

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1479



Fact or Fiction? – page 3

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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

123rd Year

H07

1479

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage 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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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association (a registered charity) number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained from either the Distribution Secretaries or from the local agents or information addresses given above.

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Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Cover and Page 3
Llandoverly Market Hall
Ken Anderton

Illustrations:

Clipart.com pgs 11-19; Todd Bolen pg 10

Bible Versions

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

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Fact or Fiction?

Whoever said “The camera doesn’t lie” knew very little about photography. It has always been the case that some manipulation was possible, either when the photograph was being taken or during the printing of the image. Now that possibility has become available to everyone, thanks to digital photography and software manipulation.

When taken, the photograph might have been dull; but it can be brightened without difficulty. There may have been elements in the picture which spoil the composition; but they can be removed. It’s even possible to add people in who weren’t there at all.

It’s not the camera that lies, of course, but the person who is manipulating the image. The end result, however, is the same – what you see may not be what was really there, on the day!

The Imaginary World

If you had been driving through South West Wales last year and happened across the small town of Llandovery, you might have been surprised by the artefacts outside the Market Hall, shown on this month’s front cover. They could have persuaded you that you had been transported back to an earlier century.

But a closer look would have made you think again. Notice that the people standing there are not wearing 18th or 19th century clothes; they are quite normally dressed. It was not a case of time travel: a film set was being prepared to give the impression that it was a much earlier time so that actors, in period

costume, could play their part in a dramatic re-enactment.

Looking at the eventual production, the film-goer is meant to identify with the action of the piece and to become absorbed in the drama. The minute he or she starts to question the authenticity or credibility of the work, perhaps because some things are inappropriate, or details like electric wiring or television aerials are spotted, the production has failed.

Make-Believe

People go to great lengths nowadays to create illusions which are believable. The arrival of digital imagery means that actors who perform against a neutral background, with nothing at all happening around them, will eventually be depicted flying through the air, fighting with monsters, or doing the most extraordinary things. Ordinary people can thus be portrayed as super-heroes, or be involved in death-defying stunts, although they never strayed from the safety of the film set. And the people who watch the final production are likely to be convinced that they did all those things and that they were really there – in mortal combat, or whatever.



The result of all this is that the border line has become blurred between reality and make-believe. People can believe in magic, but not in miracles. They can be persuaded that a young magician can fly about on a broomstick, but not that the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven with no mechanical assistance. They may be horrified by the thought that the monster Frankenstein came back to life again, but cannot believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, having conquered death.

Only Yards Away

The Bible is a factual and historical account of special things that happened many years ago. There were no film sets then; no image manipulation; no digital photography. People wrote down what had happened and talked about it, over and over again: that was the nature of society in those days, before newspapers and magazines.

Visitors to Jerusalem who were told that Jesus had risen from the dead were being told about it just weeks after the events had taken place. And it wasn't being written down by someone who wanted to compose a good story. It was being related by people who had everything to lose, including their lives.

The apostles who told the crowds what had happened were only yards away from where it had happened. They were eye-witnesses who could be questioned and there was ample opportunity to check out the facts. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is presented as something that really happened and that was a vital reality. This is what one apostle wrote:

"If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain.

Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:14-17).

Unbelief to Faith

Thousands of those who heard the testimony became baptised believers, even though this put them in difficulties with the Jewish establishment. They would not have done that if they thought that it was all make-believe.

The very witnesses themselves had taken a while to believe what had happened. At first they thought Jesus was dead and gone. They could not believe that he was risen from the dead. Even when people began to say that it had happened, and that they had seen him, they *could not* believe. They had to be persuaded by the unshakeable facts. But once they had decided there was no going back: then they were ready to suffer and die rather than deny what had happened. Theirs was an unshakeable conviction that Jesus is alive and well, now living in heaven, and that he will return to earth to establish God's Kingdom.

That conviction is the heart of the Christian message. Jesus died to save people from their sins so that they can live with him on earth in God's Kingdom. That message is grounded in fact. It is not a myth, nor is it make-believe. The Bible gives firm and logical reasons why we should believe in the supernatural and it urges us to be ready for the great changes that are about to take place.

Editor

The Bible Saves a Language

Four hundred years ago, in 1588, the Welsh Bible did more than simply make the Word of God available to the people of Wales. It also effectively preserved the Welsh language, which might otherwise have fallen into disuse. In this article, Alan Fowler explains how the Welsh Bible came to be translated, and argues that the Word of God can do more than save a language: it can save you too!

