

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1583



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of the Kingdom of God

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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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Mighty Wings

Soaring majestically amongst the mountain peaks; diving at speed from great height; ferociously catching and devouring their target; birds of prey can capture our imagination. They are a blend of beauty and menace, precision and power; a force in nature which can make us hold our breath in wonder.



We associate these birds with speed and power, and rightly so. When hunting, peregrine falcons use a flying technique called the 'stoop'. They fly high above their prey and close their wings, going into a downwards dive. A 'stooping' peregrine falcon is the fastest animal on earth, reaching speeds of over 300 km per hour (200 miles per hour). By reaching such a speed, they are able to stun or often kill their target outright.

These powerful birds have remarkable eyesight, because they have many more light receptor cells in their eyes than humans. A buzzard can see 8–10 times farther than we can: it can spot its prey from three kilometres

away! Most birds have eyes on the sides of their head, which gives them a wide field of view to look out for danger. But birds of prey have their eyes in front – just like other hunters – which gives them binocular vision. This is when both eyes can focus on one thing at the same time. It makes it much easier to judge distances, which is vital when chasing prey.

Eagles in the Bible

Where the Bible uses the image of an 'eagle', the original word in Hebrew means an eagle or other large bird of prey – we might use the general term 'raptor'. It does so in a number of different ways. The first is in the context of God's judgements. Nations used by God to punish Israel are described as

being like an eagle: fierce, swift and implacable in their attacks. In Jeremiah 4:13, the prophet is warning of impending invasion by the Babylonians, whose "*horses are swifter than eagles*". In his mourning over the fate of Jerusalem, Jeremiah says:

Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens (Lamentations 4:19).

In Deuteronomy 28:49, Moses is warning the people of Israel against rejecting God. The punishment for doing so will come from invasion by another nation "*as swift as the eagle flies*".

Power to Nurture

It is easy to see how the birds' powerful features enable them to catch their food and to fight off competitors. However, it is also fascinating to see them apply their abilities in rearing their young.

Birds of prey build large, robust nests. In them, their chicks grow quickly and need a lot of food, which has to be caught by the adults. The parents will fiercely protect their offspring from predators by land or air. When the young birds are ready to take their first flight, the parents are there to encourage and coax them from the nest, and will feed and protect them until they can care for themselves.

The picture of a raptor is also used to describe God's care for His people. This is a compelling idea, and it is also comforting, to think of the power of the Almighty brought to bear in the nurture of those who are His. When God described the way in which He brought Israel out of Egypt, He said:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself (Exodus 19:4).

This speaks both of His might used to destroy the Egyptian army, and His care exercised to protect and release His people.

Shortly before he died, Moses spent time recounting to Israel the Law given by God, as well as the events of the exodus from Egypt and the forty years spent in the wilderness. In Deuteronomy 32, he talks poetically about how God cared for Israel. The nation was saved from "a wasteland, a howling wilderness... He kept him as the apple of His eye" (v10).

He goes on to describe God watching over His people, protecting and lifting them up out of trouble and caring for them with the dedication and ferocity of a parent raptor:



As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings (v11).

This does not only apply at a national level though. God sees His people as precious individuals. A great example of this is the story of Ruth, an immigrant to Israel, with no-one to provide for her and no practical hope. God provided her with a husband, a family and a place in His purpose. Early in the story, Boaz (who she would later marry) described her as taking refuge under the 'wings' of the Lord God of Israel (Ruth 2:12).

Vitality

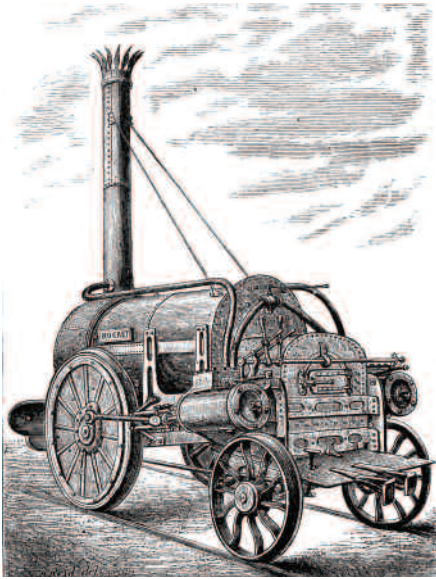
Another dramatic use of eagles as illustration is to show the power of the life that God gives to those who love Him. He enables them to live dynamic lives today, energised by knowing His plan. And He promises an endless life in His kingdom: one of strength, of energy and of divine purpose.

