

Light

...on a new world

a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible and its message for today

- Christmas
- "The merchant of death"
- Herod the Great

VOLUME 26.4

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The Christadelphians 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 Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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Cover Picture:

The Eiffel Tower, Paris. On 15 November the lights on the tower were switched off as part of a period of national mourning following a series of terrorist attacks— see 'From the editor' page 25.

Note:

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

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The Bible and the world today

Christmas

Imagine that some people you did not know announced they were going to celebrate your birthday. You did not ask them to but they go ahead anyway. They do not know the date of your birthday or how to get in touch with you and are unable to give you any gifts or cards, so they decide to give them to each other instead. This is despite you having offered them the greatest possible gift. Even though you are a powerful and important person, they want to remember you perpetually as a helpless baby. This sounds like very strange behaviour, yet this is exactly what happens to Jesus every year at Christmas.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON

Now many people who celebrate Christmas are not Christians and for them there is no religious significance to any aspect of the holiday. It is a time for family, relaxing and taking time off work. It is also a time of spending on gifts, decorations and perhaps consuming rather too much food and drink. It can also be a time of stress, when family members are forced to gather under the same roof. Some are left paying off their credit card bill for months afterwards and yet the same thing happens every year. For Christians, it is worth pausing to consider the origins and traditions of Christmas before rushing headlong into it.

The date

Why is Christmas 'celebrated' on 25th December? Is that when Jesus was born? We can't be certain of the year of Jesus' birth, let alone the date, but given the indications in the Bible together with other historical writings, we can come to a conclusion.

The Bible states that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great (Luke 1.5). Herod died in 4 BC. We also learn that Herod ordered the murder of all baby boys up to the age of two years in his attempt to eliminate the "*King of the Jews*" who he saw as a rival to his throne (Matthew 2.16). This would suggest

that Jesus was born in approximately 6 BC.

Now we have considered the year, what about the day? The Gospel accounts do not give a date, but they do refer to the shepherds being in the fields with their flocks (Luke 2.8). This does not narrow things down much, but we can definitely rule out winter, since it would be too cold for the sheep to be out in the open.

Jesus was six months younger than John the Baptist as stated by Luke: "*Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month*" (Luke 1.36 NIV). This was announced to his father Zacharias when he was carrying out his priestly duties in the temple. These duties occurred in rotation for one week twice a year and it has been calculated that John would have been born around March and Jesus six months later in September. Some work backwards from the date of his death and estimate that Christ's birth would have been in the autumn which confirms this. Either way, it certainly was not 25th December, so why is this date used?

Pagan origins

To find the answer to that question, we must look through the history of the early church. There is no mention in the Acts of the Apostles

or in the New Testament letters of any celebration of the birth of Jesus. But as Christianity spread, the Apostle Paul was constantly fighting pagan ideas and striving to keep the faith pure and uncontaminated by external influences.

After Paul and his generation passed off the scene, it is likely that a certain amount of compromise took place when new converts were made. In order to make Christianity more appealing and conversion easier, some traditions and practices that pagan converts found hard to give up, were "Christianised". The Romans had a long history of this. Wherever they went, they would absorb the gods and practices of the local population and "Romanise" them, by identifying the comparable Roman god and renaming the local one. Now the same tool was being used in the spread of Christianity - all the more so when it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. So what was the significance of 25th December?

The first Christmas

The first recorded date of Christmas being celebrated on 25th December was in AD 336, during the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine (he was the first so-called Christian Roman

Emperor). Christianity was at this time in the process of becoming the official state religion in the Roman Empire. A few years later, Pope Julius the First officially declared that the birth of Jesus would be celebrated on that date.

It is probably no coincidence that 25th December was the Winter Solstice and the ancient pagan Roman midwinter festivals called 'Saturnalia' and 'Dies Natalis Solis Invicti' (Latin for birthday of the unconquered sun) took place in December around this date - so it was already a time of celebration. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day in the year and usually occurs on 21st or 22nd December. To pagans this meant that the winter was over and they had a festival to celebrate.



RIGHT: Roman silver medallion showing 'Solis Invicti' (see text above)

They worshipped the sun for defeating the darkness of winter. In Scandinavia and some other parts of northern Europe, the Winter Solstice is known as Yule and is where Yule Logs came from.

The Roman Festival of Saturnalia took place between 17th and 23rd December and honoured the Roman god Saturn. It is described as follows:

"The holiday was celebrated with a sacrifice at the Temple of Saturn, in the Roman Forum, and a public banquet, followed by private gift-giving, continual partying, and a carnival atmosphere that overturned Roman social norms: gambling was permitted, and masters provided table service for their slaves" (Source: Wikipedia).

So we can see where the gift-giving, banqueting and partying came from. 'Dies Natalis Solis Invicti' was held on 25th December and was the 'birthday' of the Pagan Sun god Mithras (adopted from the Persian god Mitra).

The Christmas tree was brought into British homes in Victorian times by Prince Albert, who imported the idea from his native Germany. Pagans

used branches of fir trees to decorate their homes during the Winter Solstice, to remind them of the coming of spring. The Romans used fir trees to decorate their temples at the festival of 'Saturnalia'. In the Norse religion, the oak was the sacred tree of Odin and sacrifices or offerings were made under the tree in his honour. This is echoed in the placing of gifts under the tree at Yule-time.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and part of their family gather around the newly fashionable Christmas tree. From the Illustrated London News 1848

Remembering Jesus

This leads us to conclude that people celebrate Jesus' birthday on the wrong date, using traditions derived from pagan religions. Some may say that anything which draws attention to Jesus is a good thing. We would agree with this if:

a) Everyone remembered Jesus at this time of year (sadly, for many, it is just a time of excessive spending and feasting).

b) The customs associated with Christmas accurately reflect Bible truths. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

One well-known Christmas carol includes the words that Christ was "born on Christmas Day" – he wasn't, as we have seen. Carols and nativity plays depict the wise men visiting the stable where Jesus was born – they didn't. They visited the family in a house, up to two years after his birth. Another well-known carol includes the words "We three kings of Orient are" – the magi were not kings and we do not know for certain that there were three – only that they brought three gifts.

All of the above does nothing to promote a Scriptural understanding of Jesus and his life. The greatest injustice is that our Lord is perpetually depicted as the "little baby Jesus", whereas the risen Christ is

the second most powerful being in the universe!

The birth of Jesus was a sign that God's plan for the salvation of humankind was moving forward. However, it was the death and resurrection of Jesus that gave men and women the opportunity to obtain forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. We could say that Jesus' birth promised much, but his death and resurrection delivered everything.

The greatest gift

We have already alluded to the greatest gift that Jesus has given to believers:

"But God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life"

Romans 5.8-10

This is the gift that God, through Jesus, gave to us – the hope of everlasting life in His kingdom, which the Bible teaches will be established on earth when Christ returns. It is a gift because we cannot earn it and we don't deserve

it. Consider these New Testament passages:

"For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ" Romans 5.17

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"

Ephesians 2.8

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" Ephesians 4.7

These and many more Scriptures tell us of this wonderful gift, which Jesus bought for us with his blood.

