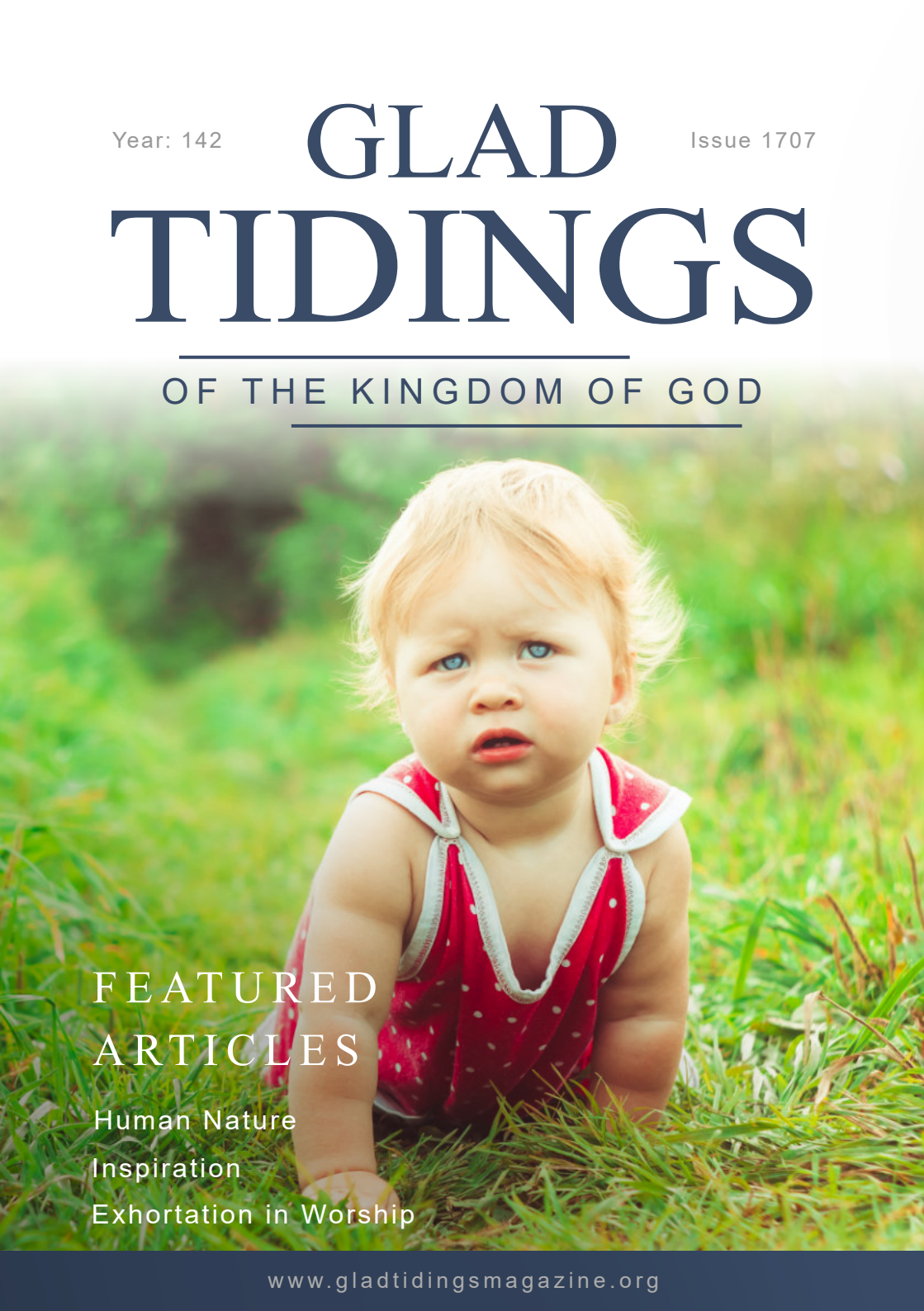


Year: 142

Issue 1707

GLAD TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A photograph of a baby with light blonde hair and blue eyes, crawling through tall green grass. The baby is wearing a red sleeveless dress with white polka dots and a white collar. The background is a soft-focus green field.

FEATURED ARTICLES

Human Nature

Inspiration

Exhortation in Worship

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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EDITORIAL

HUMAN NATURE

God had pleaded with the Jews to mend their ways and turn back to Him: *'Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and for ever' (Jeremiah 25:5)*. But at last the situation was beyond repair. In 587 BC the Babylonian army destroyed the nation, ransacked Jerusalem, and carried the majority of the surviving population into captivity.

Jeremiah 41 continues the account. The Babylonian captain appointed a Jewish noble Gedaliah as the governor of Judah, under Babylonian rule. The remaining scattered Jews throughout the country gathered to Gedaliah, including the remnant of the Jewish army that had survived the invasion. But it was a time of confusion and treachery. One of the Jewish captains assassinated Gedaliah and his men, along with the Babylonians who were with him, and fled. Frightened of the Babylonians' response when they discovered what

had happened, the survivors suggested they flee south to Egypt (vs. 17–18). They asked the prophet Jeremiah what they should do.

"Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant—because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us—that the LORD your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do" (42:2–3).

God's reply was clear—stay in Judah, don't go to Egypt (vs. 7–22). But that wasn't what they wanted to hear. They told Jeremiah he was lying (43:2–3). They left for Egypt, and took Jeremiah with them.

A Lesson for Us

One of the evidences that the Bible is the inspired word of God, rather than

a human work, is its uncompromising honesty. It's a Jewish book, written by Jews and mainly about Jews. It focusses on the Jewish Messiah (Jesus Christ) who said *"Salvation is from the Jews"* (John 4:22)—and yet it is entirely unflattering. It exposes all their weaknesses, stubbornness, dishonesty and stupidity, throughout their long history. The Jews always have been God's people (Romans 11:1–6), but their human nature is no better than the rest of us.

How could Jeremiah's people have been so rebellious? If we're honest, we'll admit that we know the reason. You and I like to hear what we want to hear, and do what we want to do. The antics of the Jewish people were recorded as a lesson for us—not to show how rotten they are, but to show us what we are like (Romans 15:4).

Being Renewed

There's an idea that people are essentially good. We just need the right environment, and we'll flourish. Sociologists tell us to obey our instincts. Feel-good movies tell us to follow our heart.

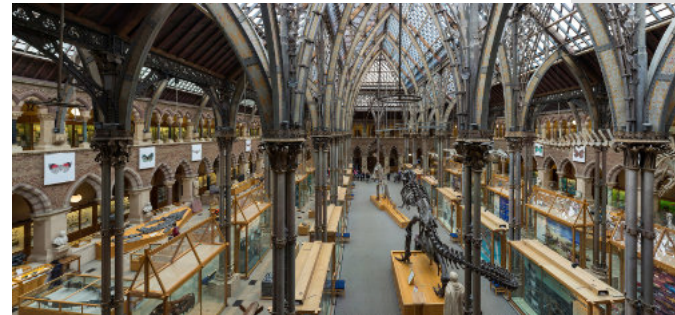
The Bible gives a very much more realistic view of human nature—we are fundamentally flawed. It explains clearly in Genesis 3 how we got like this. Jeremiah gives us God's assessment of our nature: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). I have to admit that's true, and maybe you will too.

The consistent message of the Bible is that we need to be fixed. This will happen at the return of Christ, for those who have been faithful to him: *"I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable... this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality"* (1 Corinthians 15:50–53).

As we wait for that time, the life of discipleship involves identifying and resisting the ungodly impulses of our nature, and striving to live as God wants. (We'll never be perfect, He understands that and will always forgive whenever we ask.) It is to try *"to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:22–24).



INSPIRATION



I used to teach in a university. In addition to teaching we were expected to do research; in fact, a department's quality was measured by its research publications. This produced some pressure. I found myself 'carried along' with the desire to publish—to publish for the good of the department but also, later, for personal satisfaction. Looking back, I am acutely embarrassed by this confession. While some of my papers were moderately useful, others were not of excellent quality and should not have been published.

Leaving aside deliberate misrepresentation or exaggeration, even well intentioned research can be flawed in its design, execution or reporting. In some areas, like medicine, there are stricter standards nowadays for peer review, but errors are still published. And it is impossible to prevent publication of a finding that has happened just 'by chance', and which needs later to be revoked. We cannot always believe what we read.

The Bible is Inspired

The contrast between this imperfect system and the Bible could not be greater. The men who penned the words of the Bible were also 'carried along', but not by human motivations and aspirations. They were driven and compelled by

God's Holy Spirit: *"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 1:21).

Some of these people would have been enthusiastic and delighted to write passages like Psalms of praise to God. But others might have preferred to remain silent and not write. Their message was often unpalatable and therefore hard to deliver. The prophet Jonah even tried to flee from the presence of God in order to avoid giving a message that he did not like to the Assyrian city of Nineveh (Jonah 1:1–3, 4:2).

Others, like Jeremiah, had messages that were painful for the recipients to hear. At the start of his book, Jeremiah says how he initially protested about prophesying, saying that he did not *"know how to speak"* (Jeremiah 1:6). But God reassured him that the prophetic words would not be his own: *"Do not say, 'I am*

only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak" (v. 7).

But Jeremiah endured much suffering in delivering God's message to the Jews. After they had reacted in an extremely hostile manner to God's words Jeremiah wrote:

'I have become a laughing-stock all the day; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name", there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot' (Jeremiah 20:7-9).

This was not a pleasant experience for him.

