



Light

...on a new world

- ❖ *Darwin and the whale*
- ❖ *Naaman the leper*
- ❖ *Signs of the times*

a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible and its message for today
Volume 33.4

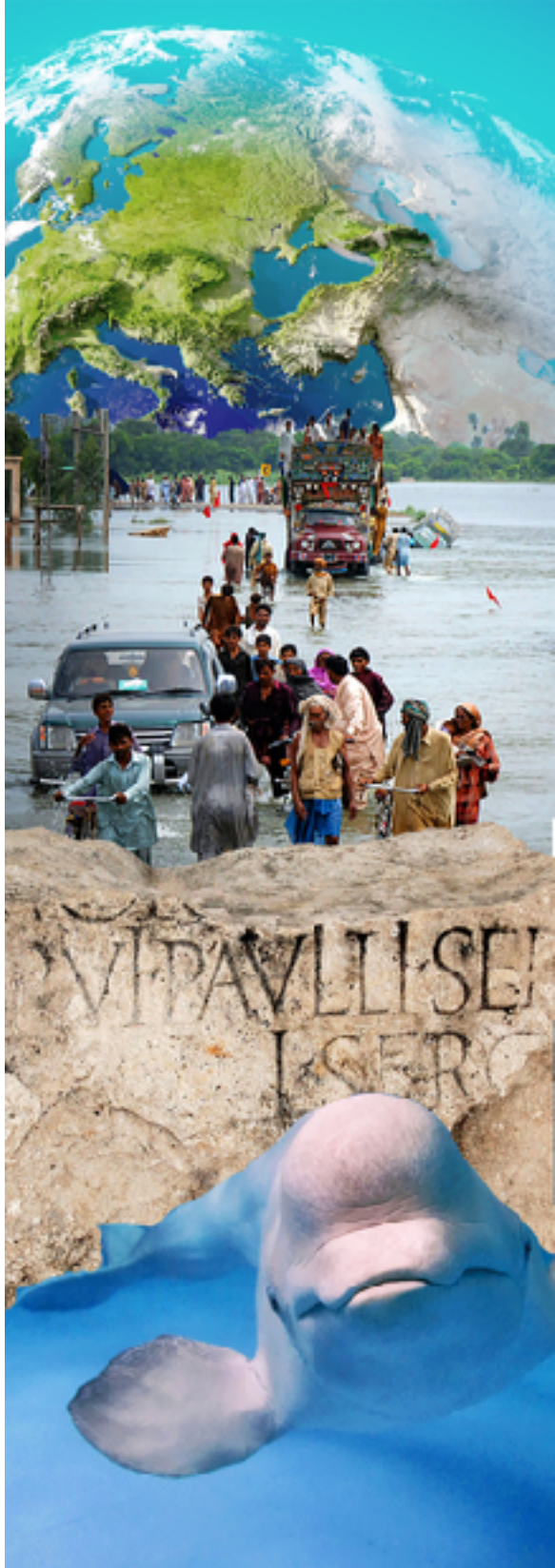
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The first century AD

cover picture

The world's largest animal, a blue whale, throws its massive bulk out of the sea in an action described as 'breaching'. Charles Darwin suggested the whale evolved from a bear –see article 'Darwin and the whale' on page 9.

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BIBLE CHARACTERS

NAAMAN the leper

The account of Naaman is one of the classic stories of the Old Testament.

In 2 Kings chapter five there is the record of how a Syrian army commander was cured of his leprosy. In order to familiarise yourself with the narrative, it is worth reading that chapter before looking at this article.

The call of a Gentile

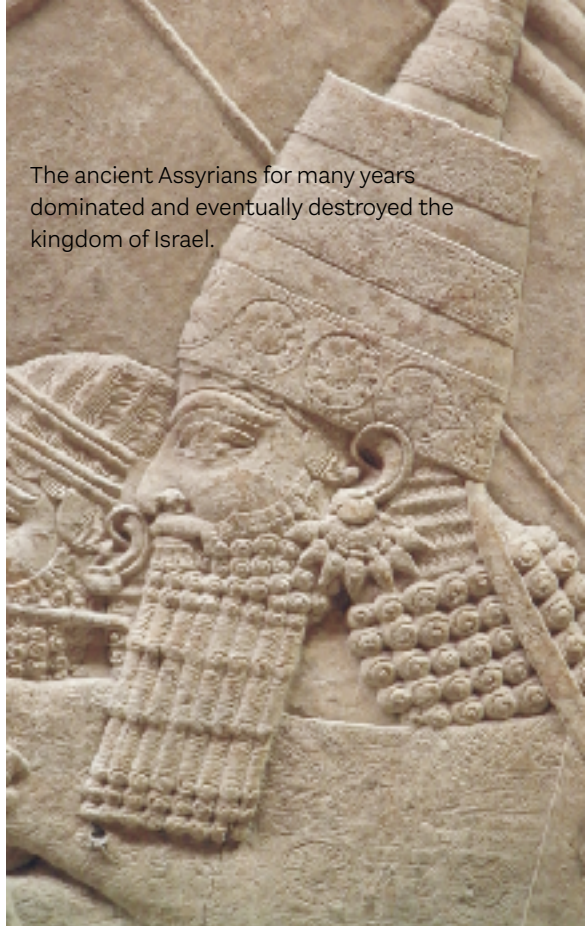
‘And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.’

Luke 4:27

Jesus explained that there was something special about Naaman; indeed, he was unique in his generation as being the focus of God’s healing power. The fact that only this foreign leper was healed suggests that, like many of Jesus’ own miracles, the ‘cleansing’ of Naaman was intended as much more than a demonstration of God’s compassion. It conveyed a deep spiritual truth to those who would look beyond this simple act of love and mercy.

In the example of Naaman we see perhaps the greatest evidence of Divine providence to manipulate

The ancient Assyrians for many years dominated and eventually destroyed the kingdom of Israel.



circumstances to bring a Gentile (non-Jew) into the orbit of God’s plan of salvation. God’s grace was never restricted to the chosen people of Israel. In this case, it was to be poured out on a Gentile who also was a leper. To the Jew there could be nothing worse than a leprous Gentile, yet as Jesus taught such a person took precedence over many Jewish lepers in God’s estimation. Therefore, at its most fundamental level, this story shows that there is no one who is outside the scope of God’s plan of

redemption. We must show humility, faith and obedience if we are to benefit from God's mercy.

Leprosy a symbol of sin

The narrative revolves around the fact that Naaman was a leper. One writer describes the significance of leprosy in this way:

'It has an insignificant beginning; it works insidiously and almost imperceptibly; it spreads rapidly; it is highly infectious; it is particularly loathsome; it is a state of living death; it was dealt with by banishment; its victims became objects of shame; it was incurable except by miracle and the grace of God' (*'Gleanings from Elisha'* by A W Pink).

In those few descriptive statements, we can see how appropriate leprosy is as a symbol of sin; it demonstrates the nature and outcome of sin in the sight of God. In the figure, Naaman was in an even worse plight, because as a Gentile he was among those described in the New Testament as *'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world'*. But God, through His grace and mercy was to reveal in a powerful way that those *'who once were far off have been brought near'*. (Ephesians 2:12,13)

Why did God choose Naaman?

So why did God choose Naaman as the vehicle to reveal His grace to the Gentiles? There is a lot of circumstantial evidence to suggest that Naaman was a good and noble man. What is the evidence? According to Strong's concordance, Naaman means 'pleasant'; Hitchcock's Bible Names gives 'agreeable'. However, the main testimony to Naaman's character is seen in the attitude of his servants.

