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CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE



The Birth of Jesus

One Friday Morning

Desmond & Gillian Ford

For the Sake of the Gospel: Throw Out the Bathwater, but Keep the Baby!

THIRTY YEARS AGO the Seventh-day Adventist Church defrocked Dr Desmond Ford for publicly challenging the denomination's prophetic views. At the same time and on the same basis, many other ministers also lost their positions. Ford had been a top Adventist scholar, who had taught ministerial students and future teachers in Adventism's tertiary institutions in Australia and the U.S.

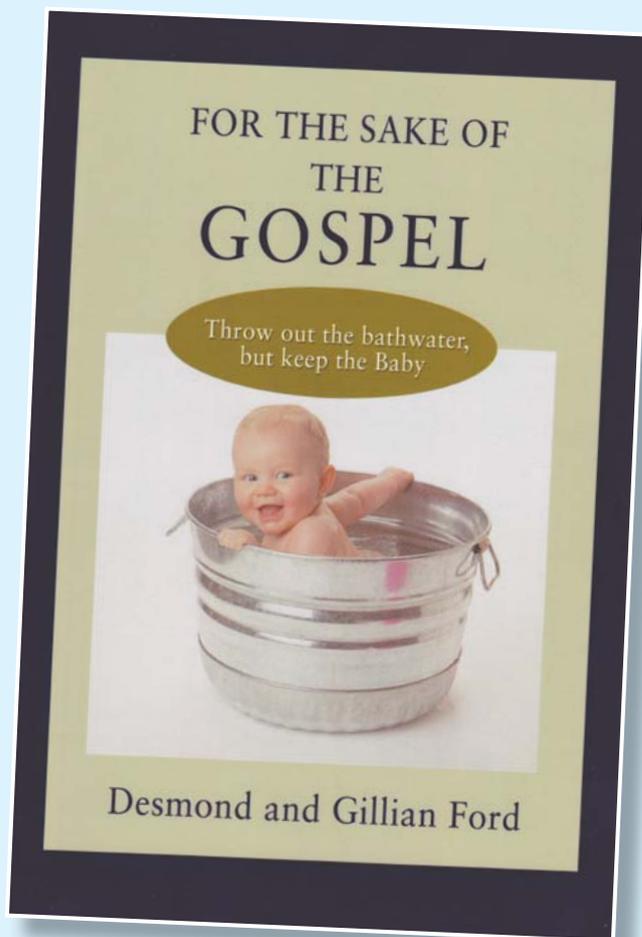
What led him to speak out, and who were the parties involved? Why was it important then? Why does it matter now?

This book answers all these questions and shows that the key to prophetic interpretation is Christ and his gospel—not humanly devised calculations hidden in musty history books. Christ clearly teaches that it is not for us to know the times and the seasons, yet official Adventism continues to teach prophetic timelines that are based on faulty premises. The Adventists teaching of the Investigative Judgment, which supposedly began in 1844, mutes the New Testament gospel, and most Adventist scholars know this. It is time for official Adventism to renounce their errors and become fully Christian in their doctrinal teachings.

Desmond Ford was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor for about thirty years and taught ministers and teachers for about twenty years of that time. He has two earned doctorates. His second wife, Gillian, was present at Ford's trial at Glacier View in 1980. They live in Queensland, Australia, and Ford has three grown children from his first marriage.

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Editorial

CHRISTMAS has always provided happy memories for me, even when times were tough. When I was in my last year at primary school, my parents were struggling financially to pay for a herd of cows, and so the only Christmas present I got was the book, *Pickwick Papers*, by Charles Dickens.

Even though I was an avid reader, I never read that book because the print was too small, the language strange, and the subject matter irrelevant to me.

Other Christmases, particularly the ones spent at my maternal grandparents' home, were very memorable. We tried hard to stay awake on Christmas Eve to see Santa, but never succeeded. We knew he had come, though, not just because of the gifts he had left us, but because he had drunk the milk and eaten the biscuits we had left for him on the hall table.

When we grew up and moved away from home, Christmas was the time when the whole family gathered together at my parents' place. And after Dad died suddenly of heart failure, we

would still drive the four-and-a-half hours to Mum's place for Christmas. Mum was a fabulous cook and we always enjoyed her wholesome and tasty meals. On one occasion she brought out a beautiful steamed pudding for dessert. It was cut into segments and served out. Our mouths were watering, but just one spoonful and everyone went quiet. Mum had put coarse salt into it instead of castor sugar. 'Never mind!'

For several years in the 1970s, Rosemary and I, together with our two girls, would celebrate Christmas in early February, because that's how long it would take for the Christmas mail to reach us in the Papuan Gulf of New Guinea, as the country was then known. When the coastal ship dropped our mailbag on the riverbank, we would take it to the house and separate everything into piles. The magazines would be stacked in one pile, the letters in another, and the parcels in another. Every parcel was opened with the utmost care because its wrapping paper—the only wrapping paper available to us—would be used again.

When our two daughters grew up and got married, our home in New Zealand became the focal point for Christmas. The Christmas tree erected by Rosemary, often with the help of the grandchildren, stands in one corner of the living room sheltering a growing pile of mysterious parcels. There are also thirty plus Christmas parcels for

the folk we care for with our food bank. We could never have afforded to provide so many parcels on our own, but our church, Gracegate, gives us a generous donation, and several members help us to create the colourful boxes for the gifts. Even the Muslim families received Christmas parcels a day or two before Christmas, which they all appreciate. Two years ago one Muslim lady gave Rosemary a thank you card with this heartfelt message: 'Thank you, lovelies, for your always help.'

On Christmas day, after a bigger than usual meal, we go out to the front lawn for an elimination round of petanque, which Rosemary invariably wins.

We are mindful of the fact that Christmas is a very stressful time for some families who do not have the income to celebrate the birth of the Saviour as they would like. If this is as true in your neighbourhood as it is in mine, and if you know a needy family, surprise them this year with a Christmas gift 'from a neighbour and friend.'

Both you and they will be blessed.



RITCHIE WAY

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Mission Statement

Christians united in offering to all meaning and direction in their lives through a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.



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The Riddle of Christmas

DESMOND FORD

RIDDLES are usually associated with fun, but some are involved with issues of life and death. You will remember that Samson set forth a riddle that had very serious consequences (read the story in Judges 14). Here is Samson's riddle: 'Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet'. The Philistines could not answer it until they threatened his wife with killing her father. Delilah coaxed the riddle out of Samson and told the Philistines, and so on the seventh day of the feast, they were ready with the answer: 'What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?' Samson knew what had happened. 'If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle'. It cost them the lives of thirty of their men, and the so-called cow, Delilah, who gave away the secret was given away to Samson's friend.

The Greeks often told the old story of the monster that guarded Thebes. He demanded of all who approached the city either their life or an answer to the puzzle: What is it that has four feet, two feet, and is weakest when it has three feet? You have probably heard the answer to that riddle: man—who first crawls on all fours, later walks on two feet, but who is weakest when ultimately he is reduced to using a walking stick.

I think Samson's riddle was better, for a Christian can find the gospel there. 'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness'. Honey had been found by Samson in the carcass of the lion he slew, and he had strengthened himself on his journey by eating it. Similarly, after our Samson overcame the Tempter in the wilderness—that Adversary who is like a roaring lion—he fed on heavenly food according to Matthew 4:11 (see also Mark 1:13).



By the grace of God all the Church's conflicts with the world and the devil yield ultimate sweetness. How appropriate for those who follow him, who plucked life from death and gained a crown from the Cross, making us partakers of his victory.

Also, it has often been pointed out that the ancient creeds of the church were the result of the assaults of false teachers ultimately overthrown by the church. Truth can be the honey from the carcass of heresy. Rejoice, for it is also true that there is no Christian who cannot derive spiritual food from those things, which test his faith and courage and threaten to destroy him. So you see, Samson's riddle was a truly great one and rich in rewards for him who solves it.

But Christmas brings yet another riddle: Why did Bethlehem, and not the great capital of Jerusalem, become the birthplace of Jesus? Why did the manger of the lowly animals of the field shelter him and not the inn? And why did the angels sing to poor shepherds and not the religious leaders of Jewry? Why? This riddle also is related to issues of life and death.

Do not spoil the parallels of the riddle by asking whether the wise men from the East were not exceptions to the rule

proposed. For they too were poor as far as the riches of revelation were concerned. They belonged to the heathen and not the chosen people.

Of course, it is not hard to see some partial answers to the riddle. Though Jerusalem was called the city of David, actually Bethlehem had been his birthplace. And now the son of David was come, who was to be the great Shepherd of his people—how appropriate he should be born where the shepherd David first found life.

