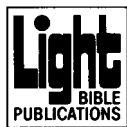


A photograph of a forest floor covered in a dense carpet of small blue flowers, likely bluebells. Several dark, vertical tree trunks are visible in the background, creating a sense of depth. The lighting is soft and dappled, filtering through the foliage.

Light

...on a New World

*Published for the
Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia (Dawn Fellowship) by*



*Light Bible Publications,
PO Box 362
DARTFORD,
DA1 9GT, England*

Editor: Colin Dryland

Assistant Editor: Ken Dennis

Correspondence Secretary: John Carpenter

Publications Secretary: Nigel Griffiths

VOLUME TWENTY ONE NUMBER NINE

CONTENTS

Editorial	Page 1
Parables of Jesus	Page 3
Important Bible Words	Page 13
Signs of the Times	Page 19
The Bible Stands the Test of Time	Page 27

Cover picture: Bluebell Woods in England

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



Editorial

BY the time you read this article, the UK will have had a General Election to decide which political party is to be in power for the next five years. At the time of writing (four days before polling day), the result is far from decided and there is talk of there being a ‘hung parliament’. This means that no political party will have obtained sufficient votes to have a majority in parliament to enable it to govern on its own. The alternative is the unhappy prospect of a coalition made up of two or more parties who join together to form a new government.

The various political parties are engaged in a last minute frenzy of activity to capture as many votes as possible. These activities are largely about discrediting the policies of their political opponents and by making promises of changes for the better if they are elected. The present adverse economic situation in Britain and many other countries is high on the agenda to be tackled by the next government but there are many other problems which taken together are impossible for any human government to resolve.

The well intentioned efforts of seemingly responsible men and women to secure a stable and successful government are really doomed to failure as history shows. God’s Word, the Bible confirms this by reminding us of the folly of trusting in human leaders rather than trusting God (See Psalm 146.3; Jeremiah 10.23).

But there is an answer to the problems that beset human governments and that answer is found in the Bible. God has promised a new world government that will rule with divine authority and accomplish all that it sets out to achieve – without fail! This government will be headed up by a man chosen by God. His identity

is revealed by the Apostle Paul: *‘...he (God) has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead’ [Acts 17.31 NIV].*

This is no isolated reference but just one of many that demonstrate the reality of God’s plan for the world. In contrast to the various political parties in the UK who have set out their stated intention in what is called a manifesto, God has set out His manifesto for change that will affect the whole world. If we profess to be Christians we must accept this fundamental teaching of the Bible which constitutes the Gospel (good news) of the coming kingdom of God to be set up when Jesus returns from heaven as the appointed world ruler.

Jesus promised his followers places of authority under him in the new world government. He said to the twelve: *‘when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ [Matthew 19.28].* In the last book of the Bible, Jesus promised that *‘he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations’ [Revelation 2.26].*

True Christians look forward to this change of government with great anticipation – but when will it happen? The disciples asked Jesus that very question: *‘Teacher but when will these things be...?’ [Luke 21.7].* He did not give them an answer for only God knows the timing of this world-shaking event [Matthew 24.36]. However, Jesus did give his followers a number of indications when to expect his return. These *‘signs’* of his second coming, point to the fact that we are living in what the Bible calls *‘the last days’* or *‘the time of the end’* (See article on page 19).

Will you be ready for the new world government?

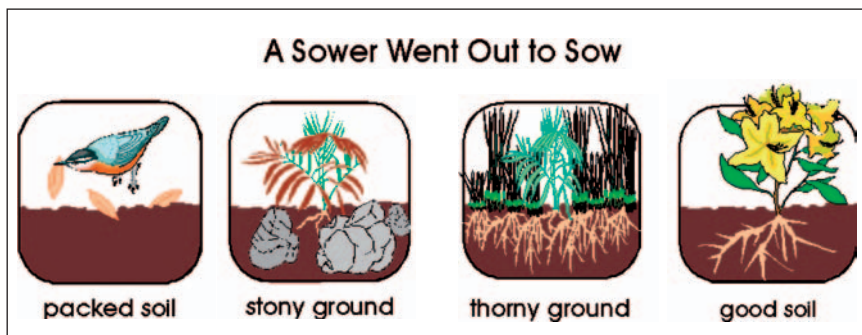
Editor

Parables of Jesus

The Sower

IN New Testament times the largest habitable area of the Holy Land was under some form of cultivation, making farming the principal occupation. When Jesus told the parable of the sower he had around him a receptive audience – receptive in the sense that many of his listeners, having themselves experience of this occupation, would have understood the different types of ground on which the seed fell. Even by observation alone in their every day lives, many of the people would readily have pictured the scene, giving added force to Jesus' teaching, for it has been said that *'the first great quality of a parable is that it makes truth into a picture which all men can see and understand.'*

From the Gospel accounts it is clear that at this point in his ministry Jesus had declined to preach in the synagogue. Though he would find a welcome from the common people, the established religious leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, were now in open opposition to him. They sifted his words in an endeavour to bring an accusation and a charge against him. Jesus withdrew from this hostility and instead engaged himself with the people along the open road, in the village streets and in



their own homes (see Mark 3.7-9; Luke 8.1). The Gospel writers mention the towns and villages clustered around the Sea of Galilee which Jesus visited in his ministry. One such place was Capernaum and was of sufficient size to be called 'a city'.