The command of Jesus to his followers

It might have come as a surprise to many devout Christians to learn that rather than celebrating the birth of Jesus, they are actually celebrating an assortment of pagan feast days with a thin Christian veneer. Christians are told to separate themselves from such things (2 Corinthians 6.17, 1 Corinthians 10.14). Perhaps in the light of this evidence, some will want to reflect on their activities at that time of year especially as there is no command-

ment in the Bible to remember Jesus' birth.

True Christians are commanded to follow the example of Jesus in their lives and remember his death and resurrection in a simple act of obedience to his command to break bread and drink wine in memory of him (Luke 22. 19, 20).

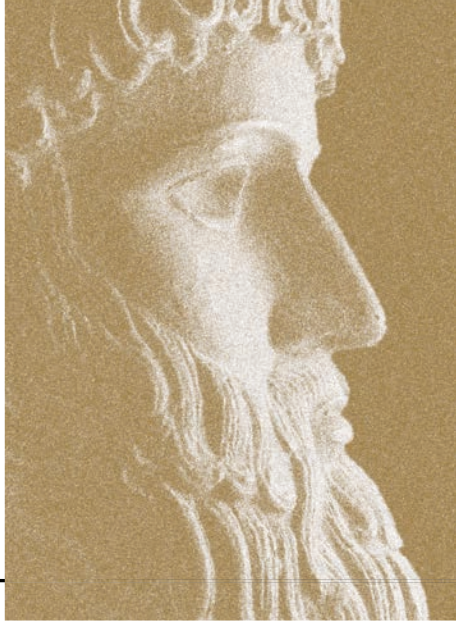
So we don't have to wait for December to come round. The followers of Jesus remember his great work every week after the example of the first century disciples, and show their thanks for the incredible gift he has made available to all those who truly follow him:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"

Romans 6.23

A Longman
Milton Keynes, UK

Please request your free copy of the Light Special Edition on Jesus Christ (see back cover).



BIBLE CHARACTERS

The Apostle John

Accepting Jesus as our Saviour and knowing “the truth” (as both Jesus and John called it), is designed to change our way of life (John 8.31, 32). The followers of Jesus are not automatically ready or equipped to enter the kingdom of God.

Their lives until the return of Christ are organised by God so that they are influenced over time to become useful to God and this is referred to as a refining process. All God’s servants have gone through this process – there’s a list of some of them in Hebrews chapter 11 – characters such as Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Samuel and David. They all

experienced refining to be truly equipped for the service of God.

Many of us put Bible characters on pedestals and rightly so, but they were similar to us and it is the study of these characters that is beneficial – God has purposely told us about these godly men and women of old in order that we may learn, develop and progress.

John’s relationship with Jesus

There was one man, the Apostle John, who was closer to the Son of God than anyone else. If “the truth” didn’t change this man then there is no hope for any of us. Let us appreciate John’s special qualities but learn from the way that Jesus helped mould his character – not just learning from his mistakes, but also observing the methods Jesus

used to help him realise his faults, in order to make him fit for God's use.

John was different from Peter, never confident in himself but confident in the Father and absolutely loyal to Jesus. He was more spiritual but not yet suitable for the kingdom of God. By analysing the life of John, we can understand his human character defects and how they needed to be addressed. God has given us clues to these development areas.

The key to his character is highlighted for us in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus had to work with all his specially chosen disciples and help them change. The story of this calling begins: *"And he went up on the mountain and called to him those he wanted. And they came to him"* (Mark 3.13). The same event is recorded by Luke in these words:

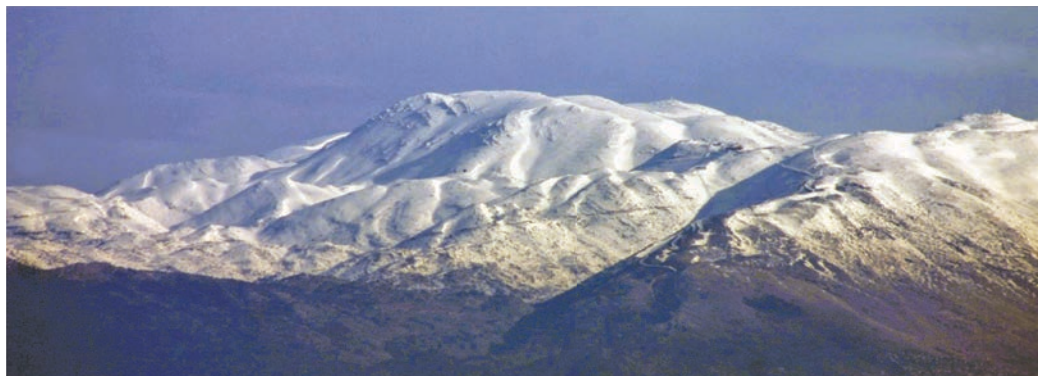
"Now it came to pass in those days that he went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples to him; and from

them he chose twelve whom he also named apostles." Luke 6.12,13

A 'Son of Thunder'

Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, not wanting to make any mistake, asking for his Father's guidance. He needed to pick the right people not just for their own qualities, but for the way in which we can take lessons from their good and bad points. This is a profound demonstration of the love of God that he chose people to appear in the Bible record in order for us to learn from their lives. Within the narrative of the naming of the twelve apostles, Mark records: *"James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder)"* (Mark 3.17 NIV).

The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word "Boanerges" is 'Benreges' which means 'son of reges', with 'reges' meaning to be moved by rage, anger or wrath. It can also be interpreted as being moved with grief, awe and joy. Strong's



concordance suggests 'reges' is to 'quiver with any violent emotion'. John's problem therefore, was that he was a very intense person and felt so strongly about things. Jesus had to work on him to help him take a little more care with the feelings of others.