First there was the disposition of the captive Jewish girl; she had been captured by one of the Syrian raiding parties, either by Naaman himself, or perhaps purchased by him from a slave market in Damascus. (2 Kings 5:2) We can imagine the sort of fate that often befell a young captive girl, over and above the traumas of being exiled from family, friends and home. Such experiences would normally lead the girl to rejoice in any calamity that came upon her captors. We see no such hostility between the girl and Naaman – quite the contrary, for she expresses concern over Naaman's condition and hopes for a cure. (2 Kings 5:3) We must conclude that she experienced nothing but kindness in the house of Naaman.

We should also note how his servants addressed him: *‘...his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father”’*. (2 Kings 5:13) They referred to him with a term of benevolence and respect. It is also a measure of the man that they felt able to approach him at all. Most slave owners would not have taken kindly to a servant suggesting they had made a mistake. They would have tried to steer clear of their master’s anger until it had subsided. But the servants clearly knew Naaman was a reasonable man. That proved to be the case, for Naaman did listen, and he agreed to follow their advice.

Human pride gets in the way

We come to the crux of the story. We can imagine Naaman arriving at Elisha’s house, with all the pomp and power of his high office. We can picture him, standing proudly in his chariot, anticipating that his honour and majesty would be recognised, and that the prophet would come and bow before him, before effecting the miraculous cure. As an army commander, Naaman was used to issuing instructions and being obeyed, so we can imagine Naaman’s fury when Elisha would not even take the trouble to come out of the house to see him (2 Kings 5:9–11).

However, God wasn’t interested in healing a leper; He was intent on saving a sinner. It is the same result that He wants to achieve in our lives, for the Apostle Peter reminds us that *‘The Lord is... long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance’*. (2 Peter 3:9) Naaman raged over the fact that the prophet would not stir himself to come out and see him but just sent a message through his servant. That wasn’t what he expected, and his indignation almost resulted in him riding away from his only hope of a cure. We do well to ask ourselves if we ever come with our own expectations of what God should do for us, thoughts driven by human pride rather than the needs of our eternal salvation.

The message Elisha sent to Naaman instructed him to go and wash in the river Jordan seven times. Being asked to bathe in this river, not once but seven times, raised Naaman’s fury even further. If washing was all that was needed, then the beautiful mountain streams of Syria were far to be preferred. But washing was not all that was required; the seven-fold washing was not to cleanse Naaman’s flesh, but to prove his heart. Note how Elisha explains the consequences of obedience to his

instruction; *‘your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.’* (2 Kings 5:10) Here is an indication of a double healing; first the physical healing of the disease of leprosy, then the spiritual healing of becoming *‘clean’* in the sight of God.

The need for humility

Naaman needed to learn the lesson from the words of the wise man Solomon: *‘The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, and before honour is humility’*. (Proverbs 15:33) So the Syrian commander’s rage was soothed by the quiet wisdom of his servant: *‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?’* (2 Kings 5:13)

This is a message not just for Naaman, but also for all those who try and obtain salvation through works. Whatever we might achieve, it can never be enough to earn God’s grace and salvation. Humility, faith and obedience are the characteristics that God looks for in a man or woman. Naaman had to learn that lesson before his leprosy could be cleansed, and we must learn it too before our sins can be washed away.

Cleansing through baptism

For us, that cleansing occurs through baptism. In his first letter Peter reminded his readers how Noah and his family *‘were saved through water’* and he continued:

‘...this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God...’ 1 Peter 3:20–21 NIV

Originally, Naaman thought he knew a better, more convenient way to be washed and challenged the prophet’s instructions: *‘Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus,*

The unimpressive waters of the River Jordan which Naaman despised.



better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ (2 Kings 5:12) Similarly, many churches today have adopted more convenient ways of baptising than the method plainly taught in the New Testament and prefigured in the cleansing of Naaman.

True baptism is a full immersion in water of a mature, believing adult. The sprinkling of water on an infant may be much more convenient, but like the rivers of Damascus, such a ceremony will achieve nothing. If Naaman had washed in the Abanah, he would have remained a leper; if we trust in infant sprinkling, our sins remain.

Three important characteristics

Naaman had to show three characteristics to be cleansed:

- ❖ **Humility:** he had to recognise that all his worldly power and influence couldn’t help him – he had to trust in God.
- ❖ **Faith:** he had to believe what God’s prophet told him. That faith was expressed by his actions, for he went down to the Jordan to wash.
- ❖ **Obedience:** he had to follow the prophet’s instruction exactly.

Washing seven times in one of the rivers of Damascus, or only once or twice in the Jordan would not achieve the healing he sought.

It is just the same in our day; these three characteristics of humility, faith and obedience are what God looks for in those who would come to Him, seeking to be cleansed from their sins. Naaman teaches us a very powerful lesson.

The thoughts that no doubt helped Naaman submit to Elisha’s instruction can help us too. Naaman must have realised that despite his wealth and his position, despite the insult he felt had been done to his honour, he was still a leper. So, what was important to him – the admiration of the world and the trappings of power? Or did he want to escape from his living death and be healed even if that meant humbling himself in the sight of his servants?

Wisely, he chose the latter course, and went to the Jordan and immersed himself in its waters. The record emphasises that it was done *‘according to the saying of the man of God’*. This confession of faith and obedience was made in the presence of his servants who witnessed his change of heart and his new-found commitment to a heavenly Lord.

Cleansing – literal and spiritual

And what a transformation came over Naaman!

‘...he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.’

2 Kings 5:14

We have already noted that Elisha’s promise of healing was both physical and spiritual. We see the same thing repeated in this verse: *‘his flesh was restored... and he was clean’*. The same verse provides an additional detail. We are told that *‘his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child’*. Here again there are hints of what was to be revealed in its fullness by Jesus, when he said to Nicodemus: *‘unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’* (John 3:3) In a similar vein Jesus said to his disciples: *‘Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’* (Matthew 18:4)

Humility and the willingness to listen to the word of God are the first steps to salvation. So Naaman returned to Elisha’s house, no longer expecting the prophet to come out of his house and bow before him. With his new-

found humility and faith, Naaman stood before the prophet as his servant. It is also important to note how Elisha refused the gift that Naaman offered in thanksgiving for his cure. (2 Kings 5:15–16) God will never be in debt to any man; we cannot earn salvation by works or through money, only through a humbleness of mind expressed in belief and obedience.

So Naaman returned to Syria a changed man, both physically and spiritually, and doubtless he went on his way rejoicing. We too can rejoice at the evident hand of providence at work in the life of this Gentile. We can be sure that it can work in our lives too, provided we have the humility and wisdom to see it, and act upon it. Then, like Naaman, we can be made clean through our baptism into the saving name of Jesus Christ.

Steve Irving,
Norfolk, UK

Editor’s note:

For a more detailed explanation of the importance and significance of baptism, send for a free booklet ‘Understanding the Bible’s teaching: Baptism’.



The story of Darwin and the whale

Blue Whale
Balaenoptera musculus

Charles Darwin
homo sapiens

***‘And God created great whales
and every living creature that moveth, which
the waters brought forth abundantly... and God
saw that it was good.’***

Genesis 1:21 KJV

Other translations use the expression ‘sea creatures’ or ‘sea monsters’, but clearly whales and other similar marine animals are included.