JESUS AT CAPERNAUM

It was while Jesus was at Capernaum, Matthew records that '*Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath. And his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat, [Matthew 12.1].*' Jesus may have been prompted by that recent occasion to think of '*the sower*' as a topic for his parable! If not, it surely points to the season of the year, and to the fact that at that time grain was ripe, growing in fields close to the Sea of Galilee. It seems unlikely as some commentators suggest that the attention of the crowd was directed to a sower at work, while Jesus spoke the parable. Sowing time would already have preceded the harvest by some months.

The method of growing wheat in Bible times greatly differed from the practice we are accustomed to now. In England, in wheat growing areas, our readers will be familiar with the pleasant sight of the ripened harvest in summer time. Apart from the loss of seed to animals and birds in some places, and given good weather conditions, farmers generally anticipate a full yield from the seed sown. The fields are enclosed and they have been cleared of weeds. They have good depth of soil and farm animals and people are prevented from walking over them. All this helps to favour steady and successful growth of the seed.

However, as the parable informs us, how different were the conditions for the farmer in the days of Jesus. There was much variation in the type and fertility of the soil and the terrain was far from ideal.

SOWING THE SEED

Three of the gospel writers record this parable and the following

quotation is from Mark's account:

'...a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred' [*Mark 4.3-8*].

A writer who wrote of his travels in the Holy Land over 100 years ago, described such a tract of land in these words:

'The sower in the days of our Saviour lived in a hamlet, or village....he did not sow near his own house, or in a garden fenced or walled....He must go forth into the open country...where there are no fences; where the path passes through the cultivated land; where thorns grow in clumps all around; where the rocks peep out in places through the scanty soil, and where also, hard by, are patches extremely fertile...'

The writer concluded:

'Nothing could be more to the point than this illustration. We doubtless are looking upon the very facts which suggested to Him who taught in parables the instructive lesson of the sower.' [*W.M. Thomson, The Land & The Book page 82*]



We note that Jesus did not explain the meaning of the parable to his hearers there and then. Instead he cautioned them not to forget his teaching, for he said: *'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'* [Mark 4.9]. The crowd had heard a compelling story of fact in the natural order of things. All were invited to discover the underlying truth for themselves as to the spiritual application in their own lives. It is the same for us today. We are not of that generation privileged to hear the spoken parable from the lips of Jesus. But its power to save and enlighten us is in the

written and inspired Word of God. For us it is a question of *'He who has eyes to see, let him see'!* If we set aside time to read a portion of the Bible daily in a structured way, it is surprising how soon we will get to know the true gospel message (See page 12 for details of a free Bible reading planner).

THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

After the multitude withdrew, Jesus was left alone with the disciples. They had ears to hear but the interpretation of the parable eluded them. Their puzzled reaction gave rise to the question described by Luke as, *'What does this parable mean?'* and by Matthew as, *'Why do you speak to them in parables?'* To deal with the latter question first, Jesus gave what would seem an unhelpful and unfriendly answer: *'...I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled ...'* [Matthew 13.13, 14].

Jesus their Messiah was the subject of many Old Testament prophecies. Indeed, the prophets, in their writings *'foretold the coming of the Just One'* [Acts 7.52] one of Jesus' many titles. Isaiah's prophecy heads the prophetic books which belong to the period of Israel's decline as a nation, the exile and eventual return to their homeland. Some of the prophets braved death to try and halt the nation's headlong rush to destruction, to warn the people of judgement and to call them back to God in repentance. Israel had ignored a much earlier prophetic warning in their Psalms: *'that the generation to come...may set their hope in God...and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation'* [Psalm 78.6-8]. Isaiah knew from the outset that his words of warning would fall on deaf ears. Hence his scathing rebuke of their attitude which led to the nation falling to Babylon in 587 BC.

Isaiah's rebuke of his people was fittingly applied by Jesus to his own situation and to his own generation. John the Baptist in introducing Jesus to the nation said; *'He came to his own, and his own (people) did not receive him'* [John 1.11]. Were the people genuinely of a mind to understand the parable of the sower? Were their ears attuned to what his interpretation might be? Judging by Jesus' words to the many who witnessed his miracles it would seem not, for he said: *'you seek me, not because you saw the signs (miracles), but because you ate of the loaves and were filled...'* [John 6.26].

