

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Woo-woo (p. 3)

A Christian in Eastern Europe (p. 9)

The Music of the Psalms (p. 16)

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

Its objectives are to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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Woo-woo

WOO-WOO is a new word in the English language. It's used to describe unconventional beliefs which have no basis in reason or science. It's often used of religion and religious people, by people who believe they know better.

We're living in a scientific age. There are those who believe that science can explain the universe, without the need for a supernatural Creator. Some go on to claim that science and reason have disproved the existence of God. This is an increasingly popular view—so I think it's worthwhile looking at just three of the many reasons why this view is neither scientific nor reasonable.

The Origin of the Universe

It's generally agreed that the universe had a beginning. If it was infinitely old it would be different from the way it is. For example the night sky would be bright with starlight, because the sky is full of stars and the only reasonable explanation why we can't see them all is that the light of most of them has not reached us yet. Another argument is from so-called 'red shift'—light from a receding object has an increased wavelength (towards the red end of the spectrum), and the light we see from distant galaxies shows that they are not stationary but are moving, in a manner that indicates an expanding universe.

So how did the universe begin? This fundamental question provides a headache

for those who reject the supernatural, because by definition it was not a natural event. Nature did not exist. Reason demands that the universe was brought into existence by something that was outside it. The Bible provides a simple, reasonable explanation: *'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1).*

Fine Tuning



The earth is perfectly suited for the abundance of life which it holds. It is just the right size and so has just the right gravitational pull; it has a magnetic field which protects it from cosmic radiation; it's just the right distance from the sun for comfort, and is tilted on its axis just the right amount to produce habitable seasons all over its surface; it's composed of the right chemical elements to support life in the right proportions; it abounds with water, which is a peculiar substance unlike anything else in the universe, but perfectly suited to be the major constituent of living organisms; it's at just the right temperature

for its water to be liquid most of the time; it has a moon which is the ideal size and in the perfect orbit to cause the tides to flow at exactly the right rate to foster life in the seas.

Scientists accept that the earth appears to be painstakingly designed. Those who don't want to admit to the possibility of a Creator point to the fact that the universe is incomprehensibly big and there must be billions of planets, and some theorise that we actually live in a 'multiverse' of an infinite number of universes, in which case there will be an infinite number of planets—so an extraordinarily improbable planet like earth is bound to occur somewhere at some time, and we've got lucky.

The Bible provides a simple, reasonable explanation for our strange planet: *'Thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other"'* (Isaiah 45:18).

Living Organisms



The more we learn about life, the more amazing we find it to be—and the more imaginative atheists need to be as they try to explain how it's just the result of unguided processes. Think for example of the human eye. The current evolutionary theory is that an organism developed a

patch of light-sensitive cells that were connected to its nervous system; the organism had descendants in which the patch developed into a depression; generations later this developed into a cup and filled with fluid; a lens appeared; muscles appeared to control focussing and direction. In parallel with the development of the eye, the brain was developing the extraordinary sophistication required to control it and handle the information it provides.

The improbability of this happening is vast, but it didn't just happen once—from the vertebrate's eyeball to the insect's compound eye, there are many different eye designs which are so different that they could not have evolved into each other, so the eye must have evolved independently many times.

The Bible provides an account of the eye's origin which is far more plausible: *'The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both'* (Proverbs 20:12).

'Science' has been defined as 'the systematic study of the physical and natural world through observation and experimentation'. Experimentation is tricky when we're dealing with the origin of life and the universe, but we can certainly use observation.

'Reason' is defined as 'the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgements logically'.

With all due respect to those who take the alternative view, I have to say that I find the idea that there is a God to be more scientific and more reasonable than the alternative.

The Importance of Faith

A SCHOOLBOY ONCE defined faith as “When you believe things that you know aren’t true”. That’s actually how many people regard faith—an attitude of mind that’s the preserve of naïve and wishful people.

In fact, faith is a matter of daily life. Without faith society would collapse. For example, we all understand the value of bank notes—but bank notes are merely pieces of paper. They have value because our country’s Central Bank promises that the note could theoretically be exchanged for real money. We believe that promise. We have faith in the bank.

