



# Light

...on a New World

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CONTENTS

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Editorial	Page 1
Bible Teaching about...	Page 3
Being good is not good enough	Page 11
Christadelphian beliefs	Page 18
Bible Trades	Page 19

Cover picture: Spring flowers

Note: All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James version except where another version is indicated after the text.



# Editorial

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THE month of March sees the celebration of Easter by millions of Christians throughout the world. This year it comes particularly early in the Christian calendar – Easter Sunday being on March 23<sup>rd</sup> for Western churches. This is the earliest date it will occur in the calendar until 2160 when we are told Easter will again fall on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

The dating of Easter was originally determined by 318 bishops at the 1<sup>st</sup> Council of Nicaea in AD 325 under the direction of the Emperor Constantine. With the adoption of the Gregorian calendar by the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Easter became linked to the occurrence of the first full moon on or after 21<sup>st</sup> March (the vernal equinox) and it has stayed that way ever since.

Although these may be interesting facts, they do not explain why so many people celebrate Easter. The word Easter only occurs once in the Bible and only in the King James version (see Acts 12 verse 4 KJV). Modern English versions quite correctly translate the original Greek word ‘*pascha*’ in the New Testament as ‘*passover*’ referring to the Jewish feast day of that name. Vine’s dictionary notes that ‘*the term “Easter” is not of Christian origin. It is another form of Astarte, one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven...the pagan festival of “Easter” was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity*’ [*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of old and New Testament Words*].

We must therefore look to the Jewish feast of 'Passover' to find the true significance of Easter. 'Passover' commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt some 1500 years before the time of Christ. Moses was instructed by God:

'On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread'

*[Leviticus 23.5,6].*

The Passover celebration involved the sacrifice of a lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on the lintels and door posts of each house as commanded by God. By carefully observing this ritual, the Jews were saved from certain death at the hands of the angel of God who went through the land and killed all the firstborn of Egypt. This was followed by the eating of unleavened bread for seven days. *[Exodus chapter 12].*

The significance of the Passover feast is called to mind in the words of the Apostle Paul to the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers at Corinth: '*...Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*' *[I Corinthians 5.7,8].*

The ritual and trappings associated with Easter have no significance for believers but the sacrifice of Christ does. Through his death and resurrection he has opened up the way to life everlasting, as Paul puts it in another place he is the '*first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*' *[I Corinthians 15.20].* This is the hope of all true Christians to be made like him – and it doesn't matter whether we have died or are alive at his second coming. So don't be distracted by the Easter celebrations –open your mind to the Bible message and prepare now for that coming day of salvation through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ!

Editor

# Bible Teaching about...

## The Holy Spirit Gifts

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**B**EFORE he was arrested, Jesus spent the closing hours of his life with his disciples. It was vital to encourage and prepare them, despite the awful events about to happen, that they might remember his final message and understand more fully his purpose.

In the three and a half years that they had been with the Lord, they had come to know his wonderful character and rely upon his unerring judgement. He was their confidant, their comfort and their hope. But it was not possible to completely prepare them for the traumatic event of his crucifixion. He had told them: *'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.'* [John 16.12]. They were still immature in knowledge and faith. It was however absolutely vital that after his departure, the disciples would be capable of continuing the great work begun by their Lord, of calling the people to repentance.

Jesus knew that they would mourn his loss, and had promised that in his absence, his Father would supply their need and send a **Comforter** – the Holy Spirit. This would equip them for the task and enable these ordinary men to fearlessly witness to all people and in every language.

The **Comforter** in John's gospel is referred to as *'the Spirit of truth'*:

‘And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it

seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him;  
for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

[John 14.16,17 AV].

This '*Spirit of truth*' means a truth-imparting spirit. Now this power was not available to the world at large, but only to those who '*know him*' and was given for a specific purpose.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit was then a **Comforter**, given to encourage the disciples after the Master had left them, a **teacher** to instruct them, a **remembrancer** to bring previous events to their recollection, a **helper** to assist them to bear witness and a **guide** to lead them into all truth:

'However, when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak; and he will tell you things to come [John 16.13].

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify of me' [John 15.26].

