

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2025



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



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Peter LAKSHMI JEFFREYS

Animals of the Bible TIM HEATON

Luke's Christmas DAVID RUNCORN

New Daylight

Edited by **Gordon Giles**

September–December 2025

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Suggestions for using *New Daylight*

Find a regular time and place, if possible, where you can read and pray undisturbed. Before you begin, take time to be still and perhaps use the prayer of BRF Ministries on page 6. Then read the Bible passage slowly (try reading it aloud if you find it over-familiar), followed by the comment. You can also use *New Daylight* for group study and discussion, if you prefer.

The prayer or point for reflection can be a starting point for your own meditation and prayer. Many people like to keep a journal to record their thoughts about a Bible passage and items for prayer. In *New Daylight* we also note the Sundays and some special festivals from the church calendar, to keep in step with the Christian year.

New Daylight and the Bible

New Daylight contributors use a range of Bible versions, and you will find a list of the versions used opposite. You are welcome to use your own preferred version alongside the passage printed in the notes. This can be particularly helpful if the Bible text has been abridged.

New Daylight affirms that the whole of the Bible is God's revelation to us, and we should read, reflect on and learn from every part of both Old and New Testaments. Usually the printed comment presents a straightforward 'thought for the day', but sometimes it may also raise questions rather than simply providing answers, as we wrestle with some of the more difficult passages of scripture.

New Daylight is also available in a deluxe edition (larger format). Visit your local Christian bookshop or BRF's online shop brfonline.org.uk. To obtain an audio version for the blind or partially sighted, contact Torch Trust for the Blind, Torch House, Torch Way, Northampton Road, Market Harborough LE16 9HL; +44 (0)1858 438260; info@torchtrust.org.

Comment on *New Daylight*

To send feedback, please email enquiries@brf.org.uk, phone +44 (0)1865 319700 or write to the address shown opposite.

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Gordon Giles writes...



The Greek word, *ekklesia*, from which we get the word for 'church' in Latin, French and Welsh, comes from two Greek words – *ek* and *klesia*. *Ek* means 'out' and *klesia* means 'called'. The church are those who are called, not in but *out*. It is sometimes said, in the media if not elsewhere, that the church is going through a difficult time. Yet there have been difficult times before, none more so probably than in those early years of discipleship when many died for their faith, as many still do today.

Today's church is still made up of good, kind people, people who are sinners, we who hurt others, the damaged and the distressed, people of every gender, colour, race and denomination. We are the church. We are those who, as St Paul says, 'once were far off but have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Ephesians 2:14, NRSV).

Paul is talking about Jews and Gentiles, but we have newer divisions and hostilities to contemplate and address. For it did not take long for the church to discover internecine strife, intellectual and spiritual argument, persecutions of its own and sectarianism. And now we are still coming up with new ones which jostle for attention.

Yet the church is not the arguments, the debates and the decisions. The church is the people of God, called in and out of our buildings to walk in the way of Christ, to live according to his teaching, to study his word and to love our neighbours as ourselves. No one, especially not Jesus, said it would be easy, nor that this calling would ever change.

Michael Ramsey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote: 'The glory of Christianity is its claim that small things really matter and that the small company, the very few, the one man, the one woman, the one child are of infinite worth to God' (*The Christian Priest Today*, SPCK, 1972, p. 42). As we approach Christmas, devoting ourselves to meditating upon scripture, let us remember that we are all – each and every one of us – loved by God, who in Christ calls us to be the church on a shared journey of faith, hope and love.

The prayer of BRF Ministries

*Faithful God,
thank you for growing BRF
from small beginnings
into the worldwide family of BRF Ministries.
We rejoice as young and old
discover you through your word
and grow daily in faith and love.
Keep us humble in your service,
ambitious for your glory
and open to new opportunities.
For your name's sake,
Amen.*

'It is such a joy to be part of this amazing project'

As part of our Living Faith ministry, we're raising funds to give away copies of Bible reading notes and other resources to those who aren't able to access them any other way, working with food banks and chaplaincy services, in prisons, hospitals and care homes.

