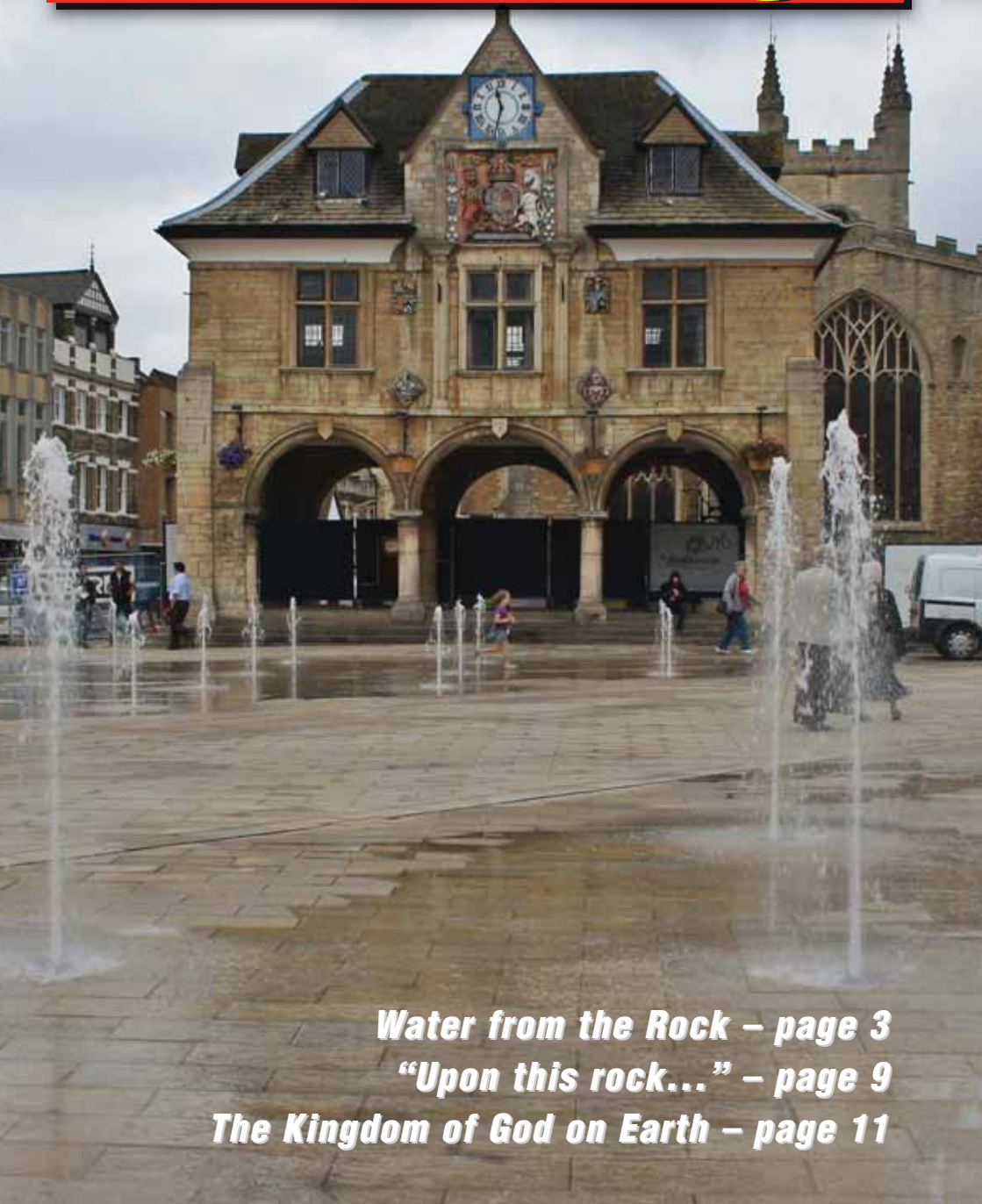


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1527



Water from the Rock – page 3

“Upon this rock...” – page 9

The Kingdom of God on Earth – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

H11

1527



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 men; 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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Bible Versions

The version most used in this issue is the New King James Version (NKJV) but other versions are sometimes used.

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Water from the Rock

Water features are common in public places – fountains, sprays, cascades and streams.

They soften a public area which is often covered with paving slabs or harsh concrete surfaces and add some visual movement and a pleasant noise. Of course, the water is not for drinking and whilst you sometimes hear that revellers have climbed into the fountains, perhaps to celebrate something special or to cool off, in the main people look at such water but don't get wet.