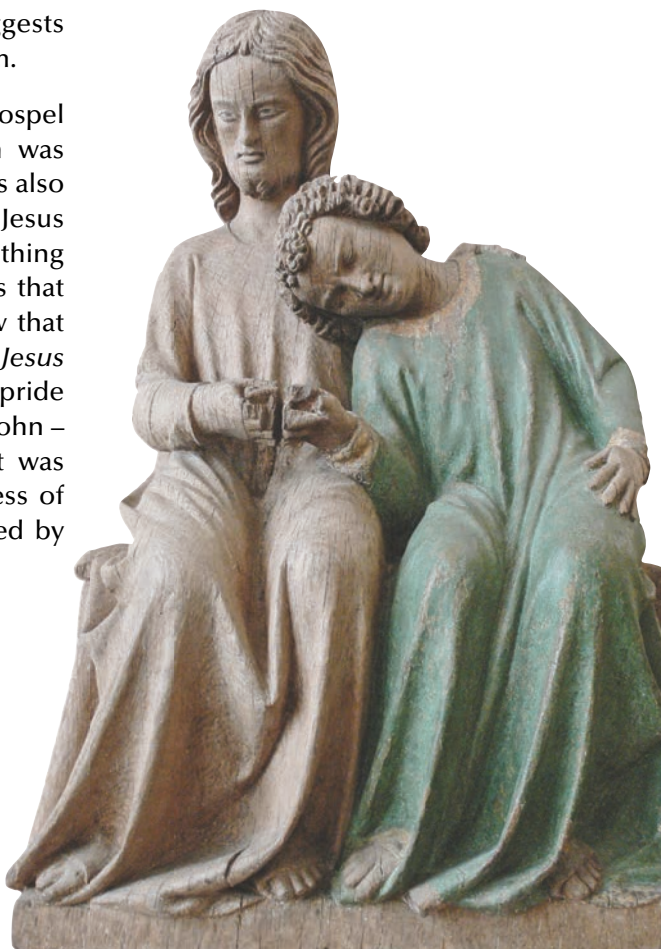
We all know of people like this and of course, we may be accused of this behaviour ourselves. They are not relaxed in situations which challenge their views or understanding. When Jesus gave him the name "Boanerges", it naturally suggests that he knew this man's problem.

A careful comparison of the Gospel narratives shows us that John was the cousin of Jesus. The Gospels also record three occasions when Jesus had to rebuke John. But one thing we can say above everything, is that he loved his Master. We know that he was the disciple "*whom Jesus loved*". If there was a touch of pride in Peter, there was no pride in John – he could write this because it was true. The extent of the closeness of John and Jesus can be explained by considering these words:

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (John 1.18). The only other time that the word "*bosom*" is mentioned in John's Gospel is in the upper room: "*Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved*" (John 13.23). There is certainly no reference to any other disciple ever 'leaning on the bosom' of Jesus and this demonstrates how close and in tune John was with Jesus.

RIGHT: 'John the Apostle resting on the bosom of Christ' – early 14th century oak carving

LEFT: The foothills of Mt Hermon. It may be here that Jesus spent all night in prayer and was later to be transfigured before his disciples.



A first rebuke

We will now consider the three occasions that Jesus rebuked John, to help him realise the flaw in his character; a characteristic that needed to change. When John speaks he always precedes his sentence with the words Master or Teacher: *"Now John answered him, saying, 'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us'"* (Mark 9.38). John was utterly distraught that this man had the audacity to attempt this action. His reaction was immediately combative. Of course, he was right in principle but the way he went about things was far too strong. He couldn't understand how anyone could not be a lover and respecter of Jesus.

Can we be like John sometimes? Do we march into battle without analysing the situation first? The lesson, surely, is not to be confrontational but tolerant towards others and challenge politely and fairly if necessary.

Jesus' reaction was the correct one and significantly less stressful: *"...Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in my name can soon afterwards speak evil of me. For he who is not against us is on our side"* (Mark 9.39,40). The calm and

polite response from Jesus was showing John that he didn't have to be so filled with rage. We could say that Jesus rebuked John gently on this occasion for short-sighted aggressiveness.

A second rebuke

Luke records an incident that included his brother James, also a Son of Thunder:

"...and as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for him. But they did not receive him, because his face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But he turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village"

Luke 9.52-56

When *'James and John saw this'* (the Greek word translated 'saw' means 'to comprehend with their brains'), they understood these Samaritans had snubbed Jesus and their immediate reaction was to request fire come and consume them, like Elijah had done. This was true passion but ultimately anger. It is not



Today very few Samaritans remain. Here they climb their sacred Mt. Gerizim to celebrate the Passover.

Christian behaviour to suggest that these human beings made in the likeness of God be obliterated for opposing Christ.

Jesus had already pronounced judgement on those cities in Galilee but it was not John's position to demand the same for these Samaritans. Although he vehemently loathed anyone who snubbed Jesus, he was not to behave with such aggression. The 'spirit of Elijah' was the 'still small voice' to heal and restore. Jesus pointed out to John his ignorance of this spirit. This rebuke would have been firm but fair and afterwards they moved on and nothing more was said; Jesus had cleverly avoided confrontation. Perhaps we can describe this second

rebuke as vindictive intolerance. There is no place among Christ's followers for this sort of intolerance and anger.

A third rebuke

To help John in his refining process, this third rebuke is recorded by Mark. Here is an example of how a person who is too strong and forthright can upset other people which, of course, is not Christian behaviour:

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him, saying, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask'. And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' They said to him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left, in your glory'"

Mark 10.35-37

This is an interesting request to analyse, because John's motives were honourable. He loved Jesus so much that he never wanted to be parted from him. For John it was all about being as close to Christ as he could get and as often as he could. But he failed to see how that might make others feel. Jesus' response was typically perfect. He made John think about his request and so responded with a question: *"...You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"* Without hesitation the response came back – *"We can"* (Mark 10.38,39). Yet John and his brother James did not know what Jesus meant when referring to the cup and, in their usual loyal but misguided way, they reacted without taking time to consider the consequences of their answer.

Later on, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 12, James did drink of the cup, being the first disciple to lose his life, although he failed to understand what was being spoken of in this instance. However, when the other disciples heard about this episode, they were not happy. John's intensity had led to ill feeling in the group. What right did he and his brother James have to expect any special position or privilege over the rest of Jesus' close friends? But his love for Christ was

deeper than the others. He just needed to have a few more social skills. We may suggest that Jesus on this occasion rebuked John for thoughtless ambition – not understanding the feelings of others.

Lessons for us

Perhaps we can summarise these three rebukes for our benefit.

- ❖ Short-sighted aggressiveness (Mark 9)
- ❖ Vindictive intolerance (Luke 9)
- ❖ Thoughtless ambition (Mark 10)

The key question of course is, did this 'Son of Thunder' learn from his lessons?

Well, if there was ever a word to describe John's own Gospel, it would be the word 'care'. He probed far more deeply and regularly into brotherly love than the other writers and it was John who took Jesus' own mother into his family after the crucifixion. His regular use of gentle language such as *"little children"* indicates a calm and respectful character.

John did appreciate Jesus' beautifully crafted rebukes to help him and he was determined never to repeat these mistakes again. The disciple whom Jesus loved had one ambition and that was to please his Lord. Whenever he opened his mouth, the words of his teacher were on his lips.

John was the thoughtful and silent observer of all that Jesus said and did.

