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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

FEATURED ARTICLES

Retaliation

Mental Health and the Teachings of Jesus

The Holy Spirit Gifts

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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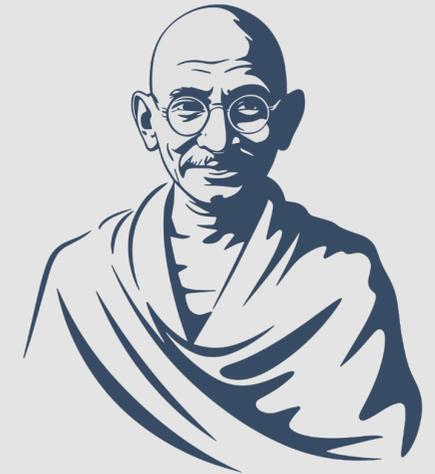
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EDITORIAL

RETALIATION

Mahatma Gandhi was the civil rights activist who led the successful campaign to achieve India’s independence from British rule in the 1940s. He taught the principle of ‘nonviolent resistance’. He rejected calls for hatred and revenge. When someone hurts you, it’s natural to want to get your own back, but we know this simply leads to an escalation of anger and hurt. Gandhi advocated the way of peace.



It’s said that someone once reminded him of the Bible’s instruction, ‘*Eye for eye, tooth for tooth*’ (Leviticus 24:20). He replied, “An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.”

When you think about it, this is a wise saying. But it’s often quoted by people who want to demonstrate that the Bible is barbaric and outdated and the world has moved on. Actually, they’re taking the Bible’s words out of context.

The Law of Moses

This is what the Bible says:

‘Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. Whoever takes an animal’s life shall make it good, life for life. If anyone injures his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever

injury he has given a person shall be given to him’ (Leviticus 24:17–20).

This command is part of the Law which God gave to Israel to govern their nation, which is known as the Law of Moses. The Law laid down a simple system of consequences for crimes.

If you know you can do wrong and you’re likely to get away with it, you’re more likely to do it. *‘Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil’ (Ecclesiastes 8:11).* Parents, teachers and the police know this. So the Law specified a straightforward system of justice—‘*eye for eye*’ ensured that the punishment was proportionate and limited. Justice

was to be dispensed fairly, consistently and promptly (Exodus 23:1–3, Leviticus 19:15).

The point is, that command ‘eye for eye’ is an instruction for the judiciary. It’s not permission to get your own back on people who hurt you. The Law insisted that matters of judgement were to be brought before judges (Exodus 22:9). It forbade taking judgement

into your own hands:

‘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 19:18).

The New Testament

In the Bible’s New Testament, we see the principles that were laid down in the Law of Moses opened up and

widened out. The Law, it turns out, was a ‘shadow’ of Jesus Christ who fulfilled it (Hebrews 10:1). Christians are not obliged to follow the rules of the Law of Moses (Acts 15:19–20)—but its timeless principles still apply.

The Apostle Paul explores the Law’s commandment not to seek revenge: *‘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).

The Law of Christ

Gandhi is admired as a man of peace. He advocated civil

disobedience rather than violence as a means of achieving your aims, and many have sought to learn from his example.

Jesus Christ set an altogether higher standard. He laid down his life for the sins of the world (John 1:29), and he calls his followers to lives of service and self-sacrifice:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But

I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” (Matthew 5:38–42).

“BUT I SAY, DO NOT RESIST THE ONE WHO IS EVIL. IF ANYONE SLAPS YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, TURN TO HIM THE OTHER ALSO.”

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Before “self-care” became a buzzword, before therapists and apps, the Bible was already dealing with the messy, complicated realities of the human mind and heart. It doesn’t promise a picture-perfect life for the Christian, or pretend that faith makes us immune to sorrow, anxiety, or despair. Instead, it offers something far richer: an honest look at our brokenness and a roadmap for healing and hope. Throughout the Bible, God acknowledges our emotional difficulties and meets us with compassion and understanding.

