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GLAD TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD



Repent—the Kingdom of God is Near!

Mary Magdalene

The End of the Beginning

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

REPENT—THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR!



When Jesus Christ arrived in Galilee at the beginning of his ministry, he had a clear message: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1:15). The crowds flocked to him. His message about the Kingdom of God was what they wanted to hear. The Jews at that time languished under the brutal occupation of the Roman empire:

there was anger and rebellion in the air.

Contemporary historians note that there was a strong Messianic mood—the Jews were looking for their promised Messiah, the king of the Jewish royal line of David who would come to re-establish their kingdom, as foretold by such prophecies as 2 Samuel 7:12–16. Evidently many people expected this to be Jesus. They tried to make him king on at least one occasion (John 6:15). When he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, in deliberate fulfilment of an ancient Messianic prophecy (Zechariah 9:9), they understood the message and were almost ecstatic: “*And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*” (Matthew 21:9).

Born to be King

They had the right idea—Jesus will one day be king: “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of*

Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33). But that was not the time.

His intention was not to lead a popular revolt and throw out the Romans. He had not come to save them from military occupation, he had come to save them from their sins. He preached a gospel of love, submission and self-denial. Then he allowed himself to be arrested and crucified (John 18:11). It was his death, as a sinless perfect sacrifice, that achieved his mission: *‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace’ (Ephesians 1:7).*

Remember his message: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* Before he establishes the Kingdom, he needs to prepare its people.

Call to Repentance

Do you think you’re a good person? We all like to think so, but as far as the Bible is concerned, *‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23).*

We cannot come to God on our own merit. There were those who thought they could, and Jesus said to them, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32).

He told a parable about two men who prayed to God—a self-righteous Pharisee whose prayer was an exercise in self-congratulation, and a tax collector who prayed *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* (Luke 18:13). The tax collector’s prayer was accepted, and not the Pharisee’s.

So what does ‘repent’ mean? It means to acknowledge that we’re wrong, to be sorry for what we’ve done, seek forgiveness, and make up our mind to do differently. Repentance is a necessary first step in the Christian life (Acts 2:38).

To come to Jesus Christ is to recognise that you’re hopeless, and to plead for mercy. To live as a follower of Christ is to try as best you can to follow him—that’s crucial (1 John 1:6–9)—but to be aware that you will continually fail, and be always prepared to repent, again and again. God knows what we’re like, He doesn’t expect us to be perfect (Romans 7:21–24). He will always forgive when we ask Him.

The message Jesus preached 2000 years ago is just as relevant and even more urgent now: *Repent—the Kingdom of God is Near!*

WORSHIP—part 9

UNITY OF HEART AND MIND

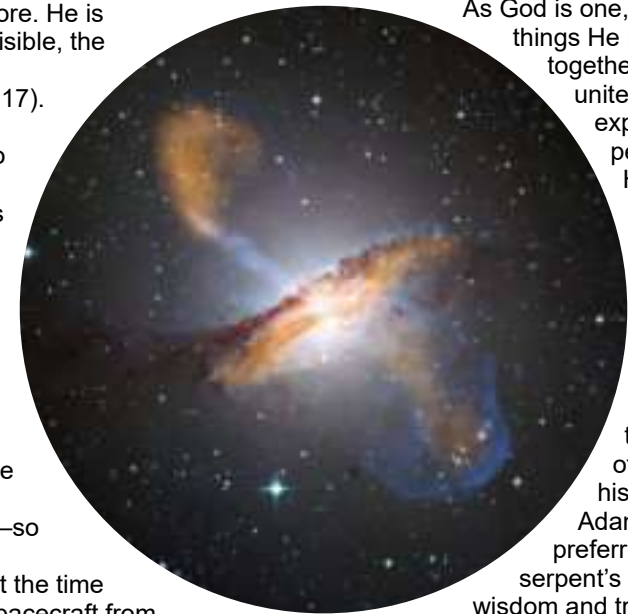
“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)

The principle of unity which is spoken of in the Bible arises from the fact that God is one. His inherent nature demonstrates this unity. He is unchanging and has existed from before time and will continue to do so for evermore. He is immortal, invisible, the only God (1 Timothy 1:17). He is from everlasting to everlasting (1 Chronicles 16:36). The laws He established to manage the universe and all the things in it, are likewise unchangeable and dependable—so much so, for example, that the time and date a spacecraft from earth gets to its target after a long journey can be accurately calculated.

