

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

The Brotherhood of Man (p. 3)

When Will These Things Be? (p. 5)

Children of God (p. 15)

A monthly magazine written and 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 humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

Table Of Contents

The Brotherhood of Man		3
When Will These Things Be?		5
Which Way Will You Go?		9
Crisis of Faith		10
Philippians		14
Children of God		15
Your E-mails and Letters		18
Bible Reader's Wordsearch		19

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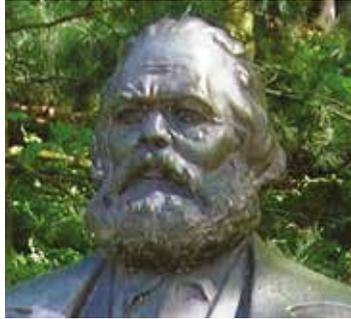
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The Brotherhood of Man

THE REVOLUTIONARY philosopher Karl Marx was one of the most influential thinkers of modern times. He had a vision of a world where everyone is equal, the rich do not exploit the poor, and we all live together in harmony. He urged the workers of the world to rise up against their rulers and establish a people's utopia.



Monument to Karl Marx in
Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic

The obvious answer (it seems to me) is that Marx and his fellow visionaries were wrong in their assessment of human nature. The evidence shows that humans are actually not capable of living together in harmony. They are not essentially good.

Human Nature

Beginning with the Russian Revolution in 1917, the ideals of Marx and those like him inspired the creation of communist states in dozens of countries. Many people believed that civilisation was on the brink of a glorious new age.

Karl Marx was an atheist. He had faith in the human spirit—he believed that given the right conditions people can build a perfect society without the need for God.

Here we are, a hundred years or so later, and we have the benefit of hindsight. Even the most ardent communist has to admit that things have not gone according to plan. A pattern has emerged. A society is formed on the principle of equality and comradeship. Its birth is usually marked by bloodshed. It is beset by corruption and strife. Within a few generations it crumbles and fails, or degenerates into a dictatorship. What is going wrong?

The Bible is, among many other things, a ruthlessly incisive historical commentary. It follows the history of humankind from its beginning, focusing on the career of the nation of Israel. One of the stamps of its authenticity is that it does not flatter its heroes. We see the fledgling nation, newly released from their slavery in Egypt, moaning and rebelling against God (for example Exodus 17). They were at last established in the Promised Land, and they had the privilege of being God's own people:

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:7–8).

But the historical books of Joshua through to Chronicles chart the nation's spiritual

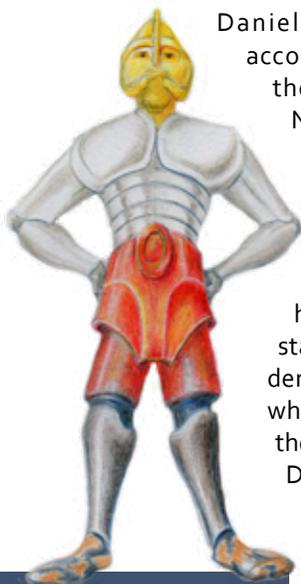
and political turmoil over the 900 years of its occupation, and its long decline until finally it was ejected from the land by the Babylonian invasion in the 6th Century BC. The prophetic books of the Old Testament are largely concerned with reprimanding the people and appealing to them to turn from their wickedness. The Bible presents to us a harsh but accurate assessment of human nature, which is summarised by the prophet Jeremiah:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9).

If Marx (who was a Jew) had paid more attention to his Bible, he would perhaps have realised that his noble vision of utopia was doomed from the start.

The Kingdom of God

On the other hand, the Bible presents the prospect of a future perfect world which is altogether more realistic. It is the Kingdom of God.



Daniel 2 contains the account of a dream of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, in which he saw his empire and the succeeding powers in the Middle East as parts of a great human statue. The statue was struck and demolished by a stone, which then grew to fill the earth. The prophet Daniel's interpretation of this was:

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever (Daniel 2:44).

Isaiah 2 contains a description of life in the Kingdom. The nations of the world will at last live together in harmony. They will be enabled to do this because they will be under the rule of God:

And many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).

This perfect world order will commence by addressing the fundamental problem—that of human nature. The Kingdom of God will be governed by people who are immortal and incorruptible (Revelation 5:9–10). Who are they? Those who have been faithful to God in this age—you and me if we want it (1 Corinthians 15:50–52). And its King, of course, will be Jesus Christ himself (Luke 1:32).