The empty tomb

John was present at the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and the raising from the dead of the daughter of Jairus, the Transfiguration, the Mount Olivet prophecy; he witnessed first-hand Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was the only apostle to be present at the crucifixion and was first to arrive at the empty tomb. Whatever was going on in Jesus' life, John was there – generally quiet – observing but learning. We can conclude our review of John's character by thinking about events at the empty tomb:

"Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple (John), and came to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb

first, went in also; and he saw and believed"

John 20.3-8

John outran Peter to the tomb because he was younger and fitter. He also demonstrates his deep desire and enthusiasm to be with Jesus again. But he allowed Peter to go into the tomb first. Surely this highlights a true understanding of others. He graciously allowed Peter to be the first to enter the tomb to find out where Jesus was. Perhaps he was aware of Peter's remorse over his denial of Christ and appreciated his need to make amends – that was a thoughtful touch – he had learned an important lesson.

The lessons John had learned from his close contact with Jesus are reflected in the three letters he later wrote to the believers, those he regarded as *"my little children"* (1 John 2.1,12,18,28). These letters are considered in more detail in another article (see page 31).

Jonathan Mitchell
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“The merchant of death”

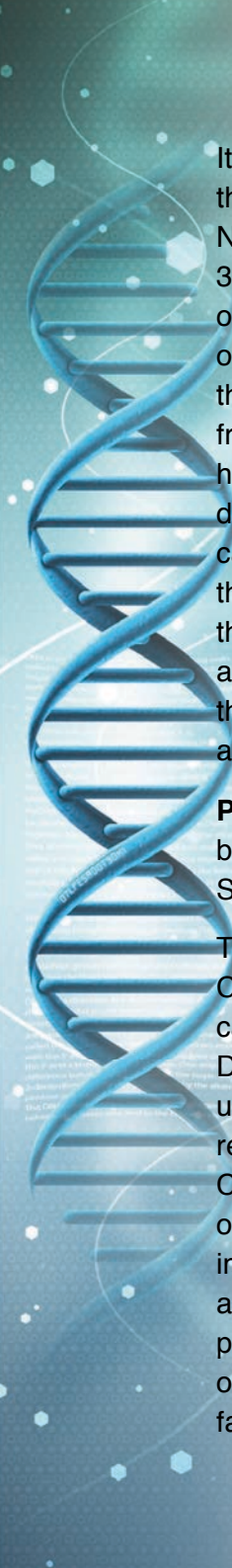
In 1888 a Swedish businessman was surprised to find himself reading his own obituary in a French newspaper. It was not very flattering; the headline read '*le marchand de la morte est mort*' – **'the merchant of death is dead'**.

The man was Alfred Nobel, a wealthy industrialist and inventor, heavily involved in armaments and inventor of the explosive called dynamite. The dead man was his brother Ludwig – a simple case of mistaken identity. Obviously concerned about his legacy, eight years later in his Will, Alfred devoted most of his fortune to establishing and funding a series of international prizes. These were to be awarded to those who confer ‘the greatest benefit on mankind’ in various fields of scientific study, literature and the pursuit of peace. A Nobel Prize is now recognised as one of the highest possible awards for human achievement.

Fast forward to 2015...

In October this year, the Nobel Prize for Chemistry was awarded to three scientists for their research on repair and error correcting mechanisms in DNA. Why is that so important?

[illegible]



It is now half a century since the discovery of DNA and the coded information it contains (awarded another Nobel Prize). Almost every cell in our bodies has about 3.2 billion letters of code, information that defines not only our individual characteristics but also controls the ongoing processes of life from moment to moment. But those fifty years have also shown that DNA is quite fragile and easily damaged. Ultraviolet light, radiation, heat, various toxic chemicals, all can attack DNA and disrupt its code, causing harmful mutations and cancers. The constant copying of genetic information that takes place in the cell can result in copying errors that quickly multiply. If these damaging processes are allowed to continue unchecked for any length of time, they produce **pandemonium** in the cell, with disastrous results.

Pandemonium! That doesn't sound very 'scientific' – but that's the word used by the Nobel Prize Committee. So how is pandemonium avoided?

The scientists whose work was recognised by the Committee have discovered that the living cell has the capacity to repair, restore and rebuild its damaged DNA, so that the processes of life can continue unimpeded. Missing information is replaced, damage is repaired; even a broken strand of DNA can be rejoined. Copying errors are reduced to an error rate of about one 'letter' in one billion. All this would defy the imagination, except for the fact that similar processes are carried out by computer programmers in a procedure often called 'debugging' – getting the 'bugs' out of an information system, repairing and correcting false and damaged code and getting the system to

work efficiently. It is a process that demands intelligence.

Do you, does anybody, have any idea how these processes, this astonishing molecular machinery, could have come about by accident? Neither the scientists involved nor the Nobel Prize Committee make any suggestions about how this all developed. And the biggest question of all remains unanswered. Where does information come from? Where did those 3.5 billion letters of DNA code originate? All human experience tells us that information has a purpose, and it is generated by one thing and one thing only – intelligence. The current theory of evolution allows for neither: no purpose, plan or foresight, and no intelligence.

But there's more!

Doesn't the current idea of evolution depend on 'mutations', the accidental changes and 'mistakes' in DNA that might just very occasionally produce something new and useful? Yes, it does. So will these repair mechanisms directly affect the so-called evolutionary process and make it more difficult? Yes, they will.

So it would seem that the process of evolution by mutations has produced a biological system that tries to eliminate mutations and prevent evolution happening? Can you get your brain round that?

When it comes to exploding the theory of evolution, you could say (thanks to Alfred Nobel), this is

DYNAMITE!

How much more logical and satisfying to believe that DNA and every living thing which depends on it are the work of an all-powerful and intelligent Designer!

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul contrasts the wisdom of the so-called wise men of his day with the wisdom that comes from God:

“‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” 1 Corinthians 1.19,20 NIV

“Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse...”

Romans 1.20 NRSV

Roy Toms

Norfolk, UK

The sequence of coded information in a small segment of DNA

HEROD THE GREAT

builder and despot

Herod the Great was appointed king of the Roman province of Judea by the Romans and ruled from 37–4 BC. An Idumean by birth, he was infamous for his cruelty. He had usurped the dynasty of the Hasmonean kings and ruled ruthlessly, destroying all who opposed him, even members of his own family. He was also a prolific builder, undertaking many significant projects.

This article traces the historical detail of two of his achievements, showing without doubt that Herod, as recorded in the Bible, was a real person. Additional details from historians and archaeologists give us a better understanding of the background to the Biblical record of this infamous king.

Herod first appears in Matthew's gospel record, when the wise men seeking Jesus came to ask him: *"Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?"* (Matthew 2.2). Herod, paranoid about the obvious threat to his own position as king, determined to wipe out potential opposition by ordering the slaughter of all boys up to the age of two years



Model of Herod's temple in Jerusalem

The Bible stands
THE TEST OF TIME

“in Bethlehem and in all its districts” (Matthew 2.16). That was totally in character from what history records of this despotic ruler.

The palace at Herodium

This atrocity must have been his last, for Matthew simply records that *“when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt...”* (Matthew 2.19). Herod however, despot that he was, had been preparing for his funeral for years. He planned to be buried at his mountain palace, Herodium, seven miles south-east of Bethlehem. It was here that a magnificent mountain top mausoleum was constructed. Josephus tells us about the great pompous funeral procession to Herodium from Jericho where he had died.

