly to us.

God's gift of salvation really is free (Romans 5:17-19), but this most certainly does not mean that we can sit back and do nothing: terms and conditions apply, and we do well to read them.

Anna Hart

Our God is a Consuming Fire

GOD IS DESCRIBED in many different ways throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, we read the striking statement that '*our God is a consuming fire*' (Hebrews 12:29). This phrase alludes to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:24, 9:3) and therefore provides a powerful example of how consistently God's character is revealed in both parts of the Bible. We'll consider one episode in which God dramatically demonstrated that He is a consuming fire, and contemplate how this has relevance for worshippers of God today.

Nadab and Abihu

Moses was the man God chose to lead the people of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. His older brother, Aaron, was chosen by God to be the first "high priest" of Israel. Aaron's sons also had special priestly duties to perform, and the role of High Priest was to pass down through his descendants. These privileged roles came with blessings, but also with considerable responsibilities. '*The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts*' (Malachi 2:7). From this, we learn that priests should have been knowledgeable teachers of God's ways and that the people

of Israel should have looked to them for spiritual direction.

Aaron had four sons who served as priests: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. The two elder sons were involved in an incredible and intimate experience of the living God:

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank (Exodus 24:9-11).

What an extraordinary privilege this was! Such a wonderful blessing demanded respect and reverent awe on the part of these two priests.

The book of Leviticus contains details about the sacrificial offerings God commanded His people to make. In chapter 9 we read of the special sacrifice which Aaron made as high priest, in which his sons were also involved.

But in the next chapter Nadab and Abihu took centre stage in the worst possible way. '*Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered*

unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "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 10:1–3).

God dramatically demonstrated that He is a consuming fire! These two sons of Aaron died because they offered 'unauthorized fire before the LORD'. From Moses' comments about this incident, we can infer that Nadab and Abihu did not treat the LORD as holy, nor did they honour Him before the people.

Furthermore, the comment '*which he had not commanded them*' is significant, particularly when placed against the backdrop of the book of Leviticus as a whole. The phrase '*the LORD*' and the word '*commanded*' appear together frequently in the book, almost always in a positive light. For example, '*Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD commanded by Moses*' (Leviticus 8:36). The phrase '*which he had not commanded them*' therefore stands out as a glaring exception of gross disobedience to God's commandments.

Then and Now

If we were to act dishonourably, as Nadab and Abihu did, it is highly unlikely that fire from God's presence would consume us—they lived at a particular time and had a special relationship with God. However, this does not mean that we can't take any

lessons from this incident and apply them to our lives. One of the ways we can do this is by considering the context of the statement '*Our God is a consuming fire*' with which we began.

Hebrews 12 contains stark warnings about falling away from faithful obedience to God. For example: '*See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven*' (Hebrews 12:25). The section concludes: '*Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire*' (Hebrews 12:28–29).

Immediately before God is described as a consuming fire, there is an exhortation to '*offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe*'. This is particularly interesting when read in the light of Nadab and Abihu's actions. They offered unacceptable worship, devoid of reverence and awe; this was despite their incredible and intimate experience of the living God.

God is a God of love, mercy and pity, who '*so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*' (John 3:16). But we must also remember that He is holy, and when we come to Him we must honour Him. '*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*' (Hebrews 10:31).

Stephen Blake

Great Grace

IN LIFE THERE ARE a great many decisions to be made every day. For followers of Christ, these decisions are often made easier. They have the Bible as their guide (Psalm 119:105), and they genuinely know that the angels are there to help and support them (Psalm 34:7). They walk in faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), knowing that God is by their side.

But temptation to do wrong is ever present. And knowing that we serve a God who is forgiving is of itself a temptation. It can lead to “presumptuousness”. The Apostle Paul asks, *‘Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?’* (Romans 6:1).

We may well recoil at the thought. The very question prompts a certain amount of soul searching. Could there be in my personal behaviour something which presumes that God has somehow got to forgive me? The fact is that not one of us can place God under any kind of obligation.

We are all sinners, and depend on God’s mercy: *‘For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all’* (Romans 11:32).

When we come before God it must be in a penitent and humble frame of mind.

Call to Salvation

Salvation is dependent upon true repentance—a recognition of our need, and a desire to change because of the love of God expressed in the giving of Jesus Christ to die for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). This is where grace comes in. Grace, by definition, is the favour which God shows to us, which we do not deserve.