Notice particularly that the work of the Holy Spirit is associated with the testimony of Jesus: '*He will testify of me*'. Jesus had continually reminded his disciples to '*Keep my word... keep my sayings... believe on me...keep my commandment...continue in my love...abide in me...let my words abide in you.*'

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered '*with one accord*' [Acts 2.1] in the city of Jerusalem, and, in fulfilment of the promise of Christ, they were '*filled with the Holy Spirit*'. The effect was instantaneous in that '*they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*' [Acts 2.4]. Thousands of Jews had come to Jerusalem, travelling from various countries to celebrate the Feast of

Pentecost. To their amazement they *'everyone heard them speak in his own language'* [Acts 2.6].

It was necessary that the apostles possessed this remarkable and unique gift of the Spirit to witness throughout the world at that time. It was only the beginning of miracles performed by the disciples. The Apostle Peter said of Jesus that he was *'a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did through him'* [Acts 2.22]. So did his followers, as it is recorded later; *'God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit'*. [Hebrews 2.4].

The *'gifts of the Holy Spirit'* were not confined to the ability to overcome the difficulties of language. They also gave the power to perform 'miracles and signs' and to 'prophesy' or teach and expound publicly (see Acts 19. 6). To some were imparted the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, or faith; to others, gifts of healing. (We learn this from 1 Corinthians 12. 7-11).

These miracles were performed by the 'Power of the Holy Spirit.' They comprised the seal of God on the testimony of the apostles demonstrating that he was with them, and that the doctrines they taught were true. Such an attestation was necessary in those times, as the preaching of the Gospel in the name of Jesus Christ was something new. The pagan world opposed it because it challenged their heathen gods; the Jewish world opposed it because it required belief in the crucified and resurrected Jesus as Messiah.

Some extraordinary Divine sign was necessary to overcome the prejudices of the age, and demonstrate beyond all doubt that Christianity is true. The miracles performed by the disciples of the Lord provided this; they showed that the hand of God was with them in their teaching.

Some Christians claim to have these gifts today but the Bible teaches that this 'power' to perform miracles of healing, and to 'speak

in tongues' is now withdrawn. The Bible shows that the gifts of the Spirit were only designed as temporary helps and that when they accomplished the purpose that God had in bestowing them, they would be withdrawn.

'THEY LAID HANDS ON THEM'

How were the gifts of the Holy Spirit were bestowed in apostolic times? In the book of Acts we learn that Philip, the evangelist '*went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them...when they believed Philip...both men and women were baptised*' [Acts 8.5-12]. The point to note here is that we then read:

'Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit...Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.'

[Acts 8.14-17]

So firstly, the recipient had to possess a sound knowledge of the Truth; and secondly, the miraculous gifts were only bestowed by the laying on of the hands of the apostles. They alone had the power to bestow the gifts of the Holy Spirit on others. We find other Scriptures that support this:

'And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied' [Acts 19. 6],

'...stir up the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.' [2 Timothy 1. 6]

We note from these references that the method of bestowing the gifts of the Spirit was by the laying on of the hands of certain of the apostles. This being the case, what happened when the last of the

apostles died? There was obviously nobody left who was capable of transmitting the gifts of the Holy Spirit – and the only conclusion we can draw from this is that they gradually ceased.

#### THE SPIRIT GIFTS WERE TEMPORARY

The gifts were to assist the growth of the community of believers, known as ‘the body of Christ’ into spiritual maturity in obedience to Christ. But, as in the natural development of a child into adulthood, so the time would come when the state of immaturity of the apostolic community would come to an end. Then, the gifts would no longer be necessary and they too ceased. This is the teaching of the Apostle Paul In his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the believers at Corinth:

‘Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away.’ [1 Corinthians 13.8-10]

Paul speaks here of the different facets of the gifts. One member would have the gift of healing, another the gift of prophecy, and so on. They each shared in the gifts; they were distributed ‘in part’ or ‘imperfectly’. So in the community of first century believers were found all aspects of the gifts, being designed to assist them to work together. But, unfortunately, this power became open to abuse and many boasted in the imaginary importance of their particular gift.

The gifts would cease ‘*when that which is perfect*’ (the word perfect means complete or mature) *has come.*’ The time did arrive when all congregations of believers became established, settled and functional. By that time the New Testament Scriptures had been completed by spirit guided men, and distributed, so that when the last of the apostles died at the end of the first century, the New Testament became their written witness, powerfully continuing the work of God down to our day.

