

An aerial, high-angle photograph of the New York City skyline, showing a dense cluster of skyscrapers and buildings. The Empire State Building is prominent in the lower center. The MetLife building is visible on the right. The city extends to the horizon under a clear blue sky.

Light

...on a New World

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Cover picture: Manhattan, New York - a symbol of Capitalism
(see Editorial and article on page 11)

Note: All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James version
except where another version is indicated after the text.



Editorial

A recent report suggests that the world's major economies are at risk of falling into recession. A poll by Reuters of around 200 economists in the U.S.A, Europe, Japan and the U.K shows a floundering U.S.A. economy and a deterioration in the outlook for Europe – particularly Britain.

There are many factors contributing to this downturn which reminds us of the fragile nature of the world in which we live. The current economic situation has brought untold misery to many families who have lost their homes due to their inability to meet their debts. In addition to this, many people in the so-called affluent countries are facing the prospect of steep increases in the cost of living due to rising prices of food and many other basic commodities.

Despite these problems there is still a great imbalance between the rich free-market economies and the developing world. It's noticeable that many countries particularly in Africa with plentiful natural resources, are home to the poorest people. A huge amount of aid is given to developing countries in an endeavour to redress this situation but with very limited success. The thinking person is left wondering whether the imbalance will ever be resolved by human governments and aid organisations.

There is an answer to these problems which has been on record for some 3,500 years in the Bible. God revealed His ultimate plan for this world to His servant Moses in these words: *'truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD'* [Numbers 14.21]. The

Divine plan is to bring to an end all forms of human organisation and government and replace them with a Divinely controlled system of government that will resolve the present economic imbalance that brings untold suffering for the millions who live in poverty.

We believe that the current state of economic turmoil in the world is one of the many indicators that God will soon intervene. After Jesus ascended to heaven, we read in the book of Acts how Peter urged the Jews in Jerusalem to recognise God's Son, the one they put to death and to be converted *'so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ...whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began'* [Acts 3.19-21].

What did these *'holy prophets'* say about the *'restoration of all things'*? Under Divine inspiration they were able to predict the great changes that will affect this world when Jesus returns to establish God's kingdom on earth. Isaiah for example wrote: *'For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind'* [Isaiah 65.17]. We commend the reading of this chapter which gives us a word picture of the age to come when the injustice associated with Capitalism will come to an end.

One of the articles in this issue deals with Christianity and Capitalism (see page 11). For those who are looking for the coming Kingdom of God, the current economic gloom is just another sign that Capitalism does not provide the answer to the world's problems. The 1st Century Christians looked forward to the second coming of Jesus as the only solution and this is our hope too – what about you?

Editor

Bible Teaching about...

The Resurrection of Jesus

Few would deny that a man named Jesus Christ was born and lived some 2,000 years ago. Jesus Christ is a fact of history, and both the Bible and contemporary historical records testify to the remarkable life of this incredible man.



The empty tomb

The Bible claims to be the revelation of

God's plan which is still to be completed in the earth. The central figure in this Divine plan is Jesus Christ, who came not merely as a great teacher, but as a Saviour, announced by an angel of God prior to his birth. Joseph was told that Mary would *'bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS, (meaning saviour) for he will save his people from their sins.'* [Matthew 1.21]. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he exclaimed: *'Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'* [John 1.29]. The death and resurrection of Jesus was therefore an essential part of God's plan, without which Christianity has no meaning, no authority and no power to serve its purpose.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESURRECTION

Resurrection is the subject of much controversy even among those who call themselves Christians. Let the Bible be our guide. Jesus said to Martha, one of his followers: *‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live’* [John 11.25]. These words are vitally important for two reasons. Firstly, resurrection is the only means of escape from the finality of death and secondly, its certainty is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus himself.

Many today, as they did in the time of Jesus, treat the resurrection with contempt. This was the reaction to the Apostle Paul’s preaching from the Athenians: *‘when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter”’* [Acts 17.32]. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth: *‘we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks (non Jews) foolishness’* [1 Corinthians 1.23]. Many look upon resurrection as impossible as they did in Paul’s day. They do not believe in it because it is outside their experience.