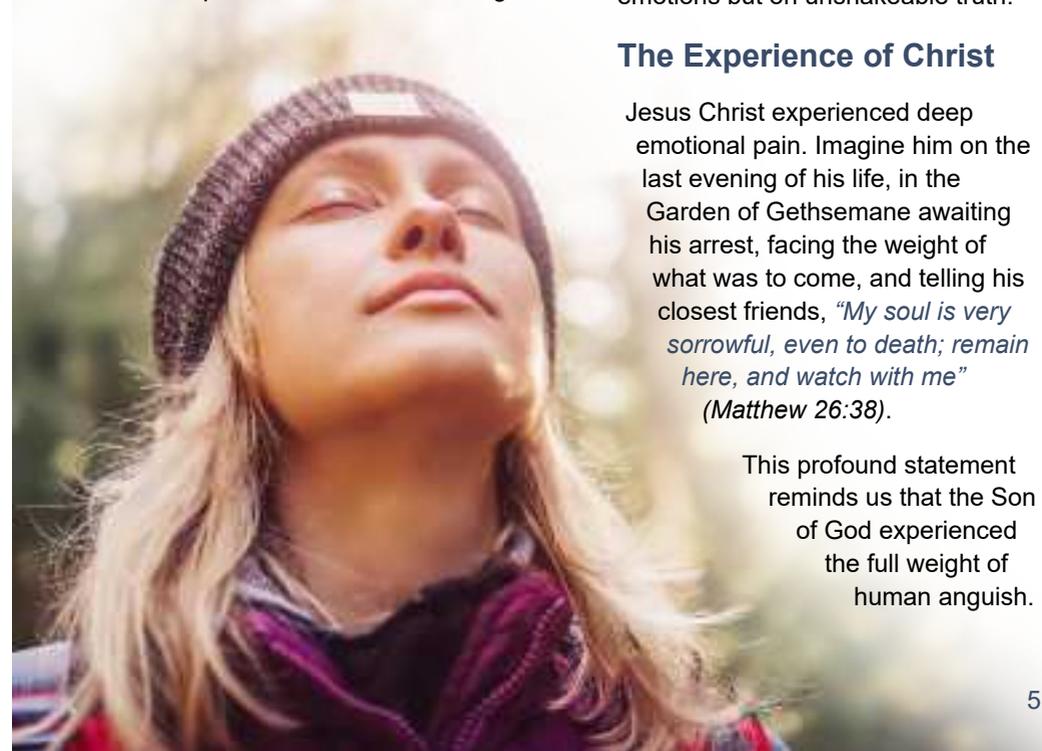
Mental health struggles are increasing globally. Many people feel untethered—lost without a clear purpose or anchor. Society pushes us to pursue endless happiness, personal success, and self-fulfilment, but what happens when these ideals fall short?

When life hits hard, the cracks widen, leaving many overwhelmed by confusion and despair. The Bible steps into this void, offering a foundation that’s not built on fleeting emotions but on unshakeable truth.

The Experience of Christ

Jesus Christ experienced deep emotional pain. Imagine him on the last evening of his life, in the Garden of Gethsemane awaiting his arrest, facing the weight of what was to come, and telling his closest friends, *“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me” (Matthew 26:38).*

This profound statement reminds us that the Son of God experienced the full weight of human anguish.





Men of Faith

King David, who is called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), wrestled with depression-like symptoms: *'Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God'* (Psalm 42:11).

David frequently poured out his grief and anxiety before God, demonstrating that sorrow and faith can coexist. Faith does not erase your pain, but it will give you a foundation to keep moving forward.

The prophet Elijah, after a dramatic victory over the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel

(1 Kings 18), found himself broken and desperate, even asking God to let him die (19:4). God's response was compassionate. He provided rest, food, and a gentle whisper of encouragement (vs. 5–18).

The Peace of God

Jesus taught about the peace that comes from God, a peace that transcends our circumstances.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

This invitation is spiritual and emotional. It is an offer of relief for the anxious, the stressed, and the mentally exhausted. Jesus calls us to a life of healing and spiritual wholeness.

Human experience in a broken world inevitably leads to mental strain. Loss, trauma, isolation, and sin all contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety. Jesus never promised a life free from suffering. He said, *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).*

He said this shortly before he was killed. He acknowledges the reality of suffering, even to the point of his own death on the cross, while pointing to his ultimate victory and the hope we have through his resurrection.



Sharing in Love

We are not meant to walk this journey alone. The Apostle Paul reminds his fellow disciples, *'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'* (Galatians 6:2).

Christians are called to support one another in love, creating a sanctuary of grace for healing and growth.