Abolition Threat

King Henry VII was a Tudor monarch, who also happened to be a Welshman. In the interests of unifying England and Wales into one kingdom, he decided upon the eventual abolition of the Welsh language. This policy was continued by his son, Henry VIII, who passed the Act of Union in 1536. His break with Rome in the same year, which led to the establishment of the Anglican Church, did not change his basic attitude to the appropriate language for worship. Like England, Wales continued to be dominated by a Latin-speaking church.

But by now the Reformation was unstoppable: this was the movement that in Europe was leading to the translation of the Bible into everyday languages. It was an especially active force in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Richard Davies (1501-1581), who in 1530 graduated from New Inn Hall, Oxford, was a reformer and translator who was made Bishop of St. David's. He may well have been instrumental in persuading Queen Elizabeth to pass an Act in 1563 which was to check the decline of Welsh. For

it called for a Welsh translation of the Prayer Book and Bible, and required that they be placed in every church in Wales by 1st March 1566.

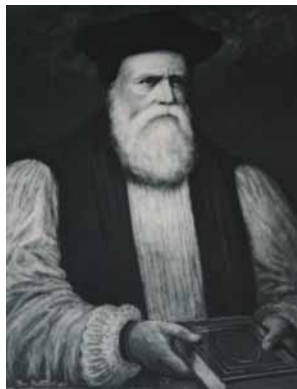
Regular readers of Glad Tidings will note that this accorded with King Henry VIII's command that an English translation be placed in each Parish in England. His decree was issued in 1538 and the resultant Great Bible appeared the following year.

New Testament

To fulfil the Act's requirements, Richard Davies enlisted the services of William Salesbury (1520-1584), a brilliant Oxford scholar and linguist, who had already published a Welsh lectionary containing the gospels and epistles. Together they published the first complete printed New Testament in Welsh, in 1567.

Unfortunately, Salesbury's New Testament was marred by his idiosyncratic alteration of Welsh words, to make them resemble their Latin equivalents. As a result the book was more suitable for scholars than for the common people.

Interestingly enough, there was a similar development in England when, in 1542, an attempt was made to



William Morgan 1545-1604

bring the Great Bible more into line with the Latin Vulgate. Fortunately the work came to nothing, otherwise we might have had such sentences as “*This is my dilect son in whom compacui*”, instead of the preferable wording “*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17).

Richard Davies and William Salesbury had planned to proceed with a Welsh translation of the Old Testament but the partnership was dissolved, so the tradition has it, because of a difference of opinion over one Hebrew word. As a result, it is said that Wales had to wait another 21 years for a complete Bible in Welsh.

William Morgan

This task was undertaken by William Morgan. He was born in 1541 and entered St. John’s College, Cambridge in 1563. William Tyndale (who first printed an English New Testament in 1525) and Miles Coverdale (who produced the first English Bible), were also educated at Cambridge, which thus continued its good tradition of close association with Bible translation.

William Morgan studied Hebrew and Greek, as well as Latin and the year after he started in Cambridge, Queen Elizabeth visited the college and made speeches in Greek and Latin. It is therefore quite likely that this visit could have inspired the young student to be the scholar who, 24 years later, would present this same Queen with the first

complete Bible in Welsh.

William Morgan graduated in 1568 and became a minister at a small town, near the coastal port of Aberystwyth. Ten years later he moved to Llanrhaedr ym Mochnant, near Oswestry, six miles from the English border. He was to stay there until he was appointed to another post, in 1595, at the request of Queen Elizabeth, and it was during the first ten years in this country village that all his energies were to be devoted to the work of translation. In these busy times, it is as well to reflect upon the benefits that have come from quiet contemplation upon the Word of God. We have to find such time ourselves, if we are to appreciate, and then apply, the teaching of God’s holy and inspired Word.

