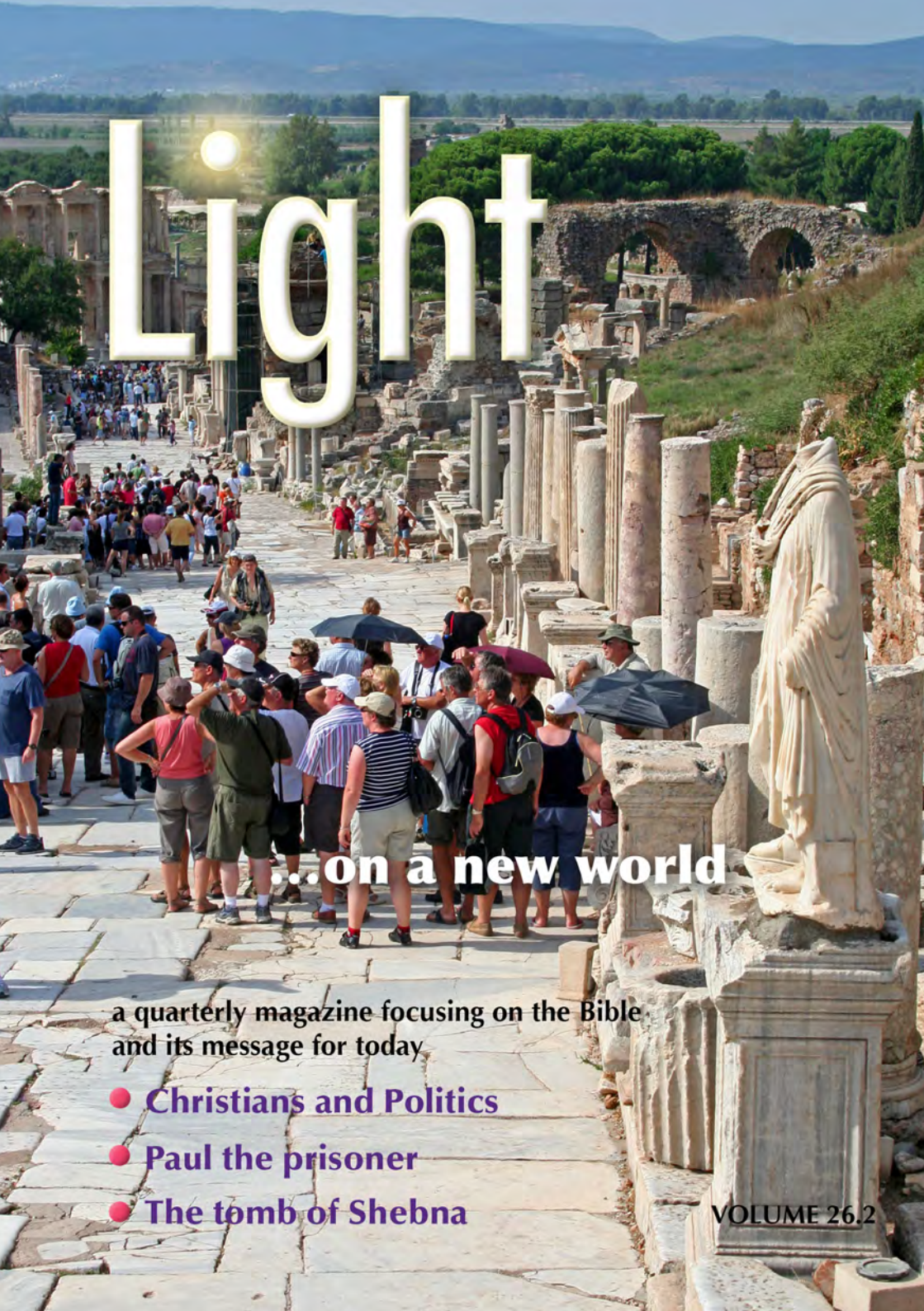




Light

...on a new world

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

- Christians and Politics
- Paul the prisoner
- The tomb of Shebna

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Note:

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

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:

When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the early Christians at Ephesus, it was a flourishing pagan city. Today the remains of the city are one of the foremost tourist attractions in Turkey.

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The Bible and the world today



The Palace of Westminster, home of the UK's 'Mother of Parliaments'

CHRISTIANS AND POLITICS

“Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those others that have been tried...”

Winston Churchill, Hansard Dec 11 1947

Several of the world's democracies have recently been through the process of electing their new governments: India (the largest), Great Britain (the oldest?) and Israel, founded the year after Churchill's words. Many Christians have taken part in those elections. In the UK the established Church is involved in government and has been for centuries. The question arises, is such political activity consistent with the teaching of Christ?

A definition of a Christian given in the Oxford Dictionary says: “A Christian hopes to attain eternal life

through Jesus Christ and should try to live by his teachings”. It may surprise you to learn that to engage in politics and the election of government is not permissible for a follower of Jesus Christ. So what are the teachings of Jesus which run counter to the generally accepted wisdom?

Jesus always claimed to speak his Father's words (John 8.28) and the Bible is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3.16). The main subject of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom of God which is to come upon this earth. It is called the gospel or good news (Mark 1.14). It is important to note Jesus' instructions as to what prayer should include, because immediately following his reverent prayer to God he told his disciples to pray

for God's kingdom to come. The Lord's Prayer, as it has long been called, used to be very familiar to everyone but is much less so today. So we quote Jesus' words:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven... For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen."

Matthew 6.9-13

The reality of the kingdom of God

Many Christians believe that the kingdom of God is a reign of grace in the hearts of men but this is emphatically not what is taught in the Bible. Rather, Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is to be a reality and not a vague metaphorical idea. When Jesus was arrested and brought before Pilate's judgement seat, Pilate was somewhat confused by the Jewish accusations against him. They alleged that he posed a threat to the Roman government represented by Pilate. The Jewish religious leaders put him under great pressure to carry out their will which was to have Jesus crucified (John 19.12).

Jesus claimed to be a king and indeed the Scriptures teach that he will be king over the kingdom of God, but that time had not yet come. In fact Pilate put the question to

Jesus: *"Are you the King of the Jews?"* Jesus answered:

"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here."