Rather than accept the creation account in Genesis, evolutionists speculate how whales evolved from some earlier creature. They find it difficult to imagine how mammals could evolve in the sea. (Mammals are defined as warm-blooded animals with a spine and that bear and suckle their young). So they suggest that whales evolved from some earlier land-based mammal

which later moved into the sea. Darwin himself set the ball rolling by suggesting that whales descended from some kind of bear – a suggestion that he later deleted from his famous book '*The Origin of Species*' chapter 6. Perhaps even he found it difficult to take seriously.

Should we take it seriously? What is the evidence? What sort of mechanism could account for such a fantastic change?

The only mechanisms available in the current theory of evolution, are tiny changes in the DNA of the creature involved. These tiny changes ('mutations') are accidental changes to just one or two letters of the DNA code. These changes are known to be either neutral, too small to have any effect at all, or damaging. Occasionally it is thought they might produce some useful characteristic which changes the creature in some way. It is admitted that these changes are highly unlikely – in fact, when challenged, evolutionists have had problems identifying even just one mutation which has been beneficial. Nevertheless, the story of evolution is the story of how a succession of these highly unlikely beneficial mutations could, over a long period of time, produce a new animal altogether, with very different DNA.

Let's examine this story in more detail. What changes would be required for this small, four-legged, land-based animal (like a wolf perhaps? Opinions differ) to evolve into a very large marine animal like the blue whale? Here is a short list:

Changes and more changes

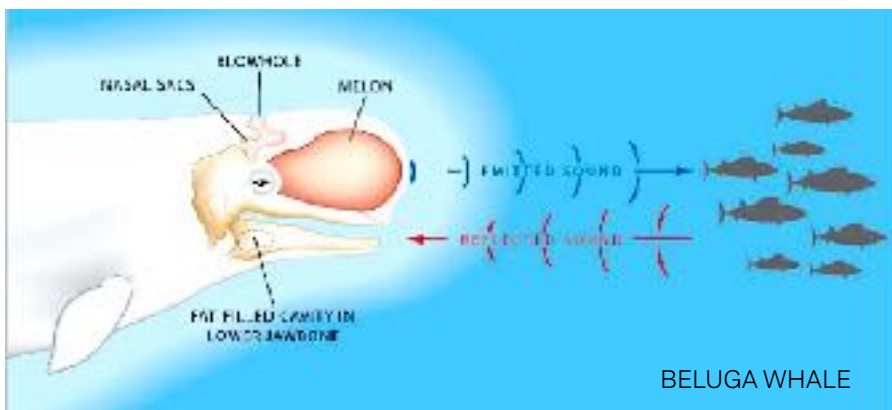
1. Enormous **lung** capacity with efficient oxygen extraction for long dives.
2. A powerful **tail** with large horizontal flukes to enable very strong swimming.
3. **Eyes** 'designed' to see properly in water with its far higher refractive index, and to withstand high pressure.
4. **Ears** different to those of land mammals (that pick up airborne sound waves) with the eardrums protected from high pressure.
5. **Skin** lacking hair and sweat glands but incorporating fibrous fatty 'blubber'.
6. Whale **fins and tongues** have countercurrent heatexchangers to minimise heat loss.
7. **Nostrils** on top of head ('blowholes').

8. Specially fitting **mouth and nipples** so that the baby whale can be fed underwater.
9. Baleen whales have sheets of **baleen** (whalebone) that hang from the roof of the mouth and filter plankton for food.
10. **Echolocation:** many cetaceans have an extremely precise sonar system. (Cetacean is the name of the order that includes whales, dolphins and porpoises).
11. Special **vocal organs and 'language'** to allow underwater communication (eg: dolphin 'clicks' and whale 'song').
12. **Weight gain!** A 100-foot blue whale weighs about 180,100 Kg (400,000 lbs). Clearly the metabolism required to support such a massive creature is utterly different to that of a supposed small wolf-like ancestor. (Note: why is the whale so big? Is it really an advantage in the struggle for survival to be so big, to need to eat four tonnes of food every day? – the evidence of the dinosaurs suggests not!).

Here is just one of those features described in more detail :

10. echolocation:

'One amazing feature of most echolocating dolphins and small whales is the **'melon'**, a fatty protrusion on the forehead. This 'melon' is actually a sound lens – a sophisticated structure designed to focus the emitted sound waves into a beam which the dolphin can direct where it likes. This sound lens depends on the fact that different lipids (fatty compounds) bend the ultrasonic sound waves traveling through them in different ways. The different lipids have to be arranged in the right shape and sequence in order





The Beluga whale showing its prominent 'melon' forehead

to focus the returning sound echoes. Each separate lipid is unique and different from normal blubber lipids, and is made by a complicated chemical process, requiring a number of different enzymes.

For such an organ to have evolved, random mutations must have formed the right enzymes to make the right lipids, and other mutations must have caused the lipids to be deposited in the right place and shape. A gradual step-by-step evolution of the organ is not feasible, because until the lipids were fully formed and at least partly in the right place and shape, they would have been of no use' (*Refuting Evolution* Jonathan Sarfati 1999).

In other words, it is impossible to imagine an accidental step-by-step sequence of small mutations, each of which would be beneficial, and that would eventually build the complete 'melon', complete with all the data processing required. This is true, not just of this particular organ in the whale, but just about any complex organ that you can think of.

Evidence

So much for speculation – what about evidence? A small series of fossils has been put together, from *Pakicetus* (50 million years ago) to *Aetiocetus* (24– 26 million years ago). They have been carefully arranged in the right sequence to support the evolutionary story. But we have seen it all before. The evolution of the horse (*eohippus*) was once regarded as a textbook example of evolution in action. But the textbooks had to change – the fossils which supported the story now lie in a basement of the American

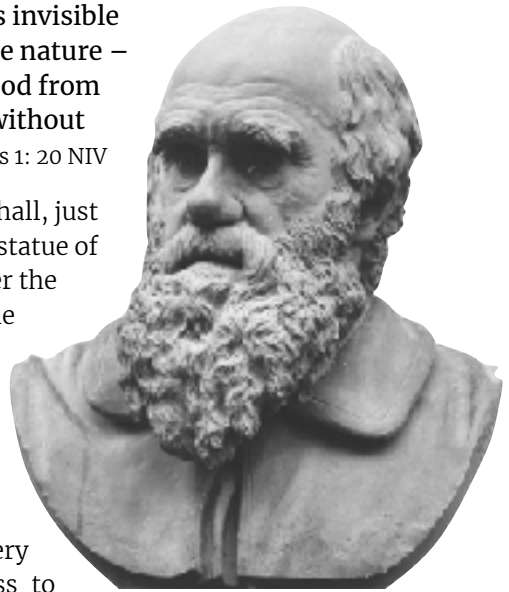
Museum of Natural history, discarded and discredited. 'The evolution of whales fairy story... is another of these fantasies of natural history. Like its predecessors, it too will soon find itself in the waste bin of science' ('A whale fantasy from National Geographic' Yahya 2001).

As you step inside the entrance of the Natural History Museum in London, (see photo page 9) you find yourself looking up at the most gigantic skeleton suspended from the ceiling, a 25 metres long blue whale, christened 'Hope' by the Museum. It inspires awe, not just because of its size, but because of its beauty and the purposeful integration of every part. Here surely is the work of a master engineer and designer, displayed for us to recognise and wonder at. Here, '*clearly seen*', is the evidence that the Apostle Paul talked about when he wrote:

'...since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without any excuse.'

Romans 1: 20 NIV

At the far end of the Museum's entrance hall, just below the tail of the whale, sits a marble statue of Charles Darwin, seated and presiding over the hall like some benevolent deity. This is the man who suggested this mighty creature over his head evolved from a bear, without any vestige of design or purpose. So much of our world is still in thrall to his godless vision.