The Scriptures were completed through the writing of the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation, and the Scriptures in themselves provided all that was necessary to guide men and women to the way of salvation.

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter addressed the Jews in Jerusalem, and declared that they had crucified the Lord Jesus. They were so smitten in conscience, that, following an outline of the Gospel message, and a recognition of the work of God in Christ, 3,000 men and women were baptised into the name of Jesus Christ. They were also given the gift of the Holy Spirit as Peter had indicated in his stirring message:

‘...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the lord our God will call’ [Acts 2.38, 39].

Note that the Holy Spirit gifts were limited in three ways:

- \* ‘*To you*’ – those baptised at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.
- \* ‘*To your children.*’ – the next generation following those addressed by the apostle.
- \* ‘*to all who are afar off*’ – the original Greek language of the New Testament means a long way off, in distance, not in time.

‘*To all who are afar off*’ is a Biblical phrase for the Gentiles, who were also to be called to the ‘hope of Israel’ through the continuing ministry of the Apostles. The Gentiles were ‘*afar off*’ from salvation; they were ‘*strangers from the covenants of promise*’ and needed to be reconciled to God (see Ephesians 2 .12-17).

The apostles did not begin the work with the Gentiles until a few years had passed after Pentecost. The first Gentile believer was Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and it was such a notable event, that God intervened by the power of the Holy Spirit, confirming it by a vision and angelic messengers (We can read of these events in Acts chapter 10).

It is important to realise that the promise of the Spirit gifts did not extend beyond the generation after those who attended the feast at that time. It certainly never related to our days, 2,000 years later.

#### DO MEN AND WOMEN POSSESS THE HOLY SPIRIT TODAY?

We firmly believe from the evidence in Scripture that we do not have the power of the Holy Spirit today. What we do have is God's Spirit Word. This Spirit Word, the Bible, is '*sharper than any two-edged sword*' [Hebrews 4.12] and is able to make us '*wise for salvation*' [2 Timothy 3.15].

We read; '*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*' [Mark 16.16]. Those who believe and are baptised into the saving name of Jesus Christ, put on the Spirit of Christ.

'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit...But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his...For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God' [Romans 8.1,9,14].

By putting on the Spirit of Christ we try to be like Christ and become spiritually minded. '*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*' [Galatians 5.25]. An understanding of the teaching of the

## LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

Bible thus comprises *'the Spirit'* which is available today, and it can be the most powerful influence in our lives. It is termed *'the Spirit'* because it came to man from God through the operation of His power on the writers as Peter puts it: *'holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit'* [2 Peter 1.21].

### THE POWER OF GOD'S SPIRIT WORD

Through the operation of God's Spirit Word, we can conquer the power of sin and ultimately death; by it we can develop faith and gain the victory over self and the world. God's truth can change a person's outlook and create in us the mind of Christ. It is this which will make us acceptable to Christ at His coming.

To that end, we urge you to give yourself to the study of the Bible, that you might understand and accept its life-giving message, in anticipation of attaining to life eternal at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign on the earth.

Richard Perfitt  
Norfolk, UK

# Why being ‘good’ is just not good enough

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A dictionary defines ‘good’ as *‘having suitable or desirable qualities; promoting health, welfare, or happiness; virtuous, kind, benevolent, worthy, beneficial, genuine, honourable, honest, upright, noble, charitable.’* Here then are some of the qualities that would be used to describe a ‘good’ person! Goodness is ‘virtue’, ‘excellence’ and ‘benevolence’.

## WHO FITS THE DICTIONARY DEFINITION?

Now there are many people all over the world who would fit these definitions as ‘good’, people who devote much of their time to the benefit of others in the community. In addition there are many charity workers in organizations like Oxfam and all over the world, many of them unpaid, who do as much as they can to help their fellows!

Then, of course, we can look at the many other organizations and caring groups that labour to relieve the distressing circumstances of unfortunate people. We can multiply these people many times over by spreading our view world wide and thinking of the ‘good’ people who serve as village elders and leaders in their nations and peoples.

These are all ‘good’ people by those dictionary definitions, aren’t they? But the question is where do all these ‘good’ people stand in the eyes of God? Many of them may not even care where they stand in God’s eyes! Others do and hope for a reward. Others perhaps don’t expect any rewards. They may not even believe that there is a God – their ‘good’ work is maybe driven by humanistic ideals which leave

God out of the equation. God's word, the Bible, means nothing to them and they probably believe their rewards are here now in their lives. Receiving satisfaction from what they do may be enough of a reward for some!

#### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The cynical person might say that many of these dedicated workers do **'good'** to gain influence and contacts in business and social life. That's their reward and some also receive honours and praise from the country they live in. But for those who do believe in God, we are told that *'He rewards those who seek him'* [Hebrews 11. 6]. So, we are looking at this subject from a religious point of view, from the Bible's point of view which leads us to some important questions. Those who do believe in a God – do they believe the Bible is his revelation to mankind? Do they believe it is His way of communicating with us and telling us what He expects us to do?

The attitude of many **'good'** people can be summed up this way – *'Well, I have never done anybody a bad turn. I've always tried to do people a good turn and I believe that if there is a God, and if there is a reward, I will get it'*. They don't want to get involved in the details and in that attitude there is wrapped up a vague belief in a God.

The Bible tells us that **it isn't good enough!** So what does it say? First of all, the teaching of Jesus is that no-one is good in the fullest sense of the word. On one occasion, a rich young man came to Jesus and asked him: *'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?'* [Matthew 19.16]. Jesus didn't immediately answer him. Instead he asked the young man a question *'Why do you call me good?'* and added *'No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.'* [Matthew 19.17].

#### THE EXAMPLE OF CORNELIUS

We have a helpful example in the Bible of a **'good'** person for us to think about - a man called Cornelius - an officer in the Roman army

which occupied Palestine (Israel) in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. We read in the book of Acts:

‘There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always’ [Acts 10.1,2].

Here we have one of those ‘**good**’ people - a devout man who with all his family and servants were believers in God. He gave generously to all and did many good works - but was that good enough? Clearly it wasn’t – something was lacking. He received an angelic vision and was told to send to Joppa to find the Apostle Peter. The angel said to him: *‘He (Peter) will tell you **what you must do**’* [Acts 10.6].

So then, what did Cornelius have to do in addition to what he was already doing? Peter eventually travelled to Caesarea to meet up with Cornelius and his family and Peter talked to them about Jesus, telling them:

‘How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed him openly .. To him all the prophets witness that, through his name, whoever believes in him will receive remission of sins’ [Acts 10.38-40, 43].

Peter talked to Cornelius and his gathered family, taking them back to the witness of the prophets - in other words he taught them all about God’s purpose in Jesus Christ from the Old Testament. When they understood that, they were all baptized as the record in Acts tells us:

‘Then Peter answered, can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized...And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.’

*[Acts 10.46-48].*

With their new understanding they were all baptized in water for the remission, or forgiveness of their sins.

#### VERY IMPORTANT ISSUES

There are some very important issues arising from this narrative. Firstly, Cornelius and his family needed to have a better level of understanding – something that they hadn’t got before they met Peter. They had to understand what God’s purpose was with the nation of Israel and with this man Jesus Christ who came from the nation of Israel. They also had to understand and accept that they possessed sinful nature, as we all do and that God had provided a way of overcoming our sinful nature through the work of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Peter emphasized the need for believing in Jesus and receiving remission of sins. Then with this understanding, they had to accept that baptism in water was a necessary act to become related to Jesus Christ. They had to understand and accept that Jesus was coming back to earth again to judge the living and the dead. By that, they would also have understood the Christian hope of being raised from the grave. By what Peter said, they would have understood that people do not go to heaven when they die – true Christians hope they will be resurrected again to life and Jesus Christ will judge and reward them together with those who are alive when he returns.

#### THE STEPS TOWARDS SALVATION

By looking at the story of Cornelius and his family group, we can see that we need a correct understanding of Christ’s teaching, a belief that is absolutely necessary first, to enable us to lead a life that is acceptable to God. The first step is to accept the guidance of the Word of God:

‘To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.’ *[Isaiah 8.20]*

‘But you have carefully followed my doctrine...and that from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. ’

*[2 Timothy 3.10, 15-17]*

There is then a necessary progression starting with belief in God ? an acceptance that the Bible is the inspired word of God, a revelation that tells us all we need to know. We need to understand that we are sin-stricken creatures who need forgiveness and saving from this mortal state which is subject to disease and death. To be saved from this nature we each possess, we then have to accept that Jesus Christ is the only one who can save us:

‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’*[Acts 4.12]*.

