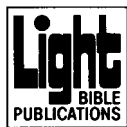


Light

A full-page background image of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there is a vast, flat, orange-brown sandy area. In the middle ground, a range of jagged, orange-brown mountains or hills stretches across the horizon. The sky above is a vibrant blue, filled with scattered white and light blue clouds. The overall lighting suggests a bright, sunny day.

...on a new world

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VOLUME TWENTY TWO NUMBER ONE

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Cover: Atacama Desert in Chile, South America

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



Editorial

AT the commencement of a new year many people are looking forward to a fresh start and are hoping for a better future in the year ahead. However, as I write these words in January 2011 and think about the state of the world, the future for the majority looks very bleak which ever way you look at.

Many millions of people still live in abject poverty. For the richer nations, the economic crisis affecting a number of countries in the European Union shows no signs of improving. The rising tide of world-wide terrorism in all its ugliness continues unabated with awful consequences for the people who just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The tension in the Middle East is reaching crisis point, threatening to engulf the region in yet another war that could have serious consequences for the whole world. In the natural world, disasters seem to be gathering pace with threats from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, storms and flooding.

Last year, the world was made aware of the plight of 33 miners who had become trapped in a copper and gold mine in the Atacama Desert. Although this was not a major disaster, the plight of these men who appeared to be without hope, became the focus of world attention. The Atacama Desert (see cover picture) is arguably the most inhospitable place on earth from a human point of view. It has been described as ‘a

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virtually rainless plateau in South America, covering a 600 mile (1,000 km) strip of land on the Pacific coast, west of the Andes mountains. The Atacama desert is according to NASA...the driest desert in the world.' [Wikipedia Encyclopaedia] In the case of the miners, a seemingly hopeless situation gave way to hope with the sinking of a shaft to reach them 2,300 feet (700 metres) below the surface of the desert and eventually they were rescued.

The point of mentioning this is that, in a world that seems to be without much hope, you can have a sure hope for the future. The first article in this issue looks at the meaning of hope for those who trust in God, read His Word the Bible and act upon it. The hope of the Bible is based on the understanding that all that is wrong with this world at present will be put right at the return of Jesus Christ. God has promised that *'all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD'. [Numbers 14.21]* and the Apostle Peter looked forward to *'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'. [2 Peter 3.13]*

Peter's words assure us that great changes will take place when Jesus returns. These changes will not only affect the way men and women behave towards each other but the natural world will be changed as well and the threats to our very existence on this planet posed by natural disasters will be a thing of the past. There are many wonderful word pictures in the Bible which describe this future for our planet, one of which reminds us that even the most inhospitable places on earth like the Atacama Desert will be changed:

'...waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water'. [Isaiah 35. 6, 7]

Editor

Important Bible Words

Hope

IN September 2010 a baby girl was born to a young couple in the Atacama Desert area of Chile. They called her ‘Esperanza’ - Hope.

Nothing very special about that perhaps – except that at the time her father Ariel Ticona was trapped in a mine 2300 feet below the surface of the desert. For 69 days he and his 32 companions lived in hope. Hope was all they had. And when at last that hope was realised and they stepped out into the sunlight once again, many of them saw it as a miracle, and thanked God for it.



Rescue of Miner (photo courtesy of Hugo Infante/Government of Chile)

For many of us thankfully, life is not so dangerous, but even so, life without hope hardly bears thinking about.

Even the dullest and most routine of days contains its elements of anticipated pleasure – the coffee break, the evening meal or the weekend away. However trivial such things are, without them life would be unbearable. Even though there is often more pleasure in the anticipation than in the reality, we continue to hope for better things in the future, continue to create objects to covet and ambitions to fulfil. To ‘hope against hope’ is a phrase that sums up man’s almost inexhaustible capacity to manufacture hope, even when no real grounds for it exist - when his situation is in fact hopeless.

HOPE AGAINST HOPE

That particular phrase is used once in the New Testament. The way it is used shows what a huge gulf separates the ‘hope’ of the Scriptures from ‘hope’ as it is commonly accepted in our everyday world. The passage where it occurs is a description of the life of Abraham, that great hero of faith of the Old Testament: *‘who against hope believed in hope...’* [Romans 4.18.AV]

What was Abraham so hopeful about? That his ninety-year-old wife Sarah would have a son! What a hope! What possible grounds could he have had to believe it? One, and only one - God had promised it. And Abraham believed God.