Again—Bethlehem, means 'house of bread'. What better name for the original home of the real Bread for starving sinners? Then also we can say about the animal shelter that it was place where the sacrificial animals were kept and now the true Sacrifice for the sins of the world had come. Furthermore, the shepherds abiding in the fields outside the shelter of the town remind us of the patriarchs who were all shepherds. From among such, Moses and David were called, while keeping sheep, to care for God's flock.

But the best answer to the riddle transcends all the above. Observe first that he who is called the Everlasting Father in Isaiah 9:6, became a child of time in Bethlehem. And the One pictured

as the Ancient of Days in Revelation 1:14 is but an infant a span in length that first Christmas. What infinite condescension! What humility!

Thou earnest a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.
Our God contracted to a span
Incomprehensibly made man.

The humility of God! He asks nothing of us that he has not performed. Mary saw the answer to the riddle clearly and put it to music. Listen to it:

He has scattered the proud
in the imagination of their hearts.
He has put down the mighty
from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree:
He has filled the hungry
with good things
and the rich he has sent
empty away.
(Luke 1:51-53)

Jesus was ever presenting the same glorious message. When the disciples of John the Baptist came to enquire whether he was the true Messiah, his answer was:

Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me.
(Matt. 11:4-6)

Had John the Baptist forgotten the words of Christ's ordination sermon? 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled' (Matt. 5:3, 6).

Had John forgotten the message of the book of Judges? Every deliverer in that record glorified God either by his or her own inadequacy or by the inadequacy of the weapons used. Remember? Deborah—the woman general; Ehud—the left-handed captain; Jephthah—son of a harlot; and Gideon—the least in his father's house. (Actually, Gideon was the least man in the world, for he belonged to a divided tribe, which was the least in Israel, and Israel comprised the least race in the world. Thus Gideon was the least important child of the least important family in the tiniest tribe of the smallest race in the world). Consider the weapons used—instruments such as Gideon's trumpets and pitchers, Shamgar's ox goad, Samson's jawbone of an ass, and Jael's tent peg.

There was no room for the Christ-child or his guardians at the inn we are told by Luke. Has it not always been thus? Is it not still the same? The privileged see no beauty in Christ or his truth. The masses reject their only hope. Worldlings, though they be outwardly religious, look for what is adorned by glamorous tinsel and announced by the blowing of trumpets.

Insight into the Riddle of Christmas

God's becoming man involved the paradox of Eternity entering time and light entering darkness. Such insight lightens the other mysteries of life. We learn to see mercy in misery, life in death and gain in the loss of all things. We perceive that there must first be the bruised before the glorified body, the Cross before the crown, the ringlet of thorns before the halo of light, the valley before the mountain-top.

Paul understood the riddle and wrote about the servants of Christ:

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth: but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ... Therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord!"
(1 Cor. 1:26-31)

But most of all, the answer to the riddle of Christmas is exemplified in the way of personal salvation. The lowly creatures see God in the flesh, the shepherds hear and see the angels. Those who know themselves to be sinners, who know they deserve death and hell and yet bow low in humble contrition and adoring love—these are elevated to glory—even the glory of righteousness and everlasting life.

But be careful! Too many become drunk at Christmas. Some are drunk who never drink. An unwise believer can become spiritually drunk. Remember the man who at last achieved humility? He became happy at his humility. But then he was sorry that he was happy about his humility. Lastly he became happy that he was sorry about his happiness at his humility. What a vicious circle, and one impossible to escape from if one focuses upon oneself instead of Christ, one's own gifts or achievements instead of his. True humility is only the possession of those who know their own poverty.

Even Old Testament saints were reminded that 'in the Lord' alone they had righteousness and strength. Paul tells us in this era that Christ is made unto us righteousness and therefore with Isaiah he bids us constantly to ever rejoice in the Lord and in him alone.

And now you have the answer to the riddle of Christmas—God gives himself to the poor, the needy, to those who know they are dying and without hope unless God looks down in mercy and grace upon them.

To such belongs the kingdom of heaven, such will be satisfied though in this life they will never graduate from the ranks of poor sinners who ever hunger and thirst for the continued blessings of God. ❄

Good News Unlimited magazines in 2013

AS YOU WILL have noted, the Good News Unlimited magazines now have a fresher format and appeal. In a few months we hope to be making the magazines available on-line, for which there will be a small subscription fee. There will be further information on this when we have it up and running.

The Board of Good News Unlimited has also decided to produce just twelve magazines each year instead of the usual sixteen. We are doing this to keep our costs down and to reduce handling. Readers, however, will not be deprived as we shall increase the size of each magazine to compensate. It is hoped that we can also make it possible for the GNU magazines to be downloaded to Apple ibooks, Apple Newsstand, and Kindle, etc.

Your suggestions about what we else we should do to keep up with rapidly changing technology and your prayers for the success of these ventures would be appreciated.



One Friday

Morning

RITCHIE WAY

*It was on a Friday morning
That they took me from the cell,
And I saw they had a carpenter
To crucify as well.
“You can blame it onto Pilate
You can blame it on the Jews
You can blame it on the devil,
It’s God, I accuse.
It’s God they ought to crucify
Instead of you and me,”
I said to the Carpenter
A-hanging on the tree.*

*You can blame it onto Adam
You can blame it onto Eve
You can blame it on the apple,
But that I can’t believe.
It was God that made the devil
And the woman and the man,
And there wouldn’t be an apple
If it wasn’t in His plan.
It’s God they ought to crucify
Instead of you and me,”
I said to the Carpenter
A-hanging on the tree.’*

— Sydney Carter

THE FELON crucified beside Jesus, to whom these words are attributed, had an excellent point. What right has God got to judge us for being sinners when we can’t help being sinners?

If we could live lives totally free of sin, there would be at least one perfect person in the world, one person who has never thought, spoken or done a wrong thing. But there isn’t, ‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23). So, if that’s the way we were born, what right has God got to judge us for being what we cannot help being?

Do you know what God says in reply to that line of reasoning? He says:

It is true, you did nothing to get yourselves into this horrible mess, but it’s also true that you don’t have to do anything to get yourselves out of it. You don’t have to endure long punishing fasts; you don’t have to whip yourself constantly, or deny yourself certain foods; you don’t have to go on a pilgrimage; or give all your worldly goods to charity. I have done everything necessary to provide you with an eternal home in my kingdom. And I offer it to you as a free gift.

When I created the human race with free will, I accepted full responsibility for what would happen if they rejected me. Right back there I chose to be “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). So when Adam and Eve rejected me, I stepped in with Plan B—the promise to pay the penalty of their failure myself. Their condemnation fell on me so that they might be free of condemnation (Rom. 8:1), and I died their death, so they could live my life (Rom. 6:23b).

The destiny you choose for yourself—whether eternal life or eternal death—is not based on what

you do or don’t do. The repentant felon who was crucified with Jesus had nothing to offer for his salvation, but Jesus gave him the gift of eternal life because he put his trust—not in himself—but in Jesus. And it’s the same for you and me. If we put our trust one-hundred-percent in Jesus, and not in ourselves, the gift of eternal life is ours also.

Here is what the Bible says on this matter:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.... Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict ... (John 3:16-19)

The verdict that declares your destiny—whether eternal life or eternal death—is based on your acceptance or rejection of Jesus’ death on the Cross in your place. To accept Jesus is to accept eternal life; to reject Jesus is to ultimately perish.

It was God they crucified, that Friday morning. On his shoulders he carried your sin and mine. In the Lord’s Supper we celebrate the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus who died for us so that we might live with him.

Every time we meet at the table set with the bread and wine we are reminded that the very foundation and essence of our faith is based in the One on the Cross whose body was broken for us and whose blood was shed for us so that we might have eternal life through faith in him.

He was the Carpenter a-hanging on the tree.

He was God crucified instead of you and me.





From the Pastor

AFTER JESUS was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him' (Matt. 2:1-2).

RON J. ALLEN

MODERN KINGS do not exercise real political power. Yet, for most of history, things were different. Kings were rulers, lawmakers, judges and men of war. They obtained power by conquest and ruled by force.

Before Christ was born, the Hasmonean family ruled the Jewish people. Hyrcanus II was effectively controlled by Rome. His chief minister, Antipater, had two sons—Pharsael and Herod. Herod became king of Israel from 40 to 4 B.C. He is the king whom Matthew names in his nativity story. His path to the throne and his time as sovereign were steeped in blood.

When Julius Caesar made Hyrcanus II ethnarch and high priest, Antipater was appointed commissioner for all Judea. He in turn appointed his sons Pharsael and Herod as governors in Jerusalem and Galilee. Herod early recognised the might of Rome and decided that loyalty at all costs was the best policy. He immediately ingratiated himself with his overlords by attacking freedom fighters in Galilee who were resisting Roman rule. Later he made a personal pilgrimage to Rome where he humbly appeared before Caesar Augustus. This audience resulted in his installation as King of the Jews with full Roman backing.

