

Light

...on a new world

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

Volume 31.2

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The fig tree

Well over a million tonnes of figs are now produced globally each year. Around 80% come from the Middle East, with Turkey, Egypt and



Morocco together producing over half of the world's figs. The fig is highly valued for its nutritional and health benefits today, but was even more important in Bible times, as numerous Scriptural references confirm, from Genesis to Revelation and over half of the books in between. The fig was the first plant in the Bible with a specific name (Genesis. 3:7) and numerous allusions to it elsewhere cover a wide range of circumstances. This article will

Leaves and immature fruit of the common fig

consider how the fig shows the power and purpose of Almighty God.

Fig tree facts

Out of at least 850 species of fig, only two have significant use for man and both are mentioned in the Bible: the common fig, *Ficus carica*, and the sycamore fig, *Ficus sycomorus*. The former is the plant most readers will



be familiar with; the latter, also present in many Middle Eastern countries, was particularly important in Egypt for both fruit and timber.

The most interesting feature of figs is how they reproduce. It is sometimes claimed that figs do not flower. The reason for this mistake is that the flowers are hidden inside what is usually regarded as the 'fruit', more correctly a multiple fruit. It contains numerous flowers developing inside a hollow, fleshy receptacle, known as a *syconium*.

A small opening in the fig provides access for a pollinator, usually the minute fig wasp. Each fig species is normally pollinated by a unique wasp species to ensure that it is pollinated by its own kind. The complex process, beyond the scope of this article, by which this takes place, is unique to fig species; it is not only critical for survival but also provides food for man. (For more about the remarkable fig wasp, see Light Vol 26.2).

Fig trees produce different kinds of figs. There are different types of flowers to produce seed and edible fruit, as well as providing a place for the fig wasp to breed. As readers of both Old and New Testaments will know, the fig produces up to three crops of figs each year.

Each cultivated fig contains around 1,500 seeds (see picture on left). It would be highly undesirable for all of these to germinate in one place, at the same time. This, however, does not happen because germination inhibitors are present in the fig that must be removed before germination can take place. This usually happens as the fig passes through the digestive system of an animal; conveniently this disperses the seed widely.

Remarkable as the fig is, the production of new plants by seed is dependent on the presence of the correct fig wasp. This is not possible in countries having unsuitable climate for this insect and, were it not for another provision, the fruit we value could not be produced in cooler countries. The Creator, however, has enabled certain fig varieties to produce infertile fruit without pollination. This provision is of great value to us but is of no benefit to the fig and it is very difficult to explain how this could possibly fit the evolutionary theories

that this unique plant has attracted. Infertility simply does not fit evolutionary theory. This remarkable plant, utilised by mankind since early Biblical times, provides an excellent example of the Creator's handiwork.

A symbol of prosperity and security

The fig was often cited in the Bible to illustrate the blessings offered to God's people. Before they entered their land, Moses identified this tree as one of six or seven vital species to be enjoyed there:

‘For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey’.

Deuteronomy 8.7,8

Recording how Israel was at peace under Solomon, the inspired historian also used the fig tree: *‘And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon’* (1 Kings 4.25).

When Israel sinned, the fig did not flourish as a punishment from God, as one of their prophets declared: *‘I blasted you with blight and mildew.*



A stamp issued in 1960 by the State of Israel, inscribed "O my dove that art in the cleft of the rock" (Song of Solomon 2.14). The Song refers to a time of green figs – see page 8 of this article

When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them... (Amos 4.9). The destruction was not, however, to be permanent, as we are constantly reminded in Scripture. For example another prophet wrote: *‘Do not be afraid... the fig tree and the vine yield their strength’* (Joel 2.22).



A symbol of the nation of Israel

Although the national tree of Israel today is the olive, the Bible associates the fig with the nation in important prophecies. Through inspired writers, God selected this tree to represent His people, and several Bible passages confirm this. One example is in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah; he mentions the fig more than any other inspired writer. God declared that the nation being taken captive was made up of good and bad individuals, as typified by baskets of figs: ‘... *two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD... One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first ripe; and the other*

The prophet Jeremiah saw his people of Israel represented by two baskets of figs, some good, some bad

basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad’ (Jeremiah 24.1,2). God then continued the analogy to tell the prophet that, although the bad figs would be rejected for ever, the good figs would return to the land; they had an eternal future, just as Joel confirms that Israel will have (see Joel 2.27; 3.17,20).

Perhaps the most important Biblical mention of the fig is to be found in the address given by Jesus to his disciples on Mount Olivet, recorded in three of the four gospels. Matthew’s account reads:

‘Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the very doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.’

Matthew 24.32–35

The certainty of this event could hardly be expressed more strongly.



Figs overwintering in the writer's garden in the UK

It is interesting that Jesus used the fig tree to illustrate his words because it is one of the last trees to develop leaves, even though fruit is present over winter (see photo above). This suggests an event taking place quite close to harvest. In a similar way, the Jewish people have been present throughout their very long 'winter' of dispersion, emerging close to 'harvest' when Jesus returns.

Jesus warns us of great trouble for the world at the time of the end, just before he returns from heaven. The disciples were just as keen as we are to know when this would happen. The answer Jesus gave had a deliberately hidden meaning so as not to disappoint believers living a long time before its fulfilment, and so that we would all maintain a state of personal readiness.

An important clue was given by Jesus: *'this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place'*. He applied the time limiting condition of

the emergence of leaves on the fig tree to the State of Israel. Thus, he is telling us that the Mount Olivet prophecy will be fulfilled during the lifetime of at least some who witnessed the founding of Israel. The State has now been in existence for 72 years. This means the time is close.

Jesus and the prophets tell us that other events will take place prior to his return. Most, if not all of these, are in an advanced state of fulfilment. Notably, Jesus tells us that there will be a great crisis: *'For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be'* (24.21). It is not difficult to see how this is being fulfilled in our world today, with so much political strife and environmental foreboding.

