

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1572



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Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

130th Year

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1572



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 mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Bible Versions

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Only One Way

When God rescued the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt He invited them to be His very own people – a nation that would be holy and special, different from all other people and nations. It was a remarkable invitation and was offered because God loved them and had made promises to their ancestors, as Moses later explained:

You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).

Such privilege brought responsibility, for God asked them to be obedient to His laws and promised that He would work with them and dwell with them if they remained faithful. Obedience would bring abundant blessing; they would be kept safe from any enemies and all their ways would prosper. But if they abandoned God, He would leave them to their own devices.

Spiritual Education

The relationship between God and His people was not just a matter of words and laws. God appointed Priests and Levites to teach the people His ways and showed them how to make a Tabernacle – a tented structure where people could come and worship Him in the appointed way. The tabernacle on this month's front cover is a replica, for the original was destroyed thousands

of years ago. This replica, designed to give visitors some idea of what the original Tabernacle would have looked like, is situated in Timna National Park, in southern Israel.

It consists of an outer courtyard, containing a replica altar (for animal sacrifices) and a laver (for washing); and an inner tented structure, divided into two sections. Like the original, which is carefully described in the Book of Exodus, it has a Holy Place which contains three items of furniture – a lampstand, a table with 12 loaves of unleavened bread, and an incense altar – and a Most Holy Place, curtained off from the first section, which contains a replica of the Ark of the Covenant. Nobody knows exactly what these items looked like, but an attempt has been made to depict them, using the descriptions that are given.

Limited Access

Visitors to Timna are allowed to wander freely through the various sections, but it was not so when the real Tabernacle existed. Then only the priests could enter the tented enclosure, to tend the lampstand, change the shewbread, or to burn incense. And only one priest (the High Priest) could enter the curtained enclosure – the Most Holy Place



– and then only on one day a year: the Day of Atonement. Everything was very carefully regulated and specified. If anyone varied God’s provisions, as the sons of Aaron once did, the outcome could be fatal:

Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Leviticus 10:1–2).

An event like that, which happened on the first day that the priesthood was being instituted, would have taught the people of Israel that God meant what He said and that He demanded total obedience. It was not acceptable to worship God any other way. God told the grieving father, Aaron, that he must hereafter: “*distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and ... teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken*” (Leviticus 10:10–11).

New Testament Truths

All this happened a long time ago but it is given fresh meaning in the New Testament, as a later article in this issue explains. Writing to the Hebrew Christians, the apostle shows that everything in the Tabernacle pointed forward to the saving work of Christ. For example, the Jewish High Priest was only allowed to enter the Most Holy Place once a year, and then only because of the sacrifice of animals, but the Lord Jesus entered into heaven itself on the basis of a better sacrifice that he offered – the sacrifice of his own life.

Nor has God changed the principles of acceptable worship. There was only

one way into the Tabernacle: through the gate in the outer courtyard, and, as we have seen, any variation from God’s revealed Word could be fatal. Yet today God is worshipped in many different ways and there are many different ways of understanding what the Bible teaches.

For example, some people believe you need to be baptised by immersion in order to properly identify with the work of the Lord Jesus. Others think that sprinkling or pouring a drop of water on a baby’s forehead is all that is needed. Both ways cannot be right. The challenge is to work out from the Bible just what God commands.

Only One Way

The apostle Paul was adamant that the true followers of Jesus are those who read the Word of God and obey its precise commands. He once recommended that very course of action to the elders of Ephesus, at the same time warning about the perils of wrong teaching creeping in, to pervert the gospel of salvation (see Acts 20, verses 28–32). And writing to the believers in Ephesus, he said this:

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in **one hope of your calling**; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:1–6).*

Editor

The Letter to the Hebrews

From its title, it is clear that this letter was written to readers of Jewish origin. They were also believers, because the writer calls them brothers and sisters, they have been given the power of the Holy Spirit, and they are suffering persecution for their faith.

That the writer is probably Paul is supported by the fact he sends greetings from the brothers from Italy, and he also asks them to pray that he may be restored to them soon, which would suggest that he was in prison as he writes. The logical and scriptural arguments he advances are also typical of the great lawyer.

