

Egypt Mourns Christian Church Bombing Victims

Egypt is a nation in mourning. A bomb explosion at a Coptic Christian church in Cairo killed at least 25 people and wounded over 49 others on Sunday 11 December. So far, no groups have claimed responsibility for the bombing. Todd Nettleton with Voice Of The Martyrs, USA says this is unusual.

'Usually within hours somebody is stepping forward saying, 'Yes, that was us. We're making the infidels pay.' But that hasn't happened in this case. So we'll wait to see when or at what point somebody does step forward, or if nobody does. If nobody claims the bombing, it raises a lot of question marks. But there's no debate that the attack itself bears the marks of terror.

'This would be the kind of attack the Islamic State would like to inspire. They would like to create animosity between Christians and Muslims in Egypt.'

Only about 10% of the Egyptian population is comprised of Coptic Christians. Conflict between portions of the Muslim population and their Christian neighbours is not a new feature in Egypt, especially since Muslims accused Christians of supporting former President Mohammed Morsi's overthrow in 2013. Nettleton says the bombing seemed to specifically target the most vulnerable in the congregation. 'The bomb ... was planted apparently by a woman [who] came in with a bag, sat down in the section of the church where the women and children sat, subsequently got up and left the church, then the bomb in the bag exploded ... So, overwhelmingly, the victims were women and children.'

– Todd Nettleton, Voice Of The Martyrs, via Mission Network News



Vic Gov'ts 'Equal Opportunity' Bill Defeated In Legislative Council

On Tuesday 6 December, Victoria's Legislative Council voted down the Labor Government's *Equal Opportunity Amendment Bill*, which was a direct attack on religious groups in Victoria, as it restricted the ability of religious groups to make employment decisions based on whether a candidate or employee agreed with and practised the religion. The Bill would have restricted religious organisations; churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples, along with faith-based schools, welfare agencies and healthcare organisations from choosing to hire people who agreed with the religion.

The bill would have also diminished freedom of association for those who choose to associate around a common cause or set of values. Many people choose to associate with particular groups because of a shared set of values or having a particular cause or quality in common, such as same political or religious beliefs, advancing the cause of a race or ethnicity, sexual preference or other cause such as relief of poverty. But only religious groups and values would have been restricted by this Bill. Not political parties or clubs, not clubs for advancing minority cultures. Choice, diversity, pluralism, and the basic freedoms of association and religion won the day. Victorians like to live and let live and can get along because of the plurality of their beliefs and practices.

– Simon Kennedy, Research Analyst At The Institute For Civil Society, In *The Spectator*, Australia.

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 12

ISSUE DATE:

15 December 2016

FILE NO: NL 2016-12-15

ISSN: 1033-7903

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PUBLISHED BY:

New Life Australia Ltd

ABN: 15 005 035 138

CONTRIBUTORS PLEASE
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'In The Deep Mid-Winter ...'

Not so long ago, when people were speaking about 'the Arab Spring' (the rise and rise of militias fighting throughout the Middle East supposedly to bring about democracy through civil war) I noted in this column that it would not be too long before this 'Spring' would turn to 'Winter'. Sadly I was right. Almost. Probably no-one imagined the scale of the destruction which would occur in Syria or the threat spreading toward Turkey and Egypt in what has now become 'the deep mid-winter.'

The ineptitude of the 'diplomacy' of those outside the Middle East, their apparent inability to see through Islamic propaganda (who in their right mind would accept that Islam is 'the religion of peace' when the evidence of their behaviour in traditional Moslem lands and their scantily reported behaviour in those countries which have taken in Moslem refugees screams otherwise), and their mistaken assumption that Moslem ethics are the same as Christian ethics – these things combine to call for serious re-appraisal of how to deal with the threat which Islam poses to the whole world.

Meanwhile the forces of secularism, 'the world, the flesh and the devil', are busy doing their worst to disown, disparage and discourage the Church and the Gospel she proclaims. It's all very well to point up the Church's failings while ignoring the blessings she brings to her own under saving grace and the world through common grace, but those who attempt to muzzle her and hinder her good works and high moral ideals are headed for hollow victory in this life and damnation in the life to come.

The Church should be used to this by now. After all, it has been going on since the Pharisees and Sadducees attacked our King and Head, falsely accused Him in a travesty of a trial and had Him executed by the Romans. 'It is the way the Master trod; shall not the servant tread it still?'