But you have a choice. The whale and every creature of this teeming planet witness to God's mighty creative power and His plan to one day perfect the earth, to fill it with His knowledge and His glory – a day that you and I can look forward to in faith and confidence.

Roy Toms
Norfolk, UK



signs of the times

The arts, especially music, are often used by their originators to convey views on various issues, whether social, political, economic, or otherwise. Often, they also express a prevailing mood. In that context, as I listened to some new music, I was interested to come across what the songwriter from the English music group, Muse, had to say about the title track 'Will of the People' from their current album:

'Our generation has seen this huge change. Something's going on in the West—a kind of collapse, a kind of division has been emerging. And now we're dealing with real external threats. We just feel like we're a part of this generation where something's going to go down in a major way.'

As an avid reader of current events media, and particularly of the opinion pieces that form for me the most interesting part of news coverage, I find that statement very interesting indeed. Why? Because

much of what I am reading is postulating that humanity is at a turning point in history. And it is worth our serious consideration, because it looks like it will profoundly influence or even determine our future. But only to a point. Let me explain.

A remarkable prophecy

To set the scene, let's look at the last part of a Bible prophecy we've referred to a number of times in these articles – the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's image recorded in Daniel chapter 2. In this prophecy an image comprising gold for its head, silver for its chest, brass for its belly and thighs, iron for its legs and iron and clay for its feet, is destroyed by a stone hitting its feet, smashing the image to fragments and grinding the fragments to powder. This remarkable prophecy summarised the history of the world from God's perspective, from the time of the Babylonians, through the Medes and

Persians, Greeks and Romans in ancient times, and continuing right through to the present day and beyond. The description of the feet is especially relevant to this article. Here are the verses from the book of Daniel (text highlights the especially apt part of the passage to today's polarised and divided world, internationally and within countries):

‘Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile.

As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And 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 2:41-44

It’s a remarkable passage because it highlights a big part of humanity’s problem – the inability to work together. But it juxtaposes this with the solution – God’s kingdom. And these words were written over 2,500 years ago. Truly remarkable!

Jesus expanded on these words from Daniel. An example of this is in the Gospel of Luke, written around 2,000 years ago. Jesus was speaking of his return to this earth to set up God’s kingdom. He said:

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

Luke 21:25-28

The first part is an accurate but sad description of the state of our world! But note especially how the second part says that we can ‘look up and lift up our heads’ when we see troubles in

our world, as opposed to being disturbed by them. Of course, I am sad that there is so much trouble, chaos and suffering. But the Bible says God is in control; Jesus will return, and he will set up that world-wide kingdom spoken of in those verses I have quoted from the book of Daniel. He is the 'stone' mentioned there which grows into a great mountain. It replaces our imperfect stewardship of this earth with perfection. (Daniel 2:34-35) All problems solved.

So, what can we see going on in our world that indicates that Jesus' return is going to happen sooner rather than later?

Imperfection

In answer to that question there is a great deal to see. But for this article let's look at just two things. They are very different examples of imperfection and how complicated it is for us to solve the problems. The first example is a relatively small-scale problem and focuses on one type of business in a city's Central Business District (CBD). The second focuses on a problem facing a whole country. In both cases the immediate cause of the problem is outside humankind's control.

A cafe in the CBD

The CBD concerned is in Sydney in Australia. The immediate cause is Covid. Here's the headline and the byline of an article by Alexis Carey from September 2nd this year ([news.com.au](https://www.news.com.au)). The headline was: 'Won't survive: Sydney businesses struggle as workers turn their backs on the CBD' and the byline 'before Covid turned the world upside down Marino Plagiotis' bustling CBD would be booked out on Fridays.'

Apparently, CBD workers aren't coming to the office on Mondays and Fridays post-Covid, and that trend, coupled with months of bad weather and ongoing public transport strikes (I note in passing that transport strikes aren't outside our control), has devastated small businesses, cafes being a prominent example.

Many other small businesses are not struggling. They have already failed with the costs, debts and heartbreak that this so often involves. For them at least these are truly distressing times. And this type of situation is replicated in many other places and across many different industries almost everywhere in the world. The ripple effects don't stop with the businesses concerned either. They

spread through society, the economy and politics.

That's sad, but why is a solution complicated? Surely 'things' will get back to 'normal'? Just one example of how complicated it is. Will people who have largely managed to work in a decentralised mode want to return to a centralised mode? And if they do return, the travel involved in a return to the 'office' is a significant contributor to pollution and thus has an impact on global warming. More about global warming when we look at our next problem! That's just one issue with a return to post Covid 'normal'. There are many more. And 'fixing' one problem so often leads to another.

Pakistan floods

The second example impacts not only the livelihoods of many but has cost,

and threatens many lives. Pakistan has been devastated by record rainfall leading to incredibly widespread flooding. At the time of writing, a massive proportion of the entire country was covered in floodwaters. Of course, flooding in Pakistan in the monsoon season is common especially along the Indus River. The monsoons always bring heavy rainfall. That's the nature of the weather in that country. But this year's monsoon has brought record rainfall in both amount and duration. Hence the catastrophic flooding.

To recover from this disaster will be a massive undertaking and will require significant help from outside Pakistan. So provided the help comes, where is the complexity? After all Pakistan is getting aid from other countries; even India, which is on very poor terms with Pakistan and vice versa, has helped.



One complexity lies in determining who is responsible for helping, and to what degree. Let me explain. The consensus of expert opinion is already that Pakistan's flood disaster was exacerbated by global warming. Pakistan contributes about 1% of the pollution that is causing global warming. At least that is now the overwhelming expert opinion, deniers notwithstanding.

Do you see problems? How is an equitable figure to be put on helping to pay for cleaning up and restoration after the flooding recedes? By the percentage of pollution each country is responsible for? Is that enough? When would that percentage be measured from, given that the effect of global warming has been cumulative? How much of the damage is directly attributable to global warming? Who would be qualified and trusted to calculate this? What about countries' ability to pay? Would countries pay anyway? And so on... and on... and on.

I quote from an article in *The Economist* dated September 17th 2022. The headline was 'Floodgates opened' and the byline 'Devastating floods like Pakistan's are much more likely in a warming world':

'Pakistani officials have exhorted richer countries to help – not just out of altruism, they argue, but because those countries' carbondioxide emissions are partly responsible for the catastrophe. And although studies measuring the role of climate change in the floods have not yet been completed, many experts believe that the evidence is already sufficient to assign some blame to man-made global warming.

The first link between the floods and broad climate trends was a heatwave in April and May, which scorched much of Pakistan and neighbouring India. According to the World Weather Attribution Project, a network of climate modellers, global warming has made such temperatures 30 times more likely than during pre-industrial times. And when temperatures rise, air picks up more moisture, increasing the chances of heavy rain. Total rainfall in Pakistan this August was more than triple the average during the past 30 years.'

It gets worse for the future. Another part of the article says:

'The 7,200 glaciers in northern Pakistan are also melting faster than in the past, largely as a result of greenhouse gas emissions. Along



Scene of devastation as the Himalayan glacier of Nando Devi (India) collapses, releasing a flood of water.

with other Himalayan glaciers, they are named the ‘third pole’, because they contain the world’s largest store of ice outside of polar regions. A study published this June finds that temperatures across the region rose by 0.42°C per decade in 1980–2018, twice the global average rate. Other forms of air pollution are also accelerating the rate of glacial shrinkage. When black particles settle on ice, they darken its surface, causing glaciers to absorb more sunlight and melt even faster...

