

"...you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation..." 2 Timothy 3:15

A FAITH THAT MAKES SENSE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL GOSPEL



Now these Jews were more noble than those in
Thessalonica; they received the word with all
eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to
see if these things were so.**

Acts 17:11

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A Faith That Makes Sense

Before We Begin...

This booklet is intended as an introduction to basic biblical teaching. We are certainly not the first to reach the conclusions presented in this brochure. There is evidence that there have been Bible students throughout the centuries who have held these beliefs, and at times they were persecuted, even murdered, for their "heresies." Today there are undoubtedly scattered individuals or organized bodies who, as a result of a personal Bible study, have reached similar conclusions. One such body is the Christadelphians. The name is derived from two Greek words meaning "brothers in Christ." In existence as an organized community since the mid-1800s, Christadelphians now number in the tens of thousands worldwide.

We encourage you to consider the teaching presented on these pages with your Bible open. Test everything you read here with what your Bible says. If your Bible does not confirm what we say, then we are not to be believed. Only what God has given us in the Bible should be our guide and the source of our faith.

Interpreting the Bible

One of the more common excuses people give for not reading the Bible is that it is so difficult to interpret. "The Bible can be interpreted in so many different ways," they say, "so why bother?" If they would just take the time to read it, they would find that the Bible doesn't really require as much interpretation as they think; that, for the most part, its teaching is quite plain and straightforward.

Think about it: The Bible claims to be a message from God to His creation. If His purpose is to communicate something to human beings, it only makes sense that it must be written in language that human beings can understand. So, the first rule for understanding the Bible is: *Let the Bible mean what it says.*

Here is an example. Zechariah, an Old Testament prophet, foretold the coming of the Messiah like this:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

Some might try to find some kind of deep spiritual meaning in these words. But how were they fulfilled? Matthew 21 tells us,

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ... And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21:6-7,10)

The fulfillment took place according to the exact, literal requirements of the prophecy.

"But," it might be asked, "is there no such thing as figurative language in the Bible?" Indeed there is; but when it occurs, it's almost always easily identifiable and understandable according to ordinary rules of speech. Metaphors, for example, which abound in the Bible, are used in our everyday conversation with no loss of comprehension. If someone remarks that a certain person is "a clumsy ox", we have no trouble understanding them, even though they aren't speaking literally. It is the same in the Bible. Metaphor, simile, personification, parable; all these devices and more are used, and are usually understandable using the basic principles of everyday language.

There is, though, one form of figurative language used in the Bible that clearly *does* require interpretation, the use of symbols. Yet even this can be easily distinguished from the literal words of Scripture. When we read the book of Revelation, for example, it's very apparent that symbolism is being used. To be honest, understanding Bible symbolism can be difficult. Humility is definitely required, and a simple, common-sense rule needs to be remembered: Our interpretation *must* be consistent with the plain, literal teaching of the Bible elsewhere. The basic message of the Bible is clear and understandable to all who open its pages.



The One True God

One of the most fundamental facts that the Bible declares concerning the nature of God is that he is the *only one*, and there is no other besides him. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deut. 6:4). God himself emphatically declares this truth throughout the 45th chapter of Isaiah:

*I am the LORD, and there is **no other**, besides me there is no God; ... there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and **there is no other**. ... Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And **there is no other god besides me**, a righteous God and a Savior; **there is none besides me**. "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Isa. 45:5-6, 21-22)*

What could be more plainly stated? Yet, from about the 4th century A.D. onward (long after the completion of the Bible), Christians have been compelled to believe in a God that consists of not one, but *three* distinct persons. The doctrine of the Trinity, admitted to be an incomprehensible mystery, has been unquestioningly received by the vast majority of Christians.

The truth is, however, that *not once* do the words *Trinity* or *Triune God* occur in the Bible. *Not once* is God referred to in the Bible as consisting of three persons. *Not once* do we find the terms "God the Son" or "God the Holy Spirit" in the Bible.

