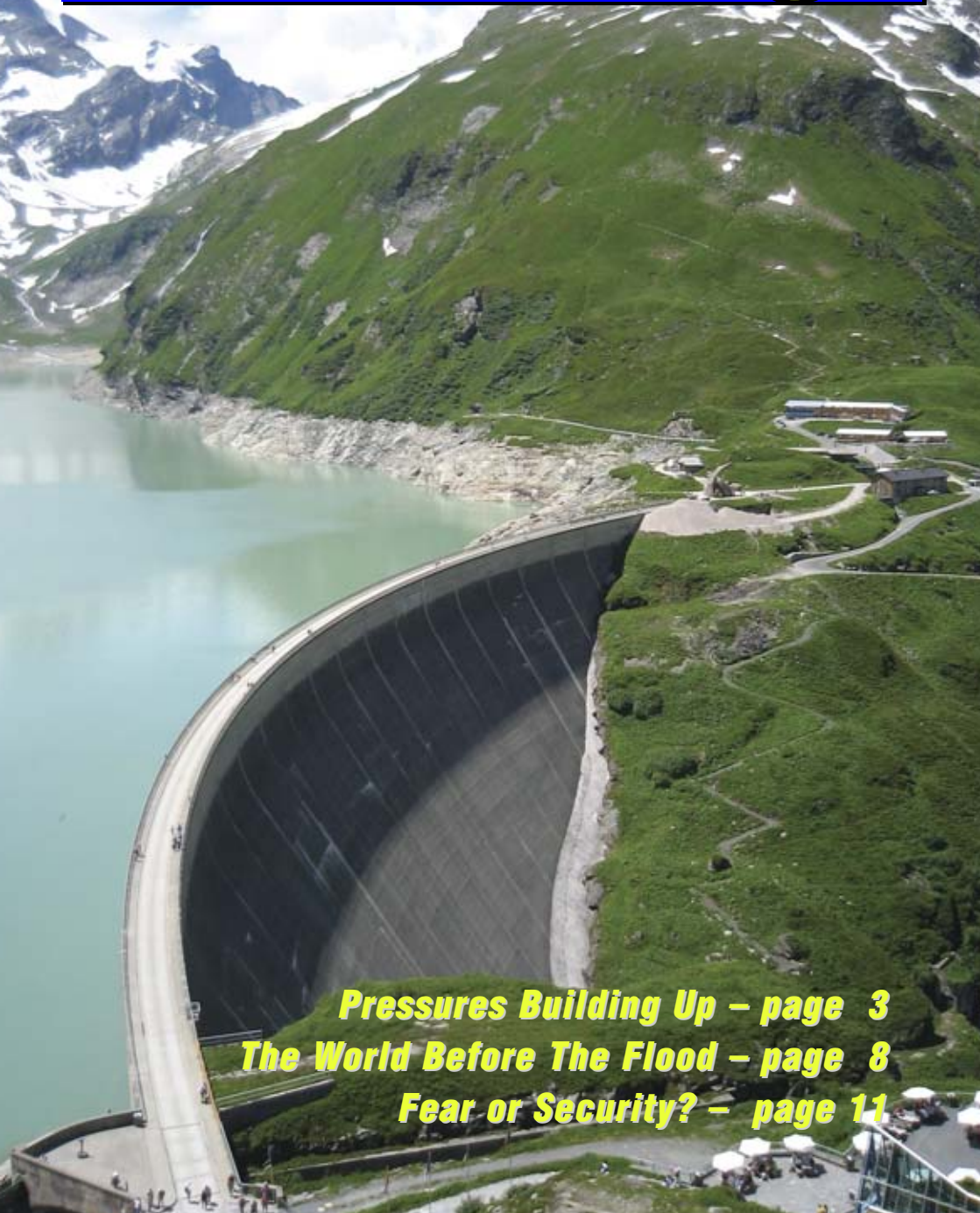


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1494



Pressures Building Up – page 3
The World Before The Flood – page 8
Fear or Security? – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

LOS

1494

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Pressures Building Up

If you have ever tried building a dam in a river, you will know that water builds up extremely quickly, especially if it is fast-flowing. As you add stones, mud, timber, and any other material you can find, things change rapidly. Once you have stopped the water flow and watched your new pool deepen, you have to ask yourself this question: "Will my dam be able to resist the pressure of the water being stored behind it, or will the whole thing collapse?"