THE REAL MEANING OF HOPE

There is a world of difference between this kind of hope and hope as it is usually understood. People may be hopeful for a number of reasons. They may be naturally optimistic, given to looking on the brighter side, come rain or shine. They may find quite adequate rational grounds for being hopeful about the future. They may have the capacity themselves to bring about the objectives they long for.

Did Abraham have any such grounds for hope? Even the most optimistic individual could hardly anticipate the miracle which was obviously required. There was nothing Abraham himself could do to

realise his dream. There was nothing in his circumstances which presented the slightest grounds for his hope, except one thing. God had promised: *'Sarah your wife shall bear you a son.'* [Genesis 17.19] Abraham believed that what God had promised he would perform. So he waited, full of hope, looking forward to that amazing day when at last he would have a son and heir. His hope was not disappointed.

Abraham's hope and Biblical hope in general, is inseparable from faith in God. The one springs from the other. If faith is the conviction that God exists and that He will fulfil His promises to mankind, then hope is the inevitable result of that conviction - the eager anticipation of the future which God has promised.

Such certainty is impossible for a world that does not believe in God. In Biblical terms, the world of unbelief is a world without hope. So the Apostle Paul described the Christians at Ephesus before their conversion as being *'without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world'*. [Ephesians 2.12] And he advised bereaved disciples at Thessalonica that they should not mourn like *'others who have no hope'*. [1 Thessalonians 4.13]

Of course, the pagan world in which the earliest Christians lived had its hopes, including a hope of life after death – but none of them could be guaranteed and many of them were illusory, as even their own poets and philosophers recognised.

THE FOUNDATION FOR HOPE

The Christian was in an entirely different position. Paul said those at Thessalonica were not to grieve unduly, because Jesus Christ had conquered death – God had raised him from the dead and would one day send him back to raise all those who had died *'in him'*, so that all believers could then share eternal fellowship with God [1 Thessalonians 4.13-18] That was their hope. It was not a fabrication, but based on God's past performance, on the incontrovertible evidence that He had raised His Son Jesus Christ from the dead.

Many times when the Apostle Paul was called upon to defend himself before the Roman authorities, he used the word ‘**hope**’ to sum up everything in which he believed:

‘concerning **the hope** and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’ [Acts 23.6]

‘...I stand and am judged for **the hope** of the promise made by God to our fathers.’ [Acts 26.6]

‘...for **the hope** of Israel I am bound with this chain.’
[Acts 28.20]

One thing his words make very clear; Paul’s hope and that of all the earliest Christians, was founded on the Old Testament. It was the hope that all God had promised to the fathers of the Jewish people would be fulfilled – through Jesus Christ.

It was Abraham’s hope that one day all nations would be blessed through one of his descendants – Jesus Christ. [Genesis 12.3; Galatians 3.16] It was the hope of King David that one day, his people and all nations would be ruled in peace for ever by one of his line – Jesus Christ. [2 Samuel 7.12-16; Luke 1.32, 33] It was the hope of Job, of David and the prophet Daniel that they would awake from the sleep of death, because the power of sin would one day be broken – by Jesus Christ. [Job 19.25, 26; Psalm 17.15; Daniel 12.2]

This was the hope of the Apostle Paul, and it remains the hope of all Christians worthy of the name. The linchpin on which it depends is the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

‘...if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ...If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.’ [1Corinthians 15.17-20]

Paul had seen and heard the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and his conviction was unshakeable. Many who have not in a literal sense either seen Christ or heard his voice, have nevertheless been just as convinced that the resurrection is a historical fact. If it is not, the hopes of a Christian are as vain and illusory as any other. If it is, both faith and hope can rest upon its rock-like foundation.

A LIFE OF HOPE

With such a vision of the future, the Christian is well-equipped to face whatever life may throw at him. His hope does not offer present gain or advantage, although it does confer great spiritual blessings. Paul later wrote: ‘...*godliness with contentment is great gain*’ [1Timothy 6.6] and contentment is a rare blessing in this greedy, grasping society in which we live. But in general, the experience of many Christians throughout the ages has been of difficulty, opposition and often outright persecution. In this respect, as in all things, Jesus showed his followers the way, looking beyond the hatred, the agony of his sufferings, to the glory which he knew would be his in the future:

‘...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...’ [Hebrews 12.2]

In the same way Paul was motivated to endure the harassment of his enemies and the most acute physical discomfort as he travelled through Asia and the Middle East on his missionary journeys.