What does the Bible say about the nature of God? We've already heard the emphatic statements of God himself in Isaiah 45, that he *alone* is God, and there is no other. But the New Testament, too, repeats this basic truth in the clearest of language. Paul states in his first epistle to Timothy:

*For there is **one God**, and there is **one mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5)*

***Not once** is God referred to in the Bible as consisting of three persons. **Not once** do we find the terms "God the Son" or "God the Holy Spirit" in the Bible.*

Notice that the "one God" teaching of the Old Testament is repeated, and Jesus is introduced to us, not as one "person" of a triune God, but as a man, who is the mediator between the one God and other men. The same idea can be found in the words of Jesus himself:

*And this is eternal life, that they know you, **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)*

Again, in the letters of the Apostle Paul, we find the following statement:

*Yet for us there is **one God**, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and **one Lord**, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)*

In all these passages, we see the fundamental truth repeated that there is only one God. And in each case, Jesus Christ is clearly separate. Jesus is the mediator between God and men, the one sent by the "only true God"; he is not himself God!

Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Is Jesus Christ God? There are a few passages in the Bible in which he is called "God", and this has led many to conclude that Jesus is God Incarnate, that he is "God the Son" or "Very God".

But consider this: In the Bible, those whom God empowers to represent Him are frequently referred to as God himself. For example, when God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush as "Yahweh", it was actually **an angel** (Exodus 3:2; Acts 7:30). Instances like this, where angels are called "God" or "the LORD", are fairly numerous. Occasionally, even men are spoken of as "God", when they are acting on God's behalf, as when Moses was to be "as God" to Pharaoh (Ex.7:1).

The principle that those who represent God may be called by His name is perhaps best illustrated in the Exodus 23, where the LORD says:

*Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, **for my name is in him.** (Exodus 23:20-21).*

If God's name may be applied to his messengers (the meaning of the word angel), how much more to his Son! We are told that Jesus came "in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9). In Philippians 2:9, we're told that because Jesus was obedient unto death, therefore "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him **the name that is above every name...**"

It is entirely appropriate therefore that Jesus should be called by God's name, yet this no more proves that he is God than the same fact does of God's lesser representatives.

The Bible is crystal clear about the relationship of Jesus to his Father. It is not one of equality, but rather of subordination. Consider these verses: *my Fath*

*...my Father **is greater than I.** (John 14:28)*

*the head of every man is Christ... and **the head of Christ is God.** (1 Corinthians 11:3)*

*And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? **No one is good except God alone.**" (Luke 18:19).*

*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not **as I will,** but as **you will.** (Mathew 26:39)*

*But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, **but only the Father.** (Mark 13:32).*

*When all things are subjected to him, **then the Son himself will also be subjected to him** who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28)*

***The Son can do nothing of his own accord,** but only what he sees the Father doing. (John 5:19)*

In other verses, we are informed that the Father is Jesus' God (Revelations 3:12); that Jesus increased in favor with God (Luke 2:52); that Jesus learned obedience to God (Hebrews 5:8).

Nowhere does the Bible tell us to believe in "God the Son", or in Jesus as one person of a triune God. The simple truth is that Jesus is the Son of God. In the words of the apostle John,

these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)



*The simple truth
is that Jesus is
the **Son** of God.*

The Sacrifice of Christ

Theologians often refer to Christ's sacrifice as the "substitutionary atonement of Christ". It is felt that Jesus paid the penalty for sin naturally due to us, much like a condemned man being set free when another offers to be executed in his place.

While this might be a simple way to understand the death of Christ, it is not consistent with the most superficial of facts: If Jesus Christ died as a substitute for us, then we shouldn't die...*yet we do!*

If he died in our place, then his resurrection shouldn't be necessary for our redemption; but 1 Corinthians 15:17 says, "if Christ *has not been raised*, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

And again, if Christ "paid our debts" by his death, then it would not be proper to speak of our debts as having been forgiven, yet forgiveness and grace are, without doubt, among the most prominent features of the proclamation of the Gospel message.

To understand how the death of Christ is a foundation for the forgiveness of our sins, we begin by noting that in his sacrifice *the righteousness of God* was declared:

*But now **the righteousness of God** has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. ... whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. **This was to show God's righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was **to show his righteousness** at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-22, 25-26*

In what way was the righteousness and justice of God declared in the shed blood of the sinless Jesus Christ? This will become evident when we consider who he was. Jesus was the Son of God, certainly; but he was also, by his own frequent description, the "Son of **man**". Being born of a human mother, he was a partaker of the same human nature ruled by our own sinful desires as the rest of mankind:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, **he himself likewise partook of the same thing...** (Hebrews 2:14)

