


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1548

A silhouette of a utility worker wearing a hard hat and safety harness, working on a power line. The worker is positioned on the right side of the frame, facing left, and is holding onto a vertical pole. The background is a bright, warm yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is one of quiet industry and dedication.

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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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A monthly magazine 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 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.

Glad Tidings Distributors

for orders and payments

United Kingdom – Cilla Palmer, "Highlands",
78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs,
England CB7 5NR
Tel: (01638)723959 (24 hrs & Fax)
cilla@gladtidings.fsnet.co.uk

Australia – Jon Fry, 19 Macey Street, Croydon South,
Victoria, Australia, 3136
gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada – Vivian Thorp, 5377 Birdcage Walk,
Burlington, Ontario, Canada, L7L 3K5
vivianthorp@bell.net

New Zealand – Neil Todd, 14 Morpeth Place, Blockhouse
Bay, Auckland 7, New Zealand *thetodds@xtra.co.nz*

South Africa – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O.Box 50357,
Musgrave Road, Durban 4062, South Africa
antoost@mweb.co.za

U.S.A. – Pat Hemingray, 3079 Kilburn West,
Rochester Hills, USA, MI 48306

Other Countries – Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive,
Hollywood, Birmingham, England, B47 5RJ
andrew@gladtidings.me.uk

Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan, 26 The Crescent,
Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, England, B92 0BP
glad.tidings@virgin.net

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Losing Power

They say that it is only when you lose something that you really come to appreciate it. That was certainly true for people who live on the Isle of Arran, to the west of Scotland, when an unseasonal snowfall left the islanders without electricity for days.

With freezing temperatures and biting winds they had to make do as best they could, making the most of any gas supplies, candles and extra clothing. It took days for the electricity company to get them reconnected because pylons had been snapped off, roads were impassable and the weather made the necessary repairs very challenging.

Fragile Society

In the days before everybody was connected to the national grid, people were less reliant upon one source of power for heating, lighting, communicating and powering all their electrical appliances. Those times have changed and now we expect the light to come on at the flick of a switch and have little to fall back on when the power supply fails. In the same way, many of the things we take for granted are dependent upon computer power and when something goes wrong with the computer or the computer infrastructure, everything goes down.

Nations are now at cyber war with other nations, trying to disrupt their communications or control their installations by sending malicious computer viruses, or hacking into their security systems. At one end of the scale attempts were made to disrupt the Iranian effort to empower their missiles with nuclear warheads and at the other

end individual computer users have to get protection for their personal data, in case their identity is stolen or their address books used for malicious purposes. So, because we are so closely connected nowadays, if our power supply was cut off, our entire existence in the developed world would be seen for what it is – incredibly fragile!

Loss of Power

Sometimes powerful leaders are deposed and sent into exile, or worse; and entire nations can lose their independence and become a subject race. It tends to happen less nowadays, given that the superpowers are willing to intervene to maintain the status quo. But in Bible times that happened often.

Israel came into existence as a nation, with its own land and national structure, when the people who had occupied Canaan were overpowered and displaced. But Israel's independence was itself severely limited when bigger and more powerful nations took control of the region. Divided into twelve tribal units and split into two main groups after the time of Solomon, Israel proved to be easy pickings for the Assyrians and the Babylonians who captured the little nations of Israel and Judah.

Both went into exile for a prolonged period and when a Jewish nation was re-established in Persian times, it was never an independent entity. When they were part of a Persian province they were closely controlled. And when Alexander's Greek empire swallowed them up, the Jews were subject to Greek control and a Hellenising influ-

ence that saw amphitheatres, Greek games and Greek customs threatening to take over Jewish society.

Roman times were equally complicated for the Jews, when very close military control was exercised to keep the nation in order. There was a Roman governor in Caesarea and Roman taxes to pay. The frequent riots and rebellions by the Jews were an expression of national frustration as they were always hoping for deliverance by God. Eventually there was an all-out Jewish rebellion against Roman control and the resulting military response led to the complete destruction of the Jewish state.

Switched Off

Many people died in AD 70 when Jerusalem was captured by the Romans and Jewish resistance was finally broken. Death is the ultimate power-cut so far as humans are concerned. We are all empowered by God with the gift of life and can do nothing about it when that life is withdrawn.

From the very beginning the Bible describes the force that empowers us as “*the breath of life*” (Genesis 1:20 ESV; 2:7) and explains that it is the same life force which is given by God to beasts as well as to humans.

If that life force was withdrawn, we would all just cease to exist. As one wise man explained:

If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust (Job 34:14–15).

We sometimes talk about someone who has died by saying that they have taken their last breath, and that is a Scriptural way of thinking about what has happened. As the Psalmist says:

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish (Psalm 146:3–4 KJV).

A more modern translation uses the expression “*his spirit departs, he returns to his earth*” (NKJV), but the thought is the same. For the life force we enjoy as a gift from God is also known as “*the spirit of God*” (Job 33:4), for it is God’s spirit (God’s power) that energises us.

Powered Up

It is no good waiting until we lose our life before appreciating what we have been given. It will be too late then. Now is the time to appreciate it and understand that God wants to give us even more. He wants to confer the gift of everlasting life on all those people who really want it.

The apostle Paul puts the issue succinctly in one of his letters when he explains that we die because of sin, but that we can have our sins forgiven because of what God has done for us, by sending His Son to die to save sinners. If we believe the gospel and are baptised into the saving name of Jesus Christ, we can be saved; but it is a life and death choice. In the apostle’s words, when we are baptized into Christ and are thus united with him, we change our allegiance:

*Now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 6:22–23).*

Editor

Abraham, a Promise, and You

The early chapters of Genesis have a particular structure in that often a summary is given, and those preliminary details are then expanded and developed in the following chapters. For example, the opening verse of the Bible tells us that “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). The next two chapters explain how that happened, stage by developing stage.

In the opening ten chapters of the Bible we see a rapid deterioration in the history of mankind. It begins pristine and peaceful and goes rapidly downhill, but there is another feature too.

Throughout that decline, God was always offering a choice, by inviting people to live as He asks, rather than to follow mankind downhill to destruction.

Two Families

From the time that Adam and Eve broke God’s law and were banished from the Garden of Eden mankind was divided into two camps. There were those who tried to do as God asked – known as the “sons of God” – and those who rebelled against everything that was right and good – known in Scripture as the “sons of man”.

The choice, whether to keep God’s law or to defy it, was first seen in the Garden when just one commandment existed (not to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree). Thereafter the choice was to be found in all sorts of different situations over the years. At a time of worldwide wickedness, we are told that:

the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5).

Yet we find that Noah and his family obeyed God and built an ark, in which they survived the destruction of an entire civilisation.

Despite the world being remade at that time, when the flood had abated, mankind continued in its rebellious ways and built a tower – the Tower of Babel – which was another act of defiance and human aggrandisement. God demolished that construction and demonstrated His superiority once again.



But was there anyone who would respond to His calling and establish a faithful family who would walk with Him?

God called Abraham

As the twelfth chapter of Genesis opens, Abraham has been invited by God to form that very family – a family who would believe God and respond to His invitation – and this is what God offered Abraham:

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family 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” (Genesis 12:1–3).

Note the details of the promise:

- ✓ a land;
- ✓ nations (Jews AND Arabs – apart from the Jews, there are about 100 million Arabs in the Middle East at this time);
- ✓ Abraham’s name to be great; and
- ✓ Blessings and curses on those who bless or curse Abraham’s seed

New Testament Exposition

This turns out to be a foundation promise of God’s dealings with mankind, important for the Semitic

people (Jews and Arabs) but important too for all mankind – Jew and Gentile alike. For the promise said that in Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- ❖ HOW was that blessing to come about?
- ❖ WHAT exactly was the blessing?

If you look out in your Bible reading for the key word “blessing,” watch to see how often it relates back to the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. And notice how the inspired writers of the New Testament explain and amplify just what was involved. Here is what the apostle Peter had to say in the streets of Jerusalem, in the aftermath of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus:

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).

This tells us clearly that the blessing God promised Abraham is nothing less than the forgiveness of sins, made possible by all that Jesus did for mankind, including his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

Apostolic Preaching

Now here’s the apostle Paul, preaching in a synagogue in Asia Minor:

We declare to you glad tidings— that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today



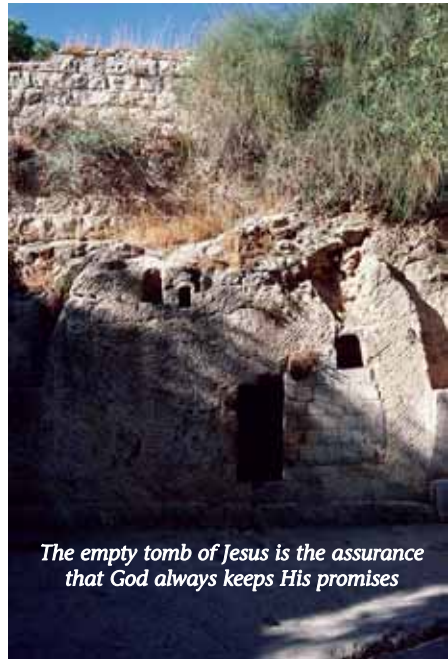
I have begotten you.’ And that He raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption.’ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:32–38).

Paul was speaking about the promises that God had made to the fathers of the Jewish people (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and saw those promises accomplished in what Jesus had achieved for mankind. Now the blessing that was available was “the forgiveness of sins”. This was to come through the descendant of Abraham – the Lord Jesus. Read the whole passage, but note in particular verses 32, 33 and 38.

For all Nations

In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul cites the experience of two great men of faith – Abraham and King David – and once again his theme is the forgiveness of sins.

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is



The empty tomb of Jesus is the assurance that God always keeps His promises

accounted for righteousness, 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” (Romans 4:1–8).

Note the references to “blessedness” (v.6) and “blessed” (v.7 and v.8), and “blessedness” again in v.9 – all pointing us back to the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”. Note especially verse 7:

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED.

This is the promise made to Abraham which, as verses 16 and 17 explain, is sure to ALL Abraham’s seed; not just to the Jews, the natural seed

of Abraham, but “to all the seed”, just as God had said. It was to be a blessing for all nations. So not only are the Jews the descendants or seed of Abraham; so are all who show the faith and ready obedience shown by Abraham.

Letter to Galatia

This is further explained in Paul’s letter to the Galatians when he says this about those who are to be counted as Abraham’s descendants – his “seed”:

Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles 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. ... Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. (Galatians 3:6–16).

And later, he says this:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is



Belief and Baptism are the two ways in which we can become members of God’s family.

neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26–29).

The Promise

The promise of the Spirit, referred to in verse 14, is the promise that we have been considering – the promise contained in the Holy Spirit word in Genesis chapter 12 – namely the forgiveness of sins. It comes, says the apostle, to those who share the faith of Abraham and who are baptised in association with the Lord Jesus – the man who was Abraham’s Seed. For the promise of forgiveness of sins comes to mankind because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of eternal life in him.

It is amazing to think that when God made that fantastic promise to Abraham so long ago, He also had you and me in mind. It only remains for us to take advantage of this great privilege and seek the forgiveness of our sins by coming to Jesus in faith and through baptism.

Hamilton Wilson

Do We Face Oblivion?

*If you are of a pessimistic nature, you might think that “We came from oblivion and as sure as night follows day, after our relatively short period of conscious existence, we shall return to oblivion”. But is that really the case or is there a better alternative? That is the topic **Grahame Cooper** now explores.*

Life and Death

There was a time when we didn't exist, when we had no consciousness, with neither feelings nor thoughts. That was the time before we were born. We came from there – from oblivion – and came into existence because God confers the gift of life upon everyone, whether we recognise it or not.



And we know, all through our lives, that there will come a time when we will cease to be, because we have seen what happens to colleagues, relatives and friends. Their life has ceased to exist, but have they returned to oblivion or have they any other prospect of continuing to exist, perhaps in a better place? To find out we need to consult the Bible, for that is our guide in all things that have to do with God and His gracious purpose.

Here are some Bible verses which explain that death is the cessation of existence:

For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 9:5–6).

They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish (Isaiah 26:14).

For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave. I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand (Psalm 88:3–5).

Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:4–5).

The Message Distorted

If your reaction to those passages is to dismiss them because they are from the Old Testament, not the New, it is well to remember that modern thinking about life after death has been adversely affected by the influence of Greek philosophy. In the four hundred

years between the two Testaments, when Israel was ruled over by Persian and then Greek Empires, their belief systems were distorted by much fanciful thinking about automatic immortality.

That same thinking has affected much of church teaching and understanding, so that today many people assume that we have an inherent ability to continue living in heaven after we die, or might end up in Hell if we are unfortunate, though at funerals everybody is given the benefit of the doubt! Again, the question we should be asking is: “What does the New Testament teach about life after death?”

New Testament Death

The first thing to note is that the Lord Jesus Christ, no less, said this about heaven:

No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13).

Jesus had originated in heaven, as part of His Father’s rescue plan for mankind, but there is never any indication that other humans have migrated there after death. Jesus expressly denies that! His emphasis is clearly upon this life and the way we use our God-given opportunity, for God offers us the prospect of eternal life and Jesus died to make that possible for us, if we choose to obey God and respond to that offer now:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting

life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:14–18).

A New Testament Example

When Jesus’ friend Lazarus had died, he told his disciples: “*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.*” The disciples thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was having natural sleep but; “*Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead’*” (John 11:11–14). When Jesus arrived in Bethany, near Jerusalem, his dear friend had been dead four days (11:17) and his two sisters – Martha and Mary – both said “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died...*”

Jesus did not say that Lazarus was now in a better place, or seek to comfort them by suggesting that he was now being looked after by the angels in heaven. Instead he said quite simply:

“Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:23–25).

That was a remarkable statement but Jesus then proceeded to show that it was no false claim. Proceeding to the tomb where Lazarus had been interred, he told the mourners to “Take away the stone” and they did so despite the protestations that Lazarus had been dead four days and his body

would have started to corrupt. Notice how Jesus was a complete master of the situation:

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. And I know that You always hear me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent me." Now when he had said these things, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:40-44).

This miracle showed forth the glory of God to all those who witnessed it and invited everyone to believe that God had sent him. Jesus is the key to both resurrection and eternal life.

Not the Whole Story

Death awaits us at the end of our life and we will all then be laid to rest in an unconscious state. If we are never awakened, and that will be the fate for some people, it means a return to the oblivion from which we came. But it doesn't have to be like that, as we are told in the Word of God.

If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we believe in the saving work of his death on the cross and obey his Commandments in our lives, then, although we die and return to the dust of the earth, resurrection is promised to those who have heard, understood and responded to the gospel message.

It was the prophet Daniel who said this:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2).

This verse tells us clearly that there is going to be a day of judgement as well as a day of resurrection. Some will sleep on forever – in oblivion – but “many” shall awake to see the Lord Jesus in his glory.

Covered by Christ

Jesus once told a parable about the judgement to come known as the parable of the Wedding Feast. Read it in Matthew 22:1-14 and you will see that we can only be admitted into the joy of the Lord (as resurrection bliss is called) provided we are covered by Christ's righteousness.

In the parable this covering is depicted as a “wedding garment”. In reality, it means that only through Christ can our sins be forgiven and we can be counted as righteous before God, when we believe in him and are baptized into his saving name.

Those who are rejected – who experience “weeping and gnashing of teeth” are those who return to oblivion having glanced what they might have experienced had they lived differently.

It is, therefore, a very wise thing to use the time we have upon this earth by seeking to obey God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, so that we will not end up in oblivion forever, but might be raised from the dead and be granted the enormous privilege of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus returns to earth, he will usher in a time of great blessing and then the life that God means us to enjoy will really begin.

Grahame A Cooper

A Miracle at Lystra

Moving on from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas came first to Iconium and then moved on to Lystra. Here they were confronted with a man who could not use his feet, having been crippled from birth. It was not unlike the situation which faced the apostles Peter and John when they went in to the Temple in Jerusalem not long after the day of Pentecost.

Marvellous Happenings!

The crippled man listened to Paul as he preached and Paul must have sensed that he had some faith, so when Paul said: “*Stand up straight on your feet!*” he leaped and walked (Acts 14:10). Unfortunately the crowd who were watching jumped to the wrong conclusion.

They assumed that this miracle showed that Paul was one of the pagan gods they worshipped, gods that were really just idols of wood and stone. They gave Paul and Barnabas no chance to explain but exclaimed: “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Not only so but they gave them names, calling Barnabas Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, Hermes or Mercury.

Events clearly moved at a great pace, for the priest of Zeus wanted to begin a sacrifice, something which Barnabas and Paul just could not allow. Something dramatic had to be done, so they rushed in to the crowd, having torn their garments and shouted to all:

Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature

as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:15–17).

This is a very short speech, but like many others recorded in the book of Acts it is probably a brief summary of what was actually said. What is perhaps even more surprising, in view of the urgency of the situation is the number of Old Testament allusions which are to be found in what Paul and Barnabas said. A Bible with marginal references will quickly show just how many there are, and some New Testament writings which also allude to what was said, or which cover the same ground.

Scriptural References

Look for a moment at the Old Testament passages which seem to be referred to, all of which show how Paul’s thinking was strongly coloured by the Jewish Scriptures:

They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation. (Deuteronomy 32:21).

Are there any among the idols of the

nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are You not He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait for You, since You have made all these (Jeremiah 14:22).

Both these passages seem to be the background to verse 15, with others coming in verses 16 and 17. Clearly both Paul and Barnabas were full of the Old Testament, all the Bible they had at that time. A few minutes checking through some of the other references given will show that they had so much more in their minds.

Quietly the writer of the Acts, Luke, is telling us that men like Paul and Barnabas, as Peter and John had shown earlier, knew their Bible well. In this they were like the Lord Jesus, who when confronted with acute temptation used his knowledge of the Bible to help him resist.

Human Nature!

There is a sad postscript to this episode which reminds us of what people are like if they are not inclined to learn from God's Word the Bible. One minute the apostles had difficulty persuading the inhabitants of Lystra not to sacrifice to them, but then things took a very different turn.

Jews from the nearby towns of Antioch and Iconium arrived in Lystra, to try and persuade them not to listen to the apostles, for they clearly feared that the Christian faith would reduce the influence of the Jewish religion. Would they be listened to, given that the people of Lystra had seen such a marvellous miracle performed? Here's the inspired record:



Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. (Acts 14:19–20).

What a sad commentary on the fickleness of human nature and yet on the courage and commitment of the apostles as they proceeded to preach the gospel of salvation, despite these setbacks. How much we should appreciate what has been done to make that gospel available to us today, if we will receive it.

Mark Sheppard

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God's Plan for the Earth

God plans to make the earth a place of peace and praise to Him forever, and the Bible is all about that plan – from beginning to end. This is how it starts:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep (Genesis 1:1-2).

Then, in simple language, the Book of Genesis proceeds to tell us that stage-by-stage the earth was made habitable and then filled with living things. First came light, so there was day and night; next the clouds lifted and there was sea and sky; then good dry ground.

Next God produced plants and trees and introduced the sunshine that they all need; then came fish, birds and animals; and finally “*on the sixth day*” man was created and introduced to all the other wonders that God had made. At each stage of the creative process we are told that “*God saw that it was good*”, so it is clear that He had a definite plan in mind from the very beginning.

God's Special Creation

Unlike the animals, man was made with the ability to consciously try to please his Maker. Genesis expresses that facility in these words:

God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

Adam and Eve – the first created couple – were to be fruitful and exercise control over the earth. In this way they would manage the earth for God but sadly, as we shall see in a later article, they satisfied their own desires instead. The outcome was that mankind and the earth came under a curse. Years later, both Adam and Eve died and so have all their descendants ever since.

A Three-fold Promise

God asks men and women to co-operate with Him. When they refuse to do so, His plans are delayed, but they are never thwarted or destroyed. God has a plan which will succeed, come what may.

❖ Israel's refusal

At the very beginning of the Jewish nation, the people whom God had chosen refused to go into the land that had been promised to their fathers. That was a setback, but God said that His purpose was still firm. He expressed His determination thus:

“But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord (Numbers 14:21).

❖ Israel's rebellion

Hundreds of years later (about 700 BC), the Jewish nation disobeyed God again. So God sent the Assyrian army to take the northern part of the nation into captivity. But God's plans stayed in place. He repeated His promise, saying through the prophet that the time would indeed come when:

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

❖ Israel's further rebellion

A century later this pattern was repeated. The sins of the Jews who had been left in the south of the country became so bad that the Babylonian army took them into captivity. Yet again this assurance was given, this time in an even fuller form:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

God's Coming Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is the term used in the Bible to describe the time when a King sent by God will rule world-wide and will establish both peace and justice on earth. Jesus is the Coming King and the Kingdom will be established when he returns.

That 11th chapter of Isaiah starts with a promise that someone very special will come to fulfil this promise of a world-wide kingdom.

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth (Isaiah 11:1-4).

Jesus is described as “a Rod from the stem of Jesse” because Jesse was the father of King David, who set up the kingdom of God in Israel during Old Testament times. The promise was that one day a descendant of David would be born, who would make God's long-term plans come true. Sure enough, one thousand years after King David, the time came for that special child to be born, and before his birth his mother was told:

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:31-33).

The Lord's Prayer

Now we can see why Jesus, when he began teaching, told his followers to pray in these terms:

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).

When God's promised king reigns as King of the world, at last Creation will have accomplished its intended destiny and will give Glory to its Creator. Jesus wanted that time to come and we should all make it the subject of our earnest prayers. God always keeps His promises and we must believe in what He has said if we are to share in the great things that are coming when Jesus returns as King.

John Woodall

The Invasion from the North

We have previously considered the prophecy of Ezekiel, chapters 36 and 37, which foretell Israel's regathering to the land of their fathers and their resurrection as a nation. This was the time when the dry bones came together and a nation was reborn, against all expectation. With the return of the Jews to found the reborn nation of Israel that prophecy has begun to come true, despite it having been given over 2,500 years ago.

Fertile and Fruitful

These chapters also speak of a time of prosperity that will come upon the nation following their repentance, when God's Spirit is in them and their king is at last reigning over them.

Thus says the Lord God:
"On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited'" (Ezekiel 36:33–35).

But although everything will then appear to be prosperous and secure, the prophecy continues, in chapters 38 and 39, to describe a massive invasion force that will come upon

Israel from the north, in the latter days. A confederacy of enemies will come, only to be destroyed by God upon the mountains of Israel.

Timing?

It is open to interpretation whether or not these chapters follow on chronologically from the previous two, and therefore refer to the time after the Lord's return, or to the time immediately prior to his return.

In this article we will just consider some of the things the record says about the event itself, without going too much into which nations are involved and the timing of the invasion.

Confederacy

Ezekiel 38 opens with a description of the confederacy of nations which will comprise the invasion force, seemingly under the control of one nation which will be a guard to the others. It uses ancient names for the nations involved, for this is a prophecy that was given a long time ago:

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling

swords. *Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you. “Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them” (Ezekiel 38:1–7).*

It is an interesting exercise to try and work out the modern day equivalents, some of which are quite straightforward. One powerful geographical pointer is given in that the house of Togarmah is described as coming: “from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you”, and that must be from the far north of the land of Israel.

Motivation?

The reason why the confederacy decides to invade is then considered, although it is clear from the passage

we have just considered that it is God who brings them down upon the mountains of Israel:

Thus says the Lord God: “On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’— to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land” (Ezekiel 38:10–12).

This description of a people who are dwelling securely in the land doesn't currently seem to describe the nation of Israel but, as we know, circumstances can change quickly. They



would, however, most definitely apply to a nation becoming prosperous under the reign of its king. Whatever the case, Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy these words:

Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord God: "On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know it? Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes" (Ezekiel 38:14–16).

The Outcome?

The invasion will not succeed for God will once again fight for His people as He did in the day of battle. And when God enters the fray nothing that His enemies can do will be of any consequence:

"I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord God. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 38:21–23).

Summary

All the events of chapter 38 are briefly summarised in the opening verses of chapter 39.

And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken," says the Lord God. "And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the Lord. So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel" (Ezekiel 39:1–7).

It is, and always has been, a fruitless exercise to fight against the living God. The rest of chapter 39 goes on to describe the aftermath and to emphasise again how the nations will know that it has all been the work of God. Whatever has happened to Israel has been God's doing. It is He who caused Israel to be scattered, and it is He who has brought them back to their own land, and it is He who will not hide His face from them anymore but will, rather, pour out His spirit upon them.

John Shepley

Bringing up Children

The Bible gives practical and helpful guidance about bringing up children and it is to be a two-way thing. Children have to do their part and parents have to act appropriately, if they are to live together harmoniously and happily before God.

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord (Colossians 3:20).

Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Clearly we see that there has to be discipline in a godly family, and that it must stem from the head of the family. It must be loving discipline, where necessary, not a matter of parental whims and fancies.

Godly Guidance

Moses counselled the Israelites to bring up their offspring with guidance in godly ways and especially to listen to what God has said in His Word. That Word was to be in their hearts (Deut 6:6). It was not to be listened to in a mechanical way, but was to be lived out daily, when it would keep them in the right way.

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Common sense says that they were not to be speaking God's Word every minute of every day, but it would teach them to know the will of God.

He wanted parents to instil in their children the same love that God showed to them. Solomon said this:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Children can be so different, the one from the other. But wise parents will know how to treat each one, to give them the comfort of knowing that God loves them.

Today's World

We cannot leave today's children without guidance, especially now that things have changed so much. Neither should our children get their moral teaching just from Sunday School, or from religious education at school (when it is still given).

They should learn about God and His gracious purpose in a loving and moral atmosphere at home. Parents and grandparents have to instruct and guide and not allow children to do just as they wish.

Children need boundaries, however irksome it may seem to them. In the long term they will see the benefit. They might find it difficult at times, but a home without direction is an unhappy home. The husband must be the head of the family, and the mother the wise one who brings much guidance and tender loving care.

What finer tribute could we give our heavenly Father, than to have all the family honouring Him? What a joy for them and for us to hear joyful words of welcome which will mean that we are united in God's family forever.

Ken Clark

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Christadelphian Bible Mission,
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B28 8SZ, UK *requests@cbm.org.uk*

The Americas

CBMA, 19111 Kinsie Street,
Northridge, California, USA, 91324
ksommerville@unitedagencies.com

Caribbean

CBMC, Box 55541, Unit 119, 15280,
101 Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada,
V3R 0J7 *philsnobelen@shaw.ca*

India

T Galbraith, GPO Box 159,
Hyderabad, 5000001, India

South and East Asia

ACBM, PO Box 42, Wallacia, NSW
2745, Australia
coelmada@ozemail.com.au

Local Information