John 18.33,36

The phrase *"not of this world"* does not refer to the planet but simply the Roman constitution or order of things that prevailed at that time. The parable of the nobleman (Luke 19.12) demonstrates that Jesus had to go and receive the kingdom from his Father and then return to establish it on earth in the future:

Again Pilate asked: *"Are you a king then?"* To which Jesus answered: *"You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."*

John 18.37

Jesus' reference to the purpose of his birth is interesting. When the angel Gabriel informed Mary that she was to conceive and bring forth the Son of God, he said (Luke 1.32,33):

"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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Old Testament teaching

It is clear therefore that the kingdom of God and its appointed king are not to do with human kingdoms and human governments. This point is underlined in the Old Testament prophecy of Daniel:

“...in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.” Daniel 2. 44

Look at the context of this verse to see its significance!

In Daniel chapter seven there is another prophecy which further illustrates the importance of the kingdom of God:

“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, (a title frequently used by Jesus of himself) coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days (a title of God), and they brought him near before him. Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve

Isaac Herzog campaigning in the recent Israeli elections



him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7.13,14

The prophetic vision goes on to explain that *“the people, the saints of the Most High”* will also be given the kingdom (Daniel 7.27). These are described by Jesus in his parable of the sheep and goats. They are the sheep who will hear his gracious invitation to inherit the kingdom: *“Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25.34).

New Testament teaching

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul told the believers at Rome that God *“will render to each one according to his deeds; eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour,*

and immortality” (Romans 2.6,7). The followers of Jesus *“seek”* those things which are associated with the coming kingdom of God.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul explained that in order for a Christian to inherit the everlasting kingdom of God he or she must of necessity be changed, from mortality to immortality (1 Corinthians 15. 50-57). The same chapter explains that Jesus will reign over the kingdom of God until all enemies are put under his feet and then he will hand over the kingdom to God (1 Corinthians 15.25-28).

The meaning of the following words from Paul’s letter to the Philippians now becomes apparent:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it

An Indian voter's fingernail is marked with a purple dye to show he has voted.



may be conformed to his glorious
body..." Philippians 3.20, 21

In what sense is the believer's "citizenship" in heaven? Jesus is in heaven awaiting the time when he will return to reward his "sheep" with citizenship of that new divine order of things. So the Bible's teaching is consistent – the rulers and kingdoms of this world are to be removed and be replaced by the everlasting kingdom of God on earth. The true followers of Christ are seeking this kingdom and not the kingdoms of the present order of things.

Divine control over human governments

Now we must take note of the attitude of a true Christian to human governments. Despite all the hype that typically excites the nation at the election of a government and the assumption that every citizen's vote matters, in fact it is God who appoints rulers! Paul's advice to the Christians at Rome was this:

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves."

Romans 13.1, 2

This may come as a surprise to many who call themselves Christians. But those who read the Old Testament will be familiar with the experiences of men such as Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon who was told by the prophet Daniel that God '*removes kings and raises up kings*' (Daniel 2.21).

Later this great king of Babylon was given a severe lesson in humility. Daniel gave him a warning that God would take away his power and authority "*...in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever he will, and sets over it the lowest of men*" (Daniel 4.17). However after his severe lesson Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses and acknowledged the hand of God in human affairs:

"...at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured him who lives forever: For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; he does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'"

Daniel 4.34, 35



*The tomb of
Cyrus the Great
(died BC 530)
at Pasagard.
Cyrus was a
powerful
instrument in
God's hands to
achieve His
plan with the
Jewish people.*

Babylon was conquered by the Persians as foretold by the prophet Daniel and it is fascinating to observe the way in which God directed Cyrus their leader to carry out His will even though Cyrus was unaware of it: *"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom..."* (2 Chronicles 36:22). This proclamation paved the way for the return of the captive Jews from Babylon to their ancient homeland and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem that had been destroyed by the Babylonians, as foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah many years before (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-5; Jeremiah 25:12,13; 29:10).

Another instance of God ruling in the kingdoms of men is that of Pharaoh, a ruler so prominent in the account of the exodus from Egypt. We read this comment in the New Testament: *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared in all the earth'"* (Romans 9:17).

The true Christian's attitude to politics

So a Christian, whilst complying with the governments appointed by God, will not interfere in God's appointments by actively engaging in politics or by casting a vote in favour of one party or another. After all he or she has no knowledge of God's purpose except His ultimate

intention to sweep away human governments and replace them with His everlasting kingdom. This means that a Christian must be somewhat detached from the affairs of this world, which can lead to resentment by its citizens. Nonetheless this is required of one who is different or separate as a true Christian. Jesus instructed the apostles shortly before his arrest:

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

John 15.18,19

Ordinary Jews rejected Jesus because he refused to take political action in overturning the oppressive Roman occupation of their land. The Jewish leaders hated Jesus because of envy and because he posed a threat to their power and authority. Caiaphas, the High Priest, pronounced that *"it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish"* (John 11.50). This was his advice to the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin) and so Jesus was crucified rather than risk the

The finely decorated ossuary of Caiaphas and his family, discovered in Jerusalem in 1990. An ossuary is where the bones of the dead were stored. Now in the Israel Museum.



retribution of the Romans on the nation. They had not learnt that God rules over the kingdoms of men and that the Romans were ruling them as a consequence of their disobedience to God's law!

“Sojourners and pilgrims”

To sum up, the Apostle Peter describes Christ's true followers as *“sojourners and pilgrims”* (1 Peter 2.11) which underlines the believer's detachment from the world of politics and human ideals. But he goes on to remind Christians that they must be subject to the ruling authorities (1 Peter 2.13-17):

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God...as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God. Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”

I Peter 2.13-17

True Christians, like their leader Jesus Christ, can take no part in human politics although they must

obey the rulers of this world because God has appointed them. They do not regard themselves as citizens of this world but seek for citizenship of the kingdom of God, for which they pray as Jesus taught his disciples:

“Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.”**

Geoff Mitchell *Norfolk, UK*



RIGHT: US President Barak Obama at his desk in the Oval Office of the White House, The most powerful governments on earth will yield their authority to Jesus Christ.



“marvellous are your works!”

THE FIG WASP

The interdependence of the fig tree and a tiny insect for the survival of both is another problem for the evolutionist. The fruit we usually call a “fig” is really a flower that has turned inside out, so that all the tiny flowers are on the inside of a closed cup, called by botanists a *syconium* (see right). Thus hidden away, it would be impossible for the flowers to be pollinated and produce viable seeds unless there was some way for pollen to be brought in from outside.