Therefore **he had to be made like his brothers in every respect**, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17)

"(Jesus) **in every respect has been tempted as we are**, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Some might be troubled at the thought that Jesus was associated with sin in any way. Consider these two passages:

*The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. **He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have.** And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. (Romans 8:3 NLT)*

*For our sake **(God) made him to be sin** who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

Jesus Christ was, therefore, a perfect *representative* of us, a sinful and dying human race. It was just and right for God to require his death, because the nature he bore was condemned. But it was also just and right that God raise him from the dead, for he committed no sin of his own. In every facet of the death and resurrection of Christ, God's righteousness was declared. And in the process, Jesus, with the strength he found in his Father, was able to do what no one else could: He destroyed the power of sin and death.

And now, "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38). God continues to enforce the just consequence for sin while leaving a door open for repentant sinners. He does not offer forgiveness indiscriminately and without condition. He does not offer it apart from the declaration of his righteousness in "Christ crucified". God says to us, in essence, "If you acknowledge your own sinfulness, repent, and associate yourself with this man, I will have mercy on you. My righteousness has been declared in him; submit to him, obey him and put on his name, and I will forgive your sins and raise you from the dead even as I raised him."

Thus, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, mercy and justice are beautifully and forever reconciled.

Death

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

This is the Bible's assessment of the condition of all of us. We all sin, and as a result, we all die.

But what is death? For centuries, people have tried to soften the finality of death by supposing that there is a continued conscious existence after death. About 400 years before the time of Christ, the Greek philosopher Plato formalized the teaching that man has an "immortal soul" which is released from the body at death; and so, in essence, man never really dies. Though this idea can't be found in the Bible, after the first century A.D., Christians gradually adopted it too. Today, the "immortality of the soul" is considered a fundamental doctrine of most Christian denominations.

The Bible, on the other hand, is perfectly clear about the nature of death. Not once does the Bible use the term "immortal soul"; not once does it speak of anyone going to heaven at the moment of death. Rather, when speaking literally, the Bible consistently represents death as a return to the dust, a state of unconsciousness and a cessation of being.

We are introduced to the subject of death very early in the Bible. In the garden of Eden, Adam was told that if he disobeyed God, he would surely die, and death was defined to him as follows:

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:19)

No mention was made to Adam of an "immortal soul", or of a continued existence in another state; death was simply a return to the dust from which he was made.

Some might object that it is only the body that returns to the dust, but the soul continues in conscious existence even after death. But consider these plain statements from Ecclesiastes:

For the living know that they will die, **but the dead know nothing**, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, **for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol** [the grave], to which you are going. (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

What could be clearer? Yet today, in a typical funeral sermon, the preacher is likely to inform his audience that the dead person is now in God's presence, praising him more perfectly than when he was restricted by his mortal body. But what does the Bible say?

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into silence. (Psalm 115:17)

For in death there is no remembrance of you, in Sheol who will give you praise? (Psalm 6:5)

When we die, all ability to work, praise, or even think, stops. We return to the dust of the earth and cease to exist:

Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. ... Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart **and am no more!**" (Psalm 39:5,13)

Since death is real, a state of non-being, unconsciousness and a return to the dust, it follows that the only hope for life after death lies in a resurrection from the dead. This explains why "the resurrection of the dead" is such an important teaching in the Bible: It's an absolute necessity!

Hell

To most people, hell is the place to which wicked immortal souls are supposed to depart, to be tormented forever in flames. Yet, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). How could a loving God torture someone, however unrighteous, eternally? Many people have abandoned religion altogether rather than believe in such a sadistic God.

The Bible, however, is not to blame for the belief. First of all, as we have already seen, the Bible is silent about the doctrine of the "immortality of the soul". It's not surprising, then, that popular ideas about hell are likewise unsupported.

In fact, there are three different words, primarily, translated "hell" in the Bible. In the Old Testament, "hell" is the Hebrew word *sheol*, which means, "the unseen state", a reference to the grave. You can readily see this for yourself by looking at different Bible translations. Some use "the grave", some "sheol" and some "hell". *Sheol*, or the grave, is the place to which *all* people eventually go, the righteous and the wicked alike:

All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.
(Ecclesiastes 3:20)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is **no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol**, to which you are going.
(Ecclesiastes 9:10)

The New Testament uses two words that translators have rendered "hell". One is the Greek word *hades*, and is the equivalent of *sheol* in the Old Testament. For example, Acts 2:27 is a quote from Psalm 16:10 and uses *hades* as the replacement for *sheol*. *Hades*, then, is simply **the grave**. The verse just mentioned, Acts 2:27, indicates that Jesus himself spent some time in hell — a difficult thing to conceive if hell is a place where the wicked are tormented! But it's a fact that Jesus did spend three days in the grave.

