

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1559



***It's Not the Building! – page 3***

***The River Crossing – page 5***

***Edward Wightman: Heretic or Hero? – page 13***

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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1559



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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# It's Not the Building!

Look carefully at the photograph on this month's front cover and you will see a black and white building located behind the Ferry Bridge that crosses the River Trent.

The fine cast iron bridge was built in 1889, the same year as the Eiffel Tower in Paris; but the black and white building is a much later structure. Once The Boat House Inn, it later became an Indian Restaurant called "River Tree", and has now become the Meeting Room of the Christadelphians in Burton upon Trent.

## Adaptability

Buildings are like that, of course. With a bit of modification and a lot of hard work they can be adapted to serve many different functions: shops can become offices, factories can become warehouses, windmills can become residences. As time passes things have to change if buildings are to continue to function, otherwise they have to be demolished. The real question is: How capable of change are the people who occupy the buildings?

Bible readers will know that in the first century a big decision was required to become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was crucified as though he had been a condemned criminal and, even today, people would



think twice before becoming a follower of someone in those circumstances. One writer sums up the dilemma in these words:

*Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:22–25).*

The writer's point is that God sometimes uses ways and actions which can be readily dismissed as 'foolish' or 'weak', but God acts in that way because He wants people to think about His purpose and to follow Him and His way of doing things, rather than their own.

## All Change!

It was the apostle Paul who was writing to a community of believers in Corinth, in Greece, but it is worth noticing what he said about that community. Just a few verses on he says that they were a mixed collection of people, none of whom were very significant from a worldly point of view:



*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called... (1 Corinthians 1:26).*

And a few chapters later he says that some of them had been quite immoral and unpleasant people before they had become Christians:

*Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you...*

But then he adds:

*... But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).*

Their acceptance of the gospel had made all the difference. They had been baptized into the saving name of Jesus and that, says the apostle, had totally changed their situation in the eyes of God.

## **New Testament Church**

Notice how he addresses this group of people in the opening words of this remarkable letter:

*Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:1–3).*

Note that the apostle is not writing to a building but to a group of people. He

calls them “the church of God” and that is an important distinction, the significance of which is not always understood. For many people their idea of ‘church’ is linked to a building, a temple, a mosque, or a cathedral. But in Bible times there were no such buildings in which Christians worshipped. On rare occasions they might have met in synagogues or assembly halls (Acts 19:9), but often they seem to have met in houses:

*Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ (Romans 16:5);*

*The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19).*

The key point is that in the Bible “the church” is a group of people, not a building. It doesn’t much matter where you meet but it very much matters what is the basis of your belief and behaviour. Work your way through the “Acts of the Apostles” and you will see that there was only one way in which you could become a legitimate follower of the Lord Jesus. First you had to understand the things that were taught by the apostles. Then you had to believe them before being baptized (by immersion) into the saving name of Jesus. Or, as the inspired writer Luke sums it up:

*And many of the Corinthians, **hearing, believed** and were **baptized** (Acts 18:8).*

It’s not the building that matters: it is belief and baptism that holds the key to eternal life.

**Editor**

# The River Crossing

The Ferry Bridge in Burton upon Trent was built to replace the boats that had ferried people across the River Trent since the Middle Ages. Behind the bridge, where the black and white building now stands, was the Ferry Boatyard. In its hey-day the ferry was carrying nearly 600 people per day, but when the bridge was built the ferry stopped. Some people have commented that a boatyard is a peculiar location for a place of worship. But actually, it's quite appropriate...

## The Crosser

Around 4,000 years ago a traveller arrived in the land of Canaan after a long journey. His name was Abram, and he had travelled with his family and all his worldly goods for over a thousand miles. His story is told in Genesis, chapter 12.