The third pole’s sweating glaciers are the source of South Asia’s main rivers. Their melting, combined with the rise in rainfall, has swollen the region’s waterways. From 1980 to 2018, flows in the upper parts of the Indus, Pakistan’s biggest river, increased by 3.9Gt per decade. The situation is likely to get worse...’ (Editor’s note: 3.9Gt is 3.9 billion metric tons. 1 Gt of water would fill

400,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools).

In that passage we quoted from Luke, Jesus described the situation just prior to his return as ‘*men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth*’.

Conclusion

The idea that the human race will somehow muddle through the many and escalating crises that we are faced with seems to me to require more faith than believing what the Bible says! I am therefore grateful to believe in the Bible, not to be anxious about the chaos in the world, but to actually see it as a powerful sign that Jesus’ return is very near. It’s a great comfort that I wish so many more people had. All the information is there to read in the Bible, which is the Word of God.

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

Bible Questions and Answers

What did Jesus mean when he said:

‘There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out’?

Luke 13:28

The whole section is worth reading, so please look at Luke 13 from verse 22 to 30. This passage teaches us a whole array of truths about the Kingdom of God, giving pointers to a number of principles of the true gospel message. It is astonishing how much a verse can tell us if we think about its implications, and how it relates to other scriptures. Set out below are the main points:

Not everyone will be saved

Jesus was speaking to those who thought that they were righteous, but their attitude and way of life were not acceptable before God. There were others who went further and wanted to kill him. They would not enter the Kingdom. *‘Weeping and gnashing of teeth’* signify bitter regret at a lost opportunity, knowing that others have been accepted. There is no such thing as salvation for everyone – universal salvation is not taught in

the Bible. The phrase *‘Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity’* (Luke 13:27) shows that very clearly.

The setting up of the Kingdom is in the future

Jesus speaks about things that will happen in the future Kingdom of God. Though Jesus, on one occasion, said to the unbelieving Pharisees *‘...the kingdom of God is in your midst’* (Luke 17:21 NIV 2011 version), he was referring to himself as the nucleus of the Kingdom of God, because without the work of Jesus, without a saviour and a king, the Kingdom of God could never become a reality.

There will be a resurrection and reward for the faithful

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been dead between 1,700 and 2,000 years. They were buried in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron, and their resting place is still there today and revered by Jews and Muslims alike. If these fathers of Israel are to sit down in the Kingdom of God in the future, then, of course, they will be resurrected from the dead. How else could it happen? Jesus himself declared that he is the author of the resurrection when he said to his

friend Martha *‘I am the resurrection and the life’* (John 11: 25). Again, he said:

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

John 5:28-29

Jesus is not teaching universal resurrection here. The *‘all’* referred to here is those who hear, believe and respond to his teaching in their lives.

The Kingdom is earth- based

People will come from the East and West and *‘sit down’* in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11). To sit down, means you have been invited and been accepted. They will have been counted worthy at the judgement by Jesus Christ because of their faith in

his shed blood for the forgiveness of their sins.

The Old Testament prophets make it abundantly clear that the Kingdom of God will ultimately be a divine, political kingdom set up on earth with Jerusalem as its capital city (Isaiah 2:1-3; Jeremiah 3:17). As the prophet Daniel stated: *‘...the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...’* (Daniel 2:44) Many of the Old Testament prophets wrote about the conditions in the restored Kingdom of God. The prophet Isaiah spoke of *‘new heavens and a new earth’*. (Isaiah 65:17) In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter speaks about the same thing: *‘Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’*. (2 Peter 3:13)

Now sadly misused, this tiny planet, cleansed and restored, will be at the centre of the Kingdom of God.



‘... all the prophets in the Kingdom of God.’

This testimony of the prophets underlines Jesus' faith and belief in their messages and their work. There are many Christians who pay scant regard to the Old Testament which consists to a large extent of the writings of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and through to Malachi at its close. This verse shows how wrong that is, because all these too will be raised from the dead.

Jesus himself endorsed the writings of the prophets, including Moses, when he rebuked the unbelievers with these words: *‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’*. (Luke 16:31). They prophesied of the Kingdom of Israel being restored in a glorious future age. They spoke of a resurrection of the dead and who will experience it:

‘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

Abraham Isaac and Jacob

Why these three in particular? The answer is fundamental to the gospel message. Yahweh, Israel's God, made

the great gospel promises to Abraham, and repeated them to Isaac his son and Jacob his grandson. From Genesis chapters 12 to 22, seven separate occasions can be seen where these promises were repeated to Abraham. They included Abraham and his ‘seed’ being given a land – the promised land of Canaan (now known as Israel) for ever. They included the promise of a chosen ‘seed’ or descendant who would be born, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16).

The promises involved Abraham Isaac and Jacob having many descendants who would also inherit the land of Israel for ever. We know from Galatians chapter 3 and other New Testament scriptures that believers in Jesus Christ are counted as Abraham's ‘seed’ and can inherit eternal life because of those promises. So, it follows that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will indeed take their places in that Kingdom of God, but unbelievers are not counted as Abraham's ‘seed’ and will not.

‘... there are last who will be first and... first who will be last.’

In these words of Jesus (Luke 13:30), the ‘first’ refers to the Jews, who were called by God and born into a nation with special privileges. However, those privileges brought

special responsibilities too. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans explains how the Jews' unbelief later opened up the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles. So, believing Gentiles (anyone who is not born a Jew) are the '**last**' who are now given the privileges of the '**first**' and have become related to the Jewish Hope, the hope of Israel, centred in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Matthew chapter 25 records the teaching of Jesus about his coming back to earth as king, to judge and reward the faithful and set up the Kingdom of God. It is about one class of people entering the Kingdom and being given eternal life, contrasted with another class who are not. If you read this passage, you will see how much of what we have referred to above fits into the picture. Above all, Jesus here mentions a way of life consistent with a true belief in his saving work:

'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.'

And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..."

Matthew 25: 31-35

Then comes the contrast – the 'goat' class are rejected, but they don't understand why. They protest their innocence:

'Then they also will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?" Then He will answer them, saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me." And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Matthew 25:44-46

God's kingdom is coming.

The present misrule, violence, warfare and suffering will end. There is only one answer, one Saviour from it all – Jesus Christ. Let us all take the lessons from Christ's teaching and prepare now for the coming Kingdom of God.

Justin Giles, London, UK

Can we trust New Testament history?

Sir William Mitchell Ramsay did not.

He was a 19th century English historian and writer who believed that the historical accounts in the Book of Acts were written in the mid-2nd century AD. Ramsay was sceptical of Luke's authorship and the historicity of the Book of Acts, and he set out to prove his suspicions. He began a detailed study of the archaeological evidence, and came to a remarkable conclusion: the historical and archaeological evidence **supported** Luke's 1st Century authorship and historical reliability. He wrote:

‘(There are) reasons for placing the author of Acts among the historians of the first rank’ (Sir William Ramsay, *‘St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen’*, page 4).

Ramsay became convinced of Luke's reliability based on his accurate description of historical events and settings. He wasn't the only scholar to be impressed by Luke:

‘One of the most remarkable tokens of (Luke's) accuracy is his sure familiarity with the proper titles of all the notable persons who are mentioned... Cyprus, for example, which was an imperial province until

22 BC, became a senatorial province in that year, and was therefore governed no longer by an imperial legate but by a proconsul. And so, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Cyprus about AD 47, it was the proconsul Sergius Paulus whom they met...’ (F.F. Bruce, *‘The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?’*, page 82).