The other New Testament word for hell, often associated with fire and burning, is the Greek word *gehenna*. A glance at a Bible dictionary or lexicon shows that *gehenna* is really a condensed form of the phrase, "the Valley of Hinnom". On a map of the old city of Jerusalem, you will find that the Valley of Hinnom is an actual valley on Jerusalem's southwest corner.

The Valley of Hinnom, or "hell", had an infamous history: This valley was used at one time for human sacrifice to idols, and was later destroyed by King Josiah, as described in 2 Kings 23:10.

By the time of Jesus, the character of *Gehenna* was so despicable that it was used only as a place to burn garbage and the occasional bodies of executed criminals. When Jesus spoke of the fires of *Gehenna*, his audience would immediately know the place he was talking about, and understand that they would fare no better eternally than the criminals whose bodies were thrown there if they were heedless of his message!

Understanding the facts about hell reveals a perfect consistency with the clear Bible teaching about death; namely, that all human beings are subject to the grave, and our only hope rests in a resurrection from the dead.

The Devil, the Great Accuser

Regarding Christ, the book of Hebrews declares:

*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might **destroy** the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil... (Hebrews 2:14)*

Since the death of Christ was for the purpose of destroying the devil, if we are to have a right understanding of the work of Jesus Christ, we must have a right understanding of the devil he came to destroy.

The common view is that the devil, or Satan, is a rebellious angel who was cast from heaven ages ago, and now, with his legions of demons, is at work trying to subvert human beings by tempting them to sin. Such a view, however, defies common sense and the plain teaching of the Bible. If God "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" for us, how could he permit the existence of a wicked supernatural creature whose express intention is to destroy us?

The truth is that the Bible nowhere says there is such a creature. It uses the words "devil" and "Satan", but nowhere does the Bible explicitly tell us that the devil is a fallen angel, or give us clear information about his supposed origin. What, then, is the devil of the Bible?

Hebrews 2:14, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, offers an important key. It says that, through death, Jesus was to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil". The devil, then, is Biblically defined as "him that had the power of death".

Now, if any person could truly be said to have the power of death, it would be God himself, because death was instituted by him, and he alone has the power to inflict it. But what is it that moves God to inflict death on people? There is only one answer: Sin. It is sin which has the power of death, because it is sin, and only sin, that brought about death to human beings. Consider the following verses:

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so **death spread to all men because all sinned.** (Romans 5:12)*

*Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and **sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.** (James 1:15)*

*The sting of death **is sin**... (1 Corinthians 15:56)*

*...the soul who **sins** shall die. (Ezekiel 18:4)*

*For the **wages of sin is death**... (Romans 6:23)*

An objection might be raised: "True, sin is the cause of death, but who tempts us to sin? Isn't this the work of a supernatural devil?" No question could be more directly met with a Bible answer:

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

The word "devil" in the New Testament comes from the Greek word diabolos, which means simply slanderer or accuser. Likewise, the Hebrew word satan means adversary. Both these words may be applied to human adversaries or accusers, as when Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23). But in the larger sense, the Bible uses these words as a personification of the greatest Adversary of the human race, that which accuses us before God — ***our own sinfulness.***

*The sting of death is **sin***

The Gospel

The word gospel means good news. If we were to ask Christians just what the Gospel was all about, the answer we would get most often would probably be that it's the "good news" that Jesus Christ died for our sins. That certainly is good news! But as an answer to our question, it would only be partially right. Why? Because what the Bible says about the Gospel might come as a surprise to some, and show that most people's conception of the Gospel is lacking an essential ingredient.

Luke 9 begins with the account of Jesus sending out the twelve apostles to preach. In verse 6, it states that "they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere." Just what was the gospel they preached? Before answering that, a glance ahead in the same chapter will let us know what it wasn't:

Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. (Luke 9:44)

He was, of course, talking about his coming crucifixion. But the next verse goes on to say that "they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it." It should be obvious, then, that the Gospel they had been preaching had nothing to do with Jesus' dying for people's sins, since they didn't understand that he had to die at all! Then what did their gospel consist of?