The water feature shown on the front cover, outside the Guildhall in Peterborough, in Cambridgeshire, England, is intended to be just like that, and you would not want to wander across that open space without looking carefully around. For the water shoots straight out of fittings set into the paving slabs and you wouldn't want to be walking across that open area when the water was suddenly turned on!

It all depends!

Of course it would be different if you were desperately short of water. Imagine coming across such a feature then! You would be beside yourself with joy and would probably be only too

happy to get thoroughly wet and totally refreshed. But you don't tend to find that sort of plumbing and careful preparation unless someone has gone to a lot of trouble to make it happen. Otherwise it would be a miracle.

People can live for quite a long time without food: for weeks or even months in some cases. But you can only live for a few days without water, especially when temperatures are high. So imagine how the people felt when they followed Moses out of Egypt and he led them into an arid area where there appeared to be little food and no water. It wasn't just that the parents had children to care for; they also had flocks and herds. For them it was a matter of survival and they soon made their feelings clear:

The whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exodus 16:2-3).

Water of Life

This group of refugees, who were in fact a nation in waiting, were to live in difficult circumstances in the Sinai Peninsula for forty years and, as you can see, they were quick to complain when things were not up to their expectations. But, as so often happens in life, things got worse for them before they got better. Hunger was one thing, but thirst was another, and when water

became scarce the position was critical:

The people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3).

It wasn't Moses who had rescued the people from slavery in Egypt: that was God's doing and it was His rescue mission. He was their Redeemer and He had brought them out by a display of power that had brought the mighty nation of Egypt to its knees. Now He would show Israel that He could also sustain them in the wilderness and He did so by another powerful display. Moses was told to go to a nearby rock and to strike it with his rod, whereupon water gushed out.

The Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Exodus 17:5–6).

Abundant Provision

That water made the difference between life and death for the people and their livestock and it should have been a powerful demonstration to them, both of God's care and of His ability to provide. Years later, the Psalmist looked back to those events and reflected upon God's grace, contrasting the grumbling of a redeemed people with God's kindness and abundance:

They tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy. Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, he struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?" (Psalm 78:18–20).

Whilst we might have been inclined to provide a meagre supply of water, so the people would have had to queue for hours to get enough for their families and their livestock: that was not God's way. The water gushed out of the rock to such an extent that it formed streams and then a river (Psalm 105:41), ensuring there was enough water for everyone. When God provides for our needs, He is both generous and caring.

Living Water

Once, when he was visiting Jerusalem at the time of a Jewish feast, Jesus shouted out this offer:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37–38).

It was as if Jesus was the rock in the wilderness and that now he was inviting a new nation in waiting – a new Israel – to come to him, where they could find refreshment and cleansing. And once they were filled, they too would be able to give refreshment and life-changing help to others, just as the rock had given life to a people who had no other hope. That invitation still stands for everyone who comes to Jesus for he is indeed the life-giver and the provider of all that we will ever need.

Editor

Translating the King James Bible

King James approved the terms of reference which Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury drafted for the translators.

They were given fifteen rules of translation which were strictly followed. Bancroft's Rule No.3, like the church authorities of Tyndale's day, suppressed the correctly translated word "congregation" from the Greek word "ecclesia" and ruled that the word "Church" was to be used to ensure the continued authority of the Church.

Two rules are of particular interest because they show that the translators were required to translate the text as literally as possible:

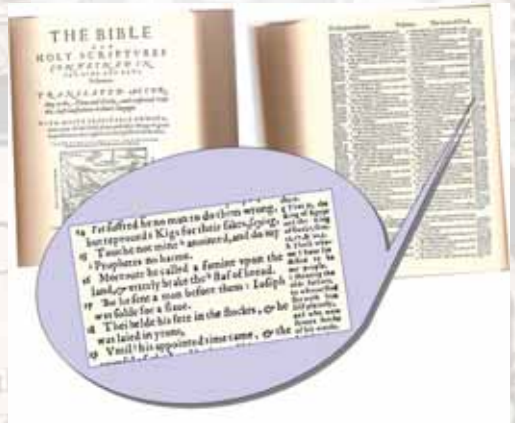
- ① *The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the Bishop's Bible, to be followed, and altered as little as the truth of the original will permit.*
- ⑮ *These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishop's Bible: Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.*

(The Great Bible became known as the Whitchurch's Bible after one of the two printers Edward Whitchurch whose name sometimes appears on the title page.)

No Marginal Notes!

Chapter headings were to be retained
⑤ and marginal notes were to be

excluded. The only permitted marginal references were those which explained the meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word ⑥. Cross references to other parts of Scripture were also permitted ⑦.



