



The G.E.M.

Volume 4 Edition 12

The Grace Electronic Magazine

December 2010

REMEMBER CHRIST'S BIRTH

Can you believe it? 2010 is almost over. For the last six years the nation and the world looked forward to this year, and after many great achievements we are about to venture into a new year. Sadly though, this has also been a year of trials, tears, and tribulations for many. A year that has torn some families apart and stretched others.

After such a difficult year, many are facing 2011 without any hope. Many fear what the new year will bring, and find it hard to be positive.

With that in mind, in this our final edition of *The G.E.M.* for 2010 we look at the one and only source of true hope for mankind, Jesus Christ. Born as a baby in a little town called Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago, the impact His birth, and later death, has had, are beyond measure. Join us as we focus on and remember the one that the season called Christmas is all about.

This month's *Bible Basics* on page 2 provides some historical insight into the book of Daniel. *Heroes of the Faith* looks at the life of one of the great men from the time of the Reformation who had a passion for proper study and teaching of the Bible, and *Bible Study 101* takes you through the first step of proper Bible study.

Finally, the crossword puzzle on the back page will test your knowledge of the Christmas story. (See how you do!)

PS: Take note that we will be open the week between Christmas and New Year (28-31 December) from 9am to 2pm, with a special bonus for Shekel Card holders.

Until next time, we wish you a blessed Christmas and new year.

Glyn and Linda. †

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Daniel

The Book of Visions

The book of Daniel records both historical events in the life of Daniel while in exile in Babylon, as well as key prophecies concerning the future of the nations in the Mediterranean region.



Date and Authorship: The author of the book of Daniel is identified within the text as Daniel himself. Written in the first person, it is traditionally accepted that the book was written between 605 and 536BC.

Due to the accuracy of the prophecies contained in the book, many critics have challenged this traditional date, claiming that it must have been written at least 300 years afterwards.

To accept the later date would make Daniel out to be a liar, not to mention Ezekiel and Jesus too, who both give testimony to the trustworthiness of the book (cf. Ezekiel 14:20 & Matthew 24:15)

Historical Background: Daniel was taken captive as a young man or teenager in 605BC. His last prophetic vision is dated in the third year of Cyrus' reign (±536BC). This was about two years after Cyrus issued a decree that allowed the Jews to return to their homeland (Israel) and rebuild the temple (±538BC).

Structure: The book of Daniel is divided into two main sections:

	<u>Chapters</u>
Daniel's Life and Work	1-6
Daniel's Visions and Prophecy	7-12

The first half is written in chronological order of the events in Daniel's life. The second half contains a series of visions given to Daniel by God of the near and distant future.

Did you Know? Daniel was written in two languages: Hebrew (1:1-2:4b and 8:1-12:13) and Aramaic (2:4b-7:28). When you study the context of those chapters, you see that the Hebrew was written for the edification of the Jews, while the Aramaic was written as warning for the Babylonians.

Value for Today: The pictures of the future conveyed in the book of Daniel gave the Israelite nation hope that the God they served was in charge of history.

Many today follow this book for answers of what is going to happen in the last days, but often the interpretations are not 100% accurate.

However, for us today, the testimony and visions of Daniel is still important, regardless of its prophecy. It shows us that the God that we serve is greater than any idols and is present and active in the lives of His followers. †

The Big Picture

I am sure you have seen one of those amazing zoom shots in a movie or documentary that starts with a shot of outer space. Then in one seemingly seamless movement, zooms onto planet earth, then onto one of the continents, then onto a country, then onto a city, then finally onto a person or scene. This is pretty much what proper Bible study is like. We need to start with the bigger picture first before we can truly understand the meaning of a particular text.

Using the book of John, let us begin the journey of properly studying the Bible.

Step 1: Read the book. Before you can look at any passage or selection of verses, you first need to read the book as a whole. This is best done in one sitting, but if that is not possible, make sure you do not have too big a gap between readings. Do not take any notes at this stage, just read the text as though you were reading a novel. If there are any things that confuse you or are difficult to understand, do not worry just yet. As you follow the steps, those problems will be ironed out.