It is reasonable to believe that Jesus was not only referring to the extent of trouble in the last days, but also to a threat that is fundamentally different from the causes of trouble in the past. This is seen in the next

verse: *'And if those days had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened'* (24.22). The troubles he referred to earlier in the chapter, although serious, did not threaten the future of mankind in the way this new cause of tribulation does. Living in the nuclear age, with weapons enhanced by the latest technology, we will understand what this means. We can add to this, the present global threat to health and economic activity caused by a previously unknown virus.

The message for today

Although there is bad news in the Mount Olivet prophecy, the final message is very good news indeed: *'Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing'* (24.45,46).

Two verses mentioning figs reinforce the good message. First, Solomon encourages us to look forward to a time of renewal: *'The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!'* (Song of Solomon 2.13). Finally, the prophet Micah assures us that the world's

frightening military resources will soon cease to exist:

'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days... They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken'

Micah 4.1-4

Thus, having witnessed the fall of man in Eden, the fig tree will also see a world at peace and the redemption of God's people.

Adrian Pickett
Hertfordshire, UK



is peace impossible ?

The media is full of terrible things, violent deaths, disasters, famine, war and disease. These horrific events have resulted in death or serious injury for many people, not to mention those traumatised by what they have experienced. World leaders now call these recent events ‘acts of war’.

The fact that peace in the world is very elusive is confirmed by a recent book aimed at helping readers understand the world’s trouble spots. Quoting the back cover of the book ‘The World in Conflict’ by John Andrews (published in 2015 by The Economist):

‘So far in the twenty-first century, the USA and its allies have invaded Afghanistan; Russia has waged war in Georgia; the brutal Islamic State (IS) has emerged in the Middle East; and a constant contest for precious minerals in Africa has provoked and financed war and carnage. Other conflicts are less bloody, but still dangerous – the nervous stand-off between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, or the continuing stalemate between North and South Korea. Whether explosive or simmering, the number of violent conflicts in the

world is high enough to surprise, intrigue and sober any reader.’

Yes, sobering indeed!

Why so much hatred and violence ?

Underlying the numerous, deep-seated political and often justifiable social issues that have brought about this frightening situation, is what one writer has described as ‘the inner struggle between light and darkness, positive and negative, good and evil’ that needs to be resolved if world peace is ever to be achieved. That viewpoint echoes the words written 2,000 years ago in the Bible. We need to ask God for the things we need, not try and get them by force:

‘Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.’

James 4.1

Clearly, removing this basic cause of wars and fights has so far proved impossible. Until covetousness and selfish ambitions are entirely removed from everyone's hearts and minds, wars and terrorism will only get worse. The growing threat of a significant change in the world's climate will inevitably make the search for world peace even harder.

The promise of peace

The word 'peace' occurs about 400 times in the Bible. So, it is hardly surprising that it contains plenty of advice and hope for anyone wanting peace in this troubled world. For a start, it points the finger at us all, and how we need to behave if we are to feel at peace within ourselves and find peace with others. The advice of the Psalmist is: *'Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it'* (Psalm 34.14).

Then there are those who need to be reassured in such a dangerous, violent and rapidly changing world, where innocent people suffer while going about their everyday lives. While *'time and chance'* as Solomon put it happens to us all (Ecclesiastes 9.11), none of us are safe from violence or the damaging effects of climate change. Nevertheless, by trusting in God, we can have an assurance now, that God will watch over us for good, as David the Psalmist realised: *'I will both lie down*

in peace, and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety' (Psalm 4.8).

The Bible encourages us to have faith in the 'peace' and 'safety' that only God can provide in the future, when His kingdom is established on earth with Jesus Christ as the divinely appointed ruler of the world:

'...the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.'

Psalm 37.11

'the work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.'

Isaiah 32.1,18

Those who have learnt to trust the Bible know that these are not empty promises. There is a real hope of peace in the future, when all nations and people are united in the world-wide kingdom that is coming.

God has made that promise.

Graham Lake
Surrey, UK

The perfect copy...

Our ability to copy just about anything with little more than the press of a button is an astonishing feature of modern technology. It is now so routine that we take it for granted, but it is revolutionary.

For thousands of years, the only way of copying something was to use exactly the same technology as produced the original, but simply repeat it, if necessary over and over again. For example, when the great rulers of the ancient world wanted multiple copies of a royal decree to send out to their provinces, they set to work an army of scribes, each with their own clay tablet, pressing the same letters into the soft clay. (The writers of the biblical books clearly had access to some of these copies – see Ezra 4.23, 5.6,7.11; Esther 3.14).

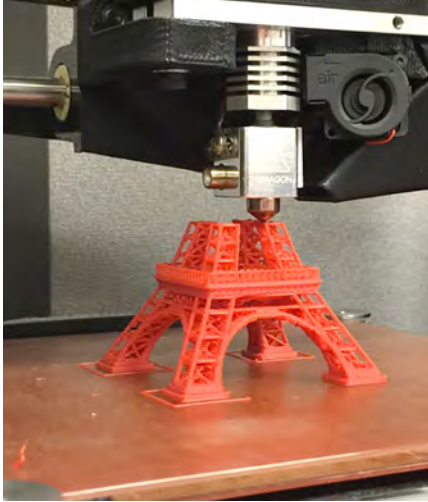
The Jewish scribes and the medieval monks spent months, even years producing a single hand-written copy of a sacred text. The invention of printing brought a way of making multiple copies, but it was an elaborate and expensive process quite unsuited to most everyday documents.



The typewriter (patented 1878) was a revolutionary step towards enabling multiple copies of ordinary documents.

The impact of the type was strong enough to penetrate several layers of very thin paper, and with the insertion of thin sheets of carbon paper between the layers, several copies could be produced at the same time – hence the term

“carbon copy” still used today. The word ‘facsimile’, meaning an exact copy, gave its name to the Fax machine, now nearly as obsolete as the typewriter.



A 3D printer produces a small model of the Eiffel Tower. Researchers are now trying to design a printer that will print itself!

Photography, first on glass plates, then film, then digital sensors, was another massive step forward. Today the ink jet printing technology developed for documents and pictures has been adapted for 3D printing, so that small components

can now be copied and reproduced exactly in three dimensions.