The Geneva Bible was full of footnotes, many of which were critical of kings and priests.

The remaining terms of reference set out the rules for adjudicating in the event of translating rare Hebrew or Greek words and for peer review of the work. The King was clear that marginal notes were not permitted in this new version. The protestant Geneva Bible was popular in England and gave cause for concern to both the King and the Bishops. For example, the Geneva Bible reads:

Psalm 105:15 "Touche not mine anointed,^h and doe myⁱ Prophets no harme."

The Geneva marginal notes for this verse are:

- h Those whom I have sanctified to be my people.*
- i Meaning, the old fathers, to whom God shewed himself plainly, and who set forth his word.*

The Geneva Bible argues that the “anointed” were God’s people and therefore that this was not a reference to the King. The Geneva Bible is packed with marginal notes including several that challenge the authority of the King to do as he chooses with his subjects.

The Work Begins

By the end of July 1604 six companies of translators set to work. King James had directed that the whole Bible be divided into five sections plus a group to translate the Apocryphal books.

❖ Two groups at Westminster

*Genesis to Second Book of Kings
New Testament letters*

❖ Two groups at Oxford

*Isaiah to Malachi
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts
& Revelation*

❖ Two groups at Cambridge

*First Book of Chronicles to Song
of Solomon*

❖ The Apocryphal Books

The translation work took about seven years to complete with groups finishing their sections at various times between 1608 and 1610. In 1610 the representatives of each translation group met in Stationers’ Hall, London each day for nine months to check and cross-check each others’ work and for the translation to be read aloud.



As the title page of the King James Bible states, it was, “Appointed to be read in the Churches”. The reading aloud at Stationer’s Hall was to allow changes where considered necessary to ensure that the translation could be readily understood by the hearers as well as those who read it.

Public Reading

The process by which God has revealed His Word to us is clearly shown by Moses and the biblical precedent for the public reading of God’s Word was also set by Moses:

❖ Moses

Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. (Exodus 24:4).

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." (Exodus 24:7)

We have a responsibility to read the Word of God carefully and to ensure we understand what God requires of us. When the children of Israel listened to God's Word, it demanded a response, so they said they wanted to serve him.

❖ **Nehemiah**

Nehemiah also recognised the importance of the public reading with understanding of God's Word:

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up ... and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:5,7-8).

When the people heard the Word of God being read they wept because they realised that they had neglected God's way and now wanted to turn to Him.

The Completed Work

When the revisers had completed their work the scripts were passed to Thomas Bilson, Bishop of Winchester, and Miles Smith an Oxford graduate. It was Smith who wrote on behalf of the translators the preface for the King James Bible, 'The Translators to the Reader'. Finally, the completed work was sent to Richard Bancroft who apparently made fourteen changes before his death on 2nd

November 1610. The details of these changes are not known. In order to remain faithful to the authority of the original text the King James Bible has been subject to more rigorous checks than any other translation of the Bible.

Tyndale's Contribution

The King James Bible draws extensively on the work of William Tyndale. He translated the whole of the New Testament, the first five books of the Bible called The Pentateuch, the Book of Jonah and Joshua to 2 Chronicles.

Over 80% of the King James New Testament is directly attributed to him and 75% of the Old Testament books that he translated. It has been estimated that the King James translators incorporated nearly 90% of Tyndale's work verbatim in the King James Bible. The fifty-four Bible translators, even with the benefit of eighty-five years of advances in biblical scholarship since Tyndale's time, agreed with most of his work.



Tyndale's translation of John, Chapter One.
"All things were made by it" (God's Word).

Tyndale's work was also one of the key source documents for Coverdale's and Matthew's Bibles, The Great Bible and Geneva Bible. Bancroft's rule No.1 required that the Bishop's Bible was to be followed by the translators and deviations permitted only where the original text required. The brief for the Bishops Bible was the Great Bible.

The Great Bible closely resembles Coverdale's Bible which was a revision of Matthew's Bible which was largely Tyndale's work. Therefore over the years from Tyndale to 1611 the translators have perpetuated the language and quality of Tyndale's translation work.

Translators Translating

The translators were required to produce a literal word-for-word translation. The benefit of this detailed process of translation is that it has given us an English Bible which we can study through the use of Bible Concordances which enable us to drill down and discover the Hebrew or Greek words behind our English text. More on this subject is planned, God willing, for a future article.

