

Year: 142

GLAD

Issue 1705

TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD



FEATURED ARTICLES

“Religion Causes Conflict!”

Forever In Debt

Listening to God

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ISSUE 1705

3	17
“RELIGION CAUSES CONFLICT!”	THE TAUNT AT JESUS’ TRIAL
5	18
FOREVER IN DEBT	MUSIC IN WORSHIP
8	22
THE FAVOURITE SON	YOUR QUESTIONS
12	23
LISTENING TO GOD	BIBLE READER’S CROSSWORD

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PUBLISHER: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association.

A registered charity—Number 248352.

“RELIGION CAUSES CONFLICT!”



I knew a man who refused to talk about religion. In his opinion, religion causes intolerance and strife and the human race would be better off without it. Have you heard people say that?

Certainly it is true that religion has been a major cause of conflict throughout history, and it still is. Some would argue that the most potent threat to world peace at the moment is militant Islam. I can't comment on Islam's relationship with violence (you would need to ask a Muslim).

But I can comment on Christianity's relationship with violence. It has to be admitted that the history of the

Christian churches has been marred by appalling inhumanity. From the Crusades in the Middle Ages to the Spanish Inquisition, to pogroms against Jews, to the Irish Troubles, it's been estimated that as many as three million people have died in persecutions and conflicts caused by Christianity.*

My comment is simple. Jesus Christ was a man of peace, and he commanded his followers to be the same: *"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"* (Matthew 5:39).

When he was facing execution, he said, *"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world"* (John 18:36).

His followers preached the same message of non-aggression: *'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).

Anyone who practises violence in the name of Christ is not his follower. Christ is not responsible for the atrocities that have been carried out in his name.

And it's worth exploring the question of whether the world really would be a more harmonious place if there was no religion. That is also a question with a simple answer. The 20th Century was a period of social change, marked in many areas of the world by a decline in religion and the rise of atheist, humanistic philosophies. It was also a period of war and calamity unprecedented in world history. It's been estimated that around 100 million people died in wars, persecutions, purges, exterminations and famines which were a direct result of the atheist ideologies of Nazism and Communism.*

It's obvious then that conflict is caused by people. People will use religion, for example Christianity, because it can provide a convenient pretext and because it can arouse strong feelings—but it is not the problem. Human nature is the problem.

So what is the solution?

In 1971 the musician John Lennon released his iconic song *Imagine*, in which he outlined his agenda for world peace:

"Imagine all the people, living for today... Nothing to kill or



die for, and no religion, too. Imagine all the people, living life in peace..."

The 1970s was a time of optimism and faith in the power of humanity to build utopia. Many people were inspired by Lennon's vision. But looking back now, those airy words seem hollow. It becomes increasingly apparent that human nature is just not capable of existing without conflict.

And that's why true religion does hold the answer—specifically, the teachings of the Bible. It explains clearly and simply that human nature is flawed (Genesis 3). It shows that there is a God, Who offers to save people from their human nature (John 3:16). It shares the promise that world peace and justice will one day be realised—not by human efforts, but in the Kingdom which will be imposed upon the world by God (Daniel 2:44). And it contains the invitation for you and me to be there: *"This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"* (John 6:40).

* *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?*
(D J Kennedy and J Newcombe, 1994)



FOREVER IN DEBT

An ambulance and a Land Rover were at the side of the road near the foot of a mountain. The Mountain Rescue Team were out. These are local unpaid volunteers who respond to calls for help from people who get into difficulties in the mountainous region. They go out in all conditions to try to save lives. Many people do not realize how perilous it can be on the mountains. While some climbers are well equipped and knowledgeable and have unfortunate accidents outside of their control, some others are foolhardy, ignoring the local advice, and taking silly risks. The rescue team does not discriminate, but they risk their own safety to get to all these people if they possibly can. And there is no charge.

Looking on, one local commented, "Oh dear, they are amazing! If they

had to come out to me I would for ever feel in their debt!"

We would hope that people would be grateful. Walkers who have been rescued should be aware that left on their own without help and unable to move, they would probably have died.

Jesus the Saviour

Mercifully, despite doing a lot of walking and often getting lost, I have never needed the Mountain Rescue Team. Nonetheless, having been 'lost' in a different way, and in dire difficulties, I have needed to be saved from death.