God made some wonderful promises to Abram – that he would give him a land of his own and a multitude of descendants, and much more. Abram believed and obeyed God. He left his comfortable home in the sophisticated city of Ur and spent the rest of his life as a wandering nomad in a strange land. History shows how, over the centuries, God's promises unfolded. Abram (later Abraham) became the

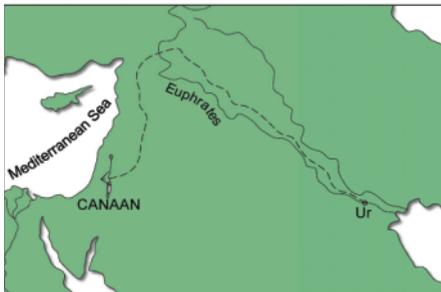


ancestor of the Jewish nation, Canaan became the land of Israel, and the Bible describes how the full depth of these promises is still being worked out, and will culminate in a time of blessing for the whole world.

While he was living in Canaan Abraham acquired a nick-name: 'the Hebrew'. The name 'Hebrew' probably refers to one of his ancestors, Eber, but it's also a word that means 'one from beyond', literally 'the crosser'. The Canaanites called him the Hebrew because he was a foreigner who had come across the river Euphrates. So this name was a constant reminder to Abraham and his descendants, who became known as Hebrews, that God had called him out of his old life on a journey of faith.

## The Exodus

The next book of the Bible, Exodus, tells how the Hebrews had become slaves in Egypt, and the book opens with the story of how God defeated their slave masters and brought the entire nation out of Egypt. Exodus chapter 14 contains the nail-biting account of the fleeing Hebrews and their arrival at the Red Sea. With the sea blocking their path and the pursu-



ing Egyptian army on their heels, the people panicked. But God intervened with one of the most spectacular miracles ever: the sea parted to allow them to cross on dry land, then when they were all safely at the shore the sea swept back and drowned their pursuers. This marvellous 'crossing' was the beginning of the Hebrews' journey through the wilderness, that eventually led them to the Promised Land.

## **Bethabara**

Now to the New Testament – the second part of the Bible that deals with the lives of Jesus and his followers.

The first time we meet Jesus as an adult is at his baptism, which marked the beginning of his three-year ministry. He did not suddenly appear to an unsuspecting public: God made sure that the way was prepared for him. He did this by means of Jesus' cousin, John, who preached to the people and urged them to repent from their evil ways and turn to God.

The people who listened to John showed their repentance by being baptised. John became known as 'John the Baptist'. If you want to know what the Bible means by baptism, read Romans chapter 6. Baptism is a graphic and powerful acted parable: when you're baptised you demonstrate that you want to 'put to death' your old godless way of life, and be born to a new life of godliness. That's why true Bible baptism is by complete immersion in water – it's a symbolic death and rebirth.

Jesus came down to the river Jordan where John was baptising. Jesus didn't need to repent, for he never sinned. But he was baptized nevertheless – as he told John:

*Thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).*

He was setting an example for all his disciples to follow. As far as the Bible is concerned, the Christian life must start with baptism.

John 1:28 tells us John was baptising at a place called 'Bethabara beyond the Jordan'. Bethabara means 'Place of Crossing' – so there was perhaps a ford or ferry there.

This was a place where people crossed the river. What better place for John to be baptising: the 'Place of Crossing'!

## **Crossings**

Jesus describes discipleship in many ways. This is one of them:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).*

So here are three life-changing crossings.

- ❖ Abram crossed the Euphrates on his journey of faith to the promised land;
- ❖ The Hebrews passed through the Red Sea on their journey from slavery to freedom; and,
- ❖ The people who responded to God's call in Jesus' time, as faithful people have been doing ever since, passed through the water of baptism to a new life.

Next time you're on a boat or on a bridge, stop for a minute and reflect. Ask yourself: 'Where are you going?'

**Chris Parkin**

# Facts you may not know about Noah's Ark

*When all the flooding was happening in the UK there were lots of mentions of Noah and his Ark. It enters naturally into conversation when people think of it rather as a fairy story. If asked about its historicity, many would say that it would be physically impossible to save the animal kingdom in a sailing vessel made from wood. In this article **Paul Tovell** explains why the Biblical account can be believed.*

How much do we think we know about the flood story? We're very familiar with it, but let's look a little deeper into it, to help us to imagine what it was really like.

## Elbow room?

Let's start with a question – how did all the animals get on board? or, to put it another way, how could you physically fit the world's animal population into one vessel? This concept alone is enough to make many people dismiss it as myth.

