

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1540



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIBLE
& ITS RELEVANCE FOR US TODAY



Why the Bible? – page 3
The Development of the English Bible – page 6
Hope for the Future – page 17

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

128th Year

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1540



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 mankind; 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

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Why the Bible?

The French philosopher Voltaire, who died in 1778, is reported to have made the claim that *“In one hundred years the Bible will be an extinct book”*. So much for Voltaire as a visionary, who could accurately foretell the future!

The Bible is a collection of messages from God given over a period of about three thousand years through many different inspired writers. It comprises a library of different books – 66 of them in all, contained in the Old and New Testaments, or covenants. It contains promises, warnings, instructions and prophecies and was written by many different people.

The writers were not people carried away by their own insight or imagination. They were inspired by God in such a way that the message they conveyed was His message, as the apostle Peter declared:

No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

God’s Word

If God has continued to convey His message over such a long period of time and by using such diverse methods and such different people, He must have something vital to tell us, otherwise why would He bother? So what does the Bible tell us, and why does it matter?

If you have ever tried to use a complicated gadget, or some computer software, and have got yourself totally confused and very stressed, the

chances are you know why. There was a detailed instruction leaflet for the gadget and the software had a “Read Me” installation guide, but it seemed more fun at the time just to see if you could work it out for yourself. That’s how many people live their lives as well.

There is an instruction book – it’s called the Bible – which tells you what life is all about, why God made us, what He wants us to do, what He has in mind for us, and how He has been preparing a better future for mankind. When your life has got muddled up and there seems no way out, the Bible is there to help you make sense of things. But you have to read it if you want God’s help to guide you through the complicated world we now live in.

What’s in it for me?

God offers us eternal life in a perfect world and wants us to be there with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he returns from heaven to rule on earth.

Jesus came the first time, when he was born of the virgin Mary, to save mankind from itself and he died as a sacrifice for sin, to make it possible for ordinary people like us to be part of God’s gracious purpose.

Read the Bible to find out what is on offer and read the rest of this issue – which is all about the Bible – to see why it’s a remarkable book. Voltaire is now extinct himself, but the Bible is a book full of life and vitality. It can help you discover God’s gracious offer of everlasting life. This is an offer far too good to miss.

Editor

The Integrity of the Bible Text

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

One of the most frequently asked questions is ‘How can you know that the Bible is accurate, because there are so many different translations?’ To answer this we must go back hundreds of years to when the Word of God was first revealed.

The Message Passed On

We learn from the Bible that from the creation of Adam and Eve to the times of Noah and the Flood, men lived an extremely long time. An example of this is Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived: he was 969 years old when he died. The message that God gave to these men would have been talked about between themselves and would, at the time of their death, be known word-for-word by others.

Jewish tradition claims that God dictated to Moses the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) letter-by-letter and that before he died he wrote out 13 scrolls and then gave one to each of the tribes of Israel and put one in the Ark of the Covenant. Tradition also said that if anyone tried to rewrite the Pentateuch, the one in the Ark would testify against him. All we are told in the Bible is:

Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:9).

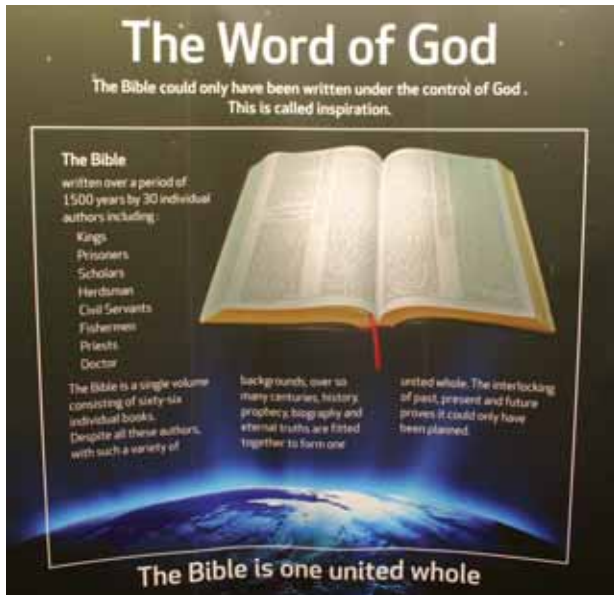
Copying the Scrolls

From that time until now, to ensure that every copy of a handwritten scroll was accurate, a proof copy is kept to check it against. This proof copy was first kept in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple, until its destruction when Jerusalem was conquered. Afterwards global checks were made from time to time by selected scribes to ensure that no errors had been made. If any were found then the faulty scroll would be destroyed.

