

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1474

***The Flower of the Field – page 3***

***Help with the Daily Readings – page 7***

***Heaven, Hell or Somewhere Else? – page 14***

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

123rd Year

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1474

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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## Bible Versions

*The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) and other versions are sometimes used.*

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# The Flower of the Field

**If you have tried to keep cut flowers alive for any length of time, you will know how difficult it is.**

However beautiful they look when first given, in a bunch or a bouquet, when you put them in a vase they are already dying. Even if you change the water every day, trim the stems, pierce them with a needle, or add plant food to the water – it is a losing battle. Within a few days they will be dead.

## Cut Off

Yet if those same flowers were left in the field they would live longer. You may have the very same variety in your garden: flowers which live for weeks, while the ones in the vase live only for days. It's because they have been separated from their life source. If they grow from bulbs, like tulips, those bulbs have energy and vitality within them which would have been transmitted to the flower throughout its life cycle. But when the cut is made, that natural lifeline is severed.

The prophet Isaiah once contrasted flowers that die with God who lives for ever. In some very powerful and pictorial language, he said this:

*“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:6-8).*

That contrast was so impressive, the

apostle Peter quotes from the prophet and then adds this further New Testament comment:

*“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because ‘All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel is preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23-25).*



## Life or Death?

People in Bible times lived in a much more rural society than many readers are used to. For them, nature was full of lessons and pointers; it spoke to them about the things of God. They saw death all around them, in both plants and animals, and when they encountered something which was totally different they recognised its worth at once.

So, both prophet and apostle saw at once that the Word of the living God offered a hope of new life and recovery. It was something that would ‘stand’ or ‘endure’ forever. And they knew that their own lives were passing and transient.

Later in his prophecy, Isaiah would record the prayer of a good King of Judah whose name was Hezekiah. Faced with the prospect of early death, at a time of

crisis for his people, that godly man prayed earnestly for deliverance and, in the process, described his fragile existence in equally graphic terms:

*"My life span is gone, taken from me like a shepherd's tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night you make an end of me" (Isaiah 38:12).*



And the apostle Peter thought of his existence in just the same way. He had been a fisherman on the dangerous storm-stricken waters of the Sea of Galilee, so he knew that sometimes you have to take your life in your hands, and that he was only going to be around for a short while, in this life:

*"Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease" (2 Peter 1:13-15).*

For Peter, his life was just like a tent and he was a camper. He could see that he was "Here today and gone tomorrow!" And it is the same for all of us, which is why we must make the very best of the opportunity this life gives us, to find out about God and to understand the gospel – "the word of God which lives and abides forever".



grafted back on to their original stalks so they could resume life where they left off. But it can happen with trees or shrubs. A new branch can be grafted on to an old stump and, in the process, both old and new parts can be energised and made fruitful.

The apostle Paul uses that very figure when describing the coming together of Jews and Gentiles into a new relationship as the people of God, so the practice of grafting to regenerate a tree or a bush has been going on for at least 2000 years. This is what he says:

*"For if you (Gentiles) were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree (Israel), how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob'" (Romans 11:24-26).*

He too was quoting from Isaiah (this time chapter 59, verse 20). Not now about being cut off and dying as a result, but about being grafted in and being saved from certain death. That's what God offers us – the chance to become part of His eternal purpose. We do not need to die like flowers in a vase. By the grace of God, we can if we choose live for evermore.

## Rebirth

You could not imagine tulips being

**Editor**



# Making Bible Reading More Meaningful

If you want to understand the Bible there are lots of helps available nowadays, many of them found at the back of your Bible, or even on the same page as the words you are reading. **Peter Forbes** now explains how you can get that help.

## Key Words

When reading a book of the Bible, or just a chapter, you may notice that certain words appear often. That repetition might occur far more often than you would expect to see in a novel or in a newspaper. Yet the Bible never repeats words just for the sake of it; there is always a good reason, and it's worth thinking hard as to why the word or the idea is so prominent.

One example of this repetition occurs in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matthew chapters 5-7). Here's an extract – you can read the whole address in Matthew 5:3-12.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

*"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"* (5:3-5).

The word 'Blessed' occurs 9 times in all. In fact, the translators have used the word to mark the beginning of each verse and have thus highlighted the underlying structure. We would have to be quite sloppy in our reading not to notice this repetition. It carefully marks the structure of Jesus'

words and takes us step-by-step through the various blessings he offers to those who follow him.

