



Light

...on a new world

- ❖ *The Trinity*
- ❖ *Signs of the Times*
- ❖ *What must I do to be saved?*

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

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cover picture

A monarch butterfly after emerging from its chrysalis in the process known as 'metamorphosis'. The New Testament tells us that a similar transformation has to occur in men and women of faith (see page 7).

LIGHT BIBLE PUBLICATIONS

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What must I do to be saved?

This question was asked by a prison keeper who lived in the Roman city of Philippi nearly 2,000 years ago. He experienced something which was totally unexpected; an earthquake which caused all the prison doors to suddenly be flung open. Expecting that the prisoners would escape, the jailer realised he would forfeit his own life and was about to kill himself.

Among the prisoners at that time were Paul and Silas, who assured him that none of the prisoners had escaped. Recognising that he owed his life to them, he *'fell down trembling'* and said to them: *'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'* (Acts 16:26–30) The answer of Paul was: *'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...'* (16:31) This was followed by his baptism. The record tells us that the jailer *'rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.'* (16:34)

A new birth

Baptism is described in the New Testament as a re-birth and is a fundamental condition for salvation. The teaching of Jesus summarises this very well. He said to Nicodemus, one of the religious leaders of the Jews: *'...unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'* (John 3:3)

Jesus then explained to Nicodemus that eternal life is dependent on a number of things – first belief, then baptism and then what? Do these two things alone guarantee that we shall live for ever in the kingdom of God? It may come as a surprise to many Christians that there is much more to it than that.

As with all children, being a child of God is a growing process and lack of growth will hinder progress. If we don't grow spiritually, we will not become mature sons and daughters of God. On one occasion Jesus spoke to a young man who, like the Philippian jailer, asked a similar question: *'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'* (Mark 10:17) The answer of Jesus must have surprised this young man: *'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.'* (Mark 10:18) Although Jesus lived a sinless life, he too needed salvation from death. In these words, Jesus recognises the fact that, in the fullest sense, only God is *'good'*



by His very nature, being immune from sin.

‘All have sinned’

There is a fundamental principle here that must be grasped if we are to progress as a child of God – we are all sinners in God’s sight and in need of forgiveness. This is a human condition which the Bible tells us we have inherited from our first parents (Adam and Eve). Being sinners alienates us from God and leads only to death. The Apostle Paul wrote: *‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’* (Romans 3:23) However, by becoming God’s children through belief and baptism, we can obtain forgiveness of our sins and commence a new life. Jesus is our example, for it is recorded of him that when he was baptised there came a voice from heaven which said: *‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’* (Matthew 3:17)

How then can we be like Jesus and please God in our lives? How can we obtain the eternal life that Jesus now enjoys? In his teaching Jesus made it very plain that it requires effort on the part of the believer. What does it really mean to be a Christian? Jesus said: *‘Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord”, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.’* (Matthew 7:21)

What shall I do?

To many people religion is more about ‘doing good’ – for as Jesus reminds us in those words already quoted from Mark, not one of us is ‘good’. If you ask people to give you a definition of being a Christian, probably many of the answers would involve some of these things: ‘I think Christianity is all about helping others’ or ‘it involves giving time, effort and money to a good cause’.

Some people do devote their lives to helping others – but we must ask ourselves if this is really what Christianity is all about. Jesus said to his disciples: **‘Follow me’**; but what did he really mean? If we want to understand what it means to be a Christian, we must consider carefully the teaching and example of Jesus and those who were his immediate followers. Jesus made it very plain that ‘doing good’ was part of being a Christian but by itself was not enough. If we are to follow him, our lives must become more like the one we profess to follow.

True Christianity is demonstrated in many of the parables of Jesus. Perhaps the most well-known is the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was prompted by a similar question to that asked by the rich young man. This time a lawyer asked a question to test

Jesus: *'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'* (Luke 10:25). It's a fundamental question – salvation is dependent on the correct answer and its application in everyday life.

But Jesus didn't answer the question – instead he asked the man a question: *'What is written in the law?'* (Luke 10:26) The man knew the answer to this question and was just testing Jesus to see how he would respond. He answered:

'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.' Luke 10:27

In these telling words we see two vital principles which cover every aspect of the true Christian's way of life. Note the order – love God first, our neighbour second. The idea of being a good Christian these days places all the emphasis on the second commandment – and in the main ignores the first. It is a great mistake to neglect our duty to God – the one who has given us life and the opportunity to serve Him. He has given us His own dear Son as the Saviour, has raised him from the dead and offered us hope of unending life.

The need for prayer

And so, first and foremost the Christian has the privilege of expressing his or her love for God in worship. Individually, this can be expressed in prayer. Jesus gave his disciples an example when they asked him: *'... Lord, teach us to pray.'* (Luke 11:1) The model prayer which follows in Luke chapter 11:2-4 has been recited by countless millions of people since that time. But how many think about the meaning of the words?

If we think about it carefully, the 'Lord's Prayer' firstly emphasises the supremacy of God our Creator: *'hallowed be Your name'*.

Secondly, it reminds us of God's plan for the world and the need to pray *'Your kingdom come'*.

Thirdly, it recognises that our lives depend on God: *'Give us day by day our daily bread.'* The Apostle Paul reminded the Athenians of God's hand in our everyday lives. He said: *'for in Him we live and move and have our being...'* (Acts 17:28) In other words our very existence depends on Him – how many people today recognise that? Lastly it contains a prayer for forgiveness: *'forgive us our sins.'* Only Jesus himself led a sinless life, but his disciples without exception succumbed to the temptations of human nature. The important thing

for the true Christian is to seek God's forgiveness in prayer – it is a communication process which has great benefits. God will respond to the prayer offered in sincerity, as can be testified by many who have used this wonderful privilege to the full.

The second aspect of this parable of the Good Samaritan is to love our neighbour. *'Who is my neighbour?'* That was the question from the Lawyer which prompted Jesus to tell the parable. The background of the parable needs to be appreciated. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews because they were Gentiles – descendants of people who had been settled in the land of Israel by the Assyrians after the Northern kingdom of Israel had gone into captivity 700 years earlier.

We can imagine the thoughts of the Jewish lawyer as the story unfolded – it took a Samaritan to show compassion on the wounded man. Then notice how the lawyer reacted to the pointed question of Jesus: *'which of these three (Priest, Levite and Samaritan) do you think was neighbour*

to him who fell among the thieves?' (Luke 10:36) The lawyer replied *'He who showed mercy on him.'* He couldn't even bring himself to mention the word Samaritan. We can imagine then how he felt when Jesus told him: *'Go and do likewise.'* (Luke 10:37) The lawyer's question had been answered in a very telling way, followed by that practical advice from the lips of Jesus.