‘THEY DID NOT BELIEVE’

Even those disciples who were close to Jesus during his ministry, despite him telling them many times he would be crucified and be resurrected on the third day, still failed to believe him. In Mark’s Gospel record we read about a small band of his followers coming to the tomb where the body of Jesus had been laid. They believed he was still dead, for they had come to anoint his body as Mark records: *‘Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint him’* [Mark 16.1]. But they were told by an angel that he was not there. The angel said: *‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him’* [Mark 16.6].

Afterwards the risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, but when she told the other disciples, we can see their reaction: *‘And when they heard*

that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After that, he appeared in another form to two of them...And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either' [Mark 16.11-13].

Thomas, one of the twelve apostles was adamant that he would not believe unless he actually saw the hands of Jesus which had been nailed to the cross, and put his hand into his side where Jesus had been pierced. Many today, like Thomas will only accept what they can see and handle. But we cannot lightly dismiss the evidence of those who, despite their initial doubts, were eye witnesses of this miracle of a dead man being raised to life again.

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created man: *'And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being' [Genesis 2.7].* God who created us in the first place from the dust of the ground is able to re-form His creation by His limitless power and through the miracle of resurrection, give eternal life to those whom he chooses.

NO RESURRECTION – NO HOPE

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians a powerful treatise on the resurrection to combat those who were denying it in the 1st Century church. His argument was that *'if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain' [1 Corinthians 15.14].* But he continues with the positive assertion that *'now has Christ risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep' [1 Corinthians 15.20].* In other words Christ was a forerunner for *'those who are Christ's at his coming' [1 Corinthians 15.23].*

The Bible tells us that death is not the gateway to life, but complete unconsciousness - the cessation of every form of physical and mental activity. One of God's faithful servants King David wrote: *'For in death there is no remembrance of you; in the grave who will give you thanks?' [Psalm 6. 5]* His son, the wise man Solomon added: *'the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing' [Ecclesiastes 9.5].*

The Apostle Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and reminded them that David's hope was centred in the resurrection of Jesus and his future work as king over the coming kingdom of God on earth (Read Peter's powerful address in Acts chapter 2 verses 22-36). One of the many joys of reading and believing the Bible is to discover how it all fits together. The doctrine of resurrection is taught clearly in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. All the promises of God necessitate, not only the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, but also the day of resurrection.

OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

The Scriptures make it so plain that the faithful of all ages still wait for these promises to be fulfilled as we read in the letter to the Hebrews: *'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them, embraced them...'* [Hebrews 11. 13].

Here are some Old Testament examples:

'As for me, I will see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness'

[words of David in Psalm 17.15].

'Your dead men shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead'

[Isaiah 26.19].

'And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt'

[Daniel 12.2].

So many, not all, will awake and note from Daniel's words – they will be separated into two classes of people. As we learn from other Bible passages, the resurrection is closely linked with a time of judgement.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION

Jesus himself confirmed the words of the Old Testament prophets in these words: *‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live’ [John 5.25].* Martha the sister of Lazarus who had died, understood this teaching when she said to Jesus: *‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’ [John 11.24].*

We have already noted that some of those disciples who were close to Jesus did not believe at first. Jesus had risen from the dead, but after he had appeared to them, what a transformation! They stood among hostile crowds and were fearless in their preaching about Jesus and the resurrection. They were beaten and put in prison and were even prepared to suffer death – so strong was their conviction. So what made those apostles, who were so sceptical at the beginning, turn into powerful preachers of the risen Christ?

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PETER

Materially, they gained nothing for their boldness, rather they were persecuted and looked on as fanatics, so they must have been fully convinced of Christ’s resurrection and that it was a crucial part of the Christian hope of salvation. The book of Acts tells us about the preaching of the apostles – how bold they were in the face of persecution. In Acts chapter 5 we read how they were brought before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Council) and commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus, but they were determined to witness to his resurrection:

‘Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to his right hand to be Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses to these things”...When

they heard this, they were furious and took counsel to kill them' [Acts 5. 29-33].