Those that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

Editor

"Come and See"

Nothing opposes human progress so much as prejudice. When Richard Arkwright invented the spinning frame, an infuriated mob at Preston made him run for his life, because they reckoned the machine would ruin their industry. In Nottingham he met with the same senseless sort of opposition. There they burned down his mills.



George Stephenson had to face storms of ridicule when he publicised his steam engine, which could run more quickly than the old stage-coaches.

The astronomer Galileo discovered that, instead of the sun going round the earth, the earth revolves round the sun. Prejudiced authorities flung him into prison and tried in vain to make him recant, because this did not fit with their views.

Missing the Saviour

Blinded by preconception, mankind has often rejected the most glorious gifts. True prophets have been persecuted, benefactors slain. Through the deadly work of prejudice, men and women through the ages have unceasingly rejected and repudiated Jesus Christ, the Son of God, His gift sent to save the world. This was even the case during Jesus' life in Israel, 2000 years ago, as one eye witness records:

He came to his own, and his own did not receive him (John 1:11).

Jesus himself commented:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing (Luke 13:34).

Not willing? Why? Through prejudice. The Jews rejected the Saviour because he bore no resemblance to their expectations of the one who was to come, sent by God, to rule over them and the whole world for ever.

Modern Misconceptions

The same applies today. Some are prejudiced against Christ by what sceptics have said or written. To many, he has never been shown except in caricature. And there are those who are blinkered by philosophy or theology which often obscures the real Jesus.

Men and women also frequently judge Jesus by his followers. They point to poor conduct or inconsistencies in Christians' lives, which colour their assessment of him. Is this fair? Every genuine Christian is Christ's representative, but how many truly reflect his character? The answer is that we are all human, and therefore fallible, and so will sometimes fail to live up to his standards. That does not make Jesus less; it emphasises our need for forgiveness.

As students of the Bible, we should recognise that Christ was sinless, he never sinned. However, we see too that we all have the tendency to sin – to disobey God. In Romans chapter 7, Paul draws a picture of an internal conflict: he does evil unwillingly, because



it is the opposite of what his God-fearing conscience wants; but his tendency to sin makes him do wrong and unable to do the good that he wishes he could.

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice (Romans 7:18–19).

To illustrate his point, Paul describes this battle as every individual having two parts:

- ❖ The 'flesh' (the lower animal nature)
- ❖ The 'spirit' or 'inward man' (the mind which thinks and reasons).

This picture reminds us that all Christians will fail at times, and everyone needs someone to deliver them from the power of this tendency to sin. In verse 25 Paul gives thanks that this is Jesus Christ, the indispensable Saviour, through his victory over sin and death.

Meeting Jesus

On one occasion when Jesus went to Galilee preaching the gospel, he caught sight of Philip and called out "Follow me" (John 1:43). Enthusiastically Philip sought Nathanael to share the good news, and the story is recorded in the subsequent verses.

In verse 45, Philip tells Nathanael the exciting news: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael's reaction was clearly narrow-minded. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see" retorted Philip, challenging Nathanael to overcome his prejudice.

As soon as Jesus saw him coming, he exclaimed: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." Nathanael remained sceptical, "How do you know me?". Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

This implies supernatural knowledge, because Nathanael was out of

human view. Not only did Jesus see him, he saw *through* him, and he saw no deceit in him.

This motivated Nathanael's change of opinion, and doubt became belief. He made his confession, "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.*" Nathanael had seen a miracle of insight and knew for certain that Jesus was who the Bible says he was.

First-Hand Experience

'Come and see' is the best cure for prejudice. Isn't it the same in all areas of life? Seeing the spinning jenny at work convinced the Lancastrians of its tremendous utility. Actual experience of the locomotive dispelled absurd prejudices and caused men to appreciate the potential of the railways.

Coming face to face with a thing or idea can quickly dispel dislikes and suspicions. Getting to know the idea or person removes prejudice and helps us make good decisions.

In the same way, spending time with Jesus himself, through the Bible record, will dispel prejudice against him. We get to know his character, his influence and his faultless example.