What of the religious leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees? Were they more discerning as hearers of Jesus' parables than the ordinary people? As Jesus had come into conflict with them when teaching in the synagogue, it is extremely doubtful. All doubt is removed when we read of Jesus' answer to their criticism of his disciples, a criticism which touched upon a matter of tradition, rather than of commandment:

'Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:
'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and
honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.'

[Matthew 15.7,8]

For any other man to have judged his hearers incapable of understanding his parable, for whatever reason, would have been presumptuous. But not so with Jesus for: *'he knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for he knew what was in man'* [John 2.24, 25].

Jesus did not expect mass conversion of the nation to his preaching involving belief in his future kingship. Those reluctant to open their hearts and minds to his teaching are described as outside (See 1 Thessalonians 4.12). Of their own volition they had made the choice of letting the parable remain an enigma to them. The parable therefore, like other parables of Jesus, drew the line of demarcation between those wilfully blind, unwilling to see anything they did not want to see and others like his disciples, eager to know the meaning.

Having now understood the appropriateness of the use Jesus made of Isaiah's prophetic passage, we can now appreciate that Jesus' attitude was neither unhelpful nor unfriendly. In dealing too with the enquiry of the disciples, *'What does this parable mean?'* as recorded by Luke, we can reflect upon Jesus' own interpretation. He begins; *'The sower sows the word'* [Mark 4.14]. As to what is being sown, Luke defines *'the seed'*, in its spiritual application as *'the word of God'*. [Luke 8.11]. This expression is not confined to the Gospel writers, for the Apostle Peter refers to his Jewish converts as having been *'born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides forever'* [1 Peter 1.23].

POOR GROUND AND GOOD GROUND

The quality of the seed is the same whatever ground it falls on. Its productiveness however, depends upon the fertility and depth of soil into which it is sown. The parable teaches us that the living seed of the Word of God is being sown in the soil of human hearts. In the human heart there is much variableness as Jesus taught: *'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out*

of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil' [Luke 6.45].

The four categories of ground upon which the seed fell (see illustration on page 3) were:

- 1) **The Wayside or the path:** The constant tramp of feet and flocks of hungry birds made germination hardly possible. This soil represents those who have no real understanding or appreciation of the gospel. They think it is irrelevant to life and that they can get on well enough without it. Their hearts have been hardened by the 'deceitfulness of sin.' The heart is used in Scripture for the human mind or intellect (See for example. Romans 10.9; Matthew 15.19; Psalm 119.11).
- 2) **Stony ground:** This was not ground full of stones; it was a thin layer of earth over an outcrop of limestone rock. Seed which fell there had a chance of germinating. However the soil had no depth and could not retain moisture and the heat of the sun soon withered the sprouting seed and it died. The call of the gospel does find an appeal with many people but they never let it get deeper than the surface of their lives.

Initially, they give joyful response to the message of the gospel. Some will see the need for conversion and will endure for a while. But when commitment and trial and opposition in the name of Christ comes, it becomes too much for them to bear. They then opt out, cease their discipleship and return to the world. Time had proved that they had never been deeply '*rooted and built up in him (Jesus) and established in the faith*' [Colossians 2.7]. For them there is a bleak future ahead when we consider Jesus' words: '*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*' [Luke 9.62].

- 3) **Thorns:** The seed which fell in this soil fell where weeds were already in possession. In Bible times, the lazy farmer would cut

off the top of the fibrous rooted weeds and burn them, so that the field might look clean. The roots nevertheless remained and in due time the weeds revived in all their strength. A long established root system enabled the weeds to choke the life out of the seed. The roots of dormant desires in the human heart are always ready to re-assert themselves for *'in the flesh dwells no good thing'* [Romans 7.18]. There may be an appearance of continuing growth but not to maturity.

Ultimately, there is no fruit to reward and gladden the sower. Jesus defines *'the thorns'* as *'the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things.'* The mind becomes so much occupied with other interests that the spiritual life is choked.

- 4) **Good ground:** The good ground is wholly favourable to the seed. We mentioned earlier that *'the seed'* is the *'Word of God.'* As it fell into the good ground it was heard, understood and received. The Gospel writers record Jesus' interpretation in this wonderfully complementary way:

'..he who hears the word and understands it, who...bears fruit..' [Matthew 13.23].

'..those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit...' [Mark 4.20].

'those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience' [Luke 8.15].

The good hearer does three things. Firstly, he listens attentively and enquiringly (See Proverbs 1.5-7). Secondly, he keeps what he hears in his mind and heart, and thinks it over until he understands the teaching of Scripture (See Luke 24.45). Thirdly, he doesn't stop there but acts upon it, translating what he has heard into action (See Acts 8.36).