Why do we trust that the bank will honour its promise? We have two reasons:

1. A promise is a serious matter. If someone breaks a promise, they lose people’s trust. If a country’s Central Bank was to fail to honour its bank notes, the country’s financial system could collapse.
2. We have the benefit of experience. If you have used bank notes to buy things in the past, you have every reason to

believe that the next time you hand one over you will get its value in goods.

The Bible records many promises that are made by God Himself, the Creator of the universe. Can we trust those promises? We certainly can! For the same two reasons:

1. A promise is a serious matter. A promise made by God is of the utmost importance, because the character of God stands on the reliability of His word.
2. We have the benefit of experience. In the past God’s promises have been fulfilled, therefore we can have confidence in His promises for the future.

Examples of Faith

Frequently Jesus underlined the importance of faith. Luke 7:1–10 contains the account of the Roman Centurion who wanted Jesus to heal his servant. He did not feel worthy for Jesus to come to his house, instead he believed that Jesus could simply say the word and his servant would be healed. What an amazing thing,



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that a Roman Centurion would say that to a Jewish carpenter! But the Centurion recognised that Jesus had authority over the forces of nature. Jesus was impressed, and said *'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith'* (v. 9). He did as the centurion asked.

In the same chapter we see the account of the woman who approached Jesus and washed his feet in the home of Simon the Pharisee (vs. 36–49). She had a shameful past, but maybe she had heard Jesus' promise, *'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'* (Matthew 11:28). She understood that Jesus had come to help people like her. So, putting all embarrassment to one side and ignoring the disapproval of Simon and others, she performed for Jesus the most menial task of service. Jesus assured her: *'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'* (Luke 7:50). She believed that he could take away her burden of guilt, and her faith was rewarded. As for Simon the Pharisee, he was unaware of any burden and therefore did not receive the blessing of forgiveness.



Among the most striking examples of faith is the criminal who was crucified along with the Lord Jesus (Luke 23:39–43). From what he said to Jesus as they hung together, it is evident that he knew a lot about Jesus and his teaching about the Kingdom of God, but his heart had not been touched. But now, seeing Jesus in terrible agony and even praying for the Roman soldiers who were crucifying him, the attitude of the criminal changed. He remembered the words of Jesus and faith was born in his heart: *'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'* (v. 42). What marvellous faith! It would be easy to believe when seeing the miracles and the vast crowds following Jesus. But this man saw Jesus, drenched in his own blood, helpless and dying; he heard the sneers of the Pharisees; yet he believed. Without doubt his words were a tremendous encouragement to Jesus as he endured the agony of those final hours on the cross.

Faith in the Promises

There is one chapter of the Bible which is all about faith: Hebrews chapter 11. It's sometimes known as 'the faith chapter'. Firstly the writer defines faith: *'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'* (v. 1).

'The assurance of things hoped for'—belief in God's promises. Promises concern future events, and by believing those promises one shows faith. By faith things promised become realities in the mind of the believer.

The chapter follows with example after example of faithful men and women whose faith was so strong that they were

prepared to make great sacrifices in order to gain those promises. He mentions Noah who built the ark because he believed that God's word would be fulfilled (v. 7). He mentions Abraham who was prepared to sacrifice his son believing that if he did God would raise him from the dead (vs. 17–19). He mentions Joseph who, when he was dying, commanded that his bones be taken back for burial in Israel, so strong was his faith that his people would one day return to their land (v. 22). He mentions Moses who grew up as an Egyptian prince but who left the life of luxury because he valued the promises of God higher than the treasures of Egypt (v. 26).



He mentions Rahab who believed that the God of Israel was the true God and so she hid the Israelite spies (v. 31). Always, faith was revealed in action, not in mere words.

Thus the chapter continues, but the important point for us to note is that those faithful men and women were individuals out of the crowds. The crowds ignore God and His promises—this is how it is and how

it's always been. But some individuals, one here and one there, believe. In the eyes of those individuals, the promises of God and the hope of His Kingdom shine brighter than the attractions of the present world.

The chapter ends thus: *'And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect'* (vs. 39–40).

The Attitude of Faith

Jesus told a parable about workers who were hired to work in a vineyard (Matthew 20:1–14). It is a simple story about a landowner who hired labourers.