It may come as no surprise to us to find that the natural world, including our own bodies, uses very sophisticated copying techniques that make our human technology seem quite rudimentary. These techniques, we are told, came about by chance and are used by the process of evolution to produce the most amazing examples of design in the world:

‘The point, which science has long understood, is that bits and pieces of... complex machines may have different – but still useful – functions... Evolution produces complex biochemical machines by copying, modifying and combining proteins previously used for other functions...’ says biologist Ken Miller. He is trying to explain how an amazing molecular machine like the tail of the bacteria (‘flagellum’) and its motor (see Light Vol 21.1 page 9) could arise by chance from something simpler. He apparently considers processes like ‘copying, modifying and combining’ to be quite simple mindless procedures that can easily happen by chance without any vision or foresight. Where is his evidence? Human experience tells us the very opposite.

Take the car for example.

Today’s models are generally the result of continuous development (‘evolution’?) over a period of many years. The first Volkswagen (‘people’s car’) was designed by Ferdinand Porsche in 1938, and came to be known as the ‘Beetle’ from its distinctive shape (see picture on right). The character (sometimes called its DNA!) of that original car is still

clearly visible in the car which finally ceased manufacture last year (2019). The latest version was the result of a long process of intelligent copying, creation, selection and refinement over 80 years or more. There was nothing easy or aimless or mindless about it. The whole process would be impossible without the creative vision of the engineers who managed it.



One of the last models of the VW Beetle to be produced

Our own existence depends on a copying process of extraordinary complexity and miniaturisation. The data that describes many of our characteristics as individuals is carried by a four letter code (**ATCG** – see the graphic overleaf) in the DNA molecules in every cell of our bodies. The ‘letters’ are in fact four different chemicals called ‘bases’. But all this information is securely stored in the core – the ‘nucleus’ – of the cell. How can it be used?

Before it can be used, it must be copied.

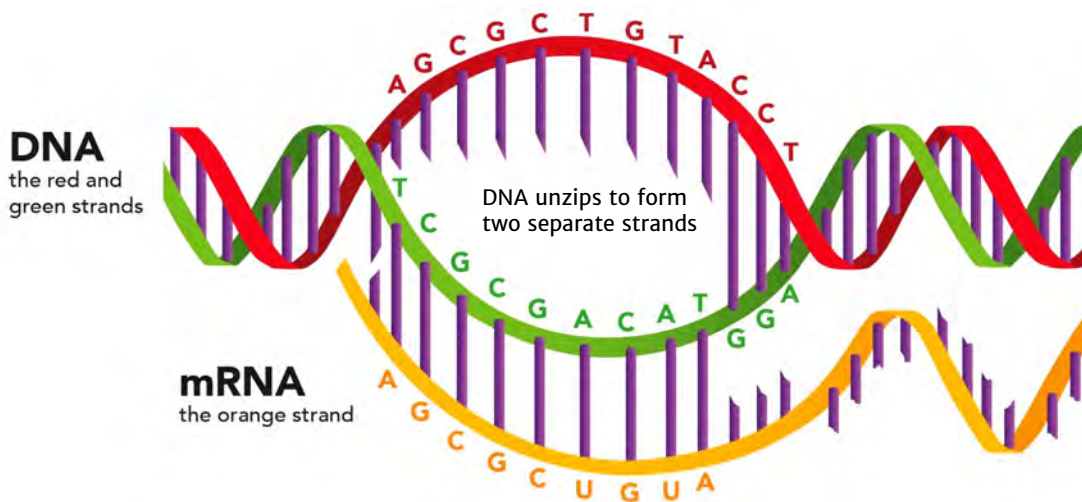
DNA is like a reference library where you are not allowed to borrow the books. You have first to visit the library, find the book you need, copy the information you need by writing notes or making photocopies, and then leave the library, taking your notes with you to be used somewhere else. The books remain, safe and intact ready to be referred to again and again. But some of the information in them has been freed for use outside the library.

In the DNA ‘library’, this process involves another remarkable molecule called **RNA**, which appears to be purpose-made for the job. First it enters the library (the core of the cell) to find the piece of DNA code it needs (not that easy – the human genome has a total of around three



A few of the twelve million books in the British Library. As with the DNA 'library', all this information has to be copied in some way before it can be used

billion letters of code). DNA is made up of two strands coiled together (see red and green strands in the graphic below) – the purple links are the bases which make up the code, two 'letters' to each link). When it is being copied, a stretch of DNA unzips into two separate strands to create a template for the single strand of RNA (orange) to follow.



RNA creates a strand that matches the DNA code and then leaves, carrying with it an exact copy of the information it needs. This is then delivered to the various machines in the cell (ribosomes) which make the proteins on which life depends. Hence the term ‘messenger’ sometimes applied to RNA. The DNA zips itself back together ready to be used again – the ‘reference library’ is intact.

This is of course a huge over-simplification of the amazing bio-technology involved, but maybe it’s as much as most of us who are not microbiologists can follow.

This copying process did NOT evolve.

Evolution can only start with life – the ‘survival of the fittest’ only applies to living organisms. The DNA code and the ability to copy it are essential **before life can even begin**. So if they did not evolve, where did they come from?

No answer. Science is silent.

Science is silent on a lot of things, especially on the big, really important questions. For authoritative answers we have to go elsewhere. God’s Word tells us that the key to meaningful life now and a wonderfully fulfilled life in the future also involves copying – copying a model that God has given us – not the celebrities, the bloggers and ‘influencers’ of our society, but his son and our saviour Jesus Christ:

‘ Copy me, my brothers, as I copy Christ himself ’

said the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 11.1, Phillips Translation).

That’s not easy.

But copying is not easy.

Roy Toms
Norfolk UK

signs of the times

Certainties and Uncertainties

Earlier this year a friend of mine drew my attention to a really thought-provoking article published by IDN - InDepthNews. It was titled 'Fear, Greed and Hate as We Enter the 2020s' and the author is Roberto Savio. This is the web address:

<https://www.indepthnews.net/index.php/opinion/3222-fear-greed-and-hate-as-we-enter-the-2020s>

I encourage you to read it. I don't agree with everything he writes but the overall message is certainly attuned to my views as a religious person who believes the turmoil in the world today has been predicted in God's Word the Bible, and is a sign that the return of Jesus is likely to be soon.