Many times in the Bible the writers' words are attributed directly to God. The phrase *'Thus says the LORD'* occurs hundreds of times in the Old Testament. And Jesus made similar claims about his words: *'So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me"' (John 7:16).*

Jesus repeated this several times. He also told his apostles that they would be enabled to faithfully teach divine truth (John 16:13). This is because they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit: *'But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things*



and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you' (John 14:26).

Not Simply 'Dictation'

What about other passages in the Bible? Not all the words were 'dictated'. But the apostle Paul wrote to his fellow worker Timothy:

'You have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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 complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

He describes the words as 'God-breathed'—that is, as if they had come from the mouth of God Himself. This does not require dictation. It does, however, guarantee God's oversight and authentication of the original texts, although we may not fully understand how He did this.

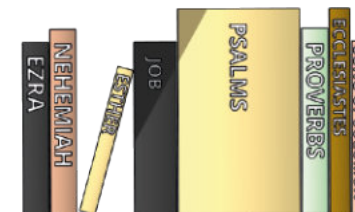
God oversaw the writing of His word—the Bible, also called the scriptures—so that the original words were what He wanted. This includes passages where people relate their own experiences (for example many Psalms of David, Jeremiah's feelings, Daniel chapter 4 which was written by the Babylonian king

Nebuchadnezzar, and accounts of trials endured by different apostles). It includes eye-witness accounts (for example in Luke's gospel and then in Acts). It includes descriptions of historical events (typically the books of Kings and Chronicles), lists of genealogies (for example in Genesis and Chronicles) and censuses (for example in Numbers): these were almost certainly compiled from existing material.

But all of this was carried out in perfect conformity to God's will, and under His complete direction and supervision. The writers were not robots: a great deal of their personal experience, attitude or style comes through. But these writers were never left to their own unaided efforts, the result being that their writing was free from error. The Bible is God's words, not a potentially flawed human record of those words. Scriptures are divine words, penned by men but actually words of God.

Jesus' View of Scripture

Jesus had the highest regard for his scriptures (our Old Testament). He said that *'Scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35)*. Many times he refers to scripture being "fulfilled" (Matthew 13:14, 26:54, 26:56; Luke 22:37, 24:44; John 13:18, 15:25, 17:12). The last of these references is



actually a prayer to God Himself. And on one occasion, when Jesus was correcting his opponents, his argument relied on the single word 'my' in a quote from Psalm 110: *'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet' (Matthew 22:44)*. Although 'my' is a distinct word in English, it is represented in the original Hebrew by a single letter. So Jesus endorsed the detailed accuracy of the scriptures.

The apostles had a similar respect for the absolute authority of the Old Testament scriptures, and also the New Testament scriptures that were being penned in their own days. Peter in his letters regularly quotes the Old Testament and also writes about the letters of Paul: *'There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures' (2 Peter 3:16)*.

Consequently, we believe that the Bible's messages and themes are accurate and consistent. They never evolve into different ideas. This allows for the revelation of extra details, building on earlier ones. It does not allow for a change in ideas or doctrine. In this way, ideas about the Messiah start in Genesis (the first book in the Bible), but further details are given and then enlarged on in a consistent manner through the Bible. The God of the New Testament is the same God, with the same character, as the God described in the Old Testament. In fact, this amazing consistency, despite the many writers

and the long time period involved, is strong evidence that the Bible is God's words.

Why Does This Matter?

If the Bible contains the words of God Himself, then we should treasure the words of the whole Bible as authoritative and as God's unique revelation to us. Unlike research papers there is no need for 'peer review'; the standards are the highest possible; there are no misleading or exaggerated claims; no conclusions to be revoked or modified, and no part that should not have been included.

This used to be a common view. The translators of the King James Version of the Bible in 1611, and those of later versions, had great respect for the integrity of the words themselves, not just general ideas. They believed that the author was "divine", and the translators believed that "the manuscripts were providentially handed down and were a trustworthy record of the inspired Word of God". They aimed for "utmost accuracy" in translation: the "strictest attention to the letter of the text"—trying to convey the actual words, not a creative paraphrase.*



If this is true then we should study the words of the Bible carefully in order to try to establish exactly what they mean.

The apostle Peter wrote, '*No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation*' (2 Peter 1:20). Prophetic words and ideas were not those of the writers. In fact, they did not always understand them (1 Peter 1:10–11). Prophecy and revelation of truth come from God. That being the case, we are not entitled to choose what the words "mean to us" in an arbitrary way. We should try to establish what God intended by them. This is not always easy, but it should be our aim—because our Bible perfectly expresses God's will and His glorious plan of salvation. And Jesus, who is essential to that plan, bears witness to the authority of the actual words of scripture as originally penned.

Warnings

We therefore should be very careful with versions of the Bible that are paraphrases and which may misrepresent the original words and meanings.