A small boy once dismissed the whole thing by saying – *“There's no way Noah could have ever got all those animals into that ark.”* When asked, how many animals were there, the boy said, *“I don't know.”* When asked how big the ark was he said *“I don't know”*. But he was quite sure Noah could not have fitted an unknown quantity of

animals into an unknown sized ship!

There are two parts to this question – the number of animals, and the size of the ark. Firstly, there are a lot of animals in the world – it's estimated that there are between 1 and 3 million known species in the world today. But let's just ask, which creatures did not need to get in the ark?

- ❖ fish
- ❖ microscopic sea creatures
- ❖ jellyfish, starfish and other marine creatures
- ❖ whales, seals and other such mammals, and
- ❖ molluscs (oysters, mussels).

It's been said before that the vast majority of life on this planet is in the sea. A few years ago, a scientist who believes in the Bible estimated that the



*A scale replica of Noah's Ark, Ark van Noach, in the Netherlands.*

*Photo: Wikipedia Commons.*

number of animals which needed to be in the ark in order for the natural world to have survived the flood would be 16,000.

## How Big?

Let's take the second question, how big was the ark? In Genesis 6:15 it says that the ark was 300 x 50 x 30 cubits, which makes it about 1.4 million cubic feet, or just under 40,000 cubic metres.

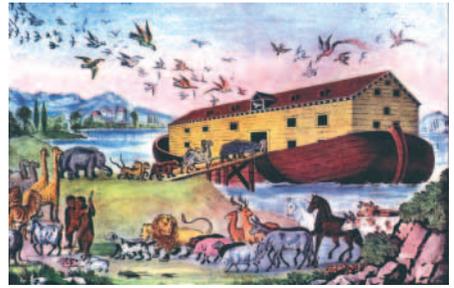
If you take the average size of these 16,000 animals to be a sheep, remembering that many are much, much smaller, his conclusion was that less than half of the ark's three decks was needed for all these animals. That leaves plenty of room for food, waste, and many more people than the eight who chose this option. This really was a massive boat – so large that it was only in 1884 that anyone in the world had built a bigger sailing vessel!

The next question might be, how did they have enough food to feed all the animals and keep them exercised? A possible answer is hibernation. Nearly all reptiles and amphibians have the capacity to hibernate. Mammals don't need to, but the latent ability to do so may still be there. Even some birds do it, although most migrate rather than hibernate.

The reason some animals hibernate is due to cold, poor oxygen, or poor food supplies at certain times of the year – in other words, environmental factors. So it is possible that they could have hibernated while they were on the ark. Another piece of evidence lies in a phrase from Genesis 6:14:

*"make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch."*

The Hebrew word for 'rooms', can also mean 'compartments'.



## "Two by Two"?

How many of each species went into the ark? If you think the answer is two, then you're only half right. In fact, a different number of clean beasts and unclean beasts went in. The record says that clean animals were to go in *by sevens*, and unclean *by twos*:

*You shall take with you **seven each** of every clean animal, a male and his female; **two each** of animals that are unclean, a male and his female; also **seven each** of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth (Genesis 7:2–3).*

Why this difference? And why is it important enough for us to be told about it? Genesis gives a clue when we read:

*You shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them (Genesis 6:21).*

The food on board the ark was for the people *and* the animals, and must have therefore consisted of herbs, vegetables and fruits. It is highly unlikely that the animals were there to provide food: that would take up far too much space anyway!

Right back in Genesis chapter 4 animals had been used for sacrifices – for offerings – to God. And they had

to be designated 'clean' animals to be offered. They had to be animals that didn't scavenge among the rubbish of the earth, to demonstrate the offerer's understanding that the God of Heaven requires purity and separation from uncleanness in all who come to Him. That was the point of having this distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean'.

The first thing Noah did when the flood was over is recorded in Genesis chapter 8 – he offered a sacrifice to the Lord God. At the heart of this episode about God's judgement upon the earth, and the faithful who survive it, we find the true worship of God in the form of the sacrifices that were offered to Him.