'Love your enemies'

In the 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus emphasises this Godly characteristic which is so foreign to the human mind – but one that is needed by all those who want to be his disciples: *'You have heard that it was said "You shall love your neighbour, and hate your enemy". But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...'* (Matthew 5:43-44)

The path of discipleship, as we can see from these verses, goes against our natural inclinations. Jesus teaches us the opposite and he was the perfect example of such teaching. He did have many enemies and the Jewish leaders

Today's Samaritans continue to worship on Mt Gerizim.



wanted to kill him. Eventually they succeeded and they had him crucified. But even in the agony of his dying moments he demonstrated this important aspect of the Christian way of life. He said, as he hung on the cross, referring to the Roman soldiers who, in ignorance, had crucified him: *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.'* (Luke 23:34)

True non-conformists

The true follower of Jesus will suffer persecution of one sort or another – it's an ugly human characteristic that those who stand up for their beliefs, who are often in a small minority, are hated and persecuted. The first century Christians experienced this hatred and so it has been ever since. The life of a true Christian is not for the majority. The follower of Jesus is a non-conformist in the true sense of the word. This is summed up in some more words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: *'Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.'* (Matthew 5:48)

These words may seem like an impossibly high standard to achieve, but Jesus wouldn't have said them if this was so. The word *'perfect'* in this passage, means *'mature'* or *'grown up.'* The child of God has to progress towards this maturity which can be

achieved through a strong conviction and with God's help. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome about how we can achieve this maturity of character which pleases God:

'...do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.'

Romans 12:2

The word *'transformed'* in this verse, is a translation of a Greek word – metamorphosis. This is a word that has come straight into our language from the Greek in which the New Testament was written. What does it mean? It is used in the natural world to describe the process of change which affects many species of living things. The butterfly is a good example (see front cover). In the early stages of its short life, it is an egg from which emerges a caterpillar. It then pupates and eventually a creature of great beauty emerges from its ugly shell.

The life of the Christian follows the same pattern; it's a transformation – not following the natural evil inclinations which lurk inside every one of us, but making a conscious effort to rise above these things as Jesus did. Read Romans chapter 12 at your leisure. Paul here enlarges on this

idea of ‘metamorphosis’ – this change that must take place in our lives if we are to grow as children of God. Jesus set the example in his own life of obedience to his Father’s will and Paul tells us that we must try to do the same.

And so what did Jesus really mean when he said ‘*follow me*’? Put simply, Christianity as practised by Jesus and his immediate followers was not a part-time occupation. It was a lifetime commitment; it was a way of life with a very definite purpose. It meant conforming to a pattern – something which is not very popular today when everyone is encouraged ‘to do their own thing’ to use a modern expression. However, the pattern for a Christian is set before us in the life and example of Jesus himself. This pattern was copied by his immediate followers and passed on to others who received the Gospel message and acted on the instruction of Jesus to ‘*follow me*’.

There are many other aspects of practical Christianity which we cannot consider now. The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5–7) is full of practical guidance on many aspects of the Christian way of life; guidance on our relationships with one another, marriage and family life; our attitude to riches and material gain. The

teaching of Christ covers the whole spectrum of daily life.

The promise of unending life

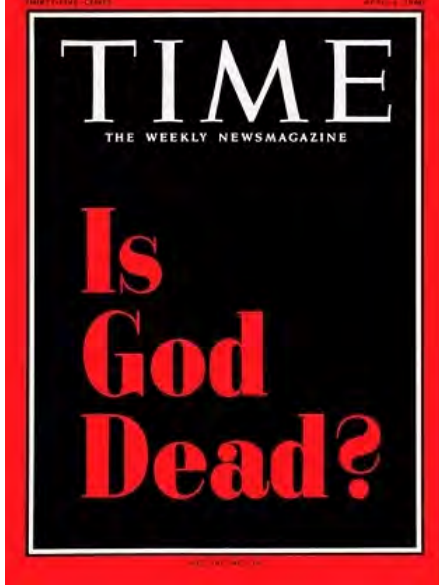
In essence, God requires us to obey Him first in our lives, to respond to His invitation to us, to follow the teaching and example of His Son Jesus and to prepare for his return to establish God’s kingdom on earth. The teaching of the Bible leaves us in no doubt as to what this means. Jesus told his disciples a parable about sheep and goats – about the time when he will return to judge all those who profess to be his followers. As a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, Jesus will separate his true followers from the rest (Matthew 25:31–33).

The question we must ask ourselves is a very personal one – am I living my life in preparation for the return of Jesus? Will I be among the sheep or the goats? To those who are counted among his sheep he will say these words:

‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’

Matthew 25:34

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This famous 'Time' magazine headline in **April 1966** captured the spirit of the times, and its scepticism still prevails. God does not feature in the lives of most people today.

But times have changed.

On **Christmas Eve 2014** the Wall Street Journal printed an editorial headed 'Science increasingly makes the case for God'. It provoked an extraordinary response. The full implications of the discoveries of the previous century were up for debate. The strident atheism that had reigned for so long was being publicly challenged.

Since the turn of the century an important series of publications have challenged the prevailing view, among them '*Return of the God Hypothesis*' by Stephen Meyer (**2021**) and most recently '*Is Atheism dead*' by Eric Metaxas, (**2021**). They expand on some of the arguments for the existence of God, *all of them springing from scientific and historical developments over the previous century or more*. The claim that 'science' has dispensed with the need for a creator does not stand up to investigation. There are strong arguments that science increasingly reveals and demands an intelligent, almighty designer and originator:

I The 'Big Bang' theory

Most scientists today seem to agree that the universe and all space/time began in a massive explosive event which demands a cause and is quite inexplicable in terms of our accepted 'laws' of physics. This is a massive change of view since the beginning of the **1900s**, when the universe was generally regarded as eternal, and therefore not demanding explanation. Many scientists opposed the new theory in the **1920s** because it seemed to smack far too much of the single creative event described in Genesis 1:1:

‘In the beginning, God created...’

Even though his own theories predicted it, Albert Einstein himself resisted the idea for many years, dismissing it as ‘inspired by the Christian dogma of creation, and totally unjustified from the physical point of view’.



Albert Einstein with Edwin Hubble at the Mt Wilson Observatory in 1931

He later admitted this was one of his biggest mistakes. Some of the evidence was Hubble’s work in the **1920s** which showed that the universe was expanding, and if tracked backwards in time must have had a beginning.

So today we have the interesting situation that a theory initially rejected and derided because it smacked too much of biblical creationism, is now generally accepted through the simple weight of scientific evidence! It also illustrates how even great scientists are prejudiced by their own personal beliefs and philosophies.

2 Evolution under fire

Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, now updated, lies at the root of current popular materialism and atheism. There is a widespread belief that the only people who oppose evolution are religious folk who choose to cling on to the Genesis account of creation, in the face of all evidence to the contrary. This has never been true; there have always been serious scientific objections to the theory, and over the last fifty years or so these have been explored in detail. In **1981** A.E.Wilder-Smith, eminent scientist and scholar, published a now famous book ‘The Natural Sciences know nothing of Evolution’, which proved inspirational for a new younger generation of scientists. In this century a series of books by highly qualified scientific writers have explored the inadequacies of Darwin’s theory.

In **2014** the eminent magazine ‘Nature’ published an article ‘Does evolution theory demand a rethink? Yes, urgently’. In **November 2016** the debate reached

one of the foremost scientific forums in the world, the Royal Society in London. The theme of its conference was ‘New Trends in Evolutionary biology’. Most of the participants were reluctant to abandon the ‘status quo’, but a vocal minority saw the need for a new or ‘extended’ version of Darwinism to deal with the serious problems of the current theory.