“The bier was of solid gold, studded with precious stones, and had a covering of purple, embroidered with various colours; on this lay the body enveloped in purple robe, a diadem encircling the head and surmounted by a crown of gold, the sceptre beside his right hand. Around the bier were Herod's sons and a large group of his relations;

these were followed by the guards, the Thracian contingent, Germans and Gauls, all equipped as for war ... The body was thus conveyed for a distance of two hundred furlongs to Herodium, where, in accordance with the directions of the deceased, it was interred” (Flavius Josephus: Jewish Wars: Book 1.33. 9).

Contrast this with the Bible's simple statement *“...when Herod was dead...”*.

Professor Netzer, of the Hebrew University, after many years of excavation and restoration of Herodium, announced in early 2007 that he had located the actual site of the tomb itself (or what remained of it). Many attempts had been made over the years to identify the place on the slopes but it was on the mountain top itself, within the artificial cone, which gave the hill its current volcano-shape, that vital clues were found. The approach to the burial site was via a monumental flight of stairs (6.5 metres wide) that were specially constructed for the funeral procession.

The mausoleum however, had long been destroyed, as the mountain

The excavations at Herodium



was used as a fortress in the Jewish rebellions against Rome in AD 70 and AD 135. What Netzer found among the rubble was the base of a well-constructed podium built uniquely of dressed stone, together with decorated urns used to store body ashes, and fragments of an elaborate sarcophagus made of reddish limestone. These clues convinced Netzer that this was indeed the tomb of Herod the Great, lost to history for 2,000 years!

Herod's Temple

The "jewel in the crown" of Herod's building projects was the magnificent Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In the time of Jesus it had been under construction for 46 years (John 2.20) and was probably not completed until a few years before the Romans came and destroyed it in AD 70.

The Temple Mount today (see aerial view below) is a very large flat area on which the main building is an Islamic shrine called the Dome of the Rock. This was constructed more than 600 years after the destruction of Herod's temple.

The original outer courtyard of the first temple which had been constructed by King Solomon on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, was 500 cubits square. Herod planned the new temple to be more impressive than had ever been seen before. Despite opposition from many Jews, construction began in 16 BC by enlarging the level temple platform, doubling it in size and necessitating the building of massive new retaining walls. The Western Wall which still exists today is a Herodian wall. The eastern wall, however, could not be built further out because it is on the very edge of the steep sides of the





Kidron valley below, and therefore parts of this wall around the East Gate are believed to be the oldest.

The other three sides to the south, west and north of the rectangle were enlarged, necessitating an incredible engineering project that would challenge even modern day technology. A clue to the impressive nature of the project is found in the gospel accounts. Jesus was with the disciples in Jerusalem and as they left the temple area they urged Jesus to look at the impressive building works: *“Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”* (Mark 13.1). It was certainly a wonder of the Roman world, a breath-taking piece of architecture.

Massive stone walls

Since 1967 the true extent of the massive outer walls has been uncovered. Stones quarried and

One of the largest stones of Herod's construction work in enlarging the Temple platform, seen from the Western Wall Tunnel (see below).

shaped by expert stonemasons typically are estimated to weigh between 2.5 and 5 tons each. Some are truly massive, and the largest is 45 feet (13.7 metres) long, 12 feet (3.7 metres) high and 12 feet deep, weighing an estimated 570 tons!

How were stones of such prodigious size moved from the quarry and put in place? How could such a stone be lifted? Answers to these questions have only been found relatively recently. On 6th July 2009 the Jerusalem Post reported that the Israel Antiquities Authority had found another quarry in central Jerusalem (the third in two years) believed to date from the second



temple period. The quarry, which is 2,030 years old, was discovered during excavations carried out ahead of planned residential development (see picture above).

Herod had more than 10,000 people trained for this work. It is believed that graded transportation routes were prepared and the stones moved on wooden rollers, or wagons drawn by camels or oxen. When on site the stones were not lifted at all. The base walls were constructed and then the platform behind was back-filled. The next layer of stones was rolled on to the new raised level from the quarry and set in place, then that new level was back-filled and so on. Therefore lifting these massive stones would not have been necessary.

King Herod the despot is long dead but Jesus the Saviour of the world and future King of the Jews is alive. Before his cruel death Jesus had said: *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2.19). He was speaking about the temple of his body - his own resurrection from the dead! This event is the foundation stone of true Christianity. It gives believers a wonderful hope for the future - resurrection at the return of Jesus as "King of Kings" to reign over the kingdom of God on earth (see article on page 25).

Justin Giles
Kent, UK



This editorial has been prompted by the news of a series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks in Paris, leaving many dead and injured. The so-called “Islamic State” has claimed responsibility and if this is true, yet another atrocity has been carried out in the name of religion.

from the editor....

Islamic State (sometimes called IS or ISIL) burst on to the international scene in 2014 when it seized large swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq. It has become notorious for its brutality, including mass killings, abductions and beheadings.

One of the effects of the rise of IS has been the displacement of more than three million people in Iraq alone, with millions more fleeing from Syria to Lebanon, Turkey and elsewhere. Many of them have risked perilous journeys to Europe via Egypt, Libya and the Mediterranean to seek asylum and a life free from the threat of extreme violence. Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 it is estimated that nine million Syrians have fled from their homes.

The record of history testifies to the inhumanity of those who have forced countless numbers of people to be uprooted from their homes

and to seek refuge elsewhere. The Bible gives us some examples of men and women who had to leave their homeland and flee to another country for a number of reasons.

The Jewish patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, sought refuge in foreign lands to avoid the effects of famine. Others like Moses, David and Mary the mother of Jesus in fear of threats to their lives, left their homes and fled for safety to a foreign land. The whole nation of Israel went into the wilderness of Sinai with God’s help, to escape the rigours of living as slaves in Egypt. However, this was intended to eventually bring the Israelites to the land of Canaan (now Israel) in fulfilment of a promise made to their ancestor Abraham.

These and others like them, were people who sought refuge and a new life in places of comparative safety. However, in the long run

asylum seekers often exchange one set of problems for another. True safety cannot be assured by just fleeing from one country to the next. What is the solution to this seemingly insurmountable problem?

God's plan is to do away with all forms of human rule and establish a world-wide government based on divine principles. Jesus is the divinely appointed king who will come again to establish the kingdom of God and reign over a world freed from hatred, oppression and injustice. David, the Psalmist who experienced life as a refugee fleeing from King Saul, expressed his hope for the future in these words:

"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Yes, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him. For he will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in his sight" Psalm 72.8,11,12,14

The world is in turmoil at present but we believe this will all be changed at the return of Jesus Christ who will fulfil those great promises made to the Jewish patriarchs. Abraham was promised a descendant (Jesus) through whom all nations would be blessed (Genesis 22.16-18). He had

great faith in God's promises and obeyed the Divine call to leave his home. He exchanged a very comfortable way of life for a nomadic existence that eventually led him to dwell in the land God had promised him for an everlasting inheritance. He then lived in that land *"dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"* (Hebrews 11.9).