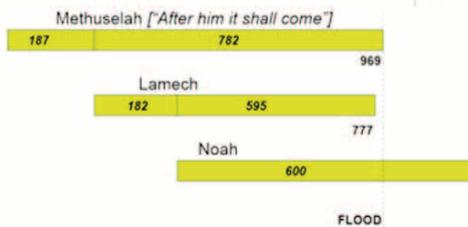
Could this be why there were many more clean animals on board than unclean, to prepare for what would happen after the flood? Noah showed how important his relationship with God was in the things that he took with him on this life-saving trip.

## Speed or stability?

Some boats are built for speed, some for stability, some for capacity. Noah's ark was not about getting anywhere. Other than survival, there was no need for it to travel great distances. All it had to do was stay afloat, and that wasn't easy! The water wasn't calm. We know there was a wind (Genesis 8:1) and this volume of water appearing and disappearing would have made for some very rough conditions. But the ark's dimensions were just right for stability in the rough waters.

In fact, it's more accurate to think of the ark being shaped like a box. Remember it didn't have to get anywhere, so it didn't need steering or an engine. It just needed to float and stay upright.

## Noah's ancestors



## A living countdown

Did you know that there was a living countdown to the flood? One of Noah's ancestors was Methuselah, whose name means "After him, it shall come". So when he died, something was going to happen. People had nearly 1,000 years to wonder what his name meant. Genesis chapter 5 provides us with information to work this out.

Look at the chart above and you'll see that Methuselah died in the same year the flood started. So people could have linked the two together quite easily. God wanted people to know that He required obedience, and that there were consequences for not obeying. It was up to individuals whether or not to take the way out that was on offer for those who wanted to serve Him.

Lamech (Noah's father, who died 5 years before the flood) and Methuselah perhaps helped to build the ark. But there's this crucial point in the genealogy that none of Noah's ancestors were alive at the time of the flood. That explains why none of them were on board.

If we stick with the family tree for a moment, another amazing fact is just how long there was a firsthand account of the flood for anyone who wanted to ask about it. People lived a

long time in those days! Noah didn't die until virtually Abraham's time – and Shem didn't die until well into Isaac's lifetime. So anyone could verify the facts with him if they weren't sure of them. There was a first-hand witness until Isaac's day, hundreds of years later. That's a big point in favour of the truth of the Noah's ark episode in the Bible. We can't accept these later chapters of Genesis about Abraham without accepting that he would have believed in the truth of the flood story.

### **“Saved by Water”**

You needed to get in the ark in order to be saved. And anyone could have opted for the salvation that God was offering – the door was open to all.

Here is a picture of the mercy of God. Genesis chapter 7 tells us that the process of getting all the animals on the ark went on for seven whole days. In verses 7 and 8 we read of Noah and his family boarding, and then we read:

*It came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth (Genesis 7:10).*

All that time there were lots of people around, watching and wondering what was going on. They all had a chance to get in the ark. It's as though God left this last final opportunity for people to say, “I'm sorry I didn't believe you at first Noah, but now I'm willing to trust you”.

The last time I took the train to London, there was an announcement that the train doors would only stay open for 30 seconds for people who wanted to get on. After that, the doors would be closed and no-one else would be able to board. For Noah's generation, there was a seven day period when the ark was open to

receive people who wanted to be saved. But once it started raining, it was too late. The door was shut. It was no good waiting until the rain started to fall. You needed to believe what God had said and get on board! Otherwise you would miss your chance.

### **How many people?**

Finally, how many righteous or faithful people were there in the world in the days of the flood? The answer is one, as far as we know. There were eight people who went in the ark – all members of Noah's family – but all we know is that: *“Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations.”*

We have no idea what his sons and their wives were like at this stage. But because of Noah's character, God accepted his whole family as being good and upright in His sight.

*“Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation (Genesis 7:1).*

What an amazing statement. Because of Noah's righteousness and faith, his whole family were invited to enter the ark. We know that God always thinks in terms of families, because that's exactly how it works with Christ. His family – his followers who are said to be his brothers and sisters – are saved not because of any righteousness of their own, but because of Christ's.

As long as we get into our spiritual ark (by being baptised 'into Christ') and stay there, safely on board, we too have the wonderful hope of surviving the coming destruction of this present world, and living in a brand new one: the Kingdom of God.