Come and see Jesus:

- ❖ Sitting on the hill with the crowd around while he pours out words of wisdom never heard before.
- ❖ Passing from place to place, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead.
- ❖ Confounding his critics, who could not out-reason the carpenter's son from Nazareth.
- ❖ Gradually being recognized by some as the Son of God.



Come and see him meekly yet triumphantly dying on the cross, the innocent victim and yet the ultimate victor. This paradox is described in Colossians 2:15. Christ won a great victory over sin and death and wants to share it with us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the moral and spiritual ultimate. His story did not end at the cross, because he rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and is waiting to return to the earth as king. We still have opportunity to come and see him in the Bible, to get rid of any false preconceptions and to be part of the future world order. Don't let prejudice rob you of a place in God's plan.

Claud Lamb

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Thinking About God

God in Creation

I know God exists –
The evidence is all around me
Someone made this fantastic world
And someone keeps it going.

I have only to look
At a flower or a fish
Or listen to a bird
Or consider the marvels
Of the eye, the ear or the brain...
To know that someone designed them all.

The Universe above me and beyond
Must have a glory all its own
And every galaxy a tale to tell
Of the One who holds them all
In the powerful hollow of His hand.

Norman Owen



There are many ways in which we can see the evidence of God in the world around us.

Some may be particularly struck by the intricate beauty of a flower. Others are amazed at the majesty of the night sky, especially when seen away from the intrusive lighting of our towns. Gazing heavenwards to look at the light of distant stars, especially if using a telescope and in some remote place, the number of stars and the vastness of the sky can be awe-inspiring.

For others, it is to delve with a microscope into the intricacies of the cell. The detail and ‘technology’ which we find in this building-block of living material can be breath-taking.

Many people look at the remarkable phenomena in nature and see quite clearly that everything has been designed by a divine creator.

Sadly there are many others who see nothing of the sort. They will not accept that the wonder and beauty of our world is evidence of a designer or creator. They see the diversity, beauty and stunning precision of this world only as evidence of blind chance. This conveniently removes the need to acknowledge the existence of a divine power.

Such an approach seems to stretch reason beyond its limits, and to go well beyond established scientific principles. It demands we accept that

creation is the result of random coincidences far more unlikely than any lottery yet devised.

Knowing More about God

We may deduce some facts about the Creator and Designer of the world from looking at the earth on which we live. The fact that He made everything makes it clear that He is powerful. We see that He loves order and sets clear rules, because those laws govern nature.

However, this alone will not tell us much about the character or purpose of God. For more detail we need to turn to the revelation God has made of Himself, to His word, the Bible.

Right from the outset, we notice that the Bible is totally in harmony with what we deduce from observation. The very first verse of the Bible tells us that it was indeed God who made all things.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

The message is repeated in different contexts throughout the Bible, for example:

I have made the earth, and created man on it. I – my hands – stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded (Isaiah 45:12).

So the Bible is in agreement with what we can see, at whatever level we look. This means that to use the Bible as our source of information about God is totally logical.

When thinking about God, we really need to look at God's word to see what else it tells us about Him. This is a remarkable privilege; the Creator invites us to get to know Him and has



given us this record so that we can do so. In the Bible He tells us about what He is like, what is His purpose with the world, and the relationship He wants with men and women.

The approach of 'Thinking about God' accepts that we shall never really understand God fully, His mind is too wonderful, His power too great for that. The Psalmist recognised this when he wrote:

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it (Psalm 139:6).

However, we can look at what we are told and think about Him. Jesus told us that this is a great privilege, and that it can lead to living for ever:

“And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

Mark Sheppard

John the Baptist – a Disciple 'Like his Teacher'

We are called to be disciples of Jesus, to learn from him and to practise what he taught. Thankfully, we are not asked to attain moral perfection like he did, as it would be impossible. We are instead asked to try our best and to be like him. Jesus said:

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master (Matthew 10:24–25).

A man who understood this very well was John the Baptist. Jesus gave him the exceptional commendation that “among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28). However, John humbly believed that he was “not worthy to stoop down and loose the sandals of his teacher” (Mark 1:7). John pointed out that even though Jesus was born after him, and started his ministry after him, he was ‘before’ John in terms of authority and importance:

This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me is preferred before me” (John 1:15).

John accepted that Jesus was always going to be above him; he understood what was (and was not) asked of him. It was enough for him to be like Jesus.