From the Original

The work of this earnest man took him back to the original languages in which



The house in Llanrhaedr ym Mochnant where most of the Welsh translation was made

the Bible was first written – Hebrew and Greek – as well as to the English translations of Tyndale and Coverdale, and the Welsh New Testament of Salesbury and Davies. It was a huge task for one man to undertake. Yet, on its success depend-

ed not only the survival of Welsh Protestantism and non-conformity, but also in all probability the survival of the Welsh as a distinct and identifiable nation. If William Morgan had not produced his translation, the Welsh language would almost certainly have

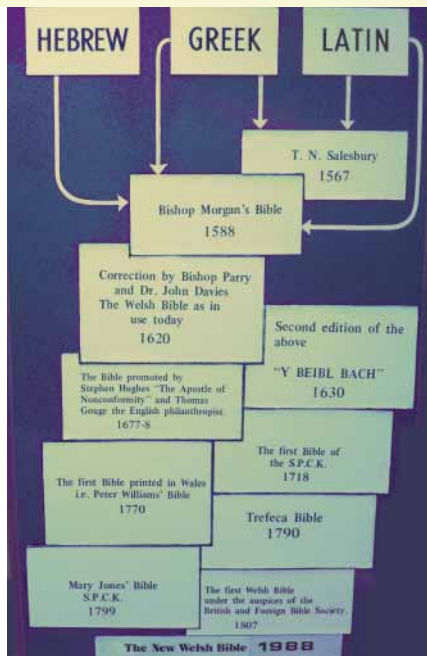
died as did Cornish and other Celtic tongues. Thanks to him Welsh remains the oldest living language in Europe.

A parallel to this can be seen in the case of the Jewish nation who, dispersed from their original land, kept Hebrew alive through their use of Biblical Hebrew. It required Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of modern Hebrew, to update the language when the Jews returned to Israel, and again it was the growing familiarity of the Welsh with the Scriptures that so embedded their language and their culture in the national mind.

A Book to Read

For William Morgan, however, the translation was solely intended for the purpose of giving his people a knowledge of the inspired Word of God. In his Dedication to the Queen he wrote, *“Unless religion is taught in the common tongue it will remain hidden and unknown”*.

His work made it possible for the people of Wales to follow the example of the people of Berea who *“searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11)*. Similar work, done by other translators, now makes it possible for us all to share this benefit. We too can read God’s Word in our native language. But do we really appreciate what a blessing that is?



In 1587 William Morgan set out on horseback carrying his precious manuscript. London was 200 miles away, but it was the only place where the Bible could be printed, even though the printer, Christopher Barker, was English. This meant that he had to remain in London in order to supervise the printing, and thus avoid errors.

All went well and in the following year, 1588, William Morgan presented a copy of his Bible to Queen Elizabeth.

When he died, in 1604, he was still a poor man, but he bequeathed incalculable riches to the Welsh nation. So, dear reader, when you examine Bishop Morgan’s Bible, or any other early translation, remember that these were written so that men and women could read and understand the Word of the living God. The Bible is a living book with a message for today; we neglect it at our peril.

The 400th anniversary of Bishop Morgan’s Bible was celebrated in 1988 and that of the Great Bible in 1989. But think what William Morgan would have said if he had been asked what celebration he thought appropriate. It would probably have been something like this:

“For the sake of your eternal salvation don’t just look at the Bible – read it!”

Alan Fowler

How Precious is your Bible to You?

A person bursts through a door shouting, very loudly and excitedly, that he's just discovered the Word of God! Just imagine it. Would you be excited?

But why would you be? Today, Bibles are not rare at all – six billion copies have been sold worldwide: more than 100 million last year alone! It even tops the best-seller list every year! Not only are there teeming millions of Bibles circulating around the world, but just think of how many you might have in your own house.

So, going back to the original question, surely it would be hard for any of us to feel too excited. It's not really a discovery, is it? We know that most people, in most countries, could get a Bible very quickly, today. Surely there's nothing special about this. Yet, if you first thought this, you might be surprised to hear that this story is not fictional at all, but actually based upon a true event. In fact, it's something that happened during biblical times, a long time ago.

King Josiah

During the time of the prophet Jeremiah – a very famous prophet of God – Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law, and gave it to Shaphan the scribe who, in turn, brought it before the King of Judah. At the time his

name was King Josiah (see 2 Kings Chapter 22). Imagine what it must have been like for the young king to hear the Word of God being read to him for the very first time.