This transfer of pollen is done by minute wasps that only live inside green figs. Each wasp grows from an egg, whose presence the fig detects and responds by surrounding it with plant tissue, providing food for the emerging larva. After pupating, the adult wasps mate and then the male burrows his way out of the fig. This provides an escape route for the female who, after picking up pollen on her legs, then goes off to find another fig.



Alighting at the tip of the fig, the wasp squeezes her way in through a very narrow opening, usually losing her wings on the way. She then lays her eggs in the tiny flowers, and in the process pollinates them with the pollen from the previous fig. She then dies, and the cycle recommences with the hatching of the eggs.

But there is another factor on which this mutual relationship depends. Figs have three kinds of flowers: male, short female and long female. The female fig wasp's egg-laying tube, or ovipositor, can reach the ovaries of only the short female flowers. Thus the short flowers nurture wasps, while the longer flowers develop seeds. Only by this complicated procedure can the fig tree produce viable seed and the fig wasp perpetuate its species.

This is a problem for the theory of evolution, which depends on purely random mutations to account for such facts. It is certain that without the figs the wasps would die out, and without

the wasps many types of fig would not survive. How then did either survive before this association just happened by chance? What made the fig at the right time provide food for the growing larva from its own tissue? And why did the fig accidentally produce two types of female flowers, and the female wasp an ovipositor of just the right length to ensure that some figs set seed? And by what instinct did the male wasp make an exit for the female before dying? The chances of all this occurring by an accidental process, and all at the same time, is infinitely remote.

The situation is even more complicated by the fact that throughout the world there are many hundreds of different species of fig wasp, each specific to one type of fig tree. So did all these synchronised random processes take place many times over?

How much more logical to believe in an all-wise Designer who by His infinite wisdom and power has created all things. As the Psalmist acknowledged:

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all..."

Psalm 104.24

Peter Southgate
Surrey UK



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

Part 16: Paul the prisoner

Having travelled widely in the Mediterranean area preaching the gospel and establishing many Christian communities, Paul was arrested and put on trial. After making his defence before the Jewish and Roman authorities he appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome. After an arduous sea journey that ended in shipwreck, he eventually landed in Italy. Coming to Rome, he was put under house arrest as he waited for his appeal to Caesar to be heard.

For many, that would have prevented the continuation of their mission, but Paul would not be deterred so easily. He spent his time strengthening the Christians in Rome, greeting visitors and dictating and writing letters to other places that he had visited, where there were now established Christian communities. He was able to continue to preach the gospel message effectively and to help the development of the churches. His letters also give much guidance to Christians in the 21st century about how we should live our lives.

Paul was not daunted by his imprisonment but rather saw it as a very positive part of his life. These remarkable words are found in his letter to the believers who lived at Philippi in Macedonia:

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” Philippians 1.12-14

A witness to all in Rome

Paul had to spend his time chained to a Roman soldier. This meant that soldiers witnessed and heard all that went on concerning Paul. They would have been privy to all of the conversations that Paul had and the

extensive discussion about the gospel that took place both with the believers in Rome and with visitors. They would have heard Paul dictating his letters. The soldiers worked in shifts and many of them heard Paul speak. No doubt they discussed what they heard with their fellow soldiers in the barracks. Paul's writings tell us that his preaching had a significant effect on them. They had come to understand that Paul was being held prisoner because of his strongly held beliefs and his adherence to the way of Jesus Christ. What an effective example of making use of every opportunity this was!

Without moving from the house Paul was able to preach extensively through those that came into contact with him. In addition, his own confidence (despite his imprisonment) had inspired others to preach more confidently, knowing that they



could rely on God to strengthen them as He had Paul. His faith is a strong example to us. When faced with adversity true Christians must maintain their faith through trust in God. Paul had written to the Christians in Rome, before he knew that he would eventually go there, and his letter included these words: *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8.28). Now he was witnessing the fulfillment of these words in his own life.

Letters Paul wrote from Rome

Paul wrote at least four letters to believers during his imprisonment in Rome. These are the letters to the churches at Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae, together with the personal letter to Philemon who lived at Colossae in the Roman province of Asia about 100 miles inland from Ephesus. The first letter to Timothy and the letter to Titus may have been written after his release from prison. It is thought that he was released for a period before being imprisoned again. It is not known where he was when they were written. In the second letter to

Timothy, Paul described himself as being a prisoner and this would have been for a second time (2 Timothy 1.8). The letters contain much practical guidance for those who seek to follow the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. The opening of each letter shows the confidence that Paul had in the hope of the gospel.

To the Philippians he wrote:

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1.3-7

To the Colossians:

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world..."

Colossians 1.3-6

These words show us both the great love that Paul had for his fellow believers and the depth of his hope

in the gospel. He was confident that those who followed Jesus had been chosen by God and were destined for a wonderful hope to be fulfilled in God's kingdom. This is the hope that we can all share if we trust in God's words and respond to the gospel message.

Practical advice for believers

Through the letters, Paul sought to encourage the churches and strengthen their faith but he also gave them guidance about practical aspects of Christian life. So he told the Philippians: *"...Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world"*

(Philippians 2.14, 15).

He gave practical advice to the Colossians about how their lives should be different from others. He told them that they should not take a legalistic approach to their beliefs as some did (Colossians 2.11-23). Nor should they follow the carnal, unwholesome ways of many around them (Colossians 3.1-11) but rather must take on a character of new people:

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind,

meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Colossians 3.12-14

Paul also described how a Christian must conduct his home affairs:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter towards them.

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they should become discouraged.

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."

Colossians 3.18-24

These divinely inspired words through Paul provide a very good foundation on which to build our relationships with our family and our dealings with one another. He

stressed the need for love between believers. He told the Philippians: *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Philippians 2.4). Our service to God must not be selfish but with full consideration for others.

Paul also encouraged the believers to *"Put on the whole armour of God"* (Ephesians 6.11) and then

described the parts of that armour. This would enable believers to do battle with the mind of the flesh and to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ:

"Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Ephesians 6.13-17

To the Philippians, he expressed the same idea in a different way:

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue or if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things."