Many of the details of Luke's account have been confirmed by archaeological discoveries:

Quirinius: Luke wrote that Joseph and Mary returned to Bethlehem because a Syrian governor named Quirinius was conducting a census (Luke 2:1-3). Discoveries in the 19th century revealed Quirinius (or someone with the same name) was also a proconsul of Syria and Cilicia from 11 BC to the death of Herod. Quirinius' name has been discovered on a coin from this period, and on the base of a statue erected in Pisidian Antioch.

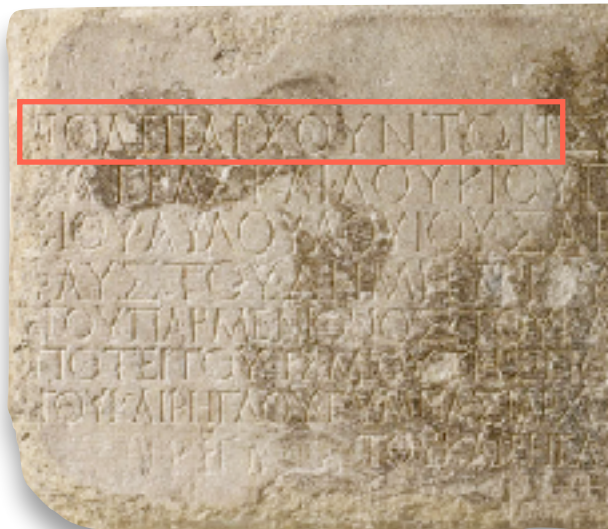
Erastus: In Romans 16:23, Paul wrote: *‘Erastus, the city treasurer greets you.’* An inscribed pavement discovered in Corinth in 1929 confirmed his existence and his status as a high public official (see right).

Lysanias: Luke described a tetrarch (co-ruler) named Lysanias and wrote that this man reigned over Abilene when John the Baptist began his ministry (Luke 3:1). Two inscriptions have been discovered that mention Lysanias by name. One of these, dated from AD 14–37, identifies Lysanias as the tetrarch in Abila near Damascus.

Iconium: In Acts 13:51, Luke described this city in Phrygia. Some ancient writers (like Cicero) wrote that Iconium was located in Lycaonia, rather than Phrygia, but a monument was discovered in 1910 that confirmed Iconium as a city in Phrygia.

Politarchs: For many centuries, Luke was the only ancient writer to use the word politarch to describe ‘rulers’ of the city. Sceptics doubted that it was a legitimate Greek term until nineteen inscriptions were

discovered. Five of these were in reference to Thessalonica (the very city in which Luke was claiming to have heard the term – see Acts 17:6,8)). See picture below.



Pontius Pilate: For many years, the only corroboration we had for the existence of Pontius Pilate (the governor of Judea who authorised the crucifixion of Jesus) was a very brief

The pavement in Corinth inscribed with the name of ERASTUS



citation by Tacitus. In 1961, however, a piece of limestone was discovered bearing an inscription with Pilate's name. The inscription was discovered in Caesarea, a provincial capital during Pilate's term (AD 26–36), and it describes a building dedication from Pilate to Tiberius Caesar.

Sergius Paulus: In Acts chapter 13, Luke identified Sergius Paulus as a proconsul in Paphos. Sceptics doubted the existence of this man and claimed that any leader of this area would be a 'propraetor' rather than a 'proconsul'. But an inscription was discovered at Soli in Cyprus that acknowledged Paulus and identified him as a proconsul (see right).

In addition to these archaeological discoveries, there are many other details recorded in the Book of Acts which corroborate its historical accuracy. Luke describes special features of the Roman world confirmed by other non-Christian historians:

- ❖ He correctly describes two ways to gain Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28).
- ❖ He includes an accurate explanation of provincial penal procedure (Acts 24:1–9).
- ❖ He correctly describes the procedure for invoking one's Roman citizenship, including the legal formula, 'de quibus cognoscere volebam' (Acts 25:16–18).
- ❖ He provides an accurate description of being in Roman custody and the conditions of being imprisoned at one's own expense (Acts 28:16, 30–31).



Where the New Testament narrative can be tested by archaeological evidence, it has passed the test with flying colours! At the beginning of his Gospel account, Luke set out his intentions: '*...to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the **certainty** of the things you have been taught.*' (Luke 1:4)

Today we can share that certainty.

With acknowledgements to J. Warner Wallace



from the editor

A recent article in a UK newspaper prompted my theme for this editorial. The article began: 'The word of the year reflects a world seized by constant anxiety, but how did we get here and are we past the point of no return?' (Camilla Tominey: Daily Telegraph 1 November 2022). Each year Collins Dictionary compiles a list of new words to add to its database and in 2022 their word of the year is 'permacrisis'. It's defined as 'an extended period of instability and insecurity'.

I'm sure we all know what the word crisis means. The older generation can reflect on a number of world-wide crises which have had a great impact in our own lifetimes. There was the Munich crisis in 1938 which led to the devastating Second World War. Since that time there have been several major crises that threatened the stability of the world, the Suez crisis in 1956, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

More recently we have lived through the global financial crisis which

began in 2008 and led to recession in many of the major world economies. Ben Bernanke, the former head of America's Federal Reserve described it as 'the worst in global economic history, surpassing even the Great Depression of 1929'.

As we observe today's world the clear signs are that we are in the middle of a permacrisis. The causes of the present crisis have been building up for decades. As I write, many world leaders are meeting at the COP27 UN Climate Summit in Egypt in a bid to do more about the climate change crisis. Because climate change has become a global issue, it touches every aspect of human life on Earth.

This is not just an environmental issue; it is also economic because the world economy is going to be adversely affected by it. It is social because billions of people will be affected by it. It is political, because, to solve the crisis, nations are going to have to compromise on an agreement to limit emissions at a time when the global geopolitical situation seems to be getting worse, driving nations apart when they should be

coming together to work to solve climate change. The growing threat of international terrorism and the refugee crisis are further indicators of the increasing instability of the nations.

In his latest 'signs of the times' article (see page 14), David Gamble refers to the escalating crises we are faced with. He concludes that belief in the Bible and its revelation of God's plan for the world can give us an assurance that, despite appearances, He is in control. Despite the well-meaning intentions of those attending the present COP27 conference, the Bible concludes that *'It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps'* (Jeremiah 10:23) or to use a modern paraphrase of Jeremiah's words *'it is not within the power of man to map his life and plan his course'* (Living Bible). Ultimately the outcome of everything to do with this planet is in God's hands and the so-called permacrisis will come to an end.

The Bible tells us that God has a plan to intervene. He will send Jesus again to set up God's kingdom (Revelation 11.15). Then the threat of global warming will be over, for the earth will be filled with God's glory through the restorative work of Jesus

(Numbers 14:21; Acts 3:20-21). The present order of things will then come to an end and there will be no need for Climate summits or any other UN sponsored meetings of world leaders to talk about world problems.

The administration of the world-wide government of the Kingdom of God will be with divine power as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. He describes the power and authority of God's appointed king in this way:

'The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD... with righteousness. He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.' Isaiah 11:2-4

We urge you, our readers, to place your trust in God, not in empty human promises! For as the Apostle Paul told the learned philosophers of his day, God *'has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.'* (Acts 17:31)

Editor

Faith

IMPORTANT BIBLE WORDS

Sir Isaac Newton was not just a great scientist, he was a man of faith.