The public at large, with the connivance of the mass media, remain almost totally ignorant of the debate going on. But in an important breakthrough in 2022 an online article appeared in the British newspaper ‘The Guardian’: ‘Do we need a new theory of Evolution?’ Nobody would accuse the Guardian of having religious or creationist sympathies, but the article exposed the discontent amongst contemporary biologists. Some openly queried whether any resolution was possible – perhaps we should be content to remain ignorant, rather than constantly searching for the elusive ‘theory of everything’. Many biologists now believe that the basic mechanism suggested by Darwin, of random variation acted on by natural selection, is quite incapable of accounting for all the creativity, diversity and complexity of the natural world.

3 The ‘fine-tuning’ of the universe

This is the discovery that all the basic parameters of the universe appear to have been very finely adjusted to make life and the universe itself possible. Examples include the strength of the force of gravity, and the strength of the various atomic forces which hold matter together. Estimates vary widely but it seems as if at the very least some thirty of these so-called ‘constants’ have been ‘tweaked’ within very fine tolerances to make life possible, and this could never have happened by chance (see Light Vol 27.3 ‘The Goldilocks Planet’). ‘A common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and there are no blind forces worth speaking about in Nature.’ (astronomer Fred Hoyle). The attempt to explain this without a designer/creator is the ‘multiverse’ theory, which suggests that ours is just one in an infinite number of different universes, where we just happen to be the one that got all the conditions right. It may be fashionable, but there is no scientific evidence for this theory whatsoever, so it remains a piece of speculative atheist philosophy dressed up as science.

4 The origin of life ('abiogenesis')

The discovery of DNA in the **1950s** showed us that life was not just about chemistry but depended on information, and all attempts since to ascribe the coding, programming and extraordinary complexity of life to chance processes have failed, and will continue to fail. Recognising this, some scientists have suggested that life originated elsewhere and could have been 'seeded' on earth by alien visitors. But the aliens too remain elusive, despite the astronomical sums of money being spent on the search for life elsewhere in the universe. The origin of any life at all, alien or otherwise, remains a complete mystery if an intelligent Creator is excluded.

5 Archaeological discoveries in the Middle East

Archaeology as a recognised science came late on the scene, when scepticism of the biblical record had already been established by the critics of the **nineteenth century** with very little evidence. Since then a continuous series of discoveries have confirmed the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible's account. The sceptical 'minimalist' school of archaeology has attempted to discount the evidence, but has been confounded by many of the latest discoveries – the existence of the ancient kingdom of Israel and its most famous king David around 1,000 BC are now established. Many people, places and events recorded in the Old and New Testaments have now been confirmed by evidence outside the Bible record (see the series of articles in earlier editions of Light in the series 'The Bible stands the Test of Time'). The collections of the great museums across the world make that evidence available to the public.

The Hittites feature prominently in the Bible account, but were unknown outside its pages – so they were dismissed as mythical until the mid 1800s. Here is the great Lion Gate of Hattussah, the Hittite capital, dating back to around 1400 BC



It is no longer possible to simply dismiss the Bible as a collection of traditions and folklore not worthy of serious attention. The widespread rejection of the Bible is not based on evidence but just expresses the anti-religious secular culture of our day. (For those who want to explore this subject in detail, see egyptologist A K Kitchen's comprehensive work '*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*' **2006**).

6 The tide of modern history

Certain aspects of our recent history have been clearly predicted and are heading towards a predetermined conclusion. Many people today will find this suggestion either ludicrous or offensive or quite possibly both. Yet that is the clear implication of the last 100 years or more.

In **1947–56** the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered, in what has been described as the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. Included in those documents were parts of most of the Old Testament, including almost complete scrolls of the prophet Isaiah. They have been reliably dated to around 200 BC. They include multiple predictions about the future of the Jewish people, how they would be nearly destroyed and exiled from their land, but would eventually be regathered, and their neglected land revitalised and restored. Those predictions are clear and unmistakable, so much so that numerous Bible students from Sir Isaac Newton onwards confidently expected the restoration of the Jewish people to their land at some time in the future (see for example Isaiah 11, Jeremiah 33, Ezekiel 37).

Amazingly, one year after the scrolls were discovered (**1948**), and well over 2,000 years after they were written, the State of Israel was declared in Jerusalem by its first president, David Ben Gurion. The first signs of that revival had come at the end of the **1800s**, with the work of Theodore Herzl, the first 'aliyah' (return of Jews to Palestine) in **1882**, and the first Zionist conference in **1897**. Two World Wars and the flight of the Jews from Europe created irresistible pressure for the founding of the new State. The subsequent history of Israel is a matter of common knowledge. Much is lacking and has still to change before the prophets' vision is fully realised, but the challenge is there. Is all this to be dismissed as coincidence, or is the hand of the Creator at work, moving the nations, moving His plan towards its goal?





Atheism in the raw

The last 100 years have also demonstrated what happens when atheism is embraced by those with limitless power over their fellow human beings. In this past century, which is supposed to represent the triumph of science and rationality over age-old superstition, an estimated 150 million people have lost their lives to the unrestrained evil of a succession of atheist regimes. Some of the figures are well known: 6 million Jews and some 9 million others, victims of Hitler's 'National Socialism'; 12-20 million victims of the Soviets' 'scientific atheism', the devastation of Mao's 'cultural revolution' in China (see left), the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and more.



"What Hitler did not believe and what Stalin did not believe, and what Mao did not believe... was that God was watching what they were doing' (David Berlinski – *'The Devil's delusion; Atheism and its scientific pretensions'* 2008). And yet there are some who would blame religion for all the world's evils, in spite of this appalling recent evidence to the contrary.



There is nothing new, clever or 'scientific' about atheism. One thousand years before Christ, king David's enemies challenged his faith: '*Where is your God?*' (Psalm 40:3). David had no such doubts, and his response was robust: '*The fool has said in his heart, there is no God*' (Psalm 14.1). Today men and women of faith have nothing to fear from the godless materialism which seems to have taken hold like a pandemic over the western world. The last century has shown us wonderful things, and today science continues its great exploration of God's handiwork.

This is how Eric Metaxas (see page 9) concludes his book:

'... God... has revealed things to us that we did not know before, that we could not have known before, that we couldn't even have imagined. And based on these new things... we can say something deeply and heartbreakingly beautiful and true: God is not dead. He is alive.

Rejoice.'

Roy Toms Norfolk UK

Bible Questions and Answers

Questions about Jesus

The following series of questions about Jesus were asked by a Bible student from Malawi in Africa. Some are straightforward, but others require deeper study.

How long did Jesus live on the earth?

Luke states that he began his ministry when he was about 30 years old (3:23). However, comparing the gospel accounts, we can calculate the length of Jesus' ministry as being no longer than three and a half years. This would make him 33 years old when he was crucified.

How long after his resurrection did Jesus ascend to heaven?