We must place ourselves in Christ’s hands and be related to Christ through baptism in exactly the same way that the man Cornelius and his household did, that is through immersion in water. If we don’t want to follow Christ and his commandments, then we are on our own - there is no other way!

The Apostle Paul wrote to one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century groups of believers in Ephesus and reminded them of their conversion in these words:

‘Therefore remember that...at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth

of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.'

*[Ephesians 2.11-13]*

That is our position too, before we accept and relate ourselves to Jesus Christ – *'having no hope and without God in the world'*

That's strong language, isn't it, in our world of equality for all! If we are not in Christ, we are aliens, strangers, we don't belong, we are estranged, we have no hope, we are without God in the world. But in Christ, we can draw near to God by the blood of Christ - in other words by the effects of his sacrifice on the cross.

#### A NEW LIFE 'IN CHRIST'

When Paul wrote to the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers in Galatia, he reminded them about their new relationship to Christ in these words

'.. the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe...You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'

*[Galatians 3. 22, 26-29 NIV]*

So there we have it - we are all under sin but through faith in Jesus Christ, we can escape its effects and be heirs to a great reward. After baptism, the believer now becomes a brother or a sister of Christ and we start a new journey in life. We can now walk in faith and do our

good works in the name of God. For the follower of Christ, faith and works go together, one without the other is no good at all.

#### A WONDERFUL HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

One thing the faithful believer has to accept is that this world is full of evil and will be swept away when Jesus returns to the earth. Paul hoped that the believers in Thessalonica in Greece would not be troubled by the evil around them and reminded them of their hope in this way:

‘...you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...when he comes, in that day, to be glorified in his saints and admired among all those who believe’ [*2 Thessalonians 1.7,8*].

The Bible is telling us that Jesus is coming back to this earth to take vengeance – strong words again – vengeance on those who don’t know God, or don’t want to know Him, and on those who don’t obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How many of those ‘**good**’ people will come through this judgment of God? We don’t know the answer to that question but there is a clear promise here that he will be glorified in his saints – those who believe and are baptized into Christ, like Cornelius and his family.

Will you be among that number?

Ken Dennis  
Kent, UK

**A SUMMARY OF CHRISTADELPHIAN BELIEFS**

- \* *There is only one God the Creator*
- \* *Jesus Christ is the Son of God*
- \* *The Holy Spirit is the power of God*
- \* *The Bible is the inspired Word of God*
- \* *Man is mortal and dies because of sin*
- \* *Resurrection is the true hope of believers*
- \* *Salvation is only possible through Jesus*
- \* *Belief and Baptism are essential for salvation*
- \* *There is only one true Gospel*
- \* *The Gospel was preached to Abraham*
- \* *Abraham's descendants, the Jewish people are God's witnesses*
- \* *The Kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of God in the past*
- \* *Jesus will return as king to re-establish the kingdom of God on earth*
- \* *The reward of the righteous is eternal life to be enjoyed on earth*

# Bible Trades

## The Tentmaker

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TENTS as dwelling places are very much part of the background to Bible times. From earliest times we have the record of tents and tent makers. The first person mentioned in the Bible, connected with tents, is a man named Jabel: *'And Adah bore Jabel. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock [Genesis 4.20].*

### LIVING IN TENTS

The immediate picture that comes to mind is that of the nomadic farmer, moving his tent-home from place to place in the interests of his cattle, which would represent his wealth and well-being. In the Hebrew language, the word usually translated as 'tent' is the word *'ohel'*, and refers to the nomadic tent, which is still preferred by some Arabs to this day. The present ruler of Libya lives in a tent for much of his life and visitors to his luxurious tent-palaces testify to the very pleasant ambience of such a dwelling place. Tent dwelling goes far back into history.

The climatic conditions of Bible lands probably lent themselves to living in tents, although the tents used by nomadic Arabs today are very much more substantial than the rather lightweight devices that brave people use in many parts of the world for leisure activities. The mid-eastern sun can be very hot, but at night the temperature in the desert can drop quite dramatically, so all tents intended for serious living in, had to be specially designed to meet the needs of the men and women who brought up their large families in such conditions.

