

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

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Messiah – Who is He? (p. 8)

Jerusalem – City of Peace (p. 12)

A monthly magazine written and published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God’s inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God’s world-wide Kingdom.

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Glad Tidings Distributors for orders and payments

United Kingdom

Fiona Oram, 24 Windermere Avenue,
Ashby de la Zouch, Leics. LE65 1FA, UK
Tel: +44 (0)7521 079 190 (24 hrs)
fiona@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Australia

Ruth Morgan, 51 Jesmond Road,
Croydon, VIC 3136, Australia
gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com

Canada

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

New Zealand

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

U.S.A.

Pat Hemingray, 1244 Pennsylvania
Avenue, Oakmont, PA 15139, USA

Other Countries

Andrew Johnson, 22 Hazel Drive,
Hollywood, Birmingham B47 5RJ,
United Kingdom
andrew@gladtidings.me.uk

Editor

Andrew Hale, 52 Mardale Crescent,
Lymm WA13 9PJ, United Kingdom
editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

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By Any Means

THE TWO boys on the front cover picture are heading off on a fishing trip. They are making their way through a picturesque old Dutch town, which contrasts with the modern bike and ‘hoverboard’ they are riding. There really are some interesting ways to get around these days!

This reminded me of a television programme, where the participants had to make the journey to a target destination, using whatever means of transport they could find. These included



all sorts: from buses and motorcycles to camels, helicopters and a tuk-tuk. The entertainment came from the travel, but the effort, imagination and perseverance of those trying to reach the goal were impressive.

Focus on the Goal

The Apostle Paul uses this sort of language in Philippians, speaking about his own life.

He had everything that a Jew of his time could want: a family pedigree, high quality education and strong standing amongst his peers. However, he wrote:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:7–8).

He was happy to turn his back on all his privileges, so that he could ‘gain Christ’. What did he mean by this? He wanted to be associated with Jesus Christ – his way of life, his willingness to die to self and live for God, and to know the power which raised Jesus from the dead.

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death (v10).

He also wanted to be part of the resurrection himself – to be part of the Kingdom of God. And he was willing to do whatever was necessary to do so.

If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (v11).

That focus is repeated a few verses later.

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (v14).

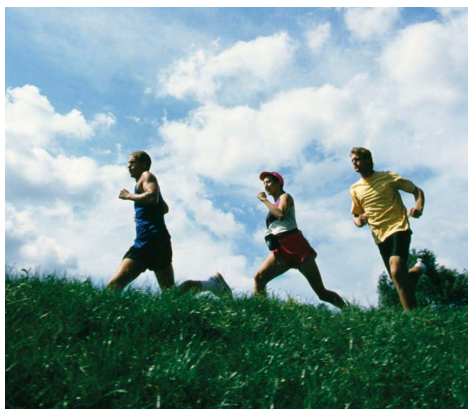
There is a word–play here which is not clear in the English Bible. In the Greek original, ‘press towards’ is also translated ‘persecuted’. Paul had previously persecuted the young church with great energy, having people imprisoned and executed. After his conversion, he put that energy into preaching, building the church, and building his own relationship with the Lord God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Using that Energy Correctly

It would be easy to misunderstand Paul here. Was he saying that it doesn’t matter how we get there? Did he mean that the end justifies the means? No – and he is very clear about this.

Writing to Timothy, a young believer, Paul used the image of an athlete to explain this. Sportspeople are individuals with whom we associate effort, focus and energy.

If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5).



Later in the chapter, Paul reminds Timothy of the need to make effort, to do it in the right way, and to be guided by the Bible:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (v15).

Removing What’s Wrong

God has told us how He wants us to live in order to please Him. It means copying the example of Jesus to the best of our ability. It also means getting rid of anything in our life which holds us back. In Hebrews chapter 11 is a catalogue of faithful men and women who did these things, and are good examples. Chapter 12 starts like this:

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The message is clear. If we want to be part of God’s family and be part of His kingdom when Jesus returns to the earth, then we need to focus on that. We need to understand how God wants us to live, and then do whatever we can to please Him.

He does not expect perfection – only Jesus managed that – but He does want us to try to the best of our ability. That’s good news, because it is possible for every one of us.