Often when we read the Bible we come across place names and journeys that people took. Our understanding of the text will increase dramatically when we know where the places were and the distances people travelled.

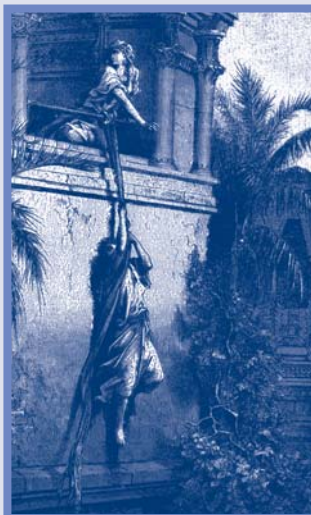
## Where Is It?

Once the locations are known we will find that our understanding improves and that various matters are identified which need further investigation. An example might help.

*"David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him"* (1 Samuel 19:18).

To set the scene: David was married to King Saul's daughter, Michal. He had already been singled out by God as the successor to Saul, whom God had now rejected. Saul knew that he had been rejected and was envious of David, because the people loved him.

At this time Saul was living at Gibeah and David had probably lived there as well, with his wife. Saul wanted David killed and



sent men to assassinate him, but Michal assisted his escape by lowering him from the house window, late at night. So David fled and escaped.

Incidentally there is a key word which occurs in 1 Samuel 19 and 20. It is the word 'fled'; maybe you would like to follow that one up yourself.

Now, here are some questions that might profitably be asked:

- ❖ *Where is Gibeah?*
- ❖ *Where is Ramah?*
- ❖ *How far apart are they?*
- ❖ *Why was David fleeing?*
- ❖ *Why did he want to talk to Samuel?*

Locating Gibeah and Ramah is a simple matter. Using the index to your



Bible maps in the back of your Bible or in a Bible atlas you will be able to locate them as you would on any map.

The distance between the two towns is also easy to establish. From the map it can be seen that David fled about 2 miles. When we realise that David was on the run we should ask the question 'If David was fleeing for his life, why did he only flee a couple of miles?' The answer to this question is to be found in the text. David wanted to tell Samuel all that Saul

had done to him (1 Samuel 19:18).

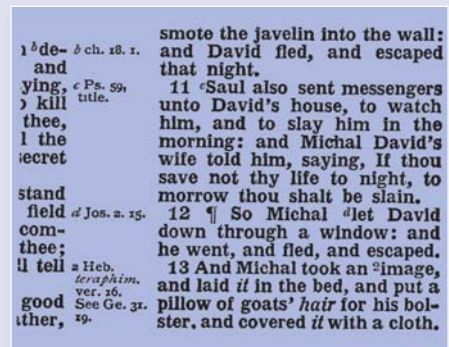
We ask another question: 'Why did he want to talk with Samuel about Saul's behaviour?' Samuel had anointed David as king-to-be some time earlier. Now David would have wanted to ask the prophet what had gone wrong in his life and what he should do about Saul's hostility.

So, we see the benefit of finding out where places are and then asking questions. If we had not enquired where Gibeah and Ramah are, and had not looked at the reason for David's flight from Saul, we would not have realised that David only went a short distance and might not even have asked why he went to see Samuel.

For your own enjoyment you might care to work out whether Samuel satisfied David's questions.

## Marginal References

Let's examine another helpful tool that is readily available to us when we read. Good Bibles have central marginal references.



Looking at the context of David fleeing from Saul and Michal letting down through the house window we read:

*" Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy*

life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain” (1 Samuel 19:11).

Notice the little ‘C’ against this verse and the marginal note which says ‘Psalm 59, title’. If you look at the title of Psalm 59, you will see:

*“To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.”*

Whilst the marginal references are not inspired, but have been inserted by Bible translators and publishers, we would do well to follow them up. They were devised by men who were keen Bible students and who had a high regard for Scripture.

As Psalm 59 was written by David following the events we have considered above, we might expect to find language in the Psalm which fits in with this time in David’s life. Read the Psalm thinking of those events – with Saul’s men surrounding the house, waiting to kill David in the morning. Why not make a list of the points you find in the Psalm which show when the men were around the house and who David saw as his deliverers? Remember, it was his wife who helped him escape.

