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GLAD TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

FEATURED ARTICLES

The Path of Life

The Genocide Problem

There's a Green Beetle in My Ear!

WHAT IS GLAD TIDINGS?

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

Its objectives are—to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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THE PATH OF LIFE

One of the most consistently popular tracks that is played at funerals is Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way". It's a stirring, emotional song that celebrates a life lived on a person's own terms.

Would it surprise you to learn that as far as God is concerned, that is a sign of failure? The Bible says, '*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*' (*Proverbs 14:12*).

There's a message that's all around us these days: "Follow your own path." "Do what's right for you." It's preached by self-help manuals, emblazoned on T-shirts, and it's the subliminal message of countless feel-good movies. But it's flatly contradicted by the teaching of Jesus Christ: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (*John 14:6*).

The Gospel message centres on God's gift of His Son Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. As Jesus said, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*" (*John 15:13*). This stupendous gift of God which leads to forgiveness and eternal life is not unconditional. "*You are my friends if you do what I command you*" (*v. 14*). This, as far as God is concerned, is a life that is worth celebrating.



Frank Sinatra

Commandments of Christ

So what does Jesus command his followers? The way to find out, of course, is to look for yourself. His teachings are contained in the four Gospels that are at the beginning of the Bible's New Testament. And they are illustrated and amplified in the rest of the Bible—Old Testament and New Testament. Here are three key points:

- 1 "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (*Luke 9:23*). Following Christ

involves self-denial, and walking a path which isn't necessarily the one you'd choose for yourself.

2 *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself"* (Luke 10:27). Jesus called these the two greatest commandments: first, to love God, the Creator, which leads to a love for your fellow creatures.

3 *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). Following Christ begins with baptism, which is the start of your new life.

The Narrow Way

Jesus told a parable about two paths. *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few"* (Matthew 7:13–14).

I see a picture of crowds of people wandering aimlessly under a gantry and along a four-lane highway, unaware and uncaring that they're heading downhill into the fog of oblivion; whilst here and there the odd one or two look up and see a path winding up a sunny mountainside—it's steep and difficult, but they decide that's where they want to be, they leave the throng and head off up the foothills to find that path.

Jesus describes the path of discipleship as hard—because it requires discipline and effort. But we all know that life is often a struggle, even when you're following the carefree crowds down the highway of destruction. Perhaps the struggle is most intense at those moments when you look around and take stock and ask yourself, "Where am I going?", "What's it all about?"

In contrast, this is another picture of the narrow way:

'You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Psalm 16:11).



WORSHIP GOD ALONE

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.'

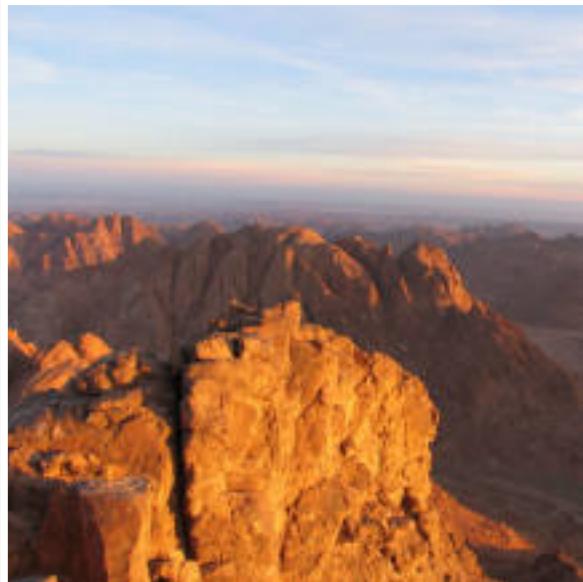
(Deuteronomy 6:4–6)

Moses was the man whom God tasked with leading Israel in their remarkable escape from their slavery in Egypt, and their exceptional journey through the '*great and terrifying wilderness*' (*Deuteronomy 1:19*). When he retold the story to them in the book of Deuteronomy, he introduced the "Ten Commandments" in chapter 5 by reminding them of the goodness of God, and how He revealed Himself to the nation on Mount Sinai.

The people who had witnessed this event, some 40 years before, had died in the wilderness because of their unbelief.