The answer is 40 days as referred to in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The account contains very important information about what Jesus said to them during this period and we can learn much from his answers to the disciples. We are told that:

- ❖ He presented himself alive *'by many infallible proofs'* (1:3) The Apostle Paul refers to some of these incidents in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15.
- ❖ During the 40 days he spoke to the apostles about the Kingdom of God. (1:3)
- ❖ He told them that they were to receive the Holy Spirit – God's special power to assist them in spreading the gospel. (1:5)
- ❖ They asked Jesus: *'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'* (1:6) Jesus' reply is important. He said: *'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority'*. (1:7) And he assured them that they would be assisted by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of the gospel of Jesus in Jerusalem, throughout Israel and to the world. (1:8)
- ❖ The restoration of Israel's kingdom is a fundamental part of the gospel plan. The promises to Abraham and David, the promise made to Mary before the birth of Jesus, and the testimony of the Old Testament Prophets, require the restoration of Israel as the centre of the future Kingdom of God on earth. The exact time frame is not revealed, but on that significant 40th day after his resurrection, the apostles saw Jesus ascend to heaven and

were given a far-reaching promise. They were given an assurance by two angels of the future purpose of God to send Jesus back to the earth: *‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven.’* (1:11)

Was Jesus ‘already there’ before he was born of Mary?

Yes, Jesus was ‘already there’, but only in the sense that he was in the mind and purpose of God from the very beginning. However, he had no physical existence before his birth. Jesus was the subject of many Bible promises before he was born of the virgin Mary. Look up the following prophetic passages in the Old Testament, written many centuries before his birth, which show that Jesus was already part of God’s plan, waiting to be revealed at the right time.

- ❖ Genesis 3:15 speaks of a ‘seed’ (male child) to be born who would deal a fatal blow to the serpent which represented sin.
- ❖ Genesis 22:18 (amongst others) speaks of a ‘seed’ (offspring) of Abraham who would bring blessings to all nations.
- ❖ 2 Samuel 7:12–16 speaks of a ‘seed’ (descendant) of David who would be God’s son and would occupy David’s throne for ever.
- ❖ Isaiah 9:6–7 speaks of a child to be born, who would be king. He would occupy David’s throne ruling over the restored Kingdom of God and bringing good government and peace for ever.
- ❖ Isaiah 53 is a remarkable prophecy showing beforehand the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and foretelling his saving work through his sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. God’s plan, centred in Jesus Christ, is fully demonstrated.
- ❖ Galatians 4: 4 shows that at exactly the predetermined time in His purpose, God acted: *‘But when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law’.*

Which Church did Jesus belong to?

Jesus was a Jew born into the tribe of Judah. The first verse of the New Testament tells us that he was *‘the Son of David, the Son of Abraham’*. (Matthew

1:1) He was the man of promise, the offspring, or ‘seed’, who fulfilled God’s promises recorded throughout the Old Testament as noted above. He was the Messiah longed for by men and women of faith in Israel, and spoken of



At Capernaum, a first century synagogue from Jesus’ time has been found below the floor of a later building.

frequently by the Prophets. As a Jew, he was subject to the requirements of the Law of Moses and he would have attended the local synagogue. The gospels refer to him speaking in the synagogues and in the temple at Jerusalem. Luke records a most powerful address at the synagogue in Nazareth. Here he read from Isaiah 61, a prophecy all about himself, and concluded with the words: *‘Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’* (see Luke 4:16–21).

He was brought up as a faithful Jew, obedient to the Law of Moses and revering the Old Testament scriptures as

the Word of God. He would have attended local synagogue congregations and would have travelled to Jerusalem three times a year to the major feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, in obedience to the Law.

However, to answer this fully, we could say that Jesus was and now is the true church! For his whole life’s work was to fulfil the Law of Moses called ‘the Old Covenant’. His death, to atone for sin, replaced all the animal sacrifices made under the Law of Moses. Jesus became the foundation of a new order of things, called the ‘New Covenant’ which was sealed and ratified in his blood. In the New Testament the word ‘church’ is translated from the Greek word ‘ekklesia’, which refers to a community of believers. After Jesus ascended to heaven, the true church or ‘ekklesia’ consisted of his disciples, believers who dedicated their lives to following his doctrines and obeying his teaching.

Were there other prophets during the time of Jesus?

Yes, there were, but as in other ages, there would have been false prophets making false claims. Anna, a faithful 84-year-old prophetess, was present in the temple when Jesus was brought there. Anna witnessed to all the people

‘who looked for redemption in Jerusalem’, recognising the birth of Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s promises. (Luke 2:36–38)

The Bible also refers to Jesus’ relative, John the Baptist, son of Elizabeth, the cousin of Jesus’ mother Mary. John’s work was to announce the coming of Jesus, as shown in John 1:19–34. Indeed, the coming of John the Baptist was foretold in the Old Testament as *‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the LORD’*. (Isaiah 40:3) Jesus endorsed John’s work when he said: *‘Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.’* (Matthew 11:11) John’s life was cut short when King Herod arrested him, because he openly spoke out about the king’s illegal marriage and divorce. The details of his cruel death are recorded in the gospels (see for example Matthew 14: 1–12).

Why was the cross of Jesus placed between two others?

This is a matter of fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah chapter 53, written some 700 years earlier, stated that the grave of the suffering servant (Jesus) would be *‘with the wicked’*. (53:9) The ‘wicked’ turned out to be two thieves condemned to death for their crimes, one on either side according to Mark 15:27. However, Luke records that one of the robbers repented, but the other one did not. (23:39–43)

The lesson for us is that all humanity falls into two camps – true believers and unbelievers, repentant and unrepentant. There are those who recognise their sinful position and want to do something about it, and there are the vast majority who don’t believe. This was demonstrated at the crucifixion by the attitude of the two robbers – one believed, but the other remained locked in unbelief. On the one hand Jesus heard one say: *‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom’*. (23:42) And when you think about it, that is the prayer of every faithful disciple of Jesus. The other robber reviled Jesus in the same way as those mocking below: *‘If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’* (23:39)

How wrong they were! Our attitude and subsequent reaction to Christ’s sacrifice, and the reason he died and rose again, will determine our future salvation, just like the repentant thief.

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Responsibility

Academic knowledge in any field may be interesting but until it is applied to a particular situation it will not be of any practical use. If we know something we usually must apply that knowledge in some way for the benefit either of ourselves or others. This principle is important when considering our knowledge of God's plan of salvation which we have set out in previous articles in this series. On one occasion, after teaching his disciples certain principles about their way of life, Jesus said to them;

'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them'. John 13: 17

Having granted us the privilege of knowing about His way of salvation, God expects us to do something with that knowledge. We are told in His Word that we will one day have to account to Him for the use we have made of the knowledge He has allowed us to have. This is what we mean by 'responsibility'.

That day of account will be when Jesus returns to the earth. At that time he will judge those who have become responsible to him because of their knowledge and understanding of God's plan of salvation. Those who have applied their knowledge well in their lives, and have lived in obedience to God, will live forever to the glory of God, in His future kingdom on this earth. But those who have not applied their knowledge will be rejected and punished. These are the matters which we explain in this article.