Philippians 4.8

The followers of Jesus Christ must be prepared to live their lives differently. Their lives must reflect the blameless life that Jesus lived,



whose character reflected the goodness of God.

The organisation of the ecclesias

The Greek word 'ecclesia' is often translated as 'church' in the English translations of the Bible. It refers to the community of believers and not to a building. It literally means those who are 'called out'. In parts of Paul's letters it is clear that there were some problems in the ecclesias (churches) which he felt required corrective action. He wrote to Titus, who he had left in Crete, to *"set in order the things that are lacking."* The whole of this letter gives guidance about how the churches should be organised. It sets out the role of elders and the qualities that a sound church should be showing.

Titus was advised to remind believers of the need to comply with the requirements of rulers and authorities outside of the church (just as Paul did) and also to avoid unnecessary dissension (Titus 3.1, 2). The advice is summed up in Paul's words: *"This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men"* (Titus 3.8).

The two letters written to Timothy are personal letters which were sent to a young man who Paul treated as his *"true son in the faith"* (1 Timothy 1.2). Timothy had been his close companion in many travels and was a great asset to him. As in the letter to Titus, Paul gave advice on how the churches should be managed and also on how Timothy should conduct himself.

He also gave Timothy significant teaching about the role of women (1 Timothy 2.8-15). Many churches today ignore the inspired words of God that Paul set out and women are given roles contrary to the teaching of Scripture. (For a detailed explanation of the Bible's teaching on this subject see article entitled 'The role of women in Christian worship' Volume 26.1).

Paul gives Timothy detailed advice about the qualities that the leaders in the ecclesias should demonstrate. Bishops (meaning overseers) *"must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour ... one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule*

RIGHT: An orthodox Jew with his son. Timothy's father was a Gentile – his early knowledge of the Scriptures was inspired by his Jewish mother and grandmother. (2 Timothy 1.5)

his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1Timothy 3.2-5).

A personal message to Timothy

The second letter to Timothy is even more personal and shows that Paul was reaching the end of his life: *“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 1.13). He reminded Timothy that he was suffering imprisonment for preaching the gospel: *“Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained”* (2 Timothy 2.8,9).

“In the last days...”

Paul warned Timothy that perilous times would lie ahead for the believers and he described the many perversions that men would demonstrate while ignoring God. Paul’s warning is particularly relevant to those living *“in the last days”* (2 Timothy 3.1). In other words it concerns the time immediately prior to the return of Jesus. These words are particularly significant and relevant for our day. Many in the world think that they can live their lives just as they please. They have no regard for God or His Word and money has often become their god. Religion in any form is derided.

The inspired advice of Paul is there for us - the Bible is the Word of God. The whole of it is to be trusted, it sets out the gospel message, and it shows us the way to salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul’s advice to Timothy is this:

“...from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable



for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3.14-17

The "*holy Scriptures*" (the Old Testament, for the New Testament was not yet completed) were the foundation on which Paul had built his former life as a Pharisee and then as a Christian from the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus. He reminded Timothy of this and underlined the need for him to follow his example:

"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

2 Timothy 4.2-4

Those words could well describe the world in which we live today!

Paul's hope for the future

Although he knew that his death could not be far off Paul had no fear of what it would bring. He held the hope of the gospel in his heart and that strengthened him. His words to Timothy, while sad in one respect, would also spur Timothy on to maintain his faith and they should do

the same for all true Christians. Paul wrote:

"... the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."

2 Timothy 4.6-8

The Bible gives us many good reasons to believe that the day of Jesus' coming cannot be far away as the world becomes increasingly godless. It tells us that Jesus will come again and overthrow the rulers of this age, to establish God's kingdom and make that kingdom one of peace and justice (see the previous article). The coming of Jesus will be the time when Paul will be raised from the dead to receive his '*crown of righteousness*', along with all those who have '*loved the appearing*' of Jesus.

John Hitches
Norfolk, UK

a New World –



‘with God’s help’

*In fourteen hundred and ninety-two,
Columbus sailed the ocean blue...
The first American? No, not quite.
But Columbus was brave and he was bright...*

Winifrid Sackville Stoner

It was August 3 1492, to be precise.

That was the day Columbus embarked from Spain on his epic voyage across the Atlantic to discover the ‘New World’, and write himself into the pages of American history.

But August 3 1492 was also notable for something else. It was the date when all Jews in Spain (about 800,000 of them) were forced by law to convert to Catholicism or leave Spain, on pain of being arrested, tortured or killed. As a result thousands of Jews were driven from Spain, or suffered terrible persecution at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition.

comment

notes
on
various
subjects
of Bible
interest

Is there any connection between those two events?

There may well be.

Many historians now believe that Columbus was a '*marrano*', a secret Jew. Study of his surviving letters and diaries show that he wrote and spoke in Ladino, the 'Yiddish' of 15th Century Spanish Jews. His letters to his son Diego each carry in the top left-hand corner the Hebrew letters *bet-hei*, meaning *b'ezrat Hashem* ('with God's help'), a blessing commonly used by observant Jews – an equivalent perhaps of 'God willing' in a Christian culture. The provisions of his last will and testament imply a very strong Jewish connection. It has been suggested that the motivation for his voyages was in part the desire to find a 'safe haven' for his Jewish brethren, free from the horrors of the Inquisition.

Persecution of the Jews has been a recurring stain on European history. The tyranny of the Spanish Inquisition pales beside the repeated 'pogroms' of the early 20th Century in Eastern Europe. A 'safe haven' was still required – and between 1880 and 1914 around 2 million European Jews found it in the 'New World' of America. Columbus' hope was fulfilled in a way he could not possibly have imagined.



*Market day in the
Jewish Quarter,
East Side,
New York, 1912*

Today, as the generation that experienced the Holocaust slowly disappears, the two thousand year old dream of the Jewish people appears to have been realised – a state of their own, where they can pursue their own hopes, religion and culture. Yet still the search for peace and security goes on. A decisive factor in the 2015 Israeli elections, it has provoked a serious rift between Israel and her long-time supporter, the USA, as Israel tries to control the threat to her existence from a long-standing and powerful enemy, Iran.

There **is** a solution – ‘with God’s help’.