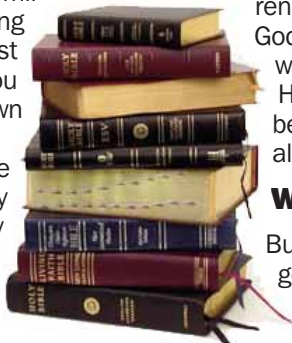
On hearing this Law – probably what we now call the “Book of Deuteronomy” – the king was moved with such emotion that he told everyone in Judah about God's holy ways. Soon the Book was being publicly read and the king assembled all the elders of Israel to renew the covenant with the Lord God of Israel. Indeed, King Josiah was just like his grandfather, King Hezekiah, who was famed for being faithful to God. Josiah was also a truly righteous king.

Written Copies

But why had this Book of the Law gone missing? We know that during Old Testament times, the law had to be written down again, afresh, whenever a new king ascended the throne of Israel. We read from that Law that:

“It shall be, when he [the King] sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes” (Deuteronomy 17:18,19).

So clearly there should have been a copy of the Law available in the king's



palace but, for whatever reason, there wasn't one. Nonetheless, the all-important point here is that Hilkiah – the high priest – discovered a copy of God's law and was overjoyed with his new find.

So what about us? Are we excited about opening the word of God – the Bible – and reading it? Have we ever been so interested with a part of Scripture that we've spent hours studying it, even into the long hours of the night? Do we read the Bible daily, to learn more of God's plan and purpose with the earth? In actual fact, our answers here are good indicators of how much we truly love and value the Bible.

The Story of Mary Jones

Some people have been prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to possess a Bible. One particularly lovely story is that of Mary Jones (1784-1872). She was a Welsh girl who wanted a Bible more than anything. At the time it was a vain hope as money was scarce. But her desire grew and she became more determined. She started saving money so she could buy her very own copy. It took her six years of saving, but eventually she had enough to finally realise her dream.

She was sixteen years of age and needed to walk to Bala, over 25 miles away, through the Welsh mountains. Excited, Mary set off and finally reached the home of Thomas Charles, only to be told he had no more Bibles for sale! Heartbroken, she began to weep. But all was not lost. Her despair touched Mr. Charles and he found her

a spare Bible that she could take home.

More importantly, Mr. Charles was so impressed with Mary's love of the Bible, and her determination to save for and purchase one (at whatever cost!), that just four years later (in 1804), he helped to establish the British and Foreign Bible Society in London. This was a remarkable moment, for the main aim of the organization was to circulate the Bible to people just like Mary Jones – those who were desperate to read it for themselves. And the Society has since produced texts in 700 languages and dialects! It has also managed to distribute over 550 million copies of the Bible around the world!

So, the wonderful character and disposition of this young girl has had a lasting effect upon the whole world. But would we have been just like her?

Would we have been driven to such efforts? Would we have placed such a high value on possessing a Bible and reading it for ourselves? How much would we be prepared to pay?

What's it Worth?

Another way – albeit a very crude one – of looking at what the Bible means to us is to calculate how much a copy in days gone by would be worth today. It's been said that a skilled writer would take about 10 months to copy the Bible by hand. So, as a basic calculation, if we assume that a scribe was paid the minimum wage of today (£5.35 an hour in the UK), and that he



worked for 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, and for 10 months, then this would come out at roughly £9,000 for a Bible! And in making this calculation we haven't even included the cost of the materials used (paper, ink, glue, gilding, etc), just the cost of the labour!



It's also probably unreasonable to assume that a highly skilled scribe would be on a minimum wage, since their skills would have been rare and greatly in demand. So, for argument's sake, let's say that the scribe was paid £30 an hour (comparable to a highly skilled worker today). Using the same assumptions as before (except for the new higher wage), a written Bible gets closer to costing us £50,000 – or, for comparison, the cost of two luxury cars!

Obviously such a huge sum of money would, sadly, put Bible ownership out of reach for the vast majority of normal people. Very few people would be able to afford such a steep price tag! What a sorry picture this would be.

Privileged people

It's impossible to estimate the real financial value of the Bible because it's absolutely priceless! You simply can't put a value to it! For in it we have a revelation of the Creator's plan and purpose with the earth and mankind, besides the only means of salvation. Without our Bibles we wouldn't know anything about the Lord Jesus Christ, and what he achieved on our behalf.