'How should we then live?' Faithful Christians must stand their ground and having done all, stand. Ephesians 6.10-20 comes into play as we:

- proclaim that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, 'is love, and whoever lives in love lives in Him;
- go about our Father's business, however strong the foe might be;
- realistically compare the various religions so that we discover that there is in fact no comparison between all the 'doing' religions (including false manifestations of Christianity) and the 'done' religion of Christianity;
- focus on Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith, of whom we are servants who do what we do 'because the love of Christ constrains us', rather than on the Church herself;
- are constant in prayer;
- rest in the plan, purpose and timing of God in creation, providence and redemption;
- never give up because the Lord has promised: 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give to you the Kingdom.

– Bob Thomas

CHINA: Persecution Set To Escalate In 2017

Since the 1980s, the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party has come less from ideology than from its ability to generate wealth. Consequently, the present economic downturn poses a threat to CCP legitimacy. Analysts have forecast that 2017 will be a particularly difficult year for the CCP, as China is faced with sky-rocketing corporate debt, an increase in bankruptcies, slowing housing, construction and manufacturing sectors, and now the prospect that the US will place massive tariffs on Chinese goods.

Anticipating escalating social and political unrest, the CCP has been reviving ideology, bolstering its power and consolidating its control over every element of society, including China's rapidly growing Church. On 7 August 2014 China's long-disappeared, internationally acclaimed Protestant Christian human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, was released from secret 'black jail' detention. Tortured and emaciated after three years in solitary confinement, Gao struggled to string a sentence together. As was clear to this writer at the time, in releasing Gao in such a state, the CCP was sending a message that 'this is what happens to those who challenge the CCP!'

More than a provocative act, it was also an experiment. If the CCP could do this to the high-profile Gao Zhisheng (52) without consequences, it could do it to anyone. Likewise, the persecution of the Church in Zhejiang, in particular in Wenzhou ('China's Jerusalem'), has been an experiment. If the CCP can remove the Cross and rein in the Church across China's Christian heartland without consequences, it can do it anywhere in China.

The CCP is cracking down on unregistered (illegal) house churches, while at the same time reining in the State-approved, registered 'Patriotic' churches. Several leading CCP-recognised Protestants – pastors with the CCP-approved Three Self Patriotic Movement and leaders in CCP-approved China Christian Council – now languish in prison on serious corruption charges, simply for criticising the CCP's religious policy. Meanwhile, leading Christian human rights lawyers have also 'disappeared' into detention. On Wednesday 30 November two Chinese Catholic bishops were ordained with joint Beijing-Vatican approval, indicating that CCP-Vatican rapprochement is making headway. Cardinal Joseph Zen (84) – the former Bishop of Hong Kong and the most senior Chinese cleric in the Catholic Church – has urged the Vatican not to go through with the 'landmark agreement' that would see the Vatican recognise only those bishops already approved by the CCP-approved Catholic Patriotic Movement. Such an agreement would necessitate the Vatican severing ties with the underground Catholic Church, which Zen notes would betray the faithful and fuel repression.

There is still no word on the whereabouts of Christian human rights lawyers Zhang Kai (re-arrested on 31 August) and Jiang Tianyong (believed to have been abducted into secret detention on 21 November). Furthermore, over the weekend of 26,27 November, Chinese security officers raided the Gospel Drug Treatment Church in Guangdong, which specialises in helping people with addictions free of charge, through its Christian rehabilitation centres. Many of its members are former patients whose lives have been transformed by treatment and by the Gospel. Computers and literature were seized and the church's leaders, Hong Kong residents Mr and Mrs Lin Haixin, were arrested, presumably for conducting unregistered (illegal) religious activities. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

– Elizabeth Kendal

Elizabeth Kendal is the author of *Turn Back The Battle: Isaiah Speaks To Christians Today* (Deror Books, Melbourne, Australia, Dec 2012) which offers a Biblical response to persecution and existential threat; and *After Saturday Comes Sunday: Understanding The Christian Crisis In The Middle East* (Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, USA, June 2016). See www.ElizabethKendal.com

PLEASE PRAY THAT:

- the ever-present Spirit of God will minister to Zhang Kai, Jiang Tianyong, Mr and Mrs Lin Haixin, and all other Christian leaders and lawyers presently languishing in Chinese prisons;
- the Lord will grant divine wisdom to all Christian figures and Church leaders, local and foreign, seeking to engage or negotiate with the Chinese Communist Party; may their eyes be open to reality and not be deceived;
- the Lord will continue to build His Church in China, refining her, moulding her and sanctifying her in preparation for the day of her freedom.