For the rest of his reign, he co-operated with Rome and facilitated its crushing rule over the Israelite people. He faithfully collected taxes for Caesar as well as imposing a heavy regimen of charges to fund his own expenditures.

Herod was only half Jewish. This meant he had to overcome the strong racial sensitivities of his subjects. His first wife, Doris, was not Jewish. She bore him a son, Antipater. He then married Mariamme, a Jewish woman from the royal Hasmonean line. She produced two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus. Herod loved her, but things started to turn sour when she learned that he had ordered that she be killed if he should die. He was motivated by jealousy. Doris, Herod's first wife, spread rumours that Mariamme and her two sons were trying to poison him.

A trial in Rome ensued and the two accused sons were acquitted, but Herod killed them anyway. Herod also executed Mariamme, only later to realise her innocence. After wrongly killing his three most precious persons, Herod was often overwrought with remorse to the point of madness. Thereafter, he was continually raked with grief and suspicion. He was gripped by the fear that one of his offspring would try to kill him and assume the kingship. Ultimately, this drove him to execute Antipater his firstborn son. It was to the court of this king—filled as it was with intrigue and dread, that the Magi came and asked: 'Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?' It is hard to imagine an enquiry more fraught with risk.

Matthew says that Herod became 'disturbed'; an understatement, surely. Here, no doubt, was another usurper bent on toppling him. His response was calculating and ruthless. Within a short time, in the little town of Bethlehem, an awful sound pierced the air; mothers wailed out their grief as their infant sons were slaughtered.

The 'orneriness of kings' (Mark Twain) is well documented. It is fortunate for the world that contemporary examples are confined almost

entirely to ceremonial functions. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's recently concluded dictatorship probably offers insight into what life could be like under monarchs who ruled the ancient world.

The birth of Joseph and Mary's child is reported as the birth of a king. Clearly, those who authored the gospels meant to say that Jesus was a real king whose rule would have political ramifications, not just ceremonial ones. Matthew and Luke both supply genealogies proving that Jesus was truly of the royal line of David. Yet this was to be a kingship like no other.

The first to hear of Jesus arrival were not the usual V.I.P.s—they were obscure persons, and Mary was one of them. After being told that her babe would 'sit on the throne of his father David', she was struck by the incongruity between her own humble status and the eminence of her expected child. Far from the usual pomp and pageantry of royal birth announcements, Christ was heralded by John the Baptist's foetal caper within Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:41). No palace room was set to enfold and protect this prince. Indeed, there was no room for him anywhere (Luke 2:7). He was born in a hotel outbuilding. Christ's kingship was announced, but not to the world's 'important' ones. Instead it was affirmed among men and women whose experience of kings and their ilk was defined by hardship, cruelty, oppression, mayhem and terror. This king would be different. In his gospel, Mark emphasises the difference by quoting from Isaiah 4:10-11:

See, the sovereign Lord comes with power and his arm rules for him.

Continued page 8

Continued from page 7

See, his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers his lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of a King who was unlike every other ruler known—past and present. Looking back on all that has happened since Christmas last, we cannot help but notice that rulers on this planet of ours have not lost their appetite for the same methods and practices, which Herod used to retain his grasp

on power and to keep his foes at bay. Governments demand taxes and require civil obedience. Christ is a king who gives blessings and rewards. Governments rule by compulsion, the strategic use of fear. Jesus is gentle to the young and to those who are pregnant. Governments rely on their armies; Jesus is a shepherd. He carries the weak and the small close to his heart.

Think how desperate is our need for such a King. Are we not worn out? Have we not had our fill of endless violence, retaliation, threat, reprisal, conquest, domination, terror, assassination,

bombings, rape and pillage, economic vandalism and bullying, strike action, riot, rape, death and grief?

To publish the good news of Jesus, the Gentle King, the Prince of Peace, is the mission of Good News Unlimited. During 2012 your gifts have helped us in this task. For this we thank you. As Christmas approaches and you plan your giving, we humbly ask you to consider the gospel work of GNU, worthy of your support.

May the One born King of the Jews come to your house this Christmas and bring you peace. ❄️

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

1834–1892

CHARLES Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was born in Essex, England. He became a Christian in 1850 and a year later was the pastor of a small Baptist church. In 1854 he was called to the pastorate of New Park Street Baptist Chapel in Southwark, London. His preaching attracted great crowds so much so that a new building, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, was erected.

During his ministry he built up a congregation, which numbered about 6,000. As well as being a popular preacher, Spurgeon was involved in several charitable organisations, including an orphanage at Stockwell.

Spurgeon also had an extensive influence through literature, in particular his sermons, which appeared in pamphlet form weekly.

He also wrote *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, a further compilation of devotional readings.

‘Just, and the justifier of him which believeth’
Romans 3:26.

Reading for September 25, Morning, in p. 562. Morning/Evening Daily Readings by C. H. Spurgeon, Fearn, Scotland, UK, 2008 reprint.

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory looks back upon past sins, with deep sorrow for the



sin, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come; for Christ has paid the debt of His people to the last jot and tittle, and received the divine receipt; and unless God can be so unjust as to demand double payment for one debt, no soul for whom Jesus died as a substitute can ever be cast into hell. It seems to be one of the very principles of our enlightened nature to believe that God is just; we feel that it must be so, and this gives us our terror at first; but is it not marvellous that this very same belief that God is just, becomes afterwards the pillar of our confidence and peace? If God be just, I, a sinner, alone and without a substitute, must be punished; but Jesus stands in my stead, and is punished for me; and now, if God be just, I, a sinner, standing in Christ, can never be punished. God must change His nature before one

soul, for whom Jesus was a substitute, can ever by any possibility suffer the lash of the law. Therefore, Jesus having taken the place of the believer—having rendered a full equivalent to divine wrath for all that His people ought to have suffered as the result of sin, the believer can shout with glorious triumph, ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?’ Not God, for He hath justified; not Christ, for He hath died, ‘yea, rather hath risen again’. My hope lives not because I am not a sinner, but because I am a sinner for whom Christ died; my trust is not that I am holy, but that being unholy, He is my righteousness. My faith rests not upon what I am, or shall be, or feel, or know, but in what Christ is, in what He has done, and in what he is now doing for me. On the lion of justice the fair maid of hope rides like a queen. ❄️



David

THE FUGITIVE

PART 2

RITCHIE WAY

WHenever David and his troops returned home from battle, the women in the towns and villages they passed through would come out dancing with tambourines and lutes, singing, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.' As you might imagine, this refrain galled Saul. Consumed with jealousy he fumed, 'They have credited David with tens of thousands, but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?'

David and Saul's son, Jonathan, however, became inseparable friends. Jonathan, himself a valiant warrior, had, with his armour bearer, bested a Philistine detachment at Michmash, so the two had much in common. Jonathan knew that the prophet Samuel had anointed David to be the next king of Israel, instead of him—Saul's heir apparent—but he accepted that this was God's will and encouraged David (1 Sam. 23:17). He made a covenant with David that David would care for his offspring if anything untoward happened to him.

When Saul's daughter, Michal, fell in love with David, Saul thought it would suit his purposes admirably to have a family spy in David's household, so he agreed to the

King Saul, impressed by David's audacious attack and defeat of the Philistine warrior, Goliath, conscripted him into the army as a full-time soldier. After a number of battles with the Philistines it became apparent that David was not only an inspiring leader, but also a very good strategist and tactician (1 Sam. 18:30), and so Saul promoted him to the rank of commander (1 Sam. 18:5).

union on condition that David paid him a dowry of one hundred Philistine foreskins. Saul was hoping that the Philistines would kill David to save him the trouble. David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines, and then presented their foreskins to Saul who gave him his daughter, Michal, to be his wife. Michal, however, loved David so much she did what she could to protect him from her jealous father.

When Saul became aware of the fact that two of his own children were sympathetic with David he lost control of good sense and tried to murder David himself. When that failed he sent some of his staff to watch David's house in which the residents dwelt on the top floor, the lower floor being set aside as a stable for the family animals. These assassins camped the night outside the house's only external door, intending to kill David when he came out in the morning. But Michal, aware of her father's plans, let David down

through a window on the far side, and he escaped.

David fled with nothing but the clothes he stood up in. Having no weapon to defend himself, and no food, he went to see the chief priest, Ahimelech, at Nob, which was a good hour's walk away. Nob was a sanctuary town of about five hundred people where only priests who served at the sanctuary, and their families lived.

Ahimelech trembled when he saw David early that Sabbath morning, suspecting that he was fleeing from Saul. 'Why are you alone,' he asked. 'Why is no-one with you?'

