

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1499



All-Consuming Fire – page 3
The Thief on the Cross – page 5
Searching for Meaning – page 17

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

125th Year

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1499

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ), available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message; 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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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association (a registered charity) number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained from either the Distribution Secretaries or from the local agents or information addresses given above.

Contents

All-Consuming Fire3

The Thief on the Cross5

Can Christians Speak with Tongues?.....8

Poem: Reflections10

More Reasons why I Believe the Bible.....11

The Call of Abraham14

Poem: Man of Sorrows16

Searching for Meaning17

Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Cover: House Ablaze!

iStockphotos

Marysville, pg 3, Glad Tidings

Illustrations:

Clipart.com pgs 7,9-10,12-19

Christian Clipart pgs 5-6,8,11

Bible Versions

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

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All-Consuming Fire

As the residents of Victoria, South Australia, know only too well, when a bush fire sweeps through it leaves nothing behind. It devours everything in its path.

In the worst disaster in Australia's history, bush fires north of the city of Melbourne destroyed some rural towns. In the words of the Victoria State Premier, John Brumby: "...whole communities just completely wiped out, completely obliterated, by what people would describe as a fireball that just came over the hills and devoured everything before it". More than 200 people died; over 1000 homes were destroyed and the flames consumed an area of some 3,000 sq km (1,200 sq miles).

People had little chance of escaping. One man said he hardly had time to react, let alone move, the flames spread so quickly. People thought they had hours when in fact they only had minutes to escape the fast-advancing flames. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd described what had happened as "hell in all its fury".

Learning Experience

After tragic events like this people always want to know what lessons can be learned. Immediately after the fires there was criticism about the advice to

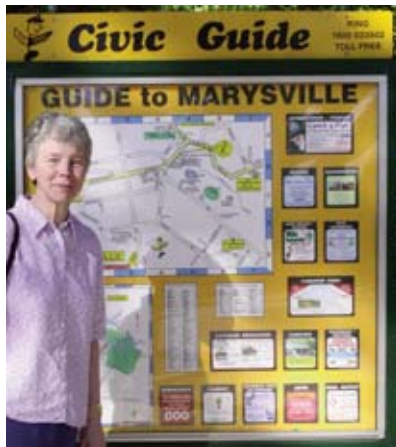
"leave early or stay and defend" policy; inadequate warnings; and a lack of information. Some people felt that they and their towns had just been left to fend for themselves. Perhaps new advice will be issued and different fire-defence strategies will emerge. But are there any more profound lessons to be learned about our relationship with the God who is described – in both Old and New Testaments – as "a consuming fire"?

When Moses encountered the angel of the LORD for the very first time, it was at the burning bush. Remarkably the bush burned but was not consumed: it was fire that exhibited something about the nature of Almighty God – the Eternal One. Ordinary fires consume to sustain themselves: when there is nothing left to feed them, they go out. But the fire that

Moses saw was perpetual: it did not rely upon the bush to feed it. God's existence is like that: He is never-ending and entirely self-sustaining. He is, as Moses later described Him, "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 90:2).

Unapproachable

In just the way that people in South Australia knew that it was pointless to try to fight the flames, for they were just too powerful, so it is with God. Newly out of Egypt, the children of Israel encountered God on the very



Marysville, north of Melbourne, one of the communities destroyed by fire

same mountain where He had appeared to Moses. Once again, He appeared in a fiery manifestation, which struck terror into the hearts of the people. We are told that:

“Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly ... The LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain” (Exodus 19:18-20).

Much later, we find that even Moses was terrified on that occasion, but he accepted the invitation and drew near to learn what God wanted His people to do, and how they were to live. That display of glory was designed to impress Israel with the fact that God, who alone has immortality, is to be found *“dwelling in unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16)*, and that nobody can draw near unless He invites them to come and makes the way of approach possible.