This was the environment in which Peter and others testified of the resurrection of Jesus and what it could achieve for believers. They were not put off by threats of death; such was their desire to publish what they had already seen. At that time, just as there are today, there were many who doubted and Peter in particular would have been aware of this, for he later wrote: *'For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty'* [2 Peter 1.16].

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

We now turn from the testimony of the Apostle Peter to focus on the Apostle Paul who was a man well qualified to preach about Jesus Christ, as a result of dramatic events that changed his life. Paul was born a Jew, the son of a Pharisee. The gospel records tell us that the Pharisees were so opposed to Jesus and all that he stood for, that they continually sought to destroy him.

Paul who was brought up as Saul, an orthodox Jew, was naturally of the same mind. After Jesus had ascended to heaven, he was one of the chief persecutors of the followers of Jesus. He later admitted to this: *'I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women'* [Acts 22.4]. But if we read any of the twelve letters which bear Paul's name we find a zealous supporter of Jesus and his resurrection. So why the sudden change? The only possible explanation for this change has to be the meeting recorded in Acts chapter nine, where Paul was confronted by Jesus while travelling on the road to Damascus. The fact that this incident is recorded three times in the book of Acts emphasises its importance.

In these three records it is emphasised that Jesus appeared to Paul as a light so bright that he was blinded. We read that *'as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from*

heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”...So he, trembling and astonished, said “Lord, what do you want me to do?” And the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” [Acts 9.3,4,6]. Paul had seen and talked and was instructed by the living Jesus and from that time forward he was a changed man – a man who was totally convinced that Jesus was the one promised as the Saviour of the world.

PAUL'S TEACHING ON RESURRECTION

Later, Paul recounted the number of eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection – firstly Peter, then all the apostles, after that 500 brethren at once. Lastly he was seen by Paul himself [I Corinthians 15.5-8]. How many witnesses do we need to establish the resurrection as a fact? Only by Jesus' resurrection from the dead, can we explain why so many disciples gave up their lives to preach the gospel message. And it is by this means only that we can have hope.

One of Jesus' last commands to his disciples is found in Mark's gospel record: ‘*And he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”*’ [Mark 16.15,16]. Now true baptism is a complete burial in water, perhaps better understood by the word ‘immersion.’ It is a symbolic act of faith in Christ's death and resurrection:

‘...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection’ [Romans 6.3-5].

The teaching of Paul here is of paramount importance – through

baptism by total immersion in water, the believer becomes associated with the death of Christ and his resurrection from the dead. The victory over mortality does not happen at the moment of death as so many believe, but by resurrection from the dead at the second coming of Christ. This was the comfort which Paul offered to a group of 1st Century believers at Thessalonica whose loved ones had died, believing in Jesus Christ. Paul did not offer a different hope in those circumstances, for there is only one true hope. Paul wrote to them:

‘...I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you should sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

[1 Thessalonians 4.13-16]

The consistency of the Scriptures concerning the resurrection is truly remarkable. If we believe and act on the teaching of the Scriptures what can we expect? The apostle Paul gave the believers of his day this answer in this same letter to the Thessalonians:

‘For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?’ *[1 Thessalonians 2.19]*

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IT has often been suggested that ‘Christianity’ and ‘Capitalism’ are completely opposed to one other. They are seen to be representative of giving to others on the one hand and the desire to accumulate wealth on the other, with little common ground between them. But is that a fair assessment? What does the Bible say?

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

An article entitled ‘Capitalism and Christianity’ referred to capitalism as a *‘philosophy of life that can only be described as pseudo-religion of greed. It usurps the role of religion to provide a distorted morality. ‘Give to all who beg from you,’ Christianity teaches. ‘What’s mine is mine,’ the capitalist answers. ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ is the Bible’s Golden Rule. ‘Take care of number one’ is the capitalist response. ‘Sell all your worldly possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow me,’ Jesus told one of his questioners. The capitalist just laughs.’ [Capitalism and Christianity by Brent Baccala October 2000 revised June 2001].*

According to the internet encyclopedia, Wikipedia, capitalism refers to *‘the economic system in which the means of production are owned by private persons, and operated for profit, and where investments, distribution, income, production and pricing of goods and services are predominantly determined through the operation of a free market’.*

Most of the world’s wealth, certainly in the West, is created by a market-based capitalist system. Is this really at odds with true Christian principles?

