



Light

...on a new world

a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible and its message for today

- anti-Semitism
- Naaman the leper
- can we communicate with the dead?

VOLUME 26.1

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The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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Cover Picture:

Inside the 'Hall of Names' at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jerusalem. About 4 million names are documented here out of the 6 million Jews who perished (see page 1).

For more information about the place of the Jewish people in God's plan, send for your free copy of the booklet 'Survivors'.

Note:

All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) except where another version is indicated after the text.

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from the Editor

What is anti-Semitism?

One encyclopedia describes it as “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group. The term anti-Semitism was coined in 1879 by the German agitator Wilhelm Marr to designate the anti-Jewish campaigns under way in central Europe at that time” (Encyclopedia Britannica Online).

Anti-Semitism is a word which is very much in the news these days, particularly in Europe. Recent attacks on Jews in Paris and Copenhagen have resulted in world-wide condemnation. The Prime Minister of Israel has appealed for European Jews to emigrate to Israel if they wish to enjoy greater protection in an increasingly hostile world.

It is only 70 years ago that the full horror of Nazi anti-Semitism was revealed to the world in January 1945 near the end of the Second World War. Hitler’s ‘final solution’ to the so-called Jewish problem resulted in the mass murder of six million European Jews in the death camps of Germany and Poland. It also resulted in the mass migration to Palestine of many Jews who managed to survive the Holocaust. The State of Israel was established in 1948 when Britain gave up its control of Palestine.

The term anti-Semitism is a misnomer because it implies prejudice against ‘Semites’. This description includes Arabs whose ancestor according to the Bible was Shem the son of Noah. Abraham was descended from Shem as we learn from Genesis chapter 11. He in turn was the ancestor of both Jews and Arabs.

The history of the Jews is a history of racial discrimination and hatred lasting for many centuries. Under Roman occupation, they rebelled with disastrous consequences. The Roman army besieged the city of Jerusalem and quelled the rebellion in AD 70, killing many Jews. Most of those who survived were sold as slaves and dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. Their subsequent history over the last 2,000 years is one of discrimination, hatred and

ill-treatment in the countries of their dispersion.

Have you ever wondered why the Jews have been the subject of so much hatred over such a long period of time? After all, the Bible tells us that they were chosen by God to be His special people. After they came out of Egypt, Moses reminded the children of Israel that they were set apart from the nations as *“a holy people to the LORD... a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth”* (Deuteronomy 7.6). But there were conditions, for God had told Moses: *“...if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people...”* (Exodus 19.5).

The children of Israel acknowledged the ‘covenant’ or solemn binding agreement in the words: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19.8). They eventually settled in the land promised to their ancestor Abraham, the land of Canaan or Israel as we know it today. However, their subsequent history reminds us that they failed to keep that covenant and eventually were removed from the land by a succession of cruel invaders – Assyrians, Babylon-ians and finally the Romans.

All that has happened to the Jews was foretold in the Bible. For example, the words of Moses are recorded as a warning to God’s people. Deuteronomy chapter 28 is well worth reading, as it reminds us of the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the consequences for failing to keep it.

“...you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will lead you.”

verse 37

“...the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other...among those nations you shall find no rest...”

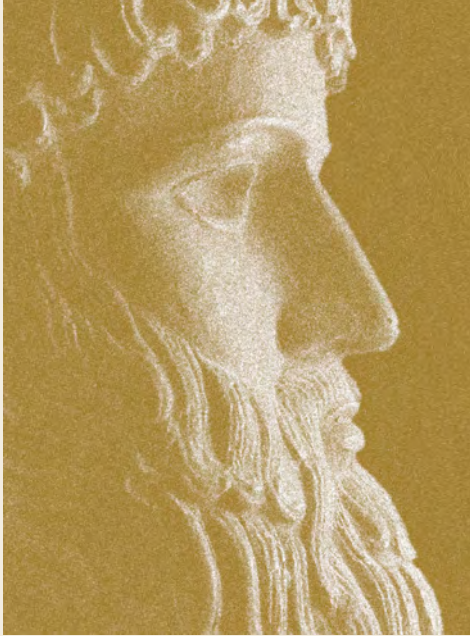
verses 64,65

“Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life.”

verse 66

God is always true to His Word and the increase in anti-Semitism today is a fulfilment of many passages of Scripture like these. The Jews today are mainly a secular nation. However, the Bible speaks of a time when a great change will take place – God’s people will eventually serve Him wholeheartedly as His covenant people. That change will affect the whole world, fulfilling some amazing promises made to their ancestor Abraham.

Editor



BIBLE CHARACTERS

Naaman the leper

The account of Naaman is one of the classic stories of the Old Testament. In the 2nd book of Kings chapter five there is the record of how a Syrian army general was cured of his leprosy. In order to familiarise yourself with the narrative, it is worth reading that chapter before looking at this article.

The call of a Gentile

We begin with some words of Jesus: “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4.27). Jesus explained that there was something special about Naaman; indeed he was unique in his generation as

being the focus of God’s healing power. The fact that only this foreign leper was healed suggests that, like many of Jesus’ own miracles, the cleansing of Naaman was intended as much more than a demonstration of God’s compassion. Its principal purpose was educational; it conveys a deep spiritual truth to those who would look beyond this simple act of love and mercy.

In the example of Naaman we see perhaps the greatest evidence of Divine providence to manipulate circumstances to bring a Gentile (non-Jew) into the orbit of God’s plan of salvation. God’s grace was never restricted to the chosen people of Israel. In this case, it was to be poured out on a Gentile who also was a leper. To the Jew there could be nothing worse than a leprous Gentile, yet as Jesus

proclaimed, such a person took precedence over many Jewish lepers in God's estimation. Therefore, at its most fundamental level, this story shows that there is no one who is outside the scope of God's plan of redemption. It also shows that humility, faith and obedience must be demonstrated if we are to benefit from God's mercy.

Leprosy a symbol of sin

The narrative revolves around the fact that Naaman was a leper. The following extract quotes a series of headings that one writer used to describe the significance of leprosy:

'It has an insignificant beginning; it works insidiously and almost imperceptibly; it spreads rapidly; it is highly infectious; it is particularly loathsome; it is a state of living death; it was dealt with by banishment; its victims became objects of shame; it was incurable except by miracle and the grace of God' (Gleanings from Elisha by A W Pink).