To ensure that every copy was accurate, twenty rules were drawn up and are still in force today. If any one of these rules was not followed when copying a scroll, then that scroll could not be used. Some examples of these rules are:

- ❖ A Torah Scroll is disqualified if even a single letter is added or deleted.
- ❖ The scribe may not write even one letter into a Torah Scroll by heart. He must have a second, completely accurate scroll opened before him at all times.
- ❖ A Scroll in which any mistake has been found, cannot be used and must be fixed within 30 days, or be buried.

By 400 BC the 39 books that make up the Old Testament had been written. Around 700 AD all known copies of the Hebrew Bible were compared and a standard copy was made. This was known as the Masoretic text



were some minor differences between all three texts, they were all either grammatical errors, differences in spelling or missing words. It was realised that none of the differences affected the meaning of the text or the sense of what was written, for the scriptures had been wonderfully preserved by God.

English and beyond

The Septuagint and Masoretic texts were the manuscripts that John Wyclif, William Tyndale, Myles Coverdale and many other brave and

and is still considered to be the most reliable Hebrew text.

From Hebrew to Greek

Some time between BC 300 – 200 the Hebrew scrolls were translated into Greek by 70 -72 Jewish scholars and the translation was called the Septuagint – the Seventy – to recognise the service of these men. This translation was made because the large number of Jews scattered over the Greek empire were Greek speaking and could no longer read their native Hebrew.

Since the Septuagint was a translation, scholars have over the years questioned its accuracy because they have noted slight differences between it and the Masoretic text. After the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, comparisons were made between the Hebrew Scrolls found in the Qumram caves and the Septuagint and Masoretic texts.

It was discovered that although there

courageous men used when they translated the Bible into the English in the Reformation period. This eventually resulted in the Authorised King James version of the Bible in 1611 and the many other modern versions we now have. How this was done is related in the following article.

It was Job, in the Old Testament, who made this plea:

“Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! That they were engraved on a rock with an iron pen and lead, forever!” (Job 19:23–24).

He wanted his words preserved for posterity and now they are, for they were included in the Bible, which has come down to us as a message from God that can be relied upon as being accurate and true.

David Ryde

The Development of the English Bible

The earliest known English translation of any part of the Bible was made when some of the Gospel of John was translated into Anglo Saxon at the beginning of the 8th century AD.

This was about the same time as the Lindisfarne Gospels were produced. However, translation of the whole of the Bible into English began in the fourteenth century.

❖ John Wyclif

Wyclif believed that ordinary men and women should have “Goddiss Lawe” (God’s Law) in their own language. He and his friends undertook the translation into English of the Latin Vulgate Bible. Hand-written copies were read aloud in villages by travelling preachers known as Lollards. As a result they were persecuted by the Church authorities who believed they alone had the right to read and interpret the Scrip-

tures. They decreed that: “No man henceforth shall by his own authority translate any text of Scripture into English ... and that no man read such book”. However Wyclif’s translation (c. 1384) and its revisions were widely used over the next century or so.

The Reformation

The fifteenth century invention of printing had a major effect on book production and the growth in learning. By the beginning of the next century printed Bibles were available in many European languages – but still not in English. In 1516 the Dutch Scholar Erasmus published the first printed Greek New Testament. He added his own Latin translation which showed up the mistakes in the Vulgate Bible. This encouraged the German reformer Martin Luther, and the English scholar William Tyndale, to make their own translations from the original Hebrew and Greek.