Covenant to be God's People

Moses began the story in Deuteronomy by reminding the people of the covenant which God made with the nation on Mount Sinai (also called Horeb) (1:6). Exodus 19 recounts how God made that covenant with the whole nation, even with this present generation, some of whom were not even born then. The



covenant was all embracing, and the response was all inclusive. He reminded them that they had been chosen specially by God—the only nation to be so chosen. The covenant was a very precious arrangement: God had chosen Israel out of all the peoples on the face of the whole earth. It arose because of love, and the oath which God had sworn to their ancestors (7:6–8).

This shows the wonder and the majesty of God; that He is kind and generous, faithful and loving. Such a mighty God expected a positive reaction, and He put before the people the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3–17 and Deuteronomy

5:7–21). The very first commandment was, “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (*Exodus 20:3*). It was followed by explanations and conditions (vs. 4–6), so they were clear about what was expected of them.

One of these conditions is in *Deuteronomy 6:14–15*. Moses explained that the gods being referred to were “*the gods of the peoples who are around you*”. Israel must beware of the insidious influence that the surrounding nations could have on them. It was a lesson in separation. God knew there would be no benefit in any association with the foreign nations, only a falling away. Moses warned the people of Israel that “*the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God*”. This was the third time this description of God had been used (*Deuteronomy 4:24, 5:9, 6:15*). They would have known what the word meant, but its connection with God was new: especially when coupled with “*lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth*” (v. 15). This was a severe warning against idolatry and unfaithfulness, which could only lead to unbelief and the loss of their inheritance in the Promised Land.

The Golden Calf

Sadly, and in a graphic description in *Exodus 32*, during a 40-day period when Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God, the people engaged in idolatrous worship. They had doubts about the whereabouts and welfare of Moses because he had been gone for a long time, and they persuaded Aaron the High Priest to build them a god. They willingly gave their gold jewellery, and Aaron moulded a golden calf. When they saw it they proclaimed, “*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!*” (v. 4). Their blasphemous and

degrading worship is described: “*The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play*” (v. 6).

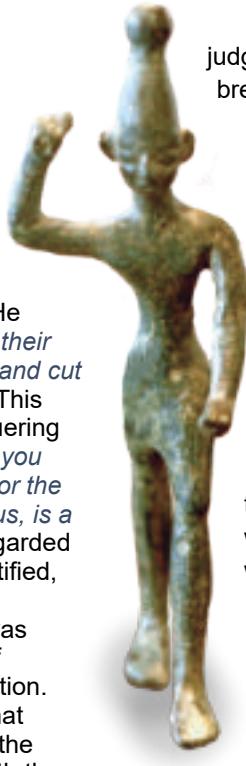


God told Moses, “*Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them*” (vs. 7–8). Such was God’s anger that He was ready to destroy them. He did not, because Moses pleaded with Him for their forgiveness on the grounds of the oaths He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This was a hard reality check for the people, and an example of what would happen if the nation adopted false gods and idolatry as their standard practice.

A Jealous God

In Exodus 34:12 the command to avoid false gods is extended. God said, “*Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst*”. And He added, “*You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim*” (v. 13). This was part of the task of conquering the indigenous nations. “*For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*” (v. 14). God regarded His people as holy and sanctified, and in a precious covenant relationship with Him. This was reinforcing the importance of physical and spiritual separation. God knew the wickedness that would follow if they adopted the customs and intermarried with the nations around them.

Deuteronomy 5:7–9 also expanded the prohibitions stated by the first commandment. When the people were in Egypt they acquired many skills. Sadly they used these skills to make idols, which they worshipped (see Exodus 32:4–5, 24; Amos 5:25–26; Acts 7:40–43). This kind of behaviour was highly displeasing to God and some of the people were judged to the point of death. God specifically forbade making or forming or building any kind of image, or figure, or likeness to anything that was in either heaven, or earth, or even in the waters of the seas and rivers. Why? Because God is a jealous God, and in order to demonstrate His uniqueness He



judged and punished those who breached this second commandment.

God was to be the sole object of the people's worship and affections. He would not be compromised or shared with false gods, which could not speak, or see, or hear, or smell, or handle, or walk (Psalm 115:4–7). Perhaps more importantly, God's covenant with His people meant that He had a long term purpose with them. They were His witnesses (Isaiah 43:10). They were to glorify Him by their everyday lives and behaviour.