Devouring Fire

God is of such moral purity that nothing impure can be tolerated in His presence. He is committed to the destruction of all sin and sinfulness, which is why fire is such a helpful figure when seeking to understand the God of the Bible. His purpose is to banish all wrongdoing and all evil and to fill the earth with His glory, and that will entail destroying everything and everyone who opposes His gracious purpose.

Prophesying about the glorious future that is coming on earth, the prophet Isaiah posed this challenging question:

“Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall

dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isaiah 33:14).

Then he proceeds to answer that question. Those who survive will be those who have chosen to do what is right, and have a right relationship with God. Just as the towns in Victoria will be rebuilt and the areas resettled, so it will be when Jesus returns. After the judgments of God have been poured out, the gracious purpose of God will become clear. He will make the world a beautiful place once more.

Paradise Restored

There is a marked contrast between a godless world which resists God and has to be destroyed, and a new world full of people who want to spend eternity with God's appointed King. Contemplating the coming judgment of God, and the destruction that will entail, the apostle Peter says this:

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?” (2 Peter 3:10-12).

What sort of people ought we to be? The apostle proceeds to answer his question. We are to be people who *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (3:18).*

Editor

The Thief on the Cross

Jesus was crucified between two other men, who were thieves. The historical accounts in the gospel records, tell us that at first they both reviled him, perhaps because of all the insults that were being directed towards him by the crowds. But then one of the thieves made a remarkable confession of faith and asked Jesus to remember him when he comes in glory to establish his Kingdom. **David Budden** looks at this outstanding confession and explains just what the thief believed.

Amazing Confession

That thief was an outstanding man. It was one thing to believe in Jesus when vast crowds were following every step and tremendous miracles were being performed. But this man saw a blood-drenched figure in excruciating agony and dying – yet he believed!

The words exchanged between the three men were not in the form of a comfortable conversation. Every gasp of breath was the cause of further agony as the weight of the body was put onto the nails through the feet so that the words were being forced out in appalling circumstances.

It seems that at first both thieves were abusive of Jesus, but as time passed the second thief became silent. He was obviously tremendously impressed by the demeanour of Jesus and by his forgiveness for the soldiers. So he rebuked the other thief and confessed that he was himself deserving of the fate that had befallen him, adding a vital comment:

“Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive

the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40,41).

Then, addressing Jesus, he asked him:

“Remember me when you come into your kingdom” (23:42).

‘King of the Jews’

What faith! The thief clearly believed that Jesus would inherit a kingdom and that he would invite those who were his to be his citizens. Obviously he knew a lot about Jesus. He knew, for instance, that Jesus was utterly sinless –

“this man has done nothing wrong”; he knew that Jesus had preached about a Kingdom over which he himself would rule. And the thief believed that Jesus was indeed “The King of the Jews”, as the placard over the cross testified.

He hadn’t believed at first – like his fellow criminal he had been abusive. But having seen the dignity of Jesus in such extreme circumstances, his composure and the spirit of forgiveness, the thief realised that Jesus was no ordinary man and admiration followed by profound faith was kindled.



Jesus perceived the depth and sincerity of the man's faith, for we are told that *"he knew what was in man"* (John 2:25). Whatever the crimes of the past, all that was forgiven as Jesus responded out of a full heart:

"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

"In Paradise"

Just what did that promise mean and where was this Paradise of which Jesus spoke? It could not mean heaven, nor could it mean that Jesus would be in his Kingdom that same day, for that same day Jesus was dead and buried. He went nowhere until he had been raised from the dead by God. As the apostle Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, several weeks later, David had prophesied:

"... concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that his soul was not left in Hades (the grave), nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and hear..." (Acts 2:31-33).

The entire witness of Scripture is that God raised Jesus from the dead; and, until the third day, Jesus lay in the tomb. How, then, can we understand the promise that Jesus made to the thief?