Erasmus' Latin Bible (1516)	Tyndale's New Testament (1525)	Coverdale's Bible (1535)	The Great Bible (1539)
			
Erasmus collected Greek manuscripts and produced a Latin translation which was substantially better than the texts then in common use.	Tyndale's New Testament was the first printed English version of the Bible. It was opposed by the church and bishops, and hundreds of copies were collected and burned. Only a few copies survive to the present.	Coverdale produced the first complete Bible to be printed in English. This version was based on the Latin, but also used Tyndale's incomplete translation.	After he broke with Rome, Henry VIII had an English Bible produced by Coverdale placed in every church. Copies were chained to the church lectern. Later Mary Tudor had them removed.

❖ William Tyndale

Due to religious persecution, Tyndale found it impossible to work as a Bible translator in Britain and was forced to live abroad. His New Testament (1525) was the first time the Scriptures had been printed in English. Copies had to be smuggled into Britain – in fact only two survive. In 1536 Tyndale was burnt as a heretic before he could complete the Old Testament.

❖ Miles Coverdale

Tyndale's friend Miles Coverdale was also forced to flee to Europe. There, in 1535, he completed the translation of the whole of the Bible, using various sources: the Latin Vulgate, Martin Luther's German translation, and some of Tyndale's translation. It was the first complete printed English Bible, and was accepted by the King of England, Henry VIII.

Later 16th century English Bibles

Other major English Bible translations appeared in the sixteenth century. John Rogers, another friend of Tyndale's, is probably the author of Matthew's Bible (1537) – a revision of Tyndale's work and one which was dedicated to Henry VIII. In 1539 Henry ordered that a Bible in English, the Great Bible (1539-1541), based on Tyndale and Coverdale, be placed in every parish church in England – the first time churches had been officially required to have a Bible. The Geneva Bible of 1560, a revision of Tyndale and the Great Bible, was produced by exiled Protestant scholars working in Switzerland. It proved to be a popular translation. The text was surrounded by commentary and notes, sometimes extremely outspoken.

It was reprinted in 140 editions during the next century. The Bishops' Bible (1568) was a revision of the Great Bible, using the Geneva Bible as its guide. The popularity of the Geneva Bible prompted Roman Catholics working in Europe to produce their own translation – the Douai-Rheims Version. The New Testament translation of the Latin Vulgate appeared in Rheims in 1582, the Old Testament in Douai in 1609.

The King James Version, 1611

In 1603 the new King of England, James I, commissioned a "uniform translation [of the Scriptures] to be done by the best learned of both [Cambridge and Oxford] Universities, reviewed by the Bishops, presented to the Privy Council [Government], lastly ratified by royal authority; to be read in the whole Church and no other. But that no marginal notes be added thereunto." James had been concerned about comments in the Geneva Bible that he thought criticised his role as king.

He was also aware that he needed to bring together the opposing Catholic and Puritan religious groups in the country, and saw in the production of an agreed "Authorized Version" of the Bible the means of doing so. It was in effect a revision of the Bishops' Bible, also drawing upon the Rheims version of the New Testament. Although it set a standard for the English language and has been of enormous influence, the King James or Authorized Version took time to become established.

For many years the Geneva Bible was more popular. However, the Authorised Version is still in print four centuries later. Due to changes in the English language, it was revised at the

end of the nineteenth century (1881-5), but this Revised Version and its American counterpart, the American Standard Version (1901) were not widely used.

Modern Versions

Since the middle of the twentieth century a great number of English translations have appeared. Some translations of the whole Bible have been the work of individuals such as James Moffatt or Ronald Knox, and of the New Testament by J. B. Phillips, and William Barclay. Other translations have been the result of the work of various committees. These include such versions as:

- The Revised Standard Version;
- The Amplified Bible;
- The New English Bible;
- The Jerusalem Bible;
- Today's English Version – also known as The Good News Bible;
- The New American Standard Bible;
- The New International Version;
- The New King James Version;
- The New American Bible, and
- The English Standard Version.

Why the many different modern translations of the Bible? New Hebrew Old Testament manuscript discoveries – such as the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, and the work of biblical scholars – especially with Greek New Testament texts, have helped achieve a more accurate rendering of the text of the Bible. Language changes over time and what may have seemed a good translation in the past can later appear to be inappropriate or even wrong.