**Peter Forbes**

## Help With The Daily Readings

**Why not use the World Wide Web to help you to do the daily readings?**

If you are reading the Bible using the *Bible Companion* reading tables (included in Issue 1472), then every day you will be reading two passages from the Old Testament and one from the New. There is a Christadelphian web site which can give you some help, for it contains over 12,750 comments, charts and tables which have been provided by over 50 different Christadelphians. There you can:

- view different thoughts on the day’s readings on-line
- have each day’s thoughts e-mailed to you daily – around 720 use this facility
- read each portion on-line in any of 5 different versions
- correspond by e-mail with any of the contributors.

The object of the site is to encourage personal Bible reading.

Log on at <http://www.dailyreadings.org.uk>

**If you want a set of Daily Bible reading bookmarks, send to the appropriate address listed on the back cover of the magazine.**



## Growth of the Gospel – 21

# Paul and Silas

*For the second time the apostle Paul was visiting Asia Minor, this time to consolidate the work he had done earlier by revisiting the believers in the cities where he and Barnabas had preached the gospel of salvation. Then they had been breaking new ground, for Gentiles had never before been admitted as members of God’s family in these large numbers. But, as John Hellowell now explains, after the Council meeting at Jerusalem a sensible outcome had been reached and racial origin no longer mattered at all. What mattered was that they were all believers.*

### Council Conclusions

As Paul, Silas and Timothy travelled through the region they delivered the conclusions of the Jerusalem Council regarding the terms on which Gentiles were to be admitted as Christians. They were to avoid those things associated with pagan worship, namely:

- things offered to idols;
- blood;
- things strangled; and
- sexual immorality.

The acceptance of these conditions not only strengthened the faith of the believers but also made the Christian faith attractive to Gentiles. So the churches grew in number. Throughout their journey the Apostles Paul and Silas, and now their new assistant Timothy, were directed by the Holy Spirit.

They were not allowed to preach in Asia, which probably means the region of the River Meander, which would include the city of Ephesus and perhaps Laodicea, Colossae and Heirapolis together with the cities of Smyrna and

Pergamum. All these places would have churches within a couple of decades, but for the moment they were “out of bounds” as the party moved north-westwards. An attempt to enter Bithynia on the very northern edge of Asia Minor was frustrated and eventually they reached the coast at Troas, virtually the most north-westerly point.

### The Call to Macedonia

At Troas, Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian man pleading with him to “come over to Macedonia and help us”. Paul concluded that this was a clear indication that they were being instructed to carry the Gospel message from Asia into Europe. Accordingly, they sailed from Troas and arrived at Samothrace the same day and the day after reached Neapolis (modern Kavella), the port closest to the city of Philippi.

Now an interesting change occurs in the text. Up to this point the account has been descriptive. For example, Acts chapter 16 verse 7 says “**they** came down to Troas”; but in verse 10 the





account becomes personal and reads “*we sought to go to Macedonia*”, indicating that the author of Acts, almost universally believed to be Luke, has joined the party.

There are three sections in which the account is given in this way and these are generally known as the “*we – passages*”. They are 16:10 -16:17; 20:5 - 21:18 and 27:1 - 28:16. It is interesting to note that they all involve sea journeys and that the first two are associated with Philippi; either sailing towards or away from the city. The last account is the voyage to Rome.

### **Roman Colony**

These facts have led to the suggestion that Philippi was Luke’s home town. We know that he was a physician (Colossians 4:14) and it may be that he was, in fact, a ship’s doctor. Scholars have noted the frequent use of medical terms in Acts and also the account of the voyage to Rome includes accurate nautical terms.

Philippi was not the capital city of Macedonia; that honour belonged to Thessalonica. However, as the text says, it was “*the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony*”. Its status as a colony, that is, a Roman colony, had a considerable bearing on what happened to Paul and Silas, as will be evident in the next article. A Roman colony was regarded as a part of Rome itself; in much the same way as a foreign embassy is effectively a part of the country which the ambassador represents. Similarly, within the colony, Roman law and customs applied and Latin was the official language.

Usually, colonies were populated by retired senior Roman soldiers and administrators who were provided with lands to support them and, as with many ex-patriots, were often more patriotic than those at home. A Roman colony could be far more Roman than Rome itself! So the scene was set for a dramatic event.