"This Day"

The answer is simple: the expression "Today" or "This day" (as it appears in

other translations) was a common Jewish expression which was used to give certainty to the statement concerned. Here are some examples

For example, consider the transaction between Jacob and Esau, when Jacob acquired the birthright from his elder brother:

"Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day.' And Esau said, 'Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me?' Then Jacob said, 'Swear to me as of this day.' So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob" (Genesis 25:31-33).

Or consider the parting words of Moses to Israel, in the Book of Deuteronomy, when he warns them over and over again about the dangers they would experience and the challenges that would come to their faith:

"This day the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in his ways and keep his statutes, his commandments, and his judgments, and that you will obey his voice" (Deuteronomy 26:16,17).

Absolute Certainty

Jesus was saying, in effect: "You ask me to remember you when I come into my kingdom. I can tell you here and now, with absolute certainty, that you will be a citizen in my kingdom".

Consider the tremendous emphasis that Jesus applied to his promise:



1. **Assuredly** – ‘with absolute truth and certainty’.
2. **I say** Meaning – ‘On my word of honour.’
3. **To you** – ‘You are precious to me.’
4. **Today** – ‘I give you my solemn pledge.’
5. **You will be with me in Paradise** – ‘Just as my resurrection from the dead is an absolute certainty, you too will rise again.’

Paradise?

Notice that although the thief used the word ‘Kingdom’, Jesus replied using the word ‘Paradise’. Why might that have been? By using the word ‘Kingdom’, the thief probably had passages like Psalm 72, Isaiah 2:1-4 and Isaiah 11:1-9 in mind – passages that describe God’s coming Kingdom.

When Jesus used the word ‘Paradise’, he used a word which means ‘a garden’. That word would suggest to the thief the Garden of Eden when man had walked in harmony with God, a relationship that had been lost through Adam’s failure.

Now the ‘last Adam’ was dying alongside him to make the restoration of that paradise possible. He might meditate on the words of the Psalmist who had written about the man of God like a tree planted by rivers of water (Psalm 1:3). Or he might think about Isaiah’s promise of that time when the wilderness would once again blossom like the rose (Isaiah chapter 35).

Thus Jesus was opening up a whole new avenue of thought in the man’s

mind – thoughts that would warm his heart and help him to endure the agony that he must suffer for a few more hours yet.

Dead and Buried

Both Jesus and the thief died that day. Jesus was buried in a tomb in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea and there he remained until the third day, when God raised him from the dead. He now sits at his Father’s right hand until the time is right for him to come to raise the dead and to establish the Kingdom of God.

The disposal of the body of the thief is unrecorded – but his resurrection is an absolute certainty, and his citizenship in the Kingdom of God is equally certain.

The promise given by Jesus had absolute assurance. In the meanwhile he lies unconscious in his grave, awaiting that time when he will be alongside his King once more – this time in the Kingdom of God.

David Budden

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Can Christians Speak with Tongues?

In this series, David Willey has shown that the First Century Holy Spirit gift of tongues conferred the ability to speak in other languages without having first to learn that language. But what does that mean for believers today, when no such ability appears to be conferred? This is what he now considers.

Many Different Gifts

In this final article we want to concentrate on one particular explanation, given by the apostle Paul when writing to the Corinthian believers, in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 to 13.

In this letter he deals with many issues and answers several questions that had been raised by the congregation. They were a Spirit-filled ecclesia and it was important to use correctly the various gifts that God had given them. The apostle Paul explains quite clearly that though there were many different gifts of the spirit, there is only one Holy Spirit – the Spirit, or power, of the Lord God:

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

He then likens the believers to a body which can only function when all its individual parts are in proper working order. The foot, the hand, the ear and the eye all need to cooperate, otherwise the result will be chaotic (12:12-17). And, he says, it was the



same with the ecclesia at Corinth. God had given them various gifts, and they had to use them properly if the congregation was to be effective. No one gift was more important than any other.

In verses 8-10 he gives a list of those different gifts:

“For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues”.