The hopes of Jews and Christians come together in the vision of the Old Testament prophets, who looked forward to a time of absolute peace for both Israel and the world, when the Jews will experience a spiritual reawakening, recognise their Messiah and live in peace under his righteous rule:

‘He shall judge between many peoples,
 and shall decide for strong nations far away;
 and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
 and their spears into pruning hooks...
 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock
 in the strength of the LORD,
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
 And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth.

And he shall be their peace.’

Micah 4.3, 5.4–5 ESV

a new world indeed – ‘with God’s help’!

Roy Toms, *Norfolk UK*



from our mailbag

What is death?

A question has been asked by a reader concerning the death state of believers. There appears to be a contradiction between a verse in Ecclesiastes which tells us that the dead “know nothing” and Revelation which speaks of a request from those who had been martyred, who cry out for God to “avenge our blood”.

In order to answer this question we need to understand what the Bible teaches about the death state and the promise of a future life. The Bible’s promise of life after death will be attained by bodily resurrection at the second coming of Jesus. A verse which seems to run counter to this teaching must have another explanation as the divinely inspired Scriptures cannot contain contradictions.

In Genesis we read that the first man Adam became mortal and subject to death following his transgression of God’s command in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3.19). However, many people like to feel, probably for consolation, that the soul lives on after death. The Bible does not support this view, but rather makes it clear that death is the end of all consciousness. The wise man Solomon wrote these words about death:

“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing. And they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 9. 5, 6

We can add to this clear statement the words of the prophet Daniel: *“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). Death is described by Daniel as a “sleep” from which many “shall awake” and this is again mentioned in the last verse of the same chapter where Daniel is assured that he will be among those who are raised from the dead: *“...you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days”* (Daniel 12.13).



God's promise to believers

In Hebrews chapter 11 we have a list of faithful men and women who were to receive God's promise of eternal life in His kingdom. But note the last verse of that chapter:

“...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

What did God promise? Everlasting life in the kingdom of God on earth, as Jesus' model prayer says: *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6. 10). If they are to be raised to live on earth then this cannot happen until Jesus returns to establish the kingdom. The writer to the Hebrews says that the apparent delay in obtaining the reward, is to allow others to be counted among the faithful of all ages. Together with those who are still alive, they will be “made perfect” when Jesus returns.

The resurrection

It is logical therefore that there must be a resurrection of the dead. This will be the first thing Jesus does

The resurrected Jesus is described as the ‘firstfruits’ of those who have died, the assurance of a great harvest to follow (see 1 Corinthians 15. 20-23).

when he returns to the earth, as we read in Paul's letter to the believers at Thessalonica:

"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

1 Thessalonians 4.16

So coming back to the apparent contradiction, the question arises from Jesus' last message in the book of Revelation where we read:

"...they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they had been, was completed."

Revelation 6.10,11

The suggestion is that those who had been killed because of their faith in God were able to communicate with Jesus to try and seek judgement on the perpetrators in order to avenge their blood. They are then told to *"rest a little while longer"* as others would die in similar circumstances and until this process was complete no judgement would take place.

Understanding Christ's last message

The book of Revelation is difficult to understand in places but we know from chapter 1 verse 1 that this last message of Jesus concerned the future things that were to happen from the time that the Apostle John received the message.

If you read the book of Revelation, it becomes clear that the way in which this message is revealed is by the use of symbols, with for example, scrolls, seals, trumpets, dragons, beasts and a prostitute riding on a beast. In between the descriptions of these symbols we catch glimpses of the splendour of the coming kingdom of God with Jesus enthroned as king. As the narrative unfolds John receives a series of visions commencing in chapter four where he sees a door open in heaven. Then he sees the souls *"under the altar"* who *"cried with a loud voice"*. They are described as *"those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held"* (Revelation 6.9,10).

There have always been those who have been persecuted for their faith and suffered cruel deaths at the hands of their adversaries. This was particularly true in the first century

RIGHT: The altar of sacrifice in a replica of the Jewish tabernacle. Clearly John's vision of souls under the altar was symbolic, not literal.

AD when John recorded these visions. John himself was one of those who were imprisoned for their beliefs. In the symbols of Christ's last message, these "souls" then cried out to be avenged. The souls of those martyrs were symbolically "under the altar" (a symbol of Christ, see for example Hebrews 13.10-12). They had sacrificed their "souls" or lives for their faith and clearly they were not in heaven.



Although the word 'soul' is widely used in the Bible, nowhere does it teach the widely held doctrine of the immortality of the soul and heaven-going at death. The death of Jesus was foretold in these words:

"...he poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53.12) and afterwards God raised him from the dead. The Apostle Paul described his approaching death as *"being poured out as a drink offering"* (2 Timothy 4.6).

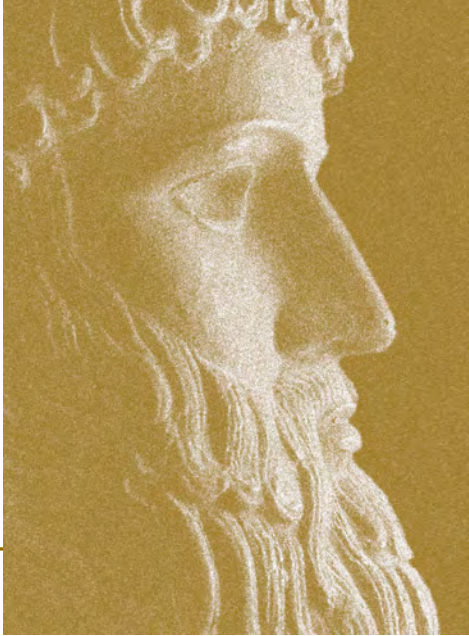
The object of the book of Revelation is for believers to think about the future fulfilment of God's plan of salvation centred in the work of Jesus. When he gave this message Jesus had been crucified, had risen and was with his Father in heaven. But there is the promise of his return to put all things right and only then will justice be done:

"...behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work."

Revelation 22.12

In conclusion then, the overwhelming message of the Bible is that people who 'die in the Lord' are spoken of as being 'asleep', totally unconscious, unable to communicate and they remain in that state until Jesus comes to raise them from the dead.