**Paul Tovell**

# Should a Christian Drink?

Several articles in this issue have featured Burton upon Trent in the Midlands of England, as its history leads naturally into a consideration of several Bible topics. For example, Burton is known as the ‘brewing capital of Britain’, because in medieval times monks discovered that the local water was ideal for brewing, because of its particular chemical composition. Brewing became a big industry in Burton, and by the nineteenth century the town consisted largely of breweries. In 1880 there were 30 of them and they had their own railway system. They produced a quarter of all the beer that was sold in Britain, plus beer for export all over the world. In this article **Chris Parkin** – who lives in Burton – asks what the Christian’s attitude should be to drinking alcohol.

## The Temperance Movement

It was in the nineteenth century that the Temperance Movement started. Reacting against the dangers to health and the social evils caused by the ‘demon drink’, many people – mainly with Christian motives – joined the movement to moderate and even abstain from drinking alcohol.

What should be the Christian’s attitude to drinking alcohol? The Bible gives clear guidance on every moral issue. Sometimes it says simply ‘You shall’ or ‘You shall not’. On other issues it gives us principles, and leaves us to act according to our conscience. Drink is one of these issues. Let’s consider some principles the Bible gives us.

## Quality of Life

*‘Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise’ (Proverbs 20:1).*

The book of Proverbs is straightforward in its warnings about the dangers of drink. Anyone who has any experience of excessive drinking will recognise this assessment:

*Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has com-*



*plaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? (Proverbs 23:29).*

This is the start of a brilliant, almost comic, description of drunkenness, that concludes:

*‘They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?’ (Proverbs 23:35)*

So the first point is a simple one: abuse of alcohol makes for a rotten life.

## You belong to God

But for the Christian, life is not just about yourself. You have a responsibility to God, as the apostle Paul expresses it:

*'You were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's' (1 Corinthians 6:20).*

The Christian should always be conscious that he or she belongs to God, body and mind. Care should be taken not to abuse either body or mind.

## **Think of others**

A basic principle of the Christian life is that you always think of others. Jesus said that the second great commandment is: *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'* (Matthew 19:19).

When you look at life from that perspective, it is sad to reflect that drink is responsible for much social evil, including –

- ❖ neglect of families,
- ❖ accidents caused by drink-driving
- ❖ silly and hurtful things that are done and said that are regretted later, and
- ❖ actual physical violence.

It goes without saying that the Christian should avoid indulging in anything that could cause distress or hurt to others.

## **Self Control**

In a letter to the disciples in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul urges them to *'watch and be sober'*. He's specifically talking about the need to be spiritually vigilant as they wait for the return of Christ, but his words describe the basic mind-set which the Christian should have:

*'You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be*



*sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober ...' (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8).*

Even though the apostle is not talking about actual drunkenness in this passage, the principle is there: the disciple should live a life which is sober and self-controlled.

## **Life is a Gift**

We've considered some warnings about the dangers of alcohol. However, in moderation it is not evil. One Psalmist lists among the blessings that God gives:

*"wine that makes glad the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15).*

When, writing to Timothy, the apostle acknowledges his young friend's fragile health he advises him:

*No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities (1 Timothy 5:23).*

## **The Good Life**

Thus the Bible agrees with modern medical advice: whereas alcohol in excess is harmful, in moderation it has some health benefits.

Ecclesiastes is a book of philosophy –

it explores life, and how to get the best out of it. This is one of its conclusions:

*Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God (Ecclesiastes 2:24).*

Alcohol used wisely can be a component in a full, happy and godly life.

## **Drink or Not?**

Some disciples appreciate a drink. Some are teetotalers. Which is better? The apostle Paul again, this time in his letter to the Romans, discusses matters of conscience. He uses the example of vegetarianism – is it good to eat everything, or just vegetables? His conclusion:

*He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he*

*gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks (Romans 14:6).*

In issues like this where there is no commandment on what is right and what is wrong, the key point is not what you do, but the attitude with which you do it.

So here's the Scriptural conclusion:

- ❖ To avoid drink altogether is good.
- ❖ To drink moderately and responsibly is also good.
- ❖ What's important is that you think it through, and behave with a good conscience so that you're able to give God thanks whatever you do.