The translators appear to have worked in a general systematic way to ensure that when a particular word occurs in the Hebrew or Greek texts, the same or similar English word is used each time. Each original word was translated into the closest equivalent English word. The translators tried to find an English word for every word in the original text. When additional words were needed to make sense in English they were added in italics as was done in the 1560 Geneva Bible. Wherever possible the word order of the original texts was also followed.

These features of the King James

Bible have all contributed to its important role in preserving, for the last 400 years, the accuracy of God's plan of salvation for mankind.

Biblical Precision

God expresses His Word in a precise and ordered way for a reason. For example, Hebrews chapter 4 tells us of an incident recorded in Genesis chapter 14. Abraham met the King of Salem (that is Jerusalem), on his return from a battle to rescue his nephew Lot from his captors.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace" (Hebrews 7:1-2).

Why we might ask, are we expected to understand that the King of Salem (Jerusalem) was first King of righteousness and then King of peace? The Apostle James gives us an answer.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:17).

God has decreed that we must try in our lives to do things His way. First, to strive for purity in our lives, or right ways in all that we say and do. This must come first, only then will God bless us with true peace.

Peter Moore

Next: The Impact and Message of the King James Version

“Upon this rock...”

If you look a little closer at this month’s front cover you can see Peterborough city’s coat of arms. The city’s motto is “Upon this rock”.



Those words are taken from the words of the Lord Jesus which are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, verse 18:

I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...

The motto is appropriate in linking the apostle Peter with Peterborough and its cathedral, which is dedicated to Peter amongst others. The city is located on the edge of the fens, in Eastern England, where the bedrock is close to the surface. The ancient monastery and subsequent cathedral were literally built on rock.

What did it mean?

When Jesus spoke those words he was not thinking of Peterborough, of course. He was talking to his apostle at a crucial turning point in his work. Jesus had taken his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, at the northern limit of the Holy Land, where he asked them whom did people say that he was? They replied that various suggestions had been proposed including:

- ✦ John the Baptist (who had been executed by Herod and so would have to have risen from the dead!);
- ✦ the Old Testament prophet Elijah (who was expected to return before the Day of the Lord, as promised in Malachi 4:5);
- ✦ the prophet Jeremiah or
- ✦ another of the prophets.

The Lord Jesus then asked the disciples for their opinion as to his identity: “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered: “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**”. The Lord replied: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven”.

Peter had not learned the Lord’s identity from anyone else but directly from God.

Vital Confession

This confession was the bedrock upon which Christ would build his church:

I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church... (Matthew 16:18).

Here we have a play on Peter's name. His original name was not Peter but Simon, and sometimes he is also called Cephas. He was given the name Peter or Cephas by the Lord Jesus when Simon was first introduced to him by his brother, Andrew:

He brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone) (John 1:42).

Not Peter!

Cephas is the Aramaic for stone while *petros* is the equivalent Greek word, as both Aramaic and Greek were in daily use at the time. From the same Greek root we derive the words petrify (turn to stone), petrology (the science of rocks) and petroleum (literally, rock oil). However, the Lord Jesus did not call Simon *Petra* but *Petros*, which means a loose stone, or a pebble.

So the statement: *"I tell you that you are Peter (Petros), and on this rock (Petra) I will build my church..."* stresses the contrast between the moveable, insecure Peter (*petros*) and the immovable and unshakeable foundation of Christ's church (*petra*), which is the confession of faith in him. It is clear that the Lord Jesus intended that Peter himself would not be the rock on which the church would be founded, contrary to the claims of the Catholic Church, but his recognition that Jesus was the promised Christ (or Messiah) and the Son of the living God.

Two Keys

One further aspect of the Peterborough coat of arms which has a connection with the New Testament is the presence of the two keys. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord Jesus says *"I will give*

you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." On another occasion Jesus had used that expression as a criticism when he said that the religious experts of that time had *"taken away the key to knowledge"* and in so doing they had excluded themselves from God's kingdom and had hindered those who wished to enter (Luke 11:52).

Now Peter was told that he was being given those keys and the apostle began to use them on the day of Pentecost when he shared the good news of the salvation that God offers us by explaining the meaning of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (in Acts chapter 2). Then he explained that, in raising Jesus, God has given us proof that the power of death cannot prevail against the Lord or his church.

Apostolic Teaching

In addition, the apostles were assured that whatever they bound on earth would be what had been bound in heaven, and whatever they loosed on earth would be what had been loosed in heaven. Here we have a guarantee given by Jesus that the Spirit-guided Apostles would speak with divine authority on all matters of Christian doctrine and practice.