In those few descriptive statements, we can see how appropriate leprosy is as a symbol of sin; it demonstrates the nature and outcome of sin in the sight of God. In the figure, Naaman was in an even worse plight, because as a Gentile he was among those described in the New Testament as *'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no*

hope and without God in the world'. But God, through His grace and mercy was to reveal in a powerful way that those *'who once were far off have been made near'* (Ephesians 2.12,13).

Why did God choose Naaman?

So why did God choose Naaman as the vehicle to reveal His grace to the Gentiles? There is a lot of circumstantial evidence to suggest that Naaman was a good and noble man. What is the evidence? For those who put significance on the meaning of names, according to Strong's concordance, Naaman means 'pleasant'; Hitchcock's Bible Names gives 'agreeable'. However, the main testimony to Naaman's character is seen in the attitude of his servants.

First there was the disposition of the captive Jewish girl; she had been captured by one of the Syrian raiding parties, either by Naaman himself, or perhaps purchased by him from a slave market in Damascus (2 Kings 5.2). We can imagine the sort of fate that often befell a young captive girl, over and above the traumas of being exiled from family, friends and home. Such experiences would normally lead the girl to rejoice in any calamity that came upon her captors. We see no such hostility between the girl and Naaman – quite the contrary, for she



Assyrian chariot on a relief from the palace of Sargon II, Khorsabad, Iraq. 717–705 BC

expresses concern over Naaman's condition and hopes for a cure (2 Kings 5.3). We must conclude that she experienced nothing but kindness in the house of Naaman.

We should also note how his servants addressed him: '*...his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father"*' (2 Kings 5.13). They referred to him with a term of benevolence and respect. It is also a measure of the man that they felt able to approach him at all. Most slave owners from that era of history would not have taken kindly to a servant suggesting they had made a mistake. They would have tried to steer clear of their master's anger until it had

subsided. But the servants clearly knew Naaman was a sensible and reasonable man. That proved to be the case, for Naaman did listen, and he agreed to follow their advice.

Human pride gets in the way

And so we come to the crux of the story. We can imagine Naaman arriving at Elisha's house, with all the pomp and power of his high office. We can picture him, standing proudly in his chariot, anticipating that his honour and majesty would be recognised, and that the prophet would come and bow before him before effecting the miraculous cure. As an army commander, Naaman was used to issuing instructions and having them obeyed, so we can imagine Naaman's fury when Elisha would not even

take the trouble to come out of the house to see him (2 Kings 5.9-11).

However, God wasn't interested in healing a leper; He was intent on saving a sinner. It is the same result that He wants to achieve in our lives, for the Apostle Peter reminds us that *'The Lord is... long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance'* (2 Peter 3.9). Naaman raged over the fact that the prophet would not stir himself to come out and see him but just sent a message through his servant. That wasn't what he expected and his indignation almost resulted in him riding away from his

only hope of a cure. We do well to ask ourselves if we ever come with our own expectations of what God should do for us, thoughts driven by human pride rather than the needs of our eternal salvation.

The message Elisha sent to Naaman instructed him to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times. Being asked to bathe in this river, not once but seven times, raised Naaman's fury even further. If washing was all that was needed, then the beautiful mountain streams of Syria were far to be preferred. But washing was not all that was required; the seven-fold washing was not to clean Naaman's flesh, but to prove his heart. Note how Elisha explains the consequences of obedience to his instruction; *"your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean"* (2 Kings 5.10). Here we have an indication of a double healing; first the physical healing of the disease of leprosy, then the spiritual healing of becoming 'clean' in the sight of God.

The need for humility

Naaman needed to learn the lesson from the words of the wise man Solomon: 'The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honour is humility' (Proverbs 15.33). So the Syrian commander's rage was

The muddy torrent of the River Jordan which Naaman despised.



soothed by the quiet wisdom of his servant: *“My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?”* (2 Kings 5.13). This is a message not just for Naaman, but also for all those who try and establish salvation through works. Whatever we might achieve, it can never be enough to earn God’s grace and salvation. Humility, faith and obedience are the characteristics that God looks for in a man or woman. Naaman had to learn that lesson before his leprosy could be cleansed and we have to learn it too before our sins can be washed away.

Cleansing through baptism

For us, that cleansing occurs through baptism. In his first letter Peter reminded his readers how Noah and his family *‘were saved through water’* and he continued:

‘...this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.’

1 Peter 3.20, 21 NIV

Originally, Naaman thought he knew a better, more convenient way to be washed and challenged the prophet’s instructions: *“Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?”* (2 Kings 5.12). Similarly, many churches today have

adopted more convenient ways of baptizing than the method plainly taught in the New Testament and prefigured in the cleansing of Naaman.

True baptism is a full immersion in water of a mature, believing adult. The sprinkling of water on an infant may be much more convenient, but like the rivers of Damascus, such a ceremony will achieve nothing. If Naaman had washed in the Abanah, he would have remained a leper; if we trust in infant sprinkling, our sins remain.

Naaman had to show three important characteristics in order to be cleansed:

1. **Humility:** he had to recognise that all his worldly power and influence couldn’t help him – he had to trust in God.
2. **Faith:** he had to believe what God’s prophet told him. That faith was expressed by his actions, for he went down to the Jordan to wash.
3. **Obedience:** he had to follow the prophet’s instruction exactly. Washing seven times in one of the rivers of Damascus, or only once or twice in the Jordan would not achieve the healing he sought.

It is just the same in our day; these three characteristics of humility,

faith and obedience are what God looks for in those who would come to Him, seeking to be cleansed from their sins. Naaman teaches us a very powerful lesson.

The thoughts that no doubt helped Naaman submit to Elisha's instruction can help us too. Naaman must have realised that despite his wealth and his position, despite the insult he felt had been done to his honour, he was still a leper. So what was important to him – the admiration of the world and the trappings of power? Or did he want to escape from his living death and be made whole, even if that meant humbling himself in the sight of his servants?