Back to the article - the author strongly argues that fear, hate and greed are major issues as we enter the 2020's. He believes that this decade will be a critical one in determining the future of humankind. He lays out some of the issues as he sees them and suggests we don't know if the slide can be reversed or even arrested. We will only know at the end of this decade. Hence the inclusion of '**uncertainties**' in the title of this article.

I thought that it would be interesting to look at what the Bible says about the future of humankind - what I regard as a Bible believer to be the '**certainties**' - and thus the title 'Certainties and Uncertainties'.

There are so many ‘signs of the times’ in the world around us, and especially in the Middle East with the recent warlike activity between Iran and the US, the chaos in Iraq, Yemen and Syria, and President Trump’s ‘Peace Plan’ embraced enthusiastically by Israelis and pilloried by Palestinians (see map on previous page). But this article focuses on looking at some of the drivers that contribute to the behaviour of governments and businesses and societies that lead to the actions that Bible believers identify as signs.

CERTAINTIES

I have listed several verses from the Bible (note that there are many, many others supporting these points). Taken together they predict the future which is focused on Israel.

The invasion

‘After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you.’

Ezekiel 38.8,9

The invader destroyed

“You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken,” says the Lord GOD. “And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.



So I will make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let them profane my holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Surely it is coming, and it shall be done,” says the Lord GOD. “This is the day of which I have spoken”.’ Ezekiel 39.4-8

‘And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – ‘The LORD is one’, and his name one.’ Zechariah 14.8,9

The world-wide kingdom of God

‘Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.’ Micah 4.1-4

In summary, this is what these prophetic verses tell us:

- ❖ Israel has been ‘gathered’ from outside of Israel (a reference incidentally to the fact that there was no State of Israel prior to 1948 but there certainly is one now!). So here we have a remarkable fulfilled prediction that would have seemed unlikely until after World War II. But Israel will be invaded and overpowered.
- ❖ God’s Son, Jesus, will return to Israel.
- ❖ The invader will be completely destroyed.
- ❖ Jesus will set up the kingdom of God with its capital in Jerusalem.

- ❖ This kingdom will grow to cover the whole world.
- ❖ This will be a time of peace for all (very much in contrast to today).

UNCERTAINTIES

Roberto Salvio started his article with these words:

'In a world in which the institutions that govern us are rapidly losing their moral compass, it is difficult not to realise that in 2020 we are now entering – or have already entered – a new low point in the history of humankind. Today, for example, we face an unprecedented existential threat brought about by the climate crisis. According to scientists, we have until 2030 to stop climate change, after which the writing is on the wall for the planet. Yet, we have just had a world conference in Madrid on climate change, which ended in nothing... Historians affirm that the two main engines of change in history are greed and fear. We enter the decade of the 2020's with both. Worse, many analysts believe we do so in a climate of hate.'

The rest of the article suggests that there has been major change during the last decade in the areas of climate change, democracy, and the distribution of wealth.



- ❖ Climate has changed from a scientific to a political issue with politicians like Donald Trump, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, Hungary's Viktor Orban and Vladimir Putin arguing that there is no climate crisis.
- ❖ Democracy declined in the last decade. Another article referred to a comprehensive study of democracy using 25 years' data. The study concluded that the proportion of voters who have lost confidence in democracy is now just over half!
- ❖ It was said, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (see picture),

that ‘Capitalism and market forces would unify the world, and lift all boats (Editor’s note: would be of benefit to everyone)’. As the author says ‘the financial crisis of 2008–2009 made it clear that only some boats were being lifted. ... some people got rich but welfare education and health were all reduced to pay for the financial crisis which cost trillions. This has led to the rise of nationalistic, xenophobic and right-wing parties...’

The author draws three conclusions. In his words:

‘The first is that, not by accident, the enemies of the fight to defend our natural environment are also the enemies of our political environment. They do not care if the first is destroyed, because they are intertwined with corporations, gas and oil companies, farmers who want to take over land (like the case of Brazil and Amazonia), or coal companies, as in Poland and Australia. But they want to twist the political environment in their favour, for their power.

Eleanor Roosevelt examines the text of the Declaration of Human Rights when it was first published in 1948

The second is that democracy is in danger, for the same reasons that the environment is also in danger. There is no ability and will among populists to reach any internal agreement. Would it be possible today to create the United Nations, or sign the Declaration on Human Rights (see picture below)? Certainly not, just as there is no will to fight climate change.

The third, therefore, is what is going to happen in the new decade we are now entering. It looks like it will be a decisive decade. In just a few years, we must act on how we will deal with two existential issues: how to remain in our present environment, and how we will live together.’

And from the last sentence of his article; ‘Well, within ten years we will



know how the world is, and what damages are irreversible or not, and if we have made any progress in halting the climate crisis ...'

All in all, and by no means a comprehensive coverage of all the problems the human race faces, a rather bleak outlook for the future!

Conclusion

Here is one more certainty and not a good one. Have you ever heard someone say in defence of an action that is undesirable or even worse: 'it's only human!' Probably unwittingly, that is a validation of a Bible truth about humankind. We are prone to doing the wrong thing. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote:

'O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps'.

Jeremiah 10.23

Even with good will, and how often do we even see that, we cannot solve our problems. Experience and history also validate that bleak statement. So will humanity solve the problems referred to in the article? And in this decade? The answer is likely to be 'no'.

This would be tragically sad – except for the certainty that God will not allow the destruction of His planet.

Jesus will return and he can, and will, solve all the problems. I hope for everyone's sake that he comes back soon. Nevertheless, it will be in God's good time.

Articles like the one I have quoted from, and the chaos that I read about in the media daily, both within countries, and between them, and especially in the Middle East, reinforce for me my belief that Jesus will return and I think, and hope, soon. This is an enormous comfort to me. It can be to you too. The future is certain despite the many uncertainties around us.

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

Editor's note: This article was written before the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic – see editorial comment on this new 'sign of the times'.



This familiar image reminds us that we are living at a time of almost unprecedented global disaster. As a recent UK newspaper article put it ‘No one can now be in any doubt; this is the most serious social and economic crisis since the Second World War. If mishandled, the consequences will include millions of lives lost, devastating economic depression, social unrest and political upheaval’. (William Hague writing in the Daily Telegraph 24 March 2020).