Two thousand years ago a righteous man died a horrific death to save us. One of the most famous verses in the Bible says this:

'For 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).

'Perish' is a strong word. Maybe, like some of the walkers, we do not realize the life-threatening situation all human beings are in. We cannot help being born mortal. That is the way life is. And, being mortal, we all die. But there is more to it than that, because death is the reward for sin—for disobeying God. And we all do that, so we all deserve to perish. Like the casualty stranded on the mountain, left to our own devices there is nothing we can do about it.

'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23).

'For the wages of sin is death...'
(Romans 6:23).

Without Jesus we will all perish. But with Jesus there is hope of the most spectacular rescue to eternal life, also described as a 'free gift'. That verse continues:

'...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

In order to save us, Jesus did not just risk his life. He voluntarily laid down his life, in an excruciating death, for those who were 'his own'. He said:

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14-15).

Action is Needed

A walker in trouble on a mountain is not rescued automatically. The team may be available but someone has to alert them. And if conscious, the casualty is wise to comply with the advice of their rescuers.

The death and resurrection of Jesus do not automatically save us. He wants to save us, and is waiting for us to respond to him, and to try to comply with what he says.

The Bible message is clear. We are told that in order to be saved we need to repent and be baptised. Repeatedly, the apostles preached this message (for example Acts 2:38, 3:19, 26:20).



Here is the example of a jailer in Philippi: *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family’ (Acts 16:30–33).*

The onlooker said they’d feel for ever in their rescuers’ debt. Those people saved by Jesus are quite literally for ever in his debt. The question is: have we responded in loving gratitude to his offer to rescue us from death?

ANNA HART

Saved For Ever

The Mountain Rescue Teams care about people, and they save many lives. But the people rescued will still eventually die. God cares even more.

‘But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:8).

However sinful, silly or foolhardy we are, Jesus died for us. And this ‘saving’ is eternal. Those who are being saved by Jesus are promised eternal life in God’s kingdom. If we obey the Gospel message then we are ‘known’ by Jesus and can truly benefit for ever with the gift of eternal life.

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THE FAVOURITE SON

We come now in the narrative to the adventures of Joseph, Jacob's son.

Rachel had been late starting a family and had died while bearing Benjamin, her second son. Joseph, her firstborn, was therefore much younger than his ten half-brothers—the sons of Jacob's other wife Leah, and his two concubines. It is likely that both in looks and temperament, Joseph reminded Jacob of Rachel. He became his father's favourite. Perhaps Jacob spent more time teaching young Joseph about the God of his fathers, and His laws and commandments. He certainly turned out a much more God-fearing person than the other members of the family. At any rate, his character, his place in the affections of their father, and the fact that he was the son of another mother, created a widening gap between Joseph and his brothers.

The Dreamer

One day, Joseph had a dream. It was one of those occasions we meet in the Bible where God revealed His will to chosen men by a special vision in the night. We read later, for example, of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph

the husband of Mary, and the Apostle Paul, all having such visitations.

Interestingly, the phenomenon is referred to in the book of Job thus: *'God speaks... in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men'* (Job 33:14–15).

Joseph's dreams are recounted in Genesis 37. The message was striking, and it was repeated. In his first dream, sheaves of corn gathered by his brothers gathered round his own sheaf and bowed down. In his second, the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. His brothers instinctively read into the dreams a prophecy that they would become his servants, a fact which



increased their antagonism towards him. Even his father thought he was getting grand ideas and reproved him. We shall return to the significance of Joseph's dreams. Their immediate effect was to bring about a dramatic change in his life, with far-reaching consequences.

Shortly afterwards, Joseph was sent by his father to find his brothers, who were away from home finding pasture for the sheep, and bring back news of their welfare (v. 14). Joseph wore a costly and brightly coloured coat given him by his doting father (v. 3)—another mark of favour—and they recognised him some distance away. Their hatred welled up, and they decided to kill him, to make an end of his fine dreams. When he came close, they seized him, tore off his robe, and threw him into a deep, dry wilderness pit.

Facing Death

It is difficult to imagine, unless you have been through such a trauma, the feelings of Joseph as his brothers retreated from the edge of the pit and left him to die. He was only 17 years old (v. 2). Minutes before, he had been a privileged young man, just entering his father's business, and likely to inherit a fortune in due course. Now his future was cut off by sandy walls he could not climb, and the searing eastern sun. His frenzied screams brought no reply from the empty wilderness, and he knew there was no chance of a search party finding him before he died of thirst. Joseph was numb with shock and

fear. Perhaps in calmer moments he prayed to the God of his father, but nothing happened. Eventually, he lay still, waiting for the end.