The natural state of mankind

We have learned from previous lessons that men and women are sinful and therefore naturally estranged from God. We can only be reconciled to God through the message of the Gospel (good news). Since most people do not understand that true Gospel, they live their entire lives subject only to their natural way of thinking, unaffected by God's Word. *Read Romans 8:5-8.*

Divine enlightenment

God's intention is to enlighten the minds and develop the character of those who respond to the call of the Gospel. This enlightenment comes from learning about God's own mind, to the extent that it is revealed in the Bible.

Read Ephesians 1:15-19; 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

The nation of Israel in the past is an example of the principle that, where God has given people an understanding of His purpose, He holds them responsible for their actions and way of life. God chose Israel as His own special people, delivered them from their years of slavery in Egypt, and enlightened them by giving them His laws. Through the prophet Amos, he told them:

‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’ Amos 3:2

Nearly 700 years before the time of Amos, God had set out through Moses how He would deal with His people Israel, because of their privileged position as His chosen nation. In Deuteronomy chapter 28 He recorded the blessings He would bestow if the people were obedient to Him, and the curses that would fall upon them for disobedience. The history of Israel from that time shows His ability to carry out what He said.

The same principle applies to enlightened people today. If we have learned and understood the Gospel message, God expects us to react to it, and He will require us to give an account of our response in the coming day of judgment when Jesus returns to the earth.

Read Deuteronomy 28; James 4:17; John 12:44-48; John 15:22.

The Apostle Paul confirms this in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

‘For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law’ Romans 2:11-12

Responsible people will be judged when Jesus returns to the earth, which means that those who have died before that event will need to be raised from the dead.

Read Daniel 12:2; John 5:25-29.

Jesus’ first work when he returns will be to raise the responsible dead and, together with the responsible living, they will be gathered to the place of judgment. The way of life of each of them will be assessed and reward or punishment will result.

Read John 6:39-40; Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 24:15;

Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10

Who will not be raised from the dead?

The Bible makes it clear that not everybody who has ever lived will be resurrected. The vast majority of men and women have died in ignorance of the Gospel and will remain forever in the grave after their life has ended.

Read Psalm 49:20; Proverbs 21:16; Isaiah 26:13–14.

In what state will the dead be raised?

In the creation record we read that:

‘the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.’

Genesis 2:7

There will therefore be no difficulty in repeating this process in respect of those who have lived and died before Jesus returns. The resurrected ones will not have been judged when they are raised from the dead, so they will not be raised from the dead as immortal beings; indeed, some of them will never be given eternal life because they have not chosen to obey the Gospel despite knowing about it. The resurrected ones will be raised from the dead with the same nature that they had before they died – that is, human and mortal.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10.

The Judgment

God has delegated the judgement of the responsible to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is because he once bore our sin-cursed nature and ‘*was ‘in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin’* (Hebrews 4:15). He will therefore be able to understand and empathise with those he is judging (Hebrews 2:18). The Bible gives us some information about the judgment.

Read John 5:20–23 and 26–29; Matthew 25:31–46.

Reward or punishment

It has already been made clear that both righteous and unrighteous will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. There will be joy for those who are accounted as righteous before the righteous and merciful judge. Some of the faithful of the past expressed their longing for that coming day of judgment because it is then that they will receive the reward of eternal life.

Read Job 19:25–27; 2 Timothy 4:6–8.

The responsible but unrighteous, as we have seen, will be condemned and rejected and will receive the punishment of eternal death. (Matthew 25:46)

The change to immortality

Jesus said that those who believed and obeyed him would not perish but receive everlasting life. The Apostle Paul explained that Christ, having already been raised from the dead, is the first of a new 'creation' of men and women who, at his coming, will like him be given immortality.

Read John 3:16; I Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-54.

Conclusion

Only God knows who is responsible to Him, but if you have learnt from what you have read in this series of articles, you will almost certainly have sufficient knowledge to make you responsible. If so, then you will be among those who will be judged by Christ at his return to the earth. It is important, therefore, that you know what he requires of you and that you do your best to obey him.

This is urgent, because we now see in the world the clear signs given in the Bible, which indicate that Jesus' return is probably near, so preparation time for that coming is limited. In any event, none of us knows how much longer we will live, and time may not be on our side. Those signs were reviewed in a previous article (see Light Volume 33.2). One of the clearest signs is the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland which has resulted in ongoing tension in the Middle East, in which God's people Israel are key players. Despite these signs, we do not know exactly when Jesus will appear. He warned that his coming would take many people by surprise and he urged those who believe to be constantly on the watch for his coming. *Read Matthew 24:36-44; 25:13; Luke 21:34-36.*

The only wise course of action is to make ourselves thoroughly familiar with God's teaching in the Bible, to understand fully God's plan for the salvation of humankind, and to obey Jesus' command to be baptised as a believing adult, and thereafter live in a way which will be pleasing to him and to God.

The TRINITY

Is the doctrine of the Trinity a biblical concept?

Part 1

The vast majority of Christians believe that God is composed of three persons, all co-equal and co-eternal. This is considered to be so basic to Christianity that any who deny this doctrine are by definition not Christian. For example, one website says of the Trinity: “Belief in it defines a Christian. It is almost universally held in Trinitarian Christianity, that denial of the Trinity is a renunciation of Christianity and salvation”.

On the other hand some recognise that the earliest Christians knew nothing of the doctrine. In outlining the development of the doctrine of the Trinity since New Testament times, William Rusch, an American Christian theologian, writes in his book *The Trinitarian Controversy* that some: “have seen the developments [of the doctrine of the Trinity] traced in this volume as a *capitulation of the biblical revelation to a foreign system from which Christianity has still not yet escaped.*” (W.Rusch, p.27; Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1980 –italics added).

So we clearly need to have an impartial look into this basic belief. Is it, to use Rusch’s words, “biblical revelation” or an imported “foreign system”? Let’s start by defining the doctrine of the Trinity as outlined in church creeds today.

The first attempt to formally define it was in the year 325, at the Council of Nicea, nearly 300 years after Christianity was first preached. For our purpose the relevant points of this **Nicene Creed** are:

“We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made ... And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”

About 200 years later the views were elaborated in the **Athanasian Creed**.

This is very long and repetitive, but here is a sample of its main teaching:

“We worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity; neither confounding the persons; nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father: another of the Son: another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal... The Father is eternal: the Son eternal: the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet there are not three eternals; but one eternal”.

The doctrine of the Trinity – undisputed facts

In considering the Trinitarian doctrine it is helpful to first establish some indisputable facts.