As world leaders struggle to deal with the pandemic and its consequences, the followers of Jesus will not be surprised. Jesus warned his disciples that these things would happen before he returns. He said ‘... *nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*’ (Matthew 24.7,8). Read through this chapter, and the parallel account in Luke chapter 21, for there is no doubt in my mind that present world events herald an even greater upheaval in the world – the end of human rule

from the editor

and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The coming kingdom of God on earth will be immensely better than the world in which we live. The Bible assures us of this. To gain an initial impression, imagine a world at peace, its inhabitants healthy and well-fed and doing rewarding work. Imagine a world in which there is full employment, where people are not exploited and where they can live long and truly prosperous lives; a world in which famine and pandemics no longer kill much of the world population and where the world’s resources are harvested for the benefit of all. This is just a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

Now imagine the benefits of internationally accepted laws, with justice administered by fair-minded, yet uncompromising judges. Conjure up a mental picture of life without terrorism, homelessness and sexual or child-abuse; where good-neighbourliness prevails and evil tendencies are discouraged, where governments establish good standards of behaviour, and implement justice. That will be the kingdom of God on earth!

To many people, the kingdom of God is just a vague hope that one day mankind will bring about a state of

happiness on earth. To others, it is a dream of heavenly bliss. Yet despite their best intentions, the aspirations of politicians are not producing a better world for us or our children. And anyone who reads their Bible carefully, knows that there is no evidence for the common belief in an afterlife in heaven. The kingdom of God will be a real, tangible, worldwide empire, which will be set up when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven, in the near future.

There are many word pictures in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets. You can get a flavour of what it will be like in God's kingdom by reading from Isaiah chapter 2 verses 1-5 as a cameo, and then all of chapter 35, chapter 65 verses 17-25 and all of chapter 11. Psalm 22 verses 25-31 and Psalm 72 speak of how people will live. Zephaniah 3 verse 9 tells us that there will be no misunderstandings between nations, because there will be one world-wide language.

The signs that Jesus Christ gave us of his imminent return are seen in the world today. Most Bible translations say there will be pestilences, an old English word meaning epidemics or pandemics. We can observe this now, on a scale that is causing great anxiety and interruption to normal life. It seems there is no escape from the Covid-19 virus, for it is quickly

spreading everywhere. But pandemics are only one of the signs – the words of Jesus above tell us that many of the problems facing world leaders today are the signs that he is coming soon (see article on page 16).

The Bible has a clear message of hope in the coming kingdom of God on earth, in contrast to today's troubled world. This can be your hope too, if you trust in God, read His Word, the Bible, and obey the simple commands of Jesus. That is to repent (admit the past and turn our lives around), believe in God and His Word, be baptised and follow Jesus' teaching, endeavouring to lead a godly life in anticipation of the great changes that will take place. Then, as we read in the last book of the Bible,

**'The kingdoms of this world
(will) have become the kingdoms
of our Lord and of his Christ, and
he shall reign for ever and ever!'**

Revelation 11.15

For a more detailed understanding of the kingdom of God and how you can be part of it, send for your free copy of the special issue of Light entitled **'the last great chapter of the human story'** (see back cover for more details).

THE BIBLE STANDS THE TEST OF TIME



The origins of Moab and Ammon

We begin with Lot the nephew of Abraham, who accompanied him on his journey from Ur of the Chaldees via Haran (Genesis 11.31). Genesis chapter 13 records Lot's separation from his uncle, and his journey across the plain to the far side of the Jordan Valley, to live in the infamous city of Sodom. The violent destruction of Sodom has been detailed in a previous article in this series (see Light volume 29.2 p.14).

MOAB and AMMON

In the book of Genesis we are told of the origins of the ancient nations of Moab and Ammon. These nations are frequently referred to in the Old Testament, and at least one famous ancestor of Jesus Christ was Ruth the Moabitess. The book of Ruth tells the beautiful story of how a young Moabite woman became a faithful follower of Israel's God, but that was exceptional as we will see.

The miraculous deliverance of Lot and his two daughters just before God's judgement fell on that wicked city, is described in detail in Genesis chapter 19.

The account describes how Lot and his daughters retreated to a remote location in the mountains and became cave dwellers. His daughters, however, were very concerned that having both lost their prospective husbands in Sodom's catastrophe,

Lot had no sons to continue his family line.

Without condoning or condemning the plan they decided upon, the Scriptures simply describe the next events, which may seem shocking to read. Both daughters slept with their father and conceived children by him. We read: *‘Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The first-born bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the people of Ammon to this day’* (Genesis 19:36–38).

So the first point to remember is that the nations descended from the families of Moab and Ammon were originally related to Abraham’s family, which became the nation of Israel. However, as separate nations, for centuries they became some of Israel’s most troublesome neighbours.

What lands did Moab and Ammon occupy?

The map on the facing page shows the approximate extent of both nations. The kingdom of Moab was located to the east of the Dead Sea, whilst Ammon was to the north east of the Jordan valley. You can see that

both nations were directly to the east of both Judah and Israel.

Jephthah the judge of Israel: the land in dispute

The Bible records disputes between Israel and Moab and Ammon all through the period of the Judges. Both nations were claiming the land east of the river Jordan. Judges chapter 11 describes how Jephthah was chosen as a leader to confront the attacking Ammonites. The cause was a land dispute – nothing is new!

‘Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, “What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?” And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah,

“Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably. So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, and said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: ‘Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon...’”

Judges 11:12–15

The piece of land referred to is shown east of Jericho (see map on previous page), immediately to the east of the Jordan, bounded on the north by a tributary of the Jordan, the river Jabbok, (see map on right) and to the south by the river Arnon which flows into the Dead Sea, that Jephthah names as the northern boundary of Moab.

Jephthah reminded his adversaries that the land was originally taken by conquest from the Amorite, Sihon king of Heshbon, in the time of Moses just prior to the main conquest of Canaan. It was not taken from Moab nor Ammon. This area was part of the lands Moses then gave to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh, east of the Jordan (Numbers 32.33). Jephthah's history lesson fell on deaf ears, however, and he was forced to wage battle against Ammon for victory. It was this clearly identified area of land east of the Jordan and between those two rivers that both Moab and Ammon fought over with Israel for centuries.