At the beginning of the day he hired the first gang, and made an agreement with them to pay one penny for a day's work. At the third hour and again at the sixth and ninth hours, and finally at the eleventh hour with only one hour of the day left to work, he hired more men. The salary was not discussed—he simply promised to pay *'whatever is right'* (v. 4). But who would decide what is right? The labourers were prepared to leave that for him to decide—they trusted him to deal with them fairly.

At the end of the day the householder paid their wages. Starting with those who had only worked for one hour, he paid them each a penny (with which they were no doubt very pleased). But when it came to those who had worked all day, they received only a penny as well. They complained, but he reminded them that he was paying them according to the terms of the contract they'd made.



raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life' (v. 4). Baptism is the way we show that we believe God, and we're going to put that belief into action in our lives.

What lesson arises from this parable? This is the lesson: if we are minded to go to God insisting on our 'rights', we ought to remember what our rights are according to the Bible: *'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23)*. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23), so death is what we deserve. Thankfully, Romans 6:23 does not stop there:

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Faith is the attitude that believes God's promises, and trusts that they are right and good though undeserved.

The Life of Faith

If Hebrews 11 is 'the faith chapter', Romans 6 is 'the baptism chapter', because it explains all about baptism.

Baptism is the start of the Christian life, when the believer is dipped under water as a symbolic death and resurrection. By this they show that they accept the salvation that Christ attained by his death, and they want to live a new life dedicated to him: *'We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was*

Why is there so much emphasis in the Bible on faith? Well, suppose you made an important promise to a friend but the friend shook his head and said, 'I don't trust your promise'. Can you imagine a more hurtful insult? How much more then, if we should say to God, 'I don't trust Your promises'.

By our faith we can honour God. By lack of faith we insult Him.

Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

David Budden

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A Christian in Eastern Europe

THE HISTORY OF Eastern Europe shares similarities with that of Western Europe, but there are also significant differences. Currently, people in Eastern Europe generally have lower incomes, which restricts their access to goods and opportunities that are more readily available in the West. If you're struggling to make ends meet and you see that others have very much more than you, it can be a cause of frustration. It can be difficult to be grateful for what you have. When the Bible says *'I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me'* (Psalm 13:6), the sentiment may not come easily.

Socialism



During much of the 20th Century, Socialism was the dominant political philosophy in Eastern Europe. Socialism is the belief

that the economy should be controlled by society as a whole. Capitalism—the belief that the economy is best controlled by individuals—prevailed in the West. East and West followed paths which took them in very different directions. The ideological divide widened after the Second World War.

Religion was seen as undesirable and dangerous to the socialist authorities. Initially they forcibly suppressed it, but in time more subtle and sophisticated tactics emerged. They extolled science as the key to progress. They emphasized the importance of repeatable experiments and measurable facts. Such miracles as the resurrection of Jesus Christ are not repeatable or measurable, therefore they were dismissed as mythology.

Another tactic was to blackmail prominent church leaders. They were investigated and their personal weaknesses were exposed, and they were obliged to submit to the state in order to retain their positions.

A third tactic was to discredit the churches. Orthodox priests were mocked for their long beards, and Catholic priests for their outlandish clothing and their celibacy. Mockery of religious leaders extended to mockery of their religion. The authorities declared

that only the feeble-minded could believe that water could be turned into wine (John 2), or that a man could ascend into the clouds (Acts 1). Miracles were dismissed as fantasy, and people who believed in them should not be taken seriously. In many countries publication of the Bible was banned.

The large established churches were permitted to operate, on condition their services were purely ceremonial and did not involve teaching, and they did not speak out against the state. The state monitored their activities closely. If a priest had an idea to increase the church's popularity, such as installing a table tennis table, the state might put pressure on the church hierarchy to have him removed. Western Protestant churches were not welcome, and their activities were discouraged.

Regime Change

The fall of Eastern European state socialism occurred between 1989 and 1991.



By this time, generations had grown up who had been taught to regard religion as foolishness. The Croats and Poles clung to the Catholic Church for nationalistic reasons, but elsewhere in Eastern Europe

religion was generally seen as the preserve of the elderly—who were nostalgic for the old days but had little idea what they believed—and young children, who were baptized as a formality and sent to religious education because it was customary, although it had little meaning.