We know from 2 Peter 3:15 that Paul wrote a letter to Hebrews, in fact to the same readership as the apostle Peter, who sent his letters to *“the exiles of the dispersion”* (1 Peter 1:1). Still, it is unusual that he did not sign off the epistle with his name as he was accustomed to do.

Leave Jerusalem!

This letter asks Jewish Christians to make a clean break with the Temple and Judaism, because the end of the Jewish State is at hand. If they continue to cling to their traditions and the false security of the Law of Moses, they will be caught up in the overthrow of Jerusalem. They must go *‘outside the camp’*, as Jesus did when he was crucified. On the same lines as the letter to the Romans, the apostle presents logical arguments to show that the Law is now redundant. Jesus, he says, has offered the perfect sacrifice to which ‘the lambs and bulls’ of the



Believers were to abandon the Temple at Jerusalem now that Christ had died as a perfect sacrifice.

Law pointed forward. The priesthood has now been changed. A New Covenant has replaced the Old. We will quickly review his careful argument, which is backed up at every turn by quotations from the Old Testament to show that new arrangements have now been provided by God.

Son of God

The apostle begins by proving that Jesus was not just another prophet. He was the Son of God – greater even than the angels, and the centre of God’s great plan. God had spoken down the centuries through the mouths of the prophets, but in Jesus He had shown His character in living flesh.

For a while, as Psalm 8 foretold, Jesus had a status lower than the angels. This was so that by suffering death he could share to the full the condition of the men and women he came to save. But now Jesus was exalted to be superior to the angels, and one day would have the world at his feet. His death as a sacrifice had

brought death in turn to the Devil (the power of sin in human hearts), and set his brothers and sisters free from the grip of the grave. And his experiences as a man like us had prepared him for his present rôle as High Priest to his followers.

Repent Today!

The third and fourth chapters are a phrase-by-phrase exposition of Psalm 95. Here, King David the Psalmist tells the people of his day not to miss out on the Sabbath rest which God has promised to His people. The original generation of Israelites that left Egypt failed to enter the Promised Land, because they had hard hearts. They could not bring themselves to believe God could do what He said. David warns his readers not to make the same mistake.

Since David wrote 500 years after the Exodus, there must still have been a 'rest' for people to enter into in the time of David. And if it was awaiting David's people, then it must be awaiting us too. The original inheritance under Joshua was therefore only a pattern or type for a future 'rest' which Jesus will bring to those who follow him. So the Law and its priesthood was not the final state of God's plan. It pointed forward to a better inheritance – the Kingdom of God.

Great High Priest

The writer now turns his attention to the work of Jesus as our High Priest. The Law of Moses had priests, who were descendants of Aaron in the tribe of Levi. Priests had to help people to survive their problems and sufferings and failures, and bring their case to

God in prayer. Jesus is uniquely placed, says the apostle, to do this. He was a man like us, and knows our temptations and weaknesses. And when we admit we have sinned against God, Jesus gave the perfect sacrifice to take away sins – the sacrifice of himself.

Paul digresses to warn us that we must progress beyond the elementary truths about salvation, and see the deeper principles that lie hidden in God's Word. We are heirs of the promises God made to Abraham, he says, which lie in the future, not the present. They are like an anchor in the storms of life, something to cling to, sure and steady because these promises are guaranteed by God Himself.

The rope that links us to the anchor passes, in a figure, through the veil, or curtain, of the Tabernacle (the tent in which God was worshipped in the wilderness journey had an inner compartment, the Most Holy, which represented the presence of God). Jesus, our High Priest, has already passed through the veil of mortality, and sits as our dependable anchor man at the right hand of God.

On the theme of Jesus as priest, we are told that he did not inherit the office of priesthood from his forefathers, like the priests under the Law of Moses. He was sworn into office by God himself, as we read in Psalm 110. Here David's Lord (Jesus) is declared to be a priest '*after the order of Melchizedek*', and we will learn more about that priesthood in the next article.

David M Pearce

To be continued



Jesus is Alive and Well!

Jesus gave his life as a perfect sacrifice for sin and was raised again by God to receive eternal life, after which he ascended to heaven to be with his Father.

Jesus died because he was truly human, just as we are. His death shows us that it is right and necessary for wayward human nature to die. But Jesus lived a perfect life so, unlike us, he did not deserve to die. Thus God raised him from the dead.