Of the unity of God, the scriptures write eloquently: *‘For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all*

things and for whom we exist’ (1 Corinthians 8:6), and “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). These straightforward teachings are clear: God made and supports the universe, and He works constantly in the whole creation. His laws of nature and His purpose control what happens, when and how: whether humankind acknowledges Him or not.

As God is one, and the things He made work together as one united whole, He expects the people whom He has created in His own image (Genesis 1:27) to be likewise united. This ideal floundered at the beginning of human history when Adam and Eve preferred the serpent’s lie to the wisdom and truth of God (3:3–6), Cain murdered Abel his brother (4:8), and the one language of the people was confounded at the tower of Babel (11:7). But God’s ultimate purpose that *‘all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the*



LORD' (Numbers 14:21) was not frustrated by all this chaos and disunity. It will be completed in His own good time. He has called out of the nations a people for His Name (Acts 15:14), who honour Him and believe Him, and who demonstrate the unity He desires in their lives and in their collective worship. Their personal response to the true Gospel defines who they are.

Unity of the Body

When the apostle Paul wrote to the congregation at Corinth to encourage them to be at one with each other and to put aside their squabbles and differences, he did so using the pattern of the human body. He wrote, *'God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it'* (1 Corinthians 12:24-27). God has structured the human body in a comparable way to the church. Some members will lead the congregation spiritually and practically, and other members will have other gifts and graces to offer. The welfare concerns of all will be covered, which should ease any schisms and bring harmony and unity.



Paul was taking the trouble to reinforce the fact that collectively the congregation's members are the body of Christ, and therefore unity in heart and mind is an important aspect of their association. One of the lovely things about group worship in the body of Christ is the fellowship each can share when there is unity between the members. The apostle John wrote about fellowship as follows: *'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'* (1 John 1:7). The key is *'walking in the light'* (of Jesus Christ). That means each person fully embracing the things of the Gospel and living them daily. If they all do this then they can share a fellowship with one another, with the great blessing of forgiveness because of the Lord's selfless sacrifice. We can understand that if there is no harmony in the assembly, and consequently no unity of hearts and minds, then there cannot be shared fellowship, which mars the worship and possibly the blessing of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ.

John had already written in verse 3 that firstly, fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, based on a committed faith and unwavering love, in what is revealed and taught by the

Gospel; and secondarily it is with others who believe and practise the same things. This is why unity in believers' hearts and minds is essential.

Encouragement to Unity

There is encouragement in the Bible to do this. The psalmist says, speaking of God, *'You are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O LORD my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name for ever'* (Psalm 86:10-12). This is a confession that God and only God has the knowledge that can convert the one who seeks the true way of God. It has to do with the way of life, and hearts united in the fear of God, uttering praise and worship because of Who and What God is.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul states a majestic truth, that *'we have the mind of Christ'* (1 Corinthians 2:16). He means that the mind of Christ had been openly revealed in his ministry, and was

captured by the preaching of the apostles, and in their letters, in which the principles of the Gospel are set out. Today we have the mind of Christ in the Bible in written form, meaning that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Jesus himself said, *"Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me"* (John 14:24).

Finally, king David in one of his psalms catches the joy and pleasure of what harmony means when demonstrated by those who agree together. He said, *'Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!'* (Psalm 133:1). He likens it to the anointing oil of Aaron when he was inaugurated as the first High Priest, or the refreshing dew on Mount Hermon or the mountains of Zion, and concludes the psalm: *'For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life for evermore'* (v. 3). This is the prize of unity in hearts and minds in worship.

VIC AUCOTT
(to be continued)



View of Mount Hermon

“LIKE A MUSTARD SEED”



In Mark 4:30 Jesus asks the rhetorical question: *“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?”* He then answers his own question by comparing it to a mustard seed: *“It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade”* (vs. 31–32).