How important it is then that we should read what they have to say and take their advice about how to live now with the Lord Jesus Christ. By doing that we will be ready for him when he returns from heaven. We can build our lives on a certain foundation – by believing that he is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. Then, however stormy the next few years might be, we will be secure and safe in the love of God.

John Hellowell

The Kingdom of God on Earth

The Kingdom of God is one of the key themes of the Bible. It was a dominant theme in the Old Testament and a key part of the teaching of the Lord Jesus. But do you understand what it is? Ernest Wisner now explains.

God's Kingdom

The very idea of such a kingdom may never have occurred to you. Perhaps you are unfamiliar with the Bible, for it is a long book and it takes a while to understand its key message. Yet when you think about those parts of the Bible you know well – like the Lord's Prayer – you will remember that the coming to earth of God's kingdom, or rulership, is something you have been praying for, even if you didn't quite understand what you were asking for.

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen (Matthew 6:9–13).

What this prayer really means in terms of the coming Kingdom is clearer when you come to understand God's plans in the Old and New Testaments. For the Kingdom or rulership of God is a key theme right through the Bible, from the very beginning when God commanded Adam to rule over or take charge of the earth He has created (Genesis 1:26).

Human Progress?

Some people used to suggest that given enough time God's kingdom would come on earth when "the church" and its teaching has reached everyone. That's not such a popular teaching nowadays as it is evident that mankind is going in the opposite direction and Bible-believing people are now in a minority.

Nor does the Lord's Prayer suggest that God's kingdom is something we might enjoy in heaven. For whilst God now rules in heaven – and has "the kingdom and the power and the glory" at all times – the Prayer requests the establishment of that rulership on earth. Then everyone will do the will of God as perfectly as it is now done by the holy angels, in heaven.

The Bible tells us that God created the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). So although mankind now has the power to render it uninhabitable, it is not God's intention that this should happen. Nor should we think that God intends to allow the chaos, suffering and misery that now exists in the world to go on for ever. He has a better plan than that.

God's Takeover Plan

Scripture tells us that God plans to take control of the world and its people by sending the Lord Jesus to reign over a righteous world government, established here on earth. If this idea is

either new to you, or seems to be far fetched, please bear with us as we share some knowledge which is freely available to all. There is only one source of Christian knowledge and that's the Bible. 500 years ago it was impossible for ordinary people like us to read it for ourselves. The people had to accept what they were told – right or wrong! Now we can all check these things out for ourselves, and it's important that we do. In this article we will explain:

- 1 *The need for God's Kingdom on earth;*
- 2 *When it will happen; and*
- 3 *Where its operational centre will be.*

Bible Prophecy

1 If you have some knowledge of the Bible you will know that long ago it predicted certain things that were to happen, and that these things came precisely true. For example, the birth of Jesus was foretold over 500 years in advance. It was to be in Bethlehem:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Notice that the prophecy tells us where the birth would take place and what the child would achieve – he would rule for God in Israel. Isaiah prophesied at the same time as Micah and he says this about the coming child, in words that have now become well-known:

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).

And later he fills out more of the details about the sort of person Jesus would be when he said – 500 years beforehand:

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears ... (Isaiah 11:2–3).

These Scriptures describe the qualifications of the one whom God would send into the world: His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Look at his qualifications – as a ruler, who will always do what is right and true in God's sight. Ask yourself if we need a man like that to come and take control. Or do you think that the people who now rule the world are already like that? I think not! These descriptions of the sort of person Jesus turned out to be show us clearly the difference between human government and the coming Kingdom of God. We really need it, and we need it now!

Critical Timing

2 So when will it happen? Jesus himself foretold the way the world would go to pieces, as one problem piles upon another and people becoming increasingly anxious about the future and increasingly irreligious (see

Matthew chapter 24). The apostle Paul also explained the serious decline of morality, family life and faith in God (see 1 Timothy chapter 4 and 2 Timothy, chapter 3).

Scripture does not give a day or year when Jesus will return. But it does describe the state of domestic and political affairs in the world with particular reference to the Middle East, for the re-establishment of the nation of Israel is a critical factor in determining that the Coming of Jesus is near and everything is working out just as the Bible predicts. So it looks as though the time of the Lord's return from heaven is incredibly near.

Centre of Government

③ The third question concerns the centre of operations and the location of the throne of King Jesus. Jesus lived and died in Israel and after his resurrection from the dead he ascended to heaven from just outside Jerusalem. It was then that the angels told the disciples in the clearest possible terms that he would come again:

“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” (Acts 1:11).