Wisely, he chose the latter course, and went down into the Jordan, and immersed himself in its waters. So Naaman bathed in the Jordan, and the record in Kings emphasises that it was done *'according to the saying of the man of God'*. This confession of faith and obedience was made in the presence of his servants; they witnessed his change of heart and his new-found commitment to a heavenly Lord.

Transformation

And what a transformation came over Naaman!

'...he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.'

2 Kings 5.14

We have already noted the duality of Elisha's promise of healing, both physical and spiritual. We see the same thing repeated in this verse, for *'his flesh was restored...and he was clean'*. The same verse provides an additional detail. We are told that *'his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child'*. Here we again have hints of what was to be revealed in its fullness by Christ, when he said to Nicodemus: *"unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3.3). In a similar vein he said to his disciples: *"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18.4).

Humility and the willingness to listen to the Word of God are the first steps to salvation. So Naaman returned to Elisha's house, no longer expecting the prophet to come out of his house and bow before him. With his new-found humility and faith, Naaman stood before the prophet as his servant. It is also

important to note how Elisha refused the gift that Naaman offered in thanksgiving for his cure (2 Kings 5.15,16). God will never be in debt to any man; we cannot earn salvation by works or through money (see also page 29), only through a humbleness of mind expressed in belief and obedience.

So Naaman returned to Syria a changed man both physically and spiritually, and doubtless he went on his way rejoicing. We too can rejoice

at the very evident hand of providence at work in the life of this Gentile. We can be sure that it can work in our lives too, provided we have the humility and wisdom to see it, and act upon it. Then, like Naaman, we can be made clean through our baptism into the saving name of Jesus Christ.

Steve Irving,
Norfolk, UK

For a more detailed exposition of the subject of baptism, send for a free booklet entitled 'Understanding the Bible's teaching: Baptism.'

'his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child'





BIBLE TEACHING ABOUT

The role of women in Christian worship

On 17th November 2014 the General Synod of the Church of England formally adopted legislation to appoint female bishops. Since then the first female bishop has been named in an appointment that will end centuries of male leadership of the Church. This change was the culmination of a process begun in 1975 and which saw the first women priests ordained in 1994. Other churches already have women bishops.

The role of women in everyday life has changed dramatically over the last 100 years, particularly in the western world. There has been a move away from the man being the sole wage earner and the woman as the keeper of the home, carer, child rearer etc. These changes came about for a number of reasons. Two World Wars saw women working in jobs previously done by men who went away to fight. Greater automation in the workplace meant less reliance on physical attributes in many spheres. Improvements in education and changes in legislation enabled women to take up jobs where men previously had a monopoly. There was also a change of outlook by women themselves. This originated in the USA with the Women's Liberation movement which later became the feminist movement.

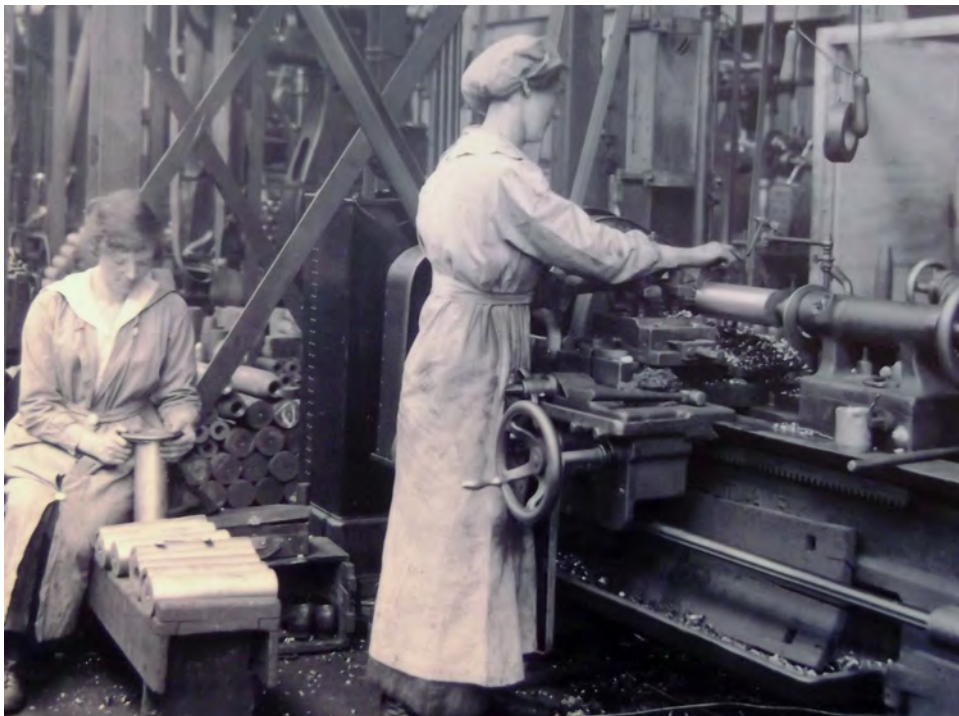
The changes in society began to permeate religious movements where governing, preaching and teaching duties were carried out by men. Women undertook supporting roles including Sunday School teaching, musical accompaniment in services and other 'behind the scenes' tasks. We can see from the opening paragraph of this article that in the Church of England for example, the role of women has become more prominent and now about one-third of the clergy are female.

Workers at the Woolwich Arsenal, London in 1917. Two World Wars brought about major changes in the role of women in the workplace in western society.

However the prime consideration must be whether this more prominent role for women agrees with what the Bible teaches. This a very important consideration because for anyone professing to be a true Christian, whether they are male or female, their beliefs and practices must agree with Bible teaching.

Old Testament teaching about the role of women

We shall look at Scriptural teaching initially in the Old Testament (O.T.) and then the New Testament (N.T.). The foundations for N.T. teaching are firmly based in the O.T. God created man first and then we read in the book of Genesis:



'The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."'

Genesis 2.18 NIV

Afterwards the woman was created and Adam said: *"she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Genesis 2.23). After the fall, God said to the woman: *"your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"* (Genesis 3.16).

These quotations show that from the beginning the woman's role was complementary to that of Adam.

Later under the Law of Moses, priests were appointed to oversee the worship of the Israelites and the priests were male without exception:

'These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests'.

Numbers 3.3.