Now that you have read through the book, read it again. Why a second time? Well, have you ever watched a movie a second time and realised afterwards that you picked up things the second viewing that you did not notice the first time? The same will happen as you read your selected book. One reading is not enough to really get the full picture. Again this is best done in one sitting. The expositor G. Campbell Morgan would read a book at least thirty times before he attempted to study it. Though you do not have to read it that many times, it is a good idea to read it again a few more times.

As you read the book, make a mental note of the following:

First reading – the purpose of the book. This can be found anywhere within the book; beginning, middle or end. The stated purpose of the Gospel of John can be found in chapter 20, verse 31; *“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

Second reading – look for repeated phrases. This will help you to understand the purpose of the book as it is developed by the writer. In the Gospel of John, you will see the phrase *“I am”* repeated often. Understanding the contexts and teachings surrounding this phrase helps to understand the purpose in 20:31.

Third and subsequent readings – look for any major themes, sub-themes, key characters and events, and any other key ideas that build on the purpose.

Though this first step may seem repetitive and time consuming, it is absolutely essential to understanding your text.

Over the next month I challenge you to select a book of the Bible and read through as detailed above, until next time when we will move on to step 2. †

John Wycliffe

When preached simply and purely, verse-by-verse and book-by-book, the Bible can change lives and transform history. Just ask Zwingli.

Ulrich Zwingli was born on January 1, 1484, in a Swiss shepherd's cottage in the Alps. His parents instilled in him a love for God. The young man proved a brilliant student, and following a brief stint as a schoolteacher he entered the priesthood. For ten years he labored in the village of Glarus, and there he began corresponding with the famous Greek scholar Erasmus.

The Swiss church was bubbling with corruption during this time. In 1516, when Zwingli moved to Einsiedeln, he, too, was struggling hard with sin. In his new village, the young priest fell into an intimate relationship with the barber's daughter. But it was also in Einsiedeln that he borrowed a copy of Erasmus's newly published Greek New Testament. Zwingli copied it. Carrying it everywhere, he pored over it continually and scribbled notes in the margins and memorized it. The pure Scripture began doing its work, and Zwingli's life and preaching took on new vigor. Soon he was invited to Zurich as chief preacher in the cathedral.

He arrived on December 27, 1518, and began his duties on his thirty-sixth birthday, January 1, 1519, with a shock. He announced that he would break a thousand years of tradition by abandoning the church liturgy and the weekly readings as a basis for his sermons. Instead, he would teach verse-by-verse through the New Testament, beginning immediately. He proceeded to preach that day from Matthew 1 on the genealogy of Christ.

Such preaching was radical in its day, but Zurich loved it. Zwingli's concern for the city's youth, his courage during the plague, and his cheerful temper dispelled initial doubts about his reformation ideas. Later, when opposition arose, Zurich's City Council and 600 other interested citizens gathered to evaluate his actions. The assembly (the First Zurich Disputation, 1523) affirmed Zwingli and encouraged his work. Lives were changed; history was made. The Swiss Reformation had begun.

Quoted from Morgan, R. J. *On This Day* (electronic edition) Nashville: Thomas Nelson (2000). †

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THE OVERLOOKED HERO OF CHRISTMAS

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

(Matthew 1:18-25)

Every year at this time, we see and hear much about the various characters of Christmas; like Mary, the shepherds, the wise men (who did not actually arrive until two or so years later), even the animals and the so-called inn-keeper are portrayed in reenactments and on Christmas cards year after year. One man in particular, namely Joseph, is often treated as an extra. He appears on the scene, but he brings no gifts, sings no songs and makes no speeches. He just stands there in his sandals, robes, holding his staff, smiling at Mary while watching the scene unfold around him.

However, there is much that we can learn from Joseph the man who stands out as an often overlooked hero of Christmas. He possessed characteristics that teach us how we should be serving God, even if we may sometimes be overlooked ourselves.

Joseph's Character (vv18-19)

1) Joseph was a holy man: The text tells us that Joseph was a "righteous" man. This means he was a man who lived for God. In terms of the Law, Joseph was blameless. And in terms of his heart, he walked by faith in the Lord.

2) Joseph was a compassionate man: Try to put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a moment. You are betrothed to Mary, which is the same as a legal marriage, except there is to be no physical intimacy. Then you find out that she is pregnant. Obviously you would think the worst. However, when Joseph heard about it, instead of reacting in anger, he responded in love and compassion towards Mary. Instead of taking advantage of what the law gave him permission to do, having her stoned or give her a letter of divorce (cf. Deuteronomy 22:13-21), Joseph sought to sort it out privately, protecting her from the scorn and shame.