'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Rom 8.38,39)

Unbelief No More For Japanese Bomber

Seventy-five years ago, on 7 December 1941, Japanese pilot Mitsuo Fuchida led the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor that stunned Americans and catapulted the US into World War II. But years later, his life was transformed, partly by the testimony of a man who had been his enemy during the war.

Jacob DeShazer hated the Japanese after Pearl Harbour, and in April 1942 he risked his life for revenge as a member of the famed 'Doolittle Raiders,' carrying out a daring daylight bombing raid on Tokyo and other cities. When his plane ran out of fuel over Japanese-held territory, he was captured by Japan and for 40 months his captors starved, beat, and tortured him. While DeShazer was in prison he asked his captors for a Bible, and by reading it he became a Christian.

After the war, Mr DeShazer returned to Japan as a missionary, and that's when he, and other Christians, intersected with Mitsuo Fuchida and helped him to faith in Jesus Christ. The amazing story of Mr Fuchida's conversion is the subject of a book called *Wounded Tiger*, by T. Martin Bennett.



– CBN Christian World News

The Guinness World Records record for the World's Largest Live Nativity has been broken this month in the UK. The record has been set jointly by Bible Society and the Calne Town Council. Officially entitled the Guinness World Records title for The Most Living Figures In A Nativity Scene the night involved 1,254 people coming together to all participate wearing traditional costumes – wise men (and women), shepherds and angels. The former record was set by 1,039 volunteers in Utah, USA in December 2014. The night was also Calne's annual Christmas light switch-on and thousands of people heard the real Nativity story as children from local schools read Luke 2.1-22 to the crowd and Bible Society's Hazel Southam reported live from Bethlehem.

Faith Comes Into Its Own At Work

Four out of five Christian workers say faith helps them face the issues and challenges of work. For the first time HR think-tank Reventure has surveyed self-identified Christian workers in their Christians@Work survey to understand the role of faith in the workplace. They found that Christian values guide actions in the workplace – as a Christian, 60% feel confident to always speak the truth and 54% to speak out against injustice. However, only 43% have actually discussed faith and values at work in the past three months. Researcher Dr Lindsay McMillan compared these results to those of the overall workforce. He says Christian workers have a higher sense of purpose and meaning at work, are more likely to feel satisfied with their job and have more positive mental health ratings than their colleagues.

– My Christian Daily

The Christmas Story In A British Context

A new film highlights some of the challenges facing asylum seekers in the UK through a modern retelling of the nativity story. This release comes the day after new figures from the Government were published revealing that in September almost 38,000 asylum seekers in the UK were in receipt of accommodation and/or financial support of less than £6 per day. Whilst primarily focusing on a

young Mary and Joseph's efforts to find somewhere safe to stay in the UK, the film, *A Very British Nativity*, also includes a cameo from the Wise Men who have ditched their trusty camels in favour of Micro Scooters. The film was produced by a coalition of four denominations: the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

– Inspire Magazine

From Bethlehem To Egypt – Without Leaving Wales

A group of Welsh Christians are walking from Bethlehem to Egypt to raise funds for Christian Aid's work with refugees and displaced people around the world – that's the 225 kilometres between the south-Wales village of Bethlehem and the north-Wales hamlet Egypt, rather than walking the 692 kilometres journey the Holy Family undertook in the Middle East all those years ago. Huw Thomas, head of Christian Aid Wales, says the response from communities across Wales has been incredible, not just in terms of those signing up to walk, but also offers of hospitality on the journey, and generous sponsorship. Established in 1945, Christian Aid has been supporting refugees and asylum seekers throughout its history and is currently working to help refugees in the Middle East and in Lebanon.

Ashley Saunders New Head Of Family Voice Australia

David and Ros Phillips, who have led FamilyVoice Australia and its predecessor Festival Of Light as director and research officer for over 40 years, formally stepped down in early December. **Ashley Saunders** has taken over as national director. Ashley comes to his new role as a former lawyer, alderman and senior church pastor in NSW and Queensland. He and his wife Lindsay have four children.



'I have big shoes to fill,' Ashley says, 'but I am looking forward to working alongside people who are passionately dedicated to preserving the best of what this country has to offer. There is a sense in which every generation stands at a crossroad, needing to choose the direction that it would take. FamilyVoice Australia has a significant role in advocating wise choices that will not only well serve this generation, but also future generations.

