

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1558



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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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Contents

No Through Road3

**God has Revealed Himself
in the Bible.....5**

**The New Testament
Letters: Romans9**

The Work of Angels.....12

**Should you expect an Easy
Life?15**

**Is there a supernatural
'Satan'?16**

Good King Uzziah.....18

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No Through Road

Extreme weather seems to have been hitting people everywhere this winter. North America was affected by a big freeze with record low temperatures. Parts of Australia suffered a heatwave with bottles of water melting at the Melbourne Australian Open tennis tournament.

In Britain rain and strong winds have dominated, making roads impassable, cutting power supplies and flooding many homes. It may all be the by-product of global warming which is upsetting weather patterns, or it may be a natural cycle which will recur from time to time. Opinions are divided about the underlying cause. What is perfectly clear however is that water can be an effective barrier when there is too much of it. When a river flows over a road there is no way through, without a boat!

“Stand Still”

Long ago the infant nation of Israel stopped alongside a watercourse and there seemed to be no way across. It mattered, for the nation comprised slaves who had been told to leave Egypt and now their erstwhile slave masters had second thoughts and wanted them back. They came in pursuit armed and with revenge in their hearts.

With an army behind them and a seemingly impassable watercourse ahead of them, it is understandable that the people looked to their leader for advice and Moses did not disappoint. But the first few words he spoke must have seemed blatantly obvious. He told them to “Stand Still”, which was what they were forced to do as

there was no way back and no way forward, but then said this:

Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13–14).

Unbeknown to them, Moses had been pleading with God for deliverance and now God told him what to do. He was to lift his rod up over the sea, and tell the people to “Go forward!”, which was precisely what Moses now did, and for once the people obeyed him implicitly. God made a way through the sea and for generations afterwards Israel’s poets and songwriters would celebrate that miracle as a demonstration of God’s power and His ability to save.

A New Way

Here are the words of a Psalmist looking back and a Prophet looking forward:

The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was in the sea, your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (Psalm 77:18–20).

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters, who brings forth the chariot and horse ... Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new

thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert... (Isaiah 43:16–19).

What God had done to rescue Israel from Egypt was only a beginning. If you are familiar with the early books of the Bible you will know that it took the refugees many years before they took possession of the Promised Land and became a proper nation, recognized by the nations round about. Their national life was turbulent, to say the least, as they were surrounded by enemies and much hostility.

Right through Bible times the nation of Israel was under threat from larger and more powerful neighbours, like the Philistines and the Assyrians. And when world empires came into existence – the superpowers of their day – the tiny nation of Israel became a subject people. Fiercely patriotic and with a burning desire for independence, they had to accept foreign control as one empire succeeded another.

By New Testament times they were subject to Roman rule and despite their attempts to break free, the Romans brought the nation to an end. First in AD70 and later in AD132 the Jewish people were deported and dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and, over the years, throughout the world.

God's Way Back

For nearly two thousand years there appeared to be no way back to the land that was once occupied by the fathers of the nation. Jews were wanderers, people with no fixed abode, a despised, hated and often persecuted nation-within-a-nation. For the wanderers never seemed to lose their Jewish identity, seldom inter-married

with non-Jews and made little or no attempt to merge with their surroundings.

A Jew was always a Jew, and that was just as God had intended it. For when it seemed there was no through road, and the political and physical way was blocked, God arranged a way back to the Promised Land and the nation of Israel was reborn.

Of course, the nations that voted for the land of Palestine to be partitioned between Jew and Arab considered that they were acting for humanitarian reasons, to compensate somewhat for the atrocities of the Nazi regime and its tragic aftermath. In fact this was the work of God, unseen and unseeable, but those nations voted to fulfil God's ancient promises carefully preserved in the Bible. As God had said:

*Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert ... To give drink to My people, My chosen. **This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise (Isaiah 43:19-21).***

Today Israel exists as a national testimony to the truth that God always keeps His promises and that His purpose is unstoppable. It is moving steadily towards the greatest event ever: the return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ who is coming to Jerusalem to reign in the midst of his people.