Gone!

Three days after his public death by crucifixion some of his sad followers went to the grave to embalm his body, but it was not there! Jesus had risen, just as he promised:

“The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up.” And they were exceedingly sorrowful (Matthew 17:22–23).

The grave had been sealed, and was also guarded by soldiers, but the stone door had been rolled aside and Jesus' body had gone. The Jewish leaders made up a story that his followers had stolen it, although they could not explain how they avoided the soldiers; nor could the leaders find the body.

What really happened was that Jesus was alive again, raised to perfect eternal life by the power of God. Please read Matthew chapter 28 for the full account.



Many Proofs

All the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell us about the resurrection of Jesus. It is that important. Matthew and John were there at the time, and were eye-witnesses. Mark was not far away. Luke carefully researched everything that he learned from other people (Luke 1:1–4) and Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would guide his apostles into ‘all truth’ (John 16:13).

Luke later wrote a long account called ‘The Acts of the Apostles’ in which he records the apostles’ activities after the death of Jesus. It starts by telling a man named Theophilus that Jesus:

“Presented himself alive after his suffering”, to the apostles “by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

Firm Evidence

Luke mentions “many proofs” that showed that Jesus was alive again. The gospel accounts describe how Jesus showed himself in all kinds of circumstances – by night and by day; to individuals and to crowds; in Jerusalem and in the country; indoors and outdoors; to men and to women. Six weeks later, the apostle Peter explained it like this:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in

your midst, as you yourselves also know—him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. For David says concerning him: 'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption'" (Acts 2:22–27).

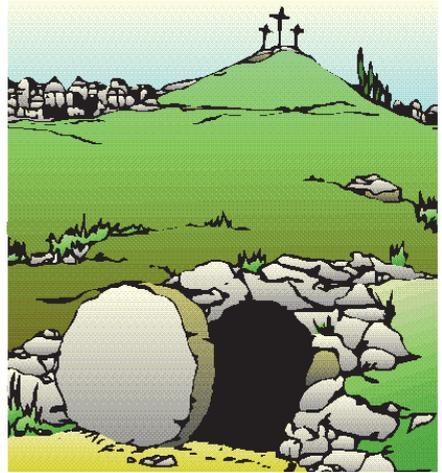
Not only is Jesus alive again, said Peter, but there is a prophecy in the Old Testament (given 1,000 years before!) which said this would happen. You can find it in Psalm 16, verses 8–11.

Other Options?

Some people have suggested other explanations for what happened. They have said that:

- ✘ it wasn't Jesus who died but someone else who took his place;
- ✘ Jesus only fainted on the cross and revived after he was put in the tomb;
- ✘ his followers went to the wrong tomb; or
- ✘ that they so wanted him to be alive that they made up the story or imagined it.

If you read the gospels carefully you will find that none of these supposed explanations work: they are all impossible. About twenty years later the apostle Paul summed up the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus in his first



letter to the church in Corinth, chapter 15. Please read all of it, but here is what he says about those men and women who saw Jesus alive again after his death:

I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that he was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all he was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

Paul had been an unbeliever, a vicious persecutor of the followers of Jesus! You can learn about his conversion by reading Acts chapter 9. Think about the facts yourself and you might come to accept the great news that Jesus is alive and well, now in heaven but due to return shortly to the earth.

John Woodall

“Glad Tidings of Great Joy”

Joy is the sort of feeling that makes you very happy indeed. Perhaps you have achieved something really worthwhile, like the job of your dreams; you are about to get married; or you’ve now got children and are expecting to move into a new house. Such things can make you really happy, truly joyful, and there are many incidents and occasions where people have been overjoyed about things like that.

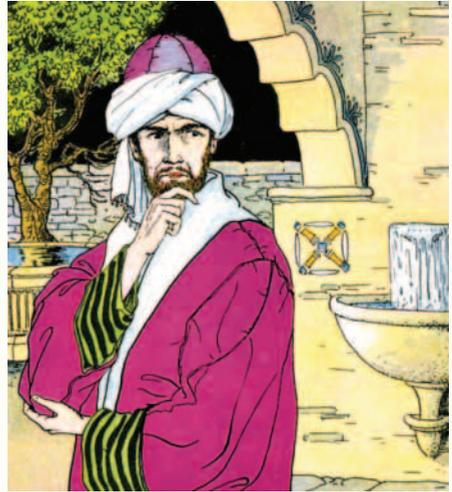
Joyful Reunions

Because the Bible is a book that captures the life stories of a lot of important people – people who are important to God – there are many occasions when they rejoiced. Take father Jacob, who had lived many years believing that his favourite son was dead, only to discover that Joseph was indeed alive and was ruling over Egypt!