'Whether through its parliamentary submissions or publications, FamilyVoice has a message of hope as well as caution for the nation as a whole.' - NACL

Understanding Islam Course At MST

In Australia today, as in all Western countries, there are growing Muslim communities. Increasingly many of us have Muslim neighbours and co-workers. Moreover, radical Islam is on the move around the globe in ways we are constantly reminded of in global news stories. These developments provide the Church with many evangelistic, apologetic, social and political challenges. The Arthur Jeffery Centre For The Study Of Islam, Melbourne School Of Theology is recognizing and seeking to respond to these challenges biblically and thoughtfully.

This course is designed for family members, students, churches, small groups, and anyone interested in the questions raised by the interaction between Islam and Christianity. Please join in praying for a wonderful time of spiritual renewal and greater understanding of our Muslim friends.

Further information about this course, which will be held on Friday 7 and Saturday 8 April 2017 at Melbourne School of Theology can be obtained from MST, 5 Burwood Hwy, Wantirna 3152.

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Franklin Graham: 'We Saw God Do A Mighty Work' – Over 170,000 Hear The Gospel In Myanmar

'It takes courage to make a public commitment in a culture that has been hostile to Christianity, but more than 7,500 left their seats to come forward. The response was so great that on the first night we didn't have nearly enough prayer counselors. I know of one counselor who talked and prayed with 15 different people,' Franklin Graham said.

'We saw God do a mighty work in the nation of Myanmar when more than 170,000 people overflowed a three-day Crusade in Yangon, that country's largest city, to hear the Gospel. It was a historic moment for churches there – Myanmar is a country where Christians have long endured persecution and where evangelism has been severely limited for decades by military governments. But when God opens the door, no opposition can shut it. Christians boldly showed up at the Crusade from all over the country, bringing nonbeliever friends and loved ones with them. One small church near Yangon went door to door in their community inviting people. They ended up needing a bus because 70 neighbours wanted to come. Churches across the nation chartered over 400 buses. We had a massive bus jam all three evenings! Many from outlying areas rode for hours to attend. One group, representing village churches in a nearly inaccessible corner of Myanmar, traveled for two weeks by foot, boat, and then bus to be there. Each night after I preached the Gospel, I invited people to put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. More than 7,500 left their seats to come forward. Some who responded to the invitation said they had never been inside a church building or attended a Christian event before.'

Sparks Of Revival: Congress Members On Their Knees In The US Capitol

President-Elect Donald Trump's former rival and 2016 presidential candidate Ted Cruz recently held a prayer meeting with conservative pastors and members of Congress on Capitol Hill. The meeting was held to pray against satan's power on Capitol Hill and was organized by Wallbuilders and the Jefferson Gathering, reported by Right Wing Watch. Wallbuilders is a conservative organization, run by evangelical author and activist David Barton, and the Jefferson Gathering is a prayer organization developed by Skyline Church, where Jim Garlow is the lead pastor. 'Senator Ted Cruz was eloquent as usual. He came through a bruising election – and continues to be a profound and significant voice in the Senate. Thank God for him!' Senator Garlow wrote on Facebook.

– *Breaking Christian News*

Ramon A Williams
- Worldwide Photos -
WANT TO SEE MORE?

New Life can only publish a small selection of photos, but you can see more of those attributed to Worldwide Photos by contacting Ramon Williams, e-mail: rlgmedia@ozemail.com.au



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Living Stones Korean Presbyterian Church. Every Sunday 1pm;

BALACLAVA: Cnr Hotham St/Denman Rd. Every Sunday 9.30am.

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Dr Helen Roseveare, 1925-2016

Dr Helen Roseveare, the renowned English missionary to the Congo, has passed away at the age of 91. As a young woman, Helen felt an increased sense of calling to the mission field and once announced publicly: 'I'll go anywhere God wants me to, whatever the cost.' She went on to serve the Lord over two decades in Africa, enduring war, imprisonment and great personal suffering along the way.



Helen studied medicine at Cambridge University and then spent six months training at the Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade College in London. In 1953, she travelled to the north-eastern region of the Congo, where she founded a training school for nurses – who would operate as evangelists at the same time. Two years later she was transferred to another post seven miles away, where she helped transform an abandoned maternity and leprosy centre into a working hospital. The new facility had 100 beds and served mothers, children and lepers, as well as operating as a training facility for paramedics.