**John Hellawell**

# The Lord’s Prayer

*Our Father which art in heaven: Hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as  
we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*



### **Structured Approach**

The Lord taught this prayer on two occasions, firstly very early in his ministry in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Matthew 6:9-13) and again on a later occasion when he was in Jerusalem (Luke 11:2-4). On the first occasion he said, “*After this manner pray ...*” but

on the second occasion he said, “*When you pray, say ...*” So, we can use the prayer as a model on which to construct our own prayers, or we can repeat it verbatim, as many people do, thinking about each clause in turn. That can be very uplifting.

The prayer is very structured. It

consists of three sections and each section has three parts. The first part is devoted to God, to –

1a. *His name,*

1b. *His kingdom, and*

1c. *His will.*

The second part contains requests for:

2a. *our daily food,*

2b. *forgiveness, and*

2c. *deliverance from temptation and evil.*

The third part returns to God's purpose and person and acknowledges:

3a. *His kingdom,*

3b. *His power, and*

3c. *His glory.*

This simple structure is very easy to remember and we can use it for our own personal prayers.

## **Our Father**

Turning to the content of the prayer, first it addresses God. In almost every language – English is one of the few exceptions – the very first word of the prayer is “FATHER”. The idea of God as a Father to His children is not exclusive to the New Testament. The first time it is found in Scripture is Exodus 4:22, when Moses said to Pharaoh: “*Thus says the LORD: ‘Israel is my son, my firstborn’*”.

So, the idea of God as a Father to Israel is associated with redemption from slavery. Likewise God can redeem us from slavery to sin and make us members of His family. When that happens, we can address God as “*Our Father*”, which is a wonderful recognition of our rebirth – our new start in life.

## **1a “Hallowed be Thy name”**

A name identifies an individual and the individual cannot be separated from his name. God's name is to be used with reverence and respect. To use God's name flippantly is a token of contempt and disrespect. It would be impossible to love God and to use His name blasphemously.

## **1b “Thy kingdom come”**

God has created a beautiful world full of infinite diversity, complexity and interdependence. He has committed it to the care of man and, sadly, it has been abused and defiled. But that will not always be so. Jesus was born to be King and he will take the Kingdom and rule over it on God's behalf. At his return to earth Jesus will establish the Kingdom of God. We are taught to pray regularly for God's kingdom to come and to give God no rest until He takes over control of His creation, out of the hands of selfish men (see Revelation 11:15-18).

## **1c “Thy will be done ...”**

Let us not utter this clause lightly for we do not know what God's will might be for us. For Jesus, that clause meant going to Golgotha. But it also points towards the time when the rule of heaven will be established on earth – when God's law operates here and when people learn again to live according to its gracious principles.

## **2a “Give us this day our daily bread”**

This prayer is just for today; we are to pray for one day at a time. As Jesus taught, “*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*” So, we will not be concerned with what might happen tomorrow (it might not happen!); our prayer will be about what is happening today.

## **2b “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive ...”**

If we acknowledge our wrongs in a repentant spirit, God is very willing to forgive us. This is what the life of Jesus is all about. Jesus shared human nature like us and endured temptation, but he overcame at every point. Finally he laid down that unblemished life and now, through Jesus, we can approach God with every stain removed. But we must show a repentant spirit.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Jesus taught how a Pharisee had told God how good he had been but the Publican simply said, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner.*” It was the Publican who left with his life renewed, while the Pharisee, it transpires, had only been talking to himself!

Notice the conditional clause, “... *forgive us ... as we forgive ...*” If we cannot find it in our hearts to forgive others, we ourselves will not be forgiven. Another parable illustrates this, about an unforgiving creditor (see Matthew 18:23-35). The man had been excused an impossible debt but he then took his fellow servant by the throat demanding the instant payment of a much smaller sum. His master was outraged by this conduct and he restored the original debt. Then Jesus said: “*Likewise shall my heavenly Father do also to you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*”

## **2c “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”**

This clause has troubled many. Would God deliberately lead anyone into temptation? To understand the meaning it will be helpful to consider a practical example. Consider Peter in the Upper Room. He was a brave,

courageous man and he loved his Lord, so when Jesus told the disciples that they would all desert him Peter was outraged, “*Though all forsake you yet will not I*”, he said with great confidence. Jesus answered that he had prayed especially for Peter lest his faith fail. On reaching Gethsemane Jesus urged all the disciples to pray, “*... lest you enter into temptation.*” But the group had often been to Gethsemane before and this occasion seemed no different to the others, so the words of Jesus made no impact.