‘...I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.’ [Romans 8.18]

In the passage that follows, Paul pictures the whole of creation as being in a state of perpetual anticipation, eagerly waiting for the day when God’s glory will be revealed in the earth – when all the futility and frustration of the present will be removed and the whole creation liberated from sin and decay to enjoy the richness of God’s kingdom.

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

[Romans 8.19-22] He longed for that day:

‘...we ourselves...wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved...’ [Romans 8.23,24 NIV]

HOPE FOR THE WORLD – A HOPE FOR YOU

Who would deny that we need a hope like that?

Nothing could be more relevant to our needs as individuals and to the problems of the world in which we live. Nineteen centuries after Paul wrote these words, the creation remains as much subject to futility and frustration as ever, in spite of the near-miraculous advances of modern science. The problem lies not in man’s abilities or potential, which appear almost limitless, as one might expect of a creature made ‘in the image of God’. [Genesis 1.27]



Bengal Tiger – one of many species of animals facing extinction

No, the problem lies in man’s moral weakness, in his inability to control and direct his own ingenuity. So the miracle of modern medicine is accompanied by the horrors of pollution and the threat of nuclear destruction. The marvel of the printed word is expressed in

floods of worthless and evil literature, at the cost of the measurable depletion of the worlds' forests every day and the disruption of the world's ecology. Millions starve and die whilst improved agricultural technology produces ever higher grain yields – for those who can afford it. The insatiable appetite of a consumer society ravages the earth's resources.

As long ago as 1972, the 'Ecologist' magazine published a major study of the earth's resources and the present state of western society entitled 'A Blueprint for Survival'. The preface opened with these words:

'An examination of the relevant information available has impressed upon us the extreme gravity of the global situation today. For, if current trends are allowed to persist, the breakdown of society and the irreversible disruption of the life-support systems on this planet, possibly by the end of the century, certainly within the lifetimes of our children, are inevitable.'



Recent catastrophic flooding in Queensland, Australia

In the years since that report, focus has shifted to the problems of global warming and the effect of carbon by-products in the atmosphere.

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

The developing world rushes headlong towards growth and greater industrialisation, and western nations fight to keep their consumer lifestyle unchecked. The symptoms are not good: extreme weather patterns, the rising price of basic foodstuffs, rising sea levels, the dramatic depletion of fish stocks in the world's oceans, the extinction of thousands of species across the globe – all evidence of the intolerable strain that man is placing on this tiny planet. No government on earth has the will and the authority to bring about the radical changes which are needed.

The result – a collision with the inevitable. Sooner or later the world, as H.G. Wells predicted, will come to 'the end of its tether'. Jesus tells us what the world would be like immediately before his coming: *'nations will be in anguish and perplexity... Men will faint from terror; apprehensive of what is coming on the world'*. [Luke 21.25,26 NIV]

But God has given us a real hope. He offers hope to this planet on which we live. He offers hope to each one of us as individuals. He has demonstrated His love for us in the most astonishing intervention on our behalf – the provision of His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He has given us all the evidence we need on which to pin our faith.

How can we fail to take hold of the hope He offers us?

Where else can we go for a hope like this? Nowhere – as Peter said to Jesus:

'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.' [John 6.68]

Roy Toms
Surrey, UK

What did Jesus mean?

‘Let the dead bury their own dead...’

AT first reading this reply of Jesus seems rather harsh. It was given as a response to someone who said they wished to become a disciple of Jesus. It seems a strange answer anyway, for how can the dead bury their dead? It cannot have a literal meaning in this sense, because when we die, of necessity we need someone else to bury us. As is always the case, we need to put this saying of Jesus into its context. When did he make this point to his listeners and why? What were the circumstances? Let’s explore this incident, because it has some very powerful lessons for the would-be disciple of Jesus today.