King David's dealings with Moab and Ammon

During the days of David's exile by King Saul, when Saul was hunting him down, David feared for the safety of even his own parents, so he



arranged a sort of 'safe house' with the king of Moab: *'Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me."'* (1 Samuel 22.3).

But later, all through the record of the books of Samuel, during the reigns of Saul and David, there was a constant animosity. Battle after battle took place, until at last David subdued both Moab (2 Samuel chapter 8) and Ammon. The record states *'...David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah'* (2 Samuel 11.1). It should be noted that Rabbah here was the same as Rabath, otherwise

called Ammon. It was the capital city that David conquered. Today the city is called Amman, the capital and largest city of Jordan, clearly bearing witness to its ancient name.

Solomon's big mistake

But Solomon, David's son, made a grave mistake in marrying foreign wives, contrary to God's command (1 Kings 11.1,2), including Moabite and Ammonite women. He built high places where the worship of Chemosh god of Moab, and Milcom (Molech) god of the Ammonites, took place. *'Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon'* (1 Kings 11.7). Worship of Molech (also referred to as Milcom) and Chemosh involved child sacrifice, which the Bible calls 'the abomination'.

It is probable that Chemosh of Moab and Molech of Ammon were one and the same as there is a reference indicating this on the Moabite stone (see overleaf). It records the king of Moab offering his son as a burnt offering when losing a battle, clearly to appeal to Chemosh his god (2 Kings 3.26,27). Passing babies through the fire to Molech is denounced time and time again in the Old Testament. For example, King

Ahaz of Judah, Hezekiah's father, was guilty of such vile practices.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote about such wicked and idolatrous practices: *'And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into my mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin'* (Jeremiah 32.35).



This 19th Century illustration shows the 'abomination' of the Ammonites taking place. The outstretched arms of the pagan god Molech receive the offering, as described by historic rabbinical sources. Both Judah and Israel were at times guilty of either practising or condoning such heinous rituals. This was one reason why they were commanded to separate themselves from the surrounding nations.

In 1966 a temple at Amman was excavated by the archaeologist J.B. Hennessy, that showed evidence of human sacrifice by fire, exactly in line with the Biblical record.

Balaam son of Beor

In addition, another reason for separation from surrounding nations was the immoral sexual practices involved with the worship of these gods. In Numbers chapter 22, the Bible describes how even before Israel entered Canaan, a false prophet named Balaam was hired by Balak the king of Moab to defeat Israel by means of a series of attempted pagan curses. This proved impossible for Balaam to carry out, but eventually he cynically advised Balak to corrupt Israel by Moabite religious prostitution called here 'joining Baal of Peor'. The book of Numbers tells us what happened:

'... and the people began to commit prostitution with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel'.

Numbers 25.1-3

External evidence about the existence of the ancient prophet Balaam was discovered in 1967 at Deir Alla, about 8 kilometres east of the River Jordan, near the Jabbok tributary. Inscriptions and illustrations were uncovered in a building near a temple destroyed by earthquake. An ancient scribe had copied the visions and prophecies of the prophet Balaam son of Beor, who had lived centuries before. Three times in the first four lines of the text his name is mentioned, Balaam son of Beor. Unmistakably the same man as we read about in the Bible.

The Moabite Stone confirms the Biblical record

One of the most significant archaeological pieces of evidence supporting the Bible record was the discovery of the Moabite Stone in the 19th Century (see opposite); a black basalt inscription written by Mesha king of Moab himself around 850 BC. On 19th August 1868, at Dhiban (Biblical Dibon), a German missionary, the Rev F Klein, was shown an inscribed slab by an Arab sheikh, containing 34 lines of writing. Mesha, the king of Moab, is boasting how he has thrown off Ahab's domination by rebelling.

It is of course very much from Mesha's viewpoint. He boasted how

he threw off the yoke of Israel and honoured his god Chemosh: *‘As for Omri king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years for Chemosh was angry at his land. And his son followed him and he also said “I will humble Moab.” In my time he spoke but I have triumphed over him and over his house, while Israel hath perished for ever!’* The account continues to explain how the House of Omri and his son Ahab had occupied Moab for 40 years. Clearly a triumphant Mesha gloats over his new found freedom! Note that Chemosh was the name of the god of Moab.

The Old Testament confirms that during the reign of Ahab king of Israel, the son of Omri, Moab were a subject people under tribute. We read a lot about this infamous Ahab, king of the house of Omri, and of his wicked wife Jezebel in 1 Kings chapters 17 to 22. The Bible record confirms the fact that at this point in history on Ahab’s death, Moab rebelled, as the stone tells us:

‘Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheepbreeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. But it

happened, when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel’ 2 Kings 3.4,5

The rest of 2 Kings chapter 3 recounts how a rather unsure confederacy of Judah, Israel and the king of Edom, sought to quash the rebellion, without apparently achieving their desired object. The record concludes *‘so they departed from him and returned to their own land.’* Moab, now independent from Israel, again survived to fight another day, though, unlike Israel, Moab and Ammon did not survive the invasions of Assyria and Babylon.

So the Moabite Stone, inscribed by king Mesha himself, gives us a truly ancient, independent endorsement, which backs up the Biblical record. You can see the evidence for yourself if you visit the Louvre in Paris where it is displayed.

Justin Giles
London UK

The
Moabite
Stone



BASIC BIBLE TEACHING

The Development of Mankind (1)

Previously in this series we have looked at the Bible teaching about creation and the fall of man, where Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instructions and as a result brought sin and death into the world. We noted that the Bible narrative (Genesis chapters 1-3) is very straightforward but requires faith to understand and accept it. Adjusting this opening narrative to suit modern popular theories destroys the cohesive strength of the entire narrative of the Bible.

In this article we will look at what we might call the development of mankind. This is the period from the fall of Adam and Eve to the time of a man called Abraham, who we will investigate in a future article, God willing. It covers a period of 2,000 years but is contained in only ten chapters of Genesis.