Tragically, when civil war broke out in 1964 all of the medical facilities Helen had established were destroyed and she was put under house arrest. After trying to escape, she was brutally beaten and dragged back. Helen said of her captors: 'They were brutal and drunken. They cursed and swore, they struck and kicked, they used the butt-end of rifles and rubber truncheons. We were roughly taken, thrown into prisons, humiliated, threatened.' However, her lowest point came on 29 October 1964 when she was raped. Helen recounted that at this time, she had reached 'what seemed to be the ultimate depth of despairing nothingness', but she later recognised the goodness of God, despite the harrowing attack.

'Through the brutal heart-breaking experience of rape, God met with me – with outstretched arms of love. It was an unbelievable experience: He was so utterly there, so totally understanding, His comfort was so complete, and suddenly I knew – I really knew – that His love was unutterably sufficient.'

After a brief return to the UK she went back to Africa in 1966. This time she established a medical facility in Zaire, which included a 250-bed hospital, maternity ward, leprosy centre and training college for doctors. In 1973 she returned to the UK for health reasons, settling in Northern Ireland, where she wrote several books. She passed on to Glory on 7 December 2016. *– The Christian Institute*

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TURN BACK THE BATTLE:

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PERSECUTION WATCH

Prince Charles Offers 'Special Prayers' Following Egypt Church Bombing

Prince Charles has written to the Coptic Church leader, Pope Tawadros II to express solidarity with all those affected by the bomb attack on a church in Cairo. His Royal Highness, who has repeatedly spoken out for the persecuted church, said he was praying for Copts in Egypt and around the world.

In the letter to Pope Tawadros II, he said: 'The steadfastness of Egyptians in the face of such appalling hatred and extremism

is greatly to be admired. I can only begin to imagine the dreadful shock and grief that Copts, and indeed all Egyptians must be feeling and my heart goes out to the families and loved ones of those who have been killed and wounded.

'I want to assure Your Holiness that Copts everywhere, and especially in Egypt, are in my thoughts and special prayers as they try to cope with the loss, pain and fear that the attack has inflicted upon them.'

Twenty-four people died when a suicide bomber entered a chapel next to St Mark's Cathedral. Police have arrested four people in connection with the attack. *– Marcus Jones, Premier Christian News*



Indonesian Blasphemy Trial Begins

The blasphemy trial against Jakarta's ethnic Chinese Christian Governor Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama commenced on Tuesday 13 December. Outside the heavily guarded court, hundreds of anti-and pro-Ahok supporters protested, kept apart by some 2,000 police. Anti-Ahok forces chanted, 'Jail Ahok, jail Ahok, jail Ahok now.' The panel of judges will hear from 30 witnesses and see 50 pieces of evidence. The trial, which is being televised live, is being rushed through the court and expected to conclude early in the New Year.

At a rally over the weekend, attended by Australian Broadcasting Corporation Indonesia correspondent Adam Harvey, the cleric Habib Muhsin Alathas re-asserted the Qur'anic/Islamic principle that Christians should never have authority over Muslims. Referring to Ahok as 'the son of Satan,' he railed against the governor using crude, racist and provocative terms. 'Some of you come to the headquarters of the pig's pimple, shaking hands with him, and even kiss his hand,' he said. 'You have been kissing the hand of someone who is not circumcised — you're better off kissing a goat's ----. ... So, if this thin eyes [Indonesian sarcasm for the Chinese] does not go in jail, we will go out onto the street once more, right?'

Australia National University's Indonesia expert, Associate Professor Greg Fealy told the ABC that while he does not believe Ahok has blasphemed, 'there's probably no way out for him now except to go through this court process, which is very likely to find him guilty I suspect.' Likewise, Professor Tim Lindsay of Melbourne Law School expects Ahok will be convicted, for not only has a fatwa been issued, but the massive rallies have terrified the authorities. Consequently, he expects the judges will run with public opinion without paying much attention to the evidence.

Reporting from Jakarta, ABC Indonesia correspondent Adam Harvey noted that Ahok looked deeply anxious as he entered the court. Harvey opined, 'He can see the writing on the wall.' Ahok broke down in tears twice as he testified. Insisting that he would never intentionally insult the *Qur'an* or hurt Muslims, he spoke of his deep affection for his Muslim godparents, and recalled how he helped poor Indonesians to perform the Hajj pilgrimage when he was a district chief a decade ago. Once the clear front-runner in the gubernatorial race, recent opinion polls indicate that Ahok has now slipped to second place behind Agus Yudhoyono, the son of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. But the gubernatorial race is doubtless the last thing on Ahok's mind now. If found guilty, which most analysts believe he will be, Ahok faces up to five years in prison. The court has now adjourned until Tuesday 20 December. *– Elizabeth Kendal*