Other O.T. references reinforce the need for male priests (2 Chronicles 31.16). The reading aloud of Scripture to the assembled congregation was always carried out by a male priest.

New Testament teaching about the role of women

The N.T. gospels tell us about events in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew records the calling and naming of Jesus' twelve disciples and all were male, continuing the

precedent set in the O.T concerning the priests and leaders of the people. Jesus sent these twelve out to preach the good news (gospel) of the coming kingdom of God and to heal the sick (see Matthew 10.7,8).

After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, the work of preaching the gospel fell to the apostles and was later supplemented by the work of the Apostle Paul and others. The apostles' preaching work brought about the establishment of a network of Christian churches.

The Greek word translated 'church' in our English Bibles is 'ecclesia' which simply means 'assembly of the called out ones'. Members had obeyed the call of the gospel and had been called out from the ways of the world to follow God's way. The principles established in the O.T. and followed by the Lord Jesus Christ were carried on by the early believers.

In the book of Acts we read how the number of believers increased necessitating certain tasks being delegated:

'Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said... "brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may

appoint over this business.”

Acts 6,2,3

Paul's teaching about the role of women in the church

The Apostle Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 7.40) and his authority as a leader in the first century church was direct from Jesus (Acts 9.15). Paul's letters to the newly established churches follow the same pattern as established in the teaching of Jesus and the twelve:

‘Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.’
1 Corinthians 14.34

‘Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence’
1 Timothy 2.11,12

Again in writing to Timothy the Apostle Paul sets out the criteria for those wishing to become a bishop (overseer):

‘This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).’

1 Timothy 3.1-5

A celebration in 2014 of the 20th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Church of England



The criteria for becoming a bishop set out by Paul under divine inspiration refers to *'a man... the husband of one wife... who rules his own house well... having his children in submission'* – no alternative is provided for a female to become a bishop. Similar criteria are given for the role of deacons (see 1 Timothy 3.8-13).

Why did the situation change?

Even in the lifetime of the apostles, the true gospel taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and the practices associated with it were altered due to the influence of strong personalities and the philosophies of the society that believers lived among – and so it has been down to the present day. The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesians about these very things (see Acts 20.29-31).

Nowadays humanist thinking has crept into religion and religious leaders have chosen to ignore the clear teaching of God's Word which is not affected by the passing of time. Unfortunately many have adopted the stance that religious groups have to move with the times. If ability were the only criteria God had laid down, then women filling preaching, teaching and associated pastoral roles would not be an issue. God has, by inspiration, set out clear

teaching in His Word which church leaders ignore at their peril.

There are huge opportunities and responsibilities for women in the daily life of a truly christian community, but leadership in worship and public teaching is not one of them. That is the clear message of inspired Scripture, unpalatable though it may be in our generation.

Does gender matter as regards the hope of eternal life?

The short answer to this question is 'No'. The Apostle Paul makes this very clear for those who accept Bible teaching as saving truth, repent of past sins and are baptized by total immersion in water. Paul wrote these words to the Galatians:

'For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

Galatians 3.26-28

Alan Day
Somerset, UK

The Babylonian Chronicle

and other tablets

'Babylonian Chronicle' sounds like a very old newspaper, and in a sense it is. It did record 'the news' in ancient times. News that is now ancient history! It is the collective name for a remarkable group of baked clay tablets found in Babylon in the nineteenth century. These accurately record the rise and exploits of the Babylonian kings and contain a unique insight into the history of significant parts of the Old Testament. They were bought by the British Museum where a small number are now on display.



The Bible stands

THE TEST OF TIME

Each tablet is about the size of a mobile phone and impressed with tiny cuneiform script which gives a brief account of the achievements of the Babylonian kings. Firstly they overthrew the Assyrians in the seventh century BC and then the Kingdom of Judah between 605 and 586 BC.

ABOVE: one of the small clay tablets now known as the 'Babylonian Chronicle'. It confirms in detail the Old Testament record of Babylon's campaigns against the Kingdom of Judah.

Unlike the Assyrians who boastfully detailed their victories on large-scale carved stone reliefs in specially built palaces, these humble tablets from Babylon are brief, factual and to the point. The really exciting fact for the readers of this magazine, is that they show the Bible to be accurate and provide additional detail illuminating the Bible record of events which took place more than 2,500 years ago!

Understanding the way in which the accuracy of the narrative is proved by reference to the tablets shows that the Bible cannot be dismissed as myth and legend.

This remarkable group of tablets includes details of the defeat of the Assyrians and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, at the hands of Nabopolassar, who was Nebuchadnezzar's father. They record the subsequent victories of the crown prince Nebuchadnezzar, the battle of Carchemish 605 BC against Egypt, and achievements in Syria and the land of Israel.

Two tablets cover the reign of Nabopolassar and two more refer to the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar's long reign which lasted 43 years. These tablets were left untranslated until 1956! Astonishing detail emerged that underpinned the accuracy of the Biblical record. They form a perfect background to the writings of the Prophet Jeremiah

who himself was present in and around Jerusalem for about 40 years, right up to its final overthrow by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and who recorded what he witnessed in detail. The prophet Jeremiah's words have been available for more than 2,000 years as a witness to the events he saw and recorded and have stood the test of time.

Jeremiah records Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Carchemish in these words:

'The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the nations. Against Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah'

Jeremiah 46.2

The Bible records how Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in 606 BC (the third year of Jehioakim, see Daniel 1.1). Judah became a vassal state subject to Babylonian rule, but king Jehoiakim later rebelled, and this led to another siege and overthrow in 598 BC (see 2 Chronicles 36.6,7). Then the Bible states that Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, was put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar as another 'puppet' king. The Bible also mentions that it happened 'at

the turn of the year (2 Chronicles 36.10) or as another translation puts it: *'in the spring'* (NIV). So the following 'gem' from these ancient Babylonian tablets was unknown just 60 years ago. It was left untranslated! The account on the tablet reads:

'The seventh year, the month Kislev, the king of Babylonia mustered his forces and marched to Syria. He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Adar he took the city and captured the king. He appointed a king of his own choice there, took its heavy tribute and brought them to Babylon.'