David lied, saying that the king had sent him on a secret mission that he didn't want anyone in Gibeah to know about, and that he had arranged for his regiment to meet him at a certain place.

David then asked Ahimelech if he had any bread he could give him. Ahimelech replied, 'The only bread we have is that which was replaced on the table in the Holy Place with fresh bread today. You can have that.'

'Do you have any weapons here that I could have?' asked David. 'I left home in such a hurry, I didn't bring one with me.'

Continued page 10

David—the Fugitive

Continued from page 9

‘The only weapon we have is the sword of Goliath the Philistine,’ replied Ahimelech. ‘It is wrapped in a cloth in the sanctuary. You can have that.’

David took the bread and the finely crafted Philistine sword and went south to the cave of Adullam, stopping briefly at his family home in Bethlehem on the way. After disclosing that he was fleeing from Saul who wanted to kill him, he gathered together some supplies and left.

Soon after, his brothers and father’s household joined him at the cave. The news of David’s flight from Saul spread quickly and ‘all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their leader’. Even the prophet Gad joined him. About four hundred men, plus wives and children, came to David (1 Sam. 22:1-5).

Meanwhile back in Gibeah King Saul was commiserating about the failure of people around him to disclose what David was doing. He accused them of keeping silent to protect his enemy. Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s head shepherd, then told Saul that he had seen David talking to the chief priest, Ahimelech, at Nob. Doeg said Ahimelech had given David some food and Goliath’s sword.

Saul sent his men to bring Ahimelech and all the priests to him. When they arrived he accused them of siding with David against him. Ahimelech protested, saying that David was Saul’s loyal servant, and in helping David they were showing their support for Saul.

But Saul hated David so much he had become irrational and vindictive, and unmercifully ordered his bodyguards to kill all the priests on the spot. To their credit the guards refused to raise a hand against the priests of the Lord. Saul then ordered Doeg to strike down the priests. Doeg, undeterred by the scruples of Saul’s bodyguards, took a sword and went down the line slaughtering the eighty-five priests, one after the other. On Saul’s instructions Doeg then went to Nob and killed all their innocent wives and children, cattle, donkeys and sheep. Fortunately, Abiathar, Ahimelech’s son escaped and fled to David, taking the sacred ephod with him (1 Sam. 22:9-23).



Three people were implicated in the annihilation of all who lived in the sanctuary town of Nob: David, Saul and Doeg.

Had David told the truth to Ahimelech, Ahimelech would have been responsible for his own decision. But David lied to save his own skin, and thus compromised not only Ahimelech’s relationship with the king, but also the relationships of the 500 people who lived in Nob.

Doeg was probably trying to be helpful when he told Saul about David’s visit to Nob, and should not be judged harshly on that account. But for him to take up the sword and kill these innocent priests and their families—whatever his motive—was completely unconscionable. His name is mentioned in Scripture in infamy and

While David was guilty of initiating the massacre at Nob, the Lord forgave him and took that guilt upon himself; he would pay the penalty for David’s sin. Forgiveness, however, does not erase the results of the wrong done. A converted man will be forgiven for wasting his life and money on alcohol, but while forgiveness will get him into Paradise, it can’t restore his wasted years or the negative effects of his drinking on himself and others. In the same way, even though David will be among the redeemed, he will still be held accountable for the devastating effect of his lie on Ahimelech and the priests of Nob.

Lying to save your own skin only dumps your problem on others. It also destroys your own credibility; people will learn that you can’t be trusted. As people who follow the Lord Jesus, we have a responsibility to reflect him in all our words.



A message came to David that the Philistines were besieging the Israelite city of Keilah, and looting its threshing floors of the grain the Keilahites had recently harvested (1 Sam. 23). David asked the Lord, via the ephod, if he should go and help Keilah. The Lord replied, ‘Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah’. David’s men, however, who had only begun military training under David, lacked battle

readiness and were poorly equipped to take on the Philistine soldiers, so they were hesitant to follow him. So David asked the Lord a second time, and a second time the Lord said, ‘Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hands.’

David led his troops to Keilah and inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines, and captured the livestock that they had brought with them to provide fresh meat for their troops (see 2 Kgs. 3:9,17). These cattle would keep David’s people fed for some time.

After the battle David’s troop stripped the slain Philistine soldiers of their spears, bows and arrows, swords, shields and armour, providing them with the equipment they needed.

It didn’t take long for the news that David was in Keilah, to get back to Saul. Gloating at his good fortune he called up



disgust. The day will come when he, the accused, will stand in judgement before the very ones he so unjustly and mercilessly killed.

And Saul will stand with him, judged for ordering the execution of these innocent servants of the Lord and their families, just to satisfy his craving for revenge on all who dared to assist the man the Lord had anointed to replace him on the throne of Israel.

It should also be noted that Saul’s rebellion against God was exacting a terrible price on the king himself: it was driving him deeper and deeper into the abyss of despair, and the acid of his jealousy and revenge was inexorably eating away at his insides. That is what happens to each of us when we persist in fighting against the Lord. Relief only comes when we repent and ask for God’s forgiveness.

David—the Fugitive

his forces to go down to Keilah to capture David. As soon as David became aware that Saul was gathering his troops he asked the Lord:

‘Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to Saul?’

The Lord replied, ‘They will.’

So David and his men, now numbering in excess of six hundred, left Keilah for the Arabah—the rift valley through which the Jordan flowed.



Life has taught me that you can go out of your way to help someone, often at considerable expense in time, effort and money, only to have them turn on you later. Such people are like pet boa constrictors. You treat them well, but one day they drop on you and try to crush you.

Jesus knows what that is like because that is what Judas Iscariot did to him. He loved Judas, but Judas rejected his love and spat in his face, so to speak. That kind of ingratitude really hurts; it plumbs the depths of emotional pain. The dictionary calls it treachery.

But like David with Keilah, and Jesus with Judas, it is best to move on and leave such people to their own devices.



When news came to Saul about David’s new hideout, he took three thousand soldiers to hunt him down. They cornered David and his men in the desert of Maon. David’s force was on one side of a hill, and Saul’s was on the other. Saul divided his troops to surround David’s force. The Scriptures say:

As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, ‘Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land!’ Then, with a blast of a trumpet, Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. (1 Sam. 23:26-28)



Why didn’t Saul capture David? It was because God had chosen David to be the next king of Israel. Saul should have learned that you cannot checkmate God.

In the same way, if we are fulfilling the gospel commission, no force the devil can raise against us will ever take us unless the Lord permits it. We may be cornered, as

was David, but the Lord will always intervene and deliver us. If necessary he will open a way through the sea for us, as he did for the Israelites when they were cornered by the armies of Egypt. The Bible promises: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ (Rom. 8:31).



After Saul had dealt with the Philistines, news came to him that David was at En Gedi, beside the Dead Sea, so he again took three thousand men to hunt him down. There was a cave there and Saul went in to relieve himself, not knowing that David and his men were hiding far back in the same cave. Saul took off his robe and draped it over a large rock, all the time keeping his eyes fixed on the entrance as a good soldier would.

One of David’s men pointed to Saul and then slid his thumb across his throat from ear to ear with his eyes wide in question. David shook his head and moved stealthily forward himself, with his sword in hand. From behind the rock he quietly cut a corner from Saul’s robe before retreating back into the darkness with it.

When Saul left the cave David gave him several minutes to get some distance away before going to the entrance and calling out to him:

Why do you listen to those who say David is bent on harming you? Today the Lord gave you into my hands. I could have killed you, but instead I just cut this corner from your robe. ‘See!’ he called, holding it up. ‘I am not out to kill you, so why are you out to kill me? What harm have I done to you that you hunt me down like a dangerous animal?’

Saul called back:

‘May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.’

So David gave his oath to Saul, and Saul returned home. (1 Sam. 24 *passim*)

But Saul had become like a yo-yo. One moment his spirits were up, the next they were down. One moment he wanted to

murder David, the next he was singing his praises. His lack of consistency was very frustrating and demoralising for his troops.

The Ziphites, who were no friends of David’s, again went to Saul to tell him where David was camped (1 Sam. 23:19; 26:1). Once again Saul mustered his three thousand crack troops and set out with the intention of killing his rival to the throne. The first night in the desert Saul made his camp beside the hill facing Jeshimon. One of David’s scouts reported their location, so David set out for the camp with two other valiant men. The army was camped in a circle and Saul lay sleeping in the middle with his spear stuck in the ground by his head.

All, including those who should have been on guard duty, were sound asleep, exhausted after a hard day’s march. David and Abishai moved quietly into the centre of the camp where Abishai indicated that he could drive his spear through Saul and kill him on the spot. David shook his head, pulled Saul’s spear from the ground and quietly left. David then climbed to the top of the nearby hill and called out to Saul. His voice carried well on the still night air.