Then Jesus was arrested and Peter followed to the house of the High Priest. It was a cold night! There was a brazier burning and it was surrounded by servants. Peter edged his way to the fire but the flickering flames lit up his face. Everyone knows the outcome and how Peter denied any knowledge of Jesus. How different it might have been if it had been a warm night. Peter could have stayed in the shadows and would not have been noticed. If he had heeded the counsel of Jesus perhaps it would not have happened in the way it did.

But Peter did not pray, he saw no need; so his unsuspected weakness was exposed and, as a result, he wept bitterly. Jesus teaches us to pray that we be not led into temptation – by which he means into testing or trial. Circumstances which befall us might be very different if we remember our weaknesses and ask God to direct our steps.

For, to God belong:

**3a The kingdom and**

**3b the power and**

**3c the glory,**

**For ever, Amen.**

**David Budden**

# Listening to Jesus



Whatever experience you have of the Bible try, for a moment, to set that aside and think things through again. You will, I hope, share with me a personal experience of listening to the Master's voice, the Master being none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

know about; and they were right!

As an educated village lad, Jesus would have been able to recite a great deal of it from memory and he often referred to it during his adult life and quoted extensively from it.

## Learning to Read

We have already thought about listening to, or reading about, John Baptist, Jesus Christ and the Bible. That's not three different messages, however. All three go hand in hand. In fact, one of the most powerful proofs that the Bible should be listened to is what it has to say about the life of Jesus, and what it records of his teaching.

When Jesus was born there were just 39 books in his Bible – what we now call the “Old Testament”. He was brought up reading that: it was probably the first reading book he ever used.

Perhaps he learned to read in the village synagogue, for his parents wouldn't have had any books or scrolls at home. They were very precious and rare things in those days and most people had to learn things by heart if they wanted to think about them afterwards. His schooling would have been intended to give him a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, because that's what everybody thought was the one really important thing to

## Law, Psalms & Prophets

Jesus would have known his Bible as divided up into these three categories of teaching: it was how Jews subdivided the Old Testament.

This way of referring to the Old Testament message was often used by Jesus, and when he did so he made some startling claims about the message he had now brought from God. Listen to some of the things he said, first from the so-called ‘Sermon on the Mount’:



*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).*

After his resurrection Jesus said:



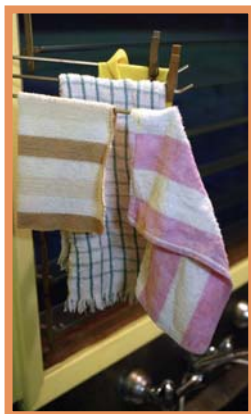
*“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me.’ And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:44-48).*

## **New Teaching**

What Jesus taught is founded upon what is written in the Old Testament. He said that was so crucial that nothing would be left out; all the promises of God will be fulfilled in due course. The life and accomplishments of Jesus are all there in the Old Testament. What is anticipated in the Old is realised in the New, with the coming of Jesus.

The two Testaments go hand-in-hand, and there are no contradictions. If we claim to be Christians (followers of Jesus Christ), we must regard the Old Testament in the same way in which our Leader did. Much of it is about Him – even, on occasions, when it appears to be talking about something or someone different. It is all intended to lead us to him and, through him, to God.

Just glance back to those Bible quotations and notice what the message is about;



- The Kingdom of Heaven*
- The death and resurrection of Jesus*
- Repentance*
- Having our sins forgiven*

If we are to lead successful lives these are things we need to know about. Just take the last one in the list. We all know we have weaknesses, failures in our lives, things we feel a burden of guilt about. Having our sins forgiven will remove the burden of guilt we might otherwise carry. That can make it possible for us to live in harmony with God.

Isn't that something you would like to know about? I know I do. Mary was one of the friends of Jesus who loved to sit at his feet, just listening to him. Her sister, Martha, was distracted with the need to prepare and then serve a meal. She thought that Mary should help get the meal ready. So she said to Jesus:

*“Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.”*

*Jesus answered and said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:40-42).*

Life is full of ‘serving’; there is always so much to do! There is often too much ‘hustle and bustle’. Take time out to listen to what the Master has to say to you – today, as he speaks to us through the words of the Bible. Listen to the Master’s voice.

