

## The Only Way From Here Is Up!

*I was standing at En Gedi, near the shore of the Dead Sea, some 400 metres below sea level. The overall occasion was a three-week tour of the state of Israel. The title of this article can appropriately be applied to our Christian lives as well, no matter how far along that road we happen to be.*

**T**his trip to Israel in the winter of 2007 was the experience of a lifetime for me personally. To be able to put pictures directly in my mind of the places that I read about in the Bible makes the Scriptures come to life, helping me to understand history more clearly.

Let me take you through a few of the biblical places where very significant events occurred, beginning with En Gedi.

It was here at En Gedi that David cut off the corner of Saul's cloak rather than harming him, proving his loyalty to the king (1 Samuel 24:1-12). In this place Saul recognised that David was to be the next king of Israel and asked him not to kill his descendants, which David complied with. When David became King of Israel he showed kindness to Saul's house, because of a promise he had made to Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:14-15), by taking Jonathan's son Mephibosheth into his household (2 Samuel 9:1-7).

### **The deep significance of the Temple area**

If you look from the Mount of Olives across to Jerusalem, David's palace would probably have been located to the left of the Temple Mount outside of the city wall.

This is where Mephibosheth would have spent his days.

David at one point, whilst influenced by Satan, decided to number Israel, and after his punishment, God told him to erect an altar and make a sacrifice on the threshing floor of Ornan. So the king purchased the area from Ornan for six hundred shekels of gold (1 Chronicles 21).



*Picture taken from En Gedi Spa towards the valleys where David hid from Saul.*



*Mineral deposits at the Dead Sea.*

On this spot his son Solomon built the first temple. Zerubbabel built the second temple on the same spot, and later Herod built the temple that stood there during the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

This place was also known as Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1). In fact the whole area was previously known as the land of Moriah. It is to this area that Abraham brought his son Isaac to sacrifice him at the command of God. Although God prevented him from taking Isaac's life, Abraham had proved his obedience (see Genesis 22:1-17).

The father of the faithful also showed that he understood the plan of God for mankind.

From this incredible incident we can understand that Abraham typified God the Father, and his son Isaac typified Jesus Christ. Of course God actually allowed His Son to be sacrificed for our benefit. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' (John 3:16). It was after this remarkable event that God told Abraham that it would be through his descendants that the Saviour of all mankind would be born (Genesis

22:18). Some 2,000 years later our Saviour paid the penalty for our sins. Here we see a description of the place where He was executed and buried 'Now in the place He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid' (John 19:41).

### History and geography intersect

When we visited the Garden Tomb, the guide explained that this site was the most



*The Temple Mount as seen from the Garden of Gethsemane.*

time of the Temple sacrifices, that the sin offerings were brought to be

burnt. This followed the example set in Exodus 29:14 because it was outside the camp; outside the city wall.

Although the exact locations of these events are disputed, when you put history and geography together, it makes you realise more fully that God has a great plan for mankind. These events in biblical history didn't happen by chance. They are all leading to the climax of the plan of God. What is that climax? Once again we have to go to biblical history to find the answer.

Abraham understood that plan.



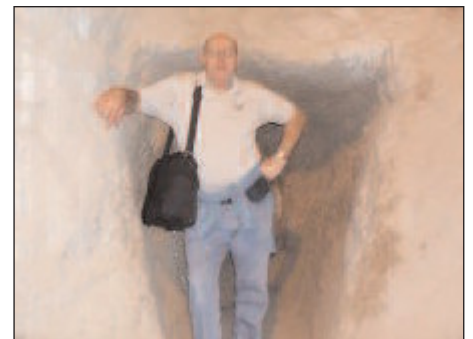
*In the foreground, the Kidron Valley with ancient tombs. Top right, the Mount of Olives with the Garden of Gethsemane below it.*

likely one to fit the description of John 19:41, because alongside the garden where the tomb is located there is an outcrop of rock with the likeness of a skull in it (compare Luke 23:33 with John 19:17).

First Luke 23:33: 'And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.' Next John 19:17: 'And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha'. The guide also explained that it was to this area, during the



*The Place of the Skull*



*Author in Canaanite tunnel at Jerusalem.*

*(Continued on page 6)*

# What's Important in Your Life?

*Each one of us has to decide on our activities each day: today, tomorrow, this week, this month. On what basis should we make our primary choices? What are your main priorities?*

**Y**ou have the same time available as everyone else – 24 hours every single day. If you are an adult, how you spend that time is largely a matter of personal choice. Your time is your life. We human beings only have so much time to spend. Do we invest it wisely? Are our key choices based on biblical teachings?