We also need to believe exactly what the Bible says. This involves thorough study, not "cherry-picking" of isolated verses quoted out of context. We need to look at who is speaking, to whom and why. Some of the accurate records are accounts of lies. Jacob lied to his father when

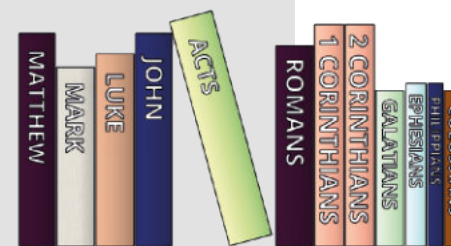
*Quotes from the preface to the NKJV (New King James Version) of the Bible.

pretending to be Esau, saying that God had helped him to catch the game for a meal (Genesis 27); Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–10). And, more insidiously, the friends of Job told a mixture of truth and untruth, thereby misrepresenting God, not speaking of Him '*what is right*' (Job 42:7). This shows how dangerous "cherry-picking" from the Bible can be.

Also, some passages are not literal. Here is an example: '*The mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*' (Isaiah 55:12). The passage is obviously about people, not nature itself: mountains do not sing, and trees do not have hands.

Jesus tells us to '*tear out*' our eye if it offends us (Matthew 5:29). Of course, we could pluck our eyes out, but self-mutilation achieves nothing. Jesus is not referring to blinding ourselves, but to exercising self control over what we look at.

But nor must we treat literal passages as purely figurative. When the text says that a great fish swallowed up Jonah and then vomited him out (Jonah 1:17, 2:10), that is a literal historical fact, and actually confirmed by Jesus (Matthew 12:40). Passages



like this may also have figurative significance, but we can misunderstand the original primary meaning if we confuse

literal with figurative. We will not look, or prepare, for the physical return of Jesus to earth to set up God's Kingdom if we believe that such words are figurative statements about Jesus being in our hearts.

Every Word True

The words of the Bible matter because they are God's words. God is not motivated by human standards. He never lies, but is always true. '*Every word of God proves true*' (Proverbs 30:5). We cannot find God's words anywhere else. We should treasure them.

Research publications can gain acclaim and then subsequently become obsolete or out of date. The Bible never has these problems. '*For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains for ever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you*' (1 Peter 1:24–25).

These are the words that we can read in our Bible. They are a matter of life or death (John 6:63). And yes, we can believe them.

ANNA HART



THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 11 contains the account of the tower of Babel. After Noah's Flood, the world's population settled in a plain and set about a building project: *"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves"* (v. 4). God's response was to confuse their languages and disperse them over the face of the earth (v. 9).

Babel was more than a tower. It was also the prototype of every political system whose builders put their trust in their own technical achievements instead of God. When rulers plan titanic schemes but leave God out of

their reckoning, the result will always be division, confusion and dissolution, because that is God's response to humanity's every attempt to be their own god and decide their own destiny: *'Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain'* (Psalm 127:1).

Babel fell into ruin, but its proud spirit lived on in the empires of Babylon, Greece and Rome and all other political and economic systems that have exalted themselves against God. It lives on today in the ideologies and utopian programmes that have promised a bright new order of universal peace, prosperity and unity: Communism, the United

Nations, the European Union—all begin with optimistic predictions about the wonderful future that will be realized once the project reaches fruition. It lives on in the ambition to conquer space and build colonies on the moon and on Mars. All empires and political systems have in effect declared, *"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens"*.

In his vision of the establishment of the Kingdom of God, the prophet John saw two cities: Babylon the Great, which symbolises the nations of this present world, and New Jerusalem, which symbolises God's Kingdom. Babylon is overthrown, with echoes of Genesis 11: *"So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more"* (Revelation 18:21).

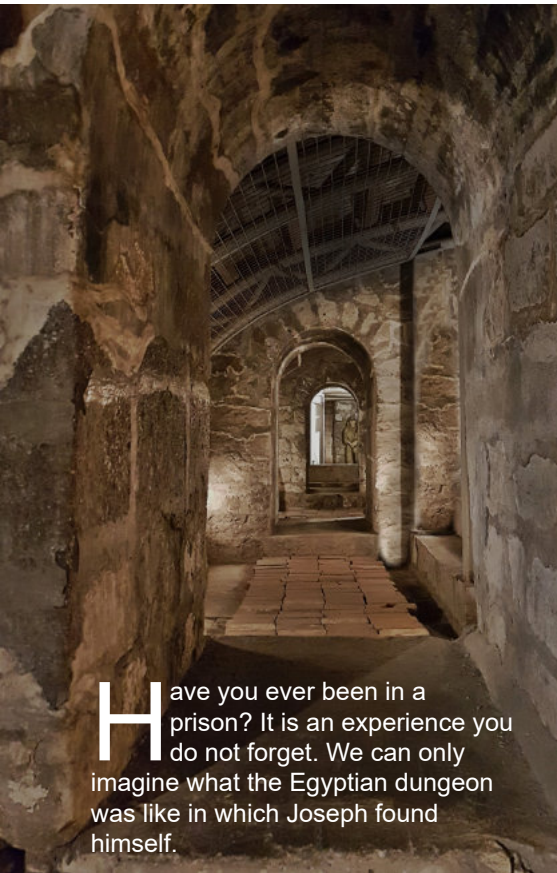
In contrast, John then sees the city of God—the opposite mirror image of Babylon. *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband'* (21:1–2).