Meanwhile, in the West secular thinking had largely displaced religion from public life. Those in Eastern Europe who emerged from state repression of religion and looked to the West for a religious revival were possibly disappointed.

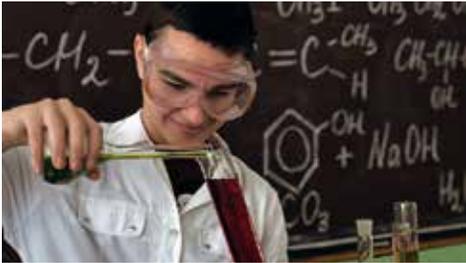
Yet religion is not incompatible with secular life. Jesus himself said, *'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'* (Matthew 22:21). The Bible clearly instructs Christians to live as good citizens in whatever country they find themselves (Romans 13:1–7).

The view of science that insists that anything that cannot be proven by experiment is therefore not possible—a view that was largely inherited from anti-religious communism—is still held by many people throughout the world. But there are some sincere people—scientists and others—who do not agree. They observe the universe in its complexity and they accept that it requires a Creator.

In his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul acknowledged that this is a logical attitude. *'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made'* (Romans 1:19–20).

Science and Faith

The natural sciences depend on proof. This is logical. If you want to know about something you will perform measurements and experiments, and they will enable you to form a theory. If you repeat those measurements and experiments and the results are consistent, the evidence for your theory becomes stronger. Eventually it will be regarded as proven.



When direct measurements and experiments are not possible, scientists may use calculations and mathematical methods. Then we come to the social sciences, which deal with the actions of people. Measurement and experiment is very difficult, especially when studying historical events. There is a huge amount of evidence for the truth of the Bible, but it does not amount to absolute proof.

This is not a problem. God does not provide scientific proof of everything the Bible says. He provides plentiful evidence that the Bible is His word, but ultimately He requires faith: *'Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him'* (Hebrews 11:6).

Christianity is not a science. It is not difficult to understand. Jesus himself

distilled the Gospel very simply, when he was asked the question: *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself"* (Matthew 22:36–39).

Followers of Jesus Christ do not attempt to present scientific proof for what they believe. They preach the simple glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ who died and rose again, as did the Apostle Paul: *'For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'* (1 Corinthians 1:22–24).

And of course they do not only preach by words. True followers of Christ are also known by their actions:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:12–14).

Zoltán Mészáros

Questions? Comments?
We'd love to hear from you!

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How did Daniel Know?

THE PROPHET DANIEL lived from around 620 to 538 BC. When he was a teenager, his home nation of Judah was attacked by the Babylonians and Daniel and some other young nobles were taken as captives to Babylon. There they became virtually slaves to the great king, Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel chapter 2 relates how God enabled the young prophet to interpret a peculiar dream the king had: a statue in the shape of a man, with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of mixed clay and iron.

Nebuchadnezzar had been wondering what would happen to his great empire after he had gone (v. 29), and so Daniel's first explanation was, 'You are the head of gold' (v.38). Babylon was a rich magnificent kingdom!

The dream showed that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was going to be replaced by another kingdom, represented by the chest and arms of silver—inferior to his, as silver is inferior to gold (v. 39).

The Fall of Babylon

Well, would you know? In 539 BC Babylon was conquered by the united kingdom of

the Medes and Persians. The account of this is in Daniel chapter 5.

Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, held a great feast in which he mocked the God of Israel. The mysterious fingers of an angel wrote a message on the wall, declaring that Belshazzar was found wanting, and he and his kingdom were at their end. *'That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old'* (vs. 30–31).

How did Daniel know that the great empire of Babylon was going to be conquered? And how did he know that the conqueror would be a dual kingdom (Medo-Persia), as represented by the two arms of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

Not only Daniel, but other Jewish prophets knew these things. The downfall of Babylon was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied around the time of the Babylonian invasion of Judah, when Babylon was at the height of its power:



Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave (Jeremiah 27:6–7).

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon at the time; his son was Nabonidus, and his grandson was Belshazzar. It happened exactly as Jeremiah said.