The meaning is clear: the Kingdom begins with one man, Jesus; he gathers around him twelve apostles. Together they make converts in Galilee and Judea consisting mainly of the poor, social outcasts, penitent sinners and tax collectors. Then the Gospel is taken throughout the Roman Empire to the Gentiles, and

beyond that, over the centuries, converts are drawn from all nations. Finally, at the end of the age, when Jesus Christ appears in power and glory to gather his faithful people, the Kingdom will come in its fullness, consisting of *‘a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation’* (Revelation 7:9), and will fill the whole world. What a contrast between the small beginnings and the enormous end towards which the process of growth is directed. A vast tree grows inexorably out of a tiny seed.

It is perhaps surprising to see where the Lord derives the imagery of this short parable. He is using the same symbolism with which the prophet Daniel describes the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar: *“The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived”* (Daniel 4:20–21). By alluding to Daniel’s words Jesus is perhaps implying that the kingdoms of this world in their transient power and glory are a pale reflection of the one true Kingdom which will replace them, to fill the whole world and last for ever.

PAUL WASSON



MARY MAGDALENE



privilege of being the first disciple to meet him after his resurrection.

She appears in the record around half way through Christ’s three and a half year ministry. *‘He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means’* (Luke 8:1–3).

Feeding and supporting the Lord and his 12 apostles, and presumably others at various times as they toured the country, would have presented a considerable logistical challenge. It was met by a group of faithful women who accompanied them, and provided for them *‘out of their means’*. Only a few of these are mentioned by name. Mary is usually mentioned first—this might imply that she was the leader and coordinator of the group, or that she was especially close to the Lord.

Mary was a common Jewish name at the time. It’s the Greek form of the Hebrew name Miriam—Miriam the prophetess was Moses’ sister. There are a number of Marys in the Gospel

The Lord Jesus Christ inspired love and devotion in many people with whom he came into contact. Perhaps no one more deeply than Mary Magdalene. We know very little about her, except for glimpses of her selfless loyalty during his ministry, her courage and dedication in the fraught and dangerous events surrounding his crucifixion, and the fact that she was given the enormous

records, and so this one is identified as Magdalene—probably because she was from Magdala, a town on the coast of the Sea of Galilee.

It's interesting to note that those women who are picked out by name had each been healed of some disease. Theirs was more than an intellectual discipleship—they were driven both by conviction and by gratitude. And of Mary we're told that *'seven demons had gone out'*.

Demon Possession

Demons are associated with intense suffering, when we see them in the New Testament. Sufferers might be handicapped (Matthew 12:22), wracked with convulsions (Matthew 17:15), or driven mad (Mark 5:1–5). Nowadays we recognise that what the Greek world in the First Century called 'demon possession' are



generally symptoms of severe mental illnesses.

Evidently Mary had been horribly afflicted. Jesus had restored her to her right mind, and inspired in her a devotion that knew no limit.

You may think that demons are not a feature of 21st Century life—but actually they are, in their original sense. Consistently in the Bible's Old Testament, 'demons' is a word that's used of gods which the heathen worshipped (for example Leviticus 17:7). The Apostle Paul applies the word to false religion generally: *'What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons'* (1 Corinthians 10:20).

Our world today is full of demons—not supernatural creatures, but hurtful influences that are contrary to the true and pure religion of God. Jesus Christ has the power to cast them out, and bring us to our right mind. Conversion to Christianity is not just an academic acceptance of facts, it is salvation from affliction (Acts 4:12). When we recognise that, we like Mary will respond with gratitude and devotion.

Self Sacrifice

There is a theory that Mary was actually romantically attached to Jesus. This is entirely false. The path on which God leads us is a path of self sacrifice. *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Matthew 16:24). Discipleship

involves giving things up. For different people, the sacrifices they make will be different. Jesus himself showed the ultimate example of service—he gave up everything, because it was his Father's will that he should give his life for the sins of his people (John 3:16).

He once told his disciples, *"There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it"* (Matthew 19:12). He was one of them. He was devoted to his life's purpose, and so had no thought of romance.

At the Cross

Most of what we know about Mary is because of her key role during Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. We see her at the foot of the cross: *'There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee'* (Matthew 27:55–56).

All the apostles except John had abandoned him and fled. Perhaps the women were more courageous; perhaps they recognised that they were less at risk of arrest than the men. They would have looked on in despair, unable to do anything. But we should not underestimate the comfort and encouragement that they

gave to their Lord, just by being there in those final hours of torture.