Enough is known to pinpoint exactly the month Kislev in the seventh year as December 598 BC, and second day of the month Adar as 15-16 March 597 BC. This is an independent record of the attack on Jerusalem, in which Zedekiah (third son of Josiah) was set up as the last puppet king of Judah, and his nephew, 18-year-old Jehoiachin, was taken captive to Babylon. This all happened exactly as the Bible states *'in the spring'*.

The young Jehoiachin lived under guard in the royal palace. However, he survived and then prospered there, raising a large family. Four tablets have been found that list the very rations for Jehoiachin king of Judah and his five sons. These tablets are now in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. The king was

released from prison in the reign of Evil-Merodach who treated him kindly (see 2 Kings 25.27-30). Verse 30 records: *'...there was a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life'*. It is this Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah) who is listed in Matthew's Gospel (1.12) as being in the line of King David – the royal line of Judah's kings that ends with Jesus!

Here is further evidence to show that the Bible is accurate in every detail with the Old and New

This tablet lists the rations given to the royal prisoners in Babylon. It includes the names of Jehoiachin king of Judah and his sons. Tablet in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.



Testaments bound together to form the inspired Word of God.

Another fascinating discovery concerns the translation of a tablet much more recently, which mentions a Babylonian official named Sarsechim. He is listed with other princes and officials by Jeremiah as being present at the final overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, after Zedekiah's rebellion in 586 BC (see Jeremiah 39.3).

A tiny tablet was acquired in 1920 which was not translated until 2007. It was found in Sippar, an ancient Babylonian city 20 miles southwest of modern Baghdad and 35 miles north of Babylon. The translation revealed that Sarsechim, was the chief eunuch of Nebuchadnezzar's court. It is only just over 2 inches (5.5 cm) wide (see photo on right) and dates from 10 years before his Biblical appearance. Though the tablet is only a mundane record of payment for gold for a temple in Babylon, it verifies the historical existence of the man and the reason why he should have been present in Jerusalem in 586 BC, because he was one of the most powerful officials in Babylon at the time.

Tens of thousands of tablets from Mesopotamia have come into the possession of the British Museum over the years, and they are still being sifted through. The science of



archaeological discovery is ongoing and developing all the time.

Time and time again we see the Biblical record vindicated, but the Bible is so much more than a historical document. We have every reason to be confident that it is in truth the Word of God, as we read and study its message some 2,500 years after these events.

Justin Giles
London, UK



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

Part 15: Paul's voyage to Rome

“You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”

The words of Festus, a Roman governor, spoken to the Apostle Paul in Caesarea (Acts 25.12) were the start of a significant episode in the life of Paul and the development of the early church. Paul had been held captive for over two years in Caesarea after the Jewish religious leaders complained about his preaching. The Roman authorities brought no proper accusation against him, so Paul exercised his prerogative as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar in Rome.

Even before his journey to Rome, Paul used every opportunity to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. King Agrippa and his wife

Bernice visited Festus the newly appointed Roman governor. Festus explained to them the circumstances relating to Paul's arrest and Agrippa asked to meet him. Then we read: *‘the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in’* (Acts 25.23).

Paul told the assembly about his former life as a Pharisee living in Jerusalem, his conversion to Christianity and his work of preaching the gospel. The response of Festus was: *"Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"*

Paul replied *"I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason"* (Acts 26.24,25). However, King Agrippa was more perceptive than Festus and said to Paul: *"You almost persuade me to become a Christian"* (Acts 26.28).

Such was the power of Paul's message about the mission of Jesus Christ that Agrippa was almost convinced himself, but to have accepted it so publicly would have put him in a very difficult position with the Jews. Instead, to avoid any embarrassment he left the assembly with Festus. In private discussion he said to Festus: *"This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar"* (Acts 26.32).

*Paul preaching before Herod Agrippa I, his sister Berenice and Governor Felix.
Painting by Vasily Surikov 1875*

This episode shows us the power of the true gospel message to influence those who hear it. Paul was not afraid to relate the message of God's Word concerning the role of Jesus of Nazareth and the commission he had given Paul to preach to the Gentiles *"to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light... that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me"* (Acts 26.18). However, Paul's words on this occasion were heard by those who did not want to accept the implications and the commitment they entailed. It required humility to accept what God required as Paul had previously written to the believers at Corinth:

'For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen



the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.’ 1 Corinthians 1.26, 27

Paul’s voyage and shipwreck

Shortly after these events Paul was put on a ship to start a perilous voyage from Caesarea to Italy (see Acts chapter 27). On the way he was to face significant danger. The ship was caught in a severe storm off the coast of Crete and blown off course. Paul had warned that the voyage would end in disaster and loss of both the cargo and the ship together with the lives of those on it (Acts 27.10). His words had not been heeded and now they faced disaster: *“Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up”* (Acts 27.20).

It must have been a terrifying time for all on board. Paul had fasted and prayed and received an answer from an angel of God, and we note how he demonstrated his faith in God to all those on board:

“Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among

you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.” Acts 27.21-26

After 14 days facing the storm the depth soundings taken on the ship showed that it was nearing land. Some of the sailors tried to leave the ship but Paul told the centurion guarding him *“Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved”* (Acts 27.31). The soldiers cut the ropes holding the ship’s boat so that it fell into the sea and could not be used.

During the days of the storm the 276 people on board had not eaten and Paul now advised them to take nourishment as none of them would be killed. We read that *‘he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat’* (Acts 27.35). All were encouraged by Paul’s words and ate. Then they further lightened the boat by throwing out the cargo of wheat that it was carrying. At daylight the anchors were cast off and the ship headed towards the shoreline that was now visible.



*St. Paul's Bay, Malta,
believed to be the site of
Paul's shipwreck.*

Paul on the island of Malta

The soldiers were afraid that the prisoners would take the opportunity to escape and they proposed killing them, but the centurion guarding Paul wanted to save him and ruled against any execution of prisoners. The result was that when the ship ran aground and started to break up, all escaped safely to land on the island of Malta. The people of the island, no doubt used to ships being wrecked off the coast, showed them kindness and made them welcome.

These events demonstrate the confidence Paul had in God's Word to influence those who would listen to him. His words were based on his faith in God and the power of prayer. He had no doubt that God would protect them all and was able to convince those on the ship who listened to him. The events are a

strong lesson to us of the way that God can protect His servants in the storms of life that we encounter if we put our trust in Him.