And the overthrow of Belshazzar was also predicted by Isaiah, who prophesied during the time of the empire of Assyria, before Babylon even had an empire:

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name (Isaiah 45:1–3).

Over 150 years before it happened, the prophet Isaiah foretold the overthrow of

Babylon, and named the king who was to do it!

We know from history that Babylon was a heavily fortified city. The river Euphrates ran through the city, and because this was a potential weak point its entrance was protected by a massive pair of gates. Cyrus ingeniously diverted the river, allowing his troops to gain access to the city—just as Isaiah described.

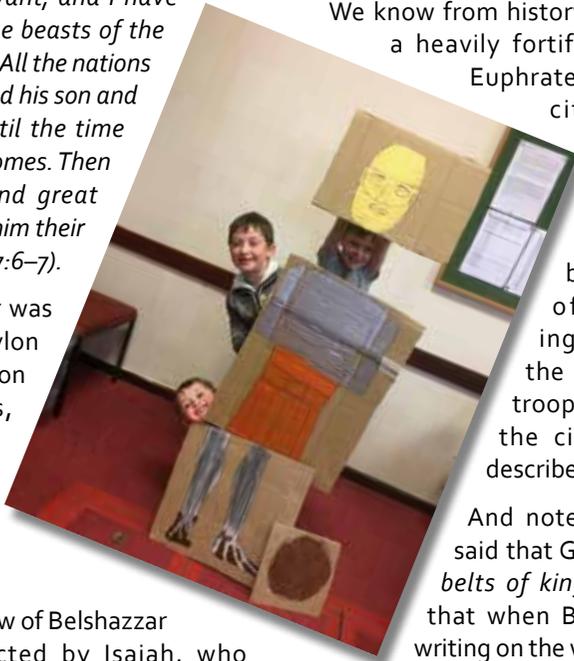
And note the detail: Isaiah said that God would '*loose the belts of kings*'. Daniel tells us that when Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall '*the king's colour changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together*' (5:6).

Nebuchadnezzar's Illness

Nebuchadnezzar was an arrogant king, but God taught him a lesson. Daniel chapter 4 tells of another dream the king had. He saw a great tree which was a shelter for all the birds and beasts of the earth (a very powerful symbol of himself, who took all the surrounding nations under his wings).

The tree was to be cut down and its growth stunted by having a band of iron and bronze bound about its stump.

Understandably, when Daniel was shown the meaning of the dream by God he was



afraid to tell the king (v. 19). How do you tell a king he's going to go mad? But he delivered God's message:

This is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will (vs. 24–25).

And so it happened. Nebuchadnezzar was struck with madness which lasted for seven years. His illness has been identified with lycanthropy, a disease where people believe they have been taken over by the characteristics of an animal, usually a wolf (this is thought to be the basis of stories about werewolves).

There is corroboration of Nebuchadnezzar's illness from secular history. Megasthenes, a Greek historian who lived in the Third Century BC, noted: "It is moreover related by the Chaldeans that as he went up to, or ascended the roof of his palace, he was possessed by some god" (most early civilisations attributed mental illness to the influence of a demon

or evil spirit). Josephus, the First Century Jewish historian, quotes a Babylonian priest called Berossus of the Third Century BC as saying of Nebuchadnezzar: "(It) may be rendered, just as well, that he fell into a state of mental depression, as into a state of bodily sickness." There is an inscription by Nebuchadnezzar himself in the Museum of the East India Company which describes the period of his insanity. It was a period when no great buildings were erected, no victims were offered on the altar of the Babylonians' god Marduk, and

the irrigation canals were not cleaned.

Nebuchadnezzar's incapacity came to an end, as Daniel said it would, and it had the effect that God intended:

At the same time my reason returned to

me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendour returned to me. My counsellors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble (vs. 36–37).

*J Hamilton Wilson
To be continued.*



1 John

JOHN'S LETTERS were the last to be written: his Gospel was probably written around 85 AD, and his three letters within the following ten years. The first was a general letter to believers.