‘Is that your voice, David my son?’ called Saul.

David replied, ‘Yes it is, my lord the king. Why are you pursuing me as though I were your enemy? What wrong am I guilty of? I could have killed you tonight with your own spear, but didn’t. I have that spear here, with me. If you send one of your young men up I’ll give it to him!’

‘I have sinned, David my son. I have acted like a fool,’ replied Saul.

Next morning Saul and his troops packed up and returned to Gibeah.



David was guilty of some major sins, but his disrespect for those who had been anointed by the Lord for special ministry was not one of them.

It was at least fifteen years after Samuel anointed David to be the next king of Israel, that he was crowned (2 Sam. 5:4). Fifteen years is a long time to wait. How would you feel if God promised you something grand today and you had to wait until the year 2028 to receive it? That’s how long David had to wait.

David could have hastened the process by killing Saul, thus making the throne immediately available. But he refused to do that. God put Saul on the throne, and God himself would decide when David would replace him. ✨



Let's go to Bethlehem

DOUGLAS R. MARTIN

AN ANGEL messenger has just announced that 'this day in the city of David, a Saviour has been born'. Then 'a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.'

As I write, I sense the excitement and acknowledge the faith of the shepherds on the hills near Bethlehem. Their response was spontaneous, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that **has happened**, which the Lord has told us about' (Luke 2:15). Their excitement is in harmony with the message they had received and the jubilation of the angels who accompanied the angelic messenger and announced the birth of 'a Saviour, Christ the Lord'.

We do not know the time of night, or whether the moon was shining. This was not a time for details. Non-essentials were blotted out by the glory that had surrounded them. One consuming passion filled their minds, and so they said, 'Let's go!'

Whether they would find the babe when they arrived in Bethlehem, or whether they would be welcome in their shepherd garb on this august occasion was not a consideration. They had been told by the messenger, 'You will find the babe wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger'. That was invitation enough, so 'Let's go to Bethlehem'. All they thought of was that in Bethlehem the 'Desire of nations' had been born—and they must see Him—and now.

They had been told great news: 'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you'. This really was mind-boggling. Earthlings had hoped and waited for thousands of years for a promise to be fulfilled. 'But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive

the full rights of sons' (Gal. 4:4). This was a season for some excitement. The Messiah had come! That was all that mattered. No doubt they secured the sheep in their fold, for they were not hirelings, and off they went.

It is quite likely that they were temple shepherds, for it is believed that in the Bethlehem area there were folds kept for sacrifice at the temple. If so, how fitting that they should be the first to hear of the birth of the Saviour, 'the Lamb of God', who would save them by offering His life.

So, why not go to Bethlehem and 'see this thing that has come to pass'. This is not a time for doubting questions. Has He really been born at long last? What had the angel said? 'A Saviour has been born to you'. 'This will be a sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger'. So what did the shepherds say? 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that *has happened*'—not, see *whether* this thing has happened. And what did they find?

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in a manger. After they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and

all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds had said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

A question projects itself on to the screen of my frontal lobe: At this time of celebration, is it not time for us to pause and ponder these things in our hearts? Let not this season pass us by as a faded memory, but let it be internalised in our hearts. This is news of a great event, not the repetition of a myth. Dr Luke has proved himself to be a reliable reporter. We are here reading of an historical, factual event, as in Luke's other historical reports in *Acts of the Apostles*.

Did you notice the italicised type in the quotation above? This is a time to celebrate and rejoice in a Saviour who came, not merely in gifts, but in the greatest gift to mankind—Jesus Himself. Did I hear someone say, 'Amen?' So let it be.

'The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen' (and what they had seen confirmed what they had heard)—note it well—'*and all who heard it were amazed*'.

This was and is a truly amazing event. 'Let us rejoice and be glad in it!'



Don't give up!

JIM DALY

A COLLEAGUE was recently telling me a story of a man whose son years ago was growing weary of balancing the rigours of college with two part-time jobs. Following was a typical day for this 19-year-old student.

His mornings would begin in the pre-dawn dark, in the middle of the night, delivering newspapers out of his beat-up 1977 Chevy Malibu. After the final paper was tossed, he'd race home, shower, change and grab a Pop-Tart or bagel on the way out to class.

A typical school day lasted till 1:00pm. He would then rush off to his other job at J. C. Penney, changing in his car.

He would read, study and tackle his homework during his two breaks in the stockroom. He would have dinner at 9:00pm, and maybe watch a little television and then it was off to bed. In a few hours, the routine would begin all over again.

Meanwhile, he saw more affluent

friends living a much easier life, regularly receiving money from parents with seemingly few expectations and demands from anyone. Jealousy turned to envy and finally, bitterness and exasperation.

'I think I'm going to take a semester or two off, Dad', he said one night. He had no intention of ever going back. He wanted to make money and shake free from this hassle, but he knew his father wouldn't endorse that approach.

So they talked, and his dad saw through the smoke. He gave him some advice he never forgot.

'When you have come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on', the father urged. 'Don't give up, don't ever give up!'

The boy was defiant. 'But I just can't do it', he said dejectedly.

His father pressed on: 'Son, the people who have made an impact on the world and who are remembered are those who refused to throw in the



towel. Thomas Edison didn't give up. Winston Churchill didn't give up. Vince Lombardi never quit, and look at Maxwell McBride!

The young man looked bewildered and asked, 'Who is Maxwell McBride?'

'See', replied the father knowingly. 'You've never heard of him. He gave up!'

They laughed. The son didn't give up.

Are you weary, dragging and ready to throw in the towel? Do you have a son or daughter on the edge, thinking about dropping out of school, surrendering a dream or desire?

Tie a knot and hang on. And if you're down, take heart and turn to Him. Because when you are down, He will lift you up. ✨

Establishing a Life Objective

A LOT OF people set goals, but few people ever set a Life Objective. Goals relate to separate parts of your life: your career, finances, family and retirement, etc. But a Life Objective sets the direction of your whole life.

Your Life Objective is the big picture. There are four tremendous benefits of thinking through and writing down a Life Objective:

It reduces frustration by simplifying decision-making. Every day you are faced with many, often complex, choices. Having a Life Objective gives you a standard by which to evaluate which alternative is best for you.

It increases motivation—The correct Life Objective will inspire you to get up in the morning and persist when you feel like giving up. 'Where there is no vision, people perish' (Prov. 29:18).



It allows concentration—Success is largely the result of focusing on one thing and doing it well. Veteran broadcaster, Dan Rather, has a plaque on his desk that states, 'Will what I'm doing right now benefit that broadcast?' A Life Objective helps you focus your time, energy, and resources.

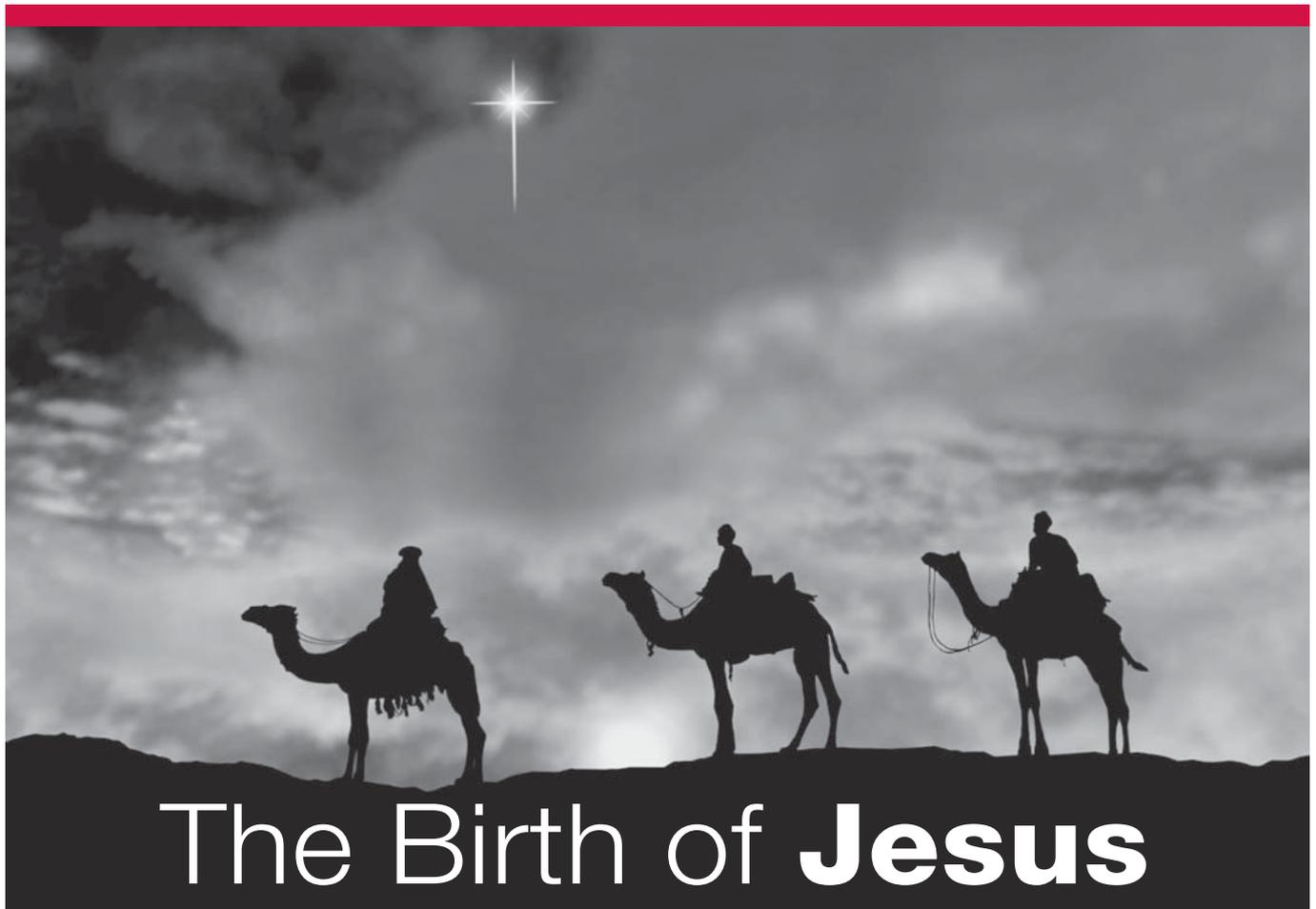
It attracts cooperation—It is an observable fact that when you decide exactly where you want to go in life, many other people will want to go