**David Nightingale**

## Part Three

# Heaven, Hell or Somewhere Else?

In this series **Mark Sawyer** has shown that there is a lot of agreement among Bible students that we have no immortal soul. Instead the Bible teaches that when we die we die, because death is a punishment for sin. So what hope is there of life after death? That is what he now explains in this concluding article.

### The Biblical Hope

The Bible teaches that there is a real hope of life after death, through bodily resurrection from the dead. That is to happen after the pattern set by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It will not be for everyone; nor will all those raised from the dead receive eternal life. We'll see why as we progress and examine the Scriptures. Do look the passages up as we review them.

In **Daniel 12:1-3** we're told what was revealed to Daniel. The prophet was told that, at a time of unprecedented world trouble, "many" people (not everyone) will be awakened from their unconscious "sleep" in "the dust of the earth" ... "some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt".

Jesus himself spoke of his own future role in these terms:

*"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29).*

By "all," Jesus evidently meant those (referred to in v24) who had heard his teaching at some time in their lives. Note that they are raised from "the graves", not brought back from heaven. The Bible never teaches that.

So, not everyone will be raised, nor will all those who are raised be given eternal life. Those who have had the opportunity to respond to God's laws prior to Christ and, in this Christian era, to the gospel of Christ, will be raised when Christ returns to earth. Christ will judge them, together with those alive at that time, who are also considered accountable. Some will be accepted and others rejected.

### In or Out?

Now for some more testimonies from other inspired writers:

**Luke 13:28** records Jesus' teaching that sceptical hearers of his teaching will be raised and will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but themselves excluded from it.

By contrast, **John 6:40** records Jesus saying that those who believe in him will be raised and will receive eternal life "at the last day". Sadly, there were plenty who saw and heard him, but who didn't believe.

In **John 12:48** Jesus spoke of those who rejected him and his words. They will, he said, be judged by those words "in the last day".

The apostle Paul, making his defence before the Roman governor Felix stated that the resurrection will involve "the just and the unjust."

*"I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will*

be a resurrection of the dead, **both of the just and the unjust**" (Acts 24:15).

That's a succinct confirmation of the Divine discrimination that is going to be exercised following the resurrection. We will either be accepted or rejected – be 'in' or 'out' of the Kingdom of God.

## Life or Destruction?

Paul taught emphatically in 1 Corinthians 15:17-23 that Christ's resurrection is indispensable to our salvation. It is only because he rose from the dead that we can have hope of being raised "*at his coming*." If we are "Christ's", that is, if we belong to him, we will have a real and living hope. But, be aware from verse 18 that for those who have "*fallen asleep in Christ*", the only alternative to resurrection is everlasting destruction:

*"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"* (1 Corinthians 15:17,18).

Note that if we might cease to exist in that way, we cannot possibly have immortal souls.

In **2 Timothy 4:1 & 8** Paul writes that Christ will judge both those who are alive at his coming and those who are then raised from the dead when he "appears" to establish God's Kingdom. He will reward those who "*have loved his appearing*." We see then that all these momentous events – Christ's return, the resurrection, the judgment and the setting up of God's Kingdom – fall within the same basic timeframe.

The last two verses of **Hebrews 11** explain that all the faithful in Old Testament times, listed in this chapter, did not receive what they were promised by God because they still await their promised reward which they will share with the faithful people from all ages. At that time all God's people are to be "made perfect". So, those faithful people from the past must be raised from the dead; otherwise the promises of God will never come true for them.

## Judgement to Come

We have seen from some of these passages that a judgement will be needed to discriminate between those who are raised, or who remain alive when Christ returns, to determine who will receive eternal life and those who won't. Here's just one passage that describes this process:

*"For we must all appear ebefore the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good*

*or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Notice that Paul says "*we...all*" must appear before that judgement seat. He was, of course, writing to believers in Christ, not to the world in general.

## Summary

Not everyone will be raised from the dead. At his Coming, the Lord Jesus Christ will judge those who have been raised, together with those who are living at that time, who are also accountable to him. The description "accountable to him" means that they will be people who



had the opportunity to respond to his gospel, whether they chose to do so or not. He will also, at the same time, raise people who lived in Old Testament times like those, named and unnamed, whose faith is catalogued in Hebrews 11. Of all these, some will be accepted and others rejected by Christ at his judgement.