VIC AUCOTT

(to be continued)

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LOVE YOUR ENEMY

ENLIGHTENED LAWS

You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbour, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:17–18

COMMANDS OF CHRIST

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

Matthew 5:43–47

PROFOUND PROVERBS

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

Proverbs 25:21–22

LEARNED LETTERS

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”

Romans 12:17–19

SPIRITUAL SONGS

A perverse heart shall be far from me;

I will know nothing of evil.
Whoever slanders his neighbour secretly

I will destroy.
Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart

I will not endure.

Psalm 101:4–5



THE GENOCIDE PROBLEM

Followers of Christ are commanded to live peacefully. They are servants of the '*God of love and peace*' (*2 Corinthians 13:11*). Is there a conflict between this principle, and the fact that there are occasions when God instructed soldiers to slaughter the inhabitants of various towns, sometimes resulting in whole nations being wiped out? This article explains the apparent discrepancy.

God Does Not Change

It is sometimes suggested that the God of the Bible's Old Testament displays a different character from the God of the New Testament. It's important to understand at the outset that God has not changed over the millennia. God Himself declared, '*I the LORD do not change'* (*Malachi 3:6*), something echoed in the New Testament when we're told that with God '*there is no variation'*

(*James 1:17*). The God of the Old Testament is therefore also the God of the New.

If we study the two testaments in more detail, we quickly see that God's immense love is not restricted to the New Testament, nor are His severe punishments restricted to the Old. For example, in the Letter to the Romans, our attention is drawn to both sides of His character when we are warned to '*note the kindness and severity of God*' (*Romans 11:22*). In the Old Testament book of Psalms, we frequently find God described as a God of mercy. Psalm 136 is notable in the way it stresses this, with a chant of '*his steadfast love endures for ever*' concluding every verse. Another Psalm that refers to God's love is Psalm 103:

'The steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his

righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments' (Psalm 103:17–18).

What's important about this verse is the condition that God has placed on His love: it is showered upon those who try to follow His commands, but it is not an unconditional love. And here we see the key to this topic.

The Difference Between the Testaments

We can conclude from the above that God has not changed between the two testaments. What differs is not God's character, but where the writing places its focus. In the Old Testament, an emphasis is placed on how God was teaching the nation of Israel to be the kind of people He wanted. One part of doing that was to provide laws that, if followed, would lead them to be a loving and caring people. Another part was to prepare an area of land for them to settle in, that could become a suitable environment for them to grow into the type of nation He wanted.

In the New Testament, the focus is shifted. Although many references to Jesus can be found in prophecies throughout the Old Testament, it is only when we get to the New Testament that the light shines more explicitly on his life and work. Its

emphasis is on how our association with Jesus' sacrifice is our way to become the kind of person God wants.

So, while the two testaments are strongly tied together by common themes that continually run between them, where they place their strongest focus is different. That's the main reason why we see more of God's severe nature in the Old Testament than we do in the New, even though God is unchanged from Genesis to Revelation.

God's Severity in the Old Testament



As explained above, a key Old Testament theme is how God was preparing an area in which the people He was nurturing could develop the characteristics He required. For the land to be conducive for that, it was important that it provided an environment free from things that might tempt them to drift away from God and do things that were wrong. The native people of the land of Canaan were just such a threat. In God's eyes, they were a wicked people, and if His nation lived among them, those people would continually tempt Israel to be unfaithful. Just prior to God leading His people into the land He had chosen for them, He therefore said this:



“I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you” (Exodus 23:31–33).

Note the reason God said the inhabitants were to be driven out: to prevent them from leading His people astray. Later, when God's people were poised to cross the River Jordan and move into the Promised Land, the same message was reiterated:

“Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you. Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness

that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Deuteronomy 9:3–5).

Those passages stress that the inhabitants of the land God had chosen were to be destroyed, not on a whim, but because their behaviour and way of life were abhorrent to God. Joshua and his soldiers fought those people because of God's direct command, and God's judgements are perfect and righteous (Psalm 119:137, Revelation 16:7).

The Amalekites

Forty years earlier, when the Israelites left Egypt after their period of slavery and walked across the desert towards the land God had chosen, a nation called the Amalekites attacked them without provocation. This led to a battle with much bloodshed, but the people led by Moses won with God's help (Exodus 17:8–13). The way the Amalekites had acted displeased God to such an extent that,

afterwards, He instructed the leaders of His people to eradicate them.

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey’”
(1 Samuel 15:2–3).