FIRST PRINCIPLES

The Bible teaches us that there is nothing wrong with wealth in itself, rather that it is greed and the misuse of wealth that is wrong, as Paul wrote to Timothy: ‘*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*’ [1 Timothy 6.10]. True Christians believe that God will provide for their needs, which in reality are very basic, and with which they must be satisfied. In return, they should work diligently to support themselves wherever possible. The work ethic is a very clear principle in the Bible, and it is an acknowledgment of the fact that after Adam and Eve had disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they were told that they would have to work in order to survive [Genesis 3.19, 23].

However, accumulating wealth, along with power and influence for its own sake is a human weakness and should be avoided by Christians because it results in temptation and corruption. The Bible also helps us take the right line if wealth comes our way. It should be used responsibly. Christians also know that true wealth is not just measured in material possessions. The Psalmist put it very simply:

‘I have been young, and *now* am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread’

[Psalm 37.25].

Solomon adds these words in the book of Proverbs:

‘A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished’ [Proverbs 28. 20].

In his Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus challenged many traditionally held views, he expanded on this principle:

‘Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for

they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ [Matthew 6.25-33].

WEALTH CREATION

Whatever the merits of Capitalism as the basis of the economy, the Bible is blunt in its assessment of people who spend their time and energy making money for themselves. This is because our present life is short and will end in our death, and the Bible teaches us that this is the complete end of our being. For such people, their wealth is the only thing they have to live for. Solomon, who had great riches wrote: *‘Do not overwork to be rich...Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle towards heaven’* [Proverbs 23.4,5].

Jesus made the same point in the parable of the rich merchant. The merchant said:

‘...I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be

merry.” But God said to him, ‘you fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ “So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”

[Luke 12.18-21].

The Apostle Paul approached it from a different angle. He wrote to Timothy:

‘But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows’ [I Timothy 6.6-10].

Our lives should be used to prepare for a new life in God’s kingdom. So far as God is concerned, this present time is one of opportunity and does not depend for its success on creating material wealth. Indeed, some of the finest examples of men and women who pleased God are those with the fewest possessions. The prime example of this is Jesus himself. God, as the Creator, can give a man unlimited wealth, and occasionally does so as in the case of Solomon, if it fulfils His will.

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH OUR WEALTH?

The Bible tells us about a number of people who were wealthy. Some of them were good examples, but a number were not. For some it was a question of priorities, or getting the motives right. On one occasion Jesus found himself talking to a devout Jew, described as ‘*a certain ruler*’. He asked Jesus:

“Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but one, *that is*, God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honour your father and your mother.’” And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” So when Jesus heard these things, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich’ [Luke 18.18-25].

Jesus was not laying down a universal rule that everyone who is wealthy has to give everything away, but he had pin-pointed a weakness in the character of this particular man. The man thought he was virtually perfect, but he had not grasped the fact that there will still much more he could do, including changing his attitude to his wealth which was clearly very important to him.

There are some outstanding examples of those who managed to balance the possession of great material wealth – which they had not sought other than by acting shrewdly – with an understanding of true values. Such a man was Abraham, who we are told ‘*was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold*’ [Genesis 13.2]. Although Abraham was rich, he was more interested in the inheritance God had promised him far in the future. In the New Testament, we have the explanation: ‘*for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*’ [Hebrews 11.10].

Another example was Job. God took away his wealth but Job never questioned God’s right to do this. In a simple statement of trust he said: ‘*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD*’ [Job 1 v 21].

EQUALITY

In the 1st Century Christian churches, the community was made up of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. There were rich and poor people, slaves and free. Some were traders or professional people, others were just ordinary folk earning their living on a day to day basis just like many people do today. There were also the cultural and racial differences that we have today. In those times people were loosely categorised as Jews or Gentiles. These differences brought into focus the distinction between rich and poor, with the belief among some that within the Christian community there should be equality.