Some new translations (such as the

Good News Bible) are almost paraphrases – adding a great many words and phrases in an attempt to make the Bible message “more relevant to our day”. Other versions have been influenced by the denominational views of the translators. These include:

- The Jerusalem Bible,
- New International Version, and
- The New English Bible.

Other versions try to keep as close as possible to the wording and word order of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. These include:

- The King James Version, and
- The New King James Version

Which one for you?

We read in 2 Timothy 3:15 that the:

“Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”.

We may like a particular modern version but we need to ask:

- ❖ Do the words and expressions used help us to understand what God is telling us?
- ❖ Does it convey clearly the teaching about: *“The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 8:12)?
- ❖ Does it help us to realise our need for salvation, and the certainty of God's promises (2 Peter 1:3-4).

If it does, then let us read so that we may *“know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent”* (John 17:3), and thank God for those translators who have given us the Scriptures in our own language.

David Nichols

The Gospel and its Message

The Gospel of Mark begins with the news that John the Baptist had appeared to end the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments:

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins (Mark 1:4–5)

A few verses later Mark continues:

Now after John was put in prison, 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).

Repentance and Baptism

Both John and Jesus talk about repentance, so what exactly is it? Repentance simply means to change your mind. Jesus was asking people to change the way they thought about God and the way they acted. Jesus wanted them to put all their past sins behind them and focus on serving God.

Jesus wanted them to be baptized and to wash away their sins. The reason was because the Kingdom of God is coming. The gospel or “Good News” that Jesus was preaching was about the future kingdom on earth when there will be peace and prosperity and we can live forever.



On the right road?

We too can be part of this future kingdom if we repent and turn our lives around. It can sometimes be easier just to keep going. Imagine you are driving in totally the wrong direction. It is difficult to find a convenient place to turn the car around, you are in heavy traffic and everyone is going the same way as you are. However if you need to be going in the opposite direction, continuing straight ahead will not get you there!

In our lives it can be easier to go along with the crowd, but where is it leading us? Are we being led to God or away from God? Even when we are trying to follow God, sometimes it can be hard. Paul writes to the believers in Rome

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice (Romans 7:19).

Every day is a new day to turn our lives around and to turn to God. The Bible is our guide and by reading it we can find out more about the gospel.

Joanna Cave

The Lord Jesus Christ

When Matthew recorded the genealogy of Jesus, he not only declared his past, but also anticipated his future.

The Gospel begins with these words:

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).

This phrase connects the past with the future. It means Jesus is part of the human race. But how was Jesus their ‘son’? The key to understanding this puzzle is in the promises God made to both David and Abraham.

Promises made at his birth

The same anticipation of the future is also true of the gospel of Luke which tells us about the angel’s message to the Virgin Mary.

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:31–33)

These verses are important as they teach some startling detail:

- ① Mary’s son was to be called Jesus and would be the Son of God;
- ② God would give him the throne which had once been occupied by his fore-father David;
- ③ Jesus would reign as the King, and his people would be the ‘house of Jacob’, i.e. Israel – Abraham’s seed or descendants;

- ④ His kingship would be ‘forever’ and his kingdom would never end.

These things provide the link with David the King and Abraham the founding father of the people of Israel, thus confirming the opening verse of Matthew’s gospel.

Saviour and King

The angel also gave a message to Joseph, the husband-to-be of Mary. He was told:

“That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20,21).

These promises mean that Jesus will rule as king on David’s revived throne in Jerusalem in the Resurrection and the kingdom of God. Also his kingdom will be over all the land and the people of Israel, as well as those in the restored earth. He is to be the Saviour of men and women by living a perfect sinless life in obedience to his Father.

As we have seen, when Jesus began his public ministry the message he preached was both about the coming kingdom of God and the need for repentance, if people wanted their sins forgiven. The earliest recorded public words of Jesus in the gospels are:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

His whole life and work was to ensure that God’s kingdom would be restored and people reconciled to God. The kingdom of God had existed once before as a theocracy in Israel, in the days of the kings like David and

Solomon. A theocracy is a society in which God is really the ruler and the coming kingdom will be like that.