### TENT-MAKERS MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE

In addition to Jabal, we know of other tent-makers by name. Moses was the overseer of the construction of the Tabernacle (tent) in the wilderness, that was used by the nation of Israel as a place of worship after they came out of Egypt. The Apostle Paul was a tent-maker and whilst he was on his journeys he met up with Aquila and Priscilla who shared the same occupation:

‘After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers’ [Acts 18. 1-3].

The Greek word translated as ‘tent-maker’ is *‘skenopios’* and refers to someone who makes small tents for the use of travellers. Perhaps Paul himself made use of his own tents as he travelled around on his missionary work. We will have a look at what these might have been made of a little later.



*Model of the Tabernacle*

### THE TABERNACLE IN THE WILDERNESS

The Tabernacle (tent) that Moses made, is described in great detail in the Bible. In fact, it is possible to make an accurate model of this portable dwelling place, designed by God as the very centre of His worship in the midst of His chosen people, Israel. Here, the original Hebrew word *mishkan* means simply a habitation or dwelling. This word can apply to something other than a tent, but whenever we come across the word ‘tabernacle’ - some 297 times in the Bible, it brings to

mind the tabernacle in the wilderness. It was used until the times of David, king of Israel, who desired to build God a more permanent dwelling place.

#### THE MATERIALS

Tent making was quite hard work, at least so far as one's hands are concerned. The materials used were various, as a study of the Tabernacle makes clear. Woven thread, linen and animal skins were used. The Apostle Paul makes an oblique reference to his trade when he protested to his readers that whilst he appreciated their hospitality, he had never taken advantage of them:

‘I have coveted no one's silver or gold, or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know, that **these hands have provided for my necessities**, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ [*Acts 20, 33-35*].

The use of goat's hair for tent making may seem strange. However, the hair when woven formed a strong material from which to make a tent and once it had been rained upon and thoroughly soaked, it became waterproof. It is the same material described as ‘sackcloth’, in the Hebrew ‘*saq*’ and the Greek ‘*sakkos*’. Tents made of goat's hair were easily repaired and the clippings of goats were kept for this and other purposes. Animal skins were also used to form the panels of the tent, but it is considered that goat's hair was the normal material used, especially in Old Testament times.

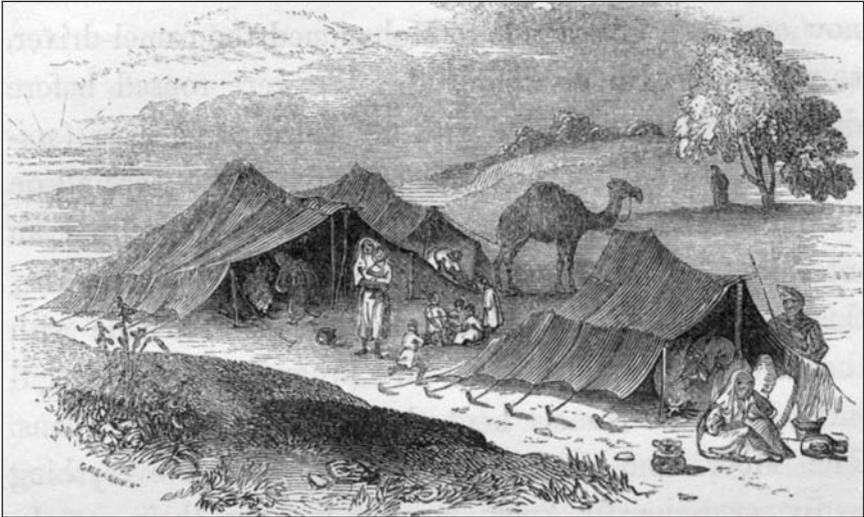
It is believed that the tents of the Bedouin which can still be seen today in use, are virtually unchanged from Biblical times, which allows us an insight into the dwellings of the patriarchs. The colour was usually black, being the natural colour of the material used. There are a number of references in the Bible which tell us about the way tents

were used. In the prophecy of Isaiah, there is a description of greatness in the form of an analogy:

‘Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes’ [Isaiah 54.2].

#### A NOMADIC LIFE

A family of nomads would almost certainly have more than one tent. For example we read of Isaac taking his future wife to stay in his mother Sarah’s tent [Genesis 24.67]. There would be separate tents in the family for the servants and a man like Abraham, who had a small private army, would certainly have had more than one tent. Tent makers would always have customers. The shepherd away from home would use a small tent for protection, the army on the move would need tents.