Two incidents took place in which Paul dramatically demonstrated the power of

the Holy Spirit. While collecting wood to put on a fire he was bitten by a viper (Acts 28.3). The islanders thought this was a sign that he was a murderer who had escaped the sea but was still to receive justice through the snakebite, but Paul shook the snake into the fire and was not harmed.

A local magistrate showed hospitality to them for three days. His father was sick (Acts 28.8) and Paul prayed and laid his hands on the father thus healing him. Other sick people also came to be healed. It must be remembered that Paul had been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. This God-given gift enabled the apostles to perform such miracles as Jesus had promised them before he ascended to heaven (Mark 16.17,18). Many Christians claim to have the Holy Spirit today but we believe that

it was withdrawn after the apostles passed off the scene (for a more detailed treatment of the work of the Holy Spirit, please see back cover).

Paul continues his journey to Rome

At this time many ships travelled from Alexandria in Egypt to Rome and other places carrying wheat. One of these had spent the winter in Malta rather than risk facing the extreme weather that Paul's ship had experienced. Paul and his party were put aboard and continued their journey to Rome. Having been blown by a beneficial southerly wind they reached Puteoli on the west coast of Italy. There they met Christians who provided accommodation for them for a week before they headed towards Rome by road.

Word of the party's approach had reached Rome and some Christians travelled the thirty miles or so to meet them. The record tells us that *"When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage"* (Acts 28.15). How exciting it must have been for him to see believers from a city that he had wanted to visit for some time (Acts 19.21). He had written a letter to them previously, knowing that a faithful community of both Jewish and Gentile believers had been established in this great pagan metropolis (Romans 1.8).

Paul's witness in Rome

Eventually Paul reached Rome together with other prisoners and was handed over to the captain of the guard. He was allowed to stay in a rented house with a soldier guarding him. Of course Paul was not a man to sit around doing nothing. For him the spreading of the gospel of the kingdom of God was the purpose of his life. He had absolute faith in the promises of God made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His aim was to ensure that others were able to espouse that hope and look forward to the return of Jesus to raise them from the dead and set up God's kingdom on earth.

After just three days in Rome Paul summoned the local leaders of the Jews to him. His words to them are significant:

"Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see



THE FORUM, ROME

The layout and many of the buildings seen here would have been familiar to Paul in the AD 60's

you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

Acts 28.17-20

The hope of Israel was in the coming of the Messiah. But the majority of Jews had failed to recognise Jesus as their saviour and their leaders crucified him. God raised him from the dead and he was taken up into heaven. Paul was confident that God would fulfil the promise that Jesus would return. He was prepared to accept imprisonment and many other privations because of that hope and his aim was to share it with others. Having initially been intent on destroying those who showed faith in Jesus, following his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was now a follower of Christ in the fullest sense – a member of a body of believers called "the Way" (Acts 24.22).

After being introduced to Paul the local Jewish community expressed a desire to learn more about him and his beliefs. They said (verse 21) that they had not received any messages about him nor had they heard anything detrimental about Paul. They were aware that many spoke against the Christian believers of "the Way" and wanted to hear more about it from Paul. They agreed to meet with him again. The Acts of the Apostles tells us how he continued his work:

"...many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved."

Acts 28.23-24



Paul the prisoner

It's easy to read these words without taking into account the circumstances. Paul was still a prisoner; there was a guard watching over him at all times. Yet he was permitted to meet with a large group of people to explain the Old Testament Scriptures to them – the New Testament had not yet been put together. These Jews had been brought up thinking that they knew and understood the Scriptures, yet Paul had to work hard to show how the promises to the Jewish Patriarchs were fulfilled in Jesus.

The things that they heard from Paul would have seemed very strange to some of them while others were convinced by his words. Paul reminded them there would be those unwilling to accept the teaching of the Scriptures and referred to

passages from the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. God had foretold through these prophets that many of His people would be blinded to the truth of His Word and their ears closed to a proper understanding of His ultimate plan centred in Jesus Christ.

This is still the case today but not just amongst God's people the Jews. There are many people across the world that profess to have faith in Jesus and confidence in God's promises yet are sadly ignorant of the full truths of those things. That is why it is so important that the Scriptures (God's Word in both the Old and New Testaments) are examined fully and carefully to extract the whole truth and the requirements that God has for those who would follow it.

Because of the failure of so many of the Jews to understand the words that he spoke to them Paul made a dramatic statement:

"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

Acts 28.28

The Jews wrongly thought that they were the sole possessors of God's truth as His chosen nation. It is not surprising that they left Paul *'and had a great dispute among themselves'* (Acts 28.29) about what they had heard from him.

The result of the tireless work of the apostle and those who assisted him, was the spread of Christianity and the development of the early church throughout the Roman world. From his prison house in Rome he continued that work by means of letters to various individuals and assemblies of Christians called ecclesias. The book of Acts concludes with these words:

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

Acts 28.30-31

It is likely that Paul was released from his first imprisonment in

Rome and continued his work of strengthening the believers and preaching the gospel. He was a truly remarkable character whose commitment to preach the gospel of the kingdom has been left on record for future generations of believers. He died in hope of the resurrection at the return of Jesus as he wrote to the Corinthians:

'For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming.'

I Corinthians 15.21-23

John Hitches
Norfolk, UK

“It is easier for a camel ...”



There are probably still a lot of people that could complete that quotation, even though they never usually open the Bible:

“... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Matthew 19.24

A wealthy young man had approached Jesus, full of good intentions. He believed he had observed all the basic principles of Moses' Law since he was a child, but he knew that something was missing. Jesus told him the one thing he didn't want to hear: “... go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19.21 NIV). Such a radical change in his lifestyle was too much for him; regretfully he turned around and walked away. Hence Jesus' comment about the camel.

Many years ago I was told that Jesus didn't quite mean what he said. He wasn't talking about a literal needle but about a small archway in the city streets, or maybe a small latch gate opening that could be left open when the main gate was shut. This was what was known as **'the eye of a needle'** (so I was told), and it was just possible to get the camel through if you unloaded all its baggage, got it down on its knees and gave it a good poke.