There is a way in which you can be part of that multitude of people who will spend eternity with the Lord. Jesus Christ is the way, through truth, to eternal life.

Editor

God has Revealed Himself in the Bible

Throughout history man has sought some being greater than himself to worship or to blame for anything he didn't understand or to entreat and to be his champion in battles between tribes and later in wars between nations.

However, things changed dramatically in the 17th century. The dawn of modern science brought answers to a whole range of questions which were previously unfathomable mysteries to the human mind. The gaps in man's knowledge about himself, the earth and the universe grew much smaller than previously and the need for a god to "fill in the gaps" in man's understanding became far less urgent. Yet despite this there were many scientists, politicians and philosophers in that period who viewed their work as revealing more of the might and power of God, as He had revealed Himself in the Bible.

Pause over these few quotations for a moment:

- ❖ *It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible* – George Washington (1732-1799), the first US president.
- ❖ *There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history* – Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), English physicist.
- ❖ *All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more the Truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures* – Sir William Herschel (1718-1822), English astronomer.

❖ *The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity* – Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

It was later still – in the 19th century, after the work of Charles Darwin – that some thinkers proposed a new idea altogether that science and religion present two different concepts about the earth and indeed the universe. They are equally true but do not overlap. They are the two sides of the same coin. One shows us how things are and how they work, the other tells us why they are and what is the purpose of it all.

Intelligent Design

Things have moved on again so that today man thinks he knows the answers to pretty well all of the questions that can be put to him. Some men have become insufferably proud of their achievements and think they can do without a God. Many even deny His existence.

But all is not lost, even today. C. S. Lewis, a Christian writer of the last



George Washington



Sir Isaac Newton

century who was also something of a philosopher, made the following points in one of his books:

- ❖ *Suppose, for a moment, that there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen for physical or chemical reasons to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product the sensation I call thought.*

But if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? It's like upsetting a glass of milk and hoping that the way the splash arranges itself will give you a map of London. But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course, I can't trust the arguments leading to atheism; therefore I have no reason to be an atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I can't believe in thought, so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God.

I've said enough to, at least, set your minds thinking about the idea of God.

God has Spoken

As Christadelphians, we have come to believe that there is an Almighty God who has revealed Himself and His purpose with His creation and that revelation is uniquely to be found in the book we know as the Bible. This is very much in accord, as we have seen, with the thinking of some well-known men of earlier generations. So let's look at some Bible passages to see what it tells us:

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. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1:1–5).

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him? (Isaiah 40:12–13).

(God) Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power (1 Timothy 6:16).

The Bible tells us that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He dwells in the heavens in unapproachable light. He is the personification of wisdom and power.

Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

The angel answered (Mary) 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 1:35).

And he (Jesus) was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:17–19).

Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them (the apostles) divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:2–4).

Again, the Bible tells us that God's power is limitless and so He is everywhere present by His Spirit. He uses His power for special purposes, some by their very nature are unique occasions.

Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21).

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4).

In all things he (Jesus) had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:16–18).

So here the Bible tells us that God has not only revealed Himself to mankind through His Word but also in the person and the life of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is God Like?

You will want to know what the God of the Bible is like as a person, given that it's possible to think of Him in that way! Is He vengeful or forgiving? Is He full of anger or of love? Has He a short fuse, like so many of us, or is He incomparably patient? One of the great leaders of the Jewish people asked these questions of the Lord God who, in reply, revealed Himself to Moses in this way:

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by

no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7).

The answer to a quite different question as to why God should speak with a man who was a leader of the Jews and not some other nation, is the subject of other articles in this magazine. Suffice it for the present to remind ourselves that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son was born of a Jewish woman.

Why is He merciful? Why is He gracious? Why is He longsuffering? Why has He all these wonderful characteristics? We need to think about this for a moment.

Our Choice

God created man in the beginning describing His creation as "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Yet He gave man a thinking mind and the ability to exercise choice. Would he choose to worship and obey God as God intended he should, or would he choose to be a rebel?