CHINA: Organs Removed From Body Of Prisoner Of Conscience Against Family's Wishes

Authorities in China removed organs from the body of Christian prisoner of conscience Peng Ming against his family's wishes, according to a statement by the family dated 10 December and translated by China Aid. On 2 December, Christian Solidarity Worldwide expressed concerns over the lack of information about the death of Peng Ming, a long term political prisoner in Hubei, China. A second official statement from his family, published by China Aid, claims that Peng Ming's body was dissected against his family's will on 5 December and that his brain and heart were removed. The family had previously requested an autopsy by 'an international, independent medical authority acceptable to the family'

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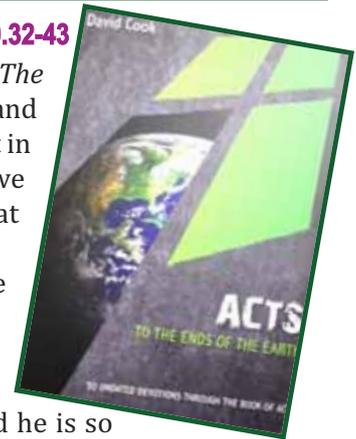
What Jesus Did Next – Through His Apostles acts 9.32-43

The book of Acts has had many names throughout its life – for example, *The Deeds Of The Apostles*, *The Acts Of All The Apostles*, *The Acts Of The Holy Spirit* and *What Jesus Continued To Do* Some of these titles seek to express the truth that in the Gospel is the record of what Jesus did in His life on Earth, while in Acts we have the record of what Jesus continues to do through His Spirit, as He sits at God’s right hand.

The account of Peter’s raising Dorcas is very similar to the account in Luke 8.49–56 of the raising of Jairus’ daughter. There is no doubt that the girl and the woman are dead, the professional mourners for Jairus’ daughter have arrived! (Luke 8.52) and Dorcas’ body has been washed ready for burial (Acts 9.37). Peter had been with Jesus at the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter and he is so bold as to pray that Jesus would do it again in the case of Dorcas.

A creation miracle is required for resurrection to take place. The brain would have to return to life, for it has been denied oxygen. But the fact that so many trust in the Lord as a result of Dorcas’ resurrection (v 42) underlines its reality. Why do we find it so hard to believe in resurrection? Jesus is Lord of life and death. He has defeated death and He exercises rule over it as He sees fit.

Blaise Pascal put it like this: ‘Atheists: What reason have they for saying that we cannot rise from the dead? Which is more difficult; to be born, or to be raised from the dead, for what has never been to exist, or for what has been to exist again? Is it more difficult to come into being than to return to it? Custom makes the one seem easy, while unfamiliarity makes the other impossible. But that is a popular way of judging!’



REFLECTION:

In what ways does Dorcas model Christian character for us?

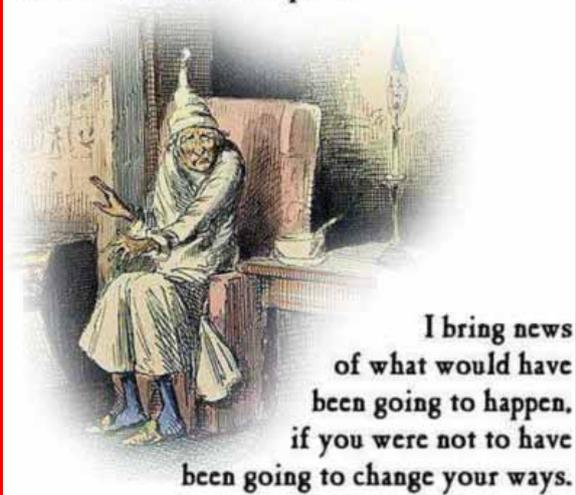
Acts 9.31–43 is a description of a vital church life. What qualities described can we pray that God would duplicate in His church today?

What has been the most encouraging aspect of these studies in Acts 1 – 9 for you?

Content taken from 'ACTS – To The Ends Of The Earth' by David Cook, published by 10Publishing, used with permission.

SEEN ON FACEBOOK:

I am the Ghost of Christmas Future Imperfect Conditional, said the Spirit.



I bring news of what would have been going to happen, if you were not to have been going to change your ways.

Romans 8.32
He gives all things.

Words Of Wisdom:

"MY FAITH RESTS NOT IN 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." - CHARLES SPURGEON

Who Can YOU Forward New Life To?