Notice that the ‘gift of tongues’ is lower down in the list of priorities as far as the Spirit gifts were concerned, which is in marked contrast to the way some people regard this gift nowadays – when they confuse it with so-called ecstatic utterance. Each of the various gifts had its proper place and had to be used as God intended. For this was a time when there were few written gospels available, and people relied

upon direct communication from apostles, or the Word of God being transmitted through prophets, or inspired teachers.

Not for Ever

As the apostle's explanation continues he tells the believers that they are living through a time of transition and that things will not always be like this – with direct communication from God. There is, he explains, something better that God has in store. In chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians we have that wonderful dissertation on the vital importance of love in our dealings with one another. Faith and hope are important, he says, but the greatest attribute of all is love. Notice what he then says:

“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away” (13:8).

He is telling the Corinthians that the time will come when the gifts of prophecy, tongues and God-given knowledge will cease. Why were these Spirit gifts to disappear? Here is his explanation:

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am



known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:9-13).

Notice the key explanation: “when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away”; that is, the gifts of the Spirit, will then have served their purpose and will be no longer needed. To what, then, does ‘that which is perfect’ refer? I suggest that it is a reference to the completion of God’s revelation – the New Testament scriptures. When was that process completed?

The writing and circulation of the 27 books we now call the “New Testament” was probably complete by the end of the 1st Century. When that had been accomplished, and God’s Word was available in Greek – the common language of the day – there was no further need for the gifts of the spirit: either the gift of prophecy or the ability to speak in foreign languages.

Confirmation

We have already seen in this series that the gifts of the Spirit could only be passed on by the apostles, by the laying on of their hands (see, for example, Acts 8:14-18; 19:6). At the time when God’s Holy Word – the Bible – had been completed, so it could be preserved and passed down to all generations, the apostles would have been dying out.

The apostles who alone had the ability to pass them on would have fallen asleep: so the gifts would die out anyway.

Also, there would be no need for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to continue. They had served



their purpose in spreading the gospel message to all nations, and that work had been completed by the end of the century, by which time Christianity was known about throughout the Greek-speaking world.

Conclusion

We can see therefore that the Bible teaches that the Spirit gift of 'speaking with tongues' was the ability to speak in foreign languages. It was a means of preaching in the First century to those who lived in different parts of the Roman Empire. It was only used in the First Century because the opportunity to pass on the gift died when the apostles fell asleep in death.

Furthermore, the spirit gifts were only available whilst the canon of

Scripture was being made up. When that had happened there was no need for any Spirit gift at all – the Scriptures would speak for themselves. It is wonderful that, in God's providence, as the gifts of the spirit passed away, so the Bible became available in all its wonderful completeness.

It follows that there are no gifts of the Spirit nowadays, despite what many other churches suggest. They are not available in the 21st Century at all, for we can now all read the Bible without anyone preventing or hindering us. Let us read and study the Word of God – the Bible – for therein we find the only way to everlasting life.

David Willey



Reflections

**I look in the mirror, and what do I see?
A very familiar face, looking at me;
A face growing older with each passing day.
With sight slowly fading, and hair turning grey.**

**A heart growing wiser with God by my side;
His Word to instruct me, to comfort and guide;
Though outwardly failing, I feel no dismay,
Within I'm renewed by God's Word every day.**

Colleen Simons

More Reasons why I Believe the Bible

No one seriously contests that Jesus Christ really did live and die. But what about his resurrection from the dead? And what other reasons are there for believing the Bible to be the inspired Word of God? That is what **Mark Sawyer** now examines.

Witness Statements

Some people are content to follow the teachings of someone who lived long ago, but who has been long dead – whose body decayed in the tomb. Other people, who say they believe in Jesus, dismiss the evidence for his bodily resurrection and speak of a ‘spiritual resurrection’, a concept which is so vague and destitute of evidence as to amount to virtual unbelief.