When he was dead, two secret disciples Joseph and Nicodemus emerged from the shadows and begged to have the body. They took it away and laid it in a garden tomb. Mary Magdalene and another Mary followed them, and noted the location (Mark 15:47).

Having served their Lord faithfully in life, the women were now determined to perform their last devotion to his body—the Jewish anointing ritual. It was the Sabbath and they were not able to perform the ritual at the time, so they spent the day making preparations. Then when the Sabbath was over, in the first dim light of dawn, they returned to the tomb.



Sunday Morning

The events of the resurrection are related from four different angles in the four Gospel records. They contain apparent discrepancies, but

these are generally viewed by historians as typical of eyewitness testimony—different people focusing on different highlights of an emotionally charged event. So this seems to be what happened:

In the dull first light of Sunday morning Mary led a small group of women (Luke 24:1), gingerly retracing their steps towards the place where they'd seen the Lord's body laid (Mark 16:1–2). Perhaps their fear was heightened by a sharp tremor in the earth as they approached (Matthew 28:2).

They were unaware that a guard of soldiers had been set at the tomb. Before they arrived, the guard was dispersed by an angel who descended from heaven and rolled the stone away from the tomb's mouth (vs. 3–4, 11–15).

They had been discussing how they could remove the great stone they'd witnessed being rolled against the

tomb's entrance (Mark 16:3), but when they arrived they found the stone had already been moved.

Mary Magdalene, assuming that the grave had been robbed, turned and ran to find her fellow disciples (John 20:2).

Meanwhile, the angel who had scattered the guards was now inside the tomb (Mark 16:5), with another angel (Luke 24:4). The remaining women entered the tomb and were shocked to see them. One of the angels spoke: *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead"* (Matthew 28:5–7). The women ran from the tomb to tell the apostles, who did not believe them (Luke 24:9–12).

The Women's Witness

There is perhaps more to this command of the angel than we might

recognise. In Jewish society at the time, men were important and women, generally, were not. If we don't appreciate this, we don't notice how radical Jesus was, in the way he treated women with respect and talked freely to them (for example John 4:1–26).

In Jewish society, a woman was not regarded as a reliable witness. Women could not testify in court. Perhaps the angels' command to the women was a direct challenge to the apostles that they needed to overcome this cultural prejudice.

One of the reasons the new religion of Christianity was regarded with such suspicion in the First Century was its attitude to women. It's obvious that men and women had different roles in the early church, but they had equal value (Galatians 3:28). This was revolutionary.

Reunited

When Mary Magdalene arrived with the news of the empty tomb, and presumably before the arrival of the other women, Peter and John ran to the garden to investigate (John 20:3–10). They found the tomb empty, and left.

Mary had followed them. She was not aware of what the other women had seen. Left alone and distraught, she stood outside the tomb weeping (v. 11). She stooped to look into the tomb—and there were the angels. They had not shown themselves to



the men, but now they appeared again.

'They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"' (v. 13). What kind of question was that? They knew that Jesus himself was standing behind her, and they must have watched with intense pleasure the encounter that followed.

'She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Having said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher)' (vs. 13–16).

Can you imagine the passion in that exclamation! Her instinct, of course, would have been to fling herself at him and crush him in a sobbing embrace. Her nightmare had been turned into delirious joy.



But 'Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (v. 17).

What exactly did he mean? He was not going to stay. He knew that after 40 days he would ascend to heaven to his Father's side (Acts 1:9). But he was not going yet—there would be time to say all that needed to be said.

The Marriage

There's more to it. That word 'cling' has connotations in the Bible. The Hebrew word means 'fasten'. You may be reminded of another episode in another garden, when God created Eve as a wife for Adam:

'And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh' (Genesis 2:22–24).



There was profound significance in this, the first appearance of the risen Christ. It was to his beloved disciple, Mary.

Jesus always said that he must go away, and come again (Mark 8:38). He compared his second coming to a wedding (Matthew 22:1–14). The Bible paints the beautiful picture of Jesus as the bridegroom, and the community of believers as his bride (Revelation 19:7–8). If you are a baptised believer, whether you're a man or a woman, you are part of Christ's bride. For now, we and he are 'betrothed'—promised to each other, longing to come together. When he returns, Mary, along with all those others through the ages who have shared her love and devotion and promised themselves to him, will at last be united together.