Miracles at Zarephath

THE DROUGHT was beginning to bite. The brook where Elijah was hiding had now dried up, and so the Lord God told him to move north–west to Zarephath, a town in Sidon, where a widow was to feed him.

It would have been a long journey, possibly as much as ninety miles, all on foot. Elijah would be tired when he reached the little town, ready for food and water. As he approached the gate of the town he found the widow, gathering firewood, and asked for some water to drink. As she went off to get some, he also asked for food, and must have wondered whether God really had planned this correctly. He asked her for just a “morsel of bread”, only to receive this reply:

As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die (1 Kings 17:12).

The widow knew who Elijah was, and seems to have been expecting him, and yet had nothing for him. In fact she was about to cook the last of the food they had for herself and her son, and resign herself to death. What had seemed to be a careful plan was apparently falling apart. The famine had clearly spread well beyond the boundaries of Israel.

Elijah was not put off by this apparent reversal, tired though he was. He said:

Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son (v13).

To do so would be a tremendous act of faith on the part of the widow, effectively to give away her last meal, and that of her son also. Elijah had one more comment for her.

For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth’ (v14).

The widow did as Elijah asked, and miraculously the flour jar never emptied, nor the jug of oil. It was a hand–to–mouth



existence, but it worked, just as God had said it would. They simply needed to trust.

God's Power at Work

The feeding of Elijah by God at the brook Cherith, and the subsequent provision of food for the prophet, the widow and her son in Zarephath were both miraculous. The next event in the life of Elijah was also a miracle, and an event which at that point was unique.

During Elijah's stay, the son of the widow became unwell, and then died. The widow felt that this was a judgement by God on her past life. Her accusation directed at Elijah is full of emotion:

What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son? (v18).

It is not surprising that she was so distraught, having already lost her husband and now her son also.

Elijah did not waste time attempting to justify himself, or even to explore the conduct of the widow before he had arrived. He said simply "Give me your son" and took the lifeless body to the upper room of the house, which he was using whilst he was there. He then took the problem to God in prayer.

O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son? (v20).

Elijah could not understand the reason the boy had died, perhaps the Lord God could

tell him the reason. He then performed an act which some have likened to mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but may not have had anything to do with that, for he continued to pray for God to revive the boy.

He had no historical evidence that anything would happen, but perhaps he was guided by God in what he did, for the account simply tells us that the life of the child came to him again and he revived. This is the first occasion in the Bible where someone is raised from the dead, and what happens just afterwards is of particular interest.

The Proof of a Prophet

Elijah took the boy down to his mother with the simple comment "See, your son lives". She must have been overjoyed. The future would have looked very bleak without her son. Now it had taken on a much happier prospect. She responded:

Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth (v24).

She had already been miraculously fed for some time, when she expected to die, but it was the raising of her son which really convinced her that this was truly a man of God. However, the boy himself appears to have said nothing. We are told what Elijah said, and what the widow said, but nothing the son said is recorded.

This is presumably because he had nothing to say, because from the time he had died and breathed his last, until the time Elijah brought life back and he revived, he was



Back to Israel

It is not clear just when Elijah went to Zarephath, but he appears to have stayed there for the rest of the drought and famine period. The next that we hear of Elijah is when God gives him the next part of his mission like this:

And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth' (1 Kings 18:1).

aware of nothing at all. He was totally without consciousness.

Scripture is totally consistent, what is said in one part is borne out in another. The wise man in Ecclesiastes said this:

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 (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

There is a comment about Elijah's time in Zarephath from the Lord Jesus, who was demonstrating that prophets are often not honoured in their home town:

I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow (Luke 4:25–26).

This was presumably the third year of the drought, as Elijah was about to be sent back to the land of Israel. There, he was to announce that there was to be rain in Israel.

It was to be a difficult time for Elijah. Ahab would not be well pleased with all that had happened, and Elijah would certainly feel the roughness of his temper, but all was being overseen and directed by God.

So, Elijah began the long journey on foot from Sidon back to Samaria, through a parched and famine-stricken Israel. He was about to begin a great demonstration of the power of God. At the same time, he would show that Baal – the false idol worshipped by Ahab and many in Israel – had no power at all.