How is God’s grace spread abroad in the world? The first thing to acknowledge is that we all experience abundantly the grace of God. *‘He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything’* (Acts 17:25).

Sadly, people often fail to appreciate this. And even whilst we are healthy, this life is also subject to corruption and ultimately death. That is how we are. We all need redemption, and happily God has provided it through His beloved Son, the Saviour Jesus Christ.

Many will hear the Gospel’s call to salvation. God, it seems, places us in situations where we can respond to the call, positively. In Matthew 13 Jesus tells a parable of a man who sowed seed on different types of ground. The parable accurately describes people’s different attitudes to the Gospel’s call. Where the Gospel seed has fallen into the ground of a good and honest heart, there will be genuine response, life will be changed and become fruitful before God.



We will deem ourselves to have been chosen by God if, by His grace, we come to the Gospel, respond in belief, repent of our sins, and through being baptised, enter His family.

God's Love at Work: Israel



In the Bible's Old Testament we have the worked example of Israel who were chosen by God, out of all the nations of the earth, to be His special people and to be granted the benefit of His promises. Notice how God expresses His love for them:

You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery,

from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:6–9).

Clearly many of the people of Israel, over the centuries, fell away, even though they had received the call. At no time was this more clearly seen than when as a nation they rejected Jesus Christ, their true Messiah. Tragically as a scattered nation over 2000 years they seem only to have become more entrenched in a position where they reject Jesus and the Gospel. But Paul tells us, 'God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew' (Romans 11:2). Just like everyone else they have the opportunity individually to come to the Gospel.

The Bible also tells us that as a nation the Jews have to suffer at least one more serious upheaval, in order to bring them to the point where finally they acknowledge their Saviour in Jesus Christ, their true Messiah (Zechariah 12:9–14).

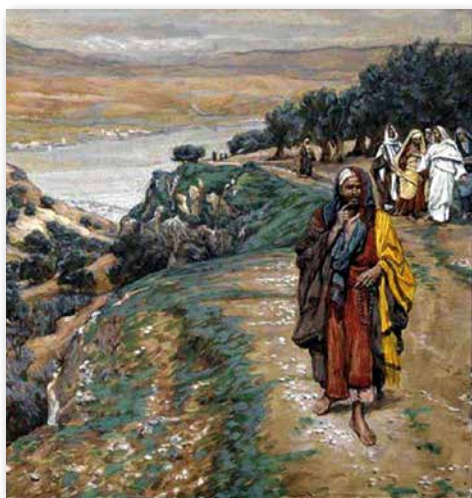
Through all their history the Jews have had choices to make; God's love has been extended to them, His pity and compassion. Unfortunately, as a nation they have been generally resistant to His overtures. However they are still witnesses to God's love at work by their very existence (Isaiah 43:10). His covenant with them still stands, and ultimately those who acknowledge their Saviour will be saved.

God's Love at Work: Everyone

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Now God's love is extended to us that we might receive the gift of grace in salvation, through Jesus Christ.

There was a rich young man who came to Jesus, keen to find salvation (Mark 10:17–22). But when challenged he went away sorrowing—his wealth was more important to him than following Jesus. Jesus was also sorrowful. Grace, compassion, love, were all held out to him, but his choice was to go away.



Isn't that like us all? Are there things in our lives that are more important to us than the Gospel? Things we cannot give up in order to follow Jesus?

The example of Israel is a warning to us that even though we may have been called and chosen; even if we have been baptised and become a member of God's special family—we may still *'fall away from grace'* (Galatians 5:4). This is not a reason to doubt the love or grace of God, but it is a reason to watch ourselves, test our behaviours, maintain our humility in the

face of God and develop our confidence in the Almighty Father.

Take My Yoke Upon You

Life can be very miserable. Many people have severe temptations and resort to extreme measures in their attempts to find happiness, wholeness, or a sense of identity, or just to stave off boredom. Experience shows that the recipes for happiness which the world offers generally do not deliver.

On the other hand, Jesus extends to us a simple invitation:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30).

If we walk with Christ, allowing him to share our loads, watching him as our example, using him as a pattern for our behaviour and a basis for the choices we make, then he will enable us to walk in the way of life.

There are, of course, times when people say things which are hurtful, usually without realising it. Remember it is down to you whether you react, take offence or not. Faith in the Lord Jesus is the key, and we need to stay focused on him. He knows what it is like to be despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:1–3).