KATIE CABEIRA

G L E A N I N G S

Gleanings is a 40-page braille magazine which contains a selection of Glad Tidings articles along with Bible studies and encouraging meditations.

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BIBLE PUZZLES*

THE CASE OF THE MISSING WITNESS

There are many (seemingly) casual facts in the Bible, scattered here and there, that, when put together, make a rational proof of its truth. For instance, on the night of Jesus' arrest, one of his followers, Peter, brandished a sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. This unhappy servant would surely be the perfect witness, you might think, in any law court to show that Jesus and his followers were anything but men of peace. Yet this evidence against Jesus was never produced. Why? Read on and find out.

With Jerusalem full of pilgrims gathered for the Feast of Passover, the priests, elders and scribes were anxious to try Jesus and sentence him before the festival began. A Council gathered (Mark 14:53) and many false witnesses were brought to testify against Jesus, but they could not agree on their stories (vs. 56 and 59). No doubt the Council felt frustrated; they had to convince Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor under whose authority they came, that they had a good

case against the itinerant preacher who was causing such a stir among the people.

Yet, earlier that evening on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39), as Jesus was being arrested (Mark 14:43, John 18:3–10), Peter had lashed out (presumably in fear) at the High Priest's servant Malchus, and cut off his right ear. Of all the people Peter could have harmed, it happened to



*Adapted from *Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences* by J J Blunt.



be someone from the High Priest's own household! A gift, surely, for the men looking for evidence against the accused. This Jesus who tells his listening crowds to turn the other cheek if anyone slaps them (Matthew 5:39) and to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44) has a right-hand man who bears an offensive weapon and uses it viciously!

What a dramatic scene this would make in court: Malchus, wearing a huge bandage on his right ear, possibly with a doctor in attendance to testify to the severity and life-changing consequences of this injury. Who would need further witnesses? Instead, not a word about it is uttered. Why? What is behind the

High Priest's silence concerning his wounded servant?

Luke's Gospel (and only Luke) has the answer. After the incident of Peter's strike against Malchus:

'Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him' (Luke 22:51).

In the dramatic silence that followed, we can imagine Malchus reaching uncertainly towards his severed ear to find it quite whole again, and perhaps wondering whether the attack had really happened. Only his stained garments assured him that it really had. The High Priest no longer had a 'star witness'.

Yet none of this is spelled out in the gospels. We need to piece it together for ourselves from the four different accounts. Just those few words *'and healed him'* change everything. Another example of how incidental phrases in the Bible can provide a complete and compelling story.

JOAN LEWIS



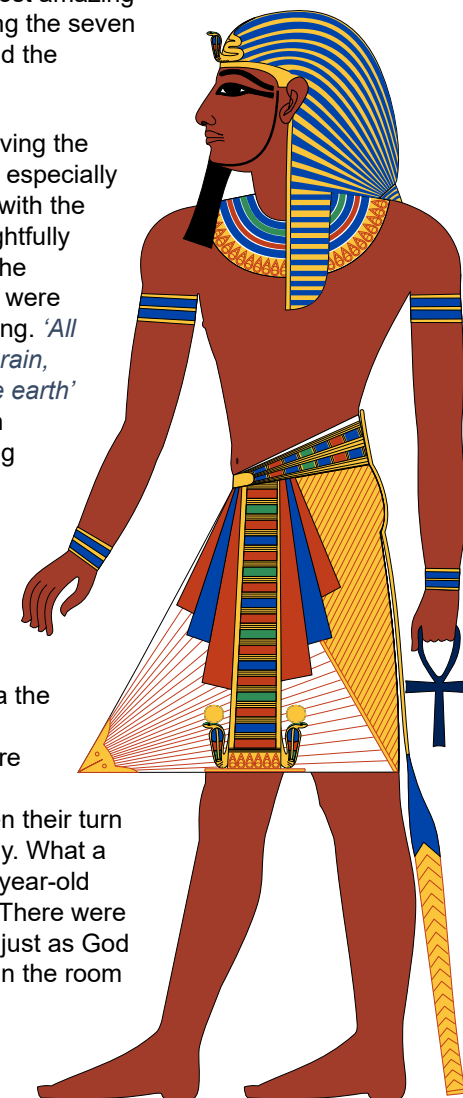
THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Fact can be stranger than fiction. The life story of Joseph is so packed with drama that it reads like a play. The most amazing episode of his career took place during the seven years of famine which came upon Egypt and the surrounding countries.