Mark Sheppard

Messiah – Who is He?

THE STUDENTS were unhappy. “Well, I thought he was the lecturer!” one snorted. “You only asked him about that paragraph in the textbook and he was flummoxed. Talk about ‘the blind leading the blind’: he hadn’t a clue”..

This critical phrase ‘blind leading the blind’ comes from graphic words of Jesus about religious leaders in Israel.

Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch (Matthew 15:14).

Later, in Matthew chapter 23, Jesus uses the word ‘blind’ five times when warning about such people. This is because, tragically, they refused to believe the stark evidence of their own eyes about who Jesus was. Moreover, despite supposedly being experts in the Jewish scriptures, they too were unable to answer the questions which Jesus asked them. One question was about this verse:

The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool’ (Psalm 110:1).

Son of David

Psalms 110 was written by King David, about his descendant Jesus, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. It is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament, which indicates its significance.

In using this verse Jesus confirmed two things: that the words were penned by David, and that they refer to the Christ – the Messiah (i.e. to Jesus himself). Clearly then, in this verse ‘The LORD’ is Almighty God and ‘my lord’ is Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus’ question to them is recorded in three of the four gospels (Matthew 22:41–45, see v 44; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44), and afterwards the dumbfounded leaders dared not ask him any more questions (Matthew 22:46).

Great King

Through the words of this psalm even great King David acknowledged the complete supremacy of his descendant who would be Christ the King (Psalm 110:2; Luke 1:32). This was contrary to Jewish custom, where ancestors were always viewed as superior. So the verse was a problem for the Pharisees, whose prejudices made them antagonistic to Jesus of Nazareth.

The apostle Peter quoted the exact same verse (Acts 2:34–35), making a strong and conclusive case to the people and to their leaders that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the Messiah’s brief in every detail (Acts 2:22–36). It is quoted again in the letter to the Hebrews in support of the same teaching (Hebrews 1:5–14; see verse 13), showing very clearly that Jesus is superior to every other human being and also to the angels.

No other human being has either been given divine nature (1 Corinthians 15:22–23) or has ascended to heaven (John 3:13). As evidence of this, even the dead body of David, a man ‘after God’s own heart’ (Acts 13:22), was in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29). The fact that Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand is so important and awe–inspiring that it is referred to in a further 12 passages in the New Testament.

Great Priest

Psalm 110:4 is also quoted extensively:

The LORD has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Psalm 110:4).

This occurs word–for–word in Hebrews (5:6; 7:17 & 21), and is also alluded to (Hebrews 5:10; 6:20), proving the unique role of Jesus as priest. Jesus is a priest for ever and so was different from the priests under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 7:19–27). This fact about Jesus is so crucial that God ‘swears and will not relent’ (Psalm 110:4). Jesus is superior to and supersedes all other priests because his sacrifice has opened up the way for believers to be saved from eternal death. No one else did or could do this.

These are awesome truths about Jesus Christ and they show how the New Testament gospel is inextricably based on the Old Testament writings. We cannot fully comprehend the inspired words of Jesus or the apostles without understanding the scriptures to which they are referring.

Seeing the Christ – Now and in the Future

Given its importance in the New Testament, it is therefore important to read the whole of Psalm 110. In addition to the words about the supremacy of the Christ, it contains very powerful language about him. He has God’s authority to exercise unassailable power.

There will be no hope for the enemies of this triumphant ruler when he returns – all his enemies will be subdued. This fact is also referred to several times in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20–22 and Hebrews 10:13).

A common image of Jesus is of a ‘meek and mild’ man who would ‘not hurt a fly’. This does not agree with this psalm’s picture of an immortal, supreme king, ruling with great power, putting down opposition with the full authority of God. One writer summarised the psalm as “Beware! He’s coming”.

Of course, everything Jesus will do will be right and completely just, but we must be careful to ensure that we are his friends, not his enemies. This means doing what he asked of us (John 15:14). We can only see and obey Jesus properly by reading the whole Bible for ourselves, avoiding the teaching of ‘blind leaders’. We then need to believe what it says and to prepare for his coming.