Many will find that surprising. Today, faith has been attacked and ridiculed by a highly vocal group of scientists. Science, we are told, has delivered us from the superstition of religion, and proved God to be unnecessary. Faith is a relic of past ignorance.

Isaac Newton, like many of the early scientists who were also Christians, believed that the universe could be investigated precisely because it had been created by a rational mind. It therefore behaved in a logical way that could be analysed and explained. Scientists were ‘thinking God’s thoughts after Him’, as one of them (the astronomer Kepler) put it.

The modern challenge to religion from Richard Dawkins and others has attacked the quality of faith itself, attempting to redefine the meaning of the word ‘faith’ in a quite unprecedented way. ‘Faith’ he says ‘is the great copout, the great excuse to avoid the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of the lack of evidence... Faith is not allowed to justify itself by argument’.

Is there any substance to such extreme claims? That is what we need, however briefly, to examine.

Everyday faith

Religious faith is just a specific, limited application of a universal human quality. Faith means trust, belief – ‘confidence or trust in a person, thing or concept’ (Wikipedia). Everybody needs faith of some sort – it is impossible to go through life without at some time trusting someone or something. We trust people: our partners, our family, our friends. We trust institutions: the government, the forces of law and order, financial institutions, etc. In all sorts of ways, we entrust aspects of our lives to other people, to organisations outside our control.

But why do we trust one person and not another? Why do we put money in one bank and not another? Because of our past experience and knowledge. If we trust somebody we don’t really know, then we can hardly be surprised if they let us down. If our investments lose money because we haven’t done our homework properly, then we will have only ourselves to blame. Our confidence needs to be based on knowledge –

our trust, our faith, needs evidence, a rational foundation.

Faith then in everyday life is based on evidence, on experience. We have faith in other people because we think we know them; we believe we can rely on their support in the future because of their support in the past. We trust organisations because of what we know about them, their past record giving us confidence in their future performance. Belief and confidence without evidence is just stupidity and credulity – ‘blind faith’ in other words. That very expression implies that there is a faith which is not blind – genuine faith based on evidence.

Religious faith

We move from faith in a general sense, to faith in its religious sense. Is it really something entirely different to the everyday variety of faith that we have been talking about?

‘Evidence’ is the foundation. It is the word used by the apostle in his famous definition of faith:

‘Now faith is the substance (confidence) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’

Hebrews.11:1 KJV

Evidence is just as much a requirement for the Christian’s religious faith as it is for faith of the everyday variety. What is different is the things that we place our faith in. Instead of the people we see every day, we are asked to place our faith in a supreme being who is literally invisible to us, and whose voice we cannot hear in any literal sense. We are asked to place our trust in His Son, whom we know only through records written nearly 2,000 years ago, whom also we cannot literally see or hear. Hence the apostle’s words about *‘things not seen’*. But the necessity for evidence is just as real, perhaps more so, because the objects of our trust are so much more important, and the consequences for us so far-reaching.

The evidence for Christianity

The big question is, if faith without evidence is not genuine faith at all, what is the evidence for the fundamentals of the Christian religion? Note first of all, that Christianity is different to other major world religions in that it is dependent on a series of (what are claimed to be) historical events. It is not just a philosophy or a system of morality – it is the story of a God who has intervened directly in human history through the life, death and resurrection of one very special human

being, Jesus Christ. These events, if they are indeed historical, should stand up to the same test as other events from the same period – the evidence for them should be of the same type.

The Apostle Paul tells us that there is one event on which Christianity stands or falls: the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:

‘... if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty... if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile ... you are still in your sins!’ I Corinthians 15:14,17

The early Christians were not followers of Jesus because they admired his character or were swayed by his charisma. They accepted Jesus because they claimed to be eye-witnesses of his resurrection, or, if they had not seen it themselves, they believed the first-hand testimony of others who had. Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus was not some ecstatic or mystical experience – he says he saw and heard the risen Christ, and was left with temporary blindness, a physical reminder of the reality of his experience. He refers to more than 500 people who also had seen the risen Christ (I Corinthians 15:6), most of whom were still alive when he wrote.

Nearly 2,000 years later their eye-witness testimony has been preserved in the New Testament for our benefit. How can we assess its value? Are the source documents authentic and reliable? Is this evidence that we can trust, and place our faith in? Volumes could be and have been written on this subject, but here are the conclusions of one member of the legal profession, one of several in this field who have weighed up the evidence:

‘As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.’ (Sir Edward Clarke K.C.)

For more information on this vitally important subject, see the series of four articles in recent editions of *Light*: ‘Evidence for the Resurrection’ (Volumes 32.4 to 33.3).

Faith in God

The resurrection of Jesus is the outstanding example of a miraculous event which can be dissected, the evidence assessed, and faith based on the weight of that evidence. But what about the biggest question of all – the existence of God Himself? Is faith in God based on good evidence, or is it just irrational sentimentality, the perpetuation of age-old superstitions?

In the letter he wrote to Christians at Rome, Paul says that the creation itself provides clear evidence to all men of the existence of God:

‘For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.’

Romans 1:19–20 ESV

William Paley, an 18th-century clergyman, argued that just as a watch by its intricacy, its organisation, its obvious purpose, provided its own evidence of its designer and creator (the watchmaker), so the natural order, the universe and the life-forms of our

planet, show clear evidence of their designer and creator, the divine ‘watchmaker’. This argument has been widely derided by the scientific community in recent years. Yet Paley’s basic observation has not been queried – the natural world which surrounds us looks as if it has been designed. The countless life-forms on our planet, the life processes and the organs which support life, the molecular coding, language, and communication systems which control every form of life – they all appear to have a purpose, to have been designed to do a particular task.

Today we are told this appearance of design is an illusion. The watchmaker, they say, is blind – ‘natural selection’, Charles Darwin’s brain-wave, is the blind, unintelligent process which has this most remarkable property of producing this appearance of design – but it is only an appearance – so they say.

Why not accept what appears to be so obvious? Why dream up such a totally improbable process to get rid of the Creator? Why not accept the abundant evidence that God has given us of His divine, all-powerful hand at work in creation? The eminent scientist and writer Edgar Andrews comments:

'I was brought up to believe the duck theorem – if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. That is why I have problems with those who (1) admit that nature gives every evidence of being intelligently designed; (2) introduce an alternative materialistic explanation for the appearance of design; and then (3) without further discussion conclude that only their alternative explanation can be true. Meet the neo-duckians, whose logic demands that 'if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is indubitably a chicken.' Such are those who tell us that the cell's molecular language is merely an accident of nature.' (*Who Made God?* by Edgar Andrews)

Opening our minds to the evidence

John's Gospel tells the story of Jesus' disciple Thomas who was simply not prepared to believe that Jesus was alive. He was surrounded by a number of fellow disciples who all claimed to have seen and spoken to Jesus, and even eaten with him on different occasions. These were all people he knew well – yet he was adamant he would never believe what they told him until he had seen Jesus himself and touched the wounds

that proved his identity. Jesus was gracious and showed him the evidence he demanded. At the same time he promised a blessing on all those who in the future would believe on him, without making the demands of Thomas: *'because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'* (John 20:29)

The attack on faith in our day should not discourage us in any way, rather the reverse, because Jesus predicted it:

'when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?'

Luke 18:8

The atheists and sceptics of our day have their role to play as God's unfolding purpose nears its conclusion. If we acknowledge the power that brought one man back from the dead; if our minds are open to the evidence of God's creative work; if we value the things that are not seen above those that are, then that faith will bring us to God's kingdom.

'This is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.'