Careful Calculations

Of course amateur dam building is not that serious an occupation. You may only want to create a pool for a short time, perhaps just so that you can swim, or fool around in slightly deeper water. If it collapses that just adds to the fun; and the chances are that the first heavy rains will swell the river and sweep all your work away anyway. But that wouldn't be acceptable if you were an engineer responsible for the sort of structure pictured on this month's front cover. Your calculations would have to be very carefully made and the steel and concrete needs to be equally carefully procured and then put into place precisely.

Millions of gallons of water are captured by an immense dam like this one and the stresses and pressures involved are immense. Nobody knows exactly how much rain or snow will fall each year; how strong the wind will be; how much water can be released, perhaps into already flooded rivers;

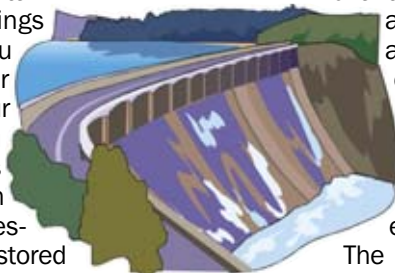
and how much water needs to be retained for public consumption in the future. The uncertainties are enormous and the mathematical calculations have to take everything into account. Get it wrong and the collapse of the dam would be a major catastrophe. Get your calculations right, and even then something can happen that endangers life.

The recent earthquake in China's Sichuan province led to fears that several dams in the locality had been structurally damaged and were no longer wholly stable. And the collapse of the barrage regulating the flow of the River Kosi in Nepal led to catastrophic flooding in the Indian State of Bihar.

Things Building Up

What is true of dam building is also true of life, where pressure can easily build up. There was a recent example of that in the political world, when Georgia's attempt to quash an independence movement in South Ossetia resulted in Russian military intervention. That, in turn, resulted in a standoff between Russia and the United States which is now threatening to begin another Cold War. That could mean a return to hostility between the two superpowers, and that at a time when many European nations are increasingly dependent upon natural gas supplies from Russia.

Whilst it appears that such things do not directly affect ordinary people living outside Georgia, in fact they do.



Energy prices, which are now increasing rapidly, have an everyday impact. As bills for gas and electricity services increase sharply, inflation also rises, interest rates rise to counter that, householders find it hard to keep their mortgage payments up, businesses have to cut back, people are laid off, the economy falters, confidence is affected, international investors move elsewhere, currency exchange rates plunge. Almost before you know it there is an economic recession, or something that feels very much like one. It's a grim prospect, but it shows the way in which one problem leads to another and another; and that individuals and governments are powerless to do much about it.

For Better or Worse?

Those things might seem the most important things in life: things that make the difference between happiness and misery. In fact there are even more important things, when you take account of the opportunity to live forever with God in a perfect world. The Bible is the guidebook to that life and it warns us about allowing one feeling to lead to another, with the result that we are found to be out of step with God. Here's the apostle James:

"God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (James 1:13-16).

Notice how pressures can build up in life, like a dam across a stream. First we see something we want, and the more we see it the more we want it.

Then the desire gets to such a state within us that we decide to get what we want, even though we know it is a wrong thing to do. If we persuade ourselves that we have a right to do something, and continue to do it regardless then, says James, it may be a fatal decision. A fully matured or determined course of sinful action will result in eternal death.

But things also work out for the better, if we have the right aspirations and build up enough desire to do the right thing. This is where the Bible can help again. It is full of wholesome counsel and sound teaching, and because it contains the thoughts of God it has the power to change our lives. Let those thoughts occupy your mind, think about them, meditate upon them, and you will find the perfect way to peace of mind. This is what the apostle Paul said:

"Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:8,9).

The apostle envisages a life which has stored up good and positive thoughts, hopes and desires – like a dam full of water which can be released day by day to quench thirst, keep things clean, and bring total refreshment to every part of human life. That's certainly something worth storing up for the future!

Editor

Natural Disasters – Is there a Loving God?

A common reason that is given for not believing in God is that if there were a God there would not be so much suffering in the world. It is said that a God of love:

- ❖ “...would not allow natural disasters or war”;
- ❖ “...would have prevented the tsunami”, or
- ❖ “...would have saved the Indian province of Bihar from flooding”.