Babylon was built by people with the intention of exalting themselves to heaven. In contrast, New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, to be set up on earth, a city that will not be destroyed but will stand for ever and ever, because it is *'the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God'* (Hebrews 11:10).

PAUL WASSON



JOSEPH IN PRISON

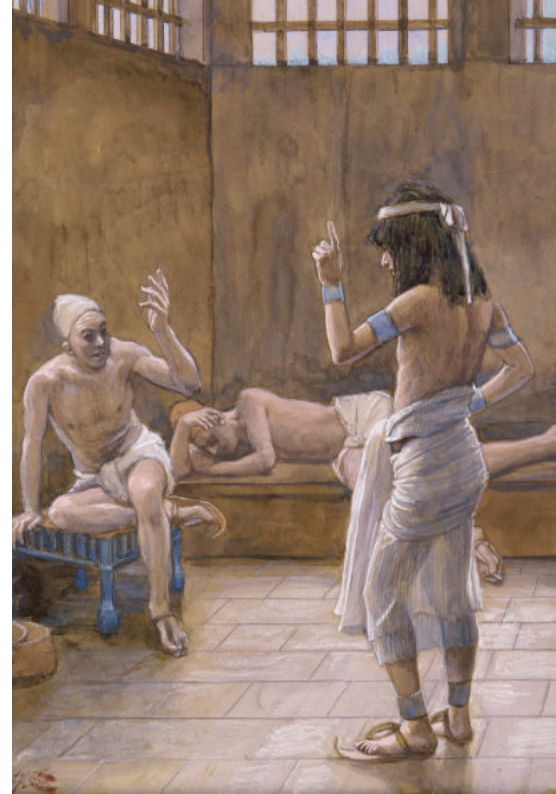


Have you ever been in a prison? It is an experience you do not forget. We can only imagine what the Egyptian dungeon was like in which Joseph found himself.

He was fitted with iron manacles that bit deep, red sores into his flesh (Psalm 105:18), and the endless hours crept past him like years. He did not even have the comfort of knowing that when he had served his time, he would be free. He was in for life, and no one cared—he was only a slave.

A lesser man would have pined away in frustration and bitterness at the injustice he had suffered. But Joseph still believed in God, and somehow saw light in his darkness. As a young lad he had been shown in a dream that one day his father and brothers would bow down to him (Genesis 37:7). This unfulfilled promise gave him hope that one day he would see them again. Nevertheless, the waiting tried his faith to the uttermost.

There was one incident, shortly after his imprisonment began, that set his heart leaping with excitement. Two prisoners joined him—courtiers who had been disgraced (Genesis 40). Both men were troubled by highly unusual dreams. With his gift for understanding the meaning of dreams, Joseph predicted that one of the two, the king's chief butler, would soon be restored to office. Joseph begged the man to put in a kind word for him when this happened, and to persuade the authorities to have him set free. When his interpretation came true, and the butler was called back to his post, Joseph waited expectantly for the messenger that would bring the vital warrant for his release. Nothing happened. Eventually he realised bitterly that he had been forgotten. It was to be two whole years more before opportunity knocked again.



Another Kind of Prison

It is worth a thought, this agony of waiting in prison for someone to deliver you from a life sentence. What Joseph endured so literally, we all suffer, considered from another point of view. Being shut up in prison is a common picture the Bible uses for our enslavement to sin. We serve self too well, and God too little, and so end up under sentence of sliding from youth and health, through a miserable waning of our powers, to everlasting death. We are like convicts, sitting chained up in rows, with no power to get rid of our manacles.

For us, though, there can be deliverance. A saviour has come

searching for us to let us out. He has killed the powerful enemy that held us enthralled, and made us free again. But the price of victory was his own blood. Look at these passages, which paint the picture so clearly for us. First, Isaiah: *'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound'* (Isaiah 61:1).

These words were quoted by Jesus, and applied to himself, in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18). He was the great deliverer, setting people free from sin.

Now we have the prophet Zechariah: *'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey'* (Zechariah 9:9). These words were fulfilled when Jesus rode into the city on a donkey's foal, six days before his crucifixion.

But see how the prophet continues: *'As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit'* (v. 11). It was Jesus' blood, *"my blood of the covenant"* as he called it (Matthew 26:28), that has made it possible for us to be raised from the waterless pit of the grave. Did you notice a connection in those words with Joseph? It was a waterless pit in the wilderness where



Joseph was left to die (Genesis 37:24). But the silver coins for which he was sold, enabled him to come out (v. 28). Jesus' blood is the price of our redemption.