1. It is not taught in the Bible

It may surprise you to learn that it has always been recognised that none of the significant phrases in either of these creeds, or even the ideas they express, can be found anywhere in the Bible, as the following quotations show, all of which are from avowed Christians:

- ❖ John Milton (author of *Paradise Lost*, 1608–1674): “For my part I adhere to the Holy Scriptures alone, I follow no other heresy or sect. If, therefore, the Father be the God of Christ, and the same be our God, and if there be none other God but one, there can be no God beside the Father.” (Quoted by H. Stannus: *A history of the Trinity in the early Church*. Christian Life Publishing, London). Commenting on this another writer says: “John Locke and Isaac Newton, with Milton the three greatest names of the period (c.1650), could not find Trinitarianism in the Bible”. (Christopher Mill: *Milton and the English Revelation*; pp.286, 296).
- ❖ George Smallridge (Bishop of Bristol, 1663–1710): “It must be owned, that the doctrine of the Trinity as it is proposed in our Articles, our Liturgy, our Creeds, is not in so many words taught us in the Holy Scriptures. What we profess in our prayers we nowhere read in Scripture, that the one God, the one Lord, is not only one person, but three persons in one substance. There is no such text as this, ‘That the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped’. No one of the inspired writers hath expressly affirmed, that in the Trinity none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another.” (*Sixty Sermons*, No xxxiii, p.343)

- ❖ Johann Neander (German theologian and Church historian, 1789–1850): “The Doctrine of the Trinity does not, it appears to me, belong strictly to the fundamentals of the Christian faith; as it appears from the fact that it is explicitly set forth in no one particular passage of the New Testament; for the only one in which this is done, the passage relating to the three that bear record [1 John 5.7] is undoubtedly spurious, and in its ungentle shape testifies to the fact.” (*History of Christian Religion*, vol. ii p.286)
- ❖ Dr Joseph Priestly (1871): “Why was not the doctrine of the Trinity taught as explicitly, and in as definite a manner, in the New Testament at least, as the doctrine of the divine Unity is taught in both the Old and New Testaments, if it be a truth? And why is the doctrine of the Unity always delivered in so unguarded a manner and without any exception made in favour of the Trinity, to prevent any mistake with respect to it?” (*A History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. The British and foreign Unitarian Association, London, 1871)
- ❖ Thomas Mozeley (the brother-in-law of the famous nineteenth-century Cardinal Newman) “I ask with all humbleness where the idea of Threeness is expressed in the New Testament with a doctrinal sense and force? Where is the Triune God held up to be worshipped, loved and obeyed? Where is He preached and proclaimed in that threefold Character? ... Certainly not in Scripture do we find the expression ‘God the Son’, or ‘God the Holy Ghost’. Whenever I pronounce the name of God, simply and first, I mean God the Father, and I cannot help meaning that, if I mean anything.” (*Reminiscences of the Oriel College and the Oxford Movement*)
- ❖ Dr W. Matthews (Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, 1940): “It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of the Trinity, as a doctrine, formed no part of the original message. St. Paul knew it not, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed.” (*God in Christian Thought and Experience*)
- ❖ Encyclopedia of Religion (1987): “Theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity. Further, theologians agree that the New Testament also does not contain an

explicit doctrine of the trinity nor does the New Testament contain the technical language of later doctrine.” (Article: *Trinity*)

Don't you think that testimonies such as these should make us hesitate before saying that the Trinity is a basic doctrine that defines Christianity and that salvation is impossible without it?

2. It formed no part of the early Christian beliefs

This increasing evidence that the Trinity is not a Bible doctrine is strengthened on considering the beliefs of the earliest Christians and subsequent history. Again, the following are indisputable facts.

It was not an original Christian doctrine, but gradually developed over a period of 300 years. As a modern writer says: “In order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity it is necessary to understand that the doctrine is a development, and why it developed... It is a waste of time to attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine directly off the pages of the New Testament.” (A & R Hanson: *Reasonable Belief. A survey of the Christian Faith*, p. 170,1980, italics added)

For several years virtually all the converts to Christianity were Jews, who were (as are the Jews today) fanatical about the unity of God, Their basic text was “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” (Deuteronomy 6.4) This is repeated many times throughout the Old Testament: “*For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.*” (Isaiah 46.9)

If, therefore, the Apostles were preaching the Trinity, the first major obstacle would be to convince their Jewish audience that God was no longer one person but three. They would have needed to spell out quite clearly the arguments in support of this new concept, had it existed. Yet, as Trinitarians freely acknowledge, there is no trace of such confrontation or discussion in the early church. As a prominent 19th century Christian theologian observed: “The doctrine, then, is never defended in the New Testament, though unquestionably it would have been the main object of attack, and the main difficulty in the Christian system. It is never explained, though no doctrine could have been so much in need of explanation... And still more, this doctrine is never insisted upon as a necessary article of faith; though it is now

represented by its defenders as lying at the foundation of Christianity.” (Andrews Norton (1833). *A Statement of reasons For Not Believing The Doctrines of Trinitarians, Concerning The Nature of God and The Person of Christ*).

To this can be added the words of Cardinal Newman, the prominent 19th century theologian recently beatified by the Pope, who admitted that the Trinity was not believed in the early church. He says that although some other doctrines were “consistently and uniformly confessed by the Primitive Church ... But it surely is otherwise with the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity. I do not see in what sense it can be said that there is a consensus of primitive [Church authorities] in its favour.” (Cardinal John Henry Newman 1845, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. 2nd Edition (London: J. Toovey, 1846), pp. 14-18, 40-42).

3. It was a gradual development over more than 300 years

History describes that although it clearly was not an original tenet of the Christian faith, the teaching of the relationship between God and Jesus gradually changed over the first few centuries of the Christian era. The importation of Greek philosophical ideas by the early Christian “fathers” and the desire to make Christianity more palatable to the wider pagan community very slowly modified the original belief. Three hundred years of discussion (indeed confrontation, for the changes were strongly resisted in some quarters) resulted in the formal statement of the Trinity as it is taught today.

This process was, according to one historian not a straightforward and “unerring homing towards the truth”, but “a process of trial and error, almost hit and miss”. (A & R Hanson: *Reasonable Belief. A survey of the Christian Faith*, p.171, 1980). The deity of the Holy Spirit was not considered or addressed for another 56 years after the Nicene creed was formulated. In 381, at the Council of Constantinople, the Holy Spirit was given equal status with Father and Son. The final definition of the doctrine was thus agreed upon and then made binding on all Christians. This obligation to believe in the Trinity was not imposed by the church leaders of the day, but by the decree of the Roman Emperor, who threatened severe sanctions for non-compliance. (Theodosius: *Epsicopi tradi.*, July 381)

The ecclesiastical historian Mosheim when commenting on the gradual doctrinal changes in the first few centuries, says: “Thus it was with the doctrine of Christ, his person and natures... For that devout and venerable simplicity of the first ages of the church, which made men believe when God speaks, and obey when he commands, was thought by the chief doctors of this age [6th century] to be *only fit for clowns*.” (J. L. Mosheim D.D. *Ecclesiastical History*. Book II, Cent vi, ch.3. London, 1863; italics added).

What is your view? Do you also consider the beliefs of the early Christians “only fit for clowns”?

But with the coming of the Reformation, when the Bible had been translated into common languages for all to read, it is significant that the first doctrine to be challenged was that of the Trinity, and some of those who queried it paid with their lives – even at the hands of their fellow Christians. (For example Michael Servetus 1511–1553, who was burnt at the stake for his denial of the Trinity; William Penn the founder of the Quaker movement, and many others).