I John 5:4

Roy Toms
Norfolk, UK

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING

The first century AD

In earlier articles in this series, we learned how Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, grew to manhood, began his public ministry of preaching at the age of 30, and three and a half years later was condemned to death and crucified; and how God raised him from the dead after three days. All these things had been foretold by God through Israel's prophets, who also prophesied that the time would come when the gospel message Jesus preached to the Jews would be extended to include all nations.

For example, the prophet Isaiah wrote of Jesus: *'I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth'*. (Isaiah 49:6) This took place in the first century AD and led to the formation of communities of Christians throughout the Roman world. In this article we will learn how this came about and what we can learn from the way of life of these early believers, as we try to be true followers of Jesus Christ today. The New Testament is the record of the development of God's purpose in the first century AD.

Read: Hebrews 6:13-20.

The New Testament

The first four books of the New Testament (NT), the gospel records, show how the Old Testament (OT) prophecies about Jesus' coming, his work, his life, death, and resurrection were fulfilled. These were covered in detail in the earlier article entitled 'Fulfilment of Old Testament Prophecy'. The fifth book is called the Acts of the Apostles and records how they spread the gospel message, basing their teaching on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Read: Acts 2:22-24; 3:12-15; 4:4; 6:7; 17:30-31.

The Epistles make up the rest of the NT apart from the last book. These are letters from the apostles to groups of believers, or individuals. They teach doctrinal matters, give advice, and encourage greater efforts to please God by the way of life of a believer.

The Book of Revelation is the last book of the NT and is a message given by Jesus to the Apostle John. By way of visions and the use of symbols it tells of

events that would happen from John's time onwards to the return of Jesus to set up God's kingdom on earth.

Read: Revelation 1:1; 22:12.

The first century was a vital period of change and the progression of God's purpose. Because Jesus had offered the perfect sacrifice by giving his life on the cross, thereby fulfilling the OT 'Law of Moses', the animal sacrifices specified under that Law were no longer to be observed by Jewish believers. And the Gentiles were now to be given the opportunity, through baptism, of becoming related to Jesus and the promises to Abraham.

Read Colossians 2:13-14; Hebrews 9:11-12; Galatians 3:27-29.

These changes became a source of conflict, as many Jews found it difficult to accept them. They were steeped in the rituals of the 'Law of Moses' and regarded themselves as the only people to whom God offered salvation.

The Mission of Jesus

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan. He was given the power of the Holy Spirit and declared to be the beloved son of God. He then submitted to a period of severe testing but because he was the son of God and knew the OT scriptures well, he was able to resist all the temptations.

Read: Matthew 3:13-17; 4:11; Mark 1:9-13.

Throughout his ministry Jesus preached the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God to his fellow Jews who were God's chosen people. Jesus also helped many who were in need, using the Holy Spirit to heal their infirmities. Compassion for people who were suffering was one of his notable characteristics.

Read: Matthew 9:35-36; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 10:38.

He explained how his followers should live their lives in order to please God and to show their love for him by obeying his commands. He set himself before them, and us, as the perfect example to follow.

Read: Matthew chapters 5-7; John 13:15; 14:15; Philippians 2:5.

From among his many disciples (students) Jesus chose twelve men who were later to be called his apostles (meaning 'ones sent forth'). He sent them out

to preach and was preparing them to continue his work after he had ascended to heaven. They were immediately given limited power to do miracles but promised that after Jesus' ascension the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon them more fully to guide them in the challenging work that lay ahead. *Read: Matthew 10:1-14; John 14:26; Acts 2:1-21.*

The remarkable thing about Jesus' ministry is that so few of the Jews believed that he was the prophet promised to them by Moses (see Deuteronomy 18:18); instead, they rejected him as their Saviour.

The Call of the Gentiles

After his resurrection Jesus instructed his apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone, including the Gentiles, not least because the Jews had been so disbelieving of Jesus. God gave the Apostle Peter a vision (see Acts chapter 10:9-16) which told him that the time had now arrived for the preaching of the gospel to all nations rather than, as before, mainly to Jews. *Read Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; 3:13-22; 7:37; 13:46.*

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles

The preaching of the gospel, based on the death and resurrection of Jesus, was strongly opposed by many Jews, and resulted in much persecution of the followers of Jesus. *Read: Acts 4:15-20; Acts 12:1-3.*

One of the chief persecutors was Saul of Tarsus (afterwards known as the Apostle Paul) but Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and told him that he was in fact persecuting him. This was a turning point in Saul's life and thereafter he dedicated himself to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. *Read: Acts 9:1-15; Romans 11:13.*

Paul followed Christ's commands closely and encouraged the Christians to follow his example (I Corinthians 11:1). His work of preaching and nurturing the newly formed groups of believers continued for the rest of his life even though it led him into great suffering. He made three extensive missionary journeys and, together with others, established churches (or ecclesias) in many cities throughout the Roman world, including Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Rome. *Read: Acts chapters 13, 14 and 16-20.*

Paul wrote letters to many of these ecclesias to strengthen them in their faith, help them with issues that were troubling them, and explain the way in which a believer should live. These letters are a guide for us in relation to doctrine and conduct. The word ecclesia is based on a Greek word which means ‘an assembly of called-out ones’. It describes a group of people who have accepted the invitation to come out and be separate from the world of the ungodly, in the way they think and behave.

Belief and obedience are necessary for salvation

Belief of the gospel message, followed by baptism are essential. The subject of baptism was covered in a separate article in the last issue of Light. It is an act of faith by which believers demonstrate their conviction that Jesus died and was raised from the dead by God and given immortality. It is also an act of obedience to a command of Jesus, and by being baptised we associate ourselves with him and his death and resurrection.

Read: Mark 16:15-16; Romans 6:3-5.

Paul himself was baptised after his conversion to Christianity. The jailer at Philippi asked Paul what he should do to be saved. The answer was to believe in Jesus and the gospel message which Paul preached to him; then he was baptised. The same answer was given by Philip to the Ethiopian man and he was baptised.

Read: Acts 8:26-38; 9:13-19; 16:30-34.

Living a new life as a Christian

While belief and baptism are an essential beginning, dedication to God’s service must follow.

Read: Matthew 7:21; Luke 9:23; Romans 2:6-7.

Those who had believed the gospel and obeyed it in baptism met with like-minded believers. The members of the ecclesia met together on the first day of the week to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, as he requested, in sharing bread and wine, and to encourage and support each other in their new life as Christ’s brothers and sisters.

Read: Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-3; Hebrews 10:23-25.

Summary

We have seen how in his life Jesus set the perfect example for true Christian believers to follow. He obeyed God implicitly and went about preaching the gospel and doing good. After his ascension to heaven his apostles continued his work, extending it to include both Jews and Gentiles in all parts of the Roman Empire. As a result, men and women learned the true gospel, believed it, and were baptised. These believers formed ecclesias and met together regularly for worship, for the ‘breaking of bread’ and to encourage each other to obey God.

Since the first century the work has gone on. In each generation a few have obeyed the divine invitation to separate themselves and to associate together in small communities striving to obey God and to prepare for the coming of Jesus from heaven. The invitation is the same today.

In a later article we will learn about the way of life required of those who respond to that calling.



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this magazine

Light on a new world

is published for
the Dawn Christadelphians by:

Light Bible Publications

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England

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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.

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The accelerated melting of the earth's icecaps and of glaciers all over the world, with the resultant rise in sea levels, is a huge concern to world leaders as they try to limit the effects of climate change.

Is it within our capacity to deal with such a huge and urgent problem?

See pages 19 and 27 of this edition