**Chris Parkin**

# **Edward Wightman: Heretic or Hero?**

*As we have seen, Burton upon Trent has many claims to fame, not just its brewing heritage. But it also has a darker history which it shares with the nearby town of Lichfield, as **Paul Tovell** now explains.*

The last man in England to be condemned to burning at the stake was from Burton upon Trent, back in 1612.

## **Heretic?**

In the seventeenth century, the church had a strong hold over ordinary people's lives. They feared its teaching about hellfire and eternal punishment, and the king could easily arrest you and imprison you for disagreeing with it. If you didn't believe what the church taught, you were in big trouble.

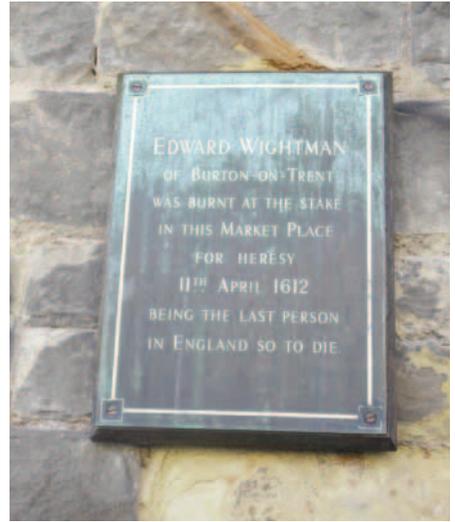
Edward Wightman, who probably lived in Burton's High Street, was a man who wanted to believe what was right, rather than be told what to think. He probably read one of the first English Bibles, newly available for people to read. We don't know very much about him, but what does survive is the Royal Writ from King James I sent to the Bishop of Lichfield in 1612 ordering his arrest and execution.

## Wightman's Beliefs

The Royal Writ gives us an amazing insight into what Wightman believed, since his beliefs were the reason for his arrest. We know that they included the following:

- ❖ THAT there is no Trinity of Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the unity of the Deity
- ❖ THAT Jesus Christ is not perfect God and of the same substance, eternity and majesty with the Father
- ❖ THAT the Holy Ghost is not God co-equal, co-eternal and co-essential with the Father and the Son
- ❖ THAT the soul is mortal, and the soul of the Lord Jesus Christ died as well as his body
- ❖ THAT souls do not go to heaven when the person dies
- ❖ THAT the baptizing of infants is an abominable custom
- ❖ THAT the use of baptism is to be administered only to converts of sufficient age of understanding
- ❖ THAT Christianity is not wholly professed and preached in the Church of England

This was an age when it was dangerous to disagree with church teachings. And yet, the reason why Wightman believed what he did was because he read the Bible and came to the conclusion that church doctrines



were not taught in the pages of Holy Scripture.

To Edward Wightman, it mattered what you believed. It wasn't enough to agree with the priest: every man had a duty to find the Bible Truth out for himself, and then to stand up for it.

Such an attitude is quite rare today, but the Christadelphians in the same way firmly base their beliefs on the Bible and no other authority. In fact, we would agree with Wightman on all of the above bulleted statements.

Edward Wightman was burnt at the stake in Lichfield Market Place on 11th April 1612, where the plaque still commemorates his status as *"the last person in England so to die"*.

History has labelled him a heretic, but perhaps he should be remembered simply because he read the Bible for himself. He leaves us the challenge to do the same and to find out for ourselves just what the Bible teaches.

**Paul Tovell**

# Where Are You Going?

On the morning of August 24th A.D.79, the top of Mount Vesuvius, in Southern Italy, split apart with a thunderous explosion. Smoke mushroomed into the sky darkening the sun. A rain of volcanic cinders and ashes began to sift down amid terrific crashes and terrifying flashes of light.

## Herculaneum and Pompeii

Violence descended on the two nearby cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii. In Herculaneum an avalanche of mud – a mixture of volcanic ash, rain and lava – engulfed the city. In Pompeii the terror came from volcanic ash and cinders, coupled with clouds of suffocating sulphur fumes. Destruction of all life was complete and sudden and the cities remained buried, under volcanic rubble, for almost seventeen centuries.