We need to think this through if we are to understand why these things happen and what God is doing – or is not doing – about them.

Of God or Men?

The first question to ask is “Who is really responsible for these things?” Much of human suffering comes about because of decisions that are taken for political or national reasons. Human greed or economic necessity results in the destruction of the Amazon rain-forests and that unsettles the global climate. People want cheaper goods and are not unduly concerned about the pollution that results from uncontrolled manufacturing processes, and that aggravates climatic change. Others turn to terrorism, and wars begin to try to stamp that out, which leads to much suffering for bystanders who are caught up in the conflict.



Whilst all this is undoubtedly true, so that we cannot blame God for the wars and lawlessness in the world, nor for the things that happen which are prompted by man's greed, an answer like that does not show from the Bible what God is actually doing to improve the situation and make the world a better place in which to live.

Man's Inhumanity to Man

When we think about man's inhumanity we should consider the death of Jesus and ask the question “Was God involved in the death of Jesus?” or do we think that God had no control over whether His son was murdered?

The Bible record shows us that Jesus' enemies felt that if Jesus really was God's Son, God would have intervened to save him. They said:

“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:43).

Yet Jesus died upon the cross, and God did not intervene to prevent that happening. If we had been there we might have thought that God was not involved nor concerned about the death of Jesus. However, speaking to the same people who had arranged the crucifixion, the Apostle Peter, some seven weeks later, said this about the death of Jesus:

“Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:23).

From this you can see that it does not follow that God’s failure to intervene means that He has no interest in, or concern for, what is happening here on earth. Far from it! The death of Jesus was a vital part of God’s plan of salvation. That is why it happened. You could wrongly argue that a God of love should have prevented it. In fact, it was a God of love who provided it:

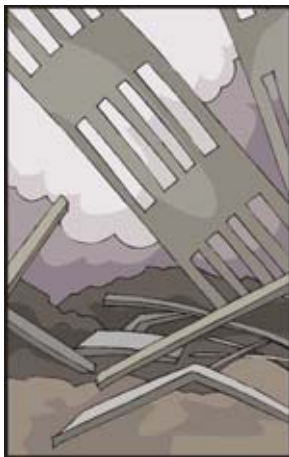
“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Things are not always as straightforward as they seem and it is very easy for us to impose on God our own opinion of how we think He should behave in different circumstances. But God always knows best.

Jesus and Natural Disasters

In the gospel records we can read about what His Son, Jesus, said and did. On one occasion, recorded in Luke’s gospel, Jesus was asked what he thought about two happenings. One of them was the result of political action which resulted in the death of worshippers at the Temple in Jerusalem; the other was the death of people following an accident in which a tower collapsed, perhaps because of earthquake activity in the region. Now take note of the answers Jesus gave:

“There were present at that season



some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think

that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

We might have thought that Jesus would have expressed anger at the death of his fellow Galileans because of Pilate’s evil actions or have been compassionate about those who suffered from the collapse of the tower. Instead, though he may well have experienced both those emotions inside himself, Jesus used the disasters as the basis for a personal plea to those who were talking to him.

He was not just saying that those who were questioning him would also die like those in the events spoken about. When using the word “perish”, he was pointing out the contrast between ceasing to exist forever and being given eternal life by God. So, in this response Jesus was saying that while many unfortunate things happen in this life, what really matters is gaining access to the life that is to come. Remember that:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Does God Care?

Given what Jesus said in Luke 13, we might ask the question: "Does God care about death?" The prophets make it very clear that God does care about people dying. The prophet, speaking God's word, says: *"I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, ' says the Lord God 'therefore turn and live!'"* (Ezekiel 18:32).

From this we see that God's concern is exactly the same as that expressed by Jesus. Both God and Jesus are concerned with the eternal salvation of man. We focus on short term problems. Almighty God and the Lord Jesus focus on the eternal issues.

God has created a world which is not yet how He intends it to be, when the time comes for the meek to inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). For the moment, mankind has been given control of God's world and a fine mess they are making of it, bringing destruction and devastation to so many by their greedy manipulation of the earth's resources and allowing human society to run headlong towards godless disaster. But, as in times past, God can use human abuse to accomplish His gracious plan of salvation.