Deliverance

Here is another passage, from the book of Hebrews. Speaking again about Jesus, it says, *'Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery'* (Hebrews 2:14–15).

And lastly Jesus himself declares, *"I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades"* (Revelation 1:18). Those keys can open for us the prison house of death, and bring us everlasting life and joy.

If you have not yet decided to put on the name of Jesus, consider your position carefully. He wants to set us free from sin and death, and unless we let him into our hearts and lives,

we will remain enslaved to sin, and eventually death.

For Joseph, deliverance came suddenly. One day, without warning, a messenger from the king hammered on the prison gate demanding to see the Hebrew slave who could understand dreams. Joseph was rapidly identified and let out of his cell. *'Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh'* (Genesis 41:14).

What a reversal of fortune, to be taken in one hour from the squalor and misery of captivity to the dazzling splendour of the palace, where the king smiles upon him and rich courtiers turn green with envy at the attention he attracts from their imperious master. The sequence of events was quite simple. Pharaoh himself had had a strange and clearly prophetic dream. No one he asked could interpret it. The chief butler suddenly remembered how Joseph had explained the meaning of his own dream, two years before, and recommended him to the king. So Joseph was presented with the

chance of a lifetime, and all eyes were fastened upon him.

He must have wondered if he were dreaming himself! Calmly he told the great man that he did not claim the credit for his powers himself. *"It is not in me,"* he said, *"God will give Pharaoh a*

favourable answer" (Genesis 41:16).

So it was that the God of Abraham came to be preached in the court of Egypt by this intrepid saint, who stood there in the heart of a civilisation wholly given to the worship of man-made gods and goddesses, and told them that his God was in control of the world.

Faithfulness and Integrity

After what he had been through, Joseph might well have turned against religion altogether. Certainly if we had been in his shoes, we should

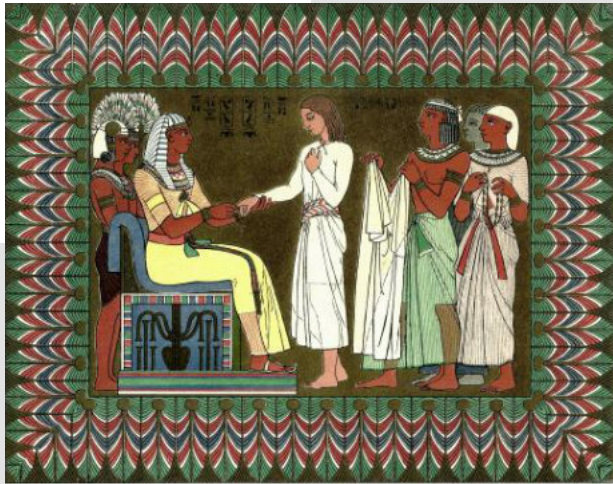
hardly have felt it expedient to try to convert Pharaoh to our beliefs at such a critical juncture in our career. We should probably have made the maximum capital for ourselves, and left God out of the picture until later. But Joseph was a man of integrity and courage, and suffering had taught him not to fear men. Coolly he dissected the king's vision, and told him that Joseph's God was sending upon Egypt seven years of record harvests, to be followed by seven ghastly years of famine. He advised the king to appoint a man to organise a storage programme during the good years, so that the surplus crops from this period could be reserved for the lean years that would inevitably follow.

The masterly way in which he spoke, and his obvious wisdom, impressed the king. To his amazement, Joseph found he had talked himself into the job. *"Since*

God has shown you all this," decreed Pharaoh, *"there is none so discerning and wise as you are... See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt"* (vs. 39–41).

So it was that at the age of 30 Joseph found himself elevated from the dungeon to the office of President of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh





himself. With his usual efficiency, he set himself to administer the great seven-year plan, and as the record harvests began on schedule, the name of the God of Abraham was exalted throughout the land.

The reward of Joseph's faith is a lesson we do well to heed in these days when humanity's power seems to go almost unchallenged. God is able to turn the tables overnight, and dramatically, when the lives of His servants are involved. Like Joseph, Jesus himself, once despised and rejected by men, will return suddenly to the scene of his sufferings, as a mighty ruler to organise the world into the kingdom of God (Acts 1:11). As Isaiah wrote, *'It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief... he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days... Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong' (Isaiah 53:10–12)*. We can share with him in this great

work. But it all depends on our having Joseph's steadfast faith today.

DAVID PEARCE
(to be continued)

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BIBLE PUZZLES*

THE MIDIANITE MERCHANTS



The men gazed into the distance. Now and again their voices rose angrily. Anybody watching would guess that all was not well with this group of young men engaged in a rancorous family dispute. A weak cry sporadically rose then died, but there was no one to see; perhaps it was not a human sound at all but the breeze that blew fitfully across the Middle Eastern plain. This wind brought with it the pungent and unmistakable aroma of camel, overladen with the pleasanter scents of wood and resin, the fragrance of balm and myrrh. These smells, and an expanding view, now made certain what wasn't before: a caravan of camels from Gilead, laden with an Egypt-bound cargo of spice, was heading their way.