Abraham died without obtaining that inheritance. He and many others:

"died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them"

Hebrews 11.13,14,16

When Jesus returns, the present refugee crisis will be resolved, along with all those other man-made problems that affect our world today. Those who share the hope of Abraham can look to the future with complete confidence.

Editor



WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

“... All who are in the graves will hear his voice”

Jesus had just healed a paralysed man in Jerusalem. The man had been ill for thirty-eight years but Jesus cured him so completely that he was immediately “made well, took up his bed, and walked” (John 5.9).

The miracle caused much discussion among the Jews, not least because they regarded Jesus as having broken their Sabbath law by healing the man on that particular day. Furthermore, they wrongly accused Jesus of making himself “*equal with God*” (John 5.18), a proposition which he always rejected.

Following on from this miracle of healing and its aftermath, Jesus emphasised that he could do

nothing of himself but was dependent on his Father for everything. He also said that there would be greater miracles than the one they had just witnessed, because his Father would enable him not just to heal, but to raise people from the dead. The subsequent words of Jesus include his teaching about the resurrection which is the subject of this article:

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

John 5.28,29

Examples of people being raised from the dead

Raising people from the dead was not something new because there are examples of this in the Old

Testament (see 1 Kings 17.17-22; 2 Kings 4.32-35).

In the New Testament, the Gospels record three occasions when Jesus raised people from the dead; the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9.25); the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7.15) and Lazarus (John 11. 43, 44). Later the apostles were given the power to raise people from the dead and examples are found in the book of Acts (see Acts 9.37-41; 20.9, 10).

God raised Jesus from the dead and this is the fundamental rock on which the Christian hope of bodily resurrection is based. After Jesus had been raised, Matthew records that *"many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many"* (Matthew 27.52, 53).

The future resurrection

The above references remind us that resurrection is not an uncommon feature of the Biblical record in both Old and New Testaments. From earliest times it has been the expressed hope of believers. The Book of Job may be the oldest in the Bible and in it Job spoke of his own eventual resurrection from the dead in these words:

"...I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth;

and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God." Job 19.25, 26

The following points should be noted:

- ❖ Job said that his redeemer (Jesus) will eventually return to the earth and, despite his own body having decomposed in the grave, he will exist again in the flesh to see Jesus at that time.
- ❖ The prophet Daniel had the same expectation. In the very last verse of his prophecy he was told by an angel: *"But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days"* (Daniel 12.13). Like Job, Daniel would rest in the grave until the end of the days and then rise from the dead to receive his reward.
- ❖ The same hope of resurrection is set out in the New Testament. For example, the Apostle John records the conversation between Jesus and Martha. Martha's brother Lazarus had died. Jesus comforted her with the knowledge that he would rise again and Martha confirmed her belief in a bodily resurrection:

"Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again'. Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'. Jesus

said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live.'

John 11.23-25

When will the resurrection take place?

Note the consistency of the message. The believer's hope is firmly based on a resurrection of the body at the last day when Jesus returns to the earth.

In his first letter to the Thessalonian believers the Apostle Paul wrote about the return of Jesus to the earth and confirmed that the resurrection of the dead would take place first, before the believers who are alive at Jesus' return are called away to meet him:

"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord..."

1 Thessalonians 4.14-17 NIV

From various references in the Gospel records it is evident that Jesus would often have referred to this latter day resurrection during his preaching of the gospel. For example he spoke about those who would *"be repaid at the resurrection of the just"* (Luke 14.14). He described some as being *"sons of the resurrection"* (Luke 20.36). He explained that marriage as we know it will not feature in the coming kingdom for those who are given the gift of everlasting life: *"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage"* (Mark 12.25). He said that it is God's will that *"everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6.40).

The hope of the faithful

There are a number of people whose faith and trust in God are recorded in Hebrews chapter 11, including Noah, Abraham, Joseph (see overleaf), Moses, Gideon and David. The writer refers to the promises they received from God and believed. He emphasises that though they had been dead for a very long time, they had still not received the fulfilment of the things promised. Why? Because they will be given eternal life at the last day, at the return of Jesus to the earth, when all the faithful will be rewarded together.



Joseph is one of many great men of faith who have not yet received their reward. He awaits the day of resurrection when all God's children will be rewarded together. (Painting by James Tissot c. 1900)

Hebrews chapter 11 ends with these words:

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

Hebrews 11.39,40 NIV

Who will be raised from the dead?

It will be apparent from some of the references quoted above that not everybody will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns. The Bible

teaches that death is a punishment for sin and that everyone dies because they have sinned. The Apostle Paul made this clear when he wrote to the Christians at Rome:

"...through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Romans 5.12

Death is a punishment for sin and a punishment cannot, by definition be a pleasant experience. Death is in fact the complete cessation of life, activity and thought, and is described over and over again in the Bible as a state of unconsciousness – a sleep from which some will be awakened on the day of resurrection. Many, however, will remain asleep in death for all time, with no hope of resurrection. Psalm 49 tells

us this when it compares unenlightened men and women to the animals in their death:

"For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish... man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish... Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendour of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies... he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life. A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish." Psalm 49.10-12 and 16-20 NIV

The prophet Isaiah refers to the permanent end of some of Israel's enemies and, in so doing, reminds us of what will happen to all those who are not called by God or who fail to respond to the Divine calling:

"They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore you have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish." Isaiah 26.14

However, for some, those who are called by God and respond, there is hope - the hope of resurrection from the dead at the second coming of Jesus. Speaking of them Isaiah says:

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

Isaiah 26.19

In the New Testament, the fifteenth chapter of the first letter to the Christians at Corinth deals with this subject in some detail. The writer explains that Jesus' resurrection is a pattern for those who have been called:

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."

1 Corinthians 15.20-23 NIV



This passage emphasises that the resurrection will take place at the coming of Jesus and that not everybody will be raised from the dead - only those who belong to him. The Old Testament prophet Daniel emphasises the point that many but not all will be raised from the dead: *"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt"* (Daniel 12;2). This verse also tells us that not all who are raised will be rewarded with everlasting life. Some, because of an unacceptable response to their calling, will be rejected. Many of Jesus' parables refer to this judgment and one parable describes this as the separation of the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25.31-46).

The meaning of Jesus' words

Now, with one possible exception, we can understand the meaning of Jesus' words which form the basis of this article:

"...the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

John 5.28, 29

The exception is the word *"all"*. Why is Jesus apparently saying that

everybody will be resurrected when the other verses we have quoted make it clear that only some will be? The answer is in that word *"graves"*.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek and the word *"graves"* is a translation of the Greek word *'mnēmeion'* which literally means a memorial. So Jesus is referring to all those in special marked out memorial graves; in other words the graves of those who belong to him as we saw earlier. As one writer puts it: "Some have stumbled at the word *'all'*, but Jesus is not speaking of universal resurrection. He has just spoken of hearing his words; such a hearing brought responsibility to his judgment" (The Gospel of John: J. Carter) and therefore to resurrection in the last day.