If you have been through a life-threatening experience, you will know the sick feelings of despair, the wild thoughts, and the pressing awareness of the precarious thread on which life hangs. Such situations force us to view life in a sharper perspective, and if we are permitted to survive, teach us a new gratitude.

Joseph leaped to his feet, his heart pounding. Craning his tear-stained face towards the patch of sky above him, he strained his ears to catch the sound again.

Hours before, his brothers had lowered him into a deep, waterless,





wilderness pit. They would listen neither to his shrieks nor his entreaties, but walked away, leaving him waiting helplessly and without hope. But now footsteps were approaching the pit. He could hear voices.

It was his brothers. So they had relented, after all! With immense relief, he heard them calling to him to hold on to the rope which they lowered. Within seconds he was standing on the surface, blinking in the strong light of the sun. He would never forget the wonderful feeling of deliverance as his eyes drank in the blue sky, the familiar sheep, and the bright robes of living men.

But whose were these camels, and this vast baggage train that had sprung out of the wilderness? And what were his brothers doing now, counting over gleaming silver coins that strange merchantmen were

drawing from their purses? Gripped once more in an icy fear, Joseph found himself dragged away, and propelled towards a gang of ragged slaves in the mastery of the desert traders. To the mocking farewells of his brothers, delighted with their bargain, he realised he had been delivered from the pit, only to be sold as a slave.

Providence

Such drama rarely comes our way. But there is one feature of this episode that we should not pass by. That trans-desert caravan crawled into view just as the eleven brothers were sitting down to eat dinner (v. 25). Its appearance prompted Judah to suggest to the others that they could make a lot of money if they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the merchantmen for cash (vs. 26–27). The arrival of the camel train swung the whole tide of

Joseph's fortunes. But the timing was critical. If it had come an hour earlier, it might have attracted only passing interest. An hour later, and the brothers might have gone. The caravan must have set out from its starting point in Gilead days before, and yet it arrived just in time to save Joseph's life.

Admittedly, you could dismiss the whole thing as chance, one of those quirks that are just as likely to bring evil into our lives as good. But we shall find a whole chain of events running forward from this incident for 20 years, in which Joseph's circumstances were consistently overruled until at last his dreams come true, his brothers bowed before him, and through his high office he could in turn preserve his brothers and his aged father from death by famine.

Joseph himself looked backwards on the amazing series of coincidences that had happened to him, and declared firmly that it was God who had directed his life. *"It was not you who sent me here,"* he declared to his awe-struck brothers, *"but God"* (Genesis 45:8). The angel of the Lord, to use the phrase of the Psalmist, had encamped around Joseph to deliver him (Psalm 34:7).



By the apparently trivial matter of the time of departure of a camel train, He had arranged that Joseph was plucked from his brothers' hands, removed to a foreign land, and prepared for the role of deliverer himself.

The corollary of this thought is that God can work in our lives too, if we let Him. By just such coincidences He can bring us friends and fortune, or pain and sorrow, shaping our characters and preparing us for His

Kingdom. The Bible likens

God to a skilled potter

(Romans 9:20–

21). He deftly

changes us

from rough

lumps of clay

into vessels of

beauty, not by

pressing us

willy-nilly into a

standard mould,

but by altering our

circumstances until we

develop faith, hope and love, and in

the process further His work in the

earth..

DAVID PEARCE

(to be continued)



LISTENING TO GOD

The Bible has a way of ‘talking to itself’. We often find that one part of the Bible sheds light on another part—even when the two parts are a long way apart, or seem at face value to be unconnected.

The Bible is Inspired


This feature is good evidence for what’s called the ‘inspiration’ of the Bible. Inspiration was the way in which the Bible came to be written. Using His special power, which the Bible calls ‘the Holy Spirit’, God influenced chosen men so that the words they wrote were the words that God wanted to be written. (Whilst we don’t always know precisely how this happened, the Bible says quite a lot about it.) This means that the words

of the Bible were produced not by men, but by God.