In the middle of the 18th century a picture of their terrible end was fully realised when the spade of the archaeologist uncovered them. Pompeii was quite different to a city which has died a natural death by withering away or even by being buried in mud. When the city was struck it was mid-morning, the inhabitants were about their everyday business, and destruction caught them, so to speak, “in the act.” The baker in his cookhouse, mourners at the last rites of the deceased, whole families gathered in their houses – all died together.

## Sudden End

It is frightening to read about the end of these cities. In such a mood there are lessons to be learnt. Destruction came to them suddenly, and life's



book was closed for all. Material prosperity was valueless – slave and noble perished together. What are the “absolute” values at such a time as this? One view is expressed in “Let us eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die,” but, surely this is not the correct philosophy. For what happens after “tomorrow”? The Bible speaks of life after death only for some, and surely that's something to be concerned about.

Where are *you* going? What is *your* objective so that the Day of Christ's return does not catch you unawares? Just before he died on the cross, Jesus had these words of warning for his disciples:

*Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:34–36).*

## Right Attitude

The direction in which we are going

depends upon important factors of mind and intent. Jesus spoke of some of his contemporaries as “whited sepulchres” which outwardly were clean and white but inside were full of dead men’s bones. Most of their fellow men would have considered them very religious people, but Jesus could say that to God they were corrupt. “All is open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do,” and to Him the objective of our lives is important. He has told us so.

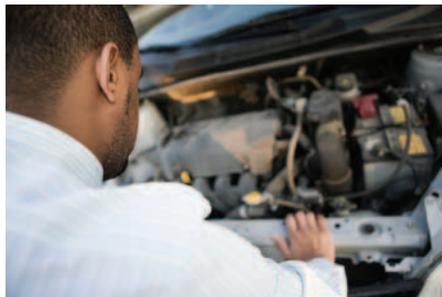
Through the prophet Jeremiah, God declares:

*Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23–24).*

Jesus, by what he did in his own life, expresses the attitude to be adopted by his followers. He understood God and knew Him in the fullest way. He showed single-minded belief and obedience to God’s law. For Jesus’ disciples the objective of our lives is vitally important: it is to develop a character like his, so that God may use us in His future service.

## **Transformation**

To take a simple lesson from life, every motorist knows that if the alternator of his car is in disrepair, quite soon the battery will become “flat” and useless for starting the car or providing power for the lights. Unless the fault in this alternator is rectified he faces the prospect of a totally immobilised car. The believer in Christ must likewise look to his alternator.



The dynamic force of the Christian life is found only through knowing the Word of God. Here we are given directions for right living which will power our lives, and shed light on the path of the believer.

A transformation of our thinking is essential before we can walk the Christian way. Human society and human thinking generates only darkness. We must come from darkness into light, a process which demands leaving our old life and accepting God’s Way. The Apostle Paul, after stating that the Christian has renounced the ways of shame and darkness, says:

*It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).*

It is clear from reading the words of Jesus and the apostles that the evidence of a believer’s faith lies in pure behaviour, which means pure thinking as well as outward goodness. The objective of the Christian life is to become perfect, as Jesus Christ is perfect. A full transformation is only effected at the Resurrection when Jesus raises his servants to be judged according to their deeds.

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the*

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to himself (Philippians 3:20–21).

## Life Plan

Our objective should be that we are acceptable disciples at the coming of Jesus Christ. He will come back to the earth with the same kind of suddenness that brought swift destruction to the inhabitants of Pompeii. At his coming each life will then be complete – as it is at that moment.

*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. "And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city (Revelation 22:11–14).*

This Scripture makes it evident that the keeping of Christ's commandments is essential before the believer can partake of life everlasting. Beyond the future change of nature is the vista of perfect service to God in His Kingdom on earth. The future work of believers is, in scriptural language, to be *"kings and priests to our God and we shall reign on the earth"* (Revelation 5:10).