## What Then?

So, where will the place of reward for faithful people be? It certainly won't be in heaven, any more than the place of punishment will be in Hell.

The Bible teaches that the Kingdom of God, which is promised in both the Old and New Testaments, will be established by Christ on this earth following his second coming, the resurrection and the judgement. These are big subjects. However, just to give you a taste of them, here is just one example out of numerous Bible passages:

*"They sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth'" (Revelation 5:9,10).*

This tells us that glorified people redeemed by Christ will become rulers and priests "on the earth".

## What must I do?

What is required of us to become part of this plan? We must belong to Christ and do what he commands. That starts with

one specific action that is required of us. The Bible tells us that it is only through baptism – by total immersion – that we can belong to Christ and become members of the family of God. That act links those who truly believe the gospel to the saving death of Christ and his glorious resurrection. A new way of life in Christ must follow this act of obedience. This is a subject dealt with in other articles in this magazine from time to time. For the moment, here are three relevant passages for you to consider:

- ❖ *In **Mark 16:16** Jesus taught his apostles that those who believe and are baptised will be saved.*
- ❖ *We read in **John 3:5** that being born of water and the spirit is essential for our admission into the Kingdom of God.*
- ❖ *From **Galatians 3:26-29** we learn that by faith and baptism we can "put on Christ," so that we become "in Christ" or "Christ's" and thus become heirs of the promises God made to Abraham. And we've seen that Abraham is destined to be in God's Kingdom.*

So, if we hear, understand, believe and obey the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the name of Christ, and try to live our lives accordingly, we have a realistic hope of being raised from the dead and being given eternal life when Christ returns to earth to set up his Father's Kingdom.

If life after death is an important issue to you, doing nothing about it is not an option. Do please think seriously about it – with an open Bible in your hand.

**Mark Sawyer**



## Days that changed my life

# Nicodemus

**It was the way that they went about plotting his crucifixion that really made me angry.**

Virtually every member of the Jewish government (the Sanhedrin) was involved. Joseph of Arimathea was the only one who kept his own counsel. I was never really sure what he thought about matters.

I was a senior member of the Sanhedrin when Jesus was arrested and tried for blasphemy but, in fact, I had met him before, secretly. I did that because my position as Israel's official teacher carried delicate responsibilities. It was my job to check and authorise interpretations of the Torah and the oral law. A lifetime of doing this had ensured that I had a pretty thorough knowledge of what I believed God required of us. It had brought other benefits too, wealth and social respect.

### **True or False?**

It was during one of Jesus' many journeys up and down the land that I met him. Of course, his reputation as a knowledgeable young Rabbi, with a different view of the Torah's teaching, was already considerable and I had heard many good things about him. He clearly had some special power from God; his ability to cure a sick man in full view of the synagogue congregation was proof of that. I was also impressed by his determination not to accept traditions for their own sake. However, I wanted to be sure that Jesus was a true prophet. Moses had given us guidance on how to judge that matter.

I decided to go and see him, but to avoid confrontation with my colleagues who were already strongly against him for healing on the Sabbath I went alone, at night. He answered my question before I could even get the words out of my mouth. I wanted to know how to get into the Kingdom of God. Jesus explained the need for a new life born of water and the spirit, but I did not fully understand what he was saying. Immersion in water was something we asked Gentiles to do when they wanted to become Jews, or "God fearers". But we were Jews already!

### **Watching and Waiting**

Over the next two years, I watched Jesus, listened to what he said and what others said about him. The more I thought about his message and his way of life, the more I concluded that he really was our long-awaited Messiah. It was that belief that put me at odds with the rest of the Sanhedrin and badly troubled my conscience. If I came out politically in favour of Jesus, I would lose my position and could no longer be a moderating influence. To be truthful, I was also afraid of some members of the government; passions run strong and deep among us Jews.

When the final crisis arose and they arrested him, I tried desperately hard to challenge their pathetic evidence at the illegal trial. My legal and Biblical training came into its own; but it was obvious that the rest of the Sanhedrin were determined to have him crucified. It was then I realised that my decision time had finally come. This was going to be a day (rather a night) that would change my life.

## Guilty Verdict

The way Jesus behaved at the trial confirmed all that my conscience had hinted at. I also realised what he had been trying to make me understand at that first meeting with him, when he talked about being “lifted up”. He had known all along that he would be crucified: he was our Passover lamb, sent to remove our sins in God’s sight.

By volunteering to complete this perfect sacrifice for God, he would bring salvation; and then he would establish that Kingdom about which I had been so anxious to learn. All my knowledge and understanding of the Law of Moses, the Tabernacle and the Passover, fell into place. You might say that this was the point at which the light dawned.

When they crucified Jesus, I resigned from the Sanhedrin amid their jeers and their arrogant claims of triumph. I was really worried about the retribution God would exact for our action in killing his Son and how I was to get forgiveness for my failure to stand up for him when my open defence of him could have made a difference.

## Final Act

At least there was one last thing I could do for the Lord Jesus and that was to help with his burial. By now, Joseph of Arimathea had told me that he too was a secret disciple of Jesus and he too wanted to make that public. He had been to see the Governor Pilate (he had met him on several occasions) about getting Jesus’ body before it was thrown into the rubbish dump fires at Gehenna, just outside the city walls. I had to support Joseph, not least for the sake of Jesus’ mother and



the women who had helped Jesus during the last three years. Understandably, they were now distraught with grief. I went home, got my precious spices, and Joseph and the women helped me to embalm and bury Jesus’ body.

I felt terrible once it was all done. I felt lost. I had no job, though that bothered me least of all. Who would want to be associated with a bunch of power-grabbing men who had broken several of God’s laws by condemning an innocent man? What I was desperately upset about was that this wonderful and innocent man was now dead. He had understood the Law and the Prophets far better than I had ever done and now there would be no guidance. I joined the other shocked and miserable disciples at a secret location in Jerusalem, for the Sanhedrin had ordered that, after the end of Passover, we were to be rounded up and imprisoned.

The resurrection three days later changed everything. Though poor and despised by those in authority, I am very happy. I know that I have found my way

to the Kingdom of God. I have now been born of water and of the spirit. I have also learned the hard way that what other men think of you is, in the end, irrelevant.

I have learned something else too. Sooner or later you

have to make a decision, to show whose side you are really on, God’s or men’s. I tried to avoid making that decision. I was foolish. Don’t make my mistake. Join Jesus and give glory to God.

**Cynthia Miles**

# Three Sayings of Jesus Christ you do not believe

## 1. **“Thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15)**

This is the first recorded saying of Jesus, apart from the familiar story of his boyhood meeting with the learned Jewish rabbis in the temple. He was about to begin his ministry and went to the river Jordan, where John the Baptist was reluctant to baptize him, saying: *“I have need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?”* But Jesus insisted: *“Permit it to be so now, for thus (by baptism) it is fitting for us (for Jesus and those who belong to him) to fulfil all righteousness”.*

Clearly, then, Jesus regarded baptism as an especially righteous thing. Not that there is anything good in itself about being dipped in water. Jesus must have regarded this baptism as having a very special meaning. To him it was something we cannot do without if we want to *“fulfil all righteousness”*. Is your attitude to Christian baptism the same as that of Jesus?

## 2. **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16)**

This was one of the last things Jesus said to his disciples when, before going away to heaven, he gave them their instructions about preaching the gospel. The words plainly mean that salvation (everlasting life), which Jesus offers, is for those who believe his gospel and who show their conviction by being baptized into his name. Notice the order of the words: first, belief; then, baptism. Yet isn't it true that with most people

baptism has come first, at the age of a few weeks, with the hope that belief will follow later? Is that good enough? Jesus was baptized when he was a grown man. Shouldn't a Christian want to be as much like Christ as possible? Many people have the idea that it is “doing good to others” which makes a Christian. In that case one might just as well be a good Buddhist or even a good atheist.

Some, at the other extreme, say that only belief in Jesus is necessary and that baptism is an outward act about which you may please yourself. But Jesus didn't say that, as the next gospel passage shows.

## 3. **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).**

Note, first of all, that Jesus was speaking about baptism. There are two more references to baptism in the same chapter and there is a great deal of evidence to show that in the early days of the Christian church these words were always taken to mean water baptism. But how many people believe what these words say, that baptism is a “must” if we want to be with Christ in his Kingdom?

**Harry Whittaker**

Here are some more Bible passages about baptism for those who think this is something to be taken seriously. – *Matthew 28:19,20; Luke 7:29,30; Acts 2:37-42; 8:12,35-39; 10:47,48; 22:16; Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27,28; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:12; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21.*

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### Stanley Owen

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