

## ***Everybody Needs Good News***

by David Stewart

Every day we are bombarded with bad news. All one has to do is watch a few minutes of TV, listen to the radio, or go online. It is easy to become overwhelmed by all of these negative messages. We may sometimes ask ourselves, “Is there any good news out there?” “Is there any hope for the future?” The message of the Bible answers these questions with an emphatic “Yes!” God’s Word provides great hope for this life and for eternity. As we begin considering this hope, let us turn our attention to a short introduction of the Bible.

### **A Brief Sketch of the Bible**

The Bible is a collection of 66 books that were written by approximately 40 men over a period of more than 1,500 years (1440 B.C.—A.D. 95). These authors were inspired by God himself; they recorded his message and were kept from making any mistakes: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

The Bible reveals God’s work in history, beginning with creation (Genesis 1) and ending with the future judgment (Revelation 20—22). It is divided into two parts, the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and records God’s former covenant with the nation of Israel. The New Testament was written in Greek, the common language of the first-century Roman world, and it focuses on God’s current covenant with the church.

### **The God of the Bible**

The opening verse of the Bible assumes that God exists: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). His creation is masterfully designed and crowned with beauty, attributes which testify to his divine power and glory (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20). Further, God’s character is revealed throughout the Bible as he interacts with mankind:

- 1) He is a loving God who cares about us (1 John 4:7-11);
- 2) He is a righteous God who never sins (1 John 1:5);
- 3) He is a truthful God who never lies (Hebrews 6:18);
- 4) He is merciful, forgiving the penitent (Romans 2:4);
- 5) He is just, punishing evil (Romans 1:18-20).

One of the key passages in the Old Testament often recited by Jews is known as the *Shema*, the Hebrew word for “hear”: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5). This text reveals at least two important truths. First, there is only one God, the LORD. Second, he desires our full devotion. God wants to have a close relationship with us—even after we have failed him.

### **The Bad News: Our Sin Problem**

From the very beginning, people have had a difficulty being fully devoted to the LORD. At creation, God placed the first couple, Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden and provided for their every need. However, they disobeyed his command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:6). Satan tempted Eve to disregard God's command, and then Eve persuaded Adam. Due to their disobedience, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and cut off from the tree of life (Genesis 3:23, 24). They were spiritually separated from God and later experienced physical death.

Like Adam and Eve, we have also separated ourselves from God because of our own personal sin: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). We often do what is right in our own eyes, instead of what is right in the eyes of the LORD. There are "sins of omission," that is, we fail to do what God has positively commanded. There are "sins of commission" in which we do what God has forbidden. Sometimes we sin intentionally, rebelling against God. Other times we are simply ignorant of God's will. In some cases, our desire is to do the right thing, but we lack the spiritual power to carry it out.

Throughout the Bible, we read about many sins that people commit against God. The following list is compiled from vice lists found in Scripture: arrogance, lying, murder, evil scheming, dissension, idolatry, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, orgies, greed, jealousy, malice, slander, gossip, God-hating, boasting, disobeying parents, faithlessness, swindling, drunkenness, theft, witchcraft, hatred, fits of rage, and selfish ambition (Proverbs 6:16-19; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8).

### **The Good News: The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ**

Throughout the Old Testament, people who were conscious of their sins and revered God would offer him sacrifices. They would often slaughter a bull or lamb and burn at least part of the animal's body on an altar. The animal's blood would be poured out at the base of the altar. The animal was considered a substitute; it paid the penalty for their sin. When God established the nation of Israel, such offerings were commanded in the Law to be performed by the priests from the tribe of Levi (Leviticus 1—7). These sacred duties were carried out at the tabernacle, which was later replaced by the temple in Jerusalem. With some exceptions, animal sacrifices were offered day after day for about 1,500 years. In God's ultimate plan, these imperfect offerings were replaced by the superior sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who gave himself once for all time on the cross for the sins of all people (Hebrews 8—10).

In the New Testament, we gain a clearer picture of the true and living God. This one God consists of three persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Before the world began, the all-knowing Father planned to save mankind by offering his Son (1 Peter 1:18-21). When the time was right, Jesus came into the world, being born as a Jew under the Law (Galatians 4:4, 5). In humility,

Christ left the splendor of heaven and became human, enduring the suffering of this fallen world: “Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus was conceived in the virgin Mary by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18). He was then born in Bethlehem of Judea, just as had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1-8). Later, he grew up in Nazareth of Galilee as the son of Joseph the carpenter (Matthew 13:55).

At about the age of 30, Jesus began his public ministry by being immersed in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Luke 3:21-23). He demonstrated the compassion and power of God by healing all kinds of diseases—even raising the dead back to life (Matthew 11:4, 5). He demonstrated his power over the forces of Satan by driving out demons from those who were possessed (Mark 1:34, 39). People came from all over Palestine to hear his authoritative teaching (Matthew 4:25; 7:28, 29). He spoke of the coming kingdom (church) and called people to have a pure heart as well as the right kind of behavior. Not only did Christ tell people how to live, he also demonstrated it by leading a sinless life, which qualified him to become our perfect sacrifice (2 Corinthians 5:21). After three years of ministry, he ultimately gave up his life by suffering for us on the cross (Matthew 27:32-56). He proved his identity as the Son of God by being raised back to life on the third day (Romans 1:4).

The death and resurrection of Christ can bring hope to our lives; it is truly “good news”! We can have the forgiveness of sins and our relationship with God restored. This right relationship is something that we cannot earn by our own goodness (Romans 5:6-8).

### **Our Response to God’s Love**

Before Jesus ascended back into heaven to be enthroned at the Father’s right hand, he gave his apostles what is known as the “Great Commission”: “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15, 16).

The fulfillment of this mission began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to preach the good news about Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 2). As a result, many people put their faith in the crucified and risen Christ. No doubt they also confessed their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, their Lord and Savior (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9, 10). The apostle Peter commanded these people, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Repentance means to turn away from one’s sinful lifestyle and turn back to God; it is a matter of the heart that leads to the right kind of behavior. Baptism refers to immersion in water and is

done to receive God's forgiveness; in this humble act of submission, one's sins are washed away by the blood of Christ and he also receives the gift of God's indwelling Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people became Christians and the church was established.

The book of Acts records the conversions of many others in the first century A.D. who became followers of Jesus, discovering a renewed relationship with God and the hope of eternal life. God expects us to respond to his grace in the same way today. We must put our faith in Jesus and confess that he is the Son of God. We must repent of the sins that we have committed. We must be baptized in order to have our sins forgiven by God. When we do this, we will be added by Christ to his church which he purchased with his own blood.

After one becomes a Christian, he must continue to grow in God's grace. This growth can occur through regular Bible study and prayer (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It is essential to meet with the Lord's church to worship God and encourage other believers (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 10:25). Further, a Christian will want to develop a servant's heart in imitation of Jesus, being transformed into his likeness (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 6:10). He will also want to share the good news about Jesus with others so they can also have this hope (2 Corinthians 5:14, 20).

### **Christ's Return and the Judgment**

Jesus promised to come again (John 14:1-3), although no one knows when that day will come except for the Father (Matthew 24:36). When he returns, everyone who has ever lived will be raised back to life and will face the judgment. Christ will only pronounce two verdicts—either heaven or hell (John 5:28, 29).

In a world filled with sin and chaos, the hope of everlasting life with God because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice is certainly good news! If you do not possess the hope of heaven through Christ, it is not out of your reach. Consider becoming a follower of Jesus so you may enjoy the wonderful blessings that he promises.

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