*And he sent them out to proclaim **the kingdom of God** and to heal. (Luke 9:2).*

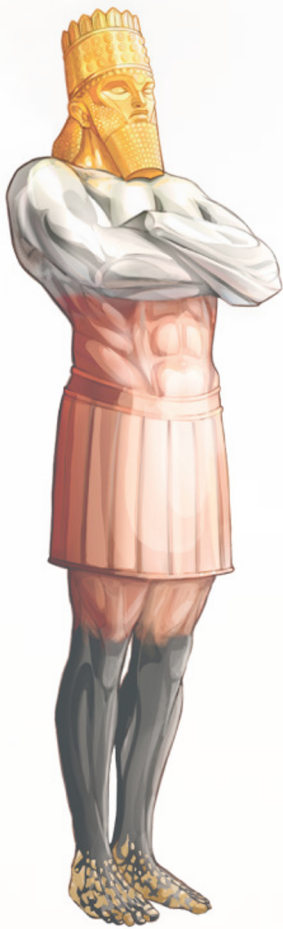
The gospel preached by the twelve apostles was the good news about the kingdom of God. This is the element that's lacking in most people's definition of the gospel —**the kingdom of God**.

After Jesus' resurrection, the teaching that his death was for the remission of sins became a very important part of the apostles' doctrine; but the good news about the kingdom of God was still just as important. Consider, for example, this passage:

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

Most people today know something about "the name of Jesus Christ", but there are few indeed who have a clear conception of what the Kingdom of God really is. The kingdom of God is one of the most important themes in all the Bible, yet it has been replaced in many minds with vague ideas about immortal souls departing to heaven at the moment of death. In the next several chapters, we'll examine more closely the Bible's teaching about the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God



In the Old Testament book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was given a Divine message in the form of a dream. He dreamed of a great image made of a succession of various metals: A head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. The prophet Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that his dream was actually a prophecy representing a succession of great empires. The Babylonian empire was to be followed by the Persian, then the Greek, and so on, right on down to the mixed state of nations we have today. History has proven the details of this prophecy to be perfectly accurate.

In the dream, the image was struck on its feet by a stone, which broke the image in pieces and then grew to become a great mountain filling the whole earth. Daniel interpreted this as follows:

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever. (Daniel 2:44)

The kingdom of God, represented by the stone which filled the whole earth, is not a nebulous entity up in the sky; it is a very real kingdom to be established on earth. Many other scriptures, too, reveal that the kingdom of God, and the ultimate dwelling place of the righteous is to be here on earth. Consider the following examples:

*you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, **and they shall reign on the earth.*** (Revelation 5:10)

*And the Lord will be king **over all the earth.*** (Zechariah 14:9)

*For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall **inherit the land.*** (Psalm 37:9).

*Blessed are the meek, for **they shall inherit the earth.*** (Matthew 5:5).

Some might protest, "But doesn't the Bible say that our reward is in heaven?" Yes, it does: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matthew 5:12). Notice carefully that it says our "reward" is in heaven, not ourselves. If our reward is in heaven, there are two possible ways that we may receive it. Either we must go to heaven to get it, or, someone must bring it to us from heaven. Nowhere does the Bible say that we go to heaven to receive this reward. Quite the contrary: "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (John 3:13).

Rather, Jesus himself said:

*And behold, I am coming quickly, and **My reward is with Me,** to give to every one according to his work.* (Revelation 22:12 NKJV)

The reward, eternal life, is indeed in heaven at the present time, reserved until the day it will be brought to us, when Christ returns to establish God's kingdom here on the earth.

The Bible tells us that the earth has always been a permanent part of God's plan: "A generation goes, and a generation comes, **but the earth remains forever**". (Ecclesiastes 1:4) It is God's sworn purpose to ultimately fill **the earth** with his glory: "But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." (Numbers 14:21) This is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Your kingdom come...**on earth** as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10)

The "kingdom of heaven", as it is sometimes called, is not heavenly because of its location, but because of its *character*. When God's will is at last done on earth as it is in heaven, and when the earth is finally filled with the glory of the LORD, then it will truly be a blessing for "the meek" to "inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

There is more to this subject of the "gospel of the kingdom of God." It has its roots in two Old Testament covenants, one which God made with Abraham, and another with King David. These will be dealt with in more detail in the next two sections.