King Solomon stated that 'There is a time to be born and a time to die' (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Between these two basic benchmarks we have time available to spend.

However, there is no way of knowing in advance exactly how much. It may be the traditional 'three score and ten', perhaps a decade more, or our time on earth could be cut short. That is one reason why the apostle Paul told Christians to 'redeem the time'.

## **God interrupts our human plans**

Many past servants of God were busily pursuing their own goals in life. They thought their time was their own. But the Creator, in His own wisdom and for His own eternal purposes, decided to reveal Himself to them and personally intervene in their lives – redirecting them in a totally different direction.

Abraham was living his own life in the ancient Mesopotamian world. But our Creator had something very special for this humble, obedient man to do for all of humankind. He was asked by a great divine Being to leave his whole world behind.

Abraham was to become 'the father

of the faithful' and through him all nations would in the process of time receive a wonderful spiritual blessing from God.

Some 1,000 years afterwards, Ezekiel, initially educated to be a priest, was suddenly asked to become a prophet and to deliver a message very

***'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.' All material concerns must play second fiddle to this one great priority.***

few people in his nation would appreciate. This sudden switching of roles could not have been easy psychologically for one trained for the priesthood, but many crucial aspects of God's prophetic plan for mankind have been revealed through this prophet.

Hundreds of years later a few fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were asked to abandon their occupations and to become special disciples of Jesus Christ, taking His message to all nations. A tax collector even became an apostle of Christ and wrote the gospel of Matthew.

Perhaps the most radical career change of all was when Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, suddenly interrupted Saul's obsessive role as arch-persecutor of Christians on the Damascus Road. His whole life completely altered in a moment of time. In due course he would become Paul, arguably the most effective apostle of all.

Throughout the 2,000 years after Christ, a relatively small minority of

human beings termed the 'firstfruits' have been called to salvation. Some have come to the knowledge of the truth in their teenage years, perhaps most in their 20s, 30s and 40s, others in middle age and some in the evening of their lives. God the Father decides both who and when (John 6:44, 65; Acts 2:39).

As you are a reader of *The Good News* and this Supplement, God may very well be calling you. If so, what is your basic responsibility, your most important duty and main spiritual goal? The answer can only be

found in the Holy Scriptures.

## **The most basic priority of all**

A crucial passage in the initial gospel account clearly shows us the first priority. Jesus stated: '*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*' (Matthew 6:33, emphasis added throughout). All material concerns must play second fiddle to this one great priority – everlasting life in God's eternal family.

If we indulge ourselves in the empty husks of material satisfaction and carelessly downplay our spiritual needs, sooner or later our allotted time on earth runs out (Hebrews 9:27).

Jesus spoke about this principle in a parable about a rich man who said to himself: 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat drink and be merry' (Luke 12:19). But his time had suddenly run out and he would not see the next morning (verse 20).

Jesus summed up the tragic lesson for us: 'So is he who lays up treasure for

himself, *and is not rich toward God*' (verse 21). Many today allow false and empty material values to dominate their lives, neglecting the desperately needed spiritual dimension.

### The pearl of great price

Jesus depicted the priority of seeking the Kingdom of God in several of His parables. Two in particular come to mind. 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid, *and for joy over it* he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, *when he had found one pearl of great price*, went and sold all that he had and bought it' (Matthew 13:44-45).

These two parables describe the infinite worth of participation in God's eternal ruling family. No sacrifice is too great if it will help ensure one's presence in the Kingdom of God. There is no substitute for it and only one path to it. Jesus said: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.'

Seeking the Kingdom was priority number one in Paul's life. His life was given over and surrendered to Jesus

Christ. He wrote: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, *but Christ lives in me* [through the Holy Spirit]; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, *who loved me and gave Himself for me*' (Galatians 2:20).

### The apostle Paul would let nothing stand in his way on the path to everlasting life.

Again, he wrote, 'If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead' (Philippians 3:11). This dedicated man would let nothing stand in his way on the path to everlasting life.

He told the young evangelist Timothy to 'lay hold on eternal life', showing that obtaining salvation requires active effort. Eternal life is a gift (Romans 6:23), but there are conditions (Romans 2:7).