At the beginning of the 20th Century many people thought that humanity had outgrown religion, and was on the brink of a bright future of its own making. They were wrong. But God's promise remains—one day soon He will establish utopia on earth. Do you want to be there?

When Will These Things Be?

THERE WAS AN OCCASION when Jesus' disciples pointed out to him the splendid buildings of the Jerusalem temple. It was one of the wonders of the ancient world, and the Jews were immensely proud of it.



Model of the Temple at the time of Jesus
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3).

Understandably, the disciples would have been alarmed at the warning that their fabulous temple was going to be destroyed. They wanted to know more. Jesus went on to tell them. Matthew 24 is often known as the 'Olivet prophecy' (because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives).

Jesus was concerned to warn his disciples about the impending destruction of the city of Jerusalem, which we now know took place in AD70.

Notice that the disciples asked two questions:

- When is Jerusalem to be destroyed?
- What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?

Duality

In his reply Jesus is answering both these questions, and the reply is such as to interweave the events of AD70 with the events of his second coming. In other words here we are introduced to a principle that is well known to Bible Students—the principle of 'duality', when things once spoken are twice true. Firstly in a local and restricted sense and then ultimately in a universal and complete sense.

An example of the principle is Psalm 2. If you read this Psalm you will see that it is a prophecy of the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD holds them in derision. Then he will speak

to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Psalm 2:1–6).

But if you look at Acts 4:25–26, you'll see that the psalm is taken by the Apostles and applied to the opposition of the rulers to the preaching of Christ in their own time. It is an illustration of the principle of duality—Psalm 2 once spoken has (at least) two applications.

Destruction of Jerusalem

With this principle in mind, let's turn back to the Olivet prophecy. We read in v. 22, *'And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.'* Jesus is saying that unless something happens to halt the process of the catastrophe everybody will be destroyed.

In fact this was true of the beleaguered city of Jerusalem in AD70. The Roman general Vespasian was pressing the siege of the city, but he was called home to Rome to

be invested as Emperor, and the command was subsequently given to his son Titus. This resulted in a temporary relaxing of the siege, and some of its inhabitants did escape to the hills. This is now a matter of history, but the point to notice is that what was true in a local sense about the city of Jerusalem is intended to have a universal application about the second coming of Christ—that is to say the time will come again when unless something happens to halt the process again, then all humanity will be destroyed. Once true of Jerusalem—true again of the whole world.

What Jesus Christ predicted has come true in our generation. In the nuclear age we have the power to destroy the whole human race. We cannot put the clock back.

The important thing is that it is unique. We have never before had this power. Jesus said it would come and it was in reply to a question *'what will be the sign of your coming?'* So here we have one unique event which cannot be confused with



The destruction of Jerusalem, AD70

anything else nor with any other time. The power to destroy the human race—unless something happens to stop it.

Luke chapter 21 concerns the same subject: the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of Christ (for example vs. 6–7 and 20–28).

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Luke 21:24–27).

Revival of Israel

The events of AD70 were terrible and would result in a period (nearly 2000 years as it turned out) of the Jews being scattered throughout the whole world, and their capital city Jerusalem being trodden down and bereft. But notice there is a limitation placed upon this period. Jerusalem would not be in Gentile hands for ever.

The '*times of the Gentiles*' were fulfilled in 1948, when the nation of Israel was re-established in its homeland. This event was a fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy. It paved the way for what is to follow.

'*Signs in the sun and moon and stars*' and the '*roaring of the sea and the waves*' could be a description of literal phenomena associated with the 'space race' and climate

change. They could also be symbolic—in Bible language, heavenly bodies often stand for political rulers and the seas often stand for the nations.

Such things will come upon the earth that people will be '*fainting with fear*' when they consider them. Notice especially '*the powers of the heavens will be shaken*'. Again this could be symbolic of political turmoil, but it could also describe a cataclysmic event that will shake the very firmament itself. Then what happens: '*they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory*'.

These are the signs of the Lord's coming and of the end of the age. A proliferation of weapons on a scale and of a kind which could destroy the whole human race so that '*no human being would be saved*'—such as has never happened before. And the fulfilment of the times of the Gentiles, when Jerusalem is again in the hands of the Jews.



Declaration of the State of Israel, 14th May 1948



The End of This Age

Finally let us consider the vision of the prophet Zechariah, who foresaw the terrible events of the 'end of the age'. In chapter 14 he describes Jerusalem besieged once more (vs. 1–2) and brought to its knees. But this time there will be salvation: *'Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east...'* (vs. 3–4). This is none other than the second coming of Jesus Christ, in emphatic fulfilment of the prophecy of the angels who told his disciples that he would return to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:10–11).