along with you. People follow those who have clearly figured out who they are and what they are here for.

Find some time this week to get alone in a quiet place to start thinking about a Life Objective.

Here are 3 steps to begin with:

- 1. Identify your talents/gifts**—Ask 'What am I good at?' and 'What do I really enjoy doing because I do it well?' When God designed you, he put certain characteristics and abilities into your DNA structure. That combination of traits makes you unique! God wants you to do what he has gifted you to do.
- 2. Review your experiences**—Ask, 'What have I learned?' Our greatest lessons come from our hurts and pains. These need to be factored into a Life Objective.
- 3. Decide what is really important**—The urgent is not always the important. William James, the father of American psychology once said, 'The best use of your life is to invest it in that which outlasts it'. So ask yourself, 'What is going to last the longest?' ✨



The Birth of Jesus

GOD'S PEOPLE had waited a long, long time for their champion to come. The prophecies told them that this mighty man—the Messiah—would be born into King David's family tree, and that he would be born in the little town of Bethlehem. But no one knew when he would be born.

The shepherds would sit around their campfires at night talking about this promised Messiah. The old men would say in their shaky voices, 'I used to believe that the Messiah would come before I finished school. But he didn't.'

'Then I believed that the Messiah would come before I got married. But he didn't.'

'Then I believed that the Messiah would come before I had children.'

'Well, I now have grandchildren and the Messiah still hasn't come.'

But up north in the small town of Nazareth, a young woman named Mary was busy about her housework when an angel appeared, scaring the daylights out of her. 'Do not be afraid!' the angel said, 'You have been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. You are to call his name Jesus.'

Now the country of Judea, where Mary lived, was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman boss of Judea announced that it was time for a census. They needed to know how many people there were in the land, and what the ages of the people were, so they could work out the taxes and other things. The government said

A Christmas Story for Primary-age Children and Others.

RITCHIE WAY

everyone had to return to his hometown for the census.

The hometown for Mary's husband Joseph was Bethlehem, down in the south, across the valley from Jerusalem. It would take three days travelling to get there, and that would not be easy because Mary was nearly due to have a baby. Her tummy was so big she was having trouble walking around, so Joseph decided to take her to Bethlehem on their donkey. It was late at night when they finally arrived in the little town. When they arrived there, Mary was tired and her back ached.

'Don't worry,' said Joseph, 'I'll soon find you a nice place to stay, and some warm food to eat.'

But it was not as simple as that. You see, many people had come back to Bethlehem from all over the country for the census, and all the hotels, motels, Bed & Breakfasts and Camping Grounds were filled up. It was getting very late when Joseph knocked on the last door. 'If we can't get a bed here,'

he said to Mary, 'I don't know what we will do.'

'I am really sorry,' said the Innkeeper. 'We just don't have a single bed left. We even have people sleeping on the floor. I can't remember when we've been so busy. In fact, the only place where there's any room left is under the house where the donkeys and camels are kept.'

'We are so tuckered out,' said Joseph, 'that we would fall asleep in an instant on a pile of hay. Would you mind if we bed down with your animals for the night?'

'Not at all! Not at all,' replied the Innkeeper. 'I wish I could do more for you.'

So Joseph led the donkey carrying Mary down to the animal shelter. It was a bit smelly down there, but with all the animals it was at least warm.

Joseph made a bed for Mary in the hay and spread a blanket over it for her to lie on. He then gave the donkey some water to drink.

The Shepherds

Out in the nearby fields the shepherds were sitting around a fire. One of them was playing a flute and another was putting some more sticks in the flames when suddenly the whole sky was lit up as if a huge skyrocket had exploded. You would think Bethlehem had won the Rugby World Cup. Both shepherds fell backwards onto the ground in fright. As they looked

up they could see an angel in the middle of the bright light. The angel called out, 'Do not be afraid! I have some good news for you. The Messiah that you have been waiting for has been born tonight in Bethlehem. You will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying in an animal's feed box under Samuel ben Zadok's house.'

Suddenly the sky was filled with a choir of angels. They sang, 'Glory to God and peace on earth to all good people.' The echoes of that song are still going around the world today.

When the angels departed the shepherds said, 'Let's go to Bethlehem to see the Messiah for ourselves.'

Meanwhile, things became pretty busy for Joseph and Mary, because their baby decided it was time to be born. They did not have long to put the baby clothes onto their baby son. They had just laid him down to sleep in a feed box full of straw, when they heard excited voices outside the stable door, and so Joseph went to see what was happening.

'We have come to see the baby!' the shepherds said excitedly.

'How did you know about baby Jesus?' Joseph asked. 'He has just been born and we have not told anyone yet.'

'Some angels came to us out on the hills and told us,' the visitors replied.

Joseph cocked his head and raised his eyebrows. 'Come in,' he said.

They all gathered around the baby's bed and 'ooo'd' and 'ahhh'd'.

The Wise Men

After the census, the town emptied out as people returned to their homes in different parts of the country, giving Joseph, Mary and Jesus the opportunity to move into a house there. Joseph's relatives asked him to stay for a while in Bethlehem, because there was plenty of work for him in that place. Joseph was a carpenter, and the village people needed someone who could make yokes for oxen and ploughs.

One day some wise men, riding on camels, arrived in Jerusalem. Their journey from the city of Babylon had taken them a long, long time. Why did they come to Jerusalem? Well, several months before they noticed that a new star had appeared in the western sky. Some Jews living in Babylon told them that it was probably the star that the Bible said would shine when the great Messiah-King was born. It is written in the Bible, 'A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel' (Numbers 24:17).

A sceptre is a special staff that only a king has. The Bible seemed to be telling them that the star would show them the way to the king. After a lot of chin-wagging they decided to go to Jerusalem to see this great King for themselves. They decided to take him presents from their country. When they eventually got to Jerusalem

they asked, 'Where is the baby who was born to be the king of the Jews?'

Now King Herod lived in Jerusalem, and when he heard that these foreign visitors were asking for the child who was born to be the king of the Jews, he wasn't a very happy chappie. Herod thought he was the king of the Jews, and no young whipper-snapper would take his crown and throne away from him. But he kept a poker face and called in the priests and asked them about the Messiah and where he would be born. They told him, 'The prophet Micah said he would be born in Bethlehem in the land of Judea.'

Herod said to the wise men, 'Go over to Bethlehem and soon as you find the little chappie come and let me know. I want to go and worship him too.' But that was just a great big lie. Herod did not want to worship Jesus; he just wanted to find out where he was so he could get rid of him. There was no way Herod was going to let anyone else take his place on the throne.

It was dark when the wise men left Herod's palace, and as they climbed into their saddles a star lit up the sky in front of them.

'Look!' they said. 'That's the star we saw back in the east. It's moving off across the valley. Let's follow it.'

At the village of Bethlehem the star stopped over the house where Jesus was, so they got off their camels and knocked on the door. Joseph came out, and after speaking with them for a while, and stepping outside to see the special star, he led them inside. When they saw the baby they knelt down and worshipped him. They then gave the parents their presents of gold, myrrh and frankincense.