Jewish Captivities

There were a number of times in Israel's history when they were either threatened with, or taken into, captivity. The Assyrians came against Jerusalem in the days of King Hezekiah. The Babylonians took the Jews captive in the days of King Zedekiah

and the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and took the Jews captive shortly after the resurrection of Jesus. Each of these events resulted in a large loss of life and a great deal of human misery – all inflicted by humans. But God did not intervene to save His chosen people; instead He let these various captivities happen.



He had warned them about the inevitable consequences of their evil conduct. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, had told them that the land of Israel was to be left desolate for

seventy years because of their failure to keep God's law (Jeremiah 25:11). But nobody took any notice: they just carried on as before, steeped in the worship of idols and trusting in anybody and everything to get them out of trouble, except their God. But the end result was that the exiled nation was brought back to its land, after seventy long years, and they were never again inclined to worship idols.

In just the same way, God is letting things develop in twenty-first century society so that right-minded people can realise that He has a plan of salvation. God can save us from the mess that the world is now getting into. When we realise that there is no way out that mankind can accomplish, we should be ready to turn to God. He loves us and wants to save us from our sins and to bring us to salvation. Remember the challenge Jesus presented to the people of his day:

"Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

Peter Forbes

The World before The Flood

*Cain killed Abel and then tried to bluff his way out, as if the angels of God were ignorant of what he had done. But they knew all about it and took action accordingly. It follows that there are two choices for mankind – either to follow Cain’s godless example, or to be like Abel, and live in a way that pleases God. This is the contrast that **Dudley Fifield** now examines and explains.*

Cain or Abel?

- 1 The early chapters of Genesis (4-6) present us with a contrast between men of humble and contrite spirit, who sought to be associated with their Creator, and those of a proud and rebellious nature, who endeavoured to make a name for themselves, through which they and not God should be glorified.
- 2 We observe first the line of Cain. It began with Cain departing from God: *“Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16).*

The name ‘Nod’ means ‘wandering’ and it is indicative of the aimless life with no direction or purpose that men live when they depart from God. In the New Testament, Jude says of such people:

“Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain ... they are clouds without water, carried about by the winds ... raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (Jude w 11-13).

- 3 Making his home in the land of Nod, Cain began to establish himself in the earth. He fathered a son and, building a city, called it after the name of his son, Enoch (Genesis 4:17).

If translated literally, the Hebrew says: *‘he began to build a city’*. Cain was a resourceful man, a man of vision and foresight: he realised the need for organisation if his dream of a man-made world was to become a reality. Notice the spirit that motivated Cain. It is indicated by the manner in which he called the name of the city after the name of his son. The Psalmist gives us an insight into the thinking of worldly-minded people like Cain when he wrote:

“Their inner thought is that their houses will continue forever, And their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:11,12).

Cain called his son ‘Enoch’, and the name means ‘instruction or training’. He appreciated the need for education if his ideal human society was to be realised. The world is still motivated by the same spirit. People still talk of



needing more and more education, so that they can create what they call “a better world to live in”. God has no place in their thinking and what they really want is a better world to sin in.

When Cain began to build his city, he laid the foundations of the kingdom of men. The spirit of Cain is illustrated perfectly by the arrogance of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who, in the 6th century BC, as he beheld the splendour and magnificence of his accomplishments, was moved to exclaim:

“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30).

④ In contrast to Cain, when Seth was born, his mother Eve said: *“God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed” (Genesis 4:25).*

To Seth also there was born a son and, in contrast to Cain, he called his name ‘Enos’, which means ‘frail’. If Cain’s determination to build a city called after the name of his son indicated the psychology of the sinner who behaves as if he were going to live for ever, then in Seth we see reflected the attitude of faithful men who recognise the frailty of flesh and were prepared to stand against the pretentious and arrogant assumptions of the Cainites.

As the distinction between the two lines (or seeds) became more apparent, so men of God recognised the need to make their separation from the ungodly manifest by an open confession of their faith. For, the record

says: *“Then men began to call on the name of the LORD” (4:26).*

⑤ The Epistle of Jude enlarges our understanding of the world before the flood, for it tells us that Enoch the seventh from Adam (in the line of Seth) prophesied saying:

“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude w14,15).