Equality is certainly a feature of Christian belief. It is based on the fact that *‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’* [Romans 3.23]. The apostles addressed the problem of unequal distribution of wealth a number of times, whilst acknowledging that the solution was not just a re-distribution of wealth with the rich simply giving away everything they had, but by having due regard for those who genuinely did not have enough. This was something that had to be done discreetly and thoughtfully. The Christians who were wealthy, whether in absolute or relative terms, were part of the means by which God would keep his promise that none of his children would be left destitute – as Jesus had said in his Sermon on the Mount.

The Apostles offered advice to their readers in their letters to the early churches. Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth:

‘...He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: “He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness remains for ever”*’ [2 Corinthians 9.6-9].

Again Paul wrote to Timothy:

‘Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy, and to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.’

[I Timothy 6.17-19]

Peter wrote:

‘As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God’

[I Peter 4 10].

TRUE WEALTH - THE GIFT OF GOD

For the Christian, true wealth consists in the wonderful knowledge of God’s plan with His creation and the fact that we can share in His coming Kingdom as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is not a concession on God’s part, it is all part of His plan and evidence of His love. *‘he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life’ [John 3.16].* It is His wish that everyone should have a part in it, because he is *‘not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance’.**[2 Peter 3 v 9].*

Paul wrote to the Romans: *‘But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ [Romans 6.22,23].*

Material wealth loses its attraction completely for people whose ambition is to leave the present life behind, and look forward to God’s Kingdom. Whether that wealth was accumulated through a capitalist

system or not, is beside the point. Abraham and Job did not live under a capitalist system, but they had discovered the right approach to wealth. There are other examples listed in Hebrews chapter 11.

Capitalism then becomes a non-issue for the Christian. Capitalism may be the way in which much of the world manages its economy. Whatever its rights or wrongs, Capitalism and any other form of human organisation will come to an end when God's Kingdom is set up. Those who have enjoyed the benefits of wealth in this life will not be able to take any of it with them. The wealthy should have used it wisely for the benefit of those less fortunate. In this way, they will have accumulated capital of a far more enduring form, with the prospect of everlasting life, freed from all the concerns and temptations of the present.

Fortunately, wealthy or not, you can look forward to that time – if you take the trouble to be guided by what God has revealed in His Word.

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God's Witnesses

THE first book of the Bible describes how our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God's instructions. God cursed them and their descendants with mortality in these words addressed to Adam:

'In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return' [*Genesis 3.19*].

The human race is therefore destined to an eternal grave, except through the mercy of God and His plan of salvation. Despite appearances to the contrary, God has always left Himself witnesses in the earth – men and women who have tried to obey His word in every generation. He has provided unseen influences for good in this world through the work of his angels, to assist would-be Godly individuals in their endeavours to serve Him.

GOD'S WITNESSES BEFORE THE GREAT FLOOD

As an example of this, we can think about the descendants of Adam through to the great flood in the time of Noah. The flood occurred 1,656 years after the Creation and we think of Noah, alone with his wife, his sons and his daughters-in-law, remonstrating with his contemporaries and warning them of imminent disaster. But Noah was not alone – for we are told that '*he found grace in the eyes of the LORD*' [*Genesis 6.8*]. Also his father Lamech was contemporary with him to within five years of the flood and his grandfather Methuselah died in the year of the flood. The Scriptures tell us that Noah was a '*preacher of righteousness*' [*2 Peter 2.5*]. In so doing he must have learnt from the example of those who had gone before him.