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2 Thessalonians



Paul's second letter to the church of the Thessalonians is far from his most well-read epistle, yet it is probably one of his earliest. Some of the themes he develops here will go on to be expressed in more mature form, and in greater length and depth, in his letters to Rome and Corinth. Yet those are not good grounds for ignoring this part of his writings. As elsewhere, he is responding to the specific context of his readers which, as the founder of their church, he knows well. They are a minority faith, facing persecution and ridicule for their beliefs. And yet they have grown sufficiently, since Paul planted them, to be starting to experience divisions among their members. It is likely that they are in some form of contact with other Christian communities in other cities and regions. That will also be exposing them to a wider range of ideas and understandings of what exactly it is that God has been up to in Jesus.

In this early period, Christian theology is still in a developing phase. Many of the earliest believers had expected Jesus to come back in their own lifetimes and had planned for only a short span on earth. As those hopes dwindle, they need to begin to adjust to a long haul, and to face the kinds of issues that emerge as the original urgency abates. How is God going to bring all things to fulfilment, if he is not doing it imminently? What are the ground rules for sustaining a Christian community over a prolonged time? How can a community be inspired to go on striving to live and proclaim the gospel for a period that may last well beyond their lifetimes?

Paul addresses these questions, and he addresses them not as some remote theological sage, but as the one who founded their church, who has lived among them, and who takes proper pride in the way they have stuck to their task, growing in number and in faith notwithstanding the external and internal pressures they face. It is a warm letter, a deeply personal letter. One might almost call it a love letter.

Jonah, the reluctant prophet



Jonah's story demonstrates an acute understanding of human frailties. We probably think we know the story well; many of us will remember from childhood the story of a man being thrown overboard into stormy waters and being swallowed up by a whale. But this is only one element in a short yet dense examination of the relationship between God and humanity. Jonah is an Everyman, a very ordinary character who is tasked with something difficult and does his best to avoid doing it. He ducks and twists, trying to hide from God, although this proves to be a fruitless endeavour as God demonstrates a determined commitment to the whole of creation.

Jonah, when asked who he is, describes himself as 'a Hebrew' who worships 'the God of heaven'. This identity does not, however, permeate his whole being; he likes to categorise himself as a member of a faith community while being reluctant to live in a way that is congruent with the religion he professes to follow. It is those around Jonah who are not conventionally 'religious' – the sailors who throw him into the sea and the wicked inhabitants of Nineveh – who are shown to be more theologically inclined than the prophet himself. The sailors agonise about their actions and are respectful of Jonah's God, while the citizens of Nineveh immediately grasp the implications of their behaviour. In this story, there are 'insiders' and 'outsiders', but all matter to God and all are given opportunities – as is Jonah – to change their ways.

The book of Jonah reads like a story without a conventional beginning or end. We are pitched into the action without any preamble – 'Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah...' (Jonah 1:1, NRSV) – and the abrupt final sentence leaves God's words hanging in the air. 'Should I not care?' asks God, but we do not find out how Jonah responds. This encourages us to consider not only how Jonah might react at this point, but also wonder what we would do if we were faced with a similar situation. It is Jonah's flaws and frailties that make him an entertaining companion; simultaneously he holds up a mirror in which we can see our own reflection. To journey with him is to discover ourselves.

Help!

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ‘Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.’ But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board.

There’s a lovely combination in this passage of the marvellous and the mundane. ‘Go and do this,’ says God, and instead of considering the request or even of arguing with God (‘What, me? Surely not!’), Jonah rushes to the coast and buys the equivalent of a ticket on the number 6 bus. It is not the usual reaction of a prophet entrusted with a significant undertaking.

And what God has commanded is not straightforward. Instead of going to talk to an individual, perhaps a significant figure in the community, to pass on God’s word, Jonah has been told to ‘cry out’ against a whole city. Where do you start with such a task?

It is comically naive of Jonah to believe that if God can find him to issue that order, getting on a boat with other passengers will render him anonymous. But we can probably feel sympathy for someone who finds, out of the blue, God speaking to him in such uncompromising terms. We might well, if we were in that position, want to run away.

I wonder if there has been a time in your life when your instinct was that something was being demanded of you that felt beyond your capabilities? Jonah’s mistake was to believe that the job he had been given had to be completed in his own strength. If he had been able to trust that God would be in it, his response might have been very different.

God of all knowledge and power, give me the grace to know that you will never ask more of me than I am able to achieve with your help. Be with me, enable me and build me up so that I can always respond with ‘Yes.’ Amen.

AMANDA BLOOR

Desperate times and desperate measures

Such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the sailors were afraid, and each cried to his god... Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him, 'What are you doing sound asleep? Get up; call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.'

There's a well-known saying that there are no atheists in foxholes; that is, when in positions of extreme danger and all other options have failed, even the apparently faithless can find themselves turning to God. We see that happening here. The sailors have thrown their cargo overboard to lighten the ship, but they know that they are in mortal peril. Prayer to their own gods has had no impact, but in desperation they will try anything. Shaking the exhausted Jonah awake, the captain orders him to pray to his own god; perhaps that will work. What do they have to lose?

Interestingly, we are not told if Jonah did get on his knees, as the story moves on in another direction. I wonder if his faith was still strong enough to cause him to plead for rescue, or if, ashamed at his cowardice, he was convinced that he was unworthy to even approach God in prayer?

It can be all too easy to believe that we are too insignificant or too sinful to deserve God's attention, but that is to undermine all that Jesus has done for us. We matter to God, not because we have earned attention, but because we are loved. Paul suggested, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, that we should 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17). That's a good precept to live by at all times, not only in desperate moments.

Gracious God, whose Son Jesus Christ taught us the depths of your love, help us to know that we can always come to you in prayer. Let us trust that we are welcomed and heard. Give us the strength we need to face troubles and the joy of knowing that we matter to you. Amen.

You have rescued me

They picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

It is easy to believe, when things go badly wrong, that God is angry and is punishing us. That is clearly what Jonah thought when a great storm arose, threatening everyone's lives. Knowing that he was running away from God, he could only think of one thing to do – to encourage the crew to cast him over the side of the boat. Perhaps then, God's vengeance would be wreaked solely on the fugitive prophet rather than those sailing with him.

Although the sailors themselves were initially repulsed by the idea of sending a man to certain death in the raging waters, they seemed to have no other option. As they watched, it must have seemed as if God was wreaking vengeance upon Jonah by ensuring a grisly and memorable death. Surely this was a warning to all? But as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the fish is a means of rescue, a somewhat unorthodox shelter from stormy waters. God does not want Jonah to die; rather Jonah is rescued and given time to reflect and to pray.

If Jonah, in all his weakness, matters this much to God, then we should remember that we also matter. God understands our failings and is sympathetic to our needs. Jonah's rescue reminds us that moments of apparent disaster are those times when we need God most. Like Jonah, we have the opportunity to accept God's offer of shelter from the storm and pray – wherever we find ourselves.

When storms are raging, Lord, and I feel that things are out of control, help me to remember that you love me still. Give me a place of shelter, so that in quietness I can draw close to you, for you are my help and my salvation. Amen.

Remembering the Lord

‘You brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!’ Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out onto the dry land.

A near-death experience for Jonah leads to a new commitment to obedience and faithfulness. ‘What I have vowed, I will pay,’ he promises. It is worth noting that this promise comes before Jonah’s return to the safety of dry land; this prayer is not a transaction – ‘If you do *this*, God, then I’ll do *that*.’ Rather, it is a statement of belief and dedication. Jonah surrenders himself totally to God and trusts that he will be saved.

The fact that after this the fish vomits up Jonah on to a nearby beach appears to be less significant than the act of faith and loyalty that precedes it. In that moment of prayer and self-giving, Jonah seems to have found peace. Of course he is hoping to be saved from what feels like rapidly approaching death – the struggle to live is an overriding human instinct – but he also remembers all that the Lord has done for him, all that is really important. As his life is ‘ebbing away,’ Jonah’s thoughts turn to God.

Sometimes it is in life’s most difficult moments, as we are forced to re-examine our lives and re-evaluate what matters most, that the way ahead can become a little bit clearer. In darkness, even a tiny pinprick of light can shine out. Perhaps we can think of moments in our own lives when our choice has been to struggle and rail against the inevitable or to look for Christ’s guiding light and loving presence. Like Jonah, we can hope in times of trouble to remember the Lord.

*Darkness sometimes threatens to overwhelm me, Lord,
but you are my hope and my salvation. You are light in darkness,
hope against despair. Let my prayers always come to you. Amen.*

AMANDA BLOOR

Hearing the news

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

I find that in today's multimedia society, where rapidly changing information is thrown at us from a multiplicity of sources throughout the day, it can be difficult to recognise what is important and what is trivial, inaccurate or sensationalist. As a result, I can simply switch off and stop taking notice. The risk is, of course, that I then miss something that I really need to know.

Jonah's proclamation of disaster could well have been dismissed or ignored by the citizens of Nineveh, because it told harsh truths. Instead, they took him seriously and quickly responded in the best way they could; they demonstrated their submission to God by fasting and wearing the simplest garments as signs of repentance. Even the king humbled himself by dressing in sackcloth and sitting in ashes. Nineveh became a place of mourning and guilty recognition of wrongdoing. I wonder why Jonah's message was so convincing? Perhaps at heart, the citizens knew that their 'wickedness' would, at some point, have consequences. Perhaps they were ready to hear the news that they had to change.

God speaks to us still, in a variety of ways, urging us to care for our world, to be tireless advocates for justice, to support the weaker members of society and to work for peace. These are crucial aspects of our calling as Christ's followers. We need to make time in our busy, pressured lives, to stop, to listen and to hear.

Open our ears, Lord, that we may hear your voice among the distractions of our noisy world. Give us good discernment so that we may know what you ask of us and grant us the strength and wisdom to respond well. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

What have you done?

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful.’

This scene is almost comical, but it is tragic too, as we can easily recognise the human truths that lie behind it. Jonah thinks only of himself and the unfairness of the task that God gave him, rather than remembering the many lives that were at stake in Nineveh. Furious and embarrassed, his dignity in tatters, he rails at God. ‘I knew that you’d do this! It’s so unfair! I might as well be dead!’

I find myself having a sneaking sympathy for Jonah. He was told to do something difficult and potentially dangerous; it was made clear to him, via a storm and a whale, that there was no escape; and when he preached doom to Nineveh, he was made to look foolish because of God’s mercy towards the repentant citizens there. The calamity he prophesied did not come to pass. Yet the difference that Jonah’s actions made was incalculable. The whole of that ‘great city,’ its people, its animals, even its very stones, were saved. In God’s eyes, that is success.

When we offer ourselves in service, we never know quite what God might ask of us and what the results could be. Far too often we might feel that we have failed because the things that we had expected do not come to pass, but we do not have the whole picture. God sees, God knows and God’s plans are good.

Sometimes, Lord, I find myself unable to trust, caught up in my own fears and anxious about my own future. The things I have done can feel worthless. Give me strength to carry on, secure in the knowledge of your guidance and wisdom. Amen.

AMANDA BLOOR

Having compassion

God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?’ And he said, ‘Yes, angry enough to die.’ Then the Lord said, ‘You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons?’

I can picture a furious Jonah sitting in the heat of the sun under the bush that God has grown to give him shelter. In the distance, he can glimpse Nineveh; a reminder of God’s irritating tendency towards mercy. When the next morning the bush withers away and the sun beats relentlessly on Jonah’s head, he is even more angry. He resents God offering him shade, but he is livid when it is taken away.

The book of Jonah gives the reluctant prophet frequent opportunities to discover what it is that God considers important, to trust in God’s guiding hand and to think of others instead of himself. It seems, however, that Jonah is unwilling to learn from his many experiences, but instead to repeat his mistakes. If we are being honest, we can probably recognise that same tendency in ourselves.

We might expect the book to come to a neat conclusion, where Jonah has learned to be more generous towards others and more trusting of God’s purposes. Yet the story comes to a halt with the reminder that if the death of a bush caused Jonah pain, the fate of the people of a whole city matters deeply to God. We are not told if Jonah, this time, accepted the lesson. I hope he did, because that gives me hope that I too can learn from my errors and, in God’s mercy, begin again.

All-seeing, all-knowing, all-merciful God, grant to us the same generosity of spirit towards others that you extend to us. You are our eternal creator, our defender in times of trouble. Forgive us our lack of compassion towards others and daily fill our hearts with your love. Amen.

New Daylight provides four months of daily Bible readings and comment, with a regular team of contributors drawn from a range of church backgrounds. It is ideal for anybody wanting an accessible yet stimulating aid to spending time with God each day, deepening their faith and their knowledge of scripture.

‘Thank you for all you do to make every issue so readable and enlightening, giving us the opportunity to get closer to God.’

‘Thank you to all the wonderful writers who bring scriptures to life and make them relevant for us in the here and now.’

‘I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the notes for helping to keep me going with reading the Bible and shedding light on demanding passages.’

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New Daylight is edited by Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral.

In this issue

David Walker
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Murdo Macdonald
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Amanda Bloor
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