Anna Hart

Joshua

THE BOOK of Joshua contains the Divine record of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, and the subsequent division of the Land among the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Lord's Servant

Joshua had been a captain of Israel's army (Exodus 17:9,10) and a personal servant to Moses (Exodus 24:13). After the death of Moses, God chose Joshua to lead His people into the Promised Land. Now, as God's servant, he was going to face challenges both from his own people and

from the battles they would face. God told him that he must be:

Strong and of good courage (Joshua 1:6).

Preparing the Way

Two spies were sent ahead to the Canaanite fortress of Jericho (pictured below) in chapter 2. Then, by a miracle, the River Jordan – which was in flood – was dried up so that the Israelites could cross over. We find this in chapter 3.

On the western bank of the river, Israel encamped at Gilgal which became a

Modern-day Jericho



temporary headquarters during the campaigns which followed. The Passover was kept (chapter 5) and the people prepared for battle.

Conquests

The overthrow of Jericho by Divine power (chapter 6) was followed by the conquest of Ai (chapter 8), cities in the south (chapter 10) and cities in the north (chapter 11). You can see the campaign routes shown on the map.

After seven years the occupation of the Land was complete. The twelve tribes were given their portions as had been promised to them.

The Levites and Priests did not have areas of land like the other tribes, but they were allotted 48 cities throughout the country. Six “cities of refuge” were appointed to which those who had accidentally committed manslaughter could flee (chapter 20; see also the detail in Numbers 35:9–34).

Joshua and Jesus

Joshua was a pointer to Jesus. The two names are virtually the same and mean ‘God saves’. As Joshua, with God’s help, conquered the enemy, so Jesus conquered sin, and will ultimately bring God’s people to the Promised Land (the Kingdom of God).

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

Joshua 1:6 – see Genesis 15:18-21; 26:3.

Joshua 2:1; 6:17-23 – see Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25.

Joshua 18:1 – see Jeremiah 7:12; Acts 7:45.



Jerusalem – City of Peace

IT IS a most unlikely proposition – I mean, that Jerusalem is a city of peace. Everything up to now seems to deny it. It is a city that has been so often the centre of war, dispute and bloody conflict. Nebuchadnezzar ravaged it twice, the Romans besieged it in the most awful siege of all time. It was captured during the Crusades and then, up to 1917, dominated by the Turks. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, it has been synonymous with conflict.

Jerusalem stands at the crossroads of the great power routes of the world – the border between east and west – the place of triangulation from which so much

provocation emerges and towards which all the destiny of the nations seems to be drawn. So, on the face of it, Jerusalem is far from being a place of harmony but more likely a focus of war. Why then do we proclaim in this article that Jerusalem is the city of peace?

A Bible Teaching

We ought to make it clear right at the start that our argument is a biblical one, not political. It is on the evidence of Bible teaching that we have this unalterable conviction about Jerusalem. So let us begin the case in the Bible. Think of the Sermon



on the Mount – in the record in Matthew, Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King (Matthew 5:33–35).

Notice what Jesus said – Jerusalem is important, comparable to heaven and earth, because it is associated with a great king. Many kings have reigned in Jerusalem at different times – some were ordinary, some were bad, a few were great. But Jesus speaks of some king who is great in an extraordinary sense: “the great King”.

Old Testament Prophecy

In order to understand what Jesus was getting at, we shall need to go next to the Old Testament to the prophecy of Ezekiel, the Hebrew prophet. He lived just at the time when the last king ever sat on the throne of David in Jerusalem. His name was Zedekiah – he was a puppet king installed by the Babylonians and he was an unworthy man in the sight of God. In fact he was deposed by God, as the prophet explained:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel' (Ezekiel 21:1–2).

Notice that the words are being addressed towards Jerusalem.

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand'. Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord GOD: 'Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him" (Ezekiel 21:24–27).

Notice the words carefully – the throne of Judah centred in Jerusalem, was to be taken from Zedekiah and at some future time was to be given him whose right it was, whenever

he came to claim it. It is a matter of history that Zedekiah was deposed and there has never again been a king from the line of David on the throne of Israel in Jerusalem.