### 'What are you waiting for?'

As human beings we often deceive ourselves about how much time we really have. *Mañana* is our motto. We often say something like this to ourselves, 'After I do such and such this

week, I'll have more time for the things of God next week.' But next week arrives and something else has come up to persuade us to put off our salvation yet again.

We procrastinate about asking for water baptism. We don't realise that the future begins now. We have to live our lives in the present. We should invest in the future by acting now. Tomorrow or next week may be too late.

Ananias asked a hesitant Saul: 'What are you waiting for? Arise and be baptised and wash your sins away' (Acts 22:16).

### Getting the ball rolling

There are several things you can do now to get off square one and get things moving in your life. For starters, simply ask for our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?*, *The Road to Eternal Life* and *Transforming Your Life*. Then begin a structured, logical study of God's Word by enrolling in our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, also gratis.

And if you are really serious about water baptism, ask for personal counsel with a minister of God. We would be glad to arrange a private appointment.

*John Ross Schroeder*

## The Right Priorities

**T**he United Church of God, an International Association, is committed to living by every Word of God (Matthew 4:4). This includes the biblical instruction to assemble on the seventh-day Sabbath and God's annual festivals (Leviticus 23:1-4; Hebrews 10:24-25). Through these commanded assemblies (weekly and yearly) God, through His Word, regularly reminds us of His awesome plan and purpose for humanity.

So the Church assembles together on the weekly Sabbath as was the custom of Jesus, His apostles and the early New Testament Church (Luke 4:16, 31-32; Acts 13:14). Like its first-century predecessor, it also assembles on the annual festivals and Holy Days. (To understand further, ask for in print or down-

load our free booklets *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest* and *God's Holy Day Plan: the Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

As a huge priority, the United Church of God is committed to proclaiming the truth about God's plan and His coming Kingdom (Matthew 24:14). Members are dedicated to preserving and proclaiming 'The faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3, NRSV). They strive to follow the example of Jesus Christ and the apostles in doctrine and practice (1 John 2:6; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

True followers of Christ are part of the family of firstfruits God is building – His own children – who will receive everlasting life at Jesus' return to this earth (1 John 3:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 51-53).

**At Your Service!**

# Office Move Takes Place Successfully



**T**welve miles from our previous premises, the administration office for the United Church of God – British Isles is now settled and functioning well at our new location on the ground floor of Peterson House in the tranquil village of Chalfont St Giles.

Files, furniture and equipment were moved safely from Northwood, Middle-

sex to the new location in early February. This move has taken more than a year to come to fruition, as finding a suitable location for our variety of needs was quite a challenge.

Much diligent detective work by a husband-and-wife team led to further investigation of

Peterson House in rural Buckinghamshire, not far from John Milton's cottage, where he wrote much of his two famous books, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. We viewed the premises several times and finally entered negotiations with the owner.

Although our previous landlord was very pleasant and helpful, our

Northwood office was not on the ground floor. When a delivery of 70 boxes of booklets arrived, or 50,000 envelopes, the heavy load had to be carried up a narrow staircase.

## Then came Google!

As a result of advertising our publications on the Internet, requests for our literature grew dramatically. The one-room office upstairs was now full to capacity. We had to face the reality that we needed to move.

Our grateful thanks go especially to Carl and Marcia Torcetti of the Tonbridge, Kent congregation for their assistance in finding the office, and the use of their ambulance-sized vehicle to move the office items. We also had a number of youthful volunteers helping.

The work in the UK also has several additional volunteers who process and post items from their homes. Only through a combined effort have we been able to serve our readers effectively.



*Top, front of Peterson House; left, co-ordinator Peter Hawkins with senior writer John Ross Schroeder in his office; right, mailing area.*



*(Continued on page 6)*

## The Only Way

Continued from page 2

‘By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ (Hebrews 11:8-10).



*The ruins of Herod's Palace at Caesarea, the home of Pontius Pilate whilst he was stationed in Israel.*

Judgement to follow, God the Father will descend to earth and bring ‘the New Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God’ (Revelation 21:1-4). Then He will be with His family on earth forever.



*Street scene in the old city of Jerusalem.*

can insert your own name here).

I aim to be once again in Israel, but this time when I go to Jerusalem it will be as a part of Christ’s millennial government. Now that I am on that road, this way that leads to eternal life, the only way my focus (and yours) should be directed is upwards!