These are momentous times. People are *'fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world'*. But the message of the Lord Jesus for his disciples was a message of encouragement: *'Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near'* (Luke 21:28).

The return of Christ will mean judgement for the world and destruction of his enemies, but it will usher in a new age of peace and justice in the Kingdom of God: *'And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one'* (Zechariah 14:9).

And those who have been faithful to Jesus Christ in this age will be the immortal rulers of that glorious age: *'You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth'* (Revelation 5:9–10).

Dennis Gillett

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Matthew 24:43–44

Questions? Comments?
We'd love to hear from you!

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Which Way Will You Go?



IF YOU WANT TO GO from A to B there are various means you can enlist to help you. You can use a map or GPS, or follow signposts. If you just trust to your sense of direction you could waste a lot of time going round in circles.

What aid do you use to guide you on the journey of life? Do you just wander from day to day without a destination in mind? Perhaps you have a destination—perhaps you have ambitions, and maybe a clear idea of how to achieve them. But sooner or later, we come to realise that all the good things in this life are short-lived. The career we've striven for has not delivered the fulfilment we imagined; pursuing the good times leaves us feeling hollow; we lose family and friends; our own health fails. We just don't know what tomorrow

will bring, let alone next week or next year. As the American statesman Benjamin Franklin memorably observed, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes."

Although we know that death is inevitable, we tend to blank it out of our minds most of the time. It only becomes a reality when we lose a loved one or we ourselves become very ill. Then we start to ask ourselves "Is this the end, or is there life after death?"

Wouldn't it be good if there was a reliable guide to life? A guide that told us what life is about, where we should be going, and how to get there. Well of course there is—it is the Bible.

"But the Bible is a very big book," you say, "where do I start?" Here is a suggestion:

the origin of our mortality is explained in **Genesis 3**

the prospect of eternal life is detailed in **1 Corinthians 15**

Romans 6 describes how we get on to the right route—by belief, repentance and baptism.

So why not start by reading these three chapters? They show that we have a choice: we can try to find our own way in life, or we can follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The one way leads to death, and the other to eternal life. Which way will you go?

Marion Buckler

Crisis of Faith

BY THE COASTAL ROAD, the distance from the border of Egypt to the frontier of Israel is under 200 miles. At a modest pace of 10 miles a day, it could be walked in three weeks. But the journey to the Promised Land took the people of Israel over 40 years. The reason for this extraordinary delay is at once depressing and instructive. This is how it came about.

Some time after they received the Law from God at Mount Sinai, the Israelites set off northwards through the Sinai Peninsula. They arrived eventually at Kadesh Barnea, an oasis in the desert not far from the boundary of Canaan. After a lifetime of burden-bearing in Egypt, the people were looking forward to the farms and villages they had been promised. The snag was,

they had no experience of warfare, and the Canaanites were likely to resist bitterly any attempts to evict them.

Reconnaissance

After some discussion, the leaders gathered together to Moses. They suggested he should send out a party of scouts to survey the country, make notes of the disposition of the enemy cities and forces, and return with a full report. God endorsed the plan, and Moses set up a twelve-man group, with a top-level representative from each tribe. 'See what the land is', he instructed them, 'and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad' (Numbers 13:18-19).



For six weeks the people camped patiently at Kadesh, waiting for the spies to come back. The reconnaissance party headed up the coastal plain to the extreme north of the country near Mount Hermon. They then swung down through the central highlands to Hebron, the burial place of their ancestor Abraham. From an

Mount Hermon



Mediterranean climate, but the hilly interior is cool in winter, with occasional snow. The Jordan valley to the east drops rapidly below sea level to a giant rift, green with steamy jungle. To the north, the majestic snow-covered Mount Hermon rises to 2750 metres (9000 feet), towering above the foothills of Lebanon.

unsuspecting Canaanite farmstead they helped themselves to figs, pomegranates and grapes, to bring back as samples of the produce you could grow there. It included a single bunch of grapes so heavy that two men had to carry it on a pole slung between them. Weary and full of their adventure, they returned to Kadesh, where the people gathered excitedly round to hear what they had to say.