Same Sayings

John was like his teacher in a number of ways, especially in the things which

he said. Many of his phrases recorded in the scriptures are identical to those used by Jesus. Below is a selection of them:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand

- John – Matthew 3:2
- Jesus – Matthew 4:17

Brood of vipers!

- John – Matthew 3:7
- Jesus – Matthew 12:34, 23:33

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire

- John – Matthew 3:10
- Jesus – Matthew 7:19

Gather the wheat into the barn

- John – Matthew 3:12
- Jesus – Matthew 13:30

Fire that shall never be quenched

- John – Matthew 3:12
- Jesus – Mark 9:43

Duplicate Deeds

John was also like his teacher in the things that he did; his actions were described in very similar, sometimes identical terms to those of Jesus. Below is a selection of them:

The angel Gabriel prophesied that John would be “great in the sight of the Lord” (Luke 1:15). That same messenger from God was sent to Mary, to announce that she would give birth to a son called Jesus. He told her that

Jesus would be “*great and... the son of the Highest*” (Luke 1:32).

During his life, John was known by Herod as being a “*just and holy man*” (Mark 6:20). This makes his eventual execution by that wicked king even more shocking. When Peter accused the Jews of denying Jesus and having him killed, he described Jesus as being the “*Holy One and the Just*” (Acts 3:14).

Mark 6:20 tells us that Herod “*heard him [John] gladly*”. Regularly in the life of Jesus, we read that large crowds “*heard him gladly*” (Mark 12:37).



Repeated Rejection

Despite John the Baptist having all these qualities, the ruling Jews did not recognize him as God’s messenger, called Elijah in Malachi 4:5. Consequently, he was to suffer and be killed. Jesus told this to his disciples:

Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands (Matthew 17:12).

Despite all of Jesus’ qualities he was

not recognized as the Messiah. Rejected by the leaders and most of the people alike, just like John, he was to suffer and be killed.

Loved Alike

Both John and Jesus had disciples who loved them and whose love towards them continued after they had died. We read after the death of John:

When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:29).

Similarly, when Jesus had been crucified and was pronounced dead:

[Joseph of Arimathaea] bought fine linen, took him down, and wrapped him in the linen. And he laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb (Mark 15:46).

John the Baptist was not the Christ, nor did he try to be (John 1:20). Like John we should humbly accept that Jesus will always be above us. Although we cannot attain to his perfect standards, we are asked to try to copy him to the best of our abilities.

However, John’s excellent example shows that we can be like our teacher in word and deed. Like John, through the grace of God we can look forward to becoming like our teacher, raised from the dead and given immortality.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:5).

Stephen Blake

Bible History – Making a Time Chart

One wonderful way to learn more from the details of the men and women in the Bible is to understand a little of the dates and times in which they lived. This helps us better appreciate the context of Bible events, and how they link together.

A simple way to do this is to construct a time chart for ourselves. There are several very good ones available in book shops and on the internet, but the activity of making our own really helps to cement the facts in our minds. What is more, we can add to it as we continue our Bible study.

The dates used here are rounded up or down to give whole numbers, and the Bible references show where the person is introduced. The time chart to the right has been completed following the steps below, and is colour-coded to help build it step by step.

Step 1: 2000–year Sections

Start with periods of 2000 years, beginning at 4000 BC and going through to 2000 AD.

Begin with Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27, 2:22), placing them about 4000 years before Jesus. Then measure 2000 years on from that first pair, and we arrive at 2000 BC. As we move forwards through the years *before* Christ, so the numbers decrease.

2000 BC gives us the time of Abraham (Genesis 11:27). He was the founder of the Jewish nation, and the rest of the Bible relates God's dealing with the Jews, from Abraham onwards.

Moving 2000 years after Abraham brings us to the time of Jesus, and we note that there is no year '0' on history, we would go from 1 BC to AD 1. Just over 2000 years after Jesus brings us to our own day.

Step 2: 1000–year Periods

Now divide each of these time periods into half, giving 1000–year gaps.

Half way between Adam and Abraham is 3000 BC, and it was about then that Noah was born (Genesis 5:29).

Mid-way from Abraham to Jesus, King David ruled over Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). He was a godly man who wrote many of the Psalms and lived in about 1000 BC.