Enoch was speaking of the world before the flood, the society in which he lived, and about which he prophesied. Particularly interesting is the reference to “harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken” against God, for in Genesis chapter 4 we can calculate who in the line of Cain was seventh from Adam and who was therefore almost certainly a contemporary of Enoch. This was Lamech, regarding whom we are given significant items of information that help us to appreciate the type of man he was (see Genesis 4:19-24).

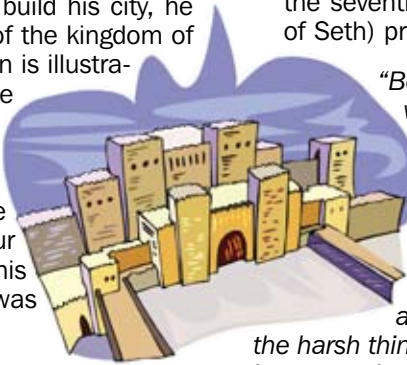
First, he took two wives and is the first recorded polygamist in the pages of Scripture.

Second, he had three sons:

Jabal – *“the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock”*

Jubal – *“the father of all those who play the harp and flute”*

Tubal-Cain – *“an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron”.*



All these pursuits seem harmless enough when considered as legitimate pursuits and pastimes. But remember, this is a description of the line of Cain, the seed of the serpent. These are things which developed as a result of a departure from God. They are a further indication of the resourcefulness of Cain and his sons, in building a better world. Perhaps the last of these particularly, would give them an advantage over others, in that it gave them the capacity to make weapons of war.

This is made evident from what is called “the song of the sword” that Lamech sang, and in which we have a striking example of the “harsh sayings” of which Enoch spoke:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; O wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold” (Genesis 4:23,24).

The words rendered ‘wounding’ and ‘hurt’ both indicate the type of injury that might be inflicted by striking with a fist or even by using insulting words. Lamech’s words, however, mean ‘to run through with a sharp implement’ – hence his sword song. It is the proud boast of an arrogant man who delighted in violence and bloodshed, and who was determined to avenge himself of every supposed insult and indignity inflicted upon him.

⑥ We know that Enoch was a prophet. It is perhaps significant that he should have called the name of his son Methuselah. There is much speculation as to the meaning of this name; but a footnote in Smith’s Bible Dictionary is difficult to resist:

“The latter portion of the root is certainly from ‘to send’. The former portion is derived by many of the older Hebraists from ‘to die’, and various interpretations given accordingly ‘He dies, and it (the flood) is sent’”.

Thus it seems that the name given by Enoch to his son had prophetic significance and, according to the Bible chronology in the chart opposite, it will be observed that Methuselah died in the year of the flood.

He was, to men of faith, a living testimony that God’s judgements would come, and as he grew older so they would appreciate that the day was drawing nearer. But Methuselah just seemed to go on living – his is the longest recorded life in Scripture. What a wonderful thought it is that, whereas in the year of his death the flood should be sent, the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared. For Methuselah lived for 969 years. (See 2 Peter 3:9.)

Thus Adam was a contemporary both of Enoch and Methuselah. Methuselah outlived Lamech and died in the year of the Flood, so he would have been able to instruct Noah in the things that he had learned from his father, Enoch.

In this way we see that whilst godless men were busy building a godless and violent society, godly men and women would have been talking about the things of God and preparing themselves for the event they knew was coming – a worldwide destruction that would herald a new start for the world. It is exactly that choice we now face as we prepare for the event about which we have been told – the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dudley Fifield

	Age	Age when son born	Years from Creation at birth of son	Years from creation at death
Adam	930	130	130	930
Seth	912	105	235	1042
Enos	905	90	325	1140
Cainan	910	70	395	1235
Mahalalel	895	65	460	1290
Jared	962	162	622	1422
Enoch	365	65	687	987
Methuselah	969	187	874	1656
Lamech	777	182	1056	1651
Noah (up to The Flood)	600		1656	

Fear or Security?

In this life we can never be wholly free of fear: fear of ill health, poverty, loss of property, ill-treatment by others, loss of those near us, or even of our own death. The list of fears, real or imagined, is endless. Because we are mortal, finite creatures, we are bound to be plagued by feelings of fear and insecurity.