Concerns for the People

Jesus' ministry was to convince his hearers of their need to turn their lives around and follow him. He knew that without a conscious effort to repent, the people remained under condemnation. His own teaching was:

"He who believes in [Jesus] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:18–19).

It is clear that repentance involved understanding who Jesus was, what his origins were and what he came to accomplish. The gospel presented a challenge to those who heard it, especially if they were serious about

following him. This was hard in the days of Jesus, because he preached that:

"If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

This was a message of self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Parables and Miracles

Jesus was not always as challenging. His message was intended to appeal and persuade people to change their way of life. As he evangelised the country, he told parables containing important lessons for discerning hearers. Sadly, because of the stubbornness of some who listened to him, his parables were not always understood. This is just as true today, unfortunately, as there are many who refuse to acknowledge him as the One sent by God to save us.

In addition to his parables and storytelling, Jesus performed many miracles



– or ‘signs’ as John’s gospel calls them. These miracles brought practical relief to people, as some were made to hear and see and speak, and some were raised from the dead to new life. Multitudes were satisfied when they were fed with bread and fish. The disciples witnessed Jesus in control of the storms and rough seas. All this activity showed Jesus as the Son of God and the Master of Creation’s forces.

Death and Resurrection

Much of the Lord’s teaching, parables and miracles anticipated his crucifixion. The gospels tell us how the Jewish elders manipulated the people and pressured Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, to sentence Jesus to death. The Apostle Peter roundly condemned them for this dark and wicked deed in a speech to the Jews when he said of Jesus:

“... whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But you asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of Life ...” (Acts 3:13-15). See also Acts 2:23; 4:10,27-28; 5:30; 7:52-53; 13:27-29.

But the life of Jesus was not to end like this. The oft-repeated message in the early chapters of Acts is the bold statement by the Apostles that they were eye-witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. They had seen him alive and Jesus had talked and lived with them again. Jesus ensured there was no doubt about his having been raised from the dead and seen. The record is that:

He also presented himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days

and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

It could not be otherwise. Jesus had lived a perfect sinless life and it would have been unjust of God to leave him in the grave. So the Apostle Paul could confidently write that Christ:

“having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him” (Romans 6:9).

Why did Jesus die?

Sin is the barrier between us and God. It needed destroying in order that God could reconcile us to Himself. Jesus was the One sent by God to do this. This is another reason why he had to be part of the human race, as we saw at the beginning of this article. The New Testament puts it like this:

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

As a result, the sin-power which holds us all captive is destroyed. It is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith and true baptism which liberates us from the fear of death and a lifetime’s bondage to sin. The resurrection of Jesus was necessary to demonstrate he had overcome death – the final enemy. The Apostle Paul explained it like this:

“Jesus our Lord [who was] raised from the dead, was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25).

Vic Aucott

Who Can Be Saved?

It seemed that Jesus was asking people to be impossibly good. The disciples had left their jobs and homes to join him; they had seen the miracles he performed, had listened to his teaching and marvelled at the wisdom of their Master. They understood that there was the wonderful promise of eternal life in the future Kingdom of God on earth for some ... but not for all.

That got them worried. How could they put everything Jesus had told them into practice? They knew they wanted to be in the Kingdom they had learned about. Without that Hope there was nothing beyond the grave.

For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:5).

So the question came, 'Who can be saved?', something people still ask.

The Bible has the Answer

We are given all the answers. Short of taking away our free will, the Lord God has done everything in His power to help us. He has given us the Bible, which points forward to a wonderful hope: God's Kingdom on earth, filled with faithful people who have chosen to listen to God and to do His will. The writer to the Hebrews says:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

If we want to know more about God and to believe in Him, it makes sense to read the Bible. There we can see His whole purpose – with nations and individuals – unfold before us. Thus the apostle Paul writes to young Timothy:

Our Need for God

Our World

Every year millions die from starvation
Millions struggle to breathe
Tens of thousands die annually
Simple food is distributed

The World's Need

An end to famine
An end to disease
An end to war
An end to violence
An end to death

Death comes to all; but is it the end?

*"He do things that they will do,
But do not think within,
And they have no mind toward
The doers of them; it is forgotten
That they have done them, and their eyes
Have never seen them."
Nations will die there is death
If something were made to live
It should not be dead, or die, or it will live
If nations do their work or die in knowledge
Or wisdom, or in grace, when we are going
To everlasting life."
- Ecclesiastes 1:1-11*

“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

Jesus the Saviour

The most amazing thing God has done for us is to give His Son. It is through the Lord Jesus’ perfect life and through his willing and voluntary sacrifice that he conquered the power of sin. This was the promise made right from the beginning.

When Adam sinned, bringing certain death to all mankind, God promised that his very special descendant would bring salvation to his people. Jesus confirmed this when he said:

“I am the way, the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

No sin too big

As Jesus went through the land teaching, many people stopped to listen – and many people walked away. They didn’t like what he had to say. Some thought that, by keeping the man-made laws they had built up around the commandments given by God, they could earn salvation. The Lord Jesus saw through their pride and self-righteousness and proclaimed the true way: that, if a man or woman wanted to serve God, they must first of all recognise their sinful nature and repent. He told the story of two men. They both prayed. One prayed with himself:

“God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector”.

The other couldn’t so much as lift his

eyes to heaven. He just prayed: *“God be merciful to me a sinner.”*

Jesus said: *“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other” (Luke 18:10-14).*

There is no sin so big that God cannot forgive.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Repent and be Baptized

Recognition of our own frailty is the first step to repentance. But, how do we show our repentance?

Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan saying: *“Thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).*

The apostle Peter instructed believers to: *“Repent and let every one of you be baptised” (Acts 2:38).*

Baptism was a requirement of every new disciple of Christ and still is today. This total immersion in water is a symbolic washing away of sins and also a burial. It is an act of sharing in Christ’s death, and committing oneself to a new life. We arise out of the waters of baptism to a new life – as children of our Heavenly Father.

Once baptized, we still fail in our discipleship from time to time, but we are now in a different relationship with God. He has become our Father and we are His children. His arms are always ready to welcome us back into His care. His ear is open to hear our prayers. Who, then, can be saved? Let Jesus give us the definitive answer:

“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Ruth Nichols

Israel – God’s people

For many a long year, there has existed a people who have been reviled, victimized, driven from country to country and yet who have still managed to maintain their uniqueness. This people were marked out for a specific purpose and about them Moses wrote these words:

“You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).

Restoration

This was written about the nation of Israel, the Jews – a people preserved for a remarkable destiny. Rising out of the ashes of apparent destruction, having been scattered throughout the world, Israel – God’s people – are a modern miracle. Their restoration was predicted in the Bible by the prophet Jeremiah:

“I am with you,” says the Lord, “to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished” (Jeremiah 30:11).

Who would have thought that the Jews after centuries of obscurity could regain their national identity, return to the land of their origin and revive their

ancient Hebrew language? Yet it has happened and for one reason only:

“You are My witnesses,” Says the Lord, “that I am God” (Isaiah 43:12).

Just in case we might assume that Israel is better than any other nation, God explains:

“I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went” (Ezekiel 36:22).

God Rules!

This modern miracle is there for everyone to see and to recognise. It demonstrates that God exists and that He is in control of the affairs of all the nations, not just Israel. As the prophet Daniel wrote, these things happen:

In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men (Daniel 4:17).

It was because of the wickedness of the nation that God had said through the prophet Jeremiah, that He would not leave them *“altogether unpunished”*. The history of the nation has been a testimony to the truth of these words. It can be summed up by words of Moses who warned that disobedience would result in the following:

The Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your



foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life (Deuteronomy 28:64–66).

How remarkable that Moses, inspired by God, was able to record Israel's future history in such graphic detail.

Blessings for Israel

Thankfully, by the same power, he was also able to record for us the future blessings of the nation of Israel:

It shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you (Deuteronomy 30:1–3).