New Testament Explanations

The next step is to turn to the New Testament as we answer the question why Jesus said, ‘the city of the great King’.



Before Jesus was born, an angel came to his mother.

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And 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.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:30–35).

You do not have to be a genius to discern to whom Ezekiel was referring in the prophecy we quoted. That is why Jesus quoted the Psalms to describe the real destiny of Jerusalem.

Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King (Psalm 48:2).



The great King is Jesus, the man from Nazareth, just as the angel said. If you think we may have inferred too much from this passage have a look at another.

Then Peter answered and said to him, “See, we have left all and followed you. Therefore what shall we have?” So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:27–28).

So according to Jesus the day will come when he reigns as king in Jerusalem. In other words a fulfilment of the words of Ezekiel. This has never happened. He has never reigned. The last time he was there he was treated like a common criminal. What does it mean – is it an empty promise? There is an explanation and we must now come to it.

A Vision for the Future

The Bible contains many visions of the effect of divine government over the world. Jesus will return from heaven to be the great King, ruling on behalf of God, his Father.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He

will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Isaiah 2:1-4).

Zechariah has a picture of peace in the city:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.' Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If it is marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvellous in My eyes?' says the LORD of hosts... 'I will bring them back, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.' (Zechariah 8:4-8).

Jerusalem will then be the capital of the new world – the centre of the kingdom of God on earth. It will be the seat of the government of Christ the King, and the place from which perfect law and perfect rule will issue to all the nations of the world.

For this superlative reason, Jerusalem is called the city of peace, because it is going to be the city of the great King.

The great news is that this state of peace will extend to the whole world. It is worth reading the whole of Psalm 72 and Isaiah 11 to get a feel for just how wonderful this will be. Here are some highlights:

Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice... They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations... He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth... His name shall endure forever; his name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed (Psalm 72:1-2, 5, 8, 17).

With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth... 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 11:4, 9).

Dennis Gillett



A Kingdom on Earth

GOD is all-powerful, He is everywhere, and He lives for ever. If God has a kingdom, then we should expect it to have similar characteristics. Nothing should be able to resist it, be outside it, or ever take its place. If that were true now, the Gospel of the kingdom would be simple. We would all be part of it and we should never want anything else. But it is not true. In heaven all is well; but on earth, where there is so much wrong, God's authority is obviously not being observed.

An Imperfect World

This is what lies behind a request in the Lord's Prayer:

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

Sincere Christians want the kingdom to be a reality on earth. That is why there is a Gospel of the kingdom. Something needs preaching, and something needs doing, before the kingdom of God is firmly established on the earth. Sadly, none of us finds it natural to obey God. Of course God is all-powerful. He can make nations obey Him, and He can punish them when they do not. He arranges the course of history.

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men (Daniel 4:17).

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel—thus you shall say to your masters: 'I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me' (Jeremiah 27:4–5).



No one, in the long run, can resist God's will. Yet God will not turn our free will into something mechanical. If we are sinful, He can punish us, but He will not make us righteous unless we are willing.

Kingdom in the Past

If we look for the kingdom of God on the earth up to now, we can look for two things. We may find people who want to obey God, and who truly honour Him as their King. Or we may find God exercising His authority over some nation. We find both.

Some people stand up for obedience to God, for example Abel and Noah (Genesis chapters 4 and 6). God also chose a man of obedient heart to leave his people and go where God led him – Abraham (Genesis 12.1). God then gave Abraham’s descendants (the Jewish nation) a promise:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6).

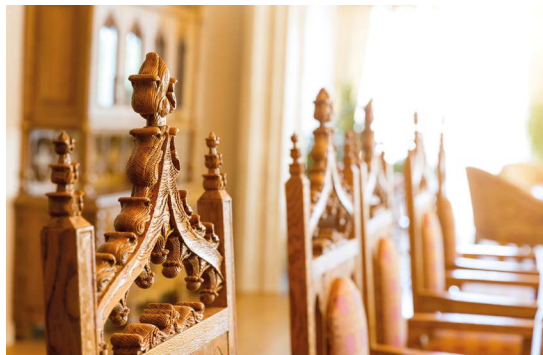
Here the word ‘kingdom’ is used about God’s people for the first time, before they had any human king. God’s kingdom promise was conditional on their obedience and they were not very obedient, in spite of their promise (Exodus 19:8). But God kept His agreement with them, even when they broke theirs with Him, and, when they asked for a human king, He allowed this too (1 Samuel 8:4-9). Later, King David was much more than the second king of the kingdom of God. One day there was to come from his royal line a King who would reign for ever.