Like most ideas that are implanted when you are young, this thought has stayed with me ever since. Then, not so long ago, I learnt that there was no evidence, historical or archaeological, for this suggestion. It was a nice idea but... (see for example the ESV Study Bible's comment on Matthew 19:24: 'there is no evidence for the popular interpretation that there was a gate in Jerusalem called the 'eye of a needle' which camels had to stoop to their knees to enter').

In other words, **Jesus meant exactly what he said!**

His disciples were astonished, and questioned him about it. His reply is crystal clear:

"...with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew.19.26

Jesus was **not** talking about something that was very, very difficult.

He was talking about something that was **impossible**.

He took the biggest animal that was familiar to his listeners, and the smallest aperture, and in a very simple graphic way illustrated his point: it was **impossible** for one to go through the other; **impossible** for the rich man to get into God's kingdom.

Impossible, that is, without God;

“with God all things are possible”.

So Jesus introduced his disciples to one of the foundations of his teaching, later to be expanded by the Apostle Paul, that we cannot in any way buy or earn a place in God's kingdom. It is **impossible** for us to make ourselves acceptable to God. It is only through God's grace – His loving forgiveness, that we have the hope of life to come, and the impossible becomes possible.

The disciples were impressed by wealth, by the gifts that rich men publicly and ostentatiously poured into the temple treasury (see another incident in Mark 12.41-44). They had nothing of their own to give and they were in danger of thinking that riches were a positive asset in getting you into the kingdom. Jesus, in this very simple, powerful illustration, showed them the right way. Later on the Apostle Paul spelt out Jesus' message:

‘For by grace you have been saved, through faith ... not of works, lest anyone should boast.’

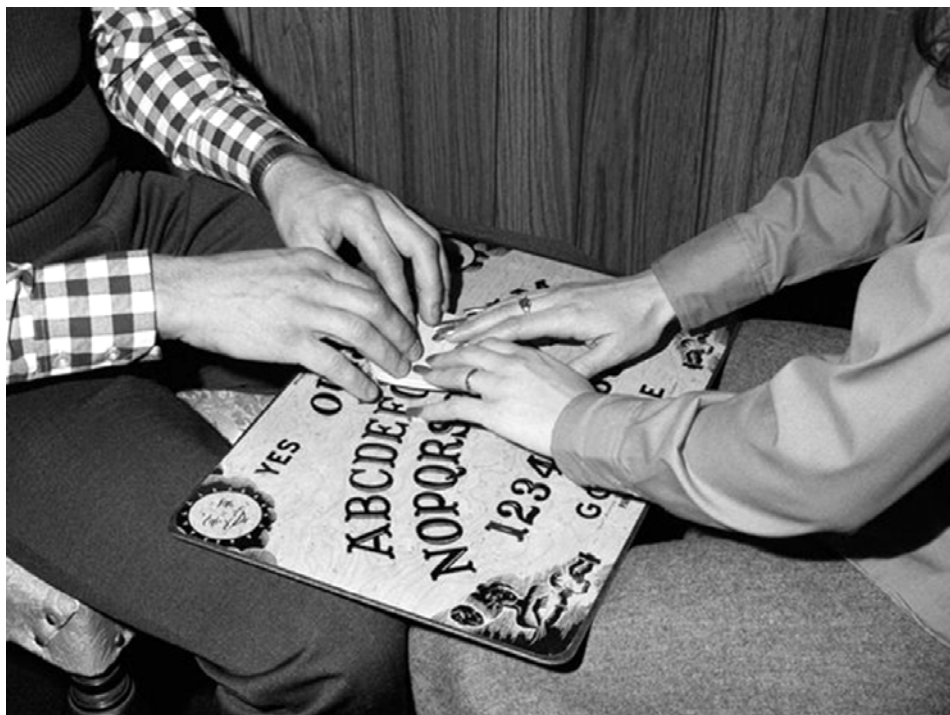
Ephesians 2.8, 9

‘... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.’

Romans 3.23,24

And if our only wealth is to be rich in faith, trusting in God's plan for each of us, then we are really very rich indeed!

Roy Toms
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Can we communicate with the dead?

There are some religious sects throughout the world who believe that it is possible to communicate with people that have died, amongst them the followers of 'Spiritualism'. To do so, they usually employ a 'medium' who will make the contact with the spirit of the dead person on behalf of a relative or friend. Most Christians believe that the souls of those who have died are in heaven

The ouija board started off as a harmless game, but soon became a supposed medium for communicating with the spirits of the dead.

and we sometimes hear people speak of them as looking down at us from there. It is understandable to want to believe in the immortality of the soul and that it is possible to communicate with them in some way. The question must be asked – is this what the Bible teaches?

There are in the world today people with extraordinary and inexplicable abilities, one of which is extra-sensory perception (ESP). This is the

receiving of information not gained through the usual physical senses. For example, husbands and wives are often able to 'read each other's minds'. Other people are able to demonstrate ESP to an astonishing degree. There are also those who, not on a religious basis, take an interest in the 'occult' and the 'spirit world' and believe that messages do come from those who have died. It is very unlikely that followers of the 'occult' (that which is hidden and clandestine, as the word means) will turn to the Bible for guidance.

This study is based only on what the Bible has to say about this topic. We believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, which alone can make us wise to salvation, that is salvation

Identical twins can sometimes communicate in ways which defy explanation.



from an eternal grave through faith in Jesus (2 Timothy 3.15). We are asking a two-part question: 'Can we or should we communicate with the dead'? We intend to deal with these questions in that order. Dependent upon the answer to the first question, the second may well be completely irrelevant!

What is death?