For such a long time Israel has been a despised nation, yet Moses recorded Israel's future blessings in these words:

The Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them (Deuteronomy 28:13).

A wonderful prospect is set before the nation, a future full of blessings. Looking forward to that turn of events, the Apostle Paul wrote these prophetic words:

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins" (Romans 11:25–27).

Adrian Standeven

Hope for the Future

Are you worried about the state of the world?

- ✓ Financial meltdown,
- ✓ The continuing war on terror,
- ✓ Revolts against brutal regimes,
- ✓ Iran pushing its nuclear programme,
- ✓ Corruption at the top of world governments resulting in massive differences in living standards between those at the top and bottom of the society?

These are just a few of the problems facing the world at this moment in time. The Bible has always been clear that we should expect these sorts of troubles to exist and that they will gradually get worse until the moment God intervenes to bring a permanent solution to the difficulties we face.

“A time of trouble such as never was”

The Bible very often uses phrases such as “*the time of the end*” or “*the day of the LORD*” to indicate the completion of a time period which ends with God’s intervention. In the past these periods have ended with events such as the destruction of the nation of Israel’s capital city Jerusalem:

- ❖ by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and
- ❖ by the Romans in AD 70.

Such a phrase appears in Daniel 11:40 and is referred to in the next chapter where the prophet says:

At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and



there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book (Daniel 12:1)

This prophecy declares there is a time coming which will be worse than any other that has gone before. It is then that God will intervene in the affairs of men one last time by sending His Son back to earth to judge the nations of the world and to re-establish His kingdom here. The resurrection of the dead will also happen at this time, as the next verse of this chapter tells us:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

For the world as a whole, things will get worse; but for the true followers of

God and the Lord Jesus Christ there is hope, both for deliverance from these judgement events when they happen and the hope of enjoying everlasting life in the Kingdom of God.

Appointed to Salvation

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, the apostle Paul encourages the believers in Thessalonica by writing about the certainty of the resurrection of the dead at Jesus' return. He says that those believers who are still alive when he comes back will be taken away to the same place of safety.

We know from elsewhere in the Bible that this will be the time when Jesus judges those who have a knowledge of God's plan and purpose with the earth and gives immortality to those who are faithful believers. In the next chapter he again addresses the state of the world during this period. First, there is this warning:



Only the Bible has the answer to the problems that now confront us

When they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

This is the 'time of trouble' we saw in Daniel, which comes suddenly. It will come when the world's governments think they have found the solutions to their problems, something that will happen at the very time that Jesus returns. Paul encourages faithful believers as follows:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

He continues his encouragement a little later:

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10).

From these verses, it appears that as long as Bible believers are faithfully watching and waiting for Christ's return, then as this sudden destruction comes upon the world, believers will be taken away and given immortality. They will thus escape the very worst that will then be happening. The ultimate hope for faithful believers will be everlasting life in the kingdom of God. The Bible explains that this will be a time when Jesus reigns on the earth, with Jerusalem as his capital city. Then all the problems of this world will be solved.

No More War

The prophet Isaiah was given a number of visions of what the kingdom of God would be like and these show how the problems of this world will be solved

permanently. For example, war will be stopped:

*It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, **neither shall they learn war anymore** (Isaiah 2:2-4).*

"Sorrow and sighing shall flee away"

The Bible goes on to tell us that other problems like famine, disease and illness will also be taken away. For the same prophet writes:

*Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you." Then **the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.** For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes (Isaiah 35:3-7).*

A Glorious Future promised

Although this world, because of its troubles, will continue to deteriorate for the time being, God will eventually intervene and send His Son back to the earth. The Bible tells us what God wants us to do to share in that wonderful time.

The promise is that the earth will have an endless glorious future when the Kingdom of God is re-established on the earth and that we can share in it. It will be a time of true peace and joy and the calamities that currently afflict this world will be a distant memory, as it says at the end of that same chapter:

*The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and **sorrow and sighing shall flee away** (Isaiah 35:10).*

This will happen! The signs in the world around us indicate that the countdown to these things has already begun and will come to a climax very soon. We need to decide whether we want to share in that wonderful time or not.

Jonathan Millar

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