It is a real blessing to have a Saviour with whom we can share our problems, but more than that he knows what it is that we really struggle with; trust him, he really does know what he is doing (Romans 8:26). The

Bible will always provide encouragement (Romans 15:4). And we have the assurance that the angels are '*ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation*' (Hebrews 1:14).

The Love of God

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Corinthians 13:7–8).

As every good parent will know, there are times when warnings and correction have to be given—indulgence is not love!



If we see a blind person about to have an accident, a warning may be all it takes to turn them around. But it may be that we have to use physical means to rescue them, say, pushing them out of the way of an oncoming bus. To allow someone to be run over because we didn't want to hurt them would not be showing love!

Likewise, between friends or in a family, and in the family of believers, difficult things have sometimes to be said and done which don't immediately seem loving. But

if someone is going astray and imperilling themselves, the truly loving thing for their family to do is to exercise discipline, in the hope that they will come to repentance and recovery (1 Corinthians 5:1–5).

There are no exceptions. We are all sinners and each responsible for our failure. But we have the opportunity of salvation, because of God's grace:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23–24).

The real question is—do we believe it? Remember that 'grace' is God's completely undeserved favour. We hope to receive it ourselves—to do so requires our unreserved repentance and a fresh start. This is available to all who come before the Lord Jesus Christ in true contrition, and receive from him his compassion and healing and hear the words, '*Do not fear, only believe*' (Mark 5:36).

David Nightingale

Visit us online for:

- topical blogs
- magazine subscriptions
- previous editions
- searchable articles
- video content
- links to other material

www.gladtidingsmagazine.org

[Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#)

click or search

'Glad Tidings Magazine'

Life is In the Blood

ONE MORE DECLARATION, which the Creator made to Noah as he stood beside the altar, must conclude our study of the Flood. It concerned the sanctity of life.

God had just destroyed life, wholesale. He made a drastic cleansing of a world which people had defiled by bloodshed and violence. In the fresh start He was making with Noah, God insisted that it would continue to be His prerogative, as Creator and Judge, to take away life. Anyone who murdered another human being must forfeit his own life, because he had trespassed upon God's rights.

Even the flesh of animals, which He now permitted Noah and his descendants to eat for food, must be drained of blood first, because God counted the blood as a symbol for the life of the creature, and the life does not belong to us, but to God.

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood... "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood

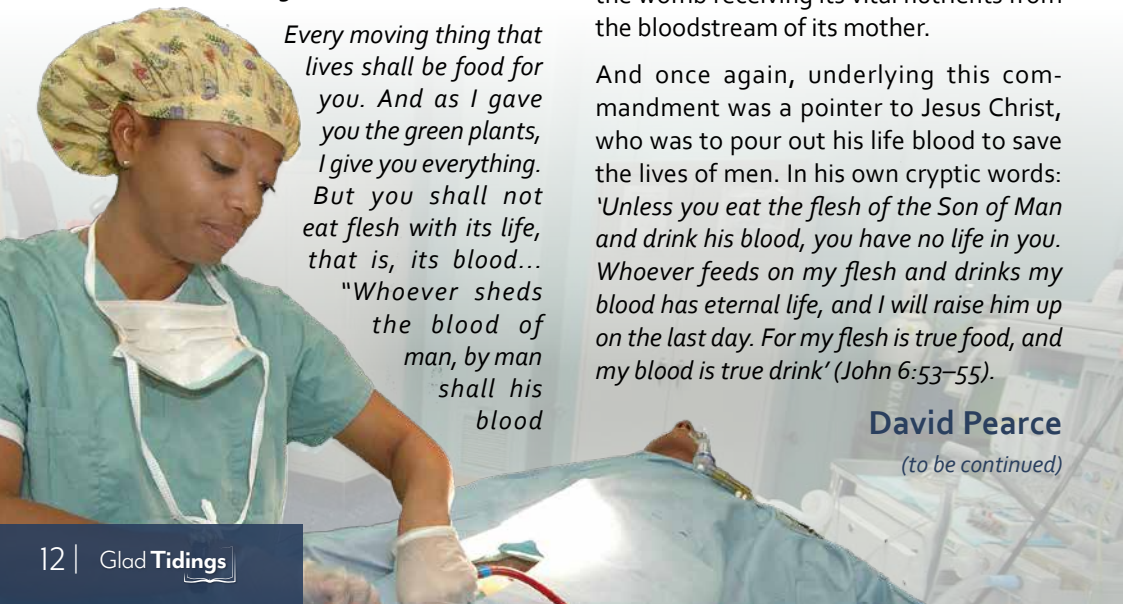
be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Genesis 9:3–6).