The Kingdom of God

Ultimately, mental health finds its deepest hope in the promise of the Kingdom of God. In Revelation 21:4, we are given a vision of complete restoration:

'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'

This promise reminds us that the struggles we face now are not the end of the story.

So, the Bible is more than an ancient text—it's a living guide for mental and emotional well-being. Jesus' life and teachings offer not only compassion for the mentally burdened but also a path to healing through relationship with God, support from community, and hope in the coming Kingdom.

JOANNE WALE



THE HOLY SPIRIT GIFTS



It is sometimes assumed that the Bible is full of miracles. Actually God gave humans miraculous powers for only about 20% of the 4,000 years of world history which the Bible narrates—and He gave them powers only ever for a specific reason.

When God commanded Moses to lead His people Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, He enabled Moses to perform two specific miracles, that the Israelites “*may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers... has appeared to you*” (Exodus 4:5). And they listened (vs. 30–31), because the signs confirmed God’s words.

Moses brought Israel out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, gave them their Law, and brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. But despite the Law becoming the foundation of Hebrew life, it was

only temporary, having ‘*a shadow of the good things to come*’ (Hebrews 10:1).

Jesus came 1,500 years later to show that the Law was not enough. God gave him power to perform miracles so that people would know that he came from God. When Jesus sent his apostles to preach across the wider world, he gave them power for the same purpose: ‘*And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs*’ (Mark 16:20). The signs were always to confirm the word, as was shown again in the life of the early church after Christ had ascended to heaven: ‘*They remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands*’ (Acts 14:3).



These powers were not permanent. The apostles themselves had to be given them on at least three occasions (Mark 3:14,15, then John 20:22, then Acts 2:4).

The First Century believers were given miraculous powers to build the brotherhood. (There is a comparison with the miraculous powers given to the craftsmen Bezaleel and Aholiab in order to construct the tabernacle in the wilderness, Exodus 31:1–6).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes the Holy Spirit gifts. You can read a summary of them in chapter 12:4–11. They included ‘*utterances of wisdom*’, ‘*gifts of healing*’ and ‘*tongues*’.

If you read this chapter, and Romans 12:4–8, and Ephesians 4:11–13, you’ll see that each passage explains how different believers were given different gifts to teach them to operate in unity. The body of believers is likened to different parts of a human body, each part having a different role, and all working together as one.

In the early church, Jews and Gentiles from many different nations,

with different backgrounds, cultures and traditions, were suddenly thrust together. There was much potential for conflict and strife. They had so much to learn in order to come together as one body in Christ. Therefore, as well as the gifts confirming the message that they preached, these gifts united totally different people from totally different backgrounds into one body, which in turn helped each individual believer to become more like Christ—‘*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*’ (Ephesians 4:12–15).

Notice the word ‘until’ in this passage. There was a temporary nature to these gifts, and they were for a specific purpose. They were like

FALSE WORSHIP



stabilisers on a child's bike, which help the child stay upright while they learn to balance. What mattered most was the

Word. The gifts would

help the congregations become established. Once the brothers and sisters grew up they would not need the 'stabilisers'. The gifts were a temporary help—the real answer was the complete Word of God. Paul emphasised this point: *'And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified'* (Acts 20:32).

It was always about the Word.

'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:1–2). Paul explains that without love, the Holy Spirit gifts mean absolutely nothing. It was never about the gifts. They were a temporary measure which would come to an end: *'Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes,*

the partial will pass away' (vs. 8–10). They would end when that which is 'perfect' (the original word means 'complete') had come. *'When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known'* (vs. 11–12).

When the Word of God was complete, when the Bible was finished, it was time for them to grow up! They now had everything they needed to guide them.

The gifts are not for today—in fact, the letter to the Hebrews describes them as a 'taste' of *'the powers of the age to come'* (Hebrews 6:5).

The day will come when God will once again give His powers to people. For now, that which is perfect is in our hands. The Word of God contains everything that we need to follow Christ, for *'all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work'* (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

What an amazing gift—a gift of the Spirit that lives and lasts for ever! Followers of Christ need to 'grow up', fill their lives with it, and never take it for granted, as they prepare for the Kingdom of God to come.