God's judgements may appear stern to us, but He hates evil behaviour (Psalm 11:5). That side of His nature is not unique to the times of Joshua and the early kings but is also clearly seen in warnings we find in the New Testament. It is evident in some of Jesus' parables (for example Matthew 3:10–12; 13:42) and, more explicitly, in some of the New Testament letters (for example Romans 2:8–9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 10:30–31, 12:29).

God's Patient Nature

However, it's very important to realise that God is also very patient with humanity, giving us every opportunity to turn away from the kinds of behaviour that He abhors. Consider the time of Noah, another example of humanity's behaviour becoming so bad that God had to intervene. In the time of Noah, the state of the world is summed up in this way:

‘The earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:11–13).

However, even in this momentous judgment, we still see God's patience



and desire that people would repent and turn from their evil behaviour. The New Testament reflects on what happened in this way: *'they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water'* (1 Peter 3:20).

Note how God's patience and longsuffering is described in that verse. Peter later described Noah as '*a herald of righteousness*' (2 Peter 2:5), so it seems Noah tried to convince those around him to repent while he was building the ark. God waited patiently during that time, hoping others would turn to Him; unfortunately, they chose not to and paid the ultimate penalty.

Similarly, the behaviour of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah

distressed God so much that He sent angels to totally destroy them. However, because a man called Lot was there, who is referred to in the New Testament as '*righteous*' (2 Peter 2:7), the angels were instructed not to destroy the towns until he was clear of the area (Genesis 19:22). Lot tried to convince his sons in law to leave Sodom before God destroyed it, but they just laughed at him and ignored the warning (Genesis 19:14); they died as a result.

The picture we see is of a God who is very patient, holding off punishment as long as He can in order to give people the opportunity to be saved. The Apostle Peter wrote, '*The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*'

(2 Peter 3:9).

Similarly, in the Old Testament, God described Himself as '*merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*' (Exodus 34:6).

A Warning for Today

However, just because God has a longsuffering and merciful nature, that



doesn't mean we can live our lives in any way we please. We must ensure God doesn't consider us in the same way He viewed the people whom Joshua was instructed to eradicate.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will return to earth to establish God's Kingdom. The Old Testament prophet Daniel likened Jesus' second coming to a stone smashing the world's nations and then filling the earth (Daniel 2:44). That illustrated how Jesus will prepare the whole earth for God's Kingdom on his return, not just the small area of land that God prepared for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus warned that those who do not turn to him risk being wiped out at that point (Matthew 13:40–43; 25:31–41), like the people of Noah's time (Luke 17:26–27) or like the inhabitants of the land in Joshua's day. The apostle Paul sounded this warning:

'Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal



life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury' (Romans 2:4–8).

Let us respond to this warning by turning to God now while He is allowing us the time. The Bible shows us what He wants us to do with our lives, and the marvellous future that is in store for those who love and obey Him.

IAN COATES

Questions? Comments?

We'd *love* to
hear from you!

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LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

In real life, love at first sight is rare. But with Jacob, it was a classic case. He had just completed a 400-mile (600 km) pilgrimage to Haran, the city where his mother was born. Tired, lonely, but excited at the prospect of meeting his relatives for the first time, he stood near the public well waiting to ask someone the way to his uncle's house. At that moment a beautiful shepherd girl approached, bringing her flock to be watered. At once Jacob sprang into action, rolling away the great stone that covered the well and filling up the troughs for her animals to drink. Before long he was deep in conversation with the blushing shepherdess, who, to their mutual surprise, turned out to be his cousin. He was escorted home, and introduced to the family, who were glad to hear news of their relatives down south. But Jacob had eyes only for Rachel, the girl he met at the well. The romance between them is one of the tenderest, and yet the most tragic, in the whole Bible story. It began with a courtship that lasted a daunting seven years, and left Jacob penniless.



Bride Price

How did this happen, you may wonder? In those days it was not just a case of informing your prospective father-in-law that you intended to marry his daughter. You had to pay a large sum of money up front before he would sign the contract. Jacob had no ready cash to provide a dowry for Rachel, and his father and mother were too far away to help him out. So he agreed to work for his uncle, with no wages except his board and lodging, to pay for his bride. *"I will serve you seven years for your*

younger daughter Rachel," he said. Laban replied, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me" (Genesis 29:18–19).