The capital punishment of a murderer was later incorporated in the Law of Moses. So, too, was the bleeding of animals at slaughter. It was a forceful reminder that we have no right to life—our lives are God's, and He determines our destiny.

It is unfortunate that some interpret these words as forbidding blood transfusions. God's words are in a context which has to do with killing. Blood transfusion has the object of preserving life. If the patient was guilty of killing the donor of the blood transfusion so as to extract their blood, there would clearly be an objection. But where the blood is freely given by a living donor, there is no more ground for condemnation than there is for a child in the womb receiving its vital nutrients from the bloodstream of its mother.

And once again, underlying this commandment was a pointer to Jesus Christ, who was to pour out his life blood to save the lives of men. In his own cryptic words: *'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink' (John 6:53–55).*

David Pearce
(to be continued)



The Dionysus Delusion

OPponents of Christianity present many and varied arguments to sow doubt in believers' minds. This is one of them. The argument goes like this:



1. Dionysus was a god in Greek mythology, who was worshipped long before Jesus Christ lived.
2. There are many similarities between Dionysus and Jesus Christ. He was the son of God and a human mother; he was rejected by his people; he miraculously produced wine; he allowed himself to be captured, and his story involves death on a tree; he died and rose to life again; he was able to bestow the blessing of special life on his followers; his followers demonstrated their allegiance by holding ceremonies in which they symbolically ate his flesh; his followers were spiritually married to him.
3. Dionysus was widely worshipped in the Middle East in the First Century AD—the time and place of Jesus and the birth of Christianity.
4. Therefore, Christianity is not original and not true, it's merely a Jewish adaptation of the Greek Dionysus cult.

On the face of it, it's a devastatingly powerful argument. It's caused some

Christians to abandon their faith. But like all such arguments, it falls down when you examine it.

Which Came First?

There certainly are similarities between themes found in classical mythology and the Bible. In some cases, this is simply coincidence—for example all religions deal with big universal issues, such as life after death. But there are also instances where a similarity is so specific that it seems that one religion may have adopted a story from another: for example, the main character being the son of God and a mortal woman. When similarities like this occur, critics usually assert that the Bible has borrowed from contemporary mythology. But they must also accept that it could be the other way round.

We know that the ancient world of the Middle East was a melting pot of cultures and ideas. For example some Greek myths are very similar to Egyptian and Indian myths. We also know that Jewish culture and religion was well known in the contemporary ancient world. The Bible's Old Testament recounts many instances of Israelites interacting with neighbouring civilizations. For example the nation of Israel lived in Egypt until around 1500 BC. When they occupied the

land of Canaan under their judges and kings they fought with and befriended the surrounding nations including the Cretans (Philistines) (Judges 13), Tyrians (1 Kings 5), Arabians (1 Kings 10), Assyrians (2 Kings 18), Babylonians (Daniel 1), and Persians (Ezra 1). Later, the land of Israel was part of the Greek empire from the 4th to the 2nd Centuries BC.

Comparing Christ and Dionysus

Dionysus first appears in the archaeological record as early as the 13th Century BC, but little is known about him at that stage. It's not until the classical period, around the 8th Century BC, that his stories emerge in Greek poetry, plays and artwork. He's perhaps best known as the god of wine—he invented it, and gifted it to mortals to bring them joy. He's also the god of ecstatic madness (linked to his role as the god of wine), and a god of nature.

We'll look at the various details of the Dionysus myth, and compare them to the equivalent details in the Christian story. I think we'll notice three things in particular:

1. Many of the similarities are so vague that they're evidently just coincidence.
2. Where there is a plausible comparison it's likely that it was actually the Greeks who borrowed the detail from the Bible. We'll see that the details of Christ's life which are alleged to be copied from the Dionysus myth were

actually foretold beforehand in the Bible's Old Testament, for example in Genesis (probably compiled by Moses around 1500 BC), in the time of King David (1000 BC) and the Hebrew prophets, notably Isaiah (600 BC).

3. There are a couple of instances where it appears that Jesus deliberately referenced the Dionysus myth in his teaching.