As the Midianite camel train drew near, a negotiation took place. Twenty shekels of silver exchanged hands; Joseph was hauled from the pit he'd been thrown into, then

handed to the traders. The brothers watched the camel train disappear south, and when they could no longer hear their younger brother's desperate pleas, they fell to discussing what they would tell their father Jacob, as they turned Joseph's many-coloured robe in their hands.

You can read the account of Joseph's brothers selling him into Egypt in Genesis 37:12–36. It's easy to overlook some small details that show it is historically and factually accurate.

Take the traders from Gilead: *'a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt'* (v. 25). Why were these traders travelling all the way to Egypt, from what is now Syria, to sell balm and myrrh?

Many years after that day he was sold, Joseph rose to power in Egypt and all his family migrated from

Canaan to join him there. Then Jacob, the father of the 12 brothers, died aged 148 (47:28): *‘And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel’* (50:2).

Then later, Joseph himself died: *‘So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt’* (50:26).

It is well known that the Egyptians preserved their dead using a long and complicated process known as embalming which involved natron, resins, tars, oils, fats, spices and aromatics.

Gilead, located east of the Jordan River, was a major source of aromatic substances and an important regional trading hub. With such a big focus on the embalming process, no doubt Egypt was one of the Gilead merchants’ most important markets.



Egyptian mummy in the British Museum

We know that for Jesus’ burial, a large quantity was required.

‘Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews’ (John 19:39–40).

The story of Joseph rising from slavery to becoming second to Pharaoh has stood the test of time. The incidental fact of where the traders came from and what their merchandise was, seems almost unnecessary, but it makes historical sense. If the account of Joseph’s life contains such factual accuracy, we can more readily believe that everything else we know about him is true.

JOAN LEWIS

WORSHIP—part 8

EXHORTATION IN WORSHIP

‘Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.’

(Romans 15:4)

‘Exhortation’ means encouragement, comfort.

If exhortation in worship is to have any relevance to the Christian life, it must be based on the Word of God. A Bible talk laden with platitudes, homilies and humorous anecdotes may be nice to listen to, but will not satisfy those souls who *‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’*, nor the mind of those who are *‘poor in spirit’* (Matthew 5:3–6). The souls which yearn to be *‘pure in heart’* (v. 8) can only be comforted, helped and encouraged by learning the ways and mind of God, and being reminded of the importance of being a *‘new creation’* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

To be effective, personal faith must be renewed and refreshed, so

that living the spiritual life becomes a little clearer by the plain and direct teaching of God’s living Word (Hebrews 4:12). At the same time, believers remember they are frail human creatures and not immune from evil influences around them. It is easy to backslide, slip up or fall away, and the temptations to do so are powerful. In an encouraging Bible talk, warnings are equally important in addition to the comfort of the wonderful hope of the Gospel.

The Apostles’ Words

When the apostles Paul and Barnabas arrived in Pisidia in Galatia on their second missionary journey, they made their way to Antioch, a town about one hundred miles north



PAUL AND BARNABAS AT ANTIOCH.



Ruins of
Pisidian Antioch

of their last area of work which was in Perga of Pamphylia. At Antioch on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue for worship. There were Gentiles in the assembly, those who were sympathetic to the Jewish faith and others who were proselytes or thinking of converting to the faith. The pattern of the service was the same as elsewhere: there were Bible readings, then a talk. This time Paul and Barnabas were invited to address the congregation. *'After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it"' (Acts 13:15).*

Paul responded, *"Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen" (verse 16).* We are not told what parts of the Law and the Prophets were read that day, but Paul's talk was based on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how the Jewish story began with God's choice of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the founding fathers of the nation, and to whom some mighty promises were made (vs. 17–41). Paul referred to several Old Testament passages to prove the

truth of the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ, including an appeal to his audience to seek forgiveness of sins and salvation. He concluded in verse 41 with a warning and a personal challenge by quoting from their Old Testament prophet Habakkuk: *'Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told' (Habakkuk 1:5).*

This was serious. It was about judgement to come. The Jewish part of the assembly in the synagogue would know this was right, because the next verse in Habakkuk was warning about an imminent invasion (in the prophet's day) into the land of Judah, by the Babylonians, and the subsequent deportation of the people into captivity. Now in the apostles' time history was about to be repeated, and Paul was warning of the impending judgements of God on this present generation of Jews, which was fulfilled by the Romans in 70 AD.

So, the warning in the words of exhortation was appropriate and timely. This is why we read that *'the people begged that these things*

might be told them the next Sabbath' (Acts 13:42). They heard the message clearly and wanted to be personally prepared and if possible, escape the horrors of what was on the horizon for the Jewish nation.