What do the New Testament Scriptures say? When we examine the historical accounts and the writings of the early believers, they could hardly be clearer in their support of the bodily resurrection of Christ. Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote when explaining the importance of the resurrection of the dead, as the true Christian hope:

“I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

He then lists those who saw the risen Christ, naming many of the individuals and adding that once Jesus was seen by

more than 500 believers at one time. Then comes the crucial point, for he adds:

“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

Historical Accounts

The gospels give detailed accounts of those eyewitness contacts and what happened was right at the centre of the message that they later preached. Here is the apostle Peter's recollection of the events:

“We are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with him after he arose from the dead” (Acts 10:39-41).

From time to time articles in this magazine focus on the reality of



Christ's resurrection and the powerful reasons for believing in it. Two points will have to suffice here.

1. Had there been a corpse to produce, there were plenty who would have dearly loved to have produced it, so as to completely destroy the claim that he had risen from the dead.
2. If it had not really happened, could we seriously expect the Apostles to have undergone the trials and persecutions that later befell them? Would they have hazarded their lives, preaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as it is quite evident they did, if they knew it was all a hoax? Of course not!

The followers of Jesus had been frightened and cowed. When Jesus was executed, they did not know what to do or what to believe. They had lost their faith. As Jesus said to them, they were "*foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe*" (Luke 24:25). But these same people became fearless preachers of the Gospel. Nothing could stop them preaching about their Risen Lord. How can that be explained other than by their complete conviction that their Master had been raised from the dead?

Scriptural Truth

Jesus Christ is the paramount witness to the truth of the Bible. He is at the heart of both Old and New Testaments. If he has been raised from the dead, and to immortal life at that, as the apostles believed and taught, then his witness is totally vindicated. His reverence for the Old Testament Scriptures – as being his Father's Word. His use of those Scrip-

tures in his teaching, and their detailed predictions about him, all point to the need to believe the Bible in its entirety if we are to be true followers of Christ. What's more, if Christ's life, death and resurrection were all accurate fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy, shouldn't we also take careful notice of all those passages, in both the Old and New Testaments, which predict his Second Coming to this earth?

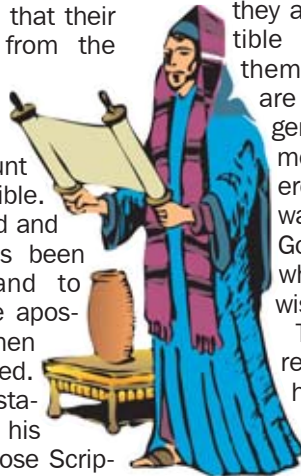
Jesus Christ then is the cornerstone of belief in the Bible. The fact that he lived and died is not in question. And if we accept the factual evidence about his resurrection, then we should also accept the authority and accuracy of the Old Testament Scriptures which Jesus himself so clearly endorsed.

Human Nature Appraised

Another reason why I find the Bible so believable is the realistic way in which it appraises human nature. From beginning to end it maintains a consistent view of the human condition and of human behaviour. Men and women are shown, not only to be mortal creatures, but to have moral weaknesses.

Human beings have remarkable powers of reason and conscience, but they are also seen to be susceptible to the desire to please themselves and consequently are vulnerable to self-indulgence and pride. Ingrained in men and women is the preference for doing what they want to do rather than what God wants them to do, even when they are aware of God's wishes.

The prophet Jeremiah recorded that the human heart is deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). The Apostle John wrote that if



we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). And the Lord Jesus Christ named the evil thoughts and acts which proceed from the human heart and exert such a defiling influence upon our race (Mark 7:21-23).

Which of us can deny that this is an accurate assessment of our natural tendencies, that it has a disconcerting ring of truth? Furthermore, would human authors, left to themselves, have produced this consistent and detracting picture of the moral condition of the human race? Is this an insight that people would want to leave on record, even if they could? To create such a record required a superior mind – the mind of God Himself.