Pharaoh was pleased with his fortune in having the bright young Hebrew to manage his affairs, especially when he saw how his coffers were bulging with the income from the grain Joseph had so thoughtfully stored away during the good years before the famine. Soon others besides the Egyptians were trekking down to buy food to keep them going. *'All the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth' (Genesis 41:57).* Word got back to Jacob in Canaan. He was now very old, but still ruling over Joseph's eleven brothers, in the patriarchal tradition.

Like his neighbours, Jacob decided to send off an expedition to bring supplies for his hungry household. Soon the brothers were on their way with money and sacks for their purchases. They had no idea the official in charge of corn sales was their brother. He had an Egyptian name, and wore Egyptian clothes, and they bowed humbly before him like the others in the queue when their turn came. But Joseph recognised them instantly. What a shock he had when he realised that his 20-year-old dream had just come true! (Genesis 37:7). There were his older brothers, doing obeisance to him, just as God had promised, yet so naturally that no one in the room knew anything about it but Joseph himself.

In a flash he perceived how God had engineered the events of his life to bring



him to that day. He had journeyed from kidnap to Egyptian slavery, from prison to Pharaoh's court, and now to a position where he had power to provide for the welfare of his family when their lives were threatened by famine.

Teasing his brothers, he acted out the part of a harsh Egyptian officer. He accused them of being spies, and treated them to a spell in prison, so that for three days they had a taste of the agony and distress he himself had once suffered at their hands. He overheard them blaming their bad fortune on the crime they had committed against him years before when they sold him as a slave. He knew then that their consciences were at work, and marvelled how God had brought them into his power. He released them to go home, insisting that they must bring back Benjamin, his blood brother who had been kept behind by Jacob.

“God Sent Me Before You”

This they did on their second expedition, upon which Joseph decided he would now reveal his identity. Embracing them and weeping with joy and excitement, he told them not to reproach themselves any longer for his misadventures. *“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors,”* he said. *“So it was not you who sent me*

here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:7-8).

He sent them home to fetch to him his beloved father, together with their wives and children, flocks and possessions. Pharaoh, delighted at the discovery of Joseph's family, donated a fertile area from the Egyptian heartland for them to settle in comfort and support their flocks. He even offered Joseph's brothers employment as managers of the royal farms. And at last, after many bitter years of separation, Joseph and Jacob were reunited.

Jacob could hardly believe that his son was still alive. He had mourned his death so long that it seemed like



some tantalising dream when the eleven brothers insisted they had talked with Joseph and eaten in his presence. The sight of the distinctive Egyptian wagons waiting at his gate to transport him south finally made up his mind. *“It is enough,”* he quavered, *“Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:28).* So all ended happily, and the old man spent his closing years in peace under the watchful eye of his favourite son, while the *Israelites ‘settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly’ (Genesis 47:27).*

We must now gather together the threads of the narrative for a few final lessons before we bid farewell to Genesis, the book of “beginnings”. There are so many points we

could consider, but here are three that stand out.

God's Promise

Firstly, there is the matter of the promise to Abraham. Over 200 years before the time of Joseph, God had told his great grandfather that the land of Canaan would be given to his family for ever. He sketched out for Abraham the outline of the next 400 years.

“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years... And they shall come back here in the fourth generation” (Genesis 15:13,16).

Abraham was not told that the foreign land was going to be Egypt, but that is how things turned out, as we have seen. In the appointed time, God sent Joseph on ahead, and then by means of the famine drew the rest of the family to the place He had prepared. There they settled and flourished. After the death of Joseph they became so numerous and powerful that the Egyptians made them slaves, to keep them under control. At last, after years of oppression, Moses led them back to the promised land of Canaan. History confirms the presence of the Hebrews in Egypt. Indeed, now Egyptologists have learned to read the hieroglyphic script of the tombs and monuments, the details of the

narrative have been proved absolutely true to life. The organisation of the prisons, the investiture to office by Pharaoh with a ring and gold chain, the preoccupation of the Egyptians with the meaning of dreams, the storing of grain in public granaries—all find their counterpart in ancient Egyptian culture.