People saw him go and they will see him return and the indications are that Jesus will return to the very place from which he ascended. For the prophet Zechariah says that, *“in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east” (Zechariah 14:4)*. Jesus is coming to rule the world from Jerusalem – to sit where once King David reigned. For the prophet also says that: *“the Lord will take possession of Judah as his inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem” (Zechariah 2:12)*.

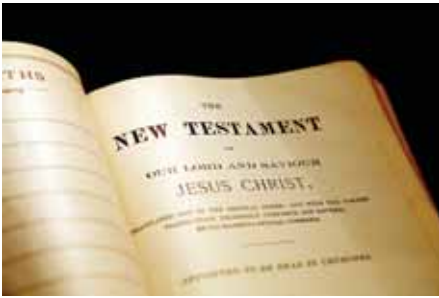
So What?

If these things are true what should our reaction be? If a king is coming soon to take over the world and to call mankind to account, what should we be doing about it, if anything? The Bible doesn't just foretell events with remarkable precision. It also explains what God wants of us.

If we want to be part of God's wonderful future for the earth we have to take the time now to understand what He has revealed and to reorder our lives so that we are motivated by a faith which is capable of transforming our thoughts and lifestyle to that which is truly Christ-like. It is not enough just to become a nominal member of a church. And it is no good just deciding to 'do your own thing'. Eternal life is available, but you have to work out your own salvation, and put some effort into it, if you want it.

New Testament Truth

Before the birth of Jesus, God's dealings were mainly with His chosen people Israel. As the New Testament opens it firmly connects to what has gone before by declaring that Jesus Christ is: *“the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1)*.



The good news is that through him alone salvation would be made possible to all peoples and nations. After the account of his miraculous birth and a brief sketch of his early life the four gospel records focus on the Lord's teaching from which it becomes clear that the Kingdom of God was his central message:

*Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people** (Matthew 4:23).*

*Now it came to pass, afterward, that he went through every city and village, **preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God** (Luke 8:1).*

*Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel"** (Mark 1:14–15).*

Call to Action

We have already seen what "the kingdom of God" is all about. Jesus is coming to reign on earth and he will then make the world a fit place where God's people can live. At his Coming he will raise the dead and enable some

of them to live forever. Israel will become the political, spiritual and cultural centre of a new and righteous world government and the Lord Jesus will reign from there in person. But the key thing is the action that we must now take. We must, said Jesus, "*Repent, and believe in the gospel*".

➤ **Repentance** is to acknowledge our sinful nature and make a life-long commitment to Jesus.

➤ **Believing the gospel** means understanding God's purpose in sending His only begotten Son into the world and knowing what is important about his birth, teaching, death and resurrection. And because his return to earth is so important, we need to understand just what Jesus will do when he comes.

Nearly two thousand years ago the apostle Paul visited Athens and warned the people of that ancient city that they must take immediate action if they wanted to be part of God's purpose. His words are still as important today.

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31).

If you want to be part of the new world order to be established by Jesus when he returns, now is the time to do something about it! Change your life now so that you can have a new life with Jesus for ever.

Ernest Wisner

Paul Reaches Rome

*At long last the apostle Paul has reached Rome as the Acts of the Apostles draws to its close. In it Luke has tracked the progress of the gospel message from Jerusalem across Palestine and through Asia, into Europe until it reaches the centre of the Roman world. **John Hellowell** concludes this long-running series by explaining what happened now that the apostle had fulfilled his ambition of being able to preach the gospel in Rome.*

Busy Prisoner

After three days, as soon as he was settled, Paul sent for the chief members of the Jewish community in Rome. He took the opportunity of setting out the background to his presence in Rome as a prisoner awaiting trial. He could not know at this stage what they had heard about him, if anything. It was possible that they had received news from Jerusalem regarding his arrest and previous trials. Paul stressed that:

- ❖ he had done nothing against the people, that is the Jews
- ❖ nor had he violated the customs of the fathers, that is, the Patriarchs.
- ❖ He may well have explained that he was actually in the Temple paying the dues of seven men who were about to be discharged from their vows when he was arrested. He stressed that he was delivered into the custody of the Romans in Jerusalem.
- ❖ The Romans had tried him and intended to release him because there was no capital charge against him. However, because the Jewish hierarchy were determined that this should not happen he had no choice but to exercise his right, as

a Roman citizen, to appeal to Caesar. He may have hinted that his enemies were intent on having him assassinated, as they had tried to do when he was first arrested.

- ❖ Paul was careful to say that he bore no grudge against his own people in general, merely their religious rulership (Acts, Chapter 28).