There are two accounts of the incident in the Gospel records – Matthew chapter eight and Luke chapter nine. The context or perhaps the background to Christ’s words is the calling to be a disciple. His ministry was nearing its end, leading to the time when he would go to Jerusalem and there be crucified. He had called his twelve disciples to him and had sent them out to continue the work of preaching the Gospel that he had initiated more than three years earlier. Jesus now turned his back on Galilee in the north of Israel and as Luke tells us *‘he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.’* [Luke 9.51] It was on this journey towards the final phase of his ministry that he was approached by three would-be disciples:

‘Now it happened, as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to him, “Lord, I will follow you wherever

you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Then he said to another, “Follow me”. But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father”. Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God”. And another also said, “Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house”. But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

[Luke 9. 57-62]

Matthew tells us that the first of these men was a Scribe. He was as member of an elite class of Jews who were an essential part of the religious hierarchy at the time of Jesus. We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of any of these would-be disciples, but Jesus was able to discern the genuineness or otherwise of those who approached him. It is written of him that *‘...he knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.’* [John 2.25] Discipleship is not an easy matter and he had made that very clear:

‘...you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another...A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master...’ [Matthew 10.22-25]

Was this Scribe prepared for such a hard life? Was he ready to leave his comfortable college and lodgings to take up the rough-and-ready work associated with being a disciple? Clearly Jesus had his doubts, hence his warning that as he, the Master, did not have somewhere he could call a home of his own, neither would this Scribe, if he chose to follow him. We do not know if the man did in fact become a disciple – perhaps he did! If so, it would be with a clear-sighted view of the new life ahead of him walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

The second of these would-be disciples was not a Scribe. He was already a disciple and for this reason the Master's words to him are all the more to the point. Luke tells us that Jesus simply said '*Follow me*' but Matthew tells us he was already a disciple. So the point that Jesus makes concerns this man's attitude towards being a disciple:

'Then another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their **own** dead."' [Matthew 8.21, 22]

It should be noted that the NKJV adds the word '*own*' in this passage and in Luke chapter 9 whereas the AV omits it. This is significant, as we shall see. Was Jesus really as harsh to a genuine disciple as these words suggest? If the man's father was indeed dead, it could only just have happened, for burial was required before sunset and surely Jesus would not have stood in the way of this man carrying this out? Or was there another reason why the man hesitated to follow him? Perhaps there was an inheritance to sort out first, before obeying the command to follow the Master! There is little doubt that Jesus was either unconvinced of the man's sincerity or that he wished to drive home the lessons to be associated with becoming a disciple. What then was the meaning of his apparently harsh words?

When Jesus referred to '*the dead*' he was clearly not talking about those who were **physically dead**, but rather those who were **spiritually dead**. We have a very good example of this in John's Gospel record where he refers to his great work in preaching the Gospel, and the hope of everlasting life in God's kingdom to come. His teaching in this passage is that those who have the knowledge of the Gospel and have acted upon it have taken a huge step away from an eternal grave:

'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life. 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. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man.’ [John 5.24-26]

Understanding the true Gospel message is like **spiritually** moving from death to life and the disciple of Christ is surely in that position. It remains for such a man or woman to follow their Master, which is why Jesus told his disciple ‘*Follow me*’. Whilst duties to dead relatives must be attended to, there is that greater object in life for the true disciple: ‘*Let the dead bury their own dead: but you go and preach the kingdom of God.*’ The reward for true and faithful discipleship is everlasting life in due time when God’s Kingdom is established on the earth. Jesus had promised his disciples:

‘...Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, 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. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit everlasting life.’

[Matthew 19. 28, 29]

Those who Jesus referred to as ‘*the dead*’ were those who had not responded to the call of the Gospel. They were dead, just as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians: ‘*And you he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...*’ [Ephesians 2.1]

For those who are alive to the truth of the Gospel, it is a time to dissociate from those who are dead to the truth. This is the reason why Jesus spoke words that may seem at first sight to be harsh. He leaves us in no doubt about what he means, in his reply to the third would-be disciple. This man, not unreasonably, says that before he gets on with the work of being a disciple, he would like to say goodbye to his family:

‘And another also said, “Lord, I will follow you, but **let me first** go and bid them farewell who are at my house.” But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”’
[Luke 9.61,62]

‘**Let me first go...**’ These are **not** the words of one who is putting **Christ first!** Jesus has already made the point: we must put **him** before family and friends and once we are committed to **him**, there can be no turning back.

To sum up the meaning of this ‘difficult’ saying of Jesus, we see how he warned the Scribe of the price of true discipleship and gently reproved these two would-be disciples, who were minded to squander some of their Lord’s time in unprofitable activities. The lessons are as real for us today as they were when Jesus uttered them some 2,000 years ago. The Apostle Paul, who once was ‘*dead in trespasses and sins*’ but was called to the Gospel and responded in faith, wrote these words to the disciples at Philippi:

‘But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.’ [Philippians 3.7-11]

We could have no finer example of following Christ!