What a reunion that must have been. No doubt he shed many tears of joy and spent the last 17 years of his life reunited with his son. In Genesis chapters 45 and 46 you can read about the embarrassment of Joseph’s brothers, who would have had to admit to their father that they had sold Joseph as a slave and then lied about his death. But Jacob’s joy is so overwhelming that no record exists of their embarrassing confessions.

The Prodigal Returns

Jesus told a parable about a son who had left home for years and had spent all his inheritance unwisely, before deciding to return home. His grieving father might have long ago given up on his prodigal son. But no! While the elder brother had disowned him, the



The elder brother was unhappy to see the prodigal son return.

father was always hoping, always looking, always expecting that one day his son would return. And one day it happened:

He arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry... (Luke 15:20–24).

Great Joy

Luke begins his gospel with a detailed account of the birth of the Lord Jesus,

including the appearance of an angel to some shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem. The angel had come with a message from heaven about the birth of a very special baby, but had not come alone:

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:8–14).

The birth of a baby is usually a joyful occasion, and the initial trauma is soon forgotten when the baby is held in its mother's arms. But this child was no ordinary baby. Mary had given birth to the Son of God: the long-awaited Messiah who was to rescue and redeem God's people from their sins. As the angels said, he was "Christ the Lord". This was a cause for more than joy: for "great joy"!

It would be quite wrong to think of heaven as somewhere devoid of emotion or deep feeling. Far from it. When Jesus told a parable about a lady who had found something she had lost, he said: "*Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*" (Luke 15:9–10).

Imagine that! Heaven in raptures because of one lost person who realises that there is more to life than mere existence and who turns to God and seeks His forgiveness.

Father and Son

Jesus grew up in Nazareth working as a carpenter but nothing is said about his skill as a tradesman. Instead we are told that he "*increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men*" (Luke 2:52). All through his life Jesus pleased his Father. From childhood to manhood he was preparing himself to do the work his Father wanted him to do and God made His approval a matter of record.

- ❖ At his baptism "*a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'*" (Mark 1:11).
- ❖ Towards the end of his public ministry, that same commendation was made, this time high on a mountainside: "*...a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear him!'*" (Mark 9:7).

Born to Die

All through his life Jesus knew that it was God's will that one day he must die to "*save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21); that was why he was named 'Jesus', or 'Saviour'. At all times it pleased Jesus to be obedient and responsive and we do him a great disservice to suggest that there was anything automatic about his life on earth. The writer to the Hebrews says:

Though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered (Hebrews 5:8);

and elsewhere:

Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear... (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus in Gethsemane

Those “*vehement cries and tears*” take us to the terrible events in the garden of Gethsemane. If anyone thinks that Jesus was merely acting out a part that would automatically take him back to heaven, they have not properly understood the turmoil that raged in the mind of Jesus as he contemplated the cruel death that lay ahead:

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.” He went a little farther and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, “O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:37–39).

The immense strain on Jesus showed in his words and actions. There was help at hand, if Jesus had wanted it. For when the mob came, guided by Judas, and Peter resisted with his sword, Jesus rebuked him gently with these words:

“Do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53).

Yet Jesus did not ask for this help. His watchword was “*Thy will be done*”, as he yielded to his Father’s will, but much later the inspired apostle to the Hebrews gives this insight:



‘Gethsemane’ means ‘Oil Press’ and this was a place of great pressure and stress for the Lord Jesus as his death drew near.

*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who **for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1–2).*

As one writer summarised what was going on in the mind of the Lord:

“For the Jews it was a shameful thing to be spat upon and derided and beaten and then, worst of all, to be crucified. But he endured the shame of it all; and he did it by faith in the promise of God by which he saw the joy before and, encouraged by this prospect, he was sustained and triumphed. He now knows that joy then contemplated; for at the Father’s right hand are pleasures for evermore” (John Carter: Hebrews).