History tells us the answer to this question time after time after time! This state of rebellion is called sin and it leads man to death and oblivion. Indeed, death is God's punishment for sin. So we ask, "What about those who really want to worship God and who choose to be obedient"? What will happen to them?

Have a quiet read from one of the psalms – Psalm 103, verses 8 to 18. Here is God's gracious mercy in action. The Creator has, through the sacrifice of His Son, made it possible for honest, repentant men and women to turn to Him and not to perish at death.

Have a look at these Bible passages:

John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-11 and 2 Peter 3:9. At death, such men and women fall asleep in Christ, into an unconscious state, waiting for the day of resurrection. The apostle Paul explains all that in detail in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 (read verses 21-22 and 51-57).

God's Mercy

The Bible tells us that God, although high and lifted up, almighty and immortal, is yet loving and merciful towards weak and rebellious mankind. As the focal point of His creation we need, as individuals, to show God that we realise how weak and failing we are and turn to Him with repentant hearts seeking forgiveness for our wrong doing, as says the prophet:

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:6-7).

God, in His great mercy, has made this possible through His Son. That's the sort of God He is – the great God of heaven. This is the majestic person that the Bible uniquely reveals to us. We all need to turn to Him through His Son who made this wonderful offer:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

Trevor A. Pritchard

The New Testament

Letters: Romans

In the survey of all the Books of the Bible, David Pearce has now reached the last part of the New Testament, which comprises letters written by the apostles, and the Book of Revelation which was given to the Apostle John.

Many Such Letters

It is apparent that we only have a few of the many letters that were written by the apostles. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:9 the Apostle Paul says “I wrote unto you in my letter ...” But we only have two letters to the Corinthians in our Bible. So what we call the First Letter to the Corinthians was actually the second. And in our First Letter, Paul replies to a number of questions that the Corinthians had sent to him earlier.

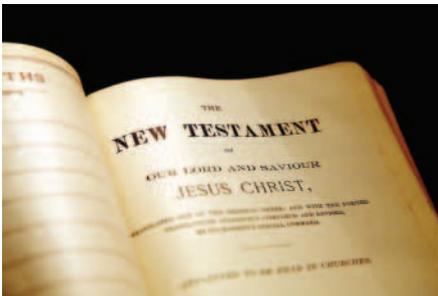
That letter was not preserved and with many of these letters we have to be detectives, and read between the lines to work out the background and the circumstances in which they were written. It is like being in the room when your daughter is talking to her boy friend on the telephone and you cannot hear the person at the other end.

How did the letters that have survived come to be in the Bible? That is an interesting question. Apart from all those letters which are missing, we know there were also many letters written by people who were pretending to be apostles, but were not. Paul refers to this regrettable development in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, warning his friends not to be alarmed by, amongst other things, “a letter as if from us”. It is for this reason that Paul always signed off his letters himself. Usually he dictated them, so they were written in different styles of handwriting, depending on who was his secretary at the time. But his signature confirmed they were genuine:

The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. (2 Thessalonians 3:17).

At the end of the First Century there were many letters (and gospels, too) in circulation, some of which were genuine and some false. The same thing had been true of the Old Testament writings, but the Jews had decided long before the time of Christ which writings were reliable.

The decisions about the New Testament books were made by the leaders of the early Church, classifying some as genuine and inspired by God, others as doubtful and grouped together in a collection known as the Apocrypha, and still others as downright cheats and rejected, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. Athanasius, writing in 367 AD, lists all 39 of our New Testament books.



Paul's Letter to the Romans

There is no chronological order to the New Testament epistles, as they are broadly placed in terms of their length. Not all Bibles have the same order; the Russian Bible, for example, places the various letters quite differently from the English Bible. However, it is usually possible by internal clues in the letters to work out approximately when they were written. The Roman letter must have been composed at the end of Paul's third journey, because he explains at some length in the closing chapters that he has now completed his work of preaching in Asia – which we now call Turkey – and was ready to move on. First, he explains, he needed to go to Jerusalem with a collection of money for the believers there (this collection is referred to in 1 Corinthians 16:1,2). Then he proposed to drop in on the Roman brothers and sisters on his way to Spain:

Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. (Romans 15:24).