The encouragement which the apostle gave impacted on the minds of those who listened and guided the thoughts of the congregation towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and what he had brought—forgiveness of sins and salvation by his crucifixion and resurrection. This was the comfort, the consolation, the encouragement to those who were in need.

The people might not have realised their need, and some Jews deliberately rejected the offer of salvation and the counsel of God against themselves and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (v. 46). But the Gentiles did recognise their need for spiritual regeneration and were admonished by what they heard, so that *'they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed' (v. 48).*

Lives which were flawed were rescued. God was glorified by the humble response to His true and faithful scriptures and the offer of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. He had been worshipped and honoured and His righteous ways acknowledged and believed. The exhortation was faithful to the Word of God and had served its purpose.

VIC AUCOTT
(to be continued)

Questions? Comments?

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

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YOUR QUESTIONS

You insist that the Bible is infallible, yet you reject the Doctrine of the Trinity. What do you make of the fact that the Canon of Scripture was established at the Council of Nicaea, which also formalised the Doctrine of the Trinity?

DE

Ed

This is a common claim, but it's not true.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD produced the Nicene Creed, which established the Trinity as the doctrine of the orthodox church. The Council did not consider the 'canon of Scripture'—the list of the books of the Bible. The claim that it did stems from a spurious 9th Century manuscript.

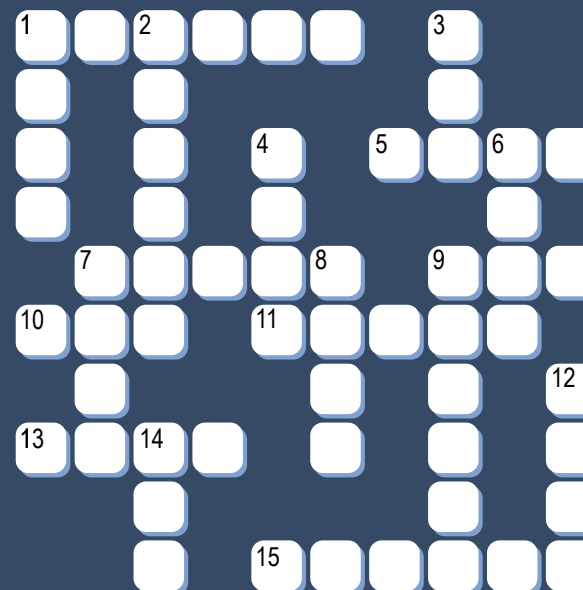
The generally accepted canon, which you're likely to find in your Bible, consists of the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. Jewish historians confirm that the Old Testament canon was already established by the time of Christ. The first known list of the New Testament canon is contained in the Easter Letter of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in 367 AD.

However, there is abundant evidence that the New Testament canon had been fixed long before this. This includes the sheer number of manuscripts of the 'canonical' books; references in early church writings to the books in the New Testament; internal evidence (where books refer to each other as scripture, for example 2 Peter 3:16); consistency with the Old Testament (the New Testament books are full of references and commentaries on the Old Testament books and together they present a unified message); and fulfilled prophecy (for example Matthew 24:15–22).

Athanasius' Easter Letter was written at a time of tension within the church, when there were pressures to disregard some of the genuine books and accept other books (which he calls 'apocryphal'). It seems that the letter was simply a defence of the established canon.

There is no meaningful link between the canon of Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity.

CROSSWORD



15 He was called out of prison and he stood between two pillars (*Judges 16:25*)

Down

- 1 Felix left him in prison (*Acts 24:27*)
- 2 Paul said that he and Silas had had this done to them and thrown into prison (*Acts 16:37*)
- 3 A priest who lived to 98 (*1 Samuel 4:15*)
- 4 While in prison, the chief baker told Joseph that he had seen in his dream baskets containing this for Pharaoh (*Genesis 40:17*)

Across

- 1 The High Priest put the apostles in this prison (*Acts 5:18*)
- 5 While in prison, the chief cupbearer told Joseph that he had seen this in his dream (*Genesis 40:9*)
- 7 This king put 12 down in prison (*Matthew 14:3*)
- 9 Observed, as did the jailor to the prison doors in Philippi (*Acts 16:27*)
- 10 Paul said that he had bound and delivered them to prison in his early life (*Acts 22:4*)
- 11 Peter told Jesus that he was willing to go to prison and to this (*Luke 22:33*)
- 13 The first man (*Genesis 2:20*)
- 6 God told him to build an ark to save himself and his family (*Genesis 6:13*)
- 7 Herod's daughter asked for that of 12 down (*Matthew 14:8*)
- 8 In Jesus' parable, the servant put his fellow servant in prison until he should pay this (*Matthew 18:30*)
- 9 The jailor put Paul and Silas in prison and fastened their feet in these (*Acts 16:24*)
- 12 He had been put in prison because he had criticised the king for taking his brother's wife (*Matthew 14:3*)
- 14 This king put Hanani the seer in prison (*2 Chronicles 16:10*)

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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