Consider what Jacob agreed to pay for his marriage. What would seven years' wages amount to for a skilled shepherd such as him? And to wait seven whole years was a test in itself. Yet his love never faltered: 'Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her' (v. 20).

Laban was a hard master, and a rogue. When the contract expired, he gave Jacob his wife. But he insisted he must also marry Leah, his elder daughter, because the etiquette of his country demanded that the eldest daughter should marry before her sisters. Jacob found himself working another seven years, again for no pay. At the end of that time he signed on for a further period, to be paid in kind out of the annual crop of lambs and kids which were in his care. At last, he began to acquire some wealth of his own.

Even then the rascally Laban kept changing the conditions of the

agreement, to cheat Jacob of his due. Sometimes this year's white lambs were to be Jacob's, but when Laban found there were more white ones than black, he changed the rules. But God saw to it that Jacob prospered, and his uncle grew poorer and poorer.

Time to Leave

Eventually, after 20 years with his uncle, Jacob had had enough. He now had children born of his two wives and their two maidservants. His capital in the form of livestock and servants was respectable. It was time to leave. While he was thinking along these lines, he had another dream. He saw the angel of God, who reminded him that He had faithfully kept His promise to preserve and feed him all these years. He must now go back to his native land. "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred," he said (Genesis 31:13). So Jacob gathered his possessions together, waited till Laban was away on a sheep-shearing trip, and stole away southwards.



Predictably, Laban came chasing after his son-in-law, angry that he had slipped away without giving notice. In the confrontation that followed, Jacob reminded him what a miserly employer he had been. *"There I was,"* he recounted: *"by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes... I served you for fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times"*

(Genesis 31:40–41). Laban had no cause for complaint at all.

Working for God

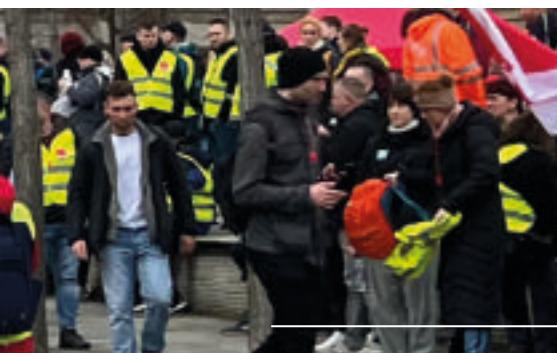
This attitude of Jacob towards an unfair and harsh employer is worth considering in the context of modern employment protection and trade unions. You would have thought Jacob would have been justified in walking out on his master when he was treated so badly (at least, after he had finished paying for his first wife!). But he stuck it out, and continued to give faithful service. Jacob's dedication is a fine example of the conduct the Apostle Peter recommends in the New Testament for the Christian disciple. *'Servants, be subject to your masters with all*

respect,' he insists, *'not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly... if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God'* (1 Peter 2:18, 20). *'Gracious in the sight of God'* is the key. The Christian should serve their employer as if they were working for God. Nothing less will do. We are not permitted to slacken our effort because our employer is unreasonable. That would be returning evil for evil. God sees and weighs our lives, and will reward us with the measure that we give.

As Jacob's case illustrates perfectly, God is able to ensure that we do not lose out. In the last analysis, Jacob ended up richer than his employer. The Apostle Paul puts it perfectly: *'Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ'* (Colossians 3:23–24). It may seem strange to be receiving lessons in labour relations from the book of Genesis, but there is no doubt where the Christian's duty lies. Old Testament and New Testament speak with one voice on this important principle.

DAVID PEARCE

(to be continued)



THERE'S A GREEN BEETLE IN MY EAR!



This was the distressed cry of a young child, as recounted years later in the autobiography of his brother, the naturalist Gavin Maxwell. With tender disbelief, the little boy's mother administered soothing lotion drops. After the second drop, she was amazed to see a green beetle crawl out of his ear.

Sometimes things that seem fanciful or incredible are, in fact, true. There are many instances in the Bible, and disbelief can have serious consequences. Our first example is

an almost droll, albeit serious, incident.