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7: 12–16).

David’s son, Solomon, was the next king of Israel, and he is described as ruling over God’s kingdom, for example:

Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him (1 Chronicles 29:23).

Meanwhile this chosen race, selected to keep alive the knowledge of God, continued its miserable course of disobedience. The larger part of the kingdom soon split away from the house of David. It



was ingloriously dispossessed from the land in 722 BC because of its relentless wickedness (2 Kings 17:9–18). The house of David was not much better. There were a few righteous kings, but also wicked and weak ones, under whom idolatry and corruption flared up. Finally, in 586 BC, this kingdom went the same way as the other (2 Chronicles 36:14–21). About 800 years after God’s kingdom promise to Israel, there was nothing much left but hope of a special righteous king (Ezekiel 21:26–7). This promise had been given to David, and repeated by the prophets.



But, for nearly 600 years the only hope of its fulfilment rested in a scattered people who, wonderfully, survived their exile. They returned under Cyrus, thrived, but then fell under the sway of the Romans.

The King

They were there when Mary travelled to Bethlehem and gave birth to the Messiah, the Son of God. The Jews, knowing their prophets' words, were expecting their promised King. They knew that he should be born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:4–7; Micah 5:2), and the angel's words to Mary were just what they expected of their Messiah: their Christ, their anointed king of an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:30–33).

They watched him eagerly as he preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). When they saw how he could miraculously provide food for them, they tried to make him a king by force (John 6:15). They even publicly proclaimed him as the promised Christ (Mark 11: 9–10). But this was not what happened. Jesus gave no

encouragement to their enthusiasm, and when the rulers condemned him, the public praise was quickly turned into a cry for his crucifixion (Mark 15: 11–14). His last public recognition was written on his cross: 'King of the Jews' (Mark 15:25–26). Although Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples who asked him whether they might now expect the kingdom to be established were given no encouragement (Acts 1: 6–7).

A Future Hope

There was to be no re-establishment of the throne of David just then, and there has not been for 2000 years afterwards. All the prophecies about that time of glory remain unfulfilled, and yet Jesus said that he believed them (Luke 24:25–27, 44). His followers went on preaching the Gospel of the kingdom after he ascended into heaven (e.g. Acts 8:12, 28:23–31; James 2:5).

God's kingdom is at the core of the Gospel and it is our choice right now whether we are to be part of it.

Alfred Norris

Apples of Gold

The Book of Proverbs is a series of wise sayings, as its opening words say:

To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom (Proverbs 1:2–3).

In chapter 25, we have this rather enigmatic phrase about wise words:

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (25:11).

It is helpful to compare it to similar verses about wisdom:

Incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God (2:2–5).

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold (3:13–14).



We see that wisdom is described as more precious than gold or silver. Wisdom comes from listening to the instructions of God contained in His Word, the Bible:

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding (4:7).

Words of Wisdom

If words fitly spoken can be compared to gold and silver, it follows that they must be wise words, the fruit of wisdom.

As we read in Proverbs, the man or woman who searches for wisdom produces this fruit which is better than gold or silver. The words which are fitly spoken come from a man or woman who has studied God's word and so has become wise. They can be words of encouragement, joy, instruction, sympathy or admonition. They could be merely a few words, or could take place during an hour or more of discussion.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

It follows that the words spoken person-to-person should reflect these virtues: delivered wisely and kindly. This is good advice for every day.

Sue Morgan

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requests@cbm.org.uk

The Americas

CBMA, 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA
93065, USA
cbma.treasurer@gmail.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
tim@galbraithmail.com

South and East Asia

ACBM, PO Box 152 Cobbley NSW,
Australia 2570
coelmada@gmail.com

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