However, this numerical illustration does highlight what an amazing bless-

ing we all have. Even as recently as a hundred years ago, books such as the Bible were still very expensive. Possessions weren't so readily available back then, and families weren't as well-off. Yet today, Bibles are owned by most

people. This is one of the great advantages of printing and publishing, as Bibles no longer have to be handwritten. They can be mass produced very quickly and cheaply, and distributed across the world. What an amazing blessing this is!

But the value of the Bible is not in its printing and binding, but in where the words have come from. They've originated from God Himself – the author of this extraordinary book! We need to read it daily, and treat it with the utmost care. And what an awesome privilege we have: to be able to listen to God – the Creator of the heavens and the earth – every day, in the reading of the Bible. But though many people own a copy, few actually read it properly – as predicted by Jesus himself when he declared, *“When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8).

So let's try to learn more of God's Word now, while we have the time and the opportunity.

Stephen Whitehouse

Bible Line



Telephone message
for UK readers
Ring 08457-660668

We Can't, but God Will

In the last issue **Andrew Walker** reviewed some of the threats that earth faces – climate change, over-exploitation of the earth's resources, the decline in other species because of the way we behave, and the challenges of nuclear weapons, terrorism and pollution. Now he examines what God is going to do to rescue the situation.

Who's to Blame?

The common factor in all the problems we now face is that they are the fault of the human race, and they are caused by human nature. We are to blame! The problem is that we tend so often to look after ourselves at the expense of others; to be aggressive and unforgiving; to live for today with not enough thought to the implications of our actions on future generations.

God placed mankind on His planet to look after it for Him, and we haven't. Instead, we have exploited the earth for our own ends and neglected to learn from the God who made us. So what lies ahead? Various reports have tried to predict the future and to foresee the results of mankind's abuse of the planet. But we have the best possible source of information – the Bible.

God's Promise

God has promised that life on earth will continue. Here is just one of those promises:

"For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the

Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).

Isaiah 45 is a chapter all about God's sovereignty. The nations surrounding the land of Israel all worshipped a myriad of gods: they made idols out of wood and stone and believed in all sorts of vain superstitions. By contrast, the Jews believed in the God of the Bible, and He used them in Isaiah's day – as he does in ours – as a proof that He is the one true God.

In verse 18 the Almighty makes an important statement about his intentions for the earth. He did not make it to be empty and deserted, devoid of life, but to be inhabited. And since Genesis chapter 1 describes God's creation of all the creatures that fill the seas, the earth and the sky, we can be sure that is how He intends it to be. Whatever mankind may do to the earth, God will ensure that it is inhabited by the creatures He made to live here.

The Earth – Man's Inheritance

This does not, by the way, give us leave to think that we can therefore carry on



exploiting the earth with no regard. The responsibility God gave mankind in the beginning is an ongoing one, and believers in the Bible should be the first to turn down the heat in their homes; to buy less and recycle more; and to use less fossil fuel. In passing, of course, these verses confirm what we already know from other Scriptures, that God's purpose with mankind lies here on earth, with people and creatures living on it, rather than in heaven.

The seasons will continue as they do now. Not only has God told us that life will be sustained, He has promised that the seasons will continue; that the earth will always provide food:

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22).

These words, spoken to Noah immediately after the flood, must have been a tremendous encouragement. God wanted Noah and his family to "be fruitful and multiply, teem on the earth and multiply in it" (Genesis 9:7), and it may be that Noah was nervous that the flood, that had just brought such devastation on the earth, would return. To us, too, they provide encouragement. Not only is the future of life on Earth secure, but we can be sure that the seasons that mark our years will continue.

Is the Future Rosy?

There are many chapters in the Bible that describe the world as it will be when the kingdom of God is established here following the Return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ. But one of them, in Isaiah chapter 35 is perhaps particularly revealing, and as it is quite short we have included it in full:

1 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;

2 it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.

4 Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

7 the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

8 And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

9 No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.



The beauty of the poetry is beguiling. Even the earth is happy and joyful, as though its inhabitants are so overcome with gladness that their feelings have spread into the sand of the desert; everywhere is clothed with beauty and peace.

The Earth Restored

We should not be carried away, however. On closer reading we see that this is a chapter describing the future; that in speaking of “*everlasting joy*” (v10) it is describing a future time when God’s Kingdom is established on the earth. But what is to happen before then? It makes grim reading. Isaiah foretells “*wilderness*”, “*dry land*” and “*desert*”. Human beings are described as “*blind*”, “*deaf*”, “*lame*” and “*mute*”; and the creatures of the earth are “*lions*” and “*jackals*”.