Joy in Heaven

Jesus was crucified and died “to save his people”, but he rose to life again on the third day. Matthew records the actions of the two Marys going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus for burial. There was no body to be found; instead an angel appeared to inform them that Jesus was risen and that

they should go and tell the disciples. What did they do?

They went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word (Matthew 28:8).

What a happy time that must have been, when Jesus appeared to convince them that he had conquered death and had opened up a way to eternal life for all who want it. During the next forty days Jesus appeared to his disciples, preparing them for what lay ahead, after his ascension to heaven.

That took place as they were walking together towards Bethany, crossing the Mount of Olives. You can read the account in Acts chapter 1, which explains how angels appeared both to receive Jesus into heaven (Acts 1:9), and to promise the disciples that he would return in due course:

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

We are left to imagine the sort of reception Jesus received when he entered his Father's presence in heaven and there he now sits at his

Father's right hand, awaiting the time when he will return to rule on earth. A thousand years before Jesus was born the psalmist King David foretold the resurrection of Jesus (as the apostle Peter confirms in Acts chapter 2) and this is what the inspired writer said about Jesus' life in heaven:

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

That fullness of joy in heaven awaited the Lord Jesus, but it is not what awaits the followers of Jesus. For heaven is coming to earth, when the will of God is done here and the Kingdom of God is established, with Jesus as its King. Heaven may not be our destination, but joy most certainly is, as the apostle Jude explains:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen (Jude 24–25).

Roy Soffe

The Joy of Jesus

With Christ, as with Paul, joy was part of "*the fruit of the Spirit*" (Gal.5:22). It resulted from knowledge of the fact that ordinary people could have fellowship with God and trust in Him as their heavenly Father. The joy of Jesus came through obedience to the Father's will and through mutual love between the Father and the Son. It was the joy of self-sacrificing service. Jesus endured the trials of life by means of the divine joy that was set before him and because of the certain hope that was his of glory to come beyond death.

W. G. Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament*

Is the Trinity Biblical?

The doctrine of the Trinity is widely accepted in orthodox Christianity and many accept it as truth without question. But people who believe that the Bible contains the truth that God has revealed about Himself and His purpose will want to satisfy themselves that the Bible really teaches that God, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are indeed three-in-one, as the creeds declare. This matters because the Lord Jesus, in a prayer to his Father, said:

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

The Origins

The word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, neither in the Old nor the New Testaments. It is a word that came into existence many years after the New Testament was completed and circulated. It first appeared in the writings of church fathers and was developed into a system of belief by church councils about 400 years later. Three creeds were formulated – the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed – and those creeds are still in use in some churches today. But are they a true expression of what the Bible teaches? We’ll look at just two.

❖ The Apostles’ Creed

This creed is the oldest of the three and is the nearest to the original faith of the early Christians.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.¹

You can see that the wording is simple and its statements largely summarize Bible teaching. But subsequent church councils developed a much more complicated way of describing the relationship between the Lord Jesus and his Father, as they saw it, resulting in another set of statements.

❖ The Athanasian Creed

Although called after Athanasius, who was a bishop in Alexandria, this wording came long after his death. It was the product of a church council which wanted to end controversy and the difference of opinion which had existed throughout the established church for centuries. That is why the wording is so emphatic that this is the only belief that will lead to salvation. Here are a few selections from the creed:

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For

there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one...

Then a bit further, we have:

As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord.

And again, a little later:

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity."

Man-Made

It should never be forgotten that this wording is the result of a church council, and is therefore very different from Bible teaching which is what God has revealed about Himself and His purpose. Indeed, the Bible cautions its readers about man-made statements:

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in



Greek Masks: One man assumes three roles their own craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile" (1 Corinthians 3:18–20).

With that caution in mind, we should remember that it is a failing of human nature to corrupt things that were originally simple and to lose sight of the simple truth in the process. Thus in the time of Jesus the religious leaders of Israel were so sure of their own beliefs and traditions they failed to recognize the Lord Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah and sought instead to have him executed. Jesus warned his disciples to:

Beware of the leaven (or teaching) of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (Luke 12:1).