PETER ANDERTON

Y*ou shall have no other gods before me.'*
(Deuteronomy 5:7)

False worship comes in many disguises. It is deceptive, beguiling and appealing. Sometimes it appears to be so close to 'the real thing' that we can fail to see the difference. It is as the Apostle Paul wrote: *'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ'* (Galatians 1:6–7). His message chided the believers who had been persuaded to embrace a false gospel (which effectively denied salvation in Christ).

The Law of Moses

In preparing the people of Israel for life in the Promised Land, God gave them commandments regarding their worship, particularly when sacrifices were to be offered. One of the earliest references is Leviticus 17:7 which reads, *'They shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom*



they whore.' The goat demons were pagan idols. This is a prohibition on animal worship and sacrifice to pagan idols. There are three more references in the Old Testament which also specifically prohibit animal and idol worship (Deuteronomy 32:17, 2 Chronicles 11:15, and Psalm 106:36–38).

Paganism

The background to this prohibition is that the demons are of pagan origin and a creation of the natural ungodly mind. In the ancient world they were often believed to be kinds of demi-gods inhabiting the air, causing illness and disease in humans by taking possession of the individual. These so-called supernatural beings appear in most pagan religions as, for example, spirits of natural objects (trees, fire, water, sun, animals), souls of dead ancestors, or the offspring of gods cohabiting with mortals.

This belief presumes the ideas of the immortality of the soul and a personal devil.* As 'demons' are pagan gods and idols, they have no real existence.

**This magazine regularly carries articles demonstrating that these ideas are contrary to Bible teaching.*

The problem for the people of Israel was that the indigenous people of Canaan, whom the Israelites were instructed to destroy, were pagan and idol worshippers. Associated with this kind of religion was an indulgent mindset, with an emphasis on sexual deviation and personal satisfaction. God foresaw that this would be a huge temptation for the people of Israel and legislated against it in His law. He had also provided that His people worship at the Tabernacle and later the Temple, where they would observe holy and honourable practices.

The Leviticus passage quoted above was referred to by the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Christian community at Corinth. *'I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons'* (1 Corinthians 10:20-21). Evidently the forbidden pagan practices of the Old Testament were being reproduced in New Testament Corinth, and some of the Christian converts had been, or continued to be, engaged with this very unchristian behaviour. The apostle was very firm in his censure and commanded them to avoid it. He drew a clear distinction between *'the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons'*, and *'the table of the Lord and the table of demons'* (contrasting the feasts in Pagan temples with the Christian *'love feasts'* (Jude:12). They were totally incompatible and created a conflict of loyalty and integrity for those

who confessed the Christian gospel.

Old Testament Teaching

Let us take another Old Testament example. Daniel 3:3–18 is the account of the call to worship of a huge gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar had built in the plain of Dura in Babylonia. When music played, everybody was to bow down and worship the image. The people were being compelled to commit idolatry. For three God-fearing Jewish captives, this was too much to ask. They refused. The penalty was death in a fiery furnace. They were appealed to but still refused, choosing to rely on the God whom they faithfully worshipped, believing He could deliver them. They did not bow down and worship the idol. The punishment was carried out. The story goes on to describe how they survived the fire with the help of an angel of God. Their faith had been rewarded.



New Testament Times

In Matthew 15:1–9 we see one of the numerous confrontations between the Lord Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. They were part of the religious authority at the time. In addressing the duty of honouring father and mother, which the scribes and Pharisees spectacularly failed to do, Jesus said, *"For the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'"* (vs. 6–9).

Clearly Jesus disapproved of their corrupt practice which denied the wisdom of God. The traditions of the religious authority were irreconcilable with the teaching of Jesus which he received from God, and therefore to be refused. Although this issue was

not about physical images or idols, 'the commandments of men' were equally repugnant and to be rejected. The religious leaders had set aside the commandments of God by their traditions.

Today

Some churches and religious places still display icons and images, which easily become objects of worship. This is precisely what God instructed the children of

Israel to avoid. It is worshipping *'the creature rather than the Creator'*, as the Apostle Paul explained (Romans 1:25). He carried on to describe the immoral behaviour which easily flows from idolatry. God detests these developments, and His commandments to His people 3,500 years ago was intended to make His people aware of its dangers.

Finally, the way worshippers present themselves receives comment. *'Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious'* (1 Peter 3:3–4).