At the beginning of this article we quoted William Rusch who said that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity was: “*a capitulation of the biblical revelation to a foreign system from which Christianity has still not yet escaped*”. (W. Rusch, p.27; Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1980, italics added).

Are you still as sure about the Trinity as you were?

Passages showing Christ’s relationship to his Father

So much for history and the opinions of leading Christians. But more importantly, what does the Bible itself say? Here are some more facts, taken from Scripture itself.

In answer to a question about the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.’” (Mark 12.29) If God was three in one what an excellent opportunity for explanation was missed.

Jesus repeatedly stated his subordination to his Father: “My Father is greater than I” (John 14.28), “The Son can do nothing of himself” (John 5.19,30), “My

Father ... is greater than all". (John 10.29) The Apostle Paul confirms this relationship still applied in his day (when Jesus was in heaven in the presence of the Father): *"The head of Christ is God."* (1 Corinthians 11.3) He also says that in the future, *"when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to Him [i.e. God] who put all things under him."* (1 Corinthians 15.28) So Jesus is subordinate to the Father and will be in all future ages.

Surely, even just one of these statements should make us pause for thought. But when the same ideas are repeated time and again, it is difficult to believe that Scripture teaches the co-equality of Father and Son.

Scripture also says that Jesus was *"sent"* by God; and that there was a possible conflict of wills, implying subordination. Had he been so inclined, Jesus could have asserted a different view, implying a separate personality: *"I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me."* (John 5.30) *"I do nothing of myself; but as my Father taught me, I speak these things."* (John 8.28)

Further, Jesus, even after his resurrection and glorification still describes his Father as *"my God"*. He said to the disciples: *"I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."* (John 20.17) Later he uses the same terms in the book of Revelation: *"I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God ...I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem."* (Revelation 3.12)

So I ask:

Does the Bible really teach the equality of Father and Son?

Editor's note:

This is the first of two extracts dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity, taken from Peter Southgate's book entitled *'A challenge to all Christians'*. The book is available free of charge from the Correspondence Secretary (see inside back cover for contact details).

The TRINITY



signs of the times

Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

Habakkuk 2:14

So wrote the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk thousands of years ago, and in so doing summed up God’s plan with this earth. When you look around, wherever you live, and examine the state of our world, there are only two broad conclusions available to you:

1. The prophecy has not yet come true.
2. The prophecy is incorrect and will never happen.

It probably comes as no surprise that I strongly believe the first conclusion and discount the second one.

What has all this got to do with signs of the times? Quite a lot. The verse I quoted from Habakkuk is a prophecy. It’s a prediction of something which we can probably agree has not happened yet. That prophecy comes from God’s Word, the Bible, which contains a large number of other prophecies. Many of these can be tested because they have come true.

Nebuchadnezzar’s image

A great example of both fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled prophecy comes from the dream given to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar some 2,600 years ago. It is recorded in Daniel chapter two and was considered in depth in the last issue of Light (see Volume 34.1).

The era in which we live is depicted by the feet and toes of the image seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream; the clay and the iron that don't stick to each other. What a perfect description of our world! Both within our societies and internationally we don't seem to agree on much, do we? We live in a polarised and fragmented world; exactly as the prophecy shows so well.

Let's examine a couple of things happening at present that demonstrate the point.

The environment in general

**'... The time has come for judging ...
and for rewarding your servants ...
and for destroying those who
destroy the earth.'**

Revelation 11:18 (NIV)

We have referred to these words a number of times in past articles. The word 'destroying' in this verse can apply to both moral and physical destruction. Let's look at an instance of already occurring physical destruction:

Thwaites Glacier

The nickname for Antarctica's Thwaites glacier is the 'doomsday' glacier. There's a good reason for the nickname. The glacier is massive and unstable. It is showing signs of

breaking up. Scientists are concerned enough about this to permanently study the glacier, because the consequences of a total or even partial breakup would be very serious worldwide.

Here are a few words from a CNN article on February 15 this year, entitled 'So-called Doomsday Glacier is "in trouble", scientists say after finding surprising formations under ice shelf':

'Antarctica's "Doomsday Glacier" – nicknamed because its collapse could drive a catastrophic sea level rise – is melting rapidly in unexpected ways, according to new research. The Thwaites Glacier is roughly the size of Florida and is located in West Antarctica. Part of what holds it in place is an ice shelf that juts out onto the surface of the ocean. The shelf acts like a cork, holding the glacier back on the land and providing an important defence against a sea level rise. But the crucial ice shelf is highly vulnerable as the ocean warms...'

Time for asking two questions: is there sufficient worldwide action to stop or even slow glacier melt? The answer to that is fairly obvious. It doesn't look likely, does it? And the second question; how far will God

allow this, and many other types of destruction, to go on?

I don't know the answers to these questions, but I'm confident of one thing. The widespread scale of environmental disaster is 'a sign' that time is running out for the human race. The time when that stone strikes the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image may well be very soon!

World Economic Forum

The World Economic Forum meets each year in January in Davos, Switzerland, and has done so for over 50 years. It brings together selected entrepreneurs, scientists, corporate and political leaders. This year the theme was "Co-operation in a Fragmented World". How very well

that theme connects with the words referred to from Daniel chapter 2.

Each year the World Economic Forum compiles and publishes the **Global Risks Report** (Website: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/>). Time magazine from January 19 2023, had this to say in an article entitled 'Society's Biggest Risks, Ranked by the World's Leading Experts':

'The WEF releases its Global Risks Report as world leaders and corporate titans convene in Davos for the annual conference to help frame the week's conversations. While energy and food supply chains top today's concerns, ...the future fears of the global elite are finally intersecting with those of climate scientists. Natural disasters and



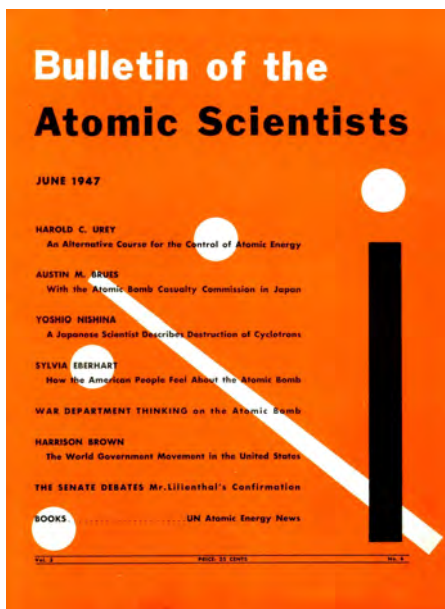
extreme weather events, along with a failure to mitigate climate change, made it into the top five risks for the next two years. Meanwhile, the top six concerns over the next decade involve a climate angle, assuming that number six – large scale involuntary migration – is considered (as it should be) a result of climate change as well as conflict, or indeed conflict caused by climate change.'

The Doomsday Clock

The Cambridge online dictionary defines 'doomsday' as 'the end of the world, or a time when something very bad will happen'; dictionary.com calls it 'the day of the Last Judgment, at the end of the world, any day of judgment or sentence, nuclear destruction of the world' and says the word originated before AD 1000 as 'domes dai, Old English dōmesdæg, Judgment Day.'