The tree of life

This was planted in the Garden of Eden but Adam and Eve did not eat of its fruit. After disobeying God's command and eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden. God placed a 'flaming sword' at the entrance to the garden. The objective was *'to guard the way to the tree of life'* lest the first human pair ate of it and lived for ever as sinners (Genesis 3.22-24). But the hope of everlasting life had not gone forever. God provided a way back for fallen man. It is this precise way back to God that is the main theme of the Bible in both Old and New Testaments. It should be noted that adding to or taking away from the Bible narrative seriously threatens the integrity of the message.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul makes two important points on this subject. In the letter to the Romans he wrote this: *'Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned'* (Romans 5.12). This is a

important point. If we say that God created lots of people at the beginning, and Adam and Eve were just two selected for comment, we destroy the 'pedigree' of sin and death. It has passed on to all men and women because all are descended from Adam and Eve, and therefore all are hereditary sinners and all die. However, as Paul tells us in Romans 6 verse 23, that is not the end, for the tree of life is promised to those who overcome sin. But as this verse also says, the way to it cannot be earned. The words of the wise man Solomon in Proverbs 3.13-18 and the final message of Jesus in Revelation 2.7, are just two examples that demonstrate the way back to God.

The ground cursed

At the point of ejection from Eden, man's existence ceased to be a delight to God. The earth suffered the punishment which the sin of Adam and Eve had brought about (read Genesis 3.17-19). In the books of the prophets there is however hope for the future. They speak of a time when this curse will be reversed (read Amos 9.13 and Isaiah 35.1).

Cain and Abel

These were Adam and Eve's first two sons. In them we have an immediate example of two types of people that would develop and populate the earth. The idea of animal sacrifice was given in Eden when animal skins were used to cover the sin of the man and woman. That is, animal's blood was spilt in order that sin could be atoned for.

This established a major divine principle that the Bible demonstrates throughout the Old and New Testament. Every animal sacrifice pointed forwards to the once for all sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Cain slew Abel (the first murder) because Abel's offering was acceptable to God. Here are some extracts from Genesis 4:

'...Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.... Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his

countenance fell... Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And he said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

Also read Genesis 3.15, 21, Genesis 4.4, Hebrews 11.4.

This teaches us that God can only be worshipped in the way He specifies, and not in any way we might feel is appropriate or best (read 1 John 3.12). Whereas Abel's offering showed that he had faith, this led to his murder in much the same way as Christ.

The reason for the fall of Adam and Eve was that they did not believe God's Word. Now Cain succumbed to the same error: personal will and ignoring of God's way.

Two lines of descendants

Something we must stay fixed on in this section is our status compared to God. It is necessary to accept that what we have been told is enough to find 'the way' back to the tree of life. We need to ensure we do not add or take away from what the Bible says. Indeed Jesus tells us that we have to have a childlike humility and innocence in coming to Jesus to receive the kingdom of God (Luke 18.15-17); this is 'the way' in which the descendants of Adam can get back to Eden and the tree of life.

In Genesis chapters 5 and 6 we read about the descendants of the first human pair. At this point in Genesis, the life span of individuals was many hundreds of years. We must presume that the human strain was so pure at this early point that it facilitated brothers marrying their sisters. Seth was born, and we find in the Bible detailed lists of Adam's descendants that enable us to understand human life spans, and how families developed. The descendants of Cain were predominantly evil. The descendants of Seth were predominantly God fearing.

It is necessary to read through Genesis chapters 4 and 5 to understand the following. The division between righteous Abel and wicked Cain was continued in the children of Seth and the children of Cain. The seventh generation from Cain was Lamech. His sons had different skills, which

might be described as the development of the arts and sciences. Jabal lived in tents and raised cattle and was a musician on lyre and pipe. Tubal-Cain was a smith who forged bronze and iron. Contrast his boast with Jesus' command to forgive; read Genesis 4.20-25 and compare with Matthew 18.21,22. So, in this line we see the development of things that take men and women away from God to a belief that their destiny is in their own hands.

In Seth's line we see the development of righteousness, which the Bible describes as 'the sons of God'. The seventh generation from Seth was Enoch. His life was in total contrast to Lamech's. The New Testament tells us more about this. Note the ungodliness which was clearly rife in his day. Enoch had faith in God's Word and made it so much part of his life that he was taken away, so that he should not see death. Enoch walked with God.

Read Genesis 4.26; 5.22-24; 6.2; Hebrews 11.5 and Jude verses 14,15.

Our way of life can be called a 'walk', and if we want to serve God then our 'walk' must show the characteristics of God. Here are some of them:

- ❖ **Walk in light** – for God is light: 1 John 1.5; Ephesians 5. 8
- ❖ **Walk in love** – for God is love: 1 John 1.4-8; Ephesians 5.2
- ❖ **Walk in truth** – for God is truth: 1 John 5.20; 2 John verse 4

The world population exploded in the first 1,500 years after creation, due to the longevity of individuals and the rate of reproduction. In Genesis chapter 6 we have a sad picture of the world before the Flood.

Read Genesis 6.1-2; 5,6; 11-13.

The sons of God (the godly line of Seth – see above) married the daughters of men (line of Cain – see above). We need to understand this in the context of those two distinct lines in the development of mankind. Some have tried to say that somehow angels came down and married human women – this is nowhere spoken of in Scripture and is incompatible with the message about the development of God's plan of salvation that runs through the Bible.

Part 2 to follow in the next edition God willing

THE GOSPEL

The phrase ‘The Gospel’ is one that many people will have heard, regardless of whether they hold a belief or not. The English word originates from the Old English god (good) spel (message), meaning ‘glad tidings announced by Jesus or one of the four gospels’ (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). This came into the English language from a translation of the Latin ‘bona adnuntiatio’, a translation of Greek ‘euangelion’, meaning ‘reward for bringing good news’.

Good news is indisputably nice, but it is often in short supply. We live in a world where the mainstream media bombard us with news from around the world that is sad, painful, depressing and seemingly endless. War, famine, disease, crime, inequality, suffering, lies, the list goes on and on. Even between individuals it is amazing how often bad news seems to crop up; there’s a phrase that ‘good news travels fast, but bad news travels faster’(see Light vol 29.4 p. 20).