In those days, the land of Canaan was extremely fertile. Thick forests covered the hills which formed the backbone of the country. Traces of these survive today only in Galilee. Westwards towards the Mediterranean Sea the sloping plains grew golden corn. Terraces of vines clothed the hillsides, and northwards in the well-watered area of Galilee were figs, olives and pomegranates. Only to the south, beyond the prairies of the Negev, lay the hostile deserts of the triangular Sinai Peninsula. Palestine is a country of contrasts. The western sea coast has a typical

The whole country is so small you can span north to south, or east to west, in a few hours' driving, revelling in its beauty. In those times, before the centuries of neglect it has suffered, it was indeed '*a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey*' (Deuteronomy 8:8).

A Bad Report

When the scouts reported back, the tribes were impressed with their mouth-watering descriptions. Their doubts came when the spies reviewed the military strength of the Canaanites. Strong, walled cities abounded in which the inhabitants could take refuge. '*The people who dwell in the land are strong*', they declared. '*All the people that we saw in it are of great height*' (Numbers 13:28, 32). So difficult did they rate the task of conquering the land, that the hearts of the Israelites sank. Wild rumours spread through the camp. Next morning a vast, noisy concourse gathered

round Moses' headquarters. Bitterly they reproached him for his folly in attempting an impossible task. *'Would that we had died in this wilderness!'* they moaned. *'Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?'* (Numbers 14:2-3).

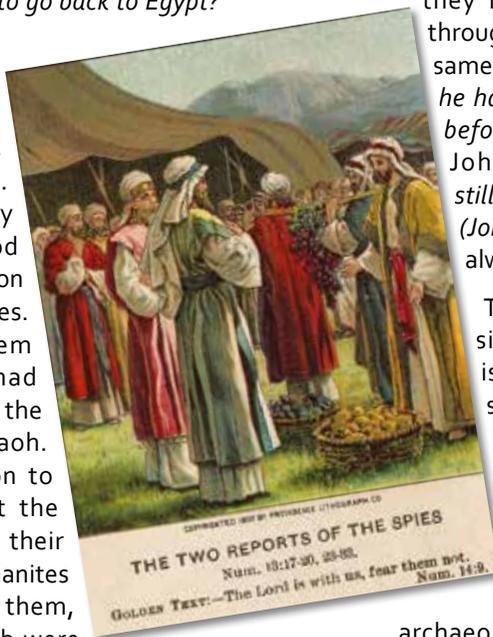
In this emergency two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, stood up for Moses. They pointed out, very reasonably, that God was their secret weapon against the Canaanites. He had not let them down so far. He had delivered them from the great army of Pharaoh. There was no reason to fear, they said. But the other ten spies gave their opinion that the Canaanites were too strong for them, and Joshua and Caleb were shouted down.

It was an ugly situation. At that moment, a burning fire shone out from the Tabernacle, and the angel of the Lord summoned Moses to his presence. *'How long will this people despise me?'* came the message. *'And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?'* (v. 11). God was very angry.

Crisis of Faith

How would you have voted, standing in that crowd before Moses' tent? Would you have had the faith to believe that God really could conquer all your enemies?

We frequently hear people saying they would like to believe in God, but they need more evidence. Depressingly, those Israelites had seen tremendous miracles, yet they still lacked the faith they needed to see them through the crisis. It was the same in Jesus' day. *'Though he had done so many signs before them'*, the apostle John concluded, *'they still did not believe in him'* (John 12:37). Seeing is not always believing.



There are plenty of signs today that God is active in the world, should we want to have faith. The return of the Jews to their land, the gathering political storm in the Middle East, the discoveries of archaeologists in Bible lands, all confirm what the Bible has been saying all along. The problem lies in our hard, self-centred human hearts. *'Do not harden your hearts'*, pleaded David the Psalmist, *'as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work'* (Psalm 95:8-9). David wrote hundreds of years after the Exodus, yet he warned his generation that they could make the same mistake as their forefathers. The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews quotes David's psalm, with the same warning a thousand years later (Hebrews 4:11). Faith is not an instant response to a miracle. It

starts in a pliable, humble heart. It grows from reading God's word and learning about His faithfulness, mercy and love. It is perfected by experience of His unseen hand. It ends as a dynamic conviction that God lives, that He cares about our lives, and that He can carry us safely to His Kingdom.

What happened to those rebels in the wilderness? God's patience had expired. *'Your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in,'* He said, *'and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness'* (Numbers 14:31–32). For the next 40 years the Israelites lived as nomads in tents, until the grown men who left Egypt had died out. Their children survived.

Two Faithful Men

There were exceptions. Joshua and Caleb, the brave spies who opposed the majority and defended the honour of God, crossed the River Jordan and were given an inheritance in the Promised Land. It had been the journey of a lifetime for them, but their faith was rewarded.

They came back to the country they had visited as spies 40 years before, and were allowed to take their choice of a place to settle. Remarkably, while Joshua was a full-born Jew, it seems likely that Caleb was not. His full title is *'Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite'* (Numbers 32:12). The Kenizzites were a tribe inhabiting the land of Canaan before the time of Abraham (Genesis 15:19). Possibly Caleb's father had married into the house of Israel and become an adopted Israelite. His name, in Hebrew, means 'a dog'—an expression Jews used to describe a Gentile (non-Jew).



If this deduction is correct, we have a wonderful lesson from the faith of these two men. Joshua the Jew and Caleb the Gentile both believed in God and both received the promise. It is an early illustration of the principle

that God is not concerned with race, or sex, or status, but with our hearts. *'The scripture,'* writes Paul, *'foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith'* (Galatians 3:8–9).

David M Pearce

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God... For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”

Hebrews 3:12–19

Philippians



PHILIPPI WAS A prosperous Roman colony in Thracia, at the northern end of the Aegean Sea. Here, the first congregation in Europe was established during Paul's second missionary journey. Contrasting with the idea of a colony of Rome, the congregation of believers is seen as a 'colony of heaven', whose members are citizens of a heavenly kingdom (3:20).

Paul's visit to Philippi and the establishment of the congregation there is related in Acts 16. He was imprisoned by the authorities. As he writes this letter he is in prison again, in Rome. Yet he rejoices that his imprisonment has worked out 'to advance the gospel' (*Philippians 1:12–18*)—he has been able to preach to his guards.

Unity in Christ

Paul urges his readers to be '*standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*' (1:27). If they are united in fellowship they will be concerned for each other's needs, imitating the example of Christ (2:1–5).

Though he was the Son of God, Jesus behaved as a servant and was '*obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*' (v. 8). As a result, '*God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*' (vs. 9–10).

Paul looks forward to the resurrection of the dead, which has been made possible by Christ's sacrifice (3:10–12).

The Philippians are to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and of the apostles (2:22, 29; 3:17) and be examples to others (4:5). In a city where poverty and riches exist side by side, the letter reminds believers of the true riches of the Gospel (4:19).

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

Norman Owen

By kind permission of 'The Christadelphian'



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ Philippians 2:9—see Acts 2:33; Hebrews 2:9.
- ◆ Philippians 3:14—see 2 Timothy 4:7–8.
- ◆ Philippians 3:20—see Acts 1:11, 3:20–21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Children of God



BEFORE THE LORD Jesus Christ came on the scene, the Jews did not refer to themselves as children of God. Rather they referred to themselves as children of Abraham. Abraham was their ancestor, whose life is recounted in Genesis chapters 12 to 25. It was Jesus who started teaching that true believers in *'the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ'* (Acts 8:12) are children of God.

The Lord Jesus was the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary by means of God's Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). All who confess their faith in the Son of God and are baptised in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:29) become adopted children of the Father. As the apostle Paul tells us:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the

spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... (Romans 8:14–17).

There was an occasion when Jesus' disciples asked him who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. *'And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"' (Matthew 18:3–4).*

The Attitude of Children

This must have been a memorable lesson for the disciples. Jesus said they had to turn from their current attitude and change their thinking, and accept that they were fully dependent upon God, just as little children depend on and trust their parents.

This humble attitude towards God must pervade every aspect of the believer's life—including their attitude to God's word, the Bible.

Just as a child accepts what their parent says unquestioningly, so the believer must accept what their Father says. This includes the difficult things. For example when we see miracles such as the sun and moon standing still (Joshua 10:12), or Jesus

raising the dead (Matthew 9:25, Luke 5:41, John 11).

Blessings of Keeping God's Word

Jesus said 'Blessed... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!' (Luke 11:28). He meant the word of God in its entirety, of course.

In Luke 9:27–36 is the account of the 'transfiguration', when Peter, James and John witnessed Christ in glory talking with Moses and Elijah.



Recalling the occasion later, Peter wrote:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased", we ourselves

heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:16–21).

Faith is one of the most important characteristics that God requires of believers, and it was the Jews' ancestor Abraham who perhaps demonstrated this best. God asked him to leave his home country and journey to a land He would show him, and promised that he and his descendants would inherit it (Genesis 12:1–3, 13:15). Abraham obeyed, but during his lifetime he did not receive what God had promised.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:8–10).

Hebrews 11 is all about faith. It contains a great truth for all believers: 'Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him' (v. 6).

The Difficult Passages

There are parts of the Bible that are particularly disputed by scholars and critics today, and it is interesting to note that in his teaching Jesus effectively endorsed most of them.



He spoke about Adam and Eve as historical figures (Mark 10:6), he spoke of the Genesis Flood as a historical fact (Matthew 24:37–39), and Sodom and Gomorrah as real places (Matthew 10:15; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12). He expected his followers to have the humility of children, and accept his teachings as the truth. This is part of being children of God, as the Apostle Paul said:

'Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Ephesians 5:1–2).

As well as Old Testament events such as we see in Genesis, there are some parts of the New Testament that can be difficult to understand. The Apostle Peter admitted that some of Paul's letters were not easy.

'There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures' (2 Peter 3:16). But they are still the inspired word of God.

When we accept the Bible as the word of God, and approach it with humility, we will appreciate it for what it is—God's message of salvation. *'For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Romans 15:4).*

Grahame A Cooper

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Isaiah 57:15

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HS *Why should we surrender to an oppressive government?*

Ed HERE ARE five Bible principles to consider:

1. God is directing world affairs towards His ultimate purpose, and all governments are put in place by Him (Daniel 4:17). This means good governments, and also bad governments—which is admittedly not an easy principle to accept. But here’s an example: the Nazi government in Germany in the 1930s was an abhorrent regime which committed many atrocities. But with hindsight we can see that the Nazis had a part in God’s plan, because their persecution of European Jews provided impetus for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, in fulfilment of Bible prophecy (for example Ezekiel 37). Hitler was a monster, but God allowed him to do what he did. So the first point is that any government is there because God is using it.
2. Followers of Christ must obey the government of the country where they live. This is emphatically explained in Romans 13:1–7. *‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities’* (v. 1). You might suggest that it’s easy to obey a benign government, but it’s not so easy to obey a bad government. So when he wrote Romans 13 was

Paul just thinking about good governments? No—the government in his day was the Roman empire. It was corrupt, cruel and violent. The Romans crucified Jesus. They persecuted the Christians and they often mistreated Paul. But Paul said we must honour and obey the government. (The only time when Christians should disobey the government is when it tells them to do things that are contrary to God’s will. When this happens, God’s will takes priority—Acts 4:19–20.)

3. Followers of Christ should not resist evil (Matthew 5:38–42). This is very difficult teaching, because it seems natural to us to fight back. Jesus said we must not fight back. He set an example of how to live: when he was tortured and crucified he did not resist (1 Peter 2:23).
4. We should leave judgement to God (Romans 12:17–21). God sees everything and knows everything. He will deal with perpetrators of oppression and atrocity when the time is right.
5. The only real solution to the problem of oppressive governments is the return of Christ to set up his kingdom. That will be a government that brings justice and peace to the whole world (Psalm 72). The most effective thing we can do is to pray for Christ to return (Matthew 6:10).

The Olivet Prophecy

THE OLIVET prophecy concerns the return of Jesus and the end of the age. It is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. These accounts are totally consistent, but vary slightly in the details given.

The grid contains eleven words which are relevant to the account in Matthew 24.

Ten of the words are listed below. Of these ten words, three are not mentioned in Mark or Luke. Which are they?

The eleventh word in the grid is not in the list. It is the name of a tree, which is mentioned near the end of each of the three gospel accounts, and is used in the Bible as a symbol of Israel.

CLOUD EARTHQUAKE FAMINE PERSECUTION MOON
LIGHTNING SUN TRUMPET VULTURES WAR

E	N	I	M	A	F	V	C	L	N	T
K	K	N	C	M	L	I	O	N	O	R
G	U	A	T	L	Q	Z	W	S	I	U
S	N	T	U	M	O	O	N	S	T	M
I	W	I	E	Q	V	U	E	H	U	P
S	L	U	N	H	H	R	D	L	C	E
W	Q	B	Y	T	U	T	X	Q	E	T
L	S	L	H	T	H	I	R	V	S	F
A	B	W	L	L	H	G	Z	A	R	R
L	A	U	R	S	X	S	I	Y	E	Z
R	V	G	I	F	D	P	Q	L	P	C

(The answers are on the back page.)

Anna Hart

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Wordsearch answers: LIGHTNING, TRUMPET, CULTURES, FIG