In reviewing this parable we see a progression. The seed by the wayside is snatched away immediately. That falling on stony ground springs up quickly but equally, shrivels up quickly. The seed among thorns hangs on longer, surviving in a feeble, useless fashion, but bears no fruit. But the seed sown in good soil grows steadily. Undeterred by the elements, be they at times unfavourable, ample fruit is produced with patience. The fruit spoken of in this parable brings to the bearer, at the appointed time, everlasting life (see Romans 6.22).

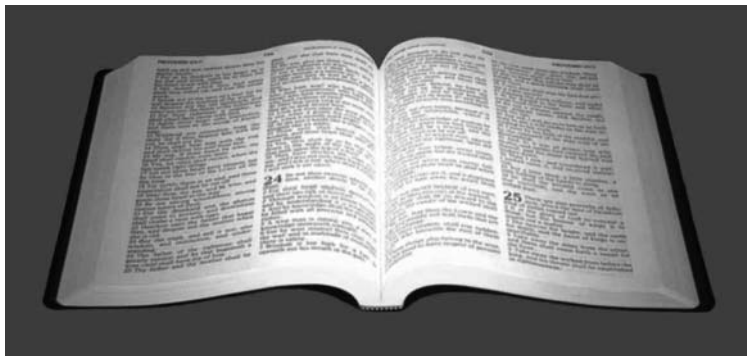
The parable of the sower is for all time. It is the Word of God, *'which lives and abides forever'* [1 Peter 1.23]. It is a parable of the coming kingdom of God on earth which Jesus prayed for: *'Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'* [Matthew 6.10].

When Jesus returns to establish God's kingdom, he will say to those who have heard, understood, and acted upon the good seed of the Word, *'...It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'* [Luke 12.32]. To those who have shut their ears to the call of the gospel, he will say, *'I never knew you; depart from me...'* [Matthew 7.23].

In the meantime, dear reader, are you preparing for this coming kingdom?

Gwilym Jones
Surrey, England

FREE BIBLE READING TABLES



Read the Bible every day with the help of our free Bible reading tables. Over the course of a year you will read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice. Send for your copy now to:

The Correspondence Secretary
Light Bible Publications
PO Box 362
Dartford
DA1 9GT
England

If you live in the UK you can write to:

Light Bible Publications
FREEPOST
Sidcup
Kent
DA14 4BR :

Alternatively you can Email us at: mail@lightmagazine.org

Important Bible Words

Atonement

THE word ‘*atonement*’ may not be familiar to some of our readers nevertheless it is an important Bible. We must look to the early history of the nation of Israel to discern its meaning and significance. Nearly 3,500 years ago God commanded that a holy day should be observed by the Israelites called the Day of Atonement. A law was given which defined its purpose and the rituals that were to be enacted on that day. This law has been preserved in what is known as the Law of Moses and is to be found in the early books of the Bible. The Bible repeatedly reminds us that the law was given to Moses by God and that Moses was to teach it to Israel, as we read in the book of Deuteronomy: *‘Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you’ [Deuteronomy 6.1].*

THE ORIGINS OF A NATION

The first five books of the Bible record the origins of the nation of Israel beginning with their patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then their migration into Egypt, their enslavement there and their deliverance by God through the leadership of Moses. The amazing events surrounding the Exodus are well known and are referred to many times throughout the Bible. No other people on earth had experienced such signs and wonders or were given so much evidence for the existence of God nor been spoken to by Him in such terms as these: *‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ [Exodus 19. 4-6].*

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Those by now numerous descendants of Jacob (Israel) were suddenly transformed from slaves into a nation called by God my '*kingdom*'! With this change came responsibilities. God gave them laws which were to be obeyed out of love for God their Saviour. Many details of that law were designed to remind them of the extraordinary position of privilege they were in and further, other nations would see and admire their wisdom and understanding and the righteousness of God's law.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Even their calendar was legislated for in the Law of Moses. Throughout the year the days were interrupted by special occasions. Each week concluded with the Sabbath, a day of rest for the whole nation. The year began in the Springtime with the Passover called 'a feast of the Lord' and was followed by five more feasts. The Day of Atonement or *Yom Kippur* took place on the 10th day of the 7th month.

So what happened on that day? Every Israelite and every foreigner living among them were simultaneously cleansed of all their sins. Even the most diligent follower of the Law could not keep it to perfection and although he or she would seek forgiveness for specific sins in the manner laid down in the Law, there would remain sins committed unknowingly, but all sins were to be forgiven on the Day of Atonement. As God was the one who would do the forgiving, the method of obtaining atonement or forgiveness was of course laid down by Him.