Here’s one example of how the Bible itself puts this (taken from a letter written by Peter, one of Jesus’ twelve apostles):

‘No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Peter 1:20–21).

This means that the Bible is unique. There’s no other book in the world that has been produced this way, so there’s no other book that can make the claims that the Bible makes about itself.



When we're reading the Bible, we're not reading words of human origin; we're reading God's words. In fact, God was so intimately involved in the writing of the Bible that we can say that He 'spoke' the very words that we read. Here's how the Apostle Paul explains this

important teaching, in a letter to the younger disciple Timothy:

'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).

God Speaking to Us

This is a remarkable thing—and something that has huge implications for us as readers of the Bible. When we read the words printed on the page, we're actually hearing God speaking to us! This is how we should approach the reading of the Bible. (We'll come back to 2 Timothy 3 later.)

Try to imagine how you would feel if you were listening to God literally speaking to you.

(I don't mean this disrespectfully; there were times in history when this happened to people—for instance, when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, which you can read about in Exodus 19.)



You would certainly pay attention to what was being said! You would have great respect for the words you were hearing, and you would want to understand exactly what the words meant—in case there was something important that you needed to do about them.

Well, this is precisely how we should be when we read the Bible. The Bible is not just words printed in ink on paper; it's God 'breathing out' words to us. So yes, we need to have total respect for what we're 'hearing'; yes, we do need to pay attention, not reading carelessly or too hastily; and we need to try to understand what the words mean, because almost certainly there's going to be something important that we need to do. Because the Bible is written by God, its words are unique. It can do things for us that no human book can do—indeed, this is exactly *why* God has given us the Bible in the way He has, as we'll see shortly.

A Book With a Job to Do

I began this article by saying that sometimes the Bible seems to ‘talk to itself’. (Perhaps this idea makes more sense now that we’ve thought about the way the Bible was produced. There is one mind—God’s mind—behind it all, despite the fact that the 66 books of the Bible were penned by different men at different times and in different places.) I was reminded of this recently when I was reading Isaiah 55. Here’s the first section of the passage in question:

‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’ (Isaiah 55:8–9).

The words are God’s, communicated through His ‘spokesman’ the Jewish prophet Isaiah, who was sent by God to speak to the nation of Judah in Old Testament times, about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. At this time God’s people were ruled by kings. Some of the kings were good, trying to follow God’s ways, and some were terrible, leading God’s people into sin and disobedience.

The two verses quoted above are part of an appeal by God to His people, the Jews, to turn back to Him. He is a merciful and compassionate God, He says through the prophet, so they will have their sins forgiven if they repent and turn back to Him sincerely. God’s thoughts are ‘higher’ than human thoughts because He can see into human hearts and know what people (we!) are really like.

Then, to reassure Isaiah’s readers of His willingness and His power to do this, God continues:



'For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it' (vs. 10–11).

I think what God is speaking about here is what we call the “water cycle”. In this cycle, rain and snow come down from above to provide moisture for the earth. This causes plants to grow, which in turn produce the food that we need to eat to stay alive. Then the moisture ‘returns’ to God (via the evaporation of rivers and seas) and the whole cycle begins again.

But the most important part of this is that God sends this rain *for a purpose*: to provide for humankind. And, because He is God, that purpose cannot fail. When God does something, it never fails. What God intends to do, He always accomplishes. There’s a reason why He sends the rain from above in this way, and the rain does its job. It does

exactly what God sends it to do—always.

Allowing the Bible to Do its Job

Reading these words, I was struck by how similar they are to the verses from 2 Timothy 3 we saw earlier. Let me quote those verses again, and this time see if you spot the similarity with the words of Isaiah 55:

'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 do the two passages have in common? Did you notice it? They both talk about something being sent from God to accomplish what He wants. In Isaiah, it’s the rain being



And if I don't achieve that, then it's not the Bible's fault.

But for this to happen, I have to let it! I have to read it—regularly and carefully, listening to God 'speaking' to me as I do so. I have to try and understand what God is saying. Then I have to

decide to do what God teaches me in the Bible, becoming His 'child' and following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know the Bible is capable of doing all this—like the rain that God sends, it really can accomplish what God wants.

But will I let it do that? Will you? We can only decide for ourselves. Let's make every effort to listen to God 'speaking' to us in the Bible. If we will allow it to have its effect on us, it really can change us in the way that God wants.