The Bible's teaching about death is consistent throughout its pages. To begin with it tells us that the first man Adam was formed and created by God out of the dust of the ground:

'...the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.' Genesis 2.7

The King James Version of the Bible (KJV) says that man became '*a living soul*' and this is often misunderstood. These words in the original Hebrew language of the Old Testament simply mean 'living creature'. We are therefore living '*souls*', creatures or beings. In this particular sense we are no different from the animals that God created, because the same description is given to them – they are '*living creatures*':

'Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and

beast of the earth, each according to its kind” ...’ Genesis 1.24,25

Mankind and the animal creation are ‘*living creatures*’. The Hebrew phrase in Genesis applies to both man and animals and all are subject to death. God said to Adam:

“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3.19

Both man and beast return to dust when they cease to live. This is the common experience of all living creatures and it is basic Bible teaching which is confirmed by the words of the wise man Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes:

‘... “Concerning the estate of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like beasts”. For what happens to the sons of men also happens to beasts; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.’ Ecclesiastes 3.18-20

The teaching of Solomon is that all living creatures, both man and beast, die because we have one, that is, the same breath or spirit. This reminds

us of Genesis and the account of creation. God breathed into both Adam and the animals ‘*the breath of life*’ and they became living creatures or beings – that is the real meaning of the Hebrew words of Scripture that we have translated in our English Bible in Genesis chapter 2 verse 7. Let’s be very clear about this, because it is crucial to answering the question posed – can we communicate with the dead?

There is absolutely no support in Scripture for the idea taught almost universally throughout the Christian world, that man was made in two parts – that he has a body and a soul! Man was made of one substance, just like the animals and God gave life to both. That is why Solomon, under Divine inspiration, wrote that in this respect, man does not have advantage above the beasts of the earth. When we die, we return to the dust.

What happens when we die?

The Bible makes some very plain statements in answer to this very important question. Here are three examples:

‘...in death there is no remembrance of you (God); in the grave who will give you thanks?’ Psalm 6.5

‘Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit (breath) departs, he

returns to his earth; in that very day
his plans (KJV thoughts) perish.'

Psalm 146,3,4

'For the living know that they will die;
but the dead know nothing, and they
have no more reward, for the memory
of them is forgotten. Also their love,
their hatred, and their envy have now
perished... Whatever your hand finds
to do, do it with your might; for there
is no work or device or knowledge or
wisdom in the grave where you are
going.'

Ecclesiastes 9, 5,6,10

Why are these verses so relevant to
our subject? Because it is very clear
that when we die, we end up as dust
– whether we are drowned at sea or
eaten by wild animals, we and they
in due course become dust or dead

matter. How then can anyone
communicate with dead people? It
is no use saying: "It is the spirit of
the dead person I am communicating
with", because the '*spirit*' that keeps
us alive is the same breath that God
breathed into the first man Adam to
make him the very first human
being. When we die, God takes this
'*spirit*' away.

Neither is it any use saying that it is
man's '*immortal soul*' you are
communicating with. The word '*soul*'
in the primary sense is used in the
Bible to mean '*creature*' and you will
never find immortality in the Bible
associated with the '*soul*' or the
'*creature*'.

'In the midst of life we are in death'
(Anglican Book of Common Prayer).

Calvary Cemetery, Queens, New York



Speaking of God's wonderful work in creation, the Psalmist wrote this:

'O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all...What you give them they gather in ...You hide your face, they are troubled; you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.' Psalm 104.24,28,29

The word 'breath' in the Hebrew of the Old Testament means 'life'. Perhaps we have considered enough basic Bible teaching about the human existence to understand that when we are dead, it is quite impossible for those who are alive to communicate with us. We are but dust and we have no memory or senses whatsoever. Once we were living creatures (living souls) but now we are dead souls because God has taken away our breath, life or spirit.

God made it very clear to the Prophet Ezekiel that souls are not immortal in these words:

"...all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine; the soul who sins shall die.'

Ezekiel 18.4

As we have no consciousness after death, the second question, 'Should we try to communicate with the dead', is almost irrelevant. If the teaching of the Bible is to mean

anything, then we are not able to communicate with those that have died.

Should we communicate with the dead?

The nation of Israel, God's chosen people were given a Law by which to regulate their lives. It is enshrined in the Ten Commandments and above all things sets Almighty God in the highest place in their devotions. The Law given initially through Moses, is recorded in some considerable detail in the Old Testament and it was administered by priests and prophets ordained by God.

As the nation of Israel departed from God's law, they took on all manner of strange practices that they learned from the nations around them. These involved the worship of strange gods, perverted sexual practices and the burning of their children as sacrifices to these idols. They also resorted to the occult. This is evident, from the record of the reign of one of their kings:

'Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king... And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel... Also he made his son pass through the fire, practised soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists

and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD. 2 Kings 21.1,2,6

Endeavouring to engage with so-called 'spiritists and mediums' is clearly condemned by God, being described here as 'abominations'. Again, if we look at the Divine message to Israel through the

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, in 1893. After tragically losing several members of his family, Doyle became one of the most celebrated Spiritualists of his day.



Prophet Isaiah, the same condemnation is very clear:

'And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter", should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?'

Isaiah 8.19

What does the Bible say? Can we communicate with the dead? Should we even try to communicate with the dead? No! It is an abomination so far as God is concerned! What should we do? Consult with God through His Word and be enlightened by the gospel (good news) of the kingdom of God, for in the gospel we have set out the true Bible hope of eternal life. The Prophet Isaiah wrote these words:

"Ask me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands, you command me... look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!"

Isaiah 45,22

Summary and conclusion

The Bible clearly teaches that we cannot communicate with the dead, because we are of the dust and return to dust again. All human beings are living creatures, kept alive by the breath of God, and when we die that breath returns to God who gave it. At the point of death there is no consciousness whatsoever; it is the

end of life. We are living souls or creatures and the idea of an immortal soul or spark of life is never found in Bible teaching – it has its roots in ancient Egyptian beliefs.

What then is the appeal of the Word of God? The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of reading and understanding its message:

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.’

2 Timothy 3.16,17

We have already hinted that there is a way out of this predicament. The Bible does offer life after death for those who believe the gospel and obey the divine requirements. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth: *‘If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable’* (1 Corinthians 15.19). But Paul doesn’t leave it there – he describes death as a sleep from which believers will awake. The true hope of everlasting life has nothing to do with immortal souls for it is based on a future bodily resurrection like that of Jesus.

‘But now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man (Adam) came death, by man (Jesus) also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are Christ’s at his coming.’

1 Corinthians 15.20-23

This was the hope of the early Christians. They looked forward to a time when they would be re-united with all those who had *‘fallen asleep’* in hope of the resurrection. Then they will be able to communicate face to face with those who were once dead, to share unending life in the kingdom of God.

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