*David Payne, elder,  
United Church of God*

## The coming Kingdom of God

Abraham was looking long term to the time when God’s Kingdom would be established on earth. This is after Jesus Christ has returned and set up His kingdom with the aim of educating all of humanity about how to live a life of joy and peace as God intended. After Christ’s millennial reign and the Great White Throne

This is the history and geography of the future, and we Christians can be there. We need to understand the relevance of the fact that God has a plan for humanity and to be part of that plan we need to be doing what He tells us. Part of our responsibility is to accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour, our Redeemer, the One who paid the penalty for sin in our stead – understanding what He went through and that He did it for you (and you

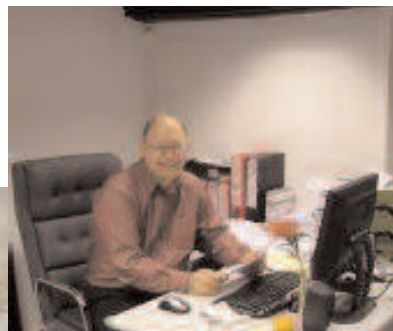
### Recommended Reading

To understand the significance of Christ’s suffering and sacrificial death for you and why it occurred at the time of the annual Passover, please request our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

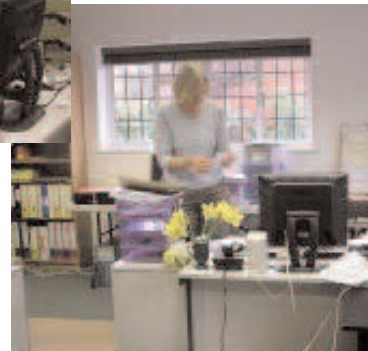
## Office Move

Continued from page 5

Jan Schroeder and Sonja Hawkins work with the mail and accounts. Their working conditions are significantly improved. John Ross Schroeder now has an office in which to continue using his editorial and writing skills. And I am settling down to my administrative



*Left to right: Sonja Hawkins, Peter Hawkins, Jan Schroeder*



duties in more space than I have been used to for some time.

We now have normal broadband Internet connections for email. Our postal address remains the same: United

Church of God,  
PO Box 705,  
Watford,  
WD19 6FZ.

*Peter Hawkins,  
Co-ordinator,  
United Church  
of God –  
British Isles*

# Questions & Answers

**Q** How can I, a habitual and guilty sinner, ever hope to stand before God?

*J S, Hertfordshire*

**A** We cannot enter God's presence by our own merits, in the tattered rags of our own self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6). Nor can we come before Him successfully as unrepentant sinners.

The apostle Paul described God's magnificence in the glorified Christ to Timothy: '[Christ] is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in inapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power' (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Paul here speaks directly of Christ, as He now is, in all of His glory, but the same description applies to God the Father as well since Jesus is in His image.

Yet many Scriptures reveal that there is a path to our Creator even for those whose former way of life has been in the diametric opposite direction. Paul wrote to Timothy: 'I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. *And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which are in Jesus Christ.* This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ

came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

'However, for this reason I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life' (1 Timothy 1:13-16, emphasis added throughout). The bottom line here is that if Paul could be saved, so can you.

Many New Testament passages express the grace of God which is chiefly shown by the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. This is what enables us to enter into the presence of God.

Of course, there are important conditions, the first of which is genuine repentance from the dead works of breaking God's law followed by water baptism (see Acts 2:38; Hebrews 6:1).

But God's abundant grace and forgiveness are what make our salvation possible. Paul told Christians at Rome that 'God demonstrates His own love toward us in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*' (Romans 5:8). Also: 'Christ died for our sins' (1 Corinthians 15:3); 'Christ gave Himself for our sins' (Galatians 1:4).

The testimony of the New Testament continues in abundance: 'In Him [Christ] *we have redemption through His blood*, according to the riches of His grace' (Ephesians 1:7). Although grace has many shades of meaning, it chiefly consists of unmerited, undeserved pardon. The apostle

Peter adds: 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, *the just for the unjust*, that He might bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18).

The apostle John was not silent on this important subject. 'In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:9-10).

Finally, hear the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16).