Escape from Prison

The apostle Peter had been imprisoned for disobeying the Jewish religious authorities. In the middle of the night an angel of God came and set him free. Peter himself initially thought that this was a vision, but soon realized that it was a miracle. He made his way to a fellow disciple's house, where a group of believers was gathered praying—presumably for him. When Peter knocked on the door, the maid Rhoda answered. On seeing Peter she was so excited that she left him there and ran in to tell the other disciples. They did not believe her, saying that it must be '*Peter's angel*'. Poor Peter was left outside knocking, until Rhoda persuaded them to go to the door themselves (Acts 12:1–17). We can surely recognize these reactions of disbelief. Quite clearly none of the disciples, including Peter himself, expected a miracle like this.

Peter had been imprisoned for preaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The religious leaders adamantly refused to believe this, and banned such preaching. But the apostles were unstoppable, even when faced with the threat of death.



The Resurrected Christ

The apostles, in turn, had taken some convincing. Some weeks before, on the morning of Jesus Christ's resurrection, faithful women had gone to his tomb. They found it empty, and two angels told them that Jesus was alive. The women went to tell the other disciples, who did not believe them. The story seemed to them just '*an idle tale*' (Luke 24:11). They thought that it was nonsense. They did not expect Jesus to live again.

Jesus subsequently appeared to ten of the eleven apostles (v. 36), and proved that he was really Jesus, and not a ghost or a vision. They were then completely persuaded about this stupendous miracle. But Thomas, who was not with them at the time, refused to believe. He said that he would only believe if he himself saw and felt the wounds on the body of Jesus. A few days later, Jesus

allowed him to do this and said, "*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

There were over 500 witnesses of the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3–8), but most people found their claims unbelievable.

The apostle Paul argued that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of Christianity. It is the only basis for any religious hope (1 Corinthians 15:14–19). If Jesus did not rise from the dead then there is no hope at all: '*If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied*' (1 Corinthians 15:19).

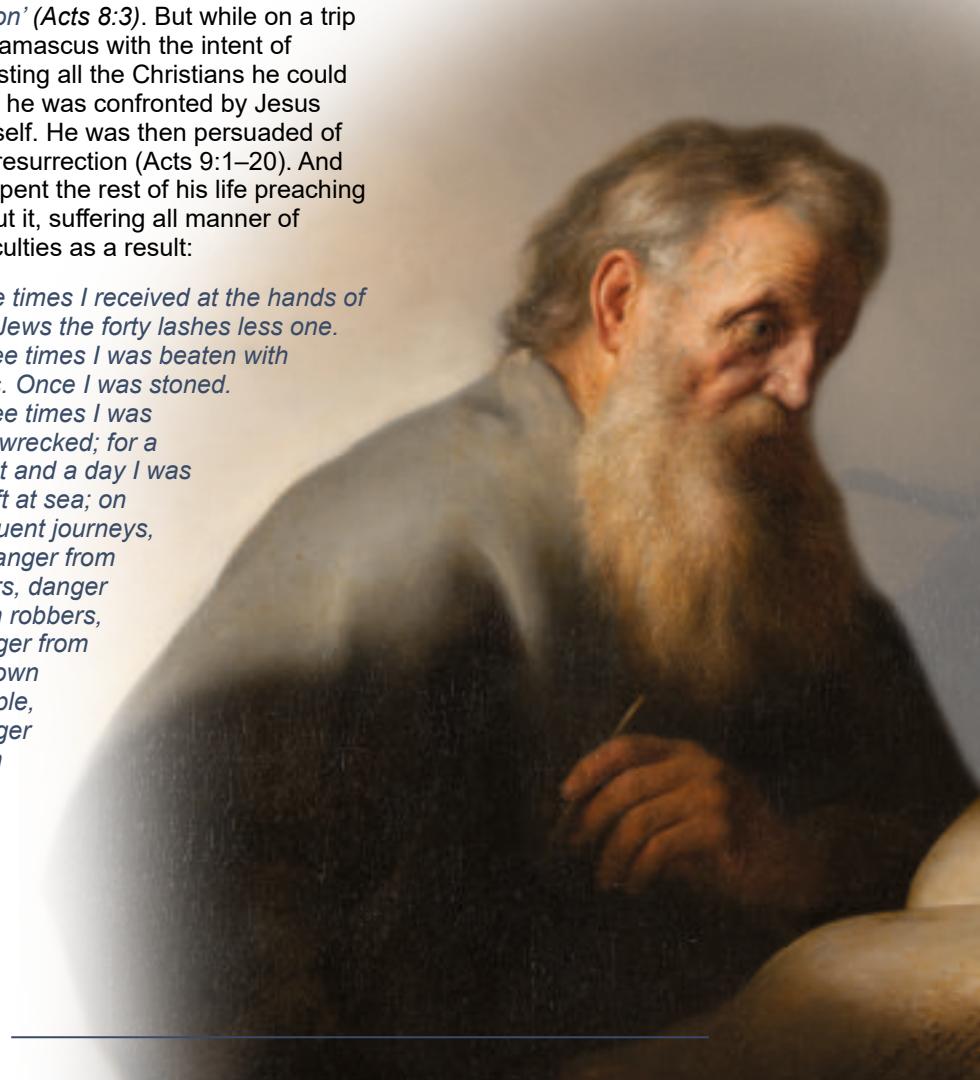
Later, when on trial, he asked King Agrippa, '*Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?*' (Acts 26:8).