The question for us individually is, if we die before Jesus comes again, will we have done what it takes to belong to him and therefore have a hope of being raised from the dead? Or will we be like those who *"will not rise"* and whose memory will simply perish for all time?

Martin Southgate
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

Part 18: The Church established

In this article we will look at the teaching of the Apostle John, who wrote three letters to the first century believers. John, together with his brother James, was one of the group of Galilean fishermen from whom Jesus chose his first disciples. Uncompromising in his zeal, he was Jesus' favourite disciple and almost certainly the one "whom Jesus loved."

(John 13.23 – see article page 7)

Together with James and Peter, he witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus on the summit of a high mountain, where they alone saw a

glorified Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah (see Matthew 17.1-9). They heard God acclaiming His Son in words later quoted by Peter in his second letter: *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* spoken by *"this voice which came from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain"*. Peter and John were *"eye-witnesses of his majesty"* and this was evidence of the truth of his second coming for which true disciples should be looking (2 Peter 1.16-18).

John had already written his Gospel record when he penned the three letters, most probably in the latter part of the first century AD.

The 1st letter of John

We can be certain of its authorship as there are striking similarities between this letter and the Gospel of John. In both he claims to have been an eye-witness of events in his master's life and the writer adopts an authoritative manner. He was a man of advanced age as the late date for its writing would lead us to expect. These arguments apply as well to his second and third letters.

The antichrist

No specific recipients are mentioned as this was a general epistle. Its target was '*the antichrist*', of whom "*many antichrists have come ...*"(2.18); his spiritual enemies were the direct opponents of Jesus

and his Gospel. They would have included Judaism, the religion of orthodox Jews, and Gnosticism, the Jesus-dishonouring set of beliefs that were increasingly influencing believers. Gnosticism, a belief that the body is totally evil, from which we need to be liberated by a special knowledge (Gnosis), was mainly a second century development. This false knowledge, which played down the work of Christ, was already beginning its pernicious growth. It was extremely damaging to the truth of the Gospel and the sin-denying way of life that belief in Jesus should bring and which is vital to our salvation.

This letter exposed the essence of the opposition, as belonging to "*the*



One of the so-called 'Gnostic gospels', the Gospel of Thomas, from the Nag Hammadi Library. The pernicious philosophy of Gnosticism was already at work among the early disciples when John wrote.

lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life", epitomising "the world" (2.16). So *"I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you"* (2.26). He also wrote *"that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God"* (5.13).

John was intent on exposing the immoral nature of the opposition; they were *"of the devil"* (i.e. our natural propensity to sin), whereas being *"born of God"* means that we must try to overcome sin (3.9); thus belief is a practical matter, for: *"Whoever does not practise righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother"* (3.10).

True fellowship

John also emphasised the *"fellowship"* (i.e. close relationship) that should exist between true believers which, most importantly, they have *"with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ"* (1.3). Only by walking in the light, which means rejecting darkness, can we show our fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ, whose blood *"cleanses us from all sin ... If we confess our sins ..."* (1.5-10).

The special relationship between the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, which is mirrored in our own

fellowship, must not be misunderstood. John's Gospel record tells us that Jesus said to his disciples *"I and my Father are one"* (John 10.30). This does not mean that they were ever equal but rather one in mind and purpose. Jesus prayed that the disciples would also share in that oneness (John 17.20,21) and he was careful to emphasise His Father's pre-eminence in his assertion that *"My Father is greater than I"* (John 14.28).

Crucial to his role as the Saviour of mankind was his birth as *'the Son of Man'* – *"the man Christ Jesus"* distinct from God (1 Timothy 2.5). As a son of Adam he had to die; but his moral perfection through all his trials, culminating in his death, meant that he became the perfect sacrifice – the one who *"cleanses us from all sin"* if we seek fellowship with him. The importance of this was emphasised by John: *"Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God"*. Further, *"this is the spirit of the antichrist...."* (4.2,3). Over the next 200 years this developed into the erroneous doctrine of the Trinity.

Correct belief in Jesus is the test of our claims to fellowship: *"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is*

the Christ?" False teachers were denying Christ's role. But *"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also"* (2.22, 23).

It is also through their righteousness that the followers of Christ show their belief. *"Whoever has been born of God does not sin... he cannot sin, because he has been born of God"* (3.9); and love is the key to their actions: *"If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love has been perfected in us"* (4.12). There is nothing vague about this love; its evidence is in keeping God's commandments: *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome"* (5.3).

From this comes our confidence as true Christians: *"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ"* (5.20).

The 2nd letter of John

The question raised by the salutation of this letter is whether this was addressed to a specific person, *"the elect (chosen) lady and her children"* (v. 1), or to a more general group of believers. Could this greeting refer to an unknown Christian lady in the province of Asia and her family, or to a local church and its members, or to a group of churches? Most likely, it was first

According to tradition John's three letters were all written from Ephesus. He was later exiled to the island of Patmos where he received the book of Revelation and Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia.



sent as a specific letter addressing a more general problem, and so gained a wider circulation, as coming from the apostle himself.

The problem related to the false teachers, with their Christ-denying teaching, that was a key theme of his first letter. In particular, John referred to the generous practice of believers taking travelling preachers into their homes for food and shelter. This reminds us that when Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the gospel, he commanded them to rely on their hearers for their food and accommodation (Matthew 10.6-15). In this way groups of believers such as the seven ecclesias (churches) in Asia Minor would have supported each other in the work.

However, false teachers were now abroad who John described as *“deceivers (who) have gone out into the world”* (v.7). Their deception was the same as that described in the first letter: they *“do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh”* (v.7). And he characterised these false teachers as he had done in the first letter: *“This sort of person is a deceiver and an antichrist”* (v.7). They were also taking advantage of the good will of such believers as the *“elect lady and her children”* (v.1).

What were they to do?

John's teaching was uncompromising. Their doors should be barred to these deceivers: *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine (belief that Jesus came in the flesh), do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds”* (vs.10,11). Only in this way could falsehood be counteracted.

The 3rd letter of John

This third letter followed on from its predecessor, in that it dealt with continuing problems arising from false teaching. It concerned the rejection by a dominant church leader of travelling teachers sent out by John to assert true doctrine. Not all were opposed in this way. John praised one Gaius, *“whom I love in truth”* (v.1), to whom the letter was addressed. He showed commendable hospitality towards these faithful *“fellow workers”* (vs. 5-8).