Human Destiny

Allied to this is the Bible's realism about the destiny of mankind. The human dream of continual progress, ever onward and upward, is a hollow optimism that, from our observation of world events and problems, we know in our heart of hearts is ill-founded. And the Bible does not share it. The Bible's view of mankind's destiny is one of decline into crisis: a crisis of such gravity that only the direct intervention of God in sending Christ back

to the earth will rescue the human race.

The prophet Daniel predicted "*a time of trouble such as never was*". Jesus himself forecast a time when men's hearts would fail them for fear as they contemplated what was coming on earth (Daniel 12:1 and Luke 21:25-27).

When we consider the world issues that hang in the balance and threaten us today, the prediction of Jesus, which is almost 2000 years old, has remarkable credibility. Nobody could have seen that far into the future without the insight that God alone can give.

What is so important is that the Bible offers a solution. It gives us a real message of hope and encouragement. It promises a new world order – the Kingdom of God on earth under the Kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the guarantee that this will happen is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. See how the message of the Bible hangs together. It's a unique book. It could not have been written solely by man. It must be a reflection of the mind of God. That's why I believe the Bible is the Word of God.

Mark Sawyer

Divine and Human

Divine Inspiration then in no way sets aside human authorship. The surrounding, the calling, the experience and the faculties of the various writers, all have a part in the form and substance of what they wrote. Their character as well as their style comes out in their narratives and records. The Spirit of God, making use of those qualities, so operated in the writers that the words they use are truly their own, yet at the same time they are God-breathed. It is this that imparts Divine authority and accuracy to their words.



W A Vine – The Divine Inspiration of the Bible

The Call of Abraham

- ① Abraham lived in Mesopotamia, the land between the two rivers, Euphrates and Tigris. It was there that God first revealed Himself to Abram (as he was then called). The record in the Acts of the Apostles explains what happened:

“The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you’” (Acts 7:2,3).

- ② The emphasis upon the “God of glory” implies that Abraham had visions and revelations of God that instructed him in God’s ways and prepared him for the call to leave his country and family and travel to the land which God would show him. Note that he is not commanded to ‘go’ but that God says ‘come’. This was the land where God was pleased to reveal Himself. It was here that Abraham would find Him. It was as if God said: “You will find Me there, waiting for you...”

- ③ At first, Abraham left only his country, moving to the city of Haran, and living there with Terah his father, Sarah his wife, and Lot his nephew. It was only when his father died that Abraham finally separated himself from his family and with

Sarah and Lot travelled to the land of Canaan.

- ④ The substance of the original promise that God made to Abraham is to be found in Genesis chapter 12:

“Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father’s house,

- ➔ *to a land that I will show you.*
- ➔ *I will make you a great nation;*
- ➔ *I will bless you and make your name great; and*
- ➔ *you shall be a blessing.*

I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:1-3).

- ⑤ The great nation which traces its origins back to Abraham, through his sons Isaac and Jacob, was the nation of Israel, a nation which is right at the centre of God’s purpose. Notice too that there is great emphasis placed upon the word “bless”. Not only would Abraham be blessed but he himself would be “a blessing” in that the purpose of God would be carried forward in the earth through him. In particular, God says: “in you all the families of



the earth shall be blessed". The apostle Paul in one of his letters picks up that foundation principle from Genesis and explains that it foreshadowed a blessing for both Jews and Gentiles. For, he writes:

"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Galatians 3:8,9).

- 6 The importance of these promises can be seen from the way the apostles referred back to them as key indicators of the unfolding purpose of God. Thus the apostle Peter, when preaching to a Jewish audience shortly after the Day of Pentecost says:

"You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up his Servant Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

And the apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Rome, says:

"What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it



was accounted to him for righteousness."

He then adds the testimony of king David to these words, saying:

"Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are

covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.' Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness" (Romans 4:6-9).