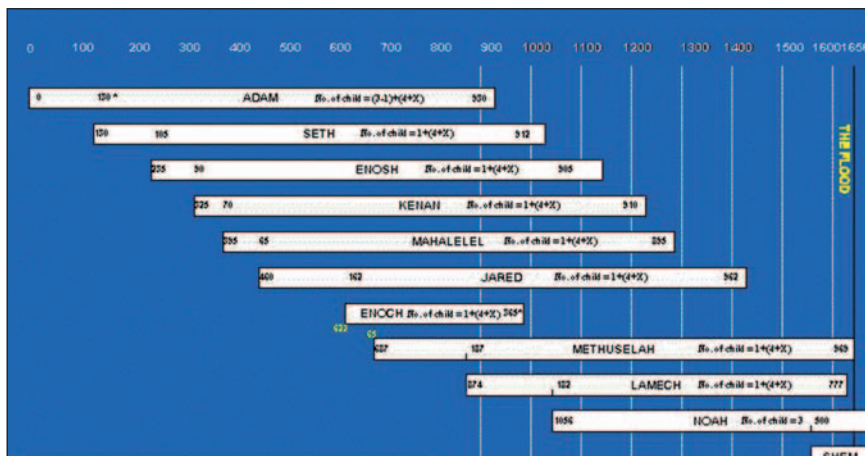


Chart of the generations from Adam to Noah

We should also note that Adam had been contemporary with Methuselah for as long as 243 years, and with Lamech for 56 years. Adams' personal influence on his descendants spanned nine generations. We can imagine the burden he carried as the introducer of death to the human race. How careful and sincere he must have been to teach his descendants the right way. Having witnessed the goodness of God in the Creation, the teaching of the angels to help him choose the right path and the severity with which He deals with those who disobey him, no doubt he was passionate about guiding his family in God's way. And so by Divine providence an influence for good was maintained among the general wickedness of mankind, as a witness to their evil way of life and a warning of the need for change.

GOD'S WITNESSES AFTER THE FLOOD

After the flood, Noah's family began to re-populate the earth as instructed by God [Genesis 8.17] and there followed eight generations all of which were contemporary with Noah.

Again we can imagine the tremendous impression the flood and his preservation from it would have had on Noah. He would recall the foundations of the deep being 'broken up' and the frantic efforts of the

dying world to get into the ark. It must have been terrifying. But he trusted in God who finally brought him back safely to dry land together with his family. How deeply he would feel the need to teach his descendants the way of the Lord and to instruct them in righteousness.

Noah's preaching activities would have been energetically pursued right up until the flood and we can be sure they continued for a further 350 years after the flood until his death. So it was that eight generations were contemporary with Noah who no doubt came under his influence. The ninth generation through the line of Shem (one of Noah's three sons) brings us to Abraham, who himself was contemporary with Noah for 58 years, being born 292 years after the flood.

Again we see the influence for righteousness in the earth. Abraham demonstrated great faith and he was called '*the friend of God*' [James 2. 23]. The relationship between God and Abraham was such that God made a promise to him, repeated on several occasions, which would eventually affect every nation on earth. God also promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation [Genesis 12. 1–3].

THE WITNESS OF ABRAHAM AND HIS DESCENDANTS

God worked in Abraham's life because of his faith and obedience in leaving his family home and travelling to an unknown land [Genesis 12. 1]. He had a son, Isaac, who also received the promise and a grandson Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. He too received the promise. Jacob's 12 sons found themselves in Egypt during a time of famine and their descendants remained in the land of Egypt, firstly as sojourners but latterly as slaves enduring hard labour [Exodus 1.8–14]. We can see from the books of Genesis and Exodus how God developed the nation in the cradle of Egypt, a distinct and separate people, the descendants of Abraham.

As slaves in Egypt, they were unable to intermarry or mix with other races. They were isolated and grew in numbers until the Exodus,

when it is calculated they numbered perhaps two million people. They had been some 430 years in God's hands who had been slowly bringing Abraham's descendants to nationhood, in line with His promise [*Exodus 12.40, 41*]. Now it was time for the children of Israel to be released from slavery into the world outside and for this new nation to inherit the land promised to Abraham, a land he had never inherited – he even had to purchase a small piece of land for family burials!

So after a demonstration of God's power in the 10 plagues, He brought them out of Egypt, destroying the Egyptian army in the process. We will not consider the details of these miraculous events. This exciting record can be found in the Bible and we direct your attention to the details found in Exodus chapters one to fourteen.

THE JEWS - GOD'S WITNESSES

Our purpose is to show that God has never been without witness in the earth and that the Jews were Divinely chosen to demonstrate the way that is right in God's eyes. From the righteous family of Abraham, He created a 'holy' or separate nation [*Exodus 19.5,6*]. God brought this nation through the wilderness of Sinai and into the land promised to them through Abraham. He gave them a law more equitable than any of man's laws requiring that the people love God first [*Deuteronomy 6.4,5*] and love their neighbour as themselves [*Leviticus 19.18*].

God also gave instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle – a place of worship and a 'house' in which God would dwell among His people. He provided guidance for them on their journeys. He gave them an angel who acted in God's stead for the benefit and spiritual guidance of the nation [*Exodus 23.20-23*].

In the prophecy of Isaiah, God refers to Israel as His witnesses [*See Isaiah 43.10, 12; 44, 8*]. The Scriptures repeatedly tell us that God chose this nation because of his promise to Abraham and that as a result, He would protect them and guide them, so long as they lived according to His Laws. He said to them through Moses:

‘...you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth’ [Deuteronomy 7.6].

This passage in the book of Deuteronomy continues with a declaration of God’s love for His chosen people but also a warning of the consequences if they failed to uphold His righteous laws. (See Deuteronomy 7.7-11). But they failed to obey God. They turned their backs on Him and served idols instead, even filling God’s house with evil representations of their idolatry. God finally overturned the Kingdom and the Jews were exiled – the northern kingdom to Assyria and later the southern kingdom to Babylonia (see 2 Kings chapters 17 and 25).

Some of the Jews eventually returned to their land, firstly under the domination of the Persians, then under the Greeks and finally the Romans. In AD70 they tried to throw off the Roman yoke and were destroyed as a nation and were scattered throughout the Roman world. For almost 1,900 years they remained, removed from their land and living in communities in most countries of the world. This was in direct fulfilment of God’s Word, that if they failed to obey his laws they would suffer the consequences (see Deuteronomy chapter 28).

THE WITNESS OF JESUS

During the Roman occupation of Palestine in the first century, God again brought the influence of a righteous man to witness to the world. Jesus Christ, the son of God witnessed to the truth of God’s Word and taught those who would listen the real substance of God’s promises. He was eventually put to death by his wicked contemporaries, who displayed hatred of his powers and authority and feared the loss of their own power and influence.

Previously many of the people had listened to his message but even with no evidence to convict him he was put to death by the Romans at

the request of the religious leaders. They persuaded the feeble Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, to have him crucified in the greatest miscarriage of justice ever perpetrated. The Apostle Peter confirmed this in one of his speeches to the crowds assembled in Jerusalem at Pentecost, not long after Jesus had been raised from the dead and ascended to heaven:

‘Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it.’

[Acts 2.22–24]

The Romans dealt the final blow to the Jewish nation in AD 70, following a horrendous three year siege. This resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of many Jews. Many more were sold as slaves and dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. The prophetic words in Deuteronomy and the prophets of Israel had come true. Yet the Scriptures declare that despite their waywardness, they are still loved by God because of his promise to Abraham and the words of the prophets of Israel, who foretold a brighter future for God’s chosen nation.

THE RE-BIRTH OF THE NATION

Around the end of the 19th century a political organisation came into being called ‘The Zionist Movement’. Its main object was to find a national home for the Jews, who had been dispersed for nearly 2,000 years. This movement was initially treated with great scepticism and mockery but it slowly gained ground. The 1st World War put a stop to all plans for a national home for the Jews, but God was working among the nations and miraculously the British removed the Ottoman Turks

from Palestine, who had held sway there for centuries. In 1917 the Balfour declaration paved the way for the return of the Jews to Palestine, their ancient homeland.

After a short gap of 21 years the 2nd World War began in which the Jews were subjected to dreadful oppression and many were killed. The war continued for six long years during which the 'Final Solution' to the Jewish problem in Europe was implemented by the Nazis. However, despite their systematic plans to do so through the extermination camps set up at Auschwitz and elsewhere, many survived. What this did achieve was the desperate resolve of the Jews in Europe to return to Palestine.