Jesus Christ is *'the word of life'* (1:1) because belief in him and his teaching can lead to eternal life. Fellowship *'with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ'* (1:3) is vital. We need to *'walk in the light'*, that is, be guided by God's word (1:7) if we are to have fellowship with Christ. He is the mediator through whom alone true believers can obtain forgiveness of sins (1:7, 2:2, 4:10). This blessing enables them to walk with Christ and with one another (2:1–6).



The Way of Truth

False teachings were already developing in John's day. Many were influenced by a philosophy called Gnosticism, whose followers claimed special knowledge (Greek *gnosis*), contradicting what the Christians had learned about the nature of Christ. John referred to such teachers as *'antichrists'* (2:18, 22; 4:3). They denied that Jesus had come *'in the flesh'* (4:2) (that is, having human nature capable of being tempted, see Hebrews 2:14). In the

Gnostics' view it was inconceivable that one who was the Son of God could exist in human form, tainted with evil. This false idea actually paved the way for the later, unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. The truth is that though God was indeed his Father, Jesus could only be a sacrifice for sin, and our *'advocate with the Father'* (1 John 2:1), if he shared our nature.

Those who believe in the Son of God can themselves become children of God: *'See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God'* (3:1). *'God is love'* (4:8), and it was because *'God so loved the world'* (John 3:16), that He sent His Son into the world, *'so that we might live through him'* (1 John 4:9). Such love demands that we show love to others (3:13–23; 4:7–21). We love God when we believe His word and keep His commandments. We love others by showing them the way of truth and eternal life (1:2, 5:20).

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ 1 John 1:5–7—see 2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:5.
- ◆ 1 John 2:18—see 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Peter 2:1.
- ◆ 1 John 4:12, 20—see John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16.

The Music of the Psalms

THE BIBLE'S BOOK of Psalms contains some of the most sublime poetry ever written. But it's not just poetry—each of the 150 Psalms was originally intended to be sung. When words are set to music their power to touch the emotions is enhanced, and they're also easier to learn.

Many of the Psalms contain invitations to sing, for example:

*Shout for joy in the LORD, O you
righteous!
Praise befits the upright.
Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp
of ten strings!
Sing to him a new song;
play skilfully on the strings, with
loud shouts.*

(Psalm 33:1–3)

Some Psalms have a structure that indicates how they may have been sung by different voices, for example:

*Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures for ever."
Let the house of Aaron say,
"His steadfast love endures for ever."
Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His steadfast love endures for ever."
*(Psalm 118:2–4)**

Many of them have headings which are musical directions, for example Psalm 6:

'To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith.' (*Sheminith* is the Hebrew word that means 'eighth', and probably refers to the key in which the Psalm was to be sung.)

The Original Music

Jewish communities throughout the world have preserved different traditions of singing the Psalms and other parts of the Bible. But is it possible to know what the Psalms originally sounded like? There have been a number of attempts to reconstruct the ancient music. Perhaps the most celebrated has been the work of the French Jewish musicologist Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, which was completed in the last decades of the 20th Century.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְקֻוּ הַמַּיִם

Sample of Bible text with the cantillation marks shown in red

Many of the oldest manuscripts of the Psalms (and, interestingly, other books of the Old Testament) feature symbols written alongside the text. These are



known in Hebrew as *te'amim*, sometimes called 'accents' or 'cantillation marks'.

Haïk-Vantoura suggested that these symbols were originally a method of recording hand signals for directing the temple singers, and that they correspond to the degrees of a musical scale. The musical scale is lost, but after a laborious process of examining and comparing how the symbols appear in relation to the text, which took many years, she was finally convinced that she had decoded the *te'amim* and rediscovered the original music. She published her research in her book *Music of the Bible Revealed*, and performed her work widely.

Scholarly opinion is divided. Some are persuaded by Haïk-Vantoura's claim, some are not.

Recordings of her music are available on the internet. It's moving and beautiful, and the more poignant when you consider that this may well be the music that Jesus and the apostles listened to and sang—possibly even the music which King David and the other Psalmists originally composed.

The problem for me, and probably for you, is that these recordings present the Psalms in Hebrew. Wouldn't it be brilliant to hear them in English?