*Bedouin Arab Tents*

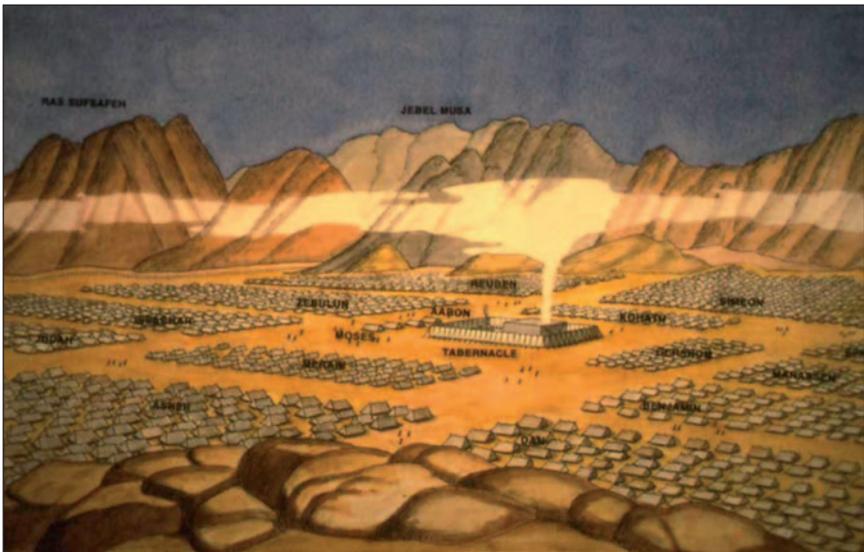
There is an illustration of an Assyrian tent in the British Museum

on one Assyrian ‘frieze’, depicting the tent erected for Sennacherib during the siege of Lachish. We can read about this in the second book of Chronicles chapter 32. The illustration in the British Museum shows the tent supported by poles and cords.

One famous warrior was killed by a woman wielding a tent peg. The man was Sisera the commander of the army of a local king in northern Israel at the time of the Judges and she was killed by a Jewish woman named Jael:

‘Then Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died’ [*Judges 4.21*].

#### THE ENCAMPMENT OF ISRAEL



Earlier in the history of Israel, when the nation lived in tents in the wilderness, they must have been an impressive sight. One of the kings

of the ‘city-states’ that were common in Canaan at that time was concerned about the Jews making progress through the desert towards the land of Canaan. For the Jews, of course this was the land they had been promised by God as an inheritance. The Moabites stood in the way of God’s people and they were determined not to allow Israel pass through their land. Balak their king sent for a prophet who had had associations with Israel, asking him to curse this people. Needless to say, Balaam, for this was the prophet’s name, was unable to fight against God, although he tried. Asked to curse Israel from a distance, this is what he said:

‘And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: How goodly are thy tents [*Hebrew ‘ohel’*], O Jacob, and thy tabernacles’ [*Hebrew ‘mishkan’*], O Israel!’ [*Numbers 24.2-5 AV*]

The encampment of Israel must have been a magnificent sight. The ranks of Israel, their tents set up in tribal lots with the Tabernacle itself in the very centre of the encampment, would be very striking indeed! The lesson from this incident is of course, that we cannot fight against God! Indeed, arising from the role of both ‘tents’ and ‘tent makers’, there are a number of lessons which are worth noting.

Paul, both tent-maker and ‘Apostle to the Gentiles’ as he styles himself, was self-sufficient through his trade and he made it an important point of teaching:

‘For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For

we hear that there are some which walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ, that they work in quietness and eat their own bread' [2 *Thessalonians* 3.10-12].

So we see that Paul set a good example by working as a tent-maker.

The Apostle Peter uses the tent as an analogy for his death. He wrote in his second letter: 'Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this **tent**, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my **tent**, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me' [2 *Peter* 1.13-14]. Earlier versions of the Bible use the word 'tabernacle' for 'tent', but the metaphor is quite clear, Peter is saying, he would soon die, and return to the dust of the ground.