Correspondence secretary



BIBLE CHARACTERS

Gideon

Gideon was the sixth of the 15 recorded Judges of Israel, or the fifth if you place Deborah and Barak together. The first was Joshua, who led the people into the land, and the last Samuel. Gideon led Israel for 40 years and is mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews as one of the heroes of faith in Old Testament times:

“...what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises.....out of weakness were made strong...”

Hebrews 11. 32-34

Background

We read in the book of Judges that after the efforts of Deborah and Barak *“the land had rest for forty years”* (Judges 5.31). Although Israel then experienced conditions of peace and tranquillity, it was a time of probation and testing and the all too familiar pattern emerged: *“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years”* (Judges 6.1).

In the book of Leviticus we read about a threat of retribution against Israel if they did not observe God’s commandments: *“I will set my face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you. And after all this, if you*



These small figurines, widely found in Israel, show how far the Jews had fallen into pagan worship.

do not obey me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins” (Leviticus 26. 17.18).

Israel had strayed into Baal worship and the use of Asherah poles. God’s law given to them at Sinai was very specific in forbidding the worship of idols. The first and second of the ten commandments were: *“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image...”* (Exodus 20.3,4).

We are not certain exactly what Asherah poles were but it seems likely that they were wooden carved images of the Canaanite mother goddess Asherah. This is based on a carbonised image found at Ai which is about 1.2 metres high (see the IVP New Bible Dictionary, article: asherah).

During this seven-year period both Midian and Amalek terrorised the people by raiding and pillage,

reducing the land to famine conditions rather than seeking the customary tribute. The situation in Israel at this time is graphically portrayed in the book of Judges. We read that the people hid in dens, caves and strongholds in the mountains for protection against raiding parties who destroyed their crops and livestock with the result that *“...Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD”* (Judges 6.2-6).

It is also likely that these conditions were the setting for the book of Ruth, whose husband’s family fled from Israel to Moab during the period of the Judges. God responded to the cry of the people and Gideon was sent to relieve them from the oppressors. At first he seemed an unlikely candidate as he was feeling the pressure of the threat from the Midianite raiders and we read: *“...Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites”* (Judges 6.11).

Gideon’s father’s house was at Ophrah, the site of which is uncertain. It was in the western half of Manasseh’s tribal area in the land of Canaan, possibly west of Mount Gerizim near Shechem. At the end of



the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" (Judges 6. 12, 14).

Gideon asked the question: *"...if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6.13).* People today sometimes ask a similar question about their own situation without considering the need for honouring and obeying God in their lives.

He also was a man who showed great humility, for when selected for the task of saving Israel he was quick to point out that his clan was the weakest in Manasseh and that he was the least in his father's house. So we might think that Gideon with his logical enquiring mind and with his natural humility would have taken on the task given to him without a second thought. However, like us he had his doubts when confronted with actions outside his normal comfort zone, although he had been assured all would be well.

his life Gideon was buried in the family tomb in this town.

A faithful character

As we have already noted, Gideon's name is among the heroes of faith listed in the New Testament. He was chosen by God for a special work and an angel visited him at Ophrah and gave him this message: *"The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valour! ...you shall save Israel from*

After achieving God's plan the people were so thankful that they wanted to make him king. They said to him: "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." However, he would have none of it: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you" (Judges 8. 22, 23).

Idolatry removed

His first task was to destroy the altar to Baal that his father had made and replace it with an altar to God. Although he was prepared to carry out these instructions, he was very worried about the consequences both for himself and his family, so he did it at night under the cover of darkness.



As he had feared, the immediate result was the people were so angry that they wanted to kill him. His father saved the situation by suggesting that Baal should plead his own cause and it was not for them to avenge the altar's destruction on Baal's behalf. The worship of Baal and the other idols of the surrounding nations was abhorrent to the Almighty.

On many occasions we are told about acceptable worship and this goes right back to Cain and Abel. Abel's sacrifice of an animal was accepted rather than the produce of the ground as submitted by Cain. This emphasises that God wants us to worship Him in a way that He requires and not as people might think is the right way.

When the angel first told Gideon of his mission he made a personal decision to offer a sacrifice and this was acknowledged as appropriate when fire from God consumed it (Judges 6.21). This followed the pattern previously established, as in the case of Aaron and Moses (Leviticus 9.24), and later by King David (1 Chronicles 21.26), Solomon (2 Chronicles 7.1) and Elijah (1 Kings 18.38).

A stone relief of Baal the 'storm god' throwing a lightning bolt. Found at Ugarit in Northern Syria.



Gideon thanks God for the miracle of the fleece.

Painting by Maarten van Heemskerck c. 1550

A sign from God

Having passed the first test Gideon was to show the guile needed to rout an enemy's vastly superior army by tactical military precision, yet again we see the uncertainty that he may not have God's support. Gideon needed to convince himself that Israel would be saved and so sought a sign from God – that if a fleece of wool was left on the ground overnight it would absorb the dew by the morning although the ground around it would be dry. This is exactly what happened (see Judges 6.37, 38).

Was this the answer he needed? It should have been, but like us at times a doubt arose as to whether it was just a coincidence. His faith still needed to be strengthened and he sought another sign:

"Then Gideon said to God: 'Do not be angry with me, and let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew'"

Judges 6.39

Once again the positive response should have confirmed that it was the will of God that he would have success in the forthcoming battle,

The Valley of Jezreel in northern Israel, where the battle took place – one of the great battlefields of the ancient world.



but still there was an element of doubt in his mind.

A military tactician

There followed the incident in the enemy's camp when he overheard a man relaying a dream of a large round of barley bread tumbling into their camp with the result that a tent overturned and collapsed. The response from a fellow Midianite soldier was that this was a sign of Gideon's pending successful attack on the camp (Judges 7.9-15).

Following a call to arms among the local tribes, a strong army of 32,000 was assembled. However, with God's help, numbers are unimportant. Gideon was asked to send home all that were fearful and afraid and 22,000 departed. The remaining 10,000 were further reduced until only 300 remained.

The resulting victory was clearly from God and not one in which the people could claim any glory for themselves. The 300 men blew their trumpets and broke the pitchers

holding torches inside to reveal the light and at the same time they cried in unison: *"The sword of the LORD and of Gideon"* (Judges 7. 18). At this the Midianite soldiers were in complete confusion even killing each other and fleeing for their lives.