The Hope of Israel

He then explained that he had called them so that he could acquaint them with the facts of his case and to stress that it was “for the Hope of Israel” that he had been bound with the chain to which he, no doubt, drew their attention. The phrase “The Hope of Israel” summed up the whole of the Jewish faith, namely the coming of Messiah to establish his reign. They replied that they had received no letters concerning him from Judea and that Jews who came to Rome from Jerusalem brought no adverse reports of him.

Some scholars have sought an explanation of this remarkable situation by suggesting that Paul had been formally ‘excommunicated’ by the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem, which meant that no one could speak of him, it was as though he did not exist. The Jews did, however, want him to explain his position, as they knew that he was

connected with ‘this sect’, that is Christianity, and that they had heard that everywhere it gained a bad reputation. It seems probable that opposition to ‘the sect’ had caused riots in Rome itself some years before. If this view were correct, many of the Jews present would have experienced these and the consequent expulsion that was ordered by Claudius.

The Kingdom of God

It was obvious that Paul could not deal thoroughly with the basis of his faith in the time remaining that day so the Jews appointed a time when Paul would have opportunity to explain himself. Since Luke stresses that on the appointed day many people came to his lodging, one may suppose that the party which heard his preliminary account had spoken to their colleagues and considerable interest had been aroused. Paul’s theme was the kingdom of God, a topic which would be fairly well understood by his audience, but he concentrated on establishing the thesis that the experiences of the Lord Jesus were in accord with what had been foretold regarding the Messiah in the Law of Moses and in the utterances of the prophets.

Paul used the full day –‘from morning till evening’- to cover the relevant material. It is not clear whether he simply lectured or whether there was an opportunity to ask questions, although the latter seems more likely. The response to his remarks was not wholly hostile, as it had been elsewhere. Some believed what he said and others did not. It seems that those who believed began to take Paul’s part and started to argue with their colleagues.

Paul’s parting shot was aimed at the disbelievers. He reminded them how

God, by the Holy Spirit, had spoken to their forefathers through the prophet Isaiah and that by not believing in Jesus they were contributing to a fulfilment of the prophecy.

Prophecy Fulfilled

*When they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, ‘Go to this people and say: “Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. **Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them”**’ (Acts 28:25–27).*



The Lord Jesus also cited this passage in Matthew 13:14,15 with regard to his use of parables and he cited the second part in John 12:40. Paul concluded his Bible study by saying that he had now discharged his responsibility in bringing the gospel to the Jews and that, in accordance with the Lord’s command, he would now preach to the Gentiles, adding that they would listen:

Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it! (Acts 28:28).

At this point the Jews departed and continued the discussion amongst themselves.

What happened next?

Luke explains that Paul remained for two whole years in the house that he had hired and that during this time he was able boldly to preach the Kingdom and the things relating to the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30-31). No one forbade him to do so. Then, intriguingly, Luke leaves his account at this point having tracked the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. What happened at the end of the two years? It may be that since Theophilus, to whom the account had been addressed (Acts 1:1), and other members of the early church knew the answer there was no need to say any more. There has, however, been speculation as to what happened, with three main possibilities:

- ❶ Paul was found guilty and executed. Some scholars believe that this was the case and so Luke had no need to spell it out: this was the very reason for his abrupt ending.
- ❷ Paul's adversaries presented their case but his defence was effective and he was found not guilty. As the case had been heard at the highest level it would make the Christian faith a recognised religion, or at least not illegal.
- ❸ His accusers failed to turn up to present their evidence and so, after two years the case lapsed and Paul was freed to resume his preaching.

Of these, option one seems highly unlikely in view of evidence in 1Timothy and Titus that Paul preached elsewhere and supervised the preaching of others, before he was arrested a second time during which time he wrote 2 Timothy. Of the remaining alternatives, given the evidence for a second arrest and, therefore, that the Christian faith had not been legally recognised and accepted by a Roman court, it seems probable that no prosecution evidence was forthcoming and that the case was dismissed.

Option three is also favoured by the obvious trouble to which the Jerusalem authorities would be put in attempting to send witnesses to Rome. As they had failed repeatedly on 'home territory' to press religious charges, it would seem even less likely that they could succeed in the highest court of the Empire.

Paul's Message for Us

Having journeyed for so long with the apostle and having read all about his trials and tribulations in making sure that the gospel was preached and understood, the least that we can do is to read his letters and thus understand why he was so persuaded that the only hope of life is to be found in God's saving work through the Lord Jesus Christ. He made a recommendation on one occasion, when speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus, which we would do well to follow. Here it is:

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

John Hellowell
Series Concluded

Middle East in Crisis

The Middle East is in crisis again, and this could be a vital turning point in world affairs. If so, we have front row seats. Can it be that the day of the autocratic Arab leader is nearing an end? Is the geopolitical order in the Middle East changing like the shifting sands of the desert? What will happen when the everyday choices Arabs make are no longer dictated by autocratic leaders influenced by western governments protecting their foreign interests? Does this affect me, why should I even think about it?