That night the wise men stayed at an inn in Bethlehem. While they were sleeping God gave them a dream. In this dream he told them not to go back to Jerusalem, but to go home another way.

That same night, Joseph also had a dream. In his dream an angel said to him, 'Get up now. Pack up your goods quickly and take the child and his mother down to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to come back home, because Herod is looking for the child to kill him.'

Joseph did as the angel had told him.

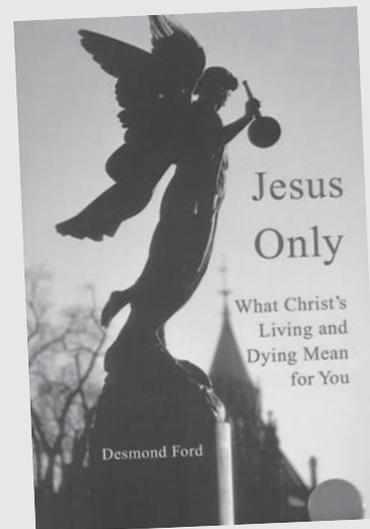
When King Herod found out that the wise men from the east had tricked him, he was very, very cross. He gave orders for his soldiers to go to Bethlehem and kill all the boys there up to the age of two. But he was too late, because Jesus and his parents were well on their way to a working holiday in Egypt. ❄

Update on translations of Ukrainian and Romanian versions of *Jesus Only*

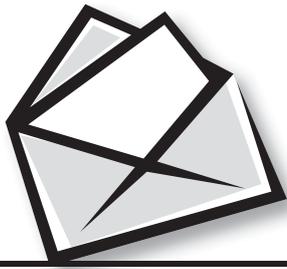
READERS will be pleased to know that the translations of an abridged version of Dr. Ford's book, *Jesus Only*, into the Ukrainian and Romanian languages have been completed and proofread.

At the time of writing [September 2012] we are in the process of seeking publishers for these Reader's Digest-sized books in the countries of their language. We are requesting glossy paperback covers, and it is our intention to mass-produce these gospel messengers to fill the lives of their readers—in countries where religion dominates but where the gospel is virtually unknown—with the assurance of salvation and the joy of redemption. It is our prayer, and we hope, yours, that the Lord may use these small books to initiate revivals.

Hopefully, by the time this magazine comes into your hands, we will be well on the way to accomplishing this goal. Your prayers and continued support are appreciated.



P.S. The Spanish translation of *Jesus Only* is now completed also, and moves are under way to translate *Jesus Only* into Samoan—the first Pacific language version. ❄



Letters from Readers

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.



FRUIT OR ROOT?

Dear Pastor Ritchie,

Can you explain the mystery of Hebrews 10:14 to me? It says there, 'By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy' (RSV).

I think I understand the first part. It is through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that I am made spiritually perfect in God's sight, and therefore guaranteed a place in heaven.

What I don't comprehend is the second part. It seems to indicate that our passport to Paradise depends upon our 'being made holy'. In other words, if we are not being made holy we won't enter Paradise.

A.S.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear A.,

Dr. Ford has taught us that justification and sanctification are like husband and wife, totally separate, but always one. It is not possible to have justification without sanctification, for when Jesus comes into our lives with his free gift of eternal perfection, we are justified, after which he sanctifies us by living out his life within us.

The sanctification that follows justification is, however, not the root of our salvation, it is the fruit. That is the key to your question.

Your faith must always be anchored in Jesus, the root, and never in your performance.

It would be fair to say, however, that if we weren't 'being made holy'—if we weren't producing the fruit of holiness in our lives—then that would indicate a problem with the root, i.e., we had not been 'made perfect forever'.

Hebrews 10:14 reveals that 'once saved, always saved' is true, but only if we are always 'being made holy' by the Spirit of Christ. Christ's sacrifice is the means of our spiritual perfection, but the evidence that we have been made perfect is our continuing growth in holiness.



AMERICAN MAGAZINE

The Editor,

Most U.S. companies operating in Australia try to conceal the fact that they are indeed American companies, and with good reason.

There is absolutely no reason for Good News Unlimited to actually 'brag' about the fact when it is not necessary to make such a declaration.

C.F.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear C.,

I am not sure what 'fact' you are referring to in your second sentence. I assume you are intimating that we shouldn't brag about being an American company. If this is what you mean then I need to correct you because Good News Unlimited in the South Pacific is NOT an American company. We were not even started in the U.S. We do have a sister organization in the States, but we both operate independently of each other.



WHAT SIN ROBS US OF OUR DESTINY?

Dear Ritchie,

I have a question. What is the sin that keeps us out of heaven? I heard a couple of scholars discussing this matter. They both agreed that it is not sins (plural) that keep us out of heaven, but sin (singular). The distinction between sins and sin, however, is over my head, so I'm hoping you can help me.

Thank you
P.J.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear P.,

Let me put it as simply as I can: When God created Adam, outside the Garden of Eden, he breathed into him his Spirit (Gen. 2:7; John 20:22). Once man had become a temple for the Spirit, the Lord put him inside the

Garden, the place of eternal life (Gen 2:8). Eternal life is contingent upon man being one with God. Only God is immortal, so his immortality is shared only with those who have him in their lives.

When man rejected God from his life—which is the sin—he became a sinner. He lost eternal life not because he became a sinner, but because he had become a temple desolate of God's presence. Sinning isn't the cause of man's Fall; it is the result. The actual cause of man's expulsion from his Edenic home was the sin of rejecting God from his life. Once he had become naked of God's presence he was banished from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken (Gen. 3:23).

To get back into Paradise (God's Kingdom) we have to do the opposite of what Adam did, which is to accept Jesus back into our life again. 'He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life' (1 John 5:12).



HAD ADAM NOT SINNED

Dear Pastor Ritchie

One more question: What would have happened had Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, but not Adam? I know this question is in the realm of speculation, but I'd be interested in your response?

P.J.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear P.,

A very interesting question! Let's assume that Eve came to Adam holding a piece of partly eaten fruit, which Adam immediately recognises as having been picked from the forbidden tree.

Adam cries, 'Eve, what are you doing with that fruit? Throw it away, now!'

'Adam, it's beautiful. It really does something to you. Here, just try a little bit.'

'No! Throw it away, Eve!'

'You don't love me, do you? If you really loved me you would share it with me'.

'Eve, please throw that fruit away!!!'

'No, if you won't share it with me...'. Eve doesn't finish the sentence but walks off in a huff.

That evening when the Lord visits the Garden a very worried and heart-broken Adam is waiting for him. He is beside himself over what might happen to Eve and their relationship.

Assume that after talking together, the Lord says to Adam, to test him, 'Eve must die because the wages of sin is death. But don't worry, Adam, I'll create another wife for you'.

Adam looks at the Lord in disbelief. 'But Lord, I don't want another wife! I want Eve!'

'Well said!' complimented the Lord. 'But I will have to die for her first, so that she can live again for eternity'.

'But it doesn't seem right that you, Lord, should die for just one person. That's a huge price to pay!'

'Yes, it is a very big price to pay, but that's what I am willing to do'.

No doubt, if Eve was the only sinner, the Lord would have died for her, for that is the price love is willing to pay.



MUSICIAN AND WARRIOR

Dear Ritchie,

I've been reading the story of David in my private worships and came across a problem that I hope you can help me with. When Saul became demented, musicians were called in to play and sing for him, no doubt because music has healing powers. One of these musicians was David, the son of Jesse from Bethlehem. Scripture reveals that Saul liked David so much that he appointed him to serve as one of his armour-bearers (1 Sam. 16:21-23).

Shortly after this David killed Goliath, the terror of Israel. On witnessing this King Saul asked Abner, the commander of the army, 'Abner, whose son is that young man?' When Abner admitted that he didn't know, Saul told him to find out. Abner brought David, still holding Goliath's head, to the king. 'Whose son are you, young man?' Saul asked him. David replied, 'I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem' (1 Sam. 16:55-58).

Now if Saul had known David well enough to make him one of his armour-bearers, how come he didn't know who he was when he killed Goliath? It seems to me that there are two separate stories here that don't quite synchronise.

Are you able to cast any light on this discrepancy?

R. B.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear R.,

The problem may not be as complex as it first appears. When David came to play music and sing for Saul, he was just one of several musicians who worked on a roster (1 Sam. 17:15). It is more than likely that the musicians would play behind a screen, providing relaxing music for the king as he went about the business of his court. If this were the case, Saul probably never met any of them.