Later the apostles warned of the way that ideas would circulate which would distort and damage the truth that God had revealed:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8);

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies

in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1–2).

These are serious warnings and show how important it is that we look carefully at what the Bible teaches, to see if the creeds are right or wrong.

God is One

It is a fundamental teaching of the Bible that God is a Unity, not a Trinity. The Jews understand that to be one of the key teachings of the Old Testament:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4–6).

The Lord Jesus endorsed that understanding when he said of this passage that it was the first and greatest commandment:

‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Matthew 22:36–37).

Wherever we look in the Bible we are assured that God is unique and supreme above all. The prophet said:

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).

The apostle said:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all,

who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4–6).

The Lord Jesus said about his followers: *‘My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand...’ (John 10:29).*

Unity of Purpose

Read that last passage and you will see that it continues like this:

‘...I and my Father are one’ (John 10:30).

It was an immediate cause of contention with the Jews who heard Jesus say that, so much so that they tried to stone him for blasphemy, thinking that he was claiming to be God. Read on and you will find that Jesus makes no such claim, and never did. What he claims to be is “*the Son of God*” (John 10:36), one who was working in perfect harmony with his heavenly Father, a harmony that he wanted his disciples to share (John 17:11).

A lot more could be written about the relationship that existed between the Father and His Son, but I hope that this article will start you thinking about the importance of understanding what the Bible really teaches, regardless of what creeds or traditions declare. Remember what Jesus said:

‘This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent’ (John 17:3).

Grahame A Cooper

¹ The “*holy catholic Church*”, here means the whole church. In older versions of this Creed, “*he descended to the dead*” reads “*he descended to hell*”. This sentence is merely saying that Jesus was laid in the grave.

King Manasseh

Queen Victoria reigned for 63 years, Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her Diamond Jubilee two years ago, and three English kings, Edward III, Henry III and George III, reigned for over 50 years.

In Bible times such lengthy reigns were rare, and only two managed more than 50 years, Uzziah and Manasseh, who reigned for 55 years.

A Poor Start

Manasseh came to the throne when he was only twelve years old following the death of his father Hezekiah. Hezekiah had been told that he was about to die and then, after an impassioned prayer, had fifteen years added to his life. It was during these years that Manasseh was born.

Unusually we are told the name of his mother, Hephzibah, which means “my delight is in her”. Manasseh’s name means “causing forgetfulness”, which is perhaps appropriate, in view of some of his later deeds.

It is not surprising that a boy of only twelve years of age coming to the throne of a kingdom like Judah, should have had problems. He would be easily influenced by his advisors and counsellors and, sadly, he seems to have set out to undo the reforms of his wise and godly father, Hezekiah.

He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he



erected altars to the Baals, and made Asheroth, and worshipped all the host of heaven and served them (2 Chronicles 33:2–3, ESV).

Baals and Asheroth were pagan idols and the high places were shrines where such false gods had long been worshipped.

A little later in the same chapter the same sorry tale is repeated, as if to stress the desperate wickedness of the early part of Manasseh’s reign. This was not the full extent of his terrible wickedness, for we are also told:

“He burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger” (verse 6).

We would find such practices totally abhorrent, but they were not uncommon at the time, although specifically forbidden in the Jewish law.

“There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer” (Deuteronomy 18:10).

From Bad to Worse

It seems as if Manasseh looked at God's law, and then tried to find ways of breaking it! His most heinous act was to place an image of an idol in the Temple at Jerusalem, the place where the Lord God had particularly said that He would put His Name. God did not immediately strike down Manasseh for his evil and wicked ways. Instead it is recorded that He spoke to Manasseh, by his servants the prophets, in an attempt to bring him back on track.

"Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things more evil than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle" (2 Kings 21:11-12).

Finally the Lord God acted against Manasseh. The Assyrian army came against him and Judah and Jerusalem, he was taken captive and sent, bound with chains to Babylon. This had an effect which all of the previous appeals had been unable to achieve: it brought him to his knees in prayer, a prayer that was sufficiently moving for the Lord God to react positively to it. He was allowed to return to Jerusalem and take up his kingship once more. This brief note says it all: "Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God."