David Evans
Kent, England

English Translations of the Bible

READERS sometimes ask why some Biblical references have some letters shown behind them e.g. *Matthew 11.13-15 NIV*, *1 John 2.1 RSV*. Today there are many different English translations of the Scriptures. Several claim to be a modern or a more accurate translation than the Authorised or King James Version which dates from the reign of King James 1 of England and was published 400 years ago in 1611.

The Authorised Version (AV), gradually won supremacy over all the previous versions which had been introduced in England and held its position for 270 years. In 1881 the Revised New Testament was published and this was followed by the Revised Old Testament in 1885. Although criticised for a greater number of minor changes, especially in the New Testament, the Revised Version, the 'RV' was considered to give a more accurate text than the 'AV'.

In 1952, the Revised Standard Version was completed. The 'RSV' has since been followed by a number of versions which are now used by Bible students, especially when wishing to give the most appropriate sense to a passage that they are quoting. This in turn makes it necessary to identify the various versions by the use of abbreviations which are listed below, these being the most common in use by contributors to 'Light on a New World'.

King James Version (Authorised Version)	AV
Revised Version	RV
Revised Standard Version	RSV
New King James Version	NKJV
New International Version	NIV

It should be noted that NKJV is omitted in articles when this version is being quoted (see inside front cover). The abbreviation which indicates the version used, tells the reader that the particular text quoted may more clearly confirm the point being made by the writer.



From our Mail Bag

A reader has expressed ‘shock’ on reading that rewards or punishment in heaven or hell do not feature among our beliefs. This is, they say, contrary to the teaching of Jesus in two passages in Luke’s Gospel record which seem to indicate that hell is a place of torment for the wicked and that believers will go to be with Jesus for ever in heaven (See Luke 16.19-31 and Luke 13.28).

If we look first at Luke chapter 16 we find Jesus telling a story about a rich man and a beggar called Lazarus. The rich man talks with Abraham, after both he and the beggar have died and it is suggested this supports the idea that souls go to heaven and hell.

Firstly, it should be noted that the words heaven, hell and souls are not mentioned in this chapter. It cannot be literal when Abraham states that *‘between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us’* [Luke 16.26]. In the story, Abraham and the rich man could see each other and the tormented rich man suggested that Lazarus dip his finger in water, come to him and cool his tongue [Luke 16.24]. The passage also speaks about bodies not souls in terms of eyes, bosom, finger and tongue whereas the common misconception is that souls are not bodies and leave the body at death.

This is one of the many parables which Jesus used to underline his teaching. A parable is a simple story which conveys a message to

endorse an important point. The passage doesn't state that *Jesus spoke a parable*, nevertheless it clearly was a parable, as only 11 of the 26 parables in Luke's Gospel are actually named as parables.

Another example is the previous parable in the same chapter, which again concerns a rich man and a shrewd '*steward*' or manager who was responsible for looking after his business affairs. The parable concluded with the fact that the Pharisees loved money. They were therefore represented by the rich class [*Luke 16.14*]. In contrast Lazarus was typical of most of the Jews of his day, the poor class deprived of even the basic essentials of life. So we ask ourselves, why give the poor man a specific name?

The answer may be that Lazarus was known to the audience and the parable may have been given after Jesus received the news that his friend Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha had died. To further support this idea, the parable was given east of the river Jordan at a place called Bethabara and although it was only a short journey from Bethabara to Bethany, we read that Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. [*John 11.6*] We also learn that Lazarus' body had laid in the tomb for four days, as Martha told Jesus when he came to the tomb. She said to Jesus: '*Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days*' [*John 11.39*]. After this we know that Jesus performed a great miracle, raising him from the dead.

It should also be noted that the rich man was clothed with purple and fine linen and living a life of luxury. There was only one class who daily dressed in this way and they were the priestly class called the Sadducees who were misleading the people with their attitude towards adultery, divorce and by denying the resurrection. So the parable was addressing these incorrect ideas, but they were not listening and the raising of Lazarus only made them more anxious to find a way of killing both Jesus and Lazarus as the record makes clear in John chapters 11 and 12.

The final words of Jesus at the end of the parable sum up his teaching. In answer to the rich man's request to send Lazarus to his brothers' house, in order to warn them, Jesus said: *'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead'*. [Luke 16.31]

Turning to the verse in Luke chapter 13, we note this does not mention heaven, hell or souls but comes from the answer of Jesus to the question in verse 23: *'Lord, are there few who are saved?'* A reading of the following verses up to verse 28 show that some who think they are entitled to a place in God's kingdom will be surprised to find that they are rejected because of their misunderstanding of God's plan of salvation and their way of life.