God's ultimate purpose is
to fill the earth with
HIS GLORY...

The Promises to Abraham

The man Abraham is one of the most prominent characters in all the Bible. This is because God made a covenant with him, including certain promises which form the foundation of the New Testament "gospel of the kingdom of God". There are many people who feel they understand the Gospel, yet know very little about Abraham. In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised Abraham a number of blessings, the most important of which was that all nations would be blessed in him. Consider carefully the commentary in the New Testament commentary about this:

*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham**, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." (Galatians 3:8)*

Think about that: The Gospel is to be found in the simple promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham! But how is this blessing of all nations to be accomplished? Later in the book of Genesis, God expanded upon his promise to Abraham:

*Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, **for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.** (Genesis 13:14-15)*

*And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, **all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.** (Genesis 17:8)*

Notice that this promise of land to be inherited forever (specifically, the land of Canaan, encompassing modern Israel), applied both to Abraham himself, and to his "offspring". Now, this word *offspring* (or *seed*, as it appears in some Bible versions) is notable because it can be either singular or plural. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul expounds upon the *singular* aspect of the seed:

*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, **but referring to one**, "And to your offspring," **who is Christ.** (Galatians 3:16)*

Jesus Christ is the singular offspring referred to in the promise of everlasting inheritance of the land. Both Abraham and Jesus are, therefore, to be given that land forever. But what does this mean for us? How do we fit in? Galatians 3 continues:

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.** (Galatians 3:27-29)*

The words are so clear, yet how few believe them! The promise of inheriting the land forever was given to Abraham and his seed. His seed is Christ, *and*, those who have "put on" Christ in baptism. This is how people of all nations can be blessed through Abraham! The promise has not yet been fulfilled, however. It is a fact that Abraham never inherited even enough land to set his foot on (Acts 7:4-5). But at the resurrection of the dead, when Christ returns to establish his kingdom, Abraham and his faithful seed of all nations and generations will inherit that very real land forever.

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ... That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring. (Romans 4:13,16)

You (will) see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God... (Luke 13:2)

The Promises to David

Next to Abraham, David, king of Israel, is one of the most important of all Old Testament characters. To both these men, God made promises which involved a descendant or seed. Abraham and his seed (which is Christ, as it says in Galatians 3:16), were to inherit the land of Canaan, modern Israel, as an everlasting possession. This promise of the seed was taken a step further when God made his covenant with David a thousand years later. This is what God said to David:

*When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up **your seed** after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and **I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** I will be his Father, and **he shall be My son.** (2 Samuel 7:12-14)*

The New Testament points once again to Jesus as the promised "seed" of David:

Jesus, then, is the seed or offspring spoken of in the promises made to both Abraham and David. The opening words of the New Testament confirm the importance of this fact:

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, **the son of David, the son of Abraham.** (Matthew 1:1)*

David's throne was in Jerusalem. When Jesus Christ returns to sit on David's throne, he, too, will be in Jerusalem. This glorious future of the city of Jerusalem is the subject of a multitude of Bible prophecies. But to those who do not believe that the kingdom of God will be established on earth, such scriptures are a problem.

Often, they are interpreted as referring to heaven. But in Isaiah 62:4, we're informed that Jerusalem shall "no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate", words that can only apply to the literal city. Isaiah continues:

*You who put the Lord in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes **Jerusalem** and makes it a praise in the earth. (Isaiah 62:6-7)*

Speaking of this future age, Jeremiah the prophet states:

*At that time Jerusalem shall be called **the throne of the LORD**, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in **Jerusalem.** (Jeremiah 3:17)*

Jesus himself, the future king of the kingdom of God, describes Jerusalem as "the city of the great King" (Matthew 5:35). The following picture emerges from all this: The kingdom of God will be centered in the land promised to Abraham and his seed—today's Israel. Its capital is to be Jerusalem when Jesus Christ returns to establish his throne there, as promised to David. The dominion of the kingdom will extend over the whole earth, and at last, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

This is truly good news! Indeed, this is the good news or Gospel of the kingdom of God!