Reformed Ruler

From then on Manasseh seems to have behaved very differently. We are not given a timescale for how soon in his reign he reformed, but it must have been in sufficient time for him to bring in serious changes. He extended the

fortifications of the part of Jerusalem known as the City of David, and placed army commanders in all the fortified cities in his realm.

More importantly he removed all the idols from the Temple and from the other altars he had built on the Temple mount and in Jerusalem. This was a precursor to restoring the altar of the Lord God and using it for the proper worship as it should have been.

One important lesson to learn from the life of Manasseh is that it is never too late for effective repentance, if that is what we really want to do. There is though a further sad comment about his reign, even after his reforms. "Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God" (2 Chronicles 33:17).

The reforms of the king only went so far for the people were not wholly involved in the repentance and reform. The leaders of a nation can only do so much, it is then up to the people.

Death claimed Manasseh after the longest reign in the history of Judah. He was succeeded by his wicked son, Amon, who reigned for only two years, before the people decided enough was enough and overthrew him in favour of his son, good King Josiah.

Mark Sheppard

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Don't be a Fool!

A Committed Businessman

“Wilfred was a very successful businessman” said the preacher. “He worked single-mindedly to make his business thrive, throwing his heart and soul into it. As a result he was highly respected in the community. He had intended to retire in a couple of years’ time after completing a few important projects. But sadly, unknown to him, he had a heart problem and last Wednesday he collapsed and died of a massive heart attack. I did not know him personally, but by all accounts he was a good-humoured and kindly person.”

Wilfred was not married and had no close family. He had not made a will, so all his money and possessions were disposed of in accordance with the law of the land. Among his papers lay a letter from his doctor inviting him to a free health check, and a half-completed coupon ordering a postal course about the Bible. Wilfred had not found the time for either of these two things and now it was simply too late.

A Foolish Rich Man

In Luke chapter 12, verses 16–21, Jesus tells a parable about a rich man in a similar position.

The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul,

“Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:16–20).

Jesus summarizes the lesson he was teaching in these words:

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Two Groups

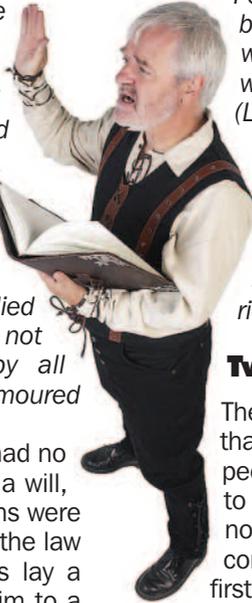
The Bible makes it quite clear that there are two groups of people – those who are trying to obey God and those who are not. Consequently, when Jesus comes back to the earth the first group will be granted eternal life in God’s kingdom and, tragically, the others will not. This was prophesied by Daniel who said:

Many of them who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting shame and contempt (Daniel 12:2).

This truth is re-iterated in the New Testament:

“... all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28–29).

The apostle Paul uses strong words



to warn the believers at Corinth against a list of things that God abhors, and which can put people in the group that is rejected:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. 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 (1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

We Can Fool Ourselves

Some of those who will be rejected are not evil by human standards. In fact they may consider themselves to be believers, but just professing to be a Christian is not good enough. Jesus warned:

Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, you who practice lawlessness' (Matthew 7:22–23).

It is therefore clear that some of those to be rejected believe that they have been true followers of Jesus, but the words of Jesus are chilling – “depart from me”. Imagine such a dreadful rebuke from the Lord Jesus.

Time running out

The rich man in the parable had got his priorities wrong, and did not put God and His ways first in his life. Hence he

was, by God’s standards, a fool. Wilfred too was foolish. He threw all his energy into his business, at the expense of his physical and spiritual health. If he had taken time to make an appointment with the doctor, maybe the heart attack could have been prevented. Far more importantly, if he had allowed himself time to read his Bible, Wilfred could have learnt what God asked of him and acted on it. He lost the opportunity.

None of us knows the date of our death or the time when the Lord Jesus will return to the earth. Each of these events will end our opportunity to do things. ‘Today’ is the day of our opportunity. Now is the time to find out God’s offer of salvation and what He asks of us so that we can then try to do it. This is the warning of the apostle when writing to Hebrew believers:

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:12–15).

Responding to God is urgent and critical – a matter of life and death. We would be fools not to make this our top priority right now!

Anna Hart

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