VIC AUCOTT
(to be continued)

BIBLE DIFFICULTIES

Let us not pretend that we never encounter difficulties when we read and seek to understand the Bible. Sometimes there are textual difficulties, where we see apparent contradictions within the Bible narrative. Sometimes the narrative is morally difficult—perhaps God commands something that seems to be unjust or cruel. If they are left as difficulties, these questions may be discouraging or disheartening. But when they are answered, faith in the Word of God will be strengthened. We shall address a few of these difficulties here, and by so doing we shall perhaps gain insight into how these kinds of difficulties can be solved.

Imprecatory Psalms

We shall think first of the phenomenon of “imprecation” in the Bible. “Imprecation” means “calling down” or “invoking”, and in the Bible we find people invoking or calling down evil from God upon their enemies. This seems barbarous. How can it be that the writer, being inspired to write by the Holy Spirit, does so in such a cruel and vindictive way? So you can see that the difficulty is not only a moral one, but also one involving inspiration itself—if we cannot imagine God inspiring a person to call down evil upon their

enemies, then perhaps these parts of the Bible are not inspired.

Psalm 109 contains a typical case of imprecation. The writer is complaining to God about his enemy: *‘Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another take his office! May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow!...’* (vs. 6–9).

With that Psalm in mind come to Acts 1. Shortly after Jesus has ascended to heaven, the Apostle Peter is speaking to his fellows about the betrayal of the Lord by Judas Iscariot, who was one of their own number. *“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to*

those who arrested Jesus... For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and ‘Let another take his office’” (vs. 16–20).

I submit that when we read Psalm 109 by itself we should never have guessed that it had reference to Judas. But when we read the Acts commentary we see two things: firstly, that it was indeed the Holy Spirit that was moving David to write those words; and secondly, that the Psalm was not just referring to immediate circumstances in David’s life, but it had a much wider reference. On the authority of Peter, the Psalm refers to Judas.

Just to enforce this argument, I wish to bring you to another example in Acts. Peter at Pentecost quotes from Psalm 16 and in particular the words of the psalmist that *‘you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. 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’ (vs. 10–11).

On the face of it nobody could blame us if we thought that the psalmist was speaking of himself when he wrote. And yet Peter makes it quite clear that the writer was not speaking of himself at all. He quotes the Psalm, and continues, *“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption”* (Acts 2:29–31).

This throws interesting light on the nature and function of the Psalms. They are often prophetic. On the face of it you would not always think so, but it was true in the case of the prophecy about Judas and true also in the case of the prophecy about Christ. So let us notice what we have seen so far:

1. that words which seemed to spring out of this passion and prejudice of human revenge are in fact not human but divinely inspired, not the words of men but the words of God
2. that although the words primarily relate to personal situations in the life of the writer, they are also deeper and more far reaching and often prophetic.

Now, these two principles lie at the root of a right understanding of imprecation in the Bible.

In our English Bibles, the tense is always what is called the “imperative”—that is to say, the words demand that God shall do this or that. For example *‘Let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few’* (Psalm 109:7–8). But the Hebrew text uses not the “imperative” but the “futurist” tense—the writer is not demanding that bad things happen, but foretelling that they will. It is a warning of the judgement which will fall one day upon the wicked, whether individuals or nations. It would apply to the wicked of the psalmist’s day, or any other day if they will not repent. Jesus said it too: *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).

The words of the Psalmist then are not the words of human passion and prejudice, but God’s words, and they reveal principles upon which all ages are to be judged. If you read Psalm 109 carefully you will see that the words are the revelation of judgement against those who hate, deceive and lie, who reward evil for good and hatred for love.

The Flock of Quail

In answer to the Israelites’ request for food in the wilderness, *‘a wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, round the camp, and about two cubits above the ground’* (Numbers 11:31).

A day’s journey on one side would be about 20 miles, and a day’s journey the other side would be about 20 miles, so there was an area of land 40 miles broad around the camp of Israel upon which the quails fell. They fell two cubits high, which is about three feet or 90 centimetres. This seems an impossible quantity. The Israelites could not have eaten them, the sheer volume of meat would in fact have presented a hygiene problem. That is most unlike the way God works: He does not waste the things He provides. There is evidently a difficulty here.