## Journey's End

In Bunyan's *"Pilgrims Progress"*, Christian and Hopeful were walking towards Mount Zion when, to their sur-



prise, they saw another person coming from that direction. His name was Atheist and he asked them where they were going. Christian answered him *"We are going to the Mt. Zion"*. Then, we read, Atheist laughed and laughed. When they asked him why, he told them they were very ignorant persons to make so tedious a journey when they would get nothing out of it, because he said *"There is no such place as you dream of in all this world"*. He said he had been looking for twenty years and hadn't found it.

We sometimes meet people like this who are always sceptical. They say they are "searchers", but haven't whole-heartedly sought God's Will and His Way. They laugh at those who believe in the Gospel of the Kingdom. Yet it is far better to have a true faith in God and His Son, expressed by Jesus in these words:

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7–8).*

Where are you going? Are you on the King's Highway journeying to the Kingdom of God?

**Ken Quixley**

# God's Witnesses

Impartial witnesses can be a crucial source of evidence for situations, like serious accidents, where it is important to establish what actually happened. Nonetheless it is not always easy to get witnesses to come forward, and so it can be difficult to corroborate the claims made by people involved in an incident.

## Only One God

The Bible makes very bold claims about God and contains some striking assertions about what He is like. Here's one:

*I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other (Isaiah 45:5-6).*

Claims are one thing, of course, and proof is another. As no one has ever seen God (John 1:18), many people believe that there is no evidence for His existence. Such people do not believe in any God, let alone in the unique God who is revealed in the Bible.

## Evidence for God

However, the God of the Bible has provided evidence to support His claims and He has witnesses who testify to both His existence and His purpose. This is

what God says to them when He summons them:

*Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one. Those who make an image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit; they are their own witnesses; they neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed (Isaiah 44:8-9).*

This argument is repeated in more detail in Isaiah 43:9-13. God's witnesses are the Jews, and God was saying, through His prophet, that their history makes them witnesses to His claims about Himself. For God has both made and kept promises to them and has foretold what is to happen to them in careful detail. Moreover, He stated that no other god has such witnesses and, referring to those who worship idols instead, that such things are not real gods at all.

## Unwitting Witness

The Jewish people are very powerful witnesses indeed because they have not volunteered to fill this role and may not even realise that they are carrying it out. Their witness is not directly under their control or their wishes. They are, therefore, most certainly impartial.



There are many prophecies about the Jews, but here we shall concentrate on two. In Deuteronomy chapter 28 God set out His promises to the nation of Israel.

- ❖ If they **obeyed** His commandments then He would care for them and protect them in the land to which He took them from Egypt.
- ❖ On the other hand if they **disobeyed** then disasters would follow. They would be taken into captivity out of their land and eventually would be scattered throughout the world.

The Jews of Old Testament times were captive for some time in Babylon, but did return to the land, but not permanently. The words of Deuteronomy were to come painfully true after A.D.70 when the Jewish people were scattered throughout the world, culminating in the holocaust in the twentieth century. These prophetic words are chilling in their accuracy:

*... And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, 'Oh, that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Oh, that it were morning!' because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see (Deuteronomy 28:65–67).*

## **Not Forever!**

The second important prophecy is that despite this scattering the Jews would keep their national identity – they would always be identifiable as Jews.

This was against all the odds and certainly unlike most of the other nations that were important when Isaiah and Jeremiah were prophesying. Where are the Assyrians, the Babylonians or the Philistines? But the Jews have survived as a separate and distinct people, as part of the Jews' witness to God. As the prophet Jeremiah said:

*Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The Lord of hosts is His name): "If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever" (Jeremiah 31:35–36).*

God was saying that if we want to destroy the Jewish nation then that will be as difficult (or as impossible) as interfering with the systems of nature which are also under His control. Consequently the very existence of the Jews and now of the Jewish nation is powerful evidence that God is indeed the One and only true God.

## **Before Our Very Eyes**

Prior to 1948 there were few Jews in Israel. Now there are millions of Jews back in their land, just as God promised. The nation of Israel is constantly in our news. Despite what they may think or believe, the whole of Jewish history is a witness that the God of the Bible exists, that He is in control, and that He is the only God.

So every time you hear about Israel, remember that it is evidence for belief in God and that His gracious purpose is now quickly nearing its conclusion.

**Anna Hart**

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