#### THE RECHABITES

There was an interesting incident in the times of the Prophet Jeremiah which concerned the Rechabites. They lived by a very strict code of conduct and one aspect was that they were always to be nomadic and live in tents. God Himself had forseen what would happen to His people, when they forsook their tents to live in towns and cities that they would take from the Canaanites, who were city dwellers. He warned Israel through Moses:

'So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and **beautiful cities, which you did not build, houses** full of all good things... hewn-out wells dig which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant - when you have eaten and are full - then beware lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage' [*Deuteronomy* 6.10-12].

This was indeed what happened. Jonadab, the father of the Rechabites did his best to make sure his descendants did not forget, hence his strict code of living. God had seen this and sent Jeremiah the Prophet to the descendants of Jonadab to test them. He suggested that they drank wine, which was another prohibition of Jonadab, and so they responded:

“We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, ‘You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, for ever. You shall not build a house, sow seed, plant a vineyard, nor have any of these; but all your days **you shall dwell in tents**, that you may live many days in the land where you are sojourners.’”

*[Jeremiah 35. 6]*

The lesson that God drew out from this, was that the descendants of Jonadab had shown true loyalty to their father, but Israel the Nation, **had not** shown loyalty to God! If you read the whole chapter, you will see how disappointed God was at the overall behaviour of the people of Israel. Israel forgot!

#### ISRAEL COMMANDED TO DWELL IN BOOTHS

They ought not to have forgotten, because one of their great feasts was called the Feast of Tabernacles and was the last great feast of the Jewish year. It followed closely after the Day of Atonement, (Yom Kippur) and was a time of great rejoicing:

‘And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall

dwell in **booths**, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in **booths** when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.’ [Leviticus 23. 40-43]



The word for ‘**booths**’ in Hebrew is ‘*cukkah*’ which means a ‘tabernacle’ or temporary dwelling place. It was a reminder to Israel of all that God had done for them and a time of great rejoicing. Rather than use actual tents, the tradition was to make booths or temporary shelters

for the duration of the feast, which was one week. It also provides us today with a very powerful lesson.

If we are true followers of the promises of God and the teaching of Jesus Christ, we must acknowledge that our life now is not permanent, but preparation for the Kingdom of God which is yet to be re-established on the earth. Our lives today need to reflect the faith of the patriarchs, who recognised that God had promised them something better, as the Apostle Paul wrote to first Century believers:

‘By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ [Hebrews 11.8-10].

The Gospel was preached to Abraham as Paul explains in Galatians

chapter 3, so he recognised that for the rest of his mortal life, he was to be a pilgrim. The ‘*city which has foundations,*’ is a metaphor for the Kingdom of God and all who share and demonstrate the same faith as Abraham can look forward to the same promise. Yes, we too must become pilgrims and acknowledge that here, in this life, we have no continuing city.

For the Israelites, established in their land, the Feast of Tabernacles was a way to remember what God had done for them. For us, there is a way in which this anticipates the amazing promise of God, that in due time He will dwell or ‘tabernacle’ with man once again – Eden restored!

‘And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the **tabernacle** of God is with men, and he will **dwel**l with them, and they shall be his people. God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ [Revelation 21.3,4].

The original Greek words used here for both ‘tabernacle’ and ‘dwell’ come from the same root word ‘*skene*’. The meaning is both simple and delightful, but the concept is profound – God, the Great Eternal God, has promised to dwell or ‘tent’ with man. What a wonderful time to look forward to!

David Evans  
Kent, UK

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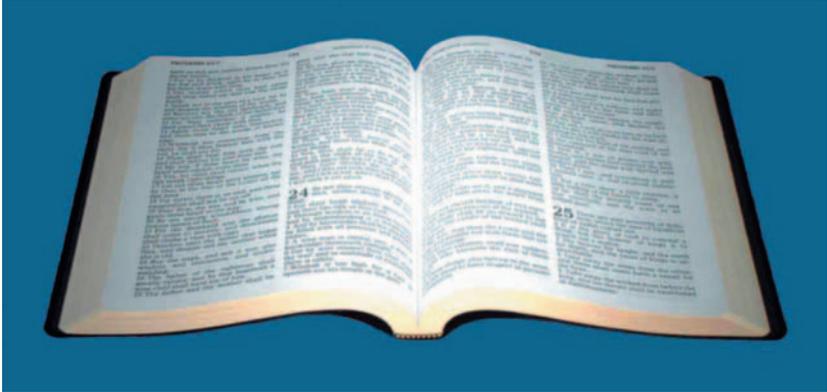
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