Past Masters

Many Bible characters experienced these fears too, but they learned that they could be overcome and their experience is recorded in God's Word so that we can learn from them and change our behaviour accordingly. The secret by which they lived is that they learned to put their trust in God. King David lived an adventure-



some and often dangerous life, yet he found that God was utterly trustworthy and wholly dependable. He knew that whatever men might do to him, or try to do to him, he had no reason to fear. His faith in God gave him hope and confidence, for he believed that God would save him and keep him secure. Here are two Psalms in which he expresses that view:

"I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (34:4);

"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God (I will praise his word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" (56:3,4).

Far-Sighted

There were many problems and pressures that confronted David but he learned to look forward in the realisation that God had a long-term plan for him.

As an outlaw, being chased by Saul, he had the assurance that he had been anointed as king (by Samuel) and that one day he would indeed sit upon Israel's throne and rule for God over His people. Thus he could write:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:4-6).

He was, in fact, looking beyond his mortal life to that time when he would be raised from the dead and given everlasting life and it was that long term view of life that also helped the Lord Jesus Christ to live a life of absolute service and to die on the cross in perfect obedience to his Father's commandments:

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,



despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (Hebrews 12:2,3).

Written For Us

Notice that these things are written so that, by considering him, we too can find peace of mind. If we put our trust in Almighty God we too can enjoy the freedom from fear and peace of mind promised by the writer to the Hebrews.

"He himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

This is a wonderful two-fold offer. First we are promised peace of mind now, in this life:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Second, we are offered the security of eternal life in the future kingdom of God, where fear will be banished forever and where peace will reign supreme. At that time, says the prophet:

"Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:4).

So there is an answer to our present fears, if we put our faith in God.



Marion Buckler

The Meeting at Miletus

The apostle Paul was journeying to Jerusalem, accompanied by delegates from several cities and towns in Europe, taking with them a sum of money to help the Christian believers at Jerusalem. They had reached Troas, in Asia Minor, and had stopped to share fellowship with the ecclesia which had been established there, but Paul was anxious to get to Jerusalem in time for the Feast of Pentecost, when a lot of Jews would be assembling there. But first, as **John Hellawell** now explains, the apostle and his companions met up with a delegation from Ephesus at a place called Miletus, and his message to them is another indication of what really constituted first century Christianity.

The Journey to Miletus

The party now embarked and sailed from Troas while Paul set off overland by foot to the port of Assos across the headland some 20 or so miles away. He had left instructions to meet him there. Here Paul met up with the boat and joined the main group. From Assos they sailed to Mitylene. It is not clear why Paul wished to make the initial part of the journey by foot, unless he found it more conducive to meditation or wanted to discuss something with a chosen companion. Clearly, Luke was not with him, as his presence was normally indicated in the text by the use of "us" and "we".

From Mitylene the ship continued sailing south along the west coast of

modern Turkey but it did not call at the most significant port, Ephesus. Paul deliberately avoided visiting Ephesus; possibly because of the trouble they had there on an earlier visit, or because he knew that there would have been difficulty getting away from that city in time to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost. Luke carefully records that they had left Philippi "after the days of unleavened bread" (Acts 20:6), so twelve days had already been taken up by the time they left Troas. Three days were taken in sailing to Miletus; so now only 35 days remained before the feast day. Some more time would have been taken up in sending a message to Ephesus to call the elders of the church and in their travelling to meet Paul in Miletus.



Artist's impression of a Roman harbour in First Century times

Paul's Farewell

Paul began his talk to them by reminding the elders of the Ephesian church how he had conducted his mission in Asia Minor, constantly serving the Lord Jesus in humility and in tears, suffering from the plotting of the Jews. He said that he had not hesitated to declare everything they would need to know, both publicly and privately in house meetings. His message, to Jews and Greeks alike, had been twofold:

1. They must turn to God in repentance, and
2. They must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having reminded them of the past he now turned to the future. He explained that he was going *"bound by the Spirit"* to Jerusalem, that is, in obedience to what the Holy Spirit had indicated, not certain of what was to happen in detail but having learned that in church after church he was facing imprisonment and suffering *"chains and tribulations"* (Acts 20:23).

Direct Revelation

How was that message about the forthcoming trouble conveyed to Paul? It could have been by direct revelation, but his reference to *"every city"* suggests that it was through New Testament prophets. This suggestion seems to gain credence by the revelation from Agabus at Caesarea (Acts 21:11). Note too, the mention of the four daughters of Philip who had the gift of prophecy (21:9). So at this time in the early church God was communicating to His people by sending messages through Christian prophets, both men and women.