Atonement means making 'at one' again after an offence. The breaking of God's law is, of course offensive to God and yet it is God, in his mercy, who willingly forgives those who seek forgiveness. Thus, what would have remained as a rift between God and the sinner is removed by the forgiveness of the sinner. The consequence of forgiveness is reconciliation to God.

The Day of Atonement began at sundown on the 9th day and lasted

until the next sundown which marked the end of the 10th day. This day was to be treated as a Sabbath whatever day of the week it fell on. It was therefore a day of rest. More than that, it was also to be a day of fasting as an expression of remorse for past sins.

Every day of the year a lamb was offered as a burnt offering both at sunrise and sundown but on this special day other offerings were added. The High Priest brought a bullock for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He brought them to the Tabernacle which was a portable temple made to God's design by Israel in the wilderness and used until a temple was built by Solomon in Jerusalem.

THE HIGH PRIEST

Normally the High Priest interceded for the people before God but on this day he represented the people. He did not therefore wear the usual High Priest's robes which distinguished him from the other priests. Instead he washed himself thoroughly and put on special linen garments and a turban. Then representatives of the community brought to him two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. The High Priest then cast lots over the goats and one was chosen to be the sin offering for the people whilst the other was kept alive.

Now the High Priest offered the bullock for himself and his family and then taking some of the bullock's blood, burning coals from the altar and incense, went into the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. No other priest was allowed in the tent at this time. He then continued by going through the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place. This was a very solemn moment because had he entered at any other time he would have been struck dead. Then he put the incense on the coals and a great cloud of incense arose concealing the Ark of the Covenant and the cherubim which overshadowed it in the Most Holy Place. Then he sprinkled the blood seven times over the Ark.

Having retired back to the altar which was outside the tent, he then killed the goat chosen for the sin offering for the people and for the second time entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of the goat and dealt with it as he had the bullock's blood. Again he went out. The

Law said that in doing this he had made ‘...*atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins...*’[Leviticus 16.16].

SINS CARRIED AWAY

After this, taking some of the bullock’s blood and goat’s blood, he sprinkled it on the horns of the altar with his finger. Seven times this was done with the purpose of cleansing the altar also from the uncleanness of the Israelites. Then taking the live remaining goat he laid both hands on its head and confessed over it all the wickedness and rebellion of Israel and sent it away with a suitable man to be released in a solitary place. In this manner God illustrated the otherwise abstract fact that their sins were indeed taken away as they watched the goat disappear into the distance.

After this the High Priest went into the Holy Place to disrobe, wash and change back into his usual High Priestly robes. Once more he was the intermediary between God and the people. Now he offered as burnt offerings the two rams and also the fat from the bullock and the goat sin offerings in the usual manner for such offerings. The rest of these carcasses were taken outside the camp and burnt in a clean place. The man who burned the carcasses and the man who released the goat both washed themselves and came back into the camp.

GOD’S LAW ENACTED

In passing, it is interesting to note God’s method of teaching. His law given to Israel dramatically illustrated by highly significant rituals what would otherwise have been an abstract matter. For example, Israel could have been told that God had forgiven them but that was not nearly as impressive as seeing the High Priest as God’s representative laying those sins on the head of the goat and watching it carry their sins far away, disappearing into the wilderness. Jesus used the same teaching method when he made use of parables. So the concept of the atonement was illustrated through the enactments decreed by God on that very special day, the Day of Atonement.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US?

Is this merely of academic interest or does it have significance today? The New Testament is emphatic that those things which God designed in the Law of Moses were for a pattern of something much greater. For example when God said, *'let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.'*[Exodus 25.8], the New Testament explains that this man-made sanctuary i.e. the Tabernacle, was only a copy of the true one which is heaven itself, where God dwells [Hebrews 9.24].

A PATTERN OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The New Testament shows that all of those details of the Law, pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider some of the details:

- ❖ The High Priest was a pattern of Christ, both as a representative of the people and as an intermediary between God and the people. *'he (Jesus) had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people'*[Hebrews 2. 17 NIV].
- ❖ The explanation continues in a later chapter: *'such a high priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens'*[Hebrews 7.26].
- ❖ Jesus was also the blood of the offering. Again, the New Testament explains that unlike the other high priests (e.g. those who served at the Tabernacle) he does not need to offer for the sins of the people. Jesus was *'sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself'* [Hebrews 7. 27NIV].
- ❖ *'He (Jesus) went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; (on the Day of Atonement) but he entered the Most Holy Place (into the presence of God, in heaven) once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption'* [Hebrews 9. 11, 12].

- ❖ *'Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a high priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man [Hebrews 8. 1,2].*

THE LAW OF MOSES SUPERCEDED

God took the Law away when all that it foreshadowed and signified came to reality in Jesus. Sadly, God's chosen nation still mistakes its symbolism for the reality and refuses to recognize Jesus as its fulfillment. However for those who believe that Jesus is God's son and that he gave his life for our atonement and that God raised him to life again, the symbolism of the Law of Moses is highly significant.