Son of God and a Mortal Woman

The Greek story: *The chief god Zeus seduced a princess called Semele and made her pregnant. Zeus's jealous wife Hera tricked him into killing Semele, but as she died he rescued her unborn child and sewed him into a gash in his thigh, from where the baby was born in due course. (Dionysus is actually one of at least six Greek gods who had human mothers.)*

The Bible story: The Gospel records narrate the circumstances of Jesus Christ's birth in careful detail. The angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary and told her she was to bear the Son of God, who would save his people from their sins and be the ruler of Israel (Luke 1:26–38). This was the fulfilment and culmination of many Old Testament prophecies (for example Isaiah 7:14). From the beginning, the Bible presents a developing picture of the Son of God who was to come into the world to bring salvation to humankind: descendant of the woman (Genesis 3:15), descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:7), and son of God (2 Samuel 7:12-15).



Rejection, Arrest and Death

The Greek story: *During his travels Dionysus was captured by pirates. He turned himself into a lion and chased them overboard, and they were turned into dolphins. He was also insulted by King Lycurgus, whom Zeus killed in revenge. Later, he allowed himself to be captured by King Pentheus, in order that he could try to persuade Pentheus to worship him. When Pentheus refused to listen, Dionysus tricked him into climbing a tree, then drove a group of women into a mad rage so that they attacked Pentheus and tore him to pieces.*

The Bible story: The Gospels vividly describe the deepening antagonism of the Jewish religious rulers towards Jesus, for example Matthew 12:14. They describe the rulers' deepening fear and hatred of him, until at last they had him arrested and executed. His rejection was foretold in the Old Testament. For example, the life of Joseph is a detailed allegory of the life of Christ—he was rejected by his brothers but in the end was their saviour (Genesis 45:5). Isaiah 53 is a detailed and deeply moving prophecy of the suffering saviour, who was *'despised and rejected by men...with his wounds we are healed'* (vs. 3–5).

He laid down his life and refused to avenge himself, in fact one of his final pleas to God was, *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'* (Luke 23:34).

Resurrection

The Greek story: *The infant Dionysus was torn apart by the Titans at the behest of Hera.*

However, his heart was saved by the goddess Athena, and he was reborn.

The Bible story: The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are described in detail in the four Gospel records. The reality of his resurrection is at the very heart of the Gospel (for example 1 Corinthians 15).

Blessing of Special Life

The Greek story: *As the god of wine, Dionysus offered his worshippers a state of ecstasy and liberation from constraint. During frenzied and sometimes violent cultic celebrations his followers claimed to undergo a spiritual transformation. Also, as the god of vegetation and fertility, he brought blessings of health and abundance to his devotees.*

The Bible story: Jesus Christ claimed to be no less than *'the way, the truth, and the life'* (John 14:6). He is the Son of God who laid down his life to give us life (1 John 3:16). To follow Christ is to enjoy the blessing of being a child of God, with all the joy that brings (Ephesians 1:3), and also to have confidence in eternal life to come (1 John 3:2).

Eating His Flesh

The Greek story: *Dionysus had female devotees known as Maenads, who engaged in mad ecstatic rituals which often involved eating raw flesh—sometimes dismembering live animals. They saw this as an act of communion with Dionysus, the god of nature.*

The Bible story: Jesus shocked his audience in the synagogue in Capernaum when



he said, *'Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day'* (John 6:54). As Capernaum was in a Gentile region where the Dionysus cult was prominent, it's likely that the audience was uncomfortably reminded of the customs of Dionysus worship. Jesus may even have been making a deliberate reference to it, in order to make an impression on them.

But far from the vile excesses of the Dionysiac rites, Jesus was explaining that he wants us to feed upon him spiritually. He explained that he is the true *'bread of life'*, in fulfilment of the manna which God provided to feed Israel in the wilderness (John 6:48–51). He is also the fulfilment of the Passover lamb, which the Israelites killed and ate on the night they were freed from their slavery in Egypt (1 Corinthians 5:7–8). To feed on Christ is to internalise him: *'If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness'* (Romans 8:10). At the Last Supper on the night before he died, Jesus progressed this thought when he commanded his disciples to share bread and wine in fellowship with him (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

The Spiritual Bride

The Greek story: *Dionysus was married to the human princess Ariadne. He had numerous children, by her and other women. It's thought that the frenzied dancing of the Dionysian rituals was a way of symbolically joining in union with him.*