Even so, with all these predictions of difficult times ahead, Paul was not to be deterred. He did not consider that saving his life was as important as completing the ministry to preach the Word which had been vouchsafed to him by the Lord Jesus.

Then Paul announced something which was a considerable shock to the Ephesian elders: that all those whom he had known from his visits to Ephesus would see his face no more. They would assume that Paul was reconciled to martyrdom in Jerusalem and so he would be unable to return.

Perhaps it was that he really intended – whatever happened at Jerusalem – that his future missionary work would be further west, and that he would leave it to others to look after the pastoral needs of the believers in Ephesus. Tradition says that Paul's Second Letter to Timothy was written to him in Ephesus, where he was the bishop or "overseer".

In 2 Timothy 4:12 Paul says that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus and it has been suggested that this was done in order that Tychicus could replace Timothy, and so allow the latter to visit Paul in Rome. In the next verse Paul asks for the cloak he left at Troas to be brought, suggesting that he had been in Asia Minor relatively recently, but had not visited Ephesus.

"I am Innocent!"

Paul then declared that he was *'innocent of the blood of all men'*. This strange phrase is explained by his earlier comment in the synagogue at Corinth:

"But when they [the Jews] opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am

clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

Confirmation is given in Paul’s next statement:

“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

The principle of responsibility is laid down in Ezekiel where the watchman has a responsibility to warn the people:

“Whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head ... But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand” (Ezekiel 33:4,6).



So Paul was declaring that, having given them the whole counsel of God, he was clear or “innocent” of any guilt.

Paul’s Warning

The Elders were now warned regarding their own responsibilities; both to themselves and to their flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. They were to feed the church of God (some Manuscripts read

‘Lord’) which he “bought (Gk. acquired) with his own blood.” If the original was “which the Lord [Jesus] had purchased with his own blood”, there is no problem. If, however, the original word was “God” then it is difficult to see how God bought the church with His blood! It has been noted that if the phrase is translated literally it reads: “...the church of God which he acquired through the blood of his own”, which would then mean “the blood of his own Son”.

Paul now revealed what the future held for the church in Ephesus. After his departing (not necessarily his death) it seemed that two problems would arise:

- ❖ from outside: grievous wolves would enter the community, not sparing the flock;
- ❖ from within, leaders would arise, perverting the truth and drawing away disciples after them.

He exhorts them to be on their guard, just as he had done when he spent three years with them, during which time he had continually warned them all, day and night, in tears.

Ephesus in Decline

The decline of Ephesus seems to have occurred quite soon afterwards. Beside the letter to the Ephesians, written during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, there are indications that Timothy was left in Ephesus to deal with these. In the first half of Ephesians, Paul reminds them of their past and their present privileged position in Christ but in the second he concentrates on a series of exhortations affecting all aspects of their life and their relationships. The whole theme is consistent with an early decline.

For example, in 1 Timothy Paul writes:

“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine...” (1 Timothy 1:3).

By the time of his second imprisonment in Rome the situation had deteriorated further. In 2 Timothy, Paul writes of the need to ensure the faithful transmission of truth:

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

In the Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation (2:4,5), the Lord Jesus complained that the Ephesians had “left their first love” and urged that they “remember therefore from where you have fallen”.

Paul’s Example

In spite of these predictions, Paul still

commended them to God’s grace which was able to build them up and give them the inheritance amongst those who are sanctified. Paul reminded them that he had never coveted anyone’s silver, gold or clothing, rather he had been self-sufficient, working to earn his own living and to support those who were with him. In this way he had set them an example of how they too should use their earnings to support those who were unable to support themselves. He reminded them of the words of the Lord Jesus which are not actually recorded in any of the Gospels:

“I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).

Finishing his speech, Paul then led the company in prayer. When he had finished, they said their farewells amidst many tears, being saddest at the prospect of never seeing Paul again this side of the Kingdom. Then they accompanied him to the harbour and watched him sail away.

John Hellowell

Gratitude

May I never cease in my praise to God
For His wonderful love and care.
May I never cease in my gratitude
In knowing He’s always there.