BOOKS WORTH READING

CUTTING TO THE HEART: APPLYING THE BIBLE IN TEACHING AND PREACHING, Chris Green, Nottingham: Ivp, 2015. ISBN 978-1-78359-293-7

What's different and especially helpful about this book on how to teach and preach the Bible is that it focusses on application – in some ways the most difficult and the most important aspect of communicating God's truth. The book's contents started as the annual Moore College Lectures of 2012. Chris Green is convinced that just as you can teach would-be preachers how to interpret the Bible, so also you can teach them how to apply it. In other words, the essential task of application can be learned.

According to Green, too often sermons give their hearers a whole lot of Bible information but then leave them to work out for themselves what to do with it. That's not good enough, for that is only the first half of the job of the preacher. Chris Green sums up the purpose of everything (and so also the purpose of preaching) in these words, 'The purpose of the Bible is to teach us how to bring glory to God by living out being remade in His image' (p 29). That is to say, the Bible is to be explained and applied in such a way that individuals and their churches are transformed to greater Christlikeness.

The preacher's task is not to make the Bible relevant – it is always relevant (for Christ is the centre of the Bible story) – but to make its truth so clear and practical that people can see its relevance and put its truth into practice. There are mistakes and extremes to avoid: ignoring the Bible (Fosdick) and ignoring the world (Barth). Green helpfully engages with John Stott's model for bridging between the Bible and contemporary culture. He warns against the approach that looks for 'timeless principles' in the Bible to apply today, for that too easily results in the discarding of much as merely cultural (throwing out the baby with the bath water!).

Application cannot be left to the hearers, for preachers have not fully explained a Bible passage until they have said how it applies to life. Application is not something tacked on to the end of a sermon, rather 'where the application begins, there the sermon begins' (Spurgeon). God being God, the Bible He has provided for us is not hopelessly out of date or locked in the past, but is the guidebook we need today and is pertinent to contemporary issues and challenges. 2 Timothy 3.16 shows that Scripture not only teaches, but corrects, rebukes and trains in godliness, and so preaching must regularly include all these aspects.

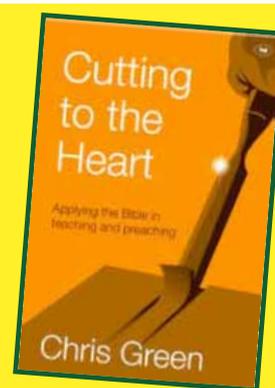
Green suggests that the two great love commandments provide a helpful grid to check that we are applying God's Word to our emotions, attitudes and relations with others. The Old Testament saints and New Testament examples of godliness can be used to provide patterns of behaviour for us, so long as the Gospel basis of all ethics is not forgotten. To change we need to be confident of God's grace in the Gospel, and it is not the preacher's job to make Christians feel guilty. Not fear of judgment but the knowledge that we are forgiven and accepted in Christ is what motivates us to resist temptation and to live for Christ.

As well, most application in sermons should relate to Monday, not Sunday. In other words, it should help Christians to live more Christianly in their daily lives. There also needs to be an element of apologetic in preaching, so that preachers attempt to answer the questions people are asking, principally: 'Is it true? Is it relevant? Is it real? Does it matter?'

Green reminds us that the preacher must preach to himself, because a little self-honesty (knowing our own sinful heart and defences) makes it a whole lot easier to apply the Bible to others. You know the games that redeemed sinners play! He also urges that the preacher not neglect the corporate facet of application, so that, following the example of Paul in his letters, God's truth is applied to congregational life as a whole, to church structures and to the culture and (bad) habits of church life.

It would be no exaggeration to say that application is the weakest aspect of most preaching, and so this is a book that scratches where the church is itching. Here is a great Christmas present for your pastor!

– Greg Goswell



'Green reminds us that the preacher must preach to himself, because a little self-honesty (knowing our own sinful heart and defences) makes it a whole lot easier to apply the Bible to others.'

We Three Kings – Clearing Up Misconceptions

Nativity displays often have three wise men. What does the Bible reveal about these wise men? Who were they? Where were they from? Tim Chaffey examines some common misconceptions about them.