Still more striking is the festival of Passover, practised by Jews every spring all over the world, to commemorate the day they left Egypt under Moses to go back to Canaan (as recorded in the book of Exodus).



These facts support the record in Genesis that the Israelites left Canaan for Egypt, and then returned, just as God had promised. He kept His word to Abraham. This should give us faith to believe that He will fulfil His other promises. He has sworn in the latter days to restore Israel again to their land, with Jesus Christ as their king (Luke 1:32). They

have already started to be regathered, and so we know that the coming of Christ must be near.

The Example of Joseph

Secondly, there is the pain Jacob suffered during those years of separation, mourning his son as dead. He had already lost his wife. Yet God allowed him to endure this extra blow.

Many people lose their faith in God in the face of tragedy, unable to accept that He may decree suffering as well as blessing in this life, as part of His plan (Job 2:10). Yet Jacob emerged from his experiences full of confidence and trust. Just before he died, he spoke to his grandchildren in these moving words:

“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys”

(Genesis 48:15). Looking back, he accepted that there had been bad times in his life, but God had led him through them all, and now he wanted his family to continue to enjoy the same relationship he had with God. Perhaps his example may bring you comfort, if now or ever you feel overwhelmed by grief or suffering.

Jesus the Deliverer

Finally, we can see in this last phase of Joseph's career, still more shadows of the work of Christ, the coming deliverer. Joseph brought salvation from death for both Jew and Gentile with the vital bread he provided. This matches the bread from heaven, Christ's body, which he gave on the cross to bring life for the world (John 6:51). Joseph's appearance to his brothers who once rejected him, to be worshipped by them and accepted as their lord, fits the second coming of Jesus. Then the Jews will at last look to him, and *“mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn”* (Zechariah 12:10). They will admit their mistake, and rejoice in his pardon. And Joseph's wonderful love and respect for his father, is just like Jesus' devotion to the will of God.

No Ordinary Book

So we could go on, multiplying examples, but these will illustrate the point we have made consistently through this series, that Genesis, like the rest of the Bible, is no ordinary book. It is the diary of God's work with real people like ourselves: people who loved, and fought, and wept, who submitted to His will or hated Him as they chose. If we dismiss it as myth, we do it an injustice. If we neglect it, we miss principles and examples that can really help us in our spiritual life. But if we heed its teaching and embrace its promises, it can take us right into



the Kingdom of God. For as the apostle Paul writes:

‘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).

DAVID PEARCE
(concluded)



YOUR QUESTIONS

What is human nature?

EE

→ DMP

What we call "human nature", the apostle Paul often calls 'the flesh' (for example *Romans 8:8–17*). It is the way we think and act when we ignore God. It is our selfish, greedy, proud way of life—the way Adam and Eve chose when they defied God and took the forbidden fruit (*Genesis 3:6*). John summarises it neatly in *1 John 2:16*. Jesus has his own version in *Matthew 15:19*. Note that the human heart has a bias to evil, not to good.

To please God we have to try to conquer our natural feelings, and follow the example of Christ. Paul likens it to changing a coat: *'You have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 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 4:21–24*).

Is total victory over sin really possible in this world for believers in Christ?

DMP

← EE

We can only have victory over sin through our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. As Paul says in *1 Corinthians 15:57*, it is God who gives us the victory through Jesus. Our own efforts to be righteous will always fail. Even the great apostle Paul, a better person than any of us, found himself constantly breaking the law of God: *'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'* (*Romans 7:24–25*). Only Jesus could set him free from his sins.

WORDSEARCH

Jesus—the Christ and Son of God

Many people met Jesus during his ministry. The grid contains the names of 12 who considered him special. Some were convinced who Jesus was even before his resurrection. The names are in the side panel with their letters rearranged.

Two of these 12 people (one man and one woman) confessed to him that he was *'the Christ, the son of God'*: who are they?

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

Words

mabritaeus
spocale
rusjai
anjoan
zalasur
thamar
tahsimat
mucodines
tepre
nasusan
dasthead
casezhau

Answers to first part: BARTIMEUS CLEOPAS JAIRUS JOANNA LAZARUS MARTHA
MATTIAS NICODEMUS PETER SUSANNA THADDAEUS ZACCHAEUS.
Answers to second part: PETER: MATTHEW 16:13–16; MARTHA: JOHN 11:25–27

ANNA HART



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