He went on to describe his own experiences, for he was a remarkable convert to the Christian faith. He had been totally committed to persecuting Christians and eradicating what he considered to be their blasphemous message. He had authorized the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:51–8:1), and was thereafter *'ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison'* (Acts 8:3). But while on a trip to Damascus with the intent of arresting all the Christians he could find, he was confronted by Jesus himself. He was then persuaded of the resurrection (Acts 9:1–20). And he spent the rest of his life preaching about it, suffering all manner of difficulties as a result:

'Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from

Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure' (2 Corinthians 11:24–27).

Paul did not endure all this for something about which he had any doubts.



Faith

After his conversion on the Damascus road, Paul, like the other apostles, was an eyewitness of the risen, immortalized Jesus. There are no such eyewitnesses alive today, only their testimony in the Bible. But faith is, by its nature, about things we cannot witness.

'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1).

And God requires such faith:

'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).

We are just like the disciples. Similar to Paul before his conversion, we do find it difficult to believe things that are outside our experience—like a green beetle in a child's ear. It helps if we have some explanation about how something happened or will happen. There is no indication of how the beetle got into the child's ear. The Bible does not tell us how God raised Jesus to life. But we must acknowledge that there are many

things in life that, despite our "advanced" knowledge, we cannot fully explain. After all, we are not God, and we must remember that He is so much greater than we are.

The Bible predicts things that are outside our experience—things which might seem impossible, because we cannot work out how they will happen. God has not given us such details. These include things like the return of Jesus to the earth; the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth; a mass resurrection; and people living for ever. But given the passionate preaching of the apostles we need a very good reason to reject any of these messages.

And if we believe their seemingly incredible testimony, we must find out what God asks of us. And then to try to obey Him.

ANNA HART

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Why does God allow people to do evil things to others?

DK

Ed

The world is full of human wickedness of all kinds. From the petty selfishness of people who throw litter, to the heartless deceit of the internet fraudster, to the unthinkable evil of the cold-blooded murderer.

The Bible has a word for human wickedness—‘sin’. We sin when we rebel against God. We are all sinners because of our fallen human nature (Jeremiah 17:9), which we inherit from our ancestors Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). When you think about it, we all do evil things—including you and me.

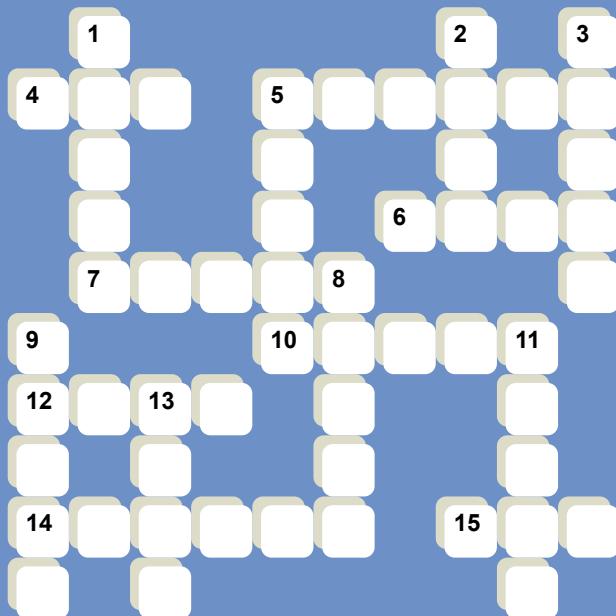
God deplores sin, in all its forms. But what is He doing about it? He could stop bad things happening: maybe He could jam the car window so the beer bottle can’t be thrown out, or freeze the computer so the fraudster can’t rob his victim, or deflect the knife to prevent the murder happening.