God uses those who have a pure and compassionate heart

These two characteristics of Joseph serve as a lesson for all who want to be used by God. God uses those who have a pure and compassionate heart. These traits were also found in the Lord Jesus Himself. Though He was God, as a boy He saw godly behavior modeled by his surrogate father Joseph.

Joseph's Call (vv 20-23)

As Joseph was thinking about how best to handle the situation, the Lord spoke to him through the angel Gabriel, and placed a call on his life just like He had with Mary.

This was a call of extreme honour and responsibility. And, given the laws of the leaders at the time, it was a call that could have brought him shame.

Through the words of the angel Gabriel, Joseph learned the identity of the child in Mary's womb, as well as his responsibility to the child. He was also told the child's gender (male children brought honour to a family), the child's name (in Jewish culture a person's name describes the person's character), and the child's purpose in life. All of this was to show Joseph that the ultimate plan God had for mankind was going to be fulfilled through Joseph's family.

When faced with this awesome challenge, Joseph did not shy away or argue with God. Instead he responded in faith and waited for the Lord's guidance and direction.

Joseph's call serves as an encouragement to all of us. When we consider Joseph's humble character and remember that he was basically a nobody, much like the rest of us, it gives us hope that we too have a role to play. To be called to be part of God's plan is an honour. Joseph recognised this.

Joseph's Conduct (vv 24-25)

When Joseph received his call from God, he changed all of his plans and went and did what the Lord told him to do. This shows us two vital attributes of Joseph's character.

1) He was obedient. Joseph did what he had been commanded to do without arguing or complaining.

This is a tough lesson for us all. Often we will debate with God, and ourselves, to do, or not do, what we know we should. We too often tend to hesitate instead of promptly responding. This is the same lesson that king Saul learned through the words of Samuel, "But Samuel replied:

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Obedience is what the Lord requires yet it is one thing we so often choose not to do.

2) He surrendered. Our text shows us that Joseph was a man who was willing to place the will of the Lord ahead of his own. This is

seen in the fact that he "had no union with her until she gave birth". It is traditionally accepted that Mary and Joseph married before Jesus was born, and even though Joseph would then have been permitted to consummate their marriage, he willingly put aside his own rights so that he could honour the Lord.

This is a powerful example of the lesson we all need to learn. If we truly desire to serve the Lord, we are to humble ourselves before Him (cf. 1 Peter 5:6 & James 4:6), putting aside any feelings, selfish desires, and those things we believe we have a right to, and do what the Lord requires of us.

Regardless of what God calls us to do, there will often be times when the world, the flesh, and the devil, will attempt to make us feel ashamed of who we, what we have done in the past, what we stand for. Despite this, we are to submit ourselves to the will of God, bearing the shame, and focussing on the joy that lies beyond the struggle.

There are times when doing what God requires is not easy or convenient. However, doing His will is always the right thing to do.

Conclusion

After nine months, Mary delivered her baby. This birth was not in a sanitary place, but with the animals. An environment that would have been deemed unclean in the eyes of the lawmakers. Yet on that night, Joseph continued to obey the Lord's command - he took the Creator into his arms and called him Jesus. In the events that followed, we see Joseph protecting Jesus and doing what was required of him as a father.

We do not read much more of Joseph, and although he may not have a major role in Christmas pageants and cards, let us remember just how great a man he was. Let us learn from his character and adopt those same characteristics into our own lives.

Joseph may be an overlooked hero, but he is a hero none-the-less. A hero to look up to, not only at Christmas, but throughout the year! †

Obedience is what the Lord requires

NEW TITLE

[A Christmas Snow](#)

Christmas is more about pain than joy for Kathleen, whose father abandoned her 30 years ago. When she and two unlikely roommates - Sam, an older man, and Lucy, the daughter of her soon-to-be-fiance - are trapped in her home by a blizzard, she is haunted by her past. Will she finally discover life-changing forgiveness?



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THE BACK PAGE

BIBLE TRIVIA CHALLENGE

Refer to the verses in brackets for help.