It is also interesting to note that verse 28 mentions Abraham, Isaac and Jacob being *'in the kingdom of God'*. They are also referred to in Hebrews 11 as being among the faithful who are yet to receive the promise of eternal life. They will remain in the grave until Jesus returns to establish God's Kingdom on earth. At that time they will *'receive the promise'* along with the living who are found faithful at that time:

‘...all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us’. [Hebrews 11.39, 40]

King David is also mentioned in the list of faithful men and women in Hebrews 11 and his position among those who *'did not receive the promise'* is endorsed by Peter in his address to the people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost: *'let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day'*. [Acts 2.29] Peter goes on to emphasise the point that *'David did not ascend into the heavens.'* [Acts 2.34]

The teaching of Jesus whether in parables or otherwise is consistent and can be summed up in some well known words found in the Gospel of John:

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not **perish** but have **everlasting life**.’ [John 3. 16]

This verse declares God’s love towards us by allowing Jesus to be the focus of His plan of salvation. Through God’s love an individual can have the certainty of knowing that, believing in Jesus and following his commands with a full and true understanding, leads to eternal life to be enjoyed in the kingdom of God on earth.

The alternative to this is not to be tormented like the rich man of the parable but in the words of Jesus to ‘*perish*’. The original Greek of the New Testament implies complete destruction. The consistent teaching of the Bible is that death itself is the divine punishment for sin and those who do not avail themselves of God’s gracious offer of salvation are without hope and will remain in the grave.

So we trust you are not ‘shocked’ by our rejection of the notion of heaven being the place of reward and hell the place of punishment, as such ideas are not Scripturally based. The Apostle Paul underlined the real alternatives when he wrote to the believers at Rome:

‘...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ [Romans 6.23]

Correspondence Secretary

Bible Characters

Solomon (Part 2)

IN the first article we considered the visit of the Queen of Sheba and how she was impressed with Solomon's wealth. But this meeting between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba wasn't just about her curiosity and admiration of his achievements.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

This meeting was probably only one episode in Solomon's successful efforts to promote trade with the surrounding nations (see map). The most likely location of the Queen of Sheba's kingdom was at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, in the area called Yemen today. Her alliance with Solomon opened up the southern route in and out of Israel for trade to Africa and to the East, into Asia. But it was his relationship with Hiram, King of Tyre, that really opened up trade for Israel with most of the then known world.



It was Solomon's pact with Hiram that led to Israel having a navy of merchant ships. Israel under Solomon became a country with ports on the Mediterranean coast – Joppa, Haifa, Acre, Dor and on the Red Sea at Ezion-Geber, today's port of Aqaba in Jordan as we read in the first book of Kings:



Phoenician sailing ship

‘King Solomon also built a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. Then Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, seamen who knew the sea, to work with the servants of Solomon.’ [1 Kings 9.26, 27]

From this southern port, Solomon's ships went on voyages lasting for three years, which suggests long distance travel. The Bible refers to Solomon's fleet of merchant ships bringing in gold, silver, ivory and apes and monkeys. [1 Kings 10. 22] Those cargoes could be from Africa or Asia, but it shows the extent of Solomon's trading empire. Solomon also realized that Israel lay astride the main land routes that linked North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula with Asia and the countries of the Euphrates-Tigris valleys and the important nations there. It is said that Solomon imposed a levy or tax on everything that passed through Israel, as many nations do in their territories today.

By this means, Solomon built up an import-export trading economy that rivalled the nations of the ancient world. A good example of this

is given for us where we read how Solomon imported chariots from Egypt and horses, but then through agents, selling horses and chariots to the Hittites and the Syrians. [1 Kings 10. 28, 29] Solomon's trading arrangements must have helped the Tyrians as much as Israel. Israel and Tyre must have been boom countries during Solomon's reign. The Bible tells us that *'All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (Solomon's palace) were of pure gold; not one was of silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon'*. [1 Kings 10. 21] That language speaks of enormous wealth.

MAJOR BUILDING PROJECTS

Hiram supplied Solomon with the raw materials that he needed to complete his magnificent building projects:

'Hiram king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress and gold, as much as he desired' [1 Kings 9.11]



Cedar trees growing in Lebanon today

Apart from the magnificent temple and his own palace in Jerusalem, Solomon began a building programme throughout Israel.