Even more significant is the Bible teaching that God is building a new temple, not a tabernacle as made by Moses, nor of stones as built by Solomon, but of people in which he intends to dwell. Jesus is described in this allegory as a *'living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious'* [1 Peter 2.4]. True believers are likewise described by Peter as *'living stones'*, who are being built into a *'spiritual house'* [1 Peter 2.5].

Such are not required to bring sacrifices as offerings for sin but are able to go directly to God in prayer through the Lord Jesus Christ. They do not cease from their own works only on the Sabbath and Day of Atonement but try to do God's works every day. Nor do they fast on the Day of Atonement but try to please God every day by abstaining from sinful works. Just as the High Priest emerged from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement to rejoin the people, so Jesus will come from the presence of God to bless those who are looking expectantly for him.

Geoffrey Mitchell
Norfolk, UK

Signs of the Times

A GAIN, we are to consider this interesting and at times, arresting aspect of Bible teaching. Two thousand or so years ago, Jesus was quite scathing about the people to whom he was sent to preach the good news of the coming Kingdom of God:

“When you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?” *[Luke 12, 54-56]*.

What was it that Jesus was referring to? The Old Testament Prophets had foretold the coming of the Jewish Messiah and had warned that he would not be recognised by the vast majority of the Jewish people. When the leaders of the Jews crucified Jesus, they could not perceive that here, in their midst was the Messiah himself. Some did recognise our Lord and became his disciples and after his resurrection continued the work of preaching the Gospel. The Christian church began to gain influence, starting from Jerusalem and spreading throughout the Roman world. Jesus had commanded his disciples:

‘...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’.

[Mark 16, 15-16]

This is the essential message of the Bible today – believe and be baptised!

The message of the Bible that the salvation which is offered for all who believe, will be realised when the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Israel in the past is re-established on earth. The Old Testament Prophets are full of word pictures of the blessings that will be seen and appreciated when Jesus rules over the earth as king for his Father.

The return of Jesus to the earth has been anxiously awaited by his true followers. As the angels said reassuringly to those disciples who had seen Jesus ascend into heaven some forty days after his resurrection: *‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven’ [Acts 1.11].*

SIGNS FOR DISCIPLES OF JESUS

In previous issues of this magazine, we have been considering in some detail the signs that might be observed and which tells us that the return of Jesus must be very soon. Every true disciple has asked the question, ‘When?’ His immediate followers asked him for signs that they could look out for:

‘Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?”’ [Matthew 24.3]

The answers that Jesus gave were very carefully worded, because he knew that terrible events would engulf the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. He knew from the Old Testament prophets that a time of scattering and great adversity was about to befall the Jews. This happened, a few years later in AD 70. The temple was destroyed by the Romans and thousands of Jews were killed. History books tell us in detail what happened. So, in giving the disciples signs of the age, Jesus made it clear that they should not be diverted from their role as disciples, but should get on with the work of preaching. The rest of the New Testament Scriptures show us the results of their work - the

establishment of Christianity, despite great persecution.

Jesus not only warned about immediate events but gave his disciples very specific signs that would herald his return to the earth. Every true disciple has waited anxiously for his return. He gave no actual time scale and steered them away from calculating when he might come back:

‘...It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ [*Acts 1.7, 8*].

There can be little doubt that the disciples thought that Jesus would come soon. Little did they know that some two thousand years would pass before some of the signs that he gave became apparent. In a previous issue of this magazine, we considered ‘**signs of the times**’ in a broad sense, and the reader is urged to read that article again (See Light Volume 21 No. 7). It is well worth looking closer to home to see if we can discern these signs in greater detail and recognise how little time there is left for the world to prepare for the return of Jesus. It is important to be ready for his return, because not everybody is going to benefit from this great event. The Bible tells us that he will come back to destroy the wicked and to establish a righteous reign over the whole world. He will sweep away false religions and will demand acceptance of him as king of the whole world.

‘A BROKEN SOCIETY’

At the time of writing this article, the UK is preparing for a general election. The politicians are trying to persuade the electorate to vote in support of their party, and the use of ‘catch phrases’ or slogans, is popular. There can be no doubt that law and order is an issue which concerns many people. The Conservative leader has described the UK

as '*a broken society*'. Is he right? Do David Cameron's words fit in with signs that Jesus gave about such times? Do you think we live in a broken society? Many readers will probably find fault with politicians and will point to failed policies and broken promises that have contributed to the so-called '*broken society*'!

What did Jesus have to say about the circumstances that will be experienced at the time of his return to the earth? These are his words:

'And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near' [Luke 21.25-28].