The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

Baptism

After his resurrection, Jesus sent out his apostles with these instructions:

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved... (Mark 16:15-16)

This, very simply, is what we must do to be saved. First, we must **believe the Gospel**. The Gospel, as we have seen in previous chapters, concerns those things which are about God's Kingdom on this earth and the name of Jesus Christ, of which so many people know so little.

But once there is belief in the true Gospel, there is something else required: **Baptism**. Since baptism must come *after* belief, it should be obvious that the practice of christening infants is *not* baptism. Throughout the New Testament, baptism is represented as a decision made by those who believe the Gospel, and is always preceded by instruction in the Gospel. For example, in Acts we read:

***When they believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptized**, both men and women. (Acts 8:12).*

What exactly is the purpose of baptism? First and foremost, baptism is the means by which forgiveness is made available to us: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the *forgiveness of your sins*" (Acts 2:38). It signifies a death, burial and resurrection to a new way of life; and thus, it is the wonderfully appropriate means by which we may identify ourselves with Christ's death and resurrection. Here's how Paul describes it in his letter to the Romans:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **we too might walk in newness of life**.*

***For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans.6:3-7)*

Clearly, the figure of death, burial and resurrection is in no way approximated by the sprinkling of babies. It can only be signified by *immersion*. In fact, the very meaning of the Greek root word used for baptism (*bapto*) means to *dip* or *immerse*.

It is also through the act of baptism that we become related to the promises God made to Abraham:

*For as many of you as were **baptized** into Christ have put on Christ. . . And if you are Christ's, then you are **Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.** (Galatians 3:27,29)*

Some expositors have argued that water baptism is unnecessary; that it's been superseded by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But in Acts 10, *after* the Holy Spirit had been poured out on an assembly of people, Peter said:

*Can anyone withhold **water for baptizing** these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he **commanded them to be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:47-48).*

Water baptism, therefore, is absolutely essential to salvation. In his first letter, Peter wrote:

*There is also an antitype **which now saves us**—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21).*

Baptism clearly is not an outdated ritual. It is full of meaning, and is, in truth, a prerequisite for salvation. It is the first act of humble obedience to God performed by those who, believing the Gospel, wish to put to death their former sinful lives and commit themselves to God's service.

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. (Mark 16:15-16)

A Word About The Christadelphians

As may be seen in this booklet, central to our beliefs is that the Bible is the inspired word of God:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible is, therefore, our only source of authority for understanding God's purpose. Because of its importance, we read our Bibles regularly, often using a daily reading guide. Besides personal Bible reading and study, we have weeknight Bible classes, Sunday school for children and adults, sometimes special weekend Bible presentations, and week-long summer Bible schools.

In addition, following the example set by Jesus Christ, we have weekly "memorial services" in which we remember his sacrifice through the emblems of bread and wine. These worship services are usually held on Sunday mornings, but sometimes on other days of the week depending on local custom. They are made up of hymn singing, prayers, Bible readings, an exhortation (Bible talk for spiritual encouragement), and the partaking of bread and wine in remembrance of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

This common respect for God's word and the common faith we share based on the Bible's teaching accompanied by baptism is what forms the foundation of our community:

Having been born again...through the word of God which lives and abides forever... Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:23-25)

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

Following the practice outlined in the New Testament, Christadelphians are organized in congregations that we call "ecclesias". The word "ecclesia" is based on the New Testament word for a group of believers. This word emphasizes the people rather than the building. It also emphasizes the gathering together of believers, so our ecclesias are also called "meetings". We have no paid ministry and no organizational hierarchy. Each ecclesia manages its own affairs and members volunteer their time and energy to the work of the Lord. Our ecclesias recognize one another by belonging to a common worldwide fellowship community.



The Christadelphians, meaning "*Brethren in Christ*" (Heb. 2:11), believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God and our only guide in life. It is our desire that you experience the joy of discovering God's word for yourself.

If you would like to explore other Bible topics,
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A FAITH THAT MAKES SENSE

This booklet is intended as an introduction to basic biblical teaching. It will be challenging reading, but we invite you to consider the teachings presented with your Bible open. Test everything you read here with what your Bible says. If your Bible does not confirm what is said, then do not believe what you read in this booklet. Only what God has given us in the Bible should be our guide and the source of our faith and actions.