It seems that our brains are hard-wired to have a morbid fascination with bad news. ‘Did you hear about Dave’s broken leg?’, or, ‘isn’t it a shame that Rachel lost her job?’ And in modern society with the escalation of technology and social media, especially among the young, there is a growing culture of people jumping on the bandwagon to spread bad news around the world in an instant, using only their thumbs.

So, when we hear about, or read a piece of good news, it often stands out like a beacon of light in a dark world. Some friends are getting married, a couple are expecting a baby, someone’s cancer is in remission, a random act of kindness that gets picked up by the media and celebrated, a successful exam result, a pay rise; we could list many more examples. However, it can feel sometimes like any good news we hear is outweighed by the bad news, and this would be disheartening if it were not for one thing.

The really good news

The good news, or gospel, announced by Jesus is the best news anyone could possibly hear. We read in

RIGHT: Good news! An elderly patient leaves hospital after recovering from the coronavirus

Matthew's gospel record that '*Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people*' (Matthew 4.23). This good news of the kingdom was like nothing that anyone had ever heard before, and Jesus quickly amassed many followers who were intrigued by the positive message and miraculous signs that he performed. People who were blind, paralysed or suffering since birth were cured of their afflictions by a touch, a word, or a prayer from this wonderful man. He even raised people from the dead!



But what did it all mean? We would all dearly love to see someone walk after decades of ill health or see the light of day for the first time, but there was, and is, so much more to Jesus' message. He was sent by God to proclaim a message to all mankind, that human existence consisted of far more than simply being born, living a life, and dying with no hope. Jesus spent his whole life looking forward, constantly striving for what lay ahead, and speaking his message of good news to anyone who would hear.

Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth and read a passage aloud from the prophecy of Isaiah:

'The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance, liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the LORD...' Luke 4.18.19

He then went on to tell the people '*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*'.

It does not get much clearer than that; Jesus was publicly stating that he was the chosen messenger, sent by God, to tell the world of the good news of God's kingdom, offered to anyone who was willing to listen.

Listening to the message

Jesus repeatedly used the phrase '*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*'. At face value, this seems like an obvious statement; human beings across the world have ears, so generally speaking we can hear, but hearing and paying attention are totally different concepts. The modern equivalent of this phrase would be, 'Listen up! Pay close attention!' After teaching the parable of the sower, all about different people who hear God's message and respond to it in different ways, Jesus said: '*Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given*' (Mark 4.24).

So, can we listen up and pay close attention, or do we struggle to hear the message amid the noise of everything else that surrounds us? In Paul's 2nd letter to Timothy he wrote:

'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their

own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.'
2 Timothy 4.3,4

Is there a more perfect summary of today's Western society? Yet things have not really changed since the time of Christ; we read Jesus' words in Matthew's account of the parable of the sower:

**'... I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the heart of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them"'.
Matthew 13.13-15**

This was true then and it is just as true now; people see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. Paul's letter to the Romans

predicted this: *'For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead. So that they are without excuse'* (Romans 1.20).

Looking for the answers

A question we must all ask ourselves at some point in our lifetime is, 'what is the meaning of life?' The good news that Jesus announced was always pointing forward to the fact that there would be a beautiful, perfect kingdom established on earth.

Why do we need this compared to our world now? Is there any country where we could honestly say there is a government that works for the good of all, operating with social equity, truth, and justice? It seems clear that any form of government run by men and women will be compromised one way or another, even with the best intentions. For a government to work, there must be consistency and peace, yet we struggle to find this with modern politics and modern society. Wouldn't it be amazing if there was just one government for the whole world that did a perfect job? God's message to us in the Bible is that a kingdom on earth, which many people today would view as a utopian dream, will be a reality. He

did not create the earth without a purpose in mind. His son Jesus will fulfil that purpose when he returns to this earth to set up the worldwide kingdom that he proclaimed time after time during his ministry. It is up to us to look to God's promises for the answers, instead of the empty promises of mankind.

Have you heard the news?

At this point we should consider going back to basics. Do we want to hear the good news of the kingdom of God, or are we satisfied with the daily bombardment of minute-by-minute updates that today's world has to offer?

If we choose the latter, there's really little hope for the future. But if we choose the former, we are opening ourselves up to an incredible opportunity that gives us a fantastic hope for the future. Why should we feel confident that the promises which God offers us far outweigh those of modern society? This modern paraphrase in the 'The Message' Bible gives the answer:

'When God wanted to guarantee his promises, he gave his word, a rock-solid guarantee—God can't break his word. And because his word cannot change, the promise

is likewise unchangeable. We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go'

Hebrews 6.17,18 MSG

We have every reason to seize this opportunity, and if we are honest with ourselves, we have no genuine reason not to. The tricky part is to focus on the right path, to look forward with confidence, faith and enthusiasm to God's kingdom that was proclaimed by the prophets of old, by Jesus, and by his followers.

'... joyfully give thanks to the Father who has made you able to have a share in all that he has prepared for his people in the kingdom of light. God has freed us from the power of darkness, and he brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son.'

Colossians 1.12,13 New Century Version

So, in this day and age where good news is hard to come by, do we want to live our lives as ships thrown about on stormy seas, or would we rather sail carefully to safe waters, guided by the beacon of light that is shone by God in the Bible? ***'Those who have ears to hear, let them hear'!***

Alex Wordsworth
London, UK



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this magazine

Light on a new world

is published for
the Dawn Christadelphians by:

Light Bible Publications

PO Box 362, Dartford, DA1 9GT
England

Editor: Colin Dryland

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Design: Roy Toms

ISSN 0047-4657

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.

We believe that over the centuries the original message of Christianity has been corrupted. Light is published to provide a better understanding of the true Christian hope.

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

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VOLUME 27.4 SPECIAL EDITION

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Volume 2

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Published by
Christadelph
Light Bible
PO Box 362
Dartford
DA1 9GT, Eng

Editor: Colin
Corresponde
Design: Roy T
ISSN 0047-465

*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 kingdom of God

'...all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him... There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains....' Psalm 72

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