Look at that verse again. The Hebrew word which is translated “beside” can also be translated “over”. They fell over the camp about two cubits above the face of the earth. I suggest

what actually happened was that the wind brought them in from the sea and swept them about 3 feet above the earth—that is to say within easy reach. There was perhaps some supernatural weather phenomenon which trapped the flock of quail near the ground in this 40 mile area, and as they were swept along by the wind at waist height they could be easily collected. That is a reasonable understanding of the narrative, and it would harmonise with how we see God working in other parts of the Bible.

Plague in the Wilderness

While they were in the wilderness, God brought a terrible plague upon the Israelites because of an episode of lewdness and immorality. The account states, *‘those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand’* (Numbers 25:9).

The Apostle Paul in the New Testament makes reference to this incident in his Corinthian letter: *‘We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day’* (1 Corinthians 10:8). Did Paul make a blunder? There is no doubt that he is referring to the same incident in Numbers 25, but he appears to have got the number wrong.

The reason I have included this example is that it reveals an important solution. We must read the text very carefully. The actual account of the plague in Numbers states that the total number of deaths was



24,000. Paul reveals that the plague was so severe that 23,000 of those deaths occurred in a single day.

This solution shows something that is often overlooked when people become perplexed by this kind of difficulty: the need to read the passage carefully, and be sure that account has been taken of every factor. Very often the only reason difficulties occur is that some factor in the incident or narrative has been overlooked, and conclusions are reached prematurely without careful reading and careful thought. It is this principle which brings me to my last difficulty: the failure and death of Judas Iscariot.

Death of the Betrayer

In Matthew 27 we see the tragic end of Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. *‘When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers’ (vs. 3-7).*

There appears to be a conflict between this account and Luke’s account: *‘Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood’ (Acts 1:18–19).*

You can see the difficulty—the accounts just do not agree. In one the priests purchased the field, in the other it was Judas; in one he hanged himself, in the other he fell and was disembowelled.

The solution lies in the principle I have already urged—that is, not to

jump to conclusions. Why should it be supposed that the words *‘reward of his wickedness’* must refer to the 30 silver pieces betrayal money? Careful reading of the New Testament reveals that Judas was treasurer of the band of disciples, but was also a covetous man and had been a thief for a long time. He had consistently been robbing the little band of its money (John 12:6).

Rather than having just bought the field with the priests’ silver, could he not have bought it previously with money filched from the bag? Then when he wanted privacy to commit suicide, that would be the logical place to go. So there were two different purchases, one by Judas and one by the priests. It may even be that it was the same field: after the death of Judas the field would come

on to the market, and maybe it was purchased by the priests—a touch of ironic justice, that the field which Judas had purchased with stolen money was purchased again with the betrayal money which he had disowned!

And with regard to the actual death of Judas: one account says he hanged himself, the other that he fell headlong, burst open and his bowels gushed out. Is this necessarily a contradiction? I know this is not a nice subject, but an improvised hanging is usually conducted by jumping from a height with a rope around the neck. Perhaps the rope snapped and the body tumbled to the ground and burst apart. One account is a description of the manner of his death, the other is a postmortem description of the result. So, taking into account all the factors and not jumping to conclusions too readily, I submit that there is no contradiction between these two accounts.

My purpose has been to illustrate that when the Bible presents apparent difficulties, they can be solved by an honest, humble, careful investigation. *‘This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word’ (Isaiah 66:2).* When we acknowledge that the Word of God is holy, true and soundly infallible, we will accept that difficulties when they arise are our difficulties, not God’s difficulties, and it is our privilege and our duty to seek out God’s solution.

DENNIS GILLET

TROUBLE ON THE JOURNEY

At last, to Jacob's great relief, Laban bade him a grudging farewell, and left him alone with his family (Genesis 31:55). But his troubles were not over—rather, they were about to begin. The next obstacle he had to face was the temper of his brother Esau, who had been planning to kill him when he left home all those years ago (Genesis 27:42).

Jacob sent messengers ahead to inform his twin that he was on the way, and meanwhile continued slowly southwards. To his consternation, his servants returned with the news that Esau was coming to meet him, with four hundred men (32:6). Jacob immediately feared the worst. Undoubtedly, he argued, Esau was bent on revenge—he must have been nursing his anger all these years, and would soon be upon them, tearing Jacob's little band into pieces in a bloody slaughter.