With this amazing victory the land experienced 40 years of peace. How ironic then that the original cause of Israel's troubles was idolatry and after a successful campaign, Gideon, who had shown himself to be God-fearing, fell into a similar error. He asked for the plundered gold earrings taken from the Midianites and made an idol — a golden ephod which he set up in his home town of Ophrah. The ephod was part of the high priest's attire and although Gideon's intention may have been good, in the end it led Israel back to idolatry (Judges 8. 22-35).

Parallels with the second coming of Jesus

Gideon's victory is a reminder to us that Christ will return to save Israel, to overthrow human rule and

authority and establish the kingdom of God on earth. Here are some of the parallels:

- ❖ The round of barley bread smashed into the Midianite camp. Similarly in Daniel chapter two a stone crashed into the feet of an image and ground it to powder. Daniel explained how this represented the overthrow of human kingdoms and the establishment of the kingdom of God (Daniel 2. 34,35,44)
- ❖ Like the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert having left Egypt, so the people, following Gideon's victory, had 40 years of testing. The followers of Jesus similarly endure a time of testing in their lives.
- ❖ Gideon's mission was to save Israel and this was also the mission of Jesus: *"he will save his people from their sins"* (Matthew 1. 21).
- ❖ Psalm 83 speaks of the enemies of Israel wishing to destroy them but they will be dealt with in the same way: *"Deal with them as with Midian"* (Psalm 83. 9).
- ❖ Gideon and his men broke the pitchers to reveal the torches inside. Jesus came to enlighten those who were in spiritual darkness. He said: *"I am the light of the world. He who follows me*

shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8. 12).

- ❖ The trumpet call: Gideon commanded the 300 chosen to blow their trumpets, break the pitchers and shout *"The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!"* (Judges 7.20). In the New Testament we read of another trumpet call to gather God's elect at Christ's second coming (Matthew 24.31 and 1 Thessalonians 4.16).
- ❖ There was a selection of the few who were alert to be with Gideon. We read of a similar selection of those who will be with Christ (Matthew 7. 14; 20. 16).
- ❖ Peace was achieved by Gideon for 40 years, and later Solomon was to rule over a peaceful Israel for a similar period. Christ's purpose in coming back to the earth is to establish God's kingdom and reign in peace for 1,000 years. (Revelation 20. 6).

The faithful few chosen by Gideon shared a great victory. Those who are chosen by Christ will also share a great victory as we read in the words of Jesus' last message: *"...he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations"* (Revelation 2. 26).

John Carpenter, Bexley UK



Houses in the village of Silwan built on top of ancient rock tombs

The Bible stands THE TEST OF TIME

The tomb of Shebna

The modern Arab village of Silwan, known in Bible times as Siloam, lies just South East across the Kidron Valley from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In full view of the Temple Mount, there is an old rock cut tomb which has been used by the Arabs as a rubbish dump. This cavern used to have a lintel over the entrance which was engraved with an ancient inscription.

However, the 1.3 metre long stone was removed in 1870 and taken to the British Museum by C.S. Clermont-Ganneau, where it is now on display. You can visit the museum and see it today, hung high up on the wall in one of the Mesopotamian galleries on the first floor. You could

easily walk by and not notice this as thousands of people do. But the exhibit is a true gem among the treasures of Biblical Archaeology. The rough surface of the stone makes the letters of the inscription difficult to distinguish and they have now been picked out in white to make them easier to see (see overleaf). For many years the meaning of the stone inscription was a mystery, but when eventually translated the result was sensational for Bible students!

In 1953 the Israeli archaeologist and scholar, Nahman Avigad, made an amazing discovery. He was an acknowledged epigraphist, an expert in dating and deciphering ancient inscriptions. The writing proved to be seventh century BC Hebrew script. As you can see from the



Israeli archaeologists in the 1950s, Nahman Avigad on the left, with Ruth Amiran and Yigael Yadin.

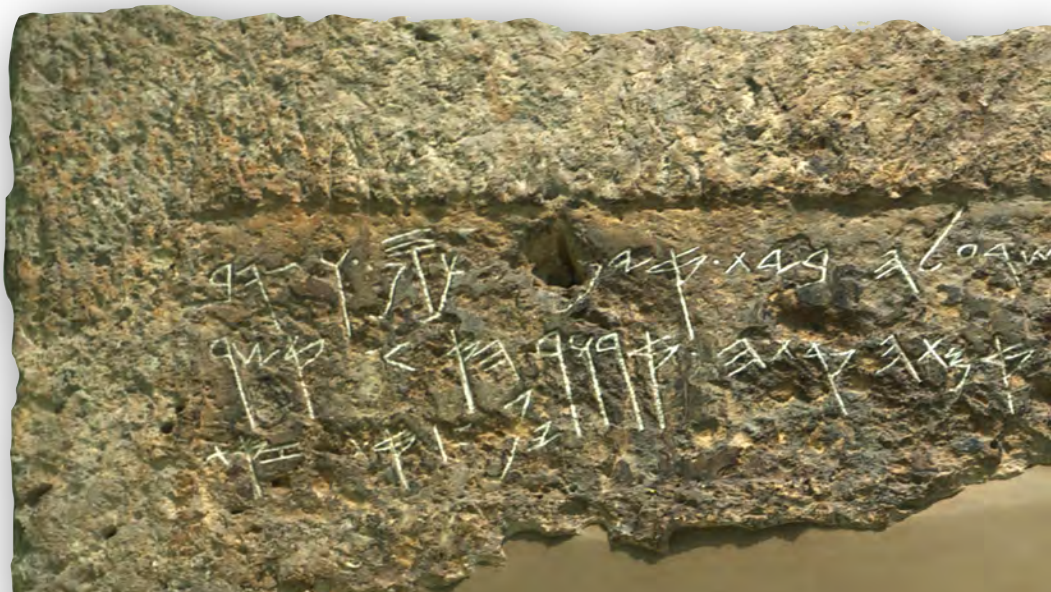
the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who will open this."