When Jesus spoke of trouble in the heavens, he was referring to the ruling powers. When he spoke about '*the sea and the waves roaring*', he did not mean the literal sea but rather the 'sea of nations'. When he spoke about '*men's hearts failing them from fear*', he meant that because of their perplexed state, they will not be able to find a way out of their problems. When we listen to the various alternatives offered by the different political parties in the UK, we can see exactly what Jesus meant! No doubt, it is the same wherever you may live in the world, in Africa, Asia, Europe or America. These signs indicate that the return of Jesus is very near! Then he went on to give a warning that applies to us as individuals:

'But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing (sensual pleasures), drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the

face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man' [Luke 21, 34-36].

Here is a very apt description of many people today who prefer to enjoy life when they can, while also trying to blot out the pressing problems of the age. True disciples of Jesus do not engage in these things.

Again in the UK, the police have been accused of being lax in tackling social disorder and anti-social behaviour. We will probably have seen the news clips of men and women, totally out of control after heavy drinking and it is the sale of cheap alcohol in our supermarkets that is blamed for the rise in such un-neighbourliness. But is it right to accuse either the police or the supermarkets? Surely it is discipline and self-control that are lacking. When we consider the way in which people behave, is it surprising that we have such disorder on our streets and in our homes? Human nature is essentially wicked, the Bible tells us that *'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked'* [Jeremiah 17.9].

GOD'S STANDARD

The Bible sets the Divine standard and when this is ignored, there is social disorder. Every aspect of social life has its guide in God's Word, but because that word is set aside and ridiculed, we see the results in the breakdown of society throughout the world. Take, for example, what Jesus had to say about marriage and divorce:

'The Pharisees came and asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" testing him. And he answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he

wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate". And in the house his disciples also asked him again about the same matter. So he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery"" [Mark 10, 2-12].

Set against those standards, the Israelite in Moses day and the servant of Christ today, have no grounds for divorce. Divorce breaks the principle that God set out from the beginning and if another marriage takes place, it is adultery. These are the commands of Jesus that must apply to us today, if we would be his true disciples.

Yet, look at the world of today. The principles of marriage are set aside by the vast majority, who prefer to live in the state of fornication – that is the Bible's description of living together unmarried. Two-thirds of marriages are expected to fail today – an astounding fact! One of the major problems affecting social life today is the 'one-parent' family. Increasingly, it is selfishness that leads to family break up and so often it is the children that are the real losers being left to grow up with a lack of strong parental guidance. God's standards and Christ's teaching are so often ignored or conveniently set aside.

WARNING FOR CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

It is hardly surprising then that we live in a world that faces massive challenges. The Apostles of Jesus, because they were given insight into these matters and their record is part of the inspired Word of God, warned of the times in which we now live. We live in a world where human achievements have reached astounding new heights. Yet we fail

to solve the problems that beset our society. The Apostle Peter warned his readers about the social disorder that existed in the Roman world of his day and how it would come to an end in *'the day of judgement'*:

'the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries....But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, beguiling unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.'

[2 Peter 2.9-14]

The shocking thing about this description of social and spiritual degradation is that Peter warns that even the righteous can be caught up in these things *'while they feast with you'*. You need to be on your guard – that is what Peter tells us: *'While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage'* [2 Peter 2.19].

THE WORLD AT THE TIME OF THE END

It may seem astonishing that Peter is actually writing to the first century ecclesias (churches), but that is the truth of the matter. They lived in a world, strongly influenced by Roman and Greek philosophies and the danger was there in their midst. Do we see a parallel today? The Apostle Paul foretold there would come such times and he saw them as a sign that Christ was about to return:

‘But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth’ [2 Timothy 3, 1-7].

When Paul used that phrase ‘*in the last days*’, it is recognised that he was referring to the time just before the return of Jesus. He too had understood the words of Jesus addressed to his first disciples and he knew full well what to expect before his return. Paul’s description of human behaviour surely has its parallel in the times that we live in.

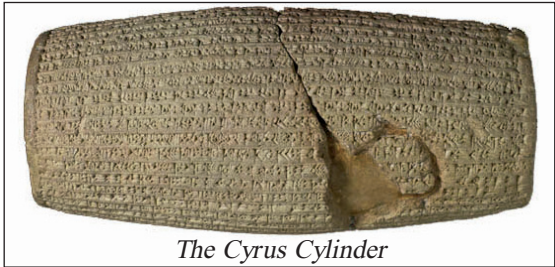
What then is the purpose of Jesus giving us these signs? In this article, we have focused upon one aspect of the **signs of our times** – evil behaviour that is so evident in modern society and those in authority are at a loss to know how to deal with it. As the Bible says ‘*It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*’ [Jeremiah 10.23].