The word 'doomsday' was in the news media in January this year in connection with a symbolic clock. The idea for the clock came from an international group of researchers who'd been part of the US project to develop the atomic bomb during the Second World War. As a response to the effects on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they began

publishing a newsletter and then the magazine, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*



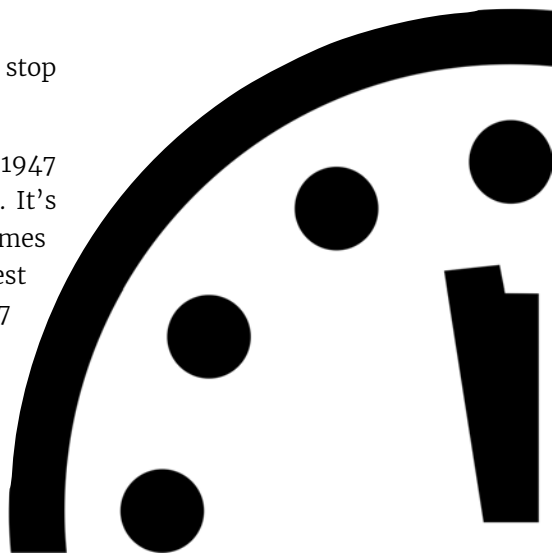
Scientists. The bulletin has been published ever since. The clock first appeared in 1947, when the magazine's co-founder Hyman Goldsmith asked the late artist Martyr Langsdorf to design a cover for the June 1947 issue (see above).

A CNN article 'Running the "Doomsday Clock" is a full-time job. 'Really' by Doug Criss, published January 26, 2018, explains that 'Langsdorf chose a clock to reflect the urgency of the problem: like a countdown, the clock suggests that destruction will naturally occur

unless someone takes action to stop it.’ (My bolding for emphasis).

The clock’s original setting in 1947 was seven minutes to midnight. It’s since been set backward eight times and forward 17 times. The farthest time from midnight was 17 minutes in 1991, and the nearest is 90 seconds, set on January 24, 2023.

RIGHT: The Doomsday Clock pictured at its 2023 setting of ‘90 seconds to midnight’.



The clock is reset annually in January if the group has assessed that a variation is needed. In the CNN article quoted above, the current CEO of the bulletin explains:

‘The Science and Security board comes together to answer two important questions,’ Bronson said. ‘One, is mankind safer or at greater risk than it was last year at this time? And second, is it safer or at greater risk compared to the 70-plus years that we’ve been asking this question?’

Why 90 seconds to midnight?

In an article titled ‘Doomsday clock hits 90 seconds to midnight, its most dire prediction ever’, the Washington Post from January 24 of this year had this to say: ‘The scientists who set

the clock each year emphasised Tuesday that, in moving it closer to midnight, they intended to signal that humanity is less safe and at greater risk, and that global leaders need to act urgently to address nuclear proliferation, climate change and global health. “What we’re conveying with the clock move is, things are not going in the right direction, and they haven’t been going in the right direction.”’ (Rachel Bronson, CEO of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists)

Conclusion

Thinking people in the world, like the bulletin scientists, can see a series of existential crises getting worse with not enough being done to forestall them.

As we watch the events happening in the world, we agree with the scientists but know that someone will indeed take action to stop it! The event prophesied at the end of Nebuchadnezzar's dream passage in Daniel chapter 2 will come true. The rock which struck the image is Jesus Christ, who will put right the existing chaos and take over. This ruler will have worldwide authority and make no mistakes. He will set the world to rights as Daniel told king Nebuchadnezzar:

'...the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a

mountain, but not by human hands —a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.' Daniel 2:44-45 NIV

It's appropriate to conclude with the Apostle John's short prayer at the end of the Bible:

'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'

Revelation 22:20

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

The future Kingdom of God is described as a great mountain that filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:35)

(seen here is Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. The icecap has retreated due to climate change)



a God of love ?

Although we might often worry about our civilisation's potential to destroy the planet, we can easily forget that the planet also has an untamed ability to destroy civilisation too. Examples of this are the earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria earlier this year killing more than 50,000 people and making many more homeless (see picture below), or the tsunami at Christmas 2004 which killed over 250,000 people.

Humanity has an enduring vulnerability in the face of nature. This is why the prospect of there being an unstoppable, life-threatening change in our climate, for example, cannot simply be ignored. Scientists may explain to us how such natural events occur, but it's not their job to tell us why.

So, why do they happen?

Although commercial contracts and insurance policies may refer to these events as 'acts of God', society in general doesn't explain such events as 'acts of divine intervention and displeasure'. Only die-hard atheists are rash enough to use such events to rubbish any belief in the existence of God.

However, we may still find it difficult to reconcile 'a God of love' with the damage God seems to let happen to this planet He created. We all struggle to make sense of disasters.

God gives His answer

The Bible records many occasions when God has used a 'force of nature' – rain, hail, fire, earthquake or flood, to achieve His plans. For example, wars have been stopped, cities captured, and powerful people brought to their knees by so-called 'natural events'.

Superficially, such events may look like the actions of 'a vindictive God'.



But God has a very beneficial ‘long-term plan’, a ‘purpose’ for His Creation. Sometimes He uses the ‘forces of nature’ to move that plan forward, as His prophets make absolutely clear:

‘If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?’

Amos 3:6

‘I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.’

Isaiah 45:7

Whilst God allows all natural events to occur, whether good or bad, He does use such events to achieve His purpose. Thankfully, anybody can be included in God’s plan for a better future, even those whose lives are cut short by natural disasters.

A real-life example

Facing terrible, personal disasters, but accepting the truth of those statements, Job, a very rich man, said this when he lost absolutely everything, including his children:

‘Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’

Job 2:10

Job accepted that God had blessed him before and, if God so wished, He would bless him again. But above all, Job looked forward to something far

better than anything this life has to offer. He looked forward to the time when all the world would be free from evil, including man-made and natural disasters. He demonstrated his faith in God in these words:

‘... and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!’

Job 19:26-27

Job’s hope of being resurrected to a better life helped him make sense of the personal disaster that brought him such great sorrow and suffering.

A promise to you too!

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes observed that ‘*time and chance happen to them all*’ (Ecclesiastes 9:11). This could occur from just being in the wrong place at the wrong time, like being killed by a terrorist bomb, or swept away by a tsunami while sitting on a beach. But similarly, neither does winning the lottery mean we are a better person, more greatly favoured in God’s eyes than those less fortunate.

The Apostle Peter wrote that God is ‘*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*’. (2 Peter 3:9) All of us have an equal

opportunity in God's eyes and, to us all, He has made this special promise:

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' John 3:16-17

Even though we all die, we can all share the hope of resurrection that Job had, as Jesus said:

'... 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

Resurrection?

Yes, bodily resurrection when Jesus returns is the true Christian hope, clearly set out in the Bible (see the Apostle Paul's powerful arguments in 1 Corinthians 15 for example). Look at the evidence now and respond to the divine invitation while you still have time. Tomorrow may never come!

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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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