Why Write?

In part, the letter was to prepare the Roman Christians for his visit. He had not been to Italy before, but Paul knew many of the members of the church in Rome, for he sends greetings to more than twenty of them in Chapter 16. It seems that people moved around the Mediterranean area quite freely, but it is likely that a good proportion of the congregation were Jews. There would be many synagogues in the capital city, and some of the members would have come across the gospel on trips to Jerusalem.



Paul's Third Missionary Journey during which the letter to the Romans was written

It is to a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians that the Apostle directs this brilliant letter. His aim is to persuade the believers at Rome that although Israel has an important role in the purpose of God, descent from Abraham and a knowledge of the Law of Moses will not of itself bring salvation from sin and death. What matters is faith in God, and belief in the sacrifice of Jesus. Without this no one will be saved.

World Astray!

He begins with a graphic description of Roman society. In a world which does not acknowledge a Creator, he says, anything goes (we can see the same phenomenon today). It was a brutal and selfish society. But it was no point in the Jew, with his divinely revealed Law, condemning the Gentiles for their immorality, unless he lived a blameless life himself. And that was the problem.

The Law of Moses was very good at spotlighting human sin, but it did not take that sin away. It left Jews, as well as Gentiles, trapped in a situation where they were condemned to death because they failed to attain the holy life that God desires. In fact, the Jew who knew the Scriptures well was

more, not less, guilty than the Roman, who had only a general appreciation of right and wrong.

Take circumcision, he says. It was a sign of the covenant between God and His people. But God called Father Abraham “righteous” (this word literally means counted innocent before a judge) long before he was circumcised. So, he explained, you do not have to be circumcised to be saved. And Abraham was called righteous, not for any great deed he performed, but because he believed God meant what he said. Faith was the key. We are all sinners, both Jews and Gentiles, and the only way to escape is to believe in Jesus.

Baptism into Christ

We express our faith in him, he writes in Romans chapter six, by being baptised – an immersion under water as a symbol of death and resurrection. In the water all our sins are left behind. We start a new life. We change sides, crossing over from Adam to Christ. From now on, we belong to God, and Sin no longer holds us as his slaves. Of course, we still continue to sin. We battle against what our human nature impels us to do, and we fail. But God in Christ will forgive our lapses when our hearts are right. Chapter eight is the climax of his argument. We are so privileged, he says, to have been adopted by God as His sons and daughters. We are heirs, waiting for the day when we shall receive an inheritance from God. Of course the waiting for God’s Kingdom is tedious, and we groan as we suffer. But the best is still to come. And whatever happens in life, we can be sure that the love of God and His Son will surround us to the grave.

Israel: God’s People

The next section deals with the position of Israel in the purpose of God. They had, Paul explains, the privilege of knowing God, and His commandments. But they had tried to turn righteousness into obeying a long list of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’. This does not work. We cannot earn salvation. We have to believe in the One who God sent. Sadly, this left the majority of the Jews deaf to the call of the gospel. Only a minority, like the 7000 who believed in Elijah’s day, had been baptised into Christ.

However, God being merciful, Paul concludes, there will come a future day when Jesus the Redeemer will come back to his people and forgive their past. Then Israel the nation will be restored to God like a broken off branch grafted back into its tree. *“And so all Israel will be saved”* (Romans 11:26) – all Israel, both those of Abraham’s race who now have faith in the Saviour they crucified, and those Gentiles who already had the faith of Abraham and are counted as his children.

The letter to the Romans ends in short exhortations, with instructions about prayers, about tolerance towards those who take a different view on unimportant issues, and the importance of unity. The Apostle’s plans to visit them on his way to Spain were not to be fulfilled, as we can see from the book of Acts. He was arrested at Jerusalem, and spent years in prison. But he got to Rome in the end, in the custody of a centurion, and after two more years in jail he was released to continue his work for the Lord he loved so well.

David M Pearce

The Work of Angels

GOD-MANIFESTATION is the great theme of the Bible. The subject is a vast one and not without difficulties. Nevertheless it is possible by advancing step-by-step to reach a sufficient understanding of the subject in its relation to God's purpose with the human race.

All power is of God. God is the Creator and the Sustainer of all things. In the words of the Apostle Paul:

For us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6).

God is the source of all power and all existence: *"for in Him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17:28). *"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things"* (Romans 11:36).

The Angels

The Bible tells us of an order of beings that are subordinate to the Creator and yet of a higher nature than ourselves. They are the angels of God. The Lord Jesus was made "a little lower than the angels" and for the suffering of death was crowned with glory and honour. These angelic beings do the will of God and execute His commandments perfectly. They were His agents in the work of creation. God asks Job:

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding ... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God (the angels) shouted for joy? (Job 38:4,7).

The angels, in the execution of a Divine plan, said, *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"* (Genesis 1:26); and the work was done. *"God said,"* and *"it came to pass."* The instruments by which He executed His work were the angels. Not only so; they are God's instruments in directing affairs at the present time, unseen but yet active in pursuing the Divine purpose.

Angelic Activity

The prophecy of Daniel draws aside the veil with regard to the activities of angels, and we see their control of events related to the Kingdom of Persia (see Daniel 10:19-21). This aspect of their work is summed up in the words of the Apostle when he says that God:

... has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels (Hebrews 2:5).

The present order is indeed subject to them and their control, but the future will be subject to the Lord Jesus and his associate brothers and sisters who will then be made like him. (Revelation 3:21; 1 John 3.2).

Until that happens, the angels of God have a work on behalf of the individual subjects of God's favour; in the words of the Psalmist:

The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them (Psalm 34:7).

The New Testament counterpart of that expression is in Hebrews, where the apostle says:

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14).

God's Messengers

Recognising the work which the angels perform, we look now at the style of Scripture in which God describes their activities. In Genesis chapter 16 we are told of the flight of Hagar from her mistress Sarai and of the angel of God finding her in the wilderness.

Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude" ... Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen him who sees me?" (Genesis 16:10-13).

Notice that in his words the angel attributes to himself the power of God and ascribes to himself that which is the purpose of God. "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly". Yet the angel speaks (in verse 11) of "the LORD" having heard her affliction: and Hagar names the one that met her, who is called "the LORD" in the narrative, "You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees". Here we have the names "the LORD" and "God" used with reference to the angel. The angel expresses in the first person that which God purposes to do.

How shall we understand this form of language? It indicates that the angels were such manifestations of God or expressions of the Divine purpose that

they spoke His word as the ones appointed to execute His purpose. They spoke of doing His purpose as though they were the Eternal Himself.

God's Representatives

Another illustration is found in Genesis 18, which is mentioned in the New Testament in the exhortation:

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels (Hebrews 13:2).

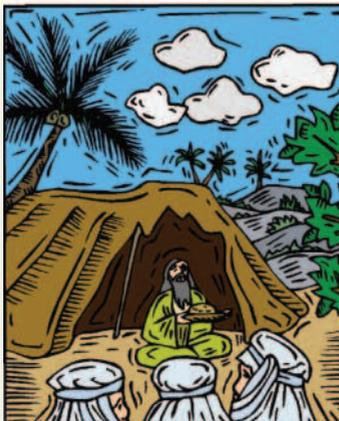
This is how the Genesis account describes the encounter:

Then the Lord appeared to him (Abraham) by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favour in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant" (Genesis 18:1-3).

These angels were manifestations of God, and being such are described as "The LORD" appearing unto Abraham. In harmony with this we read that:

The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (Genesis 18:13,14).

While the narrative speaks of the angel as the Lord, the angel speaks of



God as being a separate personality from himself.

A similar objective existence with regard to the Divine Power, the Eternal, is seen in the 19th verse, where the angel says,

For I have known him (Abraham), in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him (Genesis 18:19).

The angel does not say “he will keep my way”; but, speaking of “the way of the LORD”, he recognises the higher Power of Almighty God, whose representative he was.

Delegated Authority

By reading carefully, many other illustrations of this mode of description will be found. There is an important passage in Exodus when the children of Israel are told:

Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice; do not provoke him, for he will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in him. But if you indeed obey his voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries (Exodus 23:20–22).

In this we have an interweaving in the speech of the personalities of the Eternal and the Angel – “if you indeed obey his voice and do all that I speak” – God is the ultimate source of all operations, but the angel was the channel through which they were being accomplished. Because this angel had such a supreme position in the admin-

istration of the affairs of this people of God, therefore God says concerning him, “Beware of him and obey his voice; do not provoke him, for he will not pardon your transgressions”. Since the angel possesses delegated authority, therefore God ascribes to him the exercise of the power to forgive or to withhold forgiveness.

It is interesting to compare what is written concerning Jacob in Genesis, with the prophecy of Hosea. On Jacob’s return from sojourning with Laban (Genesis chapter 32) he met the angels of God, and he called the name of the place Mahanaim or “Two Camps”. There were two camps, the camp of angels and the camp of Jacob. Later one of the angels met Jacob when he was alone, and he wrestled with the angel for his blessing, and prevailed. To commemorate this, Jacob’s name was changed to Israel.

How does the prophet Hosea comment about what happened?

He (Jacob) took his brother (Esau) by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; he wept, and sought favour from him. He found him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us — That is, the LORD God of hosts (Hosea 12:3–5).

Here the Covenant Name of God is given to the angel who met Jacob at Bethel. It is to be understood in the light of the usage of words already noticed. God’s will is performed through the instruments He employs and the angels are beings which act for God, with His authority, and in His name.

John Carter

(To be continued)

Should you expect an Easy Life?

The question is often asked “*I am a good person, so why do things go wrong in my life?*”. This question highlights the fact that it seems to be thought that a successful life will follow for those who believe in God. However the Bible does not teach that this is so.

Jesus the Example

I suppose we would all agree that Jesus was a ‘good’ person. However we can hardly describe his life as happy or successful. In fact the Bible, speaking prophetically of Jesus, says:

He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him (Isaiah 53:3).

He once said of himself:

Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20).

There is, therefore, no reason to assume that just because we serve God we will have an easy or pleasant life. We can hardly expect a better life than Jesus had.

A Good Person?

Jesus once disputed the idea that he was ‘good’ when someone addressed him thus:

Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? (Matthew 19:16).

Jesus responded that only God is ‘good’ (Matthew 19:17). The Bible

teaches that we are all sinners by tracing the problem back to Adam:

Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

It follows that if Jesus was not happy to be called ‘good,’ we should realise that we are not ‘good’ either. It is only when we appreciate this and recognise our need of salvation that we can benefit from the sacrifice of Jesus. Once we realise that we are sinners we will want to associate ourselves with the risen Jesus. This is achieved through the waters of baptism – by the total immersion of an adult in water. The person who recognizes their sinfulness and who desires to please God is baptized to show that they deserve to die and wish to try to live a life which pleases God. Paul says this:

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–4).

So rather than wondering why being ‘good’ does not bring happiness we should think about what Jesus actually wants us to do. True happiness will come for those who are given eternal life in the kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

Peter Forbes

Is there a supernatural 'Satan'?

*In the last two articles, **John Woodall** explained that in the Bible the word 'satan' just means an adversary and that 'devil' is another way of describing human nature in opposition to God. Now he looks at some special places in the Bible which refer to 'satan' and 'the devil' and asks 'If these passages do not refer to a super-human evil being, to who or what do they refer?'*

We start with the Old Testament because 'satan' (though never 'the devil') is mentioned there in a way that seems to contradict what I have suggested earlier.

There are two clear examples where someone called 'Satan' appears, but when you think about the background to the story it is clear that 'Satan' is a character in a kind of drama set in a tribunal, or a court of law. In these 'dramas', 'Satan' represents the opposition to God's ways that was coming from men and women at the time. Real situations are described in a dramatic way, as in a play.

Satan in the Book of Job

Job was the most godly person of his time. He was also very rich and powerful. It was natural for envious minds to suggest that Job only served God because God rewarded him with the good things of this life.

The 'sons of God' (Job 1:6) are worshippers of God: we are not told whether they are angels or humans. A character called Satan appears in the early scenes of the drama (the first two chapters of the book) to challenge Job – that is, to be a 'satan' (or adversary) to him. Satan makes his suggestion openly, and God gives him the power to test this out. Then, in plainer language from chapter 3 onwards, we

see how Job trusted in God and survived the test, in spite of his friends who echo Satan's accusations.

It seems that it was their envy that had been dramatised in the earlier chapters. For, in chapter 42:11 his family console him for all the trouble that *the LORD* had brought upon him. The Satan character, having played his part, has disappeared, and the friends are reconciled when Job prays for them.

In Isaiah God says:

I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things (Isaiah 45:7).

The idea of a rival god who is responsible for evil is quite wrong.

Satan in Zechariah Ch. 3

This prophetic book was written at a time when Jerusalem was being rebuilt after it was destroyed by the Babylonians. There was much opposition from Samaritan people who were transported into the area after the Jews were taken away. In the purpose of God, however, this opposition would be defeated, and the rebuilding of the Temple would succeed.

Ezra chapter 4 describes this in plain language. Zechariah 3 is a vision which shows this contest in the form of

another play or drama. Here the Satan character represents the opposition from these Samaritans, who would be 'rebuked' by the angel of God. The High Priest would then change his working clothes to Priest's robes, and the Temple services would start again. This was the meaning at the time.

More importantly, the chapter is also a wonderful prophecy of the crowning of Jesus as our perfect High Priest. Jesus was born about 400 years later. The Hebrew name 'Joshua' means the same as 'Jesus'. Both names mean 'Yah shall save', ('Yah' is a short form of God's name 'Yahweh').

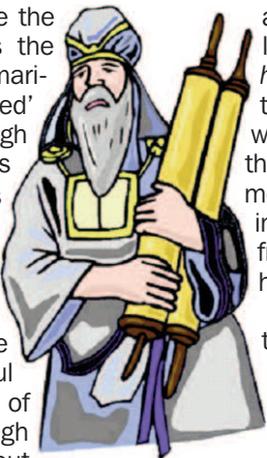
Joshua's garments were soiled – building is dirty work. This represented human nature which as we have seen is 'dirty' stuff. When Jesus was here he had the same nature as we do, but because he always pleased God he was raised to life again with God's nature – like the High Priest changing his robes for clean and splendid ones.

Satan tempts Jesus

Now we go to the New Testament to see how Jesus' temptations are shown in the same dramatic way – Jesus versus the devil or satan.

These temptations of Jesus are recorded in three Gospels (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) which shows how important they are. If we forget what the Old Testament tells us about temptation, they do seem to say that an evil super-human being visited Jesus. But here we have one more Bible 'drama'.

Remember – when we asked where opposition to God comes from, the



answer in plain (not picture) language was always "from human nature". Jesus shared this nature. Look at Luke 4:6, where the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in a moment. This could only happen in his own mind, because even from space you can only see half of the world.

This satan offered Jesus all the glory of these kingdoms:

Then the devil, taking him up on a high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, "All this authority I will give you, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whoever I wish. Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be yours." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve' " (Luke 4:5-8).

Notice that the tempter says "this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whoever I wish". Just ask the question: "Who has the world been promised to, and who has the right to share it with others?" The answer is in Psalm 2:8-9; Luke 22:28-30 and Revelation 2:26-7.

The world has only ever been promised to Jesus, and he was so sure of it that he promised his followers a share in it. This temptation therefore was in his own mind, as were the others. Temptations came into Jesus' mind because of his human nature, but he always overcame them by recalling the words of God. This is the example that he gives us, showing how we too should resist temptation.

John Woodall

Living like a King

Good King Uzziah

Middle Eastern kings in Bible times enjoyed tremendous power and privilege along with a rich and luxurious life style. King Solomon was the most obvious example of this, but King Uzziah was not far behind. He reigned over the kingdom of Judah for 52 years from about 786 BC. He is sadly an excellent illustration of the Proverb: *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverbs 16:18).

Teenage King

Uzziah became king following the death of his father Amaziah, who was killed in a conspiracy, which seems to have originated with Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom of Israel. Uzziah, sometimes called Azariah, especially in the book of Kings, became king when he was only 16. He seems to have had a flair for the role and set about establishing a really magnificent kingdom, approaching this in a very systematic manner.

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done (2 Chronicles 26:4).

He was aided in this by a man called Zechariah. This name is quite common in the Old Testament, and it is not possible to be more specific about who this was. It is quite possible he was one of the priests, though probably not the High Priest. Clearly Zechariah was able to guide the young Uzziah in the ways of God. Like other great kings of Judah before him, God blessed him because of his trust. The comment

about this is very telling *“As long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper”* (2 Chronicles 26:5).

Military Man

To ensure that the nation of Judah was able to be safe and secure, Uzziah fought against and subdued some of their long time enemies. The Philistines were still causing problems, so Uzziah removed the city walls from three Philistine towns, Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod, then built cities of his own, so that his forces could deal with any trouble quickly. He dealt with a number of other nations in a similar way and strengthened the fortifications of his capital city, Jerusalem.

Uzziah did not solely focus on the cities of his realm. He was a keen agriculturalist. It is said of him that *“he loved the soil”* (2 Chronicles 26:10). So he built towers, presumably fortifications, in the desert and also cisterns for water, to ensure that the large herds of livestock he had were not left without sufficient to drink. He had large teams of farmers and those who looked after vineyards.

Good Administration

To ensure that all of his military conquests could continue Uzziah re-formed and reorganised the army. He was assisted by a strong administrator Jeiel and two skilled army commanders. In this way he was able to ensure that his subjects worked with him. The army was large, with a total of 307,500 soldiers who were controlled by 2600 *“mighty men of valour.”* He was also able to arrange for war

machines, invented by skilful subjects, to be placed on the towers around Jerusalem. These could shoot arrows or large stones to defend the city, should the need arise. All of this ensured that Uzziah's reputation was widespread as a king who was known for his strength. Sadly, the history of Uzziah does not end there.

Wrong Decision

Having begun well, as faithful to the Lord God, Uzziah forgot the principles which should have dominated his life. Perhaps Zechariah, his advisor earlier in his life, was no longer there. The record says quite simply:

When he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense (2 Chronicles 26:16).

Offering incense in the Holy Place within the Temple was a duty strictly reserved for God's appointed priests. The law was quite specific. *"No outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the Lord"* (Numbers 16:40). There must have been some sort of tip-off, some sort of warning about the king's intentions. For Azariah the priest had followed Uzziah into the Temple. As diligent custodian of the law of God, Azariah was able to tell Uzziah forcefully that he had no business to be doing this; that he should not be there at all!

They withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honour from

the Lord God" (2 Chronicles 26:18).

If he had heeded this warning all might still have been well. He could have acknowledged his wrong doing and been forgiven. Uzziah did not do so. He became angry, and with the censer of incense still in his hand, leprosy began to break out in his forehead. Leprosy was a disease of the skin, for which there were very strict rules under the Jewish Law, because it could be very contagious.

Azariah, the High Priest, and the other priests rushed Uzziah out of the Temple. It seems that Uzziah himself realised that he had been struck by the Lord God, as he also made to leave quickly. He remained a leper for the rest of his life, living in a separate house, unable to carry out many of the duties of a king. He was now excluded from the Temple and was unable to go to places where there would be other people. So his son Jotham reigned as regent.

King, not Priest

Uzziah had lived like a king, and whilst he did the things which the Lord God expected he was successful and prosperous, and the kingdom of Judah benefited greatly. Sadly, he forgot that he was only the king and that he was not a priest as well. The Lord God expects to be approached in the right way, and Uzziah should not have tried to change that. The dual role of King and Priest is reserved for a special king, the Lord Jesus Christ. The lessons are clear: that those who follow the ways of God prosper, but to forget them is to start down a path that leads to destruction.

Mark Sheppard

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