At the end of the 2nd World War they started to return to their ancient homeland in Palestine in ever increasing numbers. The resources then available were stretched to the limit but still the flood of immigrants poured in. Communities were set up throughout the land to begin the work of farming this desolate place. The Kibbutz is now a well known feature of those early settlements. The words of the prophets were being fulfilled. Ezekiel for example, who prophesied during the time of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews wrote under Divine inspiration: *'I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land' [Ezekiel 36.24]*. In the following chapter, Ezekiel was given a remarkable vision of a 'valley full of bones' which came to life, showing in a graphic way how the then dispersed nation of Israel would finally be restored to the land promised to their ancestor Abraham. (See Ezekiel chapter 37).

ISRAEL – GOD'S WITNESSES TODAY

In 1948 the State of Israel was created. Since then Israel has engaged in three highly successful wars against the enemies that surround her. She has expanded her borders and taken full control of Jerusalem in the face of much opposition.

Yet still she does not honour the God who has chosen her. There are orthodox Jews and Christian Jews but in the main it is a secular society that does not believe the promises made to Abraham. They have partially returned to the land of their ancestors, but they negotiate and defend their territory in unbelief and without recognising the hand of God, although He is working in the background to bring about the fulfilment of His plan for Israel and the world.



Jews praying at The Western Wall in Jerusalem

THE WITNESS OF THE GENTILES

Although the Jews still refuse to worship the God who created them in the way He wishes, there are witnesses upholding the truth of God's Word and promoting godliness. These are Gentiles (non-Jews) that God has called out of the nations. The Apostles Paul and Barnabas addressed the Jews of their day in these words:

‘It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ [Acts 13.46].

The witness of the Jews continues in fulfilment of all that God has foretold about them. But since the time that Paul and Barnabas turned in their preaching *'to the Gentiles,'* others have been called to witness to the truth of God's Word and to serve him. They are described by the Apostle Paul as spiritual Jews *'whose praise is not from men, but from God'* [Romans 2.28,29]. They are witnesses who wait in patience for the return of *'the King of the Jews'* to bring great blessings to them and to the whole world.

Today Israel is surrounded by strong and determined enemies. The Scriptures foretold Israel's future - she is to be overthrown yet again. Her supporters will be swept aside in a great invasion of the Middle East by a confederacy of nations headed up by one called *'Gog'*. This great assembly of nations opposed to Israel and desirous of reaping some reward from her occupation will attempt to destroy her. But the armies of *'Gog'* will in their turn be destroyed by the power of God vested in Jesus (see Ezekiel chapter 38).

THE RETURN OF THE KING

When Jesus stood before Pilate on trial for his life, Pilate asked him *'Are you a king then?'* Jesus replied *'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice'* [John 18.37].

Jesus the King of the Jews will return, not in weakness as in his first appearance, but as the powerful saviour of God's people. He will save his people in their hour of need and they will at last accept him as their king in fulfilment of the prophetic words of Scripture [Zechariah 12. 10]. Jesus, as King of the Jews will re-establish the Kingdom of God on earth with Jerusalem as its capital city and demand the allegiance of all nations [Psalm 2]. Naturally enough, this demand will meet with initial resistance for the rulers of the earth will not give their authority up lightly. But they will be brought to their knees by the power invested in the Son of God and all nations will submit to him [Isaiah 2.1-4].

THE FUTURE FOR GOD'S WITNESSES

In the world-wide Kingdom that will be established, the Jews, God's chosen nation, will once again become the head of nations and not the tail [*Deuteronomy 28. 13*]. In contrast to today, they will be understood and admired by the populations of the earth who will seek them out and declare that they will go with them for they have heard that God is with them [*Zechariah 8. 20-23*].

In this new era the righteousness of God will become the order of the day and will result in peace throughout the world [*Isaiah 32.1, 16-18*]. This will be a time when God's witnesses, natural and spiritual Jews, will proclaim the righteousness of God as never before. The nations will seek after Divine ways. Then they will realise the benefits of godliness and righteousness.

Indications are that these events are about to overtake an unsuspecting world. You have now heard what God has in store. You may not quite believe these things yet – but watch Israel and rest assured that they will happen as God has promised. May you have the wisdom to ponder these things and prepare now for these world-shaking events!

John Morse
West Midlands, UK

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