Why should we be concerned about these things? Because we believe that the signs are for us to take careful account of. We need to be prepared for Christ’s return. If we ignore the signs we shall not be prepared. Dear reader, there is a short window of opportunity now to prepare for the day when God will intervene through His Son Jesus – grasp it now for tomorrow may be too late!

David Evans
Kent, UK

The Bible Stands the Test of Time

CYRUS king of Persia is mentioned in the second book of Chronicles as the king who would be an instrument in God's hand to release God's people the Jews from



The Cyrus Cylinder

their captivity in Babylon: *'Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia...the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia: so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,*

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah..."[2 Chronicles 36.22, 23].

The book of Ezra records how this proclamation was put into effect and the people were allowed to return to their land by Cyrus. They were also given money and materials to assist them in the rebuilding of the house of the Lord - the temple in Jerusalem. Daniel was a Jewish captive in Babylon and he recorded the capture of the great city of Babylon by the Persian armies. Daniel's prophecies include the 'image' vision seen by Nebuchadnezzar that predicted the fall of his empire to the Medo-Persians (see Daniel chapter 2). The date of the fall of Babylon has been confirmed as 539 BC. This prophecy is so remarkable that Bible critics have maintained that they must have been written after the events.

But even more remarkable is the prophecy of Isaiah concerning

Cyrus. Isaiah's long ministry lasted from about 740-690 BC and the book that bears his name records the actual naming of Cyrus some 150 years before the Jews were allowed to return. It also tells us that Cyrus would cause the temple to be rebuilt (See Isaiah 44.24-28). This prophecy is all the more amazing in that it was given before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The remarkable prediction was attacked by Bible critics, but the writings of Isaiah were vindicated when the site of ancient Babylon was excavated during the 19th Century and the remains of the great Ziggurat were exposed.

Built into one corner of the Ziggurat was this baked clay cylinder, now in the British Museum (see picture on Page 27). It was put there by Cyrus as a record of how he took the city of Babylon without a battle. Isaiah prophesied that God would '*open before him (Cyrus) the double doors so that the gates will not be shut*' [Isaiah 45.1]. Herodotus, the Greek historian (484-424 BC) tells us that Cyrus built a canal, diverting the river that ran through the city. His troops were then able to enter the city along the now fordable river bed through the river gates, taking the city with ease. Babylon fell exactly as the Bible foretold.

The Cyrus cylinder also records how he remedied the evil done by the Babylonians, in enslaving the conquered nations. It tells us how Cyrus reversed this policy by restoring these peoples including the Jews to their former homeland. Cyrus was unique among the rulers of the ancient world, in that he showed wisdom and a measure of tolerance to the conquered peoples of his empire. The words of Cyrus on the cylinder confirm the Bible accounts of a benevolent ruler, who would show kindness to God's people. The discovery of this cylinder some 2,400 years after it was concealed, is an amazing confirmation of the historical accuracy and prophetic insight of the Old Testament prophets who predicted these events under Divine inspiration.

Ken Dennis
Kent, UK

The Christadelphians (Dawn Fellowship) believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

Light on a New World is published to provide a better understanding of this true Christian hope and the Correspondence Secretary will be pleased to arrange for the magazine to be posted to any address upon request.

The Christadelphians are very willing to answer questions about Bible teaching either privately or in the pages of LIGHT magazine and correspondence will be welcomed. Please send your questions to:

The Correspondence Secretary, Light Bible Publications, P.O. Box 362, DARTFORD, DA1 9GT, England.

Alternatively by E-Mail to: mail@lightmagazine.org

For further information about the magazine and related topics visit: www.lightmagazine.org
www.neshamah.info
www.gospelofkingdom.co.uk
www.dawnbooksupply.co.uk

Information about public meetings arranged by the Christadelphians in particular areas and the names of the nearest Christadelphian representatives can be provided by the publishers on request.

Light Bible Publications can also supply a number of publications on Bible related subjects. Apply to the Correspondence Secretary for further details.

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Light Bible Publications retain subscriber addresses on a private and secure data base. They are not distributed or made available to any organisation and are removed upon request to cancel the magazine by the subscriber.

FREE BIBLE COURSE



The Bible Correspondence Course is in two parts. The first part gives a basic outline of what the Bible contains and its message. The second part is a more detailed study of the important Bible teaching concerning God's plan of salvation and the Christian way of life. The course is free of charge and the first lesson can be obtained by writing to:

The Correspondence Secretary
Light Bible Publications
P.O. Box 362
Bexley
Kent
DA1 9GT
England

If you live in the UK you can write to:

Light Bible Publications
FREEPOST
Sidcup
Kent
DA14 4BR :

Alternatively you can Email us at: **mail@lightmagazine.org**