Clearing Up Misconceptions

Over time, many beliefs with little to no Biblical basis have crept into common Christian thinking. This article aims to correct some of the most commonly held misconceptions about the Bible. Nativity scenes around the world display the wise men. Songs and poems have been written about them. They are featured in movies, plays, and Sunday school skits. They are some of the most recognizable figures in our culture, as nearly everyone has seen images of three wise men riding on camels and following a star. Some have even gone so far as to name them. But what do we really know about these men, now known as Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar? Does the biblical account of the magi support the traditional story surrounding these enigmatic characters? This article will examine many of the details given in Scripture concerning the magi. Who were they? How did they learn about the King of the Jews? How many were there? When and where did they see the Lord Jesus Christ?



Magi, Kings, Or Wise Men?

The Greek word μάγοι (mágoi) is translated as ‘wise men’ in the NKJV, KJV, and ESV, while the NASB and NIV use the word ‘magi’. Originally, the word often referred to a class of Persian wise men, and possibly priests, who were interpreters of special signs, particularly in astrology. Eventually, the word was used variously to refer to one who possessed supernatural knowledge and ability, a magician, or even a deceiver or seducer. There is little to no biblical or historical basis for identifying them as kings.

The Book Of Matthew Contains The Account Of The Wise Men

‘Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him?”’ (Matthew 2.1,2) The original meaning of μάγοι is likely in view here—wise men who interpreted special signs. There are at least three reasons for this identification. First, they acknowledged that they were interested in signs in the heavens. Second, the Bible states that they were from ‘the East,’ which would be in the direction of Babylon and ancient Persia. Third, of all the peoples of ‘the East,’ the Babylonians had many opportunities to learn of the Jewish Scriptures, which contain multiple promises of the coming Messiah. Daniel was an influential government official in Babylon about 600 years earlier, and he foretold the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 9.24–26). Also, tens of thousands of Jews lived in Babylon during the time of the Exile (605–536 BC), and they maintained a large presence there for the following centuries.

How Did They Learn Of The King Of The Jews?

The third reason above provides a plausible solution to this question. Since the magi presumably had access to the Hebrew Scriptures, they could have known about the promises of the coming Messiah. Some scholars believe that the book of Numbers informed the magi of the child who would be preceded by a star. ‘I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel’ (Numbers 24.17). Perhaps they were told in a dream about the Messiah’s birth. After all, God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod after they had seen the baby Jesus and presented their gifts to Him (Matthew 2.12). We can be sure that they fully expected to behold a child who was ‘born King of the Jews.’ While these are both plausible suggestions, we do not have enough information about the magi to know for sure. However, we can be sure that they fully expected to behold a child who was ‘born King of the Jews.’ This is probably why they traveled first to Jerusalem, the most likely location for the birth of a Jewish king.

How Many Magi Came To See Jesus?

Although the popular Christmas hymn and traditions tell us that three wise men visited Christ, the Bible does not give us the number of wise men. Matthew wrote the following concerning the magi’s visit: ‘When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2.9–11).

(Continued on p.13)

NEW LIFE EXTRA

(Continued from p.12) The traditional view that three wise men journeyed to see Christ is likely based on the fact that three gifts were given. However, since the Bible does not tell us the number of magi, we can only speculate. We know there were at least two magi, and there may have been many more.

When And Where Did They See The Lord Jesus Christ?

The traditional view presented in films, such as *The Nativity Story*, is that the wise men saw Jesus on the night of His birth, but this is highly unlikely. Matthew 2.1 reveals that the magi came to Jerusalem and subsequently visited with Herod after Jesus had been born. The angelic announcement of Christ's birth to the shepherds was at night, which means that Jesus was born at night. In Luke 2.11 the angel told the shepherds, 'For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.' The Greek word translated as 'this day' is σήμερον (sēmeron) and it means 'the same day as the day of discourse' (i.e., today). Since the Jewish day began at sundown (roughly 6pm), then the angelic use of sēmeron indicates that Christ was born at night, since that day would have started at sundown.

So it is highly implausible that the wise men would arrive in Jerusalem at night and immediately obtain an audience with Herod. The king then gathered 'all the chief priests and scribes of the people' (Matthew 2.4) so he could determine where the Messiah was to be born. The experts told Herod that the Messiah needed to be born in Bethlehem, which was predicted in Micah 5.2. So, the wise men departed and made their approximately six-mile journey to Bethlehem. If we assume that the wise men met with Herod during the day after Jesus was born, then the earliest they could have visited Jesus would be the next night.

As we study the Bible to gain an accurate understanding of these events, may we, like the wise men, worship the Saviour Jesus Christ.

– Tim Chaffey

New Life Wishes All Our Readers A Safe, Holy And Blessed Christmas.

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