Half way between Jesus and our time is about AD 1066, a date noted in Britain for the Battle of Hastings. As the New Testament was completed within around a hundred years of the birth of Jesus, AD 1066 does not of course feature in the Bible.

Step 3: 500–year Groups

Finally, we have to split these periods of 1000 years into 500–year groups.

Approximately 500 years before Abraham, Noah built the ark and was saved from the Flood. It is possible to add up the years in Genesis 5, where we find that the more accurate date is about 400 years before Abraham.

Half way between Abraham and David, Moses lived (Exodus 2:10). He

led the Israelites out of Egypt, and received the Law from God, which he wrote down and passed on to the people.

Then in the final segment 500 years after David, Zedekiah the last king of the southern part of Israel was taken captive into Babylon (2 Kings 25:1).

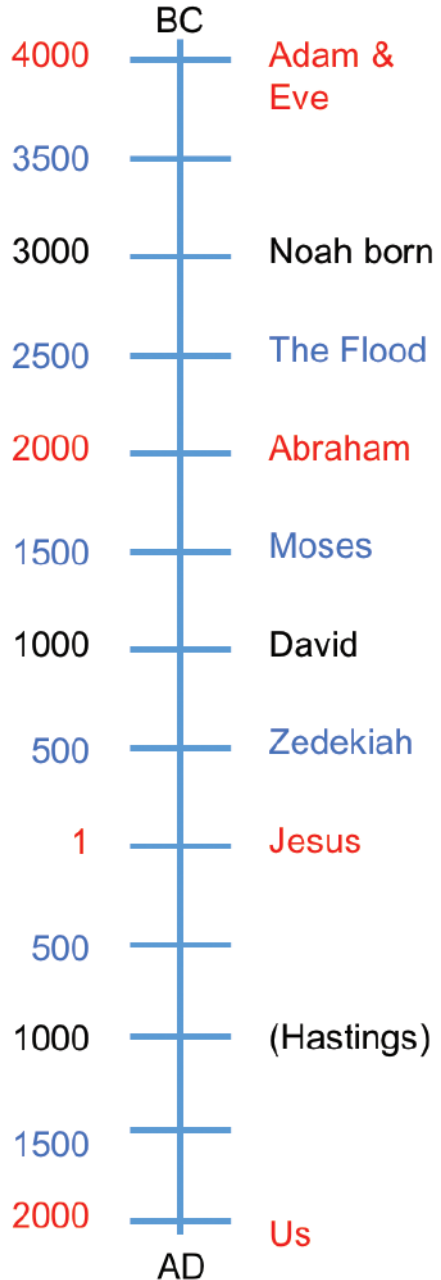
Before the Flood

To avoid confusion, it is worthwhile to note the ages of people living before the Flood. If you look at the information given in Genesis 5, you will see that people lived for much longer before the Flood than after it. This is possibly explained by there being a canopy of water surrounding the earth (Genesis 1:6–8), which filtered out many of the sun’s harmful rays. During the Flood, this water would have fallen to the earth (Genesis 7:11), so reducing the protective layer and the length of people’s lives.

Using the Time Chart

It can be interesting to keep adding to our time chart as we read our Bibles. If you plan to do this, it will be worthwhile having a larger version on a larger piece of paper, or using a notebook with each time period starting on a new page. For those with a computer, a spreadsheet is a good way to do this.

It is very useful to have a chart such as this to hand whenever we think about Bible characters. It helps us to better imagine the times in which they lived and the order in which their stories took place. Looking at the Bible in this way also reminds us that these were real people, living real lives, with a part in God’s plan. Just as we can be!



David Simpson

Learning from the Pharisees

Jesus had many followers and admirers, but he also upset a lot of people and made dangerous enemies. It's surprising to see where his opposition came from.

Interestingly, as far as we know Jesus never said a word against the harsh Roman overlords of first-century Israel; and he seems to have taken no particular interest in Herod, the depraved puppet king in Galilee. He did however strongly rebuke the chief priests in Jerusalem, as they were a corrupt, self-serving elite who ran the temple for their own profit and ruthlessly exploited the common people.

There was one particular group of people who seem to have been Jesus' main opponents throughout his ministry. They constantly criticized and provoked him. It's clear from his fierce condemnation that he saw them as his most dangerous detractors. These were the scribes and Pharisees.

Good, Upright People!

Who were the scribes and Pharisees, and what was it that made them such relentless enemies of the Lord Jesus?

- ❖ **Scribe** is the English translation of a Greek word meaning 'student of the scriptures' (referring to the Old Testament). Their occupation was writing out copies of the scriptures, and teaching people what they said. Scribes were studious men, widely respected for their knowledge, and often addressed as 'teacher'. They served as judges in legal cases, and so were also known as 'lawyers'.

- ❖ **Pharisee** means 'separated one'. The Pharisees were a group who grew out of a Jewish independence movement around 150 years previously. They were highly religious people, who insisted on strict observance of religious laws. The Pharisees were the moral leaders of their communities.

The scribes and Pharisees were the upright, peace-loving, clean-living, God-fearing, respectable pillars of society in Jesus' day. It's interesting, and worrying, to see that it was these people who opposed Jesus most aggressively. When we consider some of the things the Lord said about them, we can learn a great deal.

Ruled by Rules

The scribes and Pharisees loved to make rules. In the book of Exodus God gave a law to Israel, but this group had embellished God's law with a whole lot



of extra traditions of their own. Sometimes they used obedience to their own complicated rules as a way of side-stepping obedience to God's law! The human heart is very devious.

Mark 7:1-13 relates an occasion when Jesus fell foul of one of their

rules by not washing his hands before eating. The scribes and Pharisees were indignant. But he reminded them that God's law was more important than their own laws, and he quoted the prophet Isaiah:

This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7).

Rules and traditions can be useful: they provide order and structure in daily life, and they ensure good behaviour. The same is true for rules concerning our service to God. But the example of the scribes and Pharisees shows how they can be dangerous:

- ❖ There's always the possibility that our rules or traditions conflict with the Bible. Never be afraid to review them in the light of Bible teaching.
- ❖ However good the rules are, if our religion is just about obeying rules it enables us to tick them off and then sit back thinking we have earned God's approval. That is completely the wrong attitude.

What God wants is that we understand Him, and try to be like Him. This is much more than following rules. As another prophet, Micah, said:

He has shown you, O man, what is good: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Self-righteousness

You can read in Mark 2:15–17 about an occasion when Jesus and his disci-

ples were invited to a meal, and they were joined by many 'tax collectors and sinners' – the kind of people that a respectable person would not want to socialise with. The local scribes and Pharisees were scandalised. But Jesus said to them:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Jesus preached God's message of forgiveness and salvation to anyone who would listen, and the Bible shows that it was often the 'sinners' who responded best.

Fundamental to the Gospel is the call to repentance (that is, turning away from our sins). Those who are aware of their need of forgiveness will appreciate this – but it is meaningless to those who have a high opinion of their own righteousness. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans puts it like this:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23–4).

Hypocrisy

In the week before the Passover when he would die, Jesus was teaching in the temple at Jerusalem. His enemies attacked him on every side, trying to trip him up in his words, but they failed. Matthew 22 ends with the comment:

And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question him anymore (verse 46).

The whole of the next chapter, Matthew 23, is devoted to a warning about adopting the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus sums it up in one word – ‘hypocrisy’.



A hypocrite was an actor in a Greek play. The actor often wore a mask in front of his face to portray the character he was playing. Jesus uses this word about the scribes and Pharisees, because they were people who presented to the outside world a false appearance. Today we might call them ‘two-faced’.

They say, and do not do (Matthew 23:3).

They were good at telling other people how they should live their lives, but secretly behaved very differently:

All their works they do to be seen by men (verse 5).

They loved to appear righteous, to be admired by other people, but it was only skin-deep. They were concerned about what other people thought of them, not about how God saw them.

It’s easy enough to put on a good show, and we may well fool other people, but we cannot fool God.

The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

The Warning

During his ministry, the Lord Jesus preached the message of the Gospel to anyone who would listen. There are wonderful accounts of how his message reached the hearts of the most unlikely people.

However, there was this one group who were largely resistant to his teaching, and we’re given a lot of detail about his analysis of their problem. Obviously there’s a reason the Bible writers provide all this detail. It is a warning to us against falling into the same trap. The scribes and Pharisees are a grotesque caricature showing what it can be like when religion goes wrong.

The apostle Paul had been a Pharisee, but when he was converted to Christianity he renounced his former life. In his letter to the Philippians he reflects on the old life he has left behind:

I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:8–9).