Avigad was the first to show that the phrase "*who is over the house*" is highly significant and is in fact a Hebrew title used to denote a royal steward. Was it possible to further identify who this person actually was? Rock tombs were the privilege of kings, not servants!

photo, some of the inscription is missing because of damage, but he was able to translate the following:

"This is (the tomb of) ...iah who is over the house. There is no silver and no gold here, but his bones and

Having put together the evidence, the conclusion pointed to one man, and the answer came straight from the Bible. The inscription on the lintel strongly points to it having been taken from the tomb of Shebna, the royal steward, referred

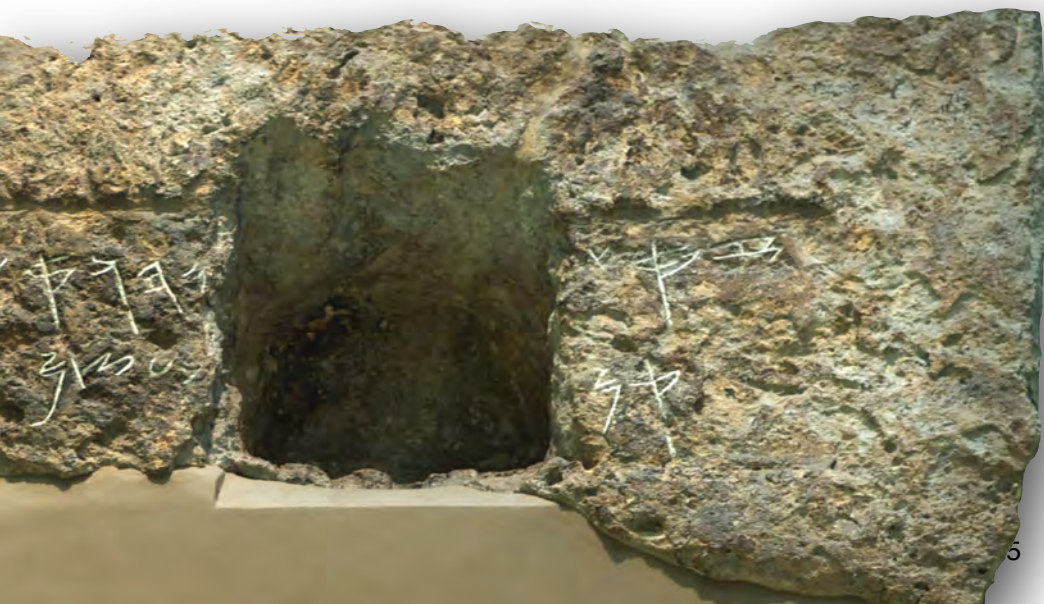


to in Isaiah chapter 22. Though most of the name is missing, it ends with 'iah' and therefore accords with the alternative spelling of the name as 'Shebaniah' as in Nehemiah chapter 9 verse 4.

According to Isaiah's record, it was the self-serving Shebna (or Shebaniah), the royal steward to king Hezekiah of Judah, who had a rock tomb fit for a king cut for himself. Perhaps he was mis-using royal funds though we are not told directly. However, his action was foolish for a steward and he brought severe rebuke on himself. Servants of the king did not assume royal status – what next? Isaiah the prophet was summoned to make a divine pronouncement concerning the fate of this man Shebna. The prophecy of Isaiah records these words:

'Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts:
"Go, proceed to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house, and say: 'What have you here, and whom have you here, that you have hewn a sepulchre here, as he who hews himself a sepulchre on high, who carves a tomb for himself in a rock? Indeed, the LORD will throw you away violently, O mighty man, and will surely seize you.'" Isaiah 22.15-17

Shebna was denounced by God through the mouth of the prophet and was to be driven from his office. He would be replaced by a far more suitable person, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. Evidently, however, Shebna kept his tomb as the inscription states, although according to the prophecy, he and his wife would not be buried there. The prophecy continues:



“He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball into a large country; there you shall die...” Isaiah 22.18

What does all this show us? It shows us that even the small details recorded in the Scriptures are accurate. It provides us with evidence that what is recorded in the Bible is true. What an amazing thing it is that proof of Bible accuracy is available for those who will look for it in an age of scepticism and unbelief!

When Eliakim was made royal steward ‘*over the house*’ the prophecy describes him in words that point forward to Jesus Christ who will eventually reign over the house of David. No doubt Eliakim was a faithful man, but there was a greater one to come, and the incident of his promotion to royal office was used by Isaiah to make a prophecy about Jesus, the promised Messiah, the greater Son of David:

“...I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will

become a glorious throne to his father’s house.” Isaiah 22.21-23

The appointment of Eliakim in place of Shebna as royal steward over Hezekiah’s house in Jerusalem brought about a limited fulfilment of these prophetic words. The greater fulfilment will be realised when Jesus returns to reign with authority on David’s throne in his coming kingdom (Luke 1.32), a kingdom that will never end (Daniel 2.44).

Eliakim became steward over the house of Hezekiah. In contrast Jesus has been appointed as a Son over God’s house (Hebrews 3.6). We too can become part of that spiritual house of believers and have a part in the coming kingdom if we believe the gospel and are baptized into the saving name of Jesus Christ.

Justin Giles
London, UK

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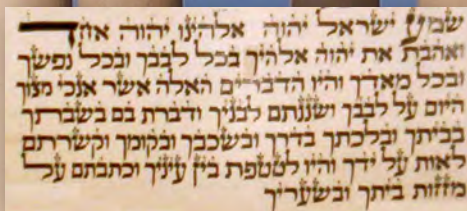
Palmyra

Islamic State is now believed to be in complete control of the Syrian city of Palmyra, once one of the major cities of the Roman Empire. There are real fears that IS will destroy the magnificent Roman remains of the city, which date from the height of its power in the 3rd century AD.

Amongst Palmyra's lesser known treasures is one of the foremost Hebrew inscriptions from antiquity: the opening verses of the Shema, inscribed on a stone doorway. The Shema is the central prayer of the Jewish prayerbook, beginning with the words of the Torah '*Sh'ma Yisrael*' ('Hear O Israel' Deut 6.4) – a prayer still recited twice a day by devout Jews.

The inscription is a relic of the Jewish minority in Palmyra at the height of its power. It was photographed in position by archaeologist Eliezer Sukenik in 1933, but what has happened to it since is unknown.

But one thing is certain: whatever havoc Islamic State may wreak in the Middle East, they will fail, but the Jewish people will survive. God's covenant with the Jews is unbreakable; as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow morning, God will never abandon his people (see Jeremiah 31 35–36, 33.25).



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IN THE NEWS