David was not inducted into Saul's army as a full-time soldier until after he had slain Goliath of Gath, because it was 'From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his fathers house' (1 Sam. 18:2; see also 16:22). David started his military service as one of Saul's armour-bearers (1 Sam. 16:21), but was quickly promoted to the rank of a commander (1 Sam. 18:5).

The reason why the stories don't synchronise is because they are written thematically rather than chronologically. Verses 21 and 22 in 1 Samuel 16 would be better understood by Western minds if they were enclosed in brackets. The reason why Saul made David one of his armour-bearers is given in the following story about David slaying Goliath.



NO MIRACLES

Dear Pastor Ritchie

Why don't we see miracles today like the miracles back in the days of Elijah and Elisha? Is it because we are not as close to the Lord as they were in those times?

Best wishes
V.G.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear V.

Your question reminds me of Gideon's cry: 'If the Lord is with us... where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, "Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?"' (Jud. 6:13). And the Psalmist lamented, 'We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be' (Psa. 74:9).

In 1500 years of biblical history there were just three periods of miracles: the Exodus period when God first revealed himself to the Hebrews; the Revival period under Elijah and Elisha when God called his people back into a covenant relationship with himself; and the time when Jesus and the Holy Spirit came to dwell among us.

Miracles were rarely given to people because they had faith. In New Testament times miracles were given to people who had no faith in the Lord, in order that they might have faith in the Lord. In other words, miracles were evangelistic.

The greatest miracle of all was the death and resurrection of Jesus. Those who shun that miracle and its significance for them, while seeking other miracles and signs that will support their particular cause, are a wicked and adulterous generation (Matt. 12:38-40).

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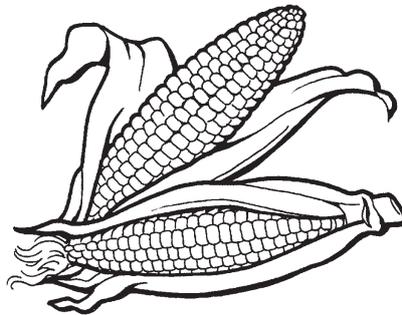
THE GROWING SEED

Our parable for this month is the story of the growing seed in Mark 4:26-29. Jesus stated:

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces corn—first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

Although I have had vegetable gardens for over forty years, in countries as wide apart as 7 degrees from the equator to 46.5 degrees south of the equator, I am still amazed that a kernel of corn, planted in the ground can turn into a plant that will produce delicious heads of grain from just soil, air, sunshine and water. According to Jesus, 'That is what the kingdom of God is like'.

The two things required here are the seed and someone to plant the seed. Let's think about this for a moment. God provides the seed but expects us to plant it. If we do not plant the seed,



there will be no harvest. If we do plant the seed, God will see that it grows and produces a harvest.

In the same way, God has provided the seed for his kingdom—his Son, Jesus Christ. If we sow this seed into our own lives and into the lives of our children and grandchildren, neighbours and workmates, etc., there will be a harvest for eternity. If we do not sow the seed, there will be no harvest.

The kingdom of God is dependent on our sowing the seed. If we do that, God will ensure that it grows even if we take no further interest in it.

This parable is different from the parable of the sower. There the crop

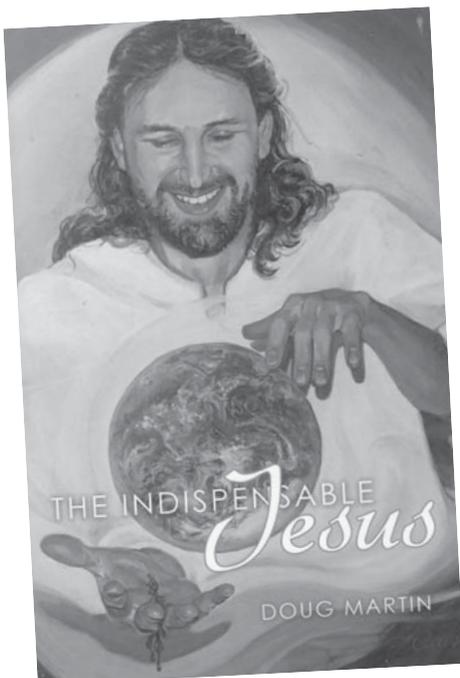
depends upon the nature of the soil. In this parable the crop depends upon the mysterious power of the seed. All the man has to do is get the seed into good soil. After that it is entirely up to the seed. If it is good seed, it will, of its own self, produce a harvest.

The task of sowing seed that will produce a good harvest for eternity has been allotted to every follower of Jesus. None of us are asked to produce a harvest; we are only asked to sow seed—to share Jesus with others.

Have you ever noticed how people love to share good news: the birth of a beautiful baby; the purchase of a treasured item at a fraction of the expected cost; the gaining of a coveted scholarship; or being selected for a longed-for job over many other qualified candidates.

In the same way, if we love Jesus supremely, and if we appreciate what he has done for us at great cost to himself, we will want to share this good news with others—to sow this seed into their lives.

Having done that, the Holy Spirit will take over and bring that seed to fruition. But first we must sow the seed. *



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The Indispensable Jesus

by Pastor Doug Martin

In his book, **The Indispensable Jesus**, Doug Martin reveals a lifetime of love and devotion to Jesus Christ. Drawing on decades of rich experience teaching and preaching and personal study, he upholds Jesus as the central theme on which all that matters hangs. Although containing many theological insights, **The Indispensable Jesus** is written in non-technical language with practical life applications. This book is an attractive and thorough guide to why Jesus is so important, and such good news for every person.

Gary Krause *BA Teaching & Editorial Studies*
(Director of the Office of Adventist Mission at the
Adventist World Headquarters.)

This book is available from the GNU Office in Tweed Heads South. For price plus postage and packaging, ring Carolyn Wagemaker +61 (0)7 5524 5040.

THE TIME IS AT HAND!

For nearly 2,000 years, the book of Revelation has been viewed as the most difficult book in the Bible.

The hundreds of commentaries in the Library of Congress testify that there is no unanimity about the meaning of the symbols of Revelation. And yet this is the only book in the Bible where a special blessing is pronounced on its readers.

It's a book from Jesus Christ about himself, his gospel, the future, and what will happen to the saints at the end of time.

Desmond Ford's, *The Time Is at Hand*, an introduction to the Book of Revelation, is the fruit of decades of study plus research at the University of Manchester under Professor F. F. Bruce. Ford offers a much-neglected key—this sacred book can only be unlocked by understanding the preceding 65 books of the Bible and, in particular, the life, teachings, and death of Jesus.

The main message of Revelation is that the church is to repeat the experience of its Lord. After its final proclamation of the gospel, it will be condemned to martyrdom.

And this climactic sin of the world will precipitate the return of Christ in glory.

Note also that *God's Amazing Grace in Romans (Right With God Right Now)* by Desmond Ford is up and live as an e-book on Kindle.

The Kindle price on www.amazon.com, \$US6.99 US, includes international wireless delivery via Amazon Whispernet.

Access God's Amazing Grace in Romans at: www.amazon.com/dp/B008OV9EUE

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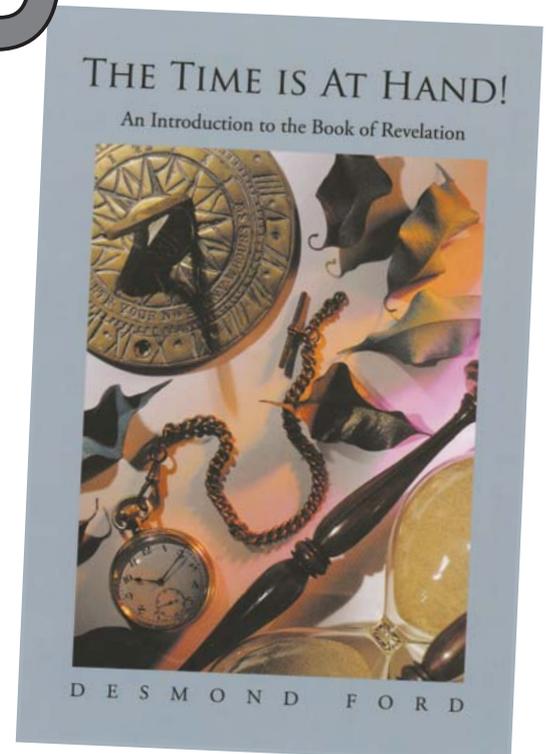
Software can be downloaded from the Kindle site: at: www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html/ref=sv_kinh_1?ie=UTF8&docId=1000493771

Note that a number of Des Ford's latest books are already on Kindle, published by iUniverse at: www.iuniverse.com

These are available as e-books on www.amazon.com for prices ranging from \$3.99 to \$9.99:

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The heart of the gospel is forgiveness. Jesus' last words to his disciples were: 'Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations ...'

— (Luke 24:46).