Is this what God should be doing—constantly overriding our bad actions? The sin would still be there, whether or not the actual acts were allowed to happen. And if there were no consequences of evil intentions, people would act on them all the more.

The Bible shows us what God is doing: He is addressing the root cause of the evil. He gave His Son Jesus Christ to die as a sacrifice to take away our sins (John 1:29). He works with people, gently, patiently, calling out of the nations ‘*a people for his name*’ (Acts 15:14). These people—you and me, if we want it—will be changed when Christ returns, so that we’re no longer sinful (1 Corinthians 15:50–53).

Meanwhile, we are sinners and we live in a world that is beset by sin. The Bible shows us what we need to do to take advantage of God’s offer of salvation, and how we must try to live, resisting sin and following God. You and I won’t change the world by what we do, but we can at least make it a better place for ourselves and those around us. And we have the tremendous comfort of the knowledge that it won’t always be like this. In God’s good time, sin and its consequences will be eradicated, when God restores the world and its population to perfection (Habakkuk 2:14).

BIBLE READER'S CROSSWORD



ACROSS

4 Reuben's relationship to Leah (*Genesis 29:32*)

5 Rachel's elder son (*Genesis 30:24*)

6 Isaac sent Jacob to Padan-aram to find one (*Genesis 28:2*)

7 Leah's daughter (*Genesis 30:21*)

10 Detested, as Leah was (*Genesis 29:31*)

12 Jacob came to that of the people of the east (*Genesis 29:1*)

14 Leah's second son (*Genesis 29:33*)

15 Bilhah's elder son (*Genesis 30:6*)

DOWN

1 Felt affection for (*Genesis 29:18*)

2 Leah's third son (*Genesis 29:34*)

3 These animals belonged to Rachel's father (*Genesis 29:9*)

5 Leah's fourth son (*Genesis 29:35*)

8 Jacob went to this place (*Genesis 28:10*)

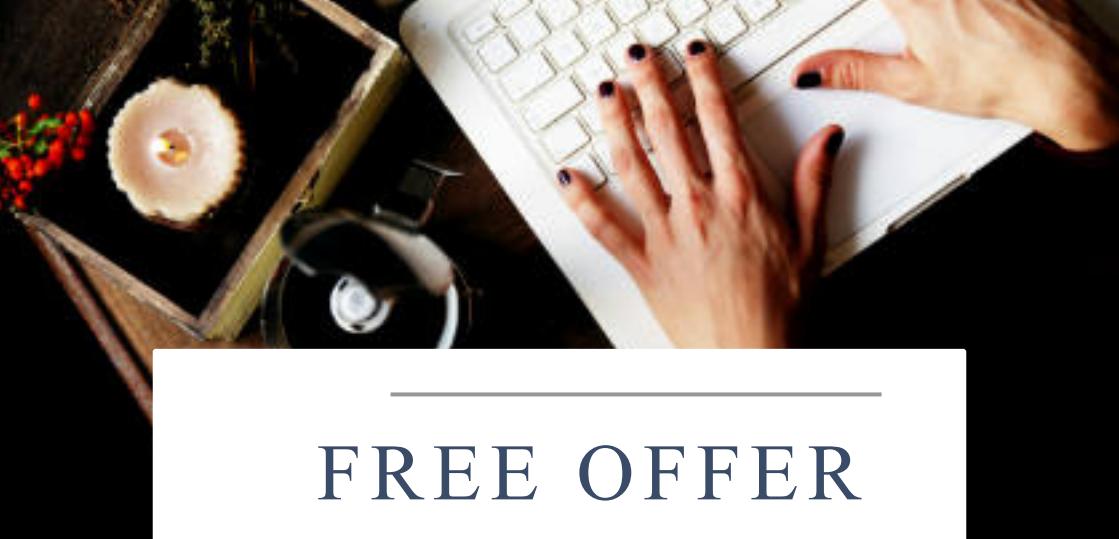
9 Laban said to Jacob, "Surely you are my bone and my ___!" (*Genesis 29:14*)

11 An angel spoke to Jacob in this (*Genesis 31:11*)

13 That by which a person is known (*Genesis 29:16*)

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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