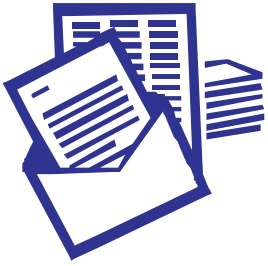
So Christ made it possible for us to enter into the Father's majestic presence, not timidly but with boldness. 'Therefore, brethren, *having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus* . . . Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [indicating baptism, see Acts 2:38]' (Hebrews 10:19, 22).

We are further told to 'Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Hebrews 4:16).

There is much more to the story of salvation, so we invite our readers to request our free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *Who Is God?*

## ***How our literature is funded***

The United Church of God – British Isles is registered as a charity in England and Wales (number 1079192). The publication of this Supplement and other literature is funded by the generosity of members of the Church, co-workers and our readers. Following Jesus Christ's instruction (Matthew 10:8), it is supplied free of charge so that His message can be made available to all. We are grateful to those who assist financially in the work done by *The Good News*. Donations may be sent to: The United Church of God, PO Box 705, WATFORD WD19 6FZ, United Kingdom. or donated online at [www.charitychoice.co.uk](http://www.charitychoice.co.uk) by selecting 'search' and entering 'United Church of God'.



# Letters From Our Readers

## **The Good News**

Thank you for *The Good News* publications that enable the people of Christ to remain true to the Word of God and enable readers to measure and weigh up life's issues. God willing, I hope that we have an opportunity to meet in the near future and also to support the work that you do.

*M & F R, Sevenoaks*

I have returned to Christianity since receiving your magazine.

*R J, Chelmsford*

When I first ordered your magazine on the Internet, I wasn't sure what to think. Was it all from just another sect or some overly traditional group? But now I have seen that it really is good material. I have really been helped and strengthened. Your magazines have also enabled me to help other Christians in discussing their faith and what they believe. As my financial situation isn't that good right now, I can't donate but know my prayers will help you just as much if not more.

*G R, Germany*

Your analysis and reportorial commentaries put the biblical prophecies in perspective and this makes the Bible come alive. *The Good News* is reassuring in a world ebbing towards ungodliness. It has sharpened my vision in turning challenges into opportunities.

*O O, Middlesbrough*

## **Bible Study Course**

I want to thank God first for the strength and desire He gave me to partake of this course. And I also want to thank you for the love of God which is in you, enabling you to pass on these undiluted words of God through the *Bible Study Course* to thousands of peo-

ple worldwide. My heart rejoices every day because I know that I have truly found the Church that Jesus built.

*K N J, Le Havre, France*

I am writing to you because I have just finished the 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* with you. I have found it very helpful in understanding the Bible and want to thank you by sending a donation cheque.

*Mrs G H, Skelmersdale, Lancs*

## **Considering Sabbath observance**

Your magazine is much appreciated, and just as I am considering Sabbath observance.

*D N, Stratford upon Avon*

Why is it that some people worship on Sundays and others on Saturday?

*D S, Hull*

- *You'll find the answer in our two free booklets The Church Jesus Built and Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.*

## **Office move to Chalfont St Giles**

I do hope the move to Chalfont St Giles went without too many problems. God bless you all.

*D H, Basingstoke*

- *It went well! For more information, read the picture article beginning on page 5.*

## **Information about the Church**

Please could you send some information about the United Church of God? I had never heard of you until I received your publication and would like to find out more such as the history of the United Church of God. It would be nice to have some background infor-

mation about the Church as I find this encouraging.

*Miss D M, Wrexham, Wales*

Please would you give me the address of your nearest congregation or send someone to see me as I have read your booklets and am very interested. I have tried the Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and even the Church of Latter Day Saints, and have not found satisfaction in any. Please could you direct me to the true Church on earth?

*D M G, Stockport*

- *We have posted the two booklets This Is the United Church of God and The Church Jesus Built. The latter publication covers the general history of the true Church. We have also posted a list of our congregations in the British Isles with contact telephone numbers.*

## **Preaching the gospel**

I love to read *The Good News* and I am sure that of all the religious organisations, the United Church of God follows the Bible. The enclosed is to help *The Good News*.

*P C A, Belgium*

I have decided to rejoice in the positive aspects of the work God has committed into your hands. The Lord Jesus Christ has moved my heart to give into your stewardship a donation toward the fulfillment of the prophecy, 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come' (Matthew 24:14). May God bless and continue to prosper you as you give yourselves as living sacrifices to His will.

*N J, Nottingham*