John had already written to the community, but his appeal had been overruled by a dictatorial member, Diotrephes *“who loves to have the pre-eminence among them”* (v.9) refusing to have anything to do with the supporters of the truth. John was telling Gaius of his plan to visit the church and confront the power-hungry gainsayer, who was *“prating (gossiping) against us with malicious words”*, as well as not receiving

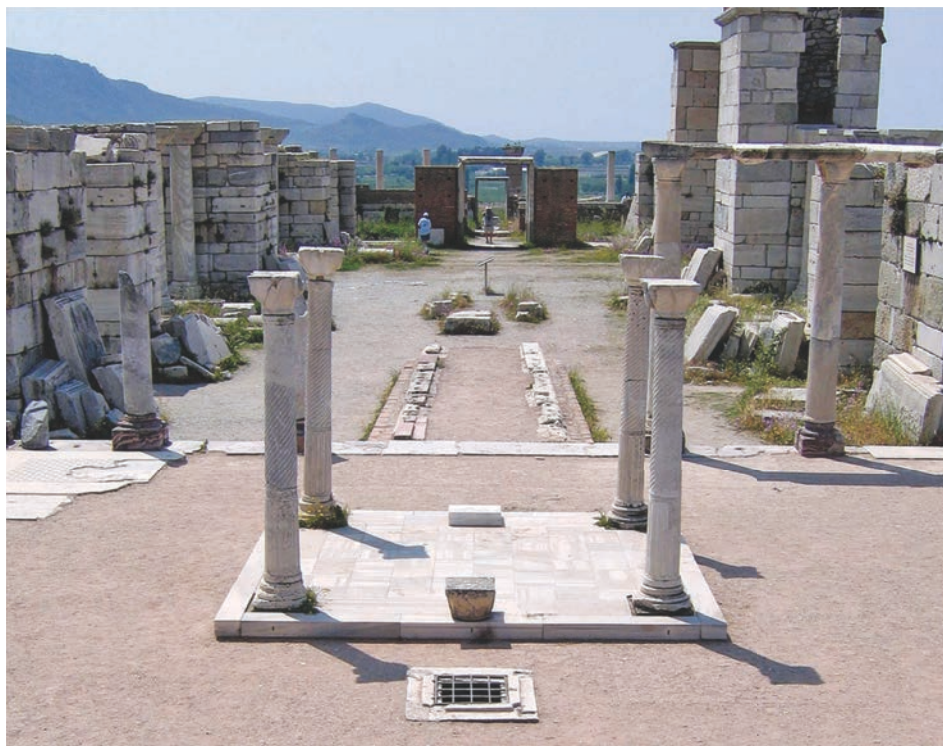
faithful visitors *“and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church”* (vs. 9,10). Thus, with the strong influence he had over the church, he allied himself with that which was evil, and *“he who does evil has not seen God”* (v.11).

One other member is mentioned as being faithful: *“Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself”* (v.12). Soon John hoped to meet them all *“face to face”* (v.14). In the meantime, Gaius and Demetrius can be reassured by the greetings from their friends at John’s church, probably Ephesus.

The aged apostle had one last task to complete before his death. He was to receive and record Jesus’ last message, the book which we now know as Revelation. It includes Jesus’ letters to each of the seven churches in Asia and these will be the subject of the next and last part of this series of articles.

Howard Cooke
Surrey, UK

The traditional site of the Apostle John’s tomb in Ephesus



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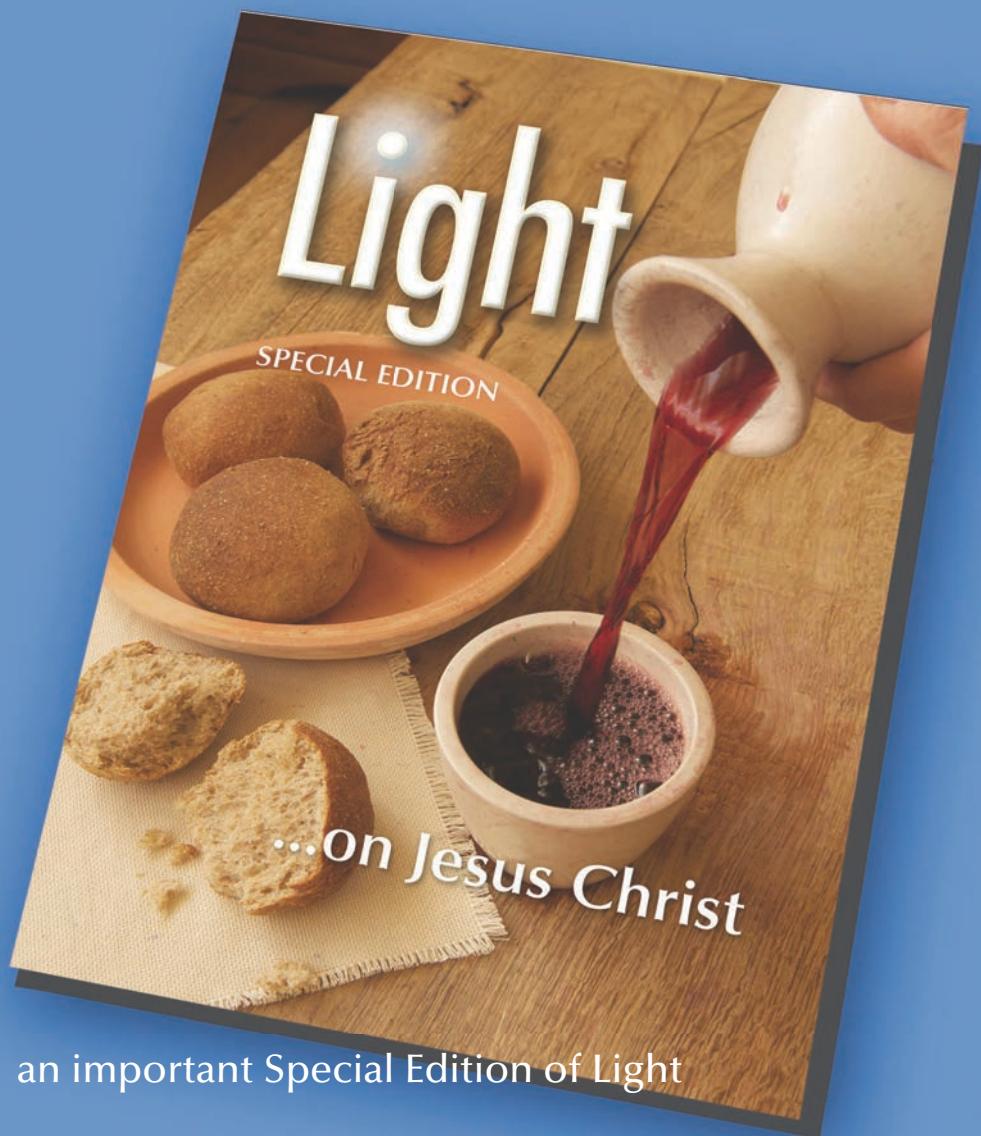
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