Uncertainty

One thing is certain – no one is sure what's coming next, apart from change. The Arab Spring revolts and demonstrations came out of nowhere and continue to surprise the world. There had been a kind of peace and stability in the region for 30 years. Now civil war rages in Libya as part of the population seeks to remove the 40 year old repressive regime of the Gaddafi family. The Assad family in Syria, who have ruled for over 40 years, have also been using force to protect their regime. Uprisings have been seen in Yemen and Bahrain as the authority of many of the veteran rulers is challenged.

The root cause of all these revolts appears to be long-pent-up rejection of oppressive, corrupt, dynastic regimes whilst the new generation suffers unemployment and economic hardship. The call is for human rights, democracy, freedom and justice. This swell of change swept Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power in January 2011 and Egypt's President Mubarak

almost a month later. The key question is will this unrest infect the whole Arab Middle East and if so over what period of time?

Egypt

President Mubarak of Egypt aligned his nation with the west, especially the USA, benefiting annually from \$1.3 billion of aid in return for protecting western foreign interests. However, three decades of failed economic policies, extreme poverty, continued repression of religious rights and near-zero tolerance for political dissent created the uprising. Now the military run the country; who knows what will follow.

Egypt today, like the Pharaohs of the past, has an impressive modern military force at its disposal, in common with many of her Arab neighbours. It is ranked 17th in the world, the second largest in the Middle East after Israel. Egypt was the first nation in the Middle East to sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, followed by Jordan in 1994. These peace agreements have survived despite the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Palestinian intifadas of 1987 and 2000 and the war in Gaza in 2008-09.

Iran

In January 1979, Israel's closest Arab ally in the region, Persia (now Iran), was undergoing much the same internal turmoil. The Iranian revolution succeeded; creating a strategic nightmare for Israel and for the whole region with their developing nuclear capability. This Republic's leaders have made no effort to hide their feelings

about Israel, wanting them “pushed into the sea and out of sight for ever”.

If they fill the Arab power vacuum left by the old regimes and take over fragile Iraq along the way, Iran could become the regional powerhouse. Freedom and liberty may be the call from the suppressed Islamic masses. But how do nations which are reliant on the region’s resources protect their supply chains in the wake of chaotic change? There are limits to any country’s patience and history suggests that such tensions eventually lead to war.

Israel

The Israeli press suggests that there is now great anxiety. The government has no strategic plan to fight Egypt, Syria or Jordan right now. They haven’t had to think about this since the peace treaties were signed. After four major wars with its neighbours, during its 60 year history, Israel could once again be surrounded by hostile nations.

Added to this, other nations now want a solution to the long-running Palestinian issue. The urgent call is to divide up Israel’s West Bank and Jerusalem into two nation states. The UN is scheduled to vote on this matter in September. Could hostilities be the outcome?

Future Developments?

Let’s try and put a few things in context.

- ✓ Some of the regional stability can be attributed to the peace treaties that Israel signed with Jordan and Egypt over 30 years ago.
- ✓ The region retains over 60% of the world’s known oil reserves.
- ✓ The USA has significant military bases in the region.

- ✓ The Palestinian containment by Israel and the Jerusalem ownership question remain prominent issues.
- ✓ The instability of Syria is perplexing to her immediate neighbours; the downfall of President Assad would cause a power vacuum further destabilising the region.
- ✓ Egypt, Syria and Iran all have formidable military capability – Israel, with its nuclear capability, is squeezed between them.
- ✓ If the Arab people really do begin to have their own say and influence their own destiny, history suggests that radical change is the result. If the two peace agreements with Israel are dissolved and Israel is threatened, we are likely to witness a major confrontation.

Major Confrontation

This is exactly what the Bible predicts. Psalm 83 describes a time similar to what is now developing in the Middle East where the enemies of Israel join together with one accord and say:

“Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more” (Psalm 83:4).

The names of the nations that make this statement in the Psalm resemble those around Israel today. The Old Testament book of Zechariah (chapters 12 and 14) further describe the build-up to a war over Jerusalem involving many nations. As world events unfold, the Bible also predicts that this will lead to God sending His Son back to rule over a better – indeed a perfect – world. In the meantime keep a close eye on events in the Middle East as these are important signs of the times.

David Bilton

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