ACROSS

- 2 The shepherds were told that Jesus would be lying in what? (Lk. 2:12)
- 7 Complete: "A voice is heard in _____, weeping and great mourning" (Mt. 2:18)
- 8 On which day was Jesus presented at the temple to be circumcised? (Lk. 2:21)
- 9 In what region is the town of Nazareth found? (Mt. 2:22)
- 10 To what priestly order did Zechariah belong? (Lk. 1:5)
- 12 What was the name of the angel sent to tell Mary about her pregnancy? (Lk. 1:26)
- 14 To whom did the angels announce the birth of Jesus? (Lk. 2:8)
- 17 To what country did Joseph take his family to escape Herod? (Mt. 2:13)
- 18 In what building was Zechariah when the angel spoke to him? (Lk. 1:9)
- 20 Jesus was born to be the what of mankind? (Lk. 2:11)
- 23 What was the name of the priest that Mary & Joseph took Jesus to at the temple? (Lk. 2:28)
- 24 In what town was Jesus born? (Mt. 2:1)
- 26 Bethlehem was called the "Town of ____" (Lk. 2:4)
- 27 What was Elizabeth's husband's name? (Lk. 1:5)
- 32 After Herod died, to which town did Joseph take his family back to? (Mt. 2:23)

DOWN

- 1 One of the gifts of the magi. (Mt. 2:11)
- 3 What was the name of Mary's cousin who was also pregnant? (Lk. 1:36)
- 4 How many generations were there between the exile and Jesus' birth? (Mt. 1:17)
- 5 What was the name of the prophetess serving in the temple? (Lk. 2:36)
- 6 To what town did the magi first go to to find Jesus? (Mt. 2:1)
- 11 In what region is the town of Bethlehem found? (Mt. 2:1)
- 13 One of the gifts of the magi. (Mt. 2:11)
- 15 Who was king at the time Jesus was born? (Mt. 2:1)
- 16 Who was Jesus' father? (Jn 3:16)
- 19 One of the gifts of the magi. (Mt. 2:11)
- 20 What did the Magi from the east follow in search of Jesus? (Mt. 2:2)
- 21 What was Joseph's father's name? (Mt. 1:16)
- 22 Elizabeth had been pregnant for how many months when Mary visited her? (Lk. 1:36-40)
- 25 Boys at what age and below were murdered by Herod's men? (Mt. 2:16)
- 28 Caesar who, who issued a decree that a census be taken? (Lk. 2:1)
- 29 What name means "God with us"? (Mt. 1:23)
- 30 For roughly how many months did Mary stay with Elizabeth? (Lk. 1:56)
- 31 What name were Elizabeth and Zechariah instructed to give their son? (Lk. 1:13)

19. Bones 20. Eyes 22. Turban 26. Gog
14. Buzi 15. Gateway 16. Temple 18. Tarshish
4. Samaria 5. Pot 9. Glory 10. Baby 12. Joseph
27. Wife 28. Moab
Down: 1. Vine 2. Lebanon
22. Thirty 23. Twelfth 24. Cedar 25. Dogs
13. Kedar 17. Fort 20. Egypt 21. Zedek
6. Edom 7. Sabbath 8. Hophra 11. Unclean
3. Israel

Answers in next edition

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ESTHER

17

Key Idea: Escape of Jews

Summary: God rescues the Jews through the influence of a woman

Key People: Esther, Mordecai, Haman, Ahasuerus, Vashti

Key Places: Shushan in Persia

Strange but True: Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God.

A queen that loses her throne for disobeying her husband (1:10-21)

The first "beauty" pageant ever recorded (2:16-17)

A man hanged on the very gallows he had built for someone else (7:10)

A dinner party that saved a nation (41:12-18)

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JOB

18

Key Idea: God and Suffering

Summary: God is in control of everything

Key People: Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu

Key Places: Uz near Edom

Strange but True: A man who lost his family, wealth, and health in a matter of days (1:13-21)

A man whose hair on his body stood on end when he saw a ghost (4:15-16)

A man who dared to question God (38:1-2)

An animal with a tail the size of a tree (40:17)

A man who was able to see his children to the fourth generation (42:16)

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Today in the town
of David a Saviour
has been born to you,
He is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11

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