Chris Parkin

The World Made Perfect

The last few articles in this series have looked at Bible teaching about the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. We saw that Jesus will return to earth to be king, sitting on the throne over that kingdom.

He will judge all those who he called to serve him during their lives, and if they have died, he will raise them to life again for this judgement. Those who deliberately rejected him will themselves be rejected and have no part in the kingdom.

To those who have pleased him, Jesus will give immortal life, untouched by disease or other human frailty: they will be "*like him*" (1 John 3:2). For them, and for Jesus himself, death will be a thing of the past. Jesus said "*Because I live, you will live also*" (John 14:19). Then they will help him to rule the earth and fill it with God's glory. These are the people that the Bible calls 'saints' (for example, 1 Corinthians 1:1-2) and to whom the kingdom is promised:

But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever (Daniel 7:18).

Teaching and Guiding

However, the people over whom Jesus and his saints rule will be mortal, like you and me now. Jesus will bring just, effective government, but there is more to it than that. The saints will be guiding and teaching these mortal people in the ways of God, wherever they live throughout the world.



Jesus hints at this in some of his parables, such as in Luke 19. Here a nobleman gives money to his servants and tells them to work for him, until he returns. Reckoning with them on his arrival, we read the master's approval to one of his faithful servants:

And he said to him, "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17).

The people of the world will be learning the truths about God and His purpose. They will also be discovering that most of the things their previous leaders had told them were wrong, both in religious matters and in daily life. Jeremiah wrote about their reaction to this:

The Gentiles shall come to you from the ends of the earth and say, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things" (Jeremiah 16:19).

Malachi 4:5-6 reveals that the Jews will also need to be converted to a true understanding of God's purpose. In

particular, they will need to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, or Christ – God’s anointed king. The prophet Elijah will have a key role to play in this.

A Patient Process

The change will not be instantaneous. It is important to realize that crime, sickness, poverty and death will not disappear suddenly at the beginning of Christ’s rule. It took at least 6000 years for the world to reach its present plight, so it is not surprising that it will take 1000 years to put things right.

During this millennium, Christ’s immortal servants will have the power to keep crime and sin under control, and they will guide men and women in the right ways of God. Revelation chapter 20 tells us about the saints’ work in Christ’s kingdom:

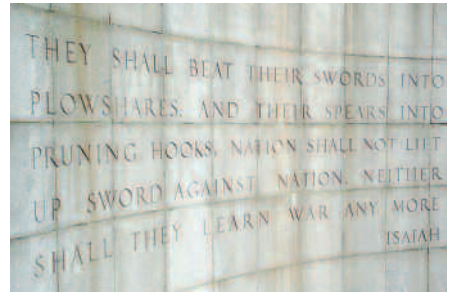
They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years (Revelation 20:4–6).

During this time, the problems of the world such as illness, war and famine will be brought under control. People will live long lives in perfect conditions.

He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; 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. But 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 4:3-4).

These words, which are also inscribed



on a wall near the United Nations, will finally come true, but only through God’s intervention.

Perfection

At the end of the thousand years, there will be one final revolt by people who reject the authority of Jesus and still want to do things their own way. This is shown in a symbolic way in Revelation 20:7–10.

Then those who chose to obey God during that millennium will be made immortal and will join Jesus Christ and his saints in sharing God’s divine, sinless nature. Death will have been abolished. Because all of this will have been achieved, God will finally be able to actually live with men and women. This wonderful situation is announced in the Revelation:

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall

be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).

This is the time when God is described as being 'all in all'. The expression comes from the apostle Paul, who gives us some insight into how this will happen:

Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

A Promise to Everyone

This perfect end-state for the world fulfils God's purpose as stated several times in the Bible:

Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord (Numbers 14:21).

Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen (Psalm 72:17-19).

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself; the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath (Isaiah 45:22-3).

Here too we see the ultimate fulfilment of those promises God made to Abraham and David. Abraham was promised that through him and his descendant (Jesus), all peoples or nationalities would be blessed:

All the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).



David was promised that his royal lineage would be unending, and that he would see it:

Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

These promises will be entirely fulfilled with men and women from all nations offered a place in the Kingdom of God. That includes you and me. We cannot earn a place in that kingdom, but are invited to be part of it through believing God's word, having faith in the work of Jesus, being baptised to show this and living as people who want to be in God's kingdom.

John Woodall

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