May I never give only a part of me
In response to the love He has shown
But in word, thought and ways, to the end of my days,
Only worship and serve Him alone.



Colleen Simons

Waiting for the Consolation of Israel

The Kingdom of God is a vitally important Bible-long theme. Once in existence, it will be established again, when God sends His king to rule on earth. That rulership will replace all human governments. But who will be its King? That is what Mark Sheppard now explains.

Important Vacancy

There once was a kingdom of God on earth, when God ruled over men through kings that He appointed. That was, at least, what God intended to happen when God's Kingdom was established in Israel. But things did not always conform to that high standard of a King ruling for God, not for his own satisfaction. Eventually a succession of kings sat on the throne of the Lord over Israel, who did not recognize or even realise that it was God's throne.

As king followed king, they became more and more wicked, less and less godly, until the last of them – King Zedekiah – received this message from God through the prophet Ezekiel:

“Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord God: ‘Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the lowly, and abase the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it



is, and I will give it to him” (Ezekiel 21:25-27).

In this prophecy Ezekiel was serving notice upon the king that his kingship had come to an end, and the throne would be vacant “until he comes.” This was a prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus, who was destined to be the king who will sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule over God's Coming Kingdom.

Long-Promised King

There had been similar prophecies already about such a Coming King. A promise had been made to King David in these terms:

“When your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son; and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish him in my house and in my kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever” (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).



This prophecy made to King David was only partly fulfilled by his son Solomon, who succeeded him. Solomon's throne was not established forever, nor was God a father to him in the particular sense which the prophecy seems to indicate. Others too had something to say about the one who should come; here is the witness of the prophet Isaiah:

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6,7).

Again, it was a prediction which could only be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus; no other could possibly do so.

Nation in Waiting

After God had given His verdict about the last king of Judah – King Zedekiah – the Jews continued as a subject nation, sometimes in captivity, sometimes in their own land. They were ruled over by many other powers: Babylonians, Persians and Grecians, until at last the Romans conquered their land. From time to time there were people who were called kings who exercised some power over them – notably the Herod family – but these were mere appointees of the Roman power and they had little Jewish blood in them (the Herods were Idumean).

The people longed for their ancient

kingdom to be revived: for the great days of the kingdom under David and Solomon to be restored. They wanted a king who would rule in his own right, not at the whim of some conquering power. At the time of the birth of John the Baptist there seems to have been an expectation that great events were about to take place. It did not extend to all, but a few significant Jews were waiting and watching. This is what the gospel writer Luke records about some of those faithful watchers:

"Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him ... And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples ... Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem'" (Luke 2:25-31,36-38).

Both Simeon and Anna were waiting, for "the consolation of Israel" and "redemption in Jerusalem": that's two ways of saying the same thing! They wanted God to:



- ✓ fulfil His promises to His nation and redeem His people;
- ✓ free His capital city; and
- ✓ establish the Kingdom of God on earth once again.



“Comfort, yes, comfort my people!” says your God. “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:1,2).

Some people, at the time of the birth and death of the Lord Jesus, were looking for fulfilment of Isaiah’s

They were both old, and knew that they had little time left to see such things, so they were looking earnestly for a fulfilment of prophecy. There were others like them. Joseph of Arimathea was a respected member of the Jewish Council and it is said of him that he *“was himself waiting for the kingdom of God”* (Mark 15:43).

It was this Joseph who, at the end of Jesus’ life on earth, offered a place for the body of Jesus to be interred. He was looking for the kingdom of God, for the fulfilment of the promises which God had made, just as Simeon and Anna looked for consolation and redemption.

Comfort and Consolation

Over 500 years before, the prophet Isaiah had predicted a coming time when God would be gracious to His people and pardon their sins:

words. They knew that God had promised to restore the fortunes of His people, and longed for the time when He would do so. They did not understand that whilst the Lord Jesus was the One who would fulfil the promises, his birth, life and ministry must first fulfil another role. He had come, first of all, to save his people from their sins.

The establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth would need to wait for his return and his Second Coming. But during his teaching ministry, Jesus had much to say about the Kingdom and how we can enter into it, as we shall see as this series continues.

Mark Sheppard

What is the Kingdom of God like?

Jesus said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God?

Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade" (Mark 4:30-32)



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