- 7 His point is that the fundamental principles of the gospel were preached to Abraham (and to David) and that they were demonstrated in his experience. For the principles associated with God's work in the life of Abraham are foundation principles of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Abraham is mentioned over seventy times in the pages of the New Testament: he is a character that we ignore at our peril.

God said *"I will bless those who bless you..." (Genesis 12:3)* and this was true not just for Abraham, but also for all those who acknowledged him as their father – whether by their natural birth or their spiritual rebirth.

- 8 To that promised blessing God added these very sobering words: *“...and I will curse him who curses you”*. There are two quite different Hebrew words translated ‘curse’ in this phrase. The first, which describes God’s curse, means: *‘to feel abhorrence for, to bitterly curse’*; it is associated with a judicial curse. That would be something like a sentence which was passed for an act that had been committed. The second, relating to the man who curses Abraham, means: *‘to make light of, to treat with contempt, to lightly esteem’*.

The message is that if any man treats Abraham and the things that God has revealed through him with contempt, if he lightly esteems them, ignores them as being of no consequence, then he cuts himself off from the wonderful blessings that God promised

through him (Abraham) and, in effect, calls upon himself the wrath of God, who will curse him bitterly.

- 9 When Abraham came into the land, the first recorded act that he performed was to build an altar unto the LORD who appeared unto him (Gen. 12:7). It is evident then that Abraham had an understanding of the principles of Atonement and had been instructed in the importance of offering a blood sacrifice for sin as instituted by God in Eden (Gen. 3: 21).

Here was a man who was well acquainted with the ways of God. His example should encourage us to live by faith – to believe what God promises and to respond to what He offers to do for us and with us.

Dudley Fifield

Man of Sorrows

There is no beauty that we should desire him. Despised and rejected, acquainted with grief; Spat upon, buffeted, “no form or comeliness”, Nailed up, and at either side was a thief.

Here is a portrait of our man of sorrows
Suffering scourging with those cruel cords;
But he overcame all, and His Father has made him
KING of all Kings and the LORD of all Lords!



Peggy Rawson

Searching for Meaning

I'm still here and have not gone to hospital yet. From the start of this experience I have tried to approach it by exercising my faith in God, especially as there is so much about it over which I have no control. These things have to be placed firmly in God's hands.

"Let go and let God"

This was what a 'Wayside Pulpit' proclaimed outside a church, but what did it really mean? How am I, as a servant of the Lord, intended to understand this experience? Barring direct revelation from God or voices in the head, the only place to turn is to the Scriptures.

There we can find an authoritative message and some factual examples of the way in which God has worked with people in the past. From there we can draw some clear conclusions, for the Scriptures give us God's help and guidance. The apostle Paul went through some challenging experiences and emerged a stronger and better man, and this is what he wrote:

"Whoever thinks he is standing firm had better be careful that he does not fall. Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond

your power to remain firm. At the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out" (1 Corinthians 10: 12,13, TEV).

Without being arrogant about it, I believe this is at least part of the meaning for me. Ultimately this experience is for my eternal welfare and will enable me to associate that much more closely with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, perhaps see more clearly why it was needed and how we can also be victorious over sin and even death.

Paul was also told that he had been given "a thorn in the flesh" to prevent him being puffed up with pride. Some say this was a "painful physical ailment" to keep him from being proud. What he needed to learn was:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Counting my Blessings

So what is my personal experience all about? This time of waiting is certainly one of self examination. It is probably natural for at least some of the time to feel guilty anyway, but in Christ this is an opportunity to see that when we repent of our sins and seek God's mercy in forgiveness, God will forgive us. And suffering, we are told, can be one of the ways that God helps us to become the sort of people He wants us to be. In Chapter 12 of the Letter to the Hebrews we are



taught that those who have committed their lives to Christ – by their belief and through baptism – are treated by God, the Father, as His children whom He disciplines (or chastens) for their development. Just think what that means for me:

- ❖ I am counted as one of the children of God.
- ❖ He cares enough about me to try and change my life so that it matches His family characteristics.
- ❖ He wants me to be in His Kingdom when it is established on Earth.
- ❖ He is prepared to forgive all my sin.
- ❖ I am being encouraged to put away my personal sin and live by faith in the grace of God.