The Bible story: Jesus was celibate. He told parables in which he is the bridegroom and his followers are the bride (for example Matthew 9:15). This theme is explored more deeply in the writing of the apostles (Ephesians 5:25–27), and in the sublime description in Revelation 19:7 of his return to establish God's Kingdom: *'Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.'*

Miraculous Production of Wine

The Greek story: *At the annual Dionysia festivals which were held around the Greek world each year, three empty jars were said to miraculously fill with wine. The wine had to be drunk in the temple, because it would turn to water if it was taken outside.*

The Bible story: The first miracle of Christ which is recorded in John's gospel is in chapter 2, when Jesus turned the contents of six water pots into wine. Much is made of this by the theorists, because it's seen as the most persuasive argument that the Christian Gospel borrowed from the Dionysus cult. There is no Old Testament precedent for miraculously producing wine, whereas the tradition of the Dionysian wine jars dates back to several centuries BC. Archaeological evidence shows that the Dionysus cult was widespread in Galilee, which was the region where Jesus performed the miracle (John 2:1–11).

Why did Jesus perform this miracle? Various reasons have been identified. First,

The region of Galilee, Northern Israel

there was a need for help and he was able to provide it. Second, it was an indication that he was sharing in the work of God of which the prophet spoke: 'Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price' (Isaiah 55:1).

Third, the miracle was no doubt prophetic itself. Jesus was looking forward to his own marriage, at his return to take his bride and establish God's Kingdom (as we noted in the previous section) (Mark 14:25).

And fourth, very probably, by filling six water pots with wine Jesus was signalling his superiority to Dionysus, the god who was widely worshipped in the region and was celebrated for filling three pots.

False and True Religion

It seems to me that there's actually very little similarity between Dionysus and Jesus Christ. Those similarities we do notice can be identified either as coincidence, or as the Greeks borrowing from the Hebrew Bible, or even as Christ himself deliberately referencing the Dionysian cult.

Dionysus was the god you'd expect from human imagination—capricious, vengeful, cunning and promiscuous. On the other hand, the Gospels paint a detailed picture of the character, words and actions of Jesus Christ as the perfect man who provides for us an example of everything we should aspire to be. And in addition, our Saviour:

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).

The Dionysian cult focused on indulgence and self-gratification (which was no doubt why it was so popular), and alcohol abuse as a route to spiritual transformation. Christianity is a way of life which involves recognising and resisting what is ungodly in us (Luke 9:23), and striving to be like God (1 Peter 1:16), with a view to eternal life in the Kingdom which is to come (Matthew 6:33).

It's immensely sad when an unstable faith is capsized by clever arguments for which it's not prepared. Attacks on our faith are nothing new. The Apostle Paul urged his brothers and sisters:

Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God (Philippians 1:27–28).

Doug Potts

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

e-mail editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

or connect with us via our web site
gladtidingsmagazine.org

or write to the Editor—address inside front cover

HS

Christians should do good in the world. One of the most effective ways we can make changes for good is by participating in politics—that's what it's there for! So why don't Christadelphians vote?

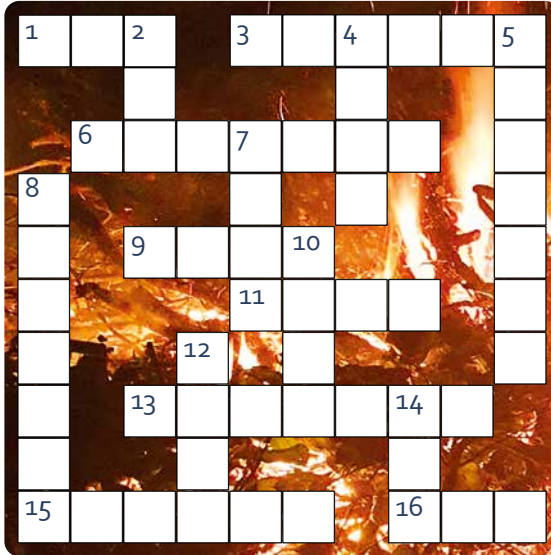
Ed

Here are five reasons:

1. We should not put our trust in human politicians, but in God (Psalm 146:3–5).
2. Followers of Christ should not divide their allegiance—they should be devoted to Christ, and strive to follow him in every aspect of their lives (Matthew 16:24). There are no politicians in the world who actually stand for what Christ stands for, so giving someone your support would be to compromise your allegiance to him.
3. God rules in the kingdoms of the world, and sets up whichever government He wants (Daniel 4:17, Romans 13:1–3). So in a democratic election, for example, whichever political party will further God's purpose will win. This does not mean that the best party or leader will win, but the party that will further God's purpose at the time. We don't know which party that is, so if we vote we may be voting against God's will.
4. The accounts in the Bible make it clear that Jesus and his followers took no part in the politics of their day. Their world was full of injustice and there were many who were trying to put it right. For example, the Jewish zealots were involved in attempts to gain freedom and independence for Judea from the detested Romans. People tried to draw Jesus into the political struggle, but he refused to be drawn (Matthew 22:14–21). The world's politics didn't matter to him. One of his disciples was a Roman collaborator (Matthew 9:9) and another was probably a Jewish zealot (Luke 6:15), but he made them live together in harmony. He summarised his political position in his interview with the Roman governor Pilate: *'My kingdom is not of this world'* (John 18:36).
5. Although we have citizenship in countries in this world, followers of Christ don't really belong here. They're citizens of the Kingdom of God, that's where they belong. *'Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ'* (Philippians 3:20). So for example I am a UK citizen, but if I was to vote in a British election, it would be like my voting in a French election. British politics are not my business, any more than French politics. When God's Kingdom is established, His people will be full and active participants in it, but until then they are described as *'strangers and exiles on the earth'* (Hebrews 11:13).

Across

- 1 *'Moses came and told the people ___ the words of the LORD'* (Exodus 24:3)
- 3 Nadab and Abihu put fire and incense in this (Leviticus 10:1)
- 6 One of the sons of Aaron (Leviticus 10:6)
- 9 Moses did this to the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:7)
- 11 Moses did this early in 13 across (Exodus 24:4)
- 13 The first part of the day (Exodus 24:4)
- 15 Uttered (Exodus 24:3)
- 16 *'And fire came out from before ___ LORD'* (Leviticus 10:2)



Down

- 2 To allow (Exodus 24:14)
- 4 Moses came this far to God (Exodus 24:2)
- 5 To accept delivery of (Exodus 25:3)
- 7 Aaron, Nadab and Abihu were told to worship at this distance (Exodus 24:1)
- 8 Aaron's sons were these (Leviticus 1:5)
- 10 *'And Moses wrote ___ the words of the LORD'* (Exodus 24:4)
- 12 The Covenant was written in this (Exodus 24:7)
- 14 *'The people shall ___ come up with him'* (Exodus 24:2)

(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

Free Offer

If you would like to receive the Glad Tidings magazine FREE for 6 months—send your name and address to one of the addresses below. Or go to our website at: www.gladtidingsmagazine.org/free-magazines

Name

Address

Postcode

Country



Addresses for the Free Offer:

In the UK write to: FREEPOST GLADTIDINGS
(orders-uk@gladtidingsmagazine.org)

In Africa and Europe write to: Anne Bayley, 17
Chesterton Close, Hunt End, Redditch B97 5XS, UK

In other countries, to: Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel
Drive, Hollywood, Birmingham B47 5RJ, UK
(orders-int@gladtidingsmagazine.org)

Contact Details:

To find out about your nearest Christadelphian meeting, or to request free Bible literature or a correspondence course, please write to the address nearest you.

United Kingdom

FREEPOST GLADTIDINGS
orders-uk@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Africa & Europe

Christadelphian Bible Mission,
404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham
B28 8SZ, UK
requests@cbm.org.uk

The Americas

CBMA, 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley,
CA 93065, USA
cbma.treasurer@gmail.com

Caribbean

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

India

T Galbraith, GPO Box 159, Hyderabad,
500001, India
tim@galbraithmail.com

South and East Asia

ACBM, PO Box 152 Cobbitty NSW,
Australia 2570
galway280@gmail.com

Picture Credits:

- ps. 1, 3: *istockphoto.com/atlantic-kid*
- p. 4: *Anonymous (15th Century)*
- p. 8: *Wilfredor, CCo*
- p. 9: *Providence Lithograph Co. (public domain)*
- p. 10: *James Tissot (public domain)*
- p. 11: *Rembrandt (public domain)*
- p. 12: *Mike Leporati (public domain)*
- p. 13: *Deiadameian, CC BY-SA 4.0*
- ps. 14–15: *Typhon2222, CC BY-SA 4.0*
- ps. 16–17: *David Honey*

www.facebook.com/GladTidingsMagazine/
YouTube: search 'Glad Tidings Magazine'

Unless otherwise indicated all scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.