JEREMY THOMAS

sent from God so that people can have enough to eat. In 2 Timothy, it's God's Word being 'spoken' so that people can be 'equipped for every good work'—so that they will have everything they need to be able to behave in ways that God wants. The rain can't fail to do its job, and God's Word can't fail to do its job either (if we take notice of it), because both are sent by God. (I hope you can see what I mean about the Bible 'talking to itself'—the words in one passage help to explain the words in another passage.)

The lesson I learned from this comparison was a very powerful one: if I read it carefully and respond in the right way, then God's Word can have exactly the effect on me that God intends: *'equipping me for every good work'*. In the same passage, Paul tells Timothy, *'the sacred writings... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (v. 15)*. The 'sacred writings' are in the Bible. So, I know there's nothing flawed or faulty about the Bible. It really can make me the kind of person that God wants me to be, behaving as He wants me to behave.

Questions?

Comments?

**We'd love to
hear from you!**

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THE TAUNT AT JESUS' TRIAL

If somebody is *not* telling the truth they'll usually make sure their story hangs together perfectly and sounds feasible to the listener.



Yet Matthew tells us no more, simply that those mocking Jesus made what appears a pointless demand. But when we come to Luke's account of the

same incident we get the answer: *'Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"'* (Luke 22:63–64).

On the other hand, a genuine person gives straight facts and leaves it there. They'll describe an event just as they remember it, (sometimes omitting the small details that listeners need for it to make complete sense). Occasionally, it's an 'off-the-cuff' detail that turns an otherwise baffling story into an understandable one. That is exactly what we have in a passage from Matthew's gospel that seems puzzling at first.

Now it makes sense; blindfolded, Jesus would not know who hit him.

During Jesus' trials he was abused by his captors: *'Then they spat in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"'* (Matthew 26:67–68).

Here is one of many small proofs of the truth of the Bible. Perhaps when Matthew wrote his gospel it was well known that Jesus was blindfolded so there was no need to mention it. Whether that is the case or not, we see that he was confident in what he wrote about. He didn't go over his story with a toothcomb to make it sound 'credible': he just told it as it was. Luke filled in the gap for us.

Since they were so close, Jesus would have easily seen who it was, so what was the point of the question? He wouldn't need to 'prophecy'.

JOAN LEWIS

MUSIC IN WORSHIP



‘Praise is due to you, O God,
in Zion,
and to you shall vows be
performed.
O you who hear prayer,
to you shall all flesh come.’
(Psalm 65:1–2)

In establishing the principle that *‘all things should be done decently and in order’* in the First Century Christian congregations (1 Corinthians 14:40), the Apostle Paul uses musical instruments as examples. He writes, *‘if even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?’* (vs. 7–8). We can infer that even the music played must be harmonious, with wind and brass instruments in tune with the strings for the melodies to be understood and appreciated. When there is music in communal worship, it must accompany the singers and not be a virtuoso performance!

Lessons from Job

In the book which bears his name, Job was challenged regarding his whereabouts at the creation of the

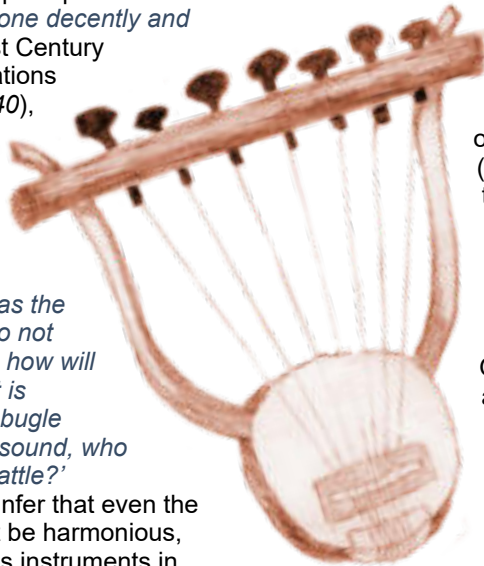
universe. God said that at that time *“the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy”* (Job 38:7). We are being told the angels of God engaged in singing to celebrate the beginning of time and the purpose of God, by praise and worship. It must have been an

occasion of great joy and pleasure to see the physical creation come into being by the word of God (Genesis 1). Whether the angels knew the earth would be inhabited by human beings is not revealed, but the race was to glorify God by its worship and praise.