This is a chapter of great beauty, but it is describing the recovery of a desolate earth, of God’s gracious and necessary actions in repairing a damaged creation. He comes to save (v4), and the inhabitants of the future earth are those who have been redeemed and ransomed (vv 9-10). So we are led to understand that the Scriptures do not tell us that nothing

will ever go wrong. The message is that one day God will put right a damaged creation.

When Jesus returns

We find the same picture when we look in the New Testament, and we learn that these things are achieved by the return of the Lord Jesus. It is clear from many passages that Jesus will come back to the earth. The angels said to his disciples when he ascended into heaven:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11)

Other passages provide more detail, and confirm what Isaiah chapter 35 said: that, by the work of the Lord Jesus, God will put right the harm that has been done to His planet. And Jesus is not just coming to save the earth: he is coming to save all those men and women who are eagerly awaiting his Coming to establish God’s New Society, here on earth:

“So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to

save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28).

Jesus' second coming will not be like his ministry 2000 years ago. He will return to save those who are eagerly awaiting him. The implication is that they need saving. If they are eagerly waiting for Jesus it is because they are in need of deliverance. For there will be trouble on the earth, and not just for believers. Jesus predicted a time when the whole earth would be in trouble. Asked about "the time of the end", this is what he said:

"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 21:25-27"

So the things that are now happening in the world – the things we hear

on the news every day - are confirming what God has told us to expect.

*** An earth that is spoiled and damaged;**

*** A human population that is unable to put things to rights; but**

*** A loving Creator who has not given up on us.**

When the time is right, God will intervene in the earth, by sending His Son, the Lord Jesus, who will return to the earth with power. He will use that power to put right the harm that we, collectively and individually, have done.

In the concluding article of this series we will see, God willing, that all this is personal. It affects more than just the planet. It is something for each of us to think about

Andrew J Walker

All quotations are from the English Standard Version of the Bible

Open My Eyes

Open my eyes to the beauty around me,
Open my eyes to the works of Thy hand;
Summer and winter, the times and the seasons,
Working together, the way Thou hast planned.

Open my eyes to the Truth in Thy Scriptures:
Help me to see wondrous things in Thy law,
For Thy Word is a light penetrating the darkness
And giving me hope, so my spirit can soar.

Open my eyes to the signs all around me
That indicate clearly Christ's coming is near;
And help me to speak of Thy wonderful gospel
"The Way of Salvation," for all who will hear.

Colleen Simons



What's the World Coming To?



Looking back over the past 12 months does not give us much cause for optimism about what the future might hold. There are much the same disappointments and tragedies we have shared in the past. Promises are made, but not kept, even by the leaders of nations. Nobody seems able to halt the threat of global terrorism; the outbreaks of violence on the battlefields of the world and elsewhere; disease keeps taking its steady toll of hundreds of thousands of lives each year, and the climate keeps changing! But, as **David Nightingale** now explains, something better is coming.

Coming Kingdom

There will come a day and a year that will herald the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring in the judgements of God and to begin his reign of peace over all the Earth. Will it be this year?

Nobody knows the exact year. When he was on earth, not even the Lord Jesus knew the time of his Return (Matthew 24:36-39), for God had not revealed it to him at the time. But we are sure that the time is drawing near, for there are clear signs to that effect.

In June 1967, just forty years ago, the Israelis were fighting what came to be known as the "Six Day War". It resulted in a resounding victory over their Arab enemies and neighbours and the city of Jerusalem came back into Jewish hands for the first time in 1900 years. Many felt that, when that happened, a prophecy made by the Lord Jesus had come to pass at last. For, speaking of what happened in AD 70 to the Jewish people of his day Jesus had said:

"There will be great distress in the land and



There was once a Jewish Temple on this site

wrath upon this people [the Jews in Jerusalem]. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:23,24).

The taking of Jerusalem seemed to suggest that the times of the Gentiles had run their course. So it would seem that at the very least a vital point had been reached in the fulfilment of these words. However, what we should do is place them back into their original context and think about the fulfilment of all that Jesus said, rather than just this one sentence.

Magnificent Temple

When Jesus spoke these words, in about 30 AD, he was sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem and, in particular, its beautiful temple. What did he say to his disciples?

"As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another

that shall not be thrown down” (Luke 21:6).