He built the fortress cities of Megiddo, Hazor and Gezer including stabling for his many horses. (see *1 Kings 9. 15-19*)



Model of ancient Megiddo

The Bible's record tells us that Solomon's royal stables held 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses! The wealth and wisdom given to him by God made him probably the most powerful ruler of his time! But was all that wealth used wisely?

FROM WISE MAN TO FOOL

But the Bible record then tells how this all changed. Did the world's wisest man become the world's richest fool? Perhaps we can see why God gave him riches and honour. Was it to test him, to see how he used that gift of wisdom? His own writings boast of a life of unbounded extravagance and self indulgence: *'Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure.'* [Ecclesiastes 2. 10]

Solomon made some dreadful mistakes! His desire to expand his empire and trade led him to enter into political marriages with the

daughters of foreign kings. His first marriage was to the daughter of Pharaoh. But this wisest of men then went in for a multiplicity of marriages. His harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines, who came from many nations, including Moab, Ammon, Sidon and the Hittite empire played a large part in his downfall as the record in Kings shows:

‘King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh... from the nations of whom the LORD had said’...“You shall not intermarry with them...For surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love...when Solomon was old...his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD...So the LORD became angry with Solomon.’ [1 Kings 11.1-9]

In these telling words, we have recorded the downfall of this most successful king of Israel. Those high places he built for them slowly became places where Solomon himself worshipped.

He used all those God-given resources and his know-how to construct those lavish buildings, provide himself with magnificent gardens, parks and farms. He amassed a personal fortune – his household was equipped to pander to his every need! While this may have given him a certain amount of satisfaction and pleasure, the sayings of Solomon in the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, show us that he wasn’t a happy man.

The Scriptures tell us that God was **angry** with Solomon. The judgment of God on Solomon was that the reign of this great monarch would end with the breaking up of his kingdom (*See 1 Kings 11. 9 – 13*).

For all his wives and concubines, it seems he had only one son – Rehoboam – and he turned out to be a useless monarch. Divine

punishment is something to be feared and Solomon failed miserably. Despite all his wisdom, Solomon forgot the **first** of God's commandments: '***You shall have no other gods before me***' [Exodus 20. 3]. That chapter in Exodus goes on to remind God's people that idolatry was forbidden – they mustn't bow down and worship idols like the surrounding nations – but that is exactly what Solomon did, didn't he?

Here is an important lesson for all who profess to follow Christ. Here was the wisest man on earth failing to see where he was going astray. The lesson for us then is that if it could happen to this wise man, it could easily happen to us!

Many Bible students like to think that Solomon repented and all those Proverbs and other writings have come to us from a wiser, older man who learnt by bitter experience! Let's hope so. Some see the book of Ecclesiastes as the expressions of Solomon's repentance. It is noticeable that it ends like this:

'The Preacher (Solomon), sought to find acceptable words;
and what was written was upright – words of truth'

and he concludes the book with these words:

'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man'. [Ecclesiastes 12. 10,13]

THE GREATER SON OF DAVID

We don't want to end our study of Solomon, thinking only of a wise man who failed! We can rejoice in the fact that his father, King David looked beyond Solomon and his kingdom, to the birth of a much greater and wiser man than Solomon. This greater Son of David would not end up in failure – but in glorious victory. That man is Jesus Christ!

The Apostle Peter set this before us clearly when he was speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem:

‘Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David...being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, **he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne.**’ [Acts 2. 29,30]

What this means is that the reign of Solomon and his glorious kingdom was a **type** of an even greater kingdom and much wiser king who will reign in Jerusalem as king over the kingdom of God.

Before Jesus was born, his mother Mary was told:

‘...you will...bring forth a Son, and shall call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and **the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.** And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ [Luke 1.31- 33]

The world around us is blissfully ignorant of this purpose of God to re-establish the kingdom of Israel. Events are already moving in that direction, and we advise our readers to take the Bible’s message to heart.

Peter reminded his audience about their ignorance of the mission of Christ, but he urged them to:

‘Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ who was preached to you before, 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]

These words are a call to the wise. The Almighty will soon send Jesus Christ back to this earth to 'restore all things' – the greater, wiser Son of David will bring the promised time of blessing on the whole of God's creation and for our readers there remains the question – do you want to be part of it ?

Ken Dennis
Kent, UK

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