Everything that happens is under the supervision of the Lord Jesus, so there is really nothing to worry about, whatever happens.

It's All Over!

I'm out of operating theatre, out of anaesthetic, out of bed, out of hospital. Life starts again! My operation had taken place during the afternoon – I'll spare you the gory details! So by the time I was recovering from the anaesthetic it was already late evening and I didn't see light again until early the following morning when the nurse came round to check blood pressure, temperature, etc. It was rather like a 'death and resurrection' experience, very similar to those we find recorded in the Old Testament: a bit like Daniel spend-

ing a night in the lion's den!

I came to the hospital resigned to "my fate" that we all have to face. We are all sinners, all suffer sin's corruption, so we must all die sometime. In the theatre anteroom it was really quite convivial with the nurse and anaesthetist making cheerful conversation, no doubt as a distraction. They explained what they were going to do and that all would be painless. I was grateful for their thoughtful care and for all their skill which I was going to experience at first hand.

But I was even more grateful to the heavenly Father. In Him through the Lord Jesus, I was lying down in hope, confident of His skill and care. He would be guiding the hands of surgeon, doctor and nurse. So it was that I awoke the following morning – the cancer removed – to the beginning of a new life. Surely this was a resurrection-like experience. God has given me a fresh start, full of hope. What a precious gift life is! How wonderful the Father's care.

Step by Step

Of course, I was soon reminded that this wasn't life in the kingdom of God just yet! The pain had to be dealt with and it was a couple of days before I actually stood on my own two feet again – only to sit down very quickly.

What a transformation a day makes!

With some food inside me and the physiotherapist's arm to guide, I began walking up and down the ward with some degree of confidence and I was joined in my efforts by other patients who were



in hospital for the same treatment. We encouraged each other on the way.

Only today one of those other patients has rung me to compare notes – ‘How was I managing?’ ‘Had I contacted the medical services for their ongoing care?’ and suchlike.

Two things have come out of my visit to the hospital I hadn’t quite bargained for:

- ① The sense of fellowship and friendship with those who had a common experience. It may not last long, it may not mean anything, but with these men I have a shared bond which has, at the very least, given me the opportunity to share with them my faith in the Almighty Lord God of heaven and earth and the Saviour He has provided. This is something like the fellowship that there is for those “in Christ” who have even more reason to rejoice!
- ② The sense of a new beginning and a new life that the experience has given; it’s a fresh start. Yes, most of the things that were in my life before are still there, but the cancer is left behind. Old relationships are renewed with wife, family,



and friends. And the idea that the Father has still something for me to learn and to do, before His Son returns. It’s a new life beginning from today, every day! What thanks I owe God for His unspeakable gift of life.

Post Script

This recovery is not over yet! I came out of hospital with medication and other medical appliances to help me on the way. Other members of the medical service swing into action and there is a plan for the future including exercises to strengthen me and get me back to full strength. So the time of complete recovery is some way off.

Once again, the spiritual lesson is clear. We all need the instruction of God’s Word, on a continuing basis. Every day we need to be reminded that God has a plan and a purpose for His world and for His people. And while we await the complete recovery of His creation, we all need the support and encouragement of other believers as we look for that day when the Lord Jesus comes to bring eternal health.

David Nightingale

Overcoming Depression

God may be invisible but His ways are seen by the pure in heart. Fall back on God’s promise of providential care, and rediscover that He cares for you. He quenches the parched soul and gives songs in the night. The weary may cast all their care upon Him. The Everlasting Arms reach lower than the lowest depression. Obedience is better than grief. Men are not saved by sorrow but by faith.

Dennis Gillett – *Diseases of the Soul*

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Tecwyn Morgan

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