So, the disciples quite naturally asked when this was to happen and what sign there would be of it being about to happen. The parallel account in Matthew adds: *“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?”* (Matthew 24:3)

Beware!

It is important to notice what Jesus said in reply. He was never guilty of avoiding answering difficult questions. The answers may not always be what we expect but every time Jesus spoke his integrity was on the line – so it had to be right! There was always someone to challenge what he said. He started with a warning:

“Take heed that you be not deceived. For many, will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them” (Luke 21:8).

Things don’t change that much. The disciples lived in a world where false Messiahs turned up regularly, making great claims, and it is the same for us. A great many people, often quite well-meaning, want us to follow their ideas, some even claiming to be “the Christ”. Put them to the test, says Jesus. This is why we should have a good understanding of who Jesus was and why we should listen to his authentic voice as it comes to us through the New Testament.

Notice that Jesus was answering several questions and, as history

shows, the events to which he referred occurred at quite different times. Because he was being asked about the Jewish nation and about the buildings of Jerusalem, they were the focus of his predications. So what did the Lord have to say about these issues?

- ① When would the stones of the temple be thrown down?
- ② What is to be the sign of his Coming and of the end of the age?

Get Out!

The answer to the first question is important for two reasons. It gives us a link with the past and it confirms for us that Jesus knows what he is talking about. For instance he said this,

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her” (Luke 21:20,21).

On the face of it this was strange advice. Shouldn’t we escape from a city before the armies surround it? In AD 70, when the Roman armies came, the siege was laid to the city. Just on the point of victory, the Romans withdrew and subsequently suffered a resounding defeat at the hands of Jewish freedom fighters.

This was the opportunity to escape, since not long afterwards the Romans returned with renewed ferocity and did destroy the city and the temple and left only small parts standing as a



memorial to their great victory.

Interesting too, the added detail Jesus gives, *“let not those who are in the country enter her”*. The general anti-Jewish feeling at the time, rife throughout Palestine (and, of course, the marauding Roman soldiery), was driving many Jews to seek for shelter in Jerusalem – not a wise move given the circumstances we have described. Jesus, in his prophecy, had the details and warnings exactly right. When he speaks about our times then surely we should take notice!

Long-Term Forecast

What about the other questions Jesus was answering? What about the 21st Century? Look again at what Jesus said after he talked about the down-treading of Jerusalem:

“There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Luke 21:25,26).

Many have suggested that these signs in sun, moon and stars should be understood literally and with so much scientific exploration and study of the heavens, together with the exploitation of satellite technology in our time that could just be true. But in the Bible these same heavenly bodies have been used to represent the family of Israel (see Genesis chapter 37, for example.) Surely Jesus is saying: *“Watch, Israel! There will be events*

there that speak of my coming”. So we should.

Watch Israel!

Recently the confidence of Israel has been shaken on two fronts. First, the grinding attrition of the Palestinian intifada, which began in 1987, has led on to the violence from within Gaza, and the daily rocket attacks now that Hamas have won control. Second, the inability of the Israeli army to obliterate the guerilla attacks from Lebanon has shown them to be susceptible to that sort of hit-and-run military engagement.

As if that were not bad enough, the Iranian president – Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – has explicitly stated that he intends that Israel be wiped from the map. Add to that the fact it is Iran’s intention to have nuclear weapons as soon as possible, and there would appear to be the real possibility of renewed conflict in the Middle East very soon! In any case what is happening in and around Israel is the sign of the coming of the Lord Jesus.

No wonder then that Jesus adds, *“on earth distress of nations with perplexity.”* There is no solution to the Jerusalem problem; the word *‘perplexity’* means *‘no way out’*. No statesman and no country have solutions to offer which will satisfy both Arab and Israeli aspirations for the land or the city. But then we could add that all the other problems facing the world – global warming, nuclear weapons, ethnic cleansing, fear of pandemics, and suchlike – are all equally insoluble, as things stand.



Rough Seas

What about the expression Jesus used: “the sea and the waves roaring”? There are two references (Psalm 65:6,7 and Isaiah 17:12) which suggest that Jesus was talking about the way in which masses of ordinary folk are mobilised across the planet to bring about change. Some would call it the working of democracy, illustrated by mass demonstrations. We have certainly seen such of late and they have had tremendous effect – bringing about the downfall of dