

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1557



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Paradise – On Earth or in Heaven? – page 10
Treasure in Heaven – page 16

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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.

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What a Bird!

Visitors to the Northenden Riverside Park in Manchester are likely to marvel at the heron situated on the banks of the River Mersey. It is never likely to swoop down to seize a passing fish, of course, for this heron was created by Philip Bews who made it from recycled metal. It is a marvel of ingenuity and creativity, but, alas, it cannot fly.

Creativity

Throughout the world there are sculpture parks, museums, galleries and private homes where works of art are displayed and widely admired. Sculptures and paintings sell for millions of pounds. Even an object like a 14-foot long tiger shark floating in formaldehyde in a glass case is regarded by some as a work of art, being sold for millions of dollars, even though the original shark deteriorated and had to be replaced.

All through history people have admired the things that others have made. Whether you gaze at Michelangelo's huge sculpture of David, or Rodin's many sculptures of 'The Thinker', you are seeing more than the artwork itself. You can see for yourself the evidence of the artist's creativity.

Imagery

The worship of things has a long history. In the Bible such things are called idols and they are condemned because people who worship them believe they have supernatural power. Aaron and the people made a golden calf while Moses was away being instructed by the angels of God. They had come from Egypt where statues and pictures dominated the religious

scene, the remains of many of which can still be seen. The God who guided them away from slavery to freedom was not seen nor depicted in any way. All they saw was a cloud that went ahead and the prophet Moses who acted as their go-between with God. So when Moses was absent for nearly seven weeks they demanded some other visible presence. The telling thing is what Aaron said when the sculpture of the calf was finished:

He received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a moulded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4).

It was a calf – a sculpture or an image. It was lifeless and powerless. They had made it, but now they offered sacrifices, worshipped before it and attributed it with the power to deliver them from lifelong bondage in Egypt! How pathetic and how deserving they were of the anger that Moses showed and the judgment that fell upon them because of their unrestrained behaviour, as they abandoned their God-given laws.

Blindness

They were looking at one thing but were not seeing it. It was a sculpture, but they had adorned it with supernatural power and that simple act had freed them of God's control and any restraint imposed by His laws. One of those laws forbade making any visible representation of His person:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of any-



thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exodus 20:4).

Yet all through Israel's history, right up to the time when they were forcibly removed from their land and exiled in Babylon, they fought against this prohibition. Idolatry remained their constant attraction. For they preferred to worship things they could see rather than the worship of the one true God whom they could not see. They chose to adore lifeless things rather than the living God. Man-made creations were regarded as superior to the One who had made mankind. It is no wonder that the prophets pleaded with them and denounced them in equal measure:

Where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, If they can save you in the time of your trouble; for according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah (Jeremiah 2:28).

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell ... Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them. O Israel, trust

in the Lord; He is their help and their shield (Psalm 115:4-9).

Covetousness

The worship of idols fell out of fashion in Israel after their return from Babylon, following the establishment of the Persian Empire. Perhaps they had seen so many things in exile that thereafter they wanted money, power, position, influence and man-made goods. By New Testament times the warnings given by Jesus and his apostles were about putting one's trust in earthly things, not true heavenly values, and the apostle Paul could sum up the danger in this way:

Put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Today people covet many things that they do not really need. That is how a consumer-driven materialistic society functions. And we only see what we want to see. We marvel at a heron made from metal, but do we marvel much more at the actual creature, which can fly and fish? We admire the creator of such artworks, and rightly so. But do we worship the Creator of the sculptor, who is our Creator too?

We certainly should.

Editor



Jesus and the Miracle of Creation

The very first recorded miracle of Jesus was that of changing water into wine for the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. You can read about it in John Chapter 2. The wine was approved as being very good. It was not a substitute ; it was the real thing, and it had been produced instantly.



The production of wine by the natural processes of fermentation of the juice of grapes which have drawn their water from the soil via the roots of the vine, is a long slow journey – from water to wine. The wine that Jesus produced bypassed all those natural processes, and the essential human supervision, yet was a mature delicious wine with every appearance of age. The master of ceremonies assumed that it had been somehow “kept until now” (John 2:10).

Instant Transformation

Another well-known miracle of Jesus was that of the feeding of the 4,000 (and later of the 5,000), in which both a processed cereal food (the bread) and fish (presumably already-cooked) were produced instantly, in quantities sufficient to satisfy a multitude and still have some left over. The additional supply of loaves and fishes were

created instantly with every appearance of age. The hours of grinding the flour and baking the bread were bypassed in the miraculous making of a great quantity of acceptable food in a moment of time.

A miracle of Jesus of a different kind that stirred up the religious opposition to fever pitch was the resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany. In this case a rotting corpse was transformed instantly into a living man.

Unlike the two previous miracles of resurrection – when two newly-deceased young people had been brought to life – Lazarus had been dead four days and the evidence of putrefaction was there:

Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to him, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days” (John 11:39).

Was this miracle so very different from the miracle of the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth? In both events the power of the spirit of



God was shown to be able to perform the miracle instantly, without any recourse to the usual processes of nature.

Creative Touch

When Adam was created, he also was given sight by the same power that gave sight to this man, the power of the spirit of God. Is it unreasonable therefore to perceive that the creation of the heavens and the earth, the sea and all things therein was the instant creation of a mature earth, a mature sea, mature trees and plants yielding seed, and innumerable forms of life, each able to reproduce its own life form?

Just as slow natural processes, as seen and known to us, were bypassed by the miracles of Jesus, so they were not necessary for Creation in the first place. The same power that Jesus possessed without measure was the power that had created a mature environment for life on earth and finally for the man and woman God created.

New-Made World

The Genesis account of creation does not say that God created seeds capable of becoming trees and plants, nor does it say that God created eggs capable of hatching chicks. The old question of the sceptics: “Which came

first, the chicken or the egg?” is answered emphatically in Genesis Chapter One. The account of creation is quite explicit that God created all living things “*after their kind*”. Indeed this statement is repeated ten times, in case anyone should be in doubt. This must mean that all forms of life were created with an appearance of age, even though they had only just been formed.

It has been alleged that if God created life with an appearance of age, this would make him a deceiver. In reply to such critics it must be pointed out that since God has clearly recorded what He did at Creation in His Word, the Bible, there is no deception. The account in Genesis is clearly and distinctly set out, just as in the gospels the instantaneous miracles of Jesus are clearly stated. Was Jesus a deceiver when he changed the water into wine? Or was he a benefactor? Was Jesus a deceiver when he raised Lazarus from the death state to a renewal of life with his sisters? Or was he a benefactor? In each case, did he not make them glad?

The first chapter of Genesis is an account in everyday language that can be understood by ordinary people. The power that created all life was the power of God. The Creator spoke and it was done. Moreover the Creator saw that it was done and proceeded to inspire the written record. As if there could be any doubt, the Creation account is encapsulated and confirmed by these words of the Almighty when giving the divine law to Israel:

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them (Exodus 20:11).

John V. Collyer



Paul's Missionary Journeys

Barnabas came from the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea, so this was a good place to begin, as Paul and Barnabas set off on the First Missionary Journey. From Acts chapter 13 to the end of Luke's account (chapter 28) we follow the apostle and his companions on three missionary journeys and then on an action-packed journey to Rome.



They could not stomach the idea that God's promised King would die like a criminal. But many Gentiles in the audience were impressed, and a week later a huge crowd gathered to hear Paul teach. Many of them became believers. The results of the first campaign were beginning to flow in.

Jewish Reaction

They took a ship across to Salamis, the capital, and worked their way through the island. Luke notes a major triumph – the conversion of the Roman Governor, Sergius Paulus. Then the two preachers crossed to the mainland and trudged up into the mountains of Galatia. It is possible Paul became ill at this time, because when writing later to the Galatian Christians he reminds them:

You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first (Galatians 4:13).

Paul at Antioch

In any event, he still managed to give a stirring speech in the Synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, rather like Peter's on the Day of Pentecost, where he picked out key Old Testament prophecies that foretold how the Messiah must die and rise again in order to bring salvation from sins. This was unpalatable to his Jewish listeners.

The Jewish leaders at Antioch reacted by stirring up trouble for Paul amongst the rulers of the city. He was forced to move on further east to Iconium and Lystra. At Lystra he was nearly killed. He had just started to preach there, when the Jews from Antioch came after him and had him publicly stoned, leaving him close to death. Thankfully he revived and resumed his journeys, moving on to Derbe, where he was unmolested, before bravely returning to the cities where he had been persecuted to strengthen the new disciples of Jesus. He made friends for the rest of his life on this first trip to Galatia, including young Timothy, who was to become his right-hand man.

There were consequences from Paul's success. The Christians in Jerusalem, many of whom were still keeping the Law of Moses, were getting cold feet about this preaching to Gentiles. They wanted them, too, to be circumcised and keep the commandments. Some came to Galatia,

and Paul had to write a strongly worded letter to the Galatians to warn them not to listen to these men. Eventually it was decided to hold a conference in Jerusalem to decide what should be done. This is described in Acts chapter 15.

When the audience heard Paul's report of the amazing response he had had, and Peter and James, their trusted leaders, added their approval to Paul's work, it was agreed to write an official letter to the Gentile believers. This said they need not keep the Law, but it would be helpful if they could avoid actions which would particularly upset Jews, like eating meat which came from sacrifices to heathen gods, or blood products. Paul could breathe again. If the decision had gone against him, Christianity would have remained a branch of Judaism. Now he could press on into the Roman world.

Back to Galatia

The Second Missionary journey began with a return to Galatia, after which the Apostle was guided by the Spirit to move across into Europe, via Philippi, a major city in the north of Greece.

Having established a community of believers there, the group of missionaries then turned south through the Roman province of Macedonia to



Athens, the capital of Greece. Paul's formula was to stay in a city as long as he could, but to move on when persecution became intolerable. We have to admire the sheer courage of this great man, who endured prison, beatings, robbers, shipwrecks and thousands of miles of foot slogging along dusty roads to bring the good news to yet more eager ears.

He made it a practice not to accept money from his listeners. This meant he had to pay his way by manual work as a tent maker, a craft which he had learned as a young man. Paul's preaching was done in his spare time, and all the time he was looking over his shoulder, avoiding his enemies.

The philosophers of Athens were unimpressed by Paul's attempts to persuade them that Jesus had come back from the dead, but he found a ready audience further south in the bustling port of Corinth. Here he stayed for eighteen months before returning to his base at Antioch in Syria.

Paul at Ephesus

The Third Journey took Paul back to Galatia, and then on to Ephesus, a vast city near the west coast of modern Turkey. Here he spent a total of three years. As was his custom, he began by visiting the synagogue – the Jews must be given the first chance to hear the gospel. Only when their leaders became hostile did he move on to address the Gentile population. So many Ephesians became believers that he caused a noticeable drop in the number of pilgrims buying souvenirs from the Temple of Artemis (Diana of the Ephesians). That hurt the pockets of the silversmiths, and they banded together to make a public protest. They dragged Paul's compan-



ions into the theatre – a huge public space, the ruins of which can still be visited today. Here they were rescued by the Town Clerk, who tactfully dismissed the rioting crowd, but Paul was forced to move on to Greece. Here he had previously arranged to make a collection of money from the believers there to help the poorer Christians in Jerusalem, a token of their love, their solidarity and their practical support.

Back to Jerusalem

This plan went forward, interrupted (as we have come to expect) by an attempt by the Jews to assassinate Paul on board ship, which forced him to travel overland instead, up through Macedonia to Philippi. On his way back to Jerusalem he said goodbye to his friends in Turkey, because he now intended to move on further west to Italy and Spain. But life is unpredictable, and his great scheme fell apart.

When the Apostle came to Jerusalem and handed over the money he had gathered together, he visited the Temple several times. By an unfortunate coincidence he was recognised there by some of his enemies, Jews from the province of Asia who were also visiting the city. They stirred up a riot, in which he was badly beaten, and rescued only by the intervention of the

Roman tribune in charge of the Temple area.

In Prison

This was the beginning of a long, frustrating period in Paul's life. He spent the next three years in jail, waiting for a proper trial. At the end of this time he was forced to use his right as a Roman citizen (his father was a citizen and he inherited this privilege) to appeal to have his case heard by the Emperor in Rome. The dramatic story of his voyage there as a prisoner, in the company of faithful Luke, occupies the 27th chapter of Acts. Their ship was wrecked on the island of Malta, but he survived, and the following spring came to Rome, to be detained for two more weary years in the long queue for Roman justice.

Luke ends his account at this point. However, we can work out from the letters he wrote that Paul was eventually freed (there was no sound case against him). For a few more years he was able to resume his travels, until the Emperor Nero turned against the Christians, and he was brought back to Rome to be sentenced to death.

The years of confinement, miserable though they were to a man who had spent much of his life on the open road, were highly productive. Even in prison, Paul was not a man to sit in a corner and sulk. Unable to visit his friends, he wrote long and detailed letters to them, some of which have been preserved in our New Testament. Through them the principles and doctrines of the First Century Christian community have been recorded for our benefit. So Paul's work goes on, in us.

David M Pearce

Paradise – On Earth or in Heaven?

Jesus had a few words with the thief who was crucified alongside him, as recorded in Luke 23. It ended with the Lord saying: "... you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The essential issue is: *Where will the righteous be rewarded?* And, to a lesser extent: *When?* So it is a limited Scriptural teaching which is being considered in this short article. It is not the aim to discover what makes a person righteous in God's sight, simply where are they to be rewarded – in heaven, or on earth?

Search the Scriptures

A valuable method of Bible study on essential matters would seem to be; examine simple, clear, unambiguous passages and use them as a basis. This is what we are now about to do.

Firstly, we are told where the righteous will NOT be rewarded. Look at the following clear statement:

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).

So, subsequent to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle John can record that NO ONE HAS ASCENDED TO HEAVEN. There was, by the time of writing, one exception – the Lord Jesus – and the writer is careful to include that in the record. (He was, of course, writing under inspiration and therefore the words are accurate.) The teaching of that passage is clear. Other

people who had died had not gone to heaven, however good they might have been.

The same teaching is found in the Book of Acts when the apostle Peter says this about David the good king of Israel. He was a man described by God as "a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22), yet this is what the apostle Peter said:

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand'" (Acts 2:34).

So, although he was righteous, yet David did not ascend to heaven but was (and remains) in the grave until the resurrection of the dead, as the apostle Paul later affirms (Acts 13:36).

What Then?

If people who have died are not in heaven, where are they? A clear Bible principle is established in one of the Psalms:

The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men (Psalm 115:16).



This is a wonderful promise; that this beautiful earth, at an appointed time, will be taken from man's misrule and, under God's control, will be given to mankind. This is in perfect accord with the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

These well-known words of the Lord's Prayer teach his disciples to pray for the time when God's kingdom will again be set up on earth. Do you recall these words of Jesus?

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

(To pursue this further look up the following passages: Psalm 37:9-11; Proverbs 2:21,22; Proverbs 11:31; Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19 and Isaiah 45:18. There are many others.)

God's Coming Kingdom

The gospel as recorded by Matthew makes constant reference to "the kingdom of heaven". That is NOT to say that the kingdom is IN heaven. For the other gospel writers speak of "the kingdom of God" and, when you look carefully, they are seen to be one and the same. In other words, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN = THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Consider the following two passages, each referring to the beginning of the preaching of Jesus after John Baptist was put into prison:

*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).*

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the

*gospel of **the kingdom of God** (Mark 1:14).*

So, the kingdom for which Jesus taught his disciples to pray ("Thy kingdom come") will be the kingdom of heaven, that is, the kingdom of God, established on earth.

Heavenly Reward

Jesus once said:

"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:12).

Since the reward is in heaven there are two possibilities;

- ❶ The righteous go to heaven to receive it. This is already ruled out by statements such as "no one has ascended to heaven".
- ❷ The reward is brought from heaven to earth for the righteous to enjoy on earth, which fits well with "*blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*". Also, see the following two passages:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you** (1 Peter 1:3-4).*

***...when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away** (1 Peter 5:4).*

The reward is to be brought from heaven at the return of Jesus to the earth.

The Thief

What then of the incident recorded in Luke?

One of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed him, saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "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." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

First, notice the man's beliefs. He:

- ❖ Feared God
- ❖ Knew he deserved to die
- ❖ Knew Jesus to be sinless
- ❖ Was waiting for a kingdom
- ❖ Recognised Jesus as its King
- ❖ Believed in resurrection, for although he and Jesus were about to die, yet he says: *"remember me when you come into your kingdom"*.

Paradise

What of the Paradise of which Jesus spoke? The word simply means "a garden or enclosed park". The thief did not ask to go to heaven nor did Jesus reply that he would do so. Indeed heaven is not mentioned in the conversation. Jesus would not have offered an immediate reward, for it was his consistent teaching that the righteous will: *"be repaid at the resurrection of the just"* (Luke 14:14).

Because there is no punctuation in the Greek original, it is possible to translate the words of Jesus like this: *"Assuredly I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise"*. This is a common Bible expression to give emphasis to the words that follow; for example:

I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish (Deuteronomy 8:19).

Moses was not saying you will perish today, but was emphasising his words; "Today I am telling you". This is a manner of speaking often found in Scripture.

So the teaching of the Bible is clear: the righteous do not go to heaven, at death nor at any time. The reward – eternal life - promised by God is to be on earth after the resurrection of the dead.

With this as a basis, it is vital to discover what makes a person righteous so that you too can have this great hope of blessing which God offers. As in all such investigations the same basic rule applies, "search the Scriptures". Find out for yourself the sort of earthly Paradise God has in store for His people.

David Radford

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More about the Devil

One of the reasons why Christadelphians differ from many Christians who study and quote the Bible is that we start at the beginning and let the Bible explain to us what its words mean.

We have seen from Genesis Ch.3 that temptation was put before Adam and Eve by a very unusual snake (or 'serpent') who could think and express his ideas to them. There is no evidence that this creature produced offspring physically, and there are no serpents like that now; but its ideas entered our first parents' minds and produced sin.

By its challenging words the serpent tempted Eve so, in one way, it was the 'father' of sinners. The serpent slandered God by saying that He had bad reasons for giving them His law, saying:

God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

That tendency to doubt God's Word is in all human minds now, but it was something that would never have occurred to Adam and Eve at the time, because of the nature they then possessed.

False Accuser

The word translated 'devil' in the English Bible means 'slanderer' (the act of accusing someone falsely). That helps us to see what Jesus meant when he said to sinful people "*you are of your father the devil*" (John 8:44). In Matthew 23:33 he called them "*serpents, brood of vipers*". Earlier, a prophet called 'John the Baptist', who had introduced Jesus to the nation,

said to some of them "*Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath (God's anger) to come?*" (Matthew 3:7).

That is what human nature does – it slanders God, and fellow-humans too: it is 'the devil'. In some places in English Bibles this Greek word '*diabolos*' is translated 'slanderer', and it would be better if it was always translated 'slanderer' instead of being rendered 'devil'. Some translators make things harder by spelling the word with a capital 'D' – 'the Devil'. This leads people to think that 'the Devil' is the name of a superhuman evil being. But the Greek language used in the Bible did not begin names with capital letters in the way that we do.

Some Examples

Here are some places where the word is used –

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). He was referring to Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.

Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things (1 Timothy 3:11). Here the word "slanderers" is the Greek word *diabolos* elsewhere translated "devils".

...The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things (Titus 2:3). Again, "slanderers" is the Greek word *diabolos*.

New Testament Only

The reason why these quotations are from the New Testament is that the word 'devil' never occurs in the Old Testament! (You can find the word 'devils' in some English translations, but it should be 'demons' – a word describing imaginary gods which were worshipped by nations surrounding Israel.)

For thousands of years God's people were taught about sin, and they were blamed when they sinned, but never were they taught that their sins were due to a superhuman tempter. The reason is obvious. There isn't one – the source of sin is human nature itself.

Satan the Adversary

The word *satan* means 'adversary' or 'opponent' - (someone or something that resists what another wants to do). Again, it would be better if this word 'satan' was always translated. But unlike 'devil', the word 'satan' is found in the Old Testament and the New Testament alike. The serpent had opposed God by saying "*you will not surely die*". It contradicted what God said, so it was a *satan*.

Anyone who resists another's purpose is a *satan*. Jesus called the apostle Peter 'satan' when Peter tried to stop him obeying his Father's will (Matthew 16:23). But unlike the word devil (*'diabolos'*) which always describes something bad, *satans* (opponents) can be either good or bad.

When the false prophet Balaam tried to curse the nation of Israel, "*the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary*" (Hebrew *satan*, Numbers 22:22).

Later, when King Solomon was turning away from the service of the



true God, "*the Lord raised up an adversary (satan) against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite*" (1 Kings 11:14). Another adversary (*satan*) called Rezon is mentioned in verse 23.

It is true though, that most often the word *satan* describes someone who is an opponent or adversary to God and His people. The idea that this tempter is a superhuman being is very common. It is found in Judaism, Islam and many mainstream Christian churches, and people do think that the Bible teaches it.

So, in the next article we will look at some rather special references to 'the devil and *satan*', and see what they really mean. For unless we understand the background behind the Bible chapters that mention 'the Devil', or 'Satan', we are very likely to misunderstand them.

John Woodall

Eyes and Ears

It was King Solomon who told us that old age does not come alone. In his portrait of old people, he says that the eyes grow dim, the ears are muffled, and lots of other faculties are lost. Perhaps it is only when these wonderful faculties begin to fail that we learn to fully appreciate them.

Gifts from God

“He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? (Psalm 94:9).

God, who made us so wonderfully, hears all and sees all. When we look on the marvellous working of the eye how could it have evolved?



In fact Darwin admitted, *“The thoughts of the eye turn me cold.”*

For it had to be perfect first time. Isaac Newton asked, *“Was the eye contrived without skill in optics, and the ear without knowledge of sound?”*

Eye and ear both needed a brilliant Creator.

Open Your Eyes

We should thank God for both, and use them in His service. The Psalmist pleaded:

Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law (Psalm 119:18).

Can we not say the same? He set the example for us. The mighty God is speaking to us through His servant so that we might respond and see the glorious way that He can open to us. There are some though who cannot read, and many learn by constant repetition. It makes no difference whether we read the Word for ourselves or others read it to us. We all can receive that invitation and listen as God requires us to repent and turn to Him.

Seek a Blessing

The Psalmist declared this blessing for people who are inclined towards God and His ways:

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! (Psalm 119:1-2).

He saw the happiness of those who had chosen the way of righteousness and longed to learn more of God’s ways and thus set an example for us. We too can pray that God will bless us in the reading of His law.

Finally we hear the apostle Paul, with great earnestness, say to a younger man,

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13).

It is vital that we do give such attention to God’s Word, so that at the Lord’s coming he may find men and women eager not only to read but to put into practice those things that they have learned throughout their lives.

Ken Clark

Treasure in Heaven

In what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount – the greatest ever uttered – Jesus urged his hearers not to strive for the riches of this world. They can only be possessed for a short time and can easily be lost, and we cannot take them with us, as the apostle Paul explained:

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out (1 Timothy 6:7).

Learning from Jesus

So how should we live, and what should we try to acquire? Here's Paul's advice again:

*Godliness **with contentment** is great gain ... having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:6–8).*

Paul impresses upon Timothy the virtue of contentment and Jesus explains why earthly riches can never give us that:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19–21).

The vital lesson that Jesus was imparting was that:

“no one can serve two masters”.

Then he amplified what he was saying by declaring that:

“You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

Time to Choose

The clear message of Jesus was that we cannot have the best of two worlds. We have to choose either one or the other. For, at the return of Jesus, the faithful dead will be raised in the Resurrection and be rewarded with eternal life on earth.

It will be remembered that just before Jesus performed the wonderful miracle of raising the dead Lazarus to life again he reassured his grieving sister, Martha, with these comforting words,

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live (John 11:25).

In urging his hearers to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” Jesus was telling them to turn to God in repentance so that they could receive the forgiveness of their sins. Paul, in his Letter to the Christian converts at Colossae referred to the “treasures” laid up in heaven for true believers, as he writes:

Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth (Colossians 1:5–6).

The hope of life everlasting in God's Kingdom upon the earth is truly a treasure beyond price!

Written in Heaven

When the seventy disciples appointed

by Jesus to preach the gospel message returned in a happy state of mind having achieved remarkable conversions we can well imagine how elated they must have been at the encouraging words of Jesus when he said to them, “*Rejoice because your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20).

They had proclaimed the great news about the Kingdom of God which is to come on earth and the salvation available to those who put on the saving name of Jesus by belief and baptism and, because of their zealous Christian discipleship, had laid up for themselves “*treasure in heaven.*”

Jesus was saddened by the way that many strove after wealth while neglecting the true meaning of life and the wonderful hope of salvation offered by God. When a man in the crowd appealed to Jesus about his earthly inheritance, Jesus gave this telling answer:

“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses...” (Luke 12:15).

For when Jesus returns, he will rule the world in righteousness and establish peace, as so beautifully portrayed by David, when he says:

...the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Psalm 37:11).

The meek are those who, in humility and reverence, have obeyed the laws of God. They are the ones whose names are written in heaven and whose faithful lives have laid up “treasures” for themselves there.

Love God not Money

It is a sad aspect of life today that

many of the people in the communities among whom we live aim at making as much money as they can and their compulsion is amply catered for. This addiction to the prospect of winning money is widespread in society and sends a wrong signal to young people, persuading them that it is quite all right to get as much as they can without having to work for it. The Apostle Paul addressed some very sobering words to his fellow-worker, Timothy, regarding things to be taught in his preaching of the Christian faith and stressed that:

...the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10).

Jesus appealed to those who thronged him not to set their affections on what could be gained in this life of limited duration, but to give earnest consideration to the vital things that he taught concerning repentance, belief and baptism and in the giving of honour and praise to God in their lives.

The same hope of salvation offered by Jesus Christ to people who saw and heard him so long ago is available to all those of honest heart today who will make the decision to live in accordance with God’s laws – those principles of righteousness and true faith so clearly manifested in all that Jesus said and did. The words of the Saviour convey the promise of eternal life, compared with which all that can be obtained in this brief life pales into insignificance. Remember his words:

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21).

Denis M Elliott

The Last Days

Daniel was God's beloved prophet, writing in the 6th century BC, over 2500 years ago. In his prophecy he predicts many things that have now come to pass, including a detailed resume in his 11th Chapter of the political changes that would occur long after his death. But other things have only just begun to happen, included in these words:

At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book... (Daniel 12:1).

A Sealed Book

The prophet was then commanded to shut up the words of the vision and seal the book until the time of the end; for, he was told:

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase (Daniel 12:4).

Many Bible readers reasonably believe this time has now arrived, a time known otherwise as the Day of the Lord, an expression which includes:

- ❶ matters prior to Christ's coming,
- ❷ his advent, and
- ❸ the things that will then follow.

Without God's Spirit to inspire him, Daniel could never have imagined what it would be like when "*Many shall run to and fro*" and "*knowledge shall increase*". Both of these aspects of life

dominate today's society with people travelling all over the world both for business and for pleasure and when there is an unparalleled increase of knowledge in every sphere of human life. The overriding sign for each one of us lies in the threat of nuclear annihilation and, most recently, in the use of chemical weapons.

Time Up!

"*Time Gentlemen Please!*" was a cry once made by British barkeepers when all the pubs in England closed down at 11pm. It was an order to clear out, a sign that the party was over. This scene will be reenacted on the world stage sometime in the future, so successful has man been in proving that he is not capable of governing himself (Jeremiah 10:23), for the signs in the world strongly indicate that our Creator is about to close shop.

The kingdom of men is destined to give place to the Kingdom of God: the former, the natural dispensation of which we are a part; the latter, God's kingdom established on earth. According to Daniel and many other prophets, it will be a long and painful process. Can we see more signs to jog our response to the call of the gospel message that God sent His son into the world to save the world? Well, don't count on it. We've been given the only sign we're going to get, according to Jesus, who reminds us of the sign of the prophet Jonah, clearly signifying his resurrection (Luke 11:29).

The Lord's Day

Concerning these things we might well be instructed by Paul's inspired writing

to the Thessalonians (ca. 51 AD). This ancient Greek city of over 200,000 was a mixed and bustling society much like our big cities today. Mt. Olympus, home of the Greek gods, was located near this prosperous port where its influence flourished. The pagans cared little for the lowly Christians in Thessalonica, and believers were persecuted unmercifully. It was dangerous to be a Christian in those days. Their paramount hope lay in the doctrine of the return of Christ, and Paul catered to their need for reassurance of this truth in both his letters. Don't worry, he advised, speaking of the Day of the Lord, but don't be deceived. In one place Paul warns:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Paul was warning the Thessalonians about the same situation that had been prophesied by Daniel so long before regarding events at the time of the end. He was telling them that godlessness and rebellion against the law of God would become the norm, just before Jesus returns. But the apostle gives this warning to all believers:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

The words "Peace and safety" spring to life in a cry that reaches out and grabs our attention as we watch what's

going on in the Middle East. The ongoing war in Syria has steadily escalated as rebels bring militants in from other countries and chemical weapons were deployed. 1,400 people met their deaths in that fashion and world leaders acted to limit further damage by forcing an agreement that chemical stockpiles would be destroyed. But, that apart, there seems to be no end to the conflict and its effects that are spilling over into nearby countries.

Any Time Now!

Christ's approach may be near. It will be unexpected, we're told, and no one can pinpoint the day or year. No doubt watchers perceive the anxiety and uncertainty in the minds of world leaders, who try to make sense of the future, and the possibility of a terrible calamity. If world leaders see the futility of a strike on Syria—and many do—but nevertheless, in some miraculous way manage to negotiate a peace treaty, thereby establishing a condition of peace and safety in the world, will it last? Or will "sudden destruction" follow?

To watchers everywhere help comes by Christ's words to the seven churches in Asia, after his ascension into heaven. In his words to the church of Philadelphia, there was no reproof:

I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name (Revelation 3:8).

This is what we must all do. If we stand by Christ, he will stand by us.

Marian Canoles

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