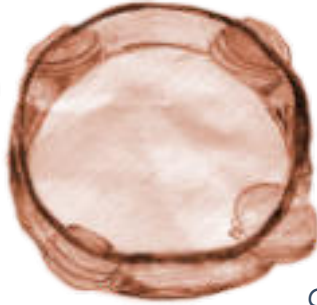
By the time God had finished His speech, Job found it all too much and was overwhelmed by the magnificence of what he had heard about God’s power and wisdom. He said later, *“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you”* (Job 42:5). He now understood the holiness of God.

David’s Vision

When Samuel the prophet and the future king David prepared for the building of the temple in Jerusalem,



they ensured that singing and musical accompaniment would be a major part of the people's worship. The appointed leaders of the choirs and orchestras were all accomplished players, capable of providing leadership in the required skills. Asaph was the chief, and he conducted and beat time with cymbals; others played psalteries (stringed instruments either plucked or played with a bow), and harps, and priests contributed with trumpets. David ordered that *"4,000 shall offer praises to the LORD with the instruments that I have made for praise"* (1 Chronicles 23:5). It is possible these instruments included lyres and harps, which were also stringed.



*'Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful
noise to the rock of our
salvation!*

*Let us come into his
presence with
thanksgiving;*

*let us make a joyful
noise to him with songs
of praise!...*

*Oh come, let us worship
and bow down;*

*let us kneel before the LORD, our
Maker!'*

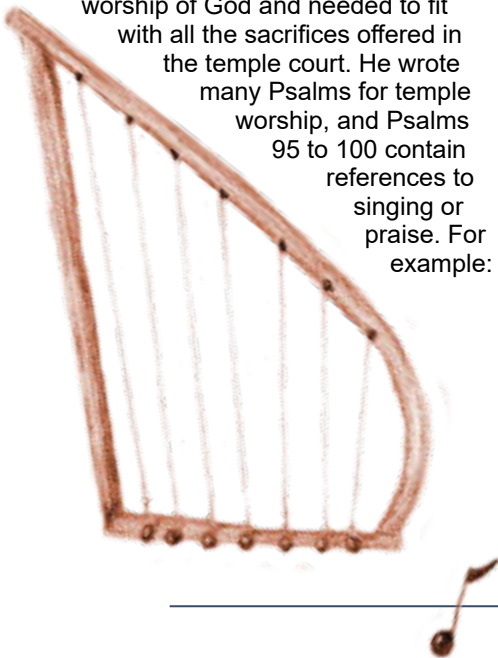
(Psalm 95:1–2, 6)

After the Exile

Many years later the nation had fallen away from God. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried the Jews away captive. But eventually they returned from exile, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe how they rebuilt the temple and the city. Some 550 years after King David's appointment of Asaph to lead the worship, Nehemiah chose Asaph's descendants to take charge of the music and accompany the spiritual revival of the nation. They had maintained their integrity and constancy, being encouraged by God's prophets.

In Jerusalem the dedication of the walls was celebrated by two choirs, one led by Ezra and the other by the family of Asaph, marching around the walls in opposite directions, until they met when they turned into the city (Nehemiah 12:27–43). Their joyful singing was heard a long way off and Godly praise sounded in Jerusalem once again.

David was also concerned about the singing, and particularly the words. They were to be suitable for the worship of God and needed to fit with all the sacrifices offered in the temple court. He wrote many Psalms for temple worship, and Psalms 95 to 100 contain references to singing or praise. For example:



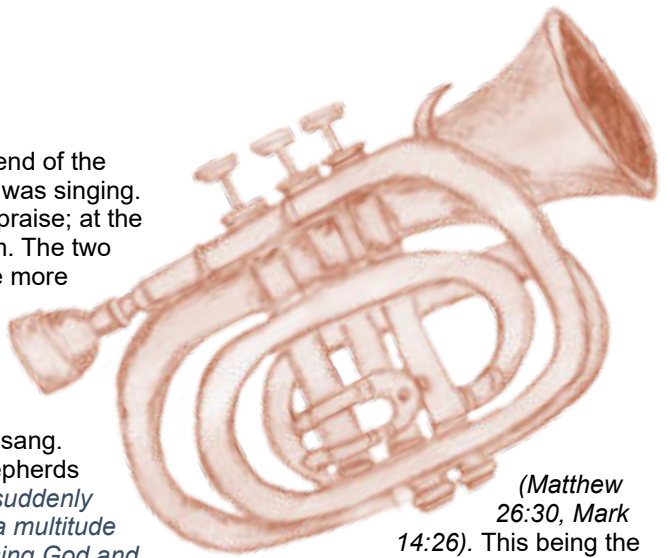
In the Life of Jesus

At the beginning and the end of the mortal life of Jesus, there was singing. At his birth, rejoicing and praise; at the end the singing of a psalm. The two occasions could hardly be more different, yet both were an integral part of God's greater purpose of salvation.

At Jesus' birth the angels sang. An angel appeared to shepherds outside Bethlehem, and *'suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"'* (Luke 2:13–14). The angel knew that the child just born of the virgin Mary was at the heart of God's plan of salvation, foretold in the promises made to the patriarchs of Israel, and by the Hebrew prophets. God was praised and glorified because this birth was evidence that He was still working in human affairs, and would ensure His purpose would be fulfilled.

At the end of his ministry, on the night before his crucifixion, Jesus shared his 'last supper' with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. Then he and the disciples sang a hymn. Both Matthew and Mark record the occasion in precisely the same words.

They write, *'And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives'*



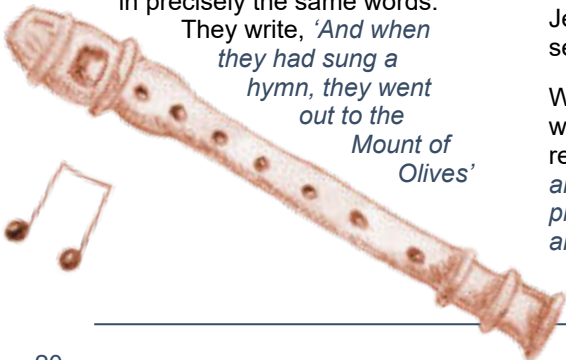
(Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). This being the

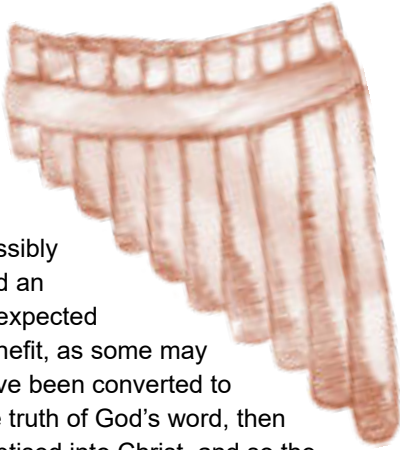
Jewish Passover, the hymn was probably one of the 'Hallel Psalms', which are in our Bibles as Psalms 113–118. They are psalms of praise, and the Jews associated them with Passover (Psalm 114 concerns Israel's deliverance from Egypt).

In the Young Churches

Early in the Acts of the Apostles we learn about the general arrangements of the first Christian congregations, and how they conducted themselves. *'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'* (Acts 2:42). Undoubtedly, the believers engaged in singing, as the Jews were used to this in their services.

When the Apostles Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, it is recorded that *'about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them'* (Acts 16:25). Their singing





possibly had an unexpected benefit, as some may have been converted to the truth of God's word, then baptised into Christ, and so the Philippian church was founded.

Paul urged the believers in Ephesus to be '*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart*' (*Ephesians 5:19*); and he told the Colossians, '*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*' (*Colossians 3:16*).

The words of the hymns they sang were important as they were a method of teaching their beliefs. The things believed were declared by the hymns they sang. As well as being a means to praise and worship God, the hymns would encourage the believers in Godly living and reinforce the Gospel truths.



VIC AUCOTT
(to be continued)

Psalm 98

Oh sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvellous things!
His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.
The LORD has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness
in the sight of the nations.
He has remembered his steadfast
love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.
Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all
the earth;
break forth into joyous song and
sing praises!
Sing praises to the LORD with the
lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of
melody!
With trumpets and the sound of the
horn
make a joyful noise before the
King, the LORD!
Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwell in
it!
Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together
before the LORD, for he comes
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with
righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

YOUR QUESTIONS

Where do you stand on Freemasonry?

GC

Ed

Freemasonry traces its origins to the medieval craft guilds. It is a worldwide brotherhood of people, who are united by their core values of community and tolerance, the pursuit of self-improvement, and service to their wider communities. Is it compatible with a Christian faith?

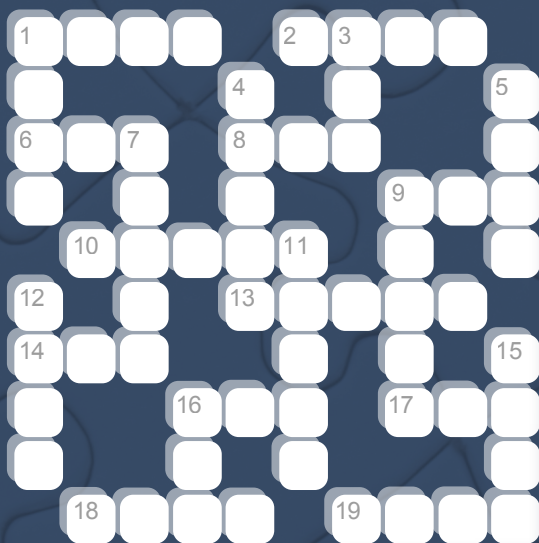
1. Freemasons believe in a “Supreme Being”, but other than that, religion does not matter: they can be members of any faith. The Bible, however, insists that there is only one way of salvation: Jesus said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6).
2. A Christian community is a brotherhood of believers, united by their faith in and devotion to Christ. The Apostle Paul said, *‘Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?’* (2 Corinthians 6:14). Christians are called to be ‘saints’ (for example Romans 1:7)—the word ‘saint’ means someone who is devoted to God and separated from things that are ungodly.

This conflicts with membership of the Freemasons, who themselves are a ‘brotherhood’, united in a shared outlook, sharing fellowship together and specially looking out for each other—but are people of all different faiths.

3. Christians should always be ready to speak about their faith to anyone, because it’s the most important thing in their lives (1 Peter 3:15). That conflicts with the practice in Freemason meetings of not talking about religion.
4. Jesus has commanded his servants to work in his service while they’re waiting for him to return (Luke 19:13). There’s lots to do—preaching the Gospel, looking after each other and others, sharing worship and fellowship with each other. Being a Freemason would be a distraction from the Lord’s work.
5. Freemasonry puts emphasis on personal growth and improvement. One of its mottoes is “Making good men better”. Christianity, by contrast, starts with a recognition that we have no goodness of our own, but we need to allow God to build us up by His grace through Christ (for example Romans 7:24).
6. Freemasonry has a big commitment to charitable work, and does it in a high profile way. Jesus also set great store by charitable work, but he said, *“When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”* (Matthew 6:3).

Freemasons tend to be upstanding members of their communities, and the organisation does much good. But I suggest that membership is not compatible with the life of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

CROSSWORD



Across

- 1 Joseph was given this by his father (*Genesis 37:3*)
- 2 Listen to (*Genesis 37:6*)
- 6 To utter (*Genesis 37:17*)
- 8 To allow (*Genesis 37:27*)
- 9 Joseph's brothers did this in order to do 3 down (*Genesis 37:25*)
- 10 Joseph's father (*Genesis 37:2*)
- 13 Joseph told this to his brothers (*Genesis 37:5*)
- 14 "Let us not take ... life" (*Genesis 37:21*)

- 16 In his dream, this bowed down to Joseph (*Genesis 37:9*)
- 17 Joseph was his father's favourite one (*Genesis 37:3*)
- 18 "on their way to carry it ... to Egypt" (*Genesis 37:25*)
- 19 In addition (*Genesis 38:10*)

Down

- 1 Went up (*Genesis 37:35*)
- 3 After throwing Joseph in the pit, his brothers decided to do this (*Genesis 37:25*)
- 4 Joseph's robe was dipped in that of a goat (*Genesis 37:31*)
- 5 Joseph's brothers decided to throw him into one of these (*Genesis 37:20*)
- 7 Joseph was 17 of these (*Genesis 37:2*)
- 9 In his dream, these bowed down to Joseph (*Genesis 37:9*)
- 11 To fetch (*Genesis 37:14*)
- 12 Reuben said that this should not be done to Joseph's blood (*Genesis 37:22*)
- 15 "And they took him and threw him ... a pit" (*Genesis 37:24*)
- 16 Observed (*Genesis 37:25*)

(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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