His reaction in this emergency is instructive. He had no weapons or skill in fighting to defend himself against his warlike brother. There were only two things left he could do. The first he put into effect that very night. He got down on his knees and begged God to deliver him from his brother. He reminded God that He had promised to make of him a great nation, a promise that could not come true if his family was wiped out. God's word was staked on his survival. But



he asked it very humbly, in a monumental prayer.

O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as

the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude'" (32:9-12).

Jacob made plain his helplessness, his fear, his unworthiness, and left the outcome to God.

The other course of action Jacob settled on was both ingenious and practical. He sent on ahead an enormous present for Esau, to appease his wrath. This combination of prayer and sensible precaution is repeated many times in the Bible's biographies, and illustrates the point that we cannot simply leave it to God and do nothing ourselves every time we are in trouble. There will be times when we really are helpless, with no options but prayer alone. But when there is something practical that will help forward our case, there is no virtue in neglecting it. Goliath, for example, did not fall by a thunderbolt, but by a well guided stone from a

faithful shepherd's sling (1 Samuel 17:49).

Later that night Jacob met an angel in the darkness, sent to protect him (Genesis 32:22–32). Assuming he was an enemy, he wrestled with him. Only at daybreak did the angel break free and inform Jacob that God was going to change his name. He would no longer be Jacob, "the man who grabs by the heel". Now he would be Israel, "a prince with God". But he was left with a permanent limp. It would remind him every day that God, not human cunning or wisdom, is our true strength.

To Jacob's great relief, Esau met him with a big hug, and after a brief exchange of news, the brothers parted on the best of terms (ch. 33). Jacob had crossed his second hurdle, with greatly increased faith, and resumed his pilgrimage to Bethel, the "House of God".

DAVID PEARCE
(to be continued)



YOUR QUESTIONS

By what authority did Jesus forgive sins?

EE

Ultimately it has to be God who forgives sins, because He is the one we sin against. So, when Jesus was dying on the cross, we hear him asking his Father to forgive the sins of the men who crucified him (Luke 23:34). He may already have forgiven them himself, but it needed God's approval for the process to be complete. Ironically, his death on the cross was an essential link in the process of God's forgiveness—he was the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Having said that, there is an incident in the gospels where Jesus stands over a paralysed man and says *"Your sins are forgiven you!"* (Luke 5:20). This shocked the Pharisees, who said, *"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (v. 25). Jesus then proved he had the authority to forgive sins on behalf of God, by curing the man of his incurable disease. So God had delegated the power to forgive the sins of others to Jesus. Interestingly, Jesus, too, delegated the same power to his apostles (John 20:23). He gave them authority to forgive sins.

The answer to this conundrum is that in the Jewish idiom, what you do through your agent, you do yourself. This is an important principle. A good example can be seen in Exodus 23:20–22. Here God appointed an angel as His representative and authorised him to speak and act for God, including to rule and to judge. So when Moses went into the Tabernacle to speak with God, it was actually the angel of God that he spoke to, and from whom he received instructions. So, in the same way, Jesus had the delegated authority to forgive sins. He could even pass on that authority to a lower rank, the apostles. Yet the actual process of forgiveness still had to lie with God Himself. The Roman centurion in Luke 7:7–9 understood this relationship perfectly. He had authority from Caesar to order his servant to do something, and the servant had to obey. He could see that Jesus, in the same way, had been appointed by God to do His work on the earth, so if he gave the order, his servant would be healed.

In the book of Hebrews, and in Romans 8:34, Jesus is described as the mediator (or intercessor) for his disciples. Even today, in heaven, he speaks to God on their behalf, and pleads that God will forgive their sins, since he understands from his earthly experiences what it is like to be tempted, and can enter into our feelings. In a reversal of his earthly role, where he was God's representative, he now acts as our representative before God.

DMP

WORDSEARCH

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

— Words
serac
reech
(santolis-
onoc)
toof
dehl
veol
ynam
psils
luso
tafsdeats
thugot
tehar

God: The Refuge of the Faithful

Many faithful people in the Bible experienced fear and near desperation, but their trust in God sustained them.

Here is an example from **Psalm 94:18-19**.

Complete the quote with the twelve words hidden in the wordsearch.

Psalm 94:18-19

When I ____, "My ____
____", your ____ ____, O
LORD ____ me up.
When the ____ of my
____ are ____, Your ____
____ my ____.

ANNA HART



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