Adaptations

The Psalms have inspired some of the greatest hymns in the English language. For example "The Lord's My Shepherd",

based on Psalm 23, set to the Scottish tune Crimond, is a hymn which has lifted the hearts of worshippers for hundreds of years and is still popular today. But such hymns are paraphrases of the Bible's words—they give a flavour of the Psalm and they convey its basic thoughts, but in order to fit the words to the tune they inevitably move the words around and miss some out.

There are ways to enable the Psalms to be sung in their entirety. For example the Anglican chant uses a simple melodic formula which can fit irregular English word patterns. Such chants are easily learned and enable anyone to sing them, but they can lack feeling and they don't encourage the words to stick in the mind.

An internet search will reveal a number of individuals and organisations who have set some or all of the Psalms to modern music, with varying degrees of faithfulness to the text. Recordings are available, as well as resources to enable you to sing the Psalms individually or as a choir.

The Psalms were written to be sung, and music brings out the beauty and power of the words. But it is the words that are most important:

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

(Psalm 119:97–104)

Doug Potts

SF *You say that people don't go to heaven when they die. So why did Jesus tell the thief on the cross that he was going to paradise?*

Ed CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED along with two criminals.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:39–43).

Where did Jesus go on the day that he died? The Bible is clear that he didn't go to heaven. He spent three days in the grave, then he rose to life, and 40 days later he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11). Shortly afterwards the Apostle Peter was explaining the reality of Christ's resurrection, and he quoted a Psalm which was a prophecy of the resurrection: *'You will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption'* (Acts 2:27). Hades is the word that is often translated 'hell'—it simply means the grave. Literally, Christ went to hell when he died! (That's another subject.)

So what was the promise that Jesus made to the criminal? He

used carefully chosen words of encouragement.

Firstly, he used the word 'paradise' which is an unusual way to refer to the Kingdom of God. Paradise is a Persian word which originally meant a king's pleasure-garden, and so it's a very apt description of the Kingdom when the earth will be restored to its original beautiful state, like the Garden of Eden (Isaiah 51:3).

Secondly, he assured his companion that his suffering would be short. Crucifixion is a horrific method of torture, in which the victim would often take days to die. But because this was the eve of a Jewish holy day and the authorities wanted the bodies out of the way, they gave them a swift death (John 19:31–37)—so the man's suffering was cut short.

For those who die in faith, death is merely a sleep, awaiting the return of Christ when *'many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt'* (Daniel 12:2).

Jesus' final promise which he made to his faithful companion in suffering will be fulfilled—as far as he is concerned it will be the same day when he awakes to meet Christ in his glory.

Dreams From God

1 THE PROPHET DANIEL was able to interpret the dreams that God gave to king Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Daniel himself had prophetic dreams. The wordsearch contains their two names, together with seven other people who had God-given dreams.

**DANIEL NEBUCHADNEZZAR ABIMELECH BAKER
CUPBEARER JACOB JOSEPH LABAN PHARAOH**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| J | B | I | D | N | H | A | G | C | W | B | L | N | K |
| T | U | A | A | A | B | C | U | D | E | O | C | O | V |
| V | U | B | K | Z | N | P | E | B | M | C | N | M | S |
| H | A | T | C | E | B | I | P | L | F | A | Q | O | T |
| L | P | D | A | E | R | S | E | G | E | J | D | L | W |
| D | H | O | A | R | A | H | P | L | O | M | T | O | N |
| L | O | R | B | R | J | O | S | E | P | H | I | S | E |
| O | E | W | B | M | T | B | J | S | U | I | E | B | C |
| R | X | D | G | X | C | S | C | O | F | Z | V | G | A |
| R | A | Z | Z | E | N | D | A | H | C | U | B | E | N |

2 Identify each of the people in the following descriptions. None of them are in the book of Daniel. (References are on the facing page.)

He had dreams himself and was also able to interpret other people's dreams.

These three were kings.

God asked him in a dream what he wanted, and gave him more than he asked.

A king who had a dream about what would happen to his country.

These two each had a dream—one was a good outcome, one was not.

These two had conversations with God in their dreams.

These two were warned to do something, and obeyed.

He saw angels ascending and descending.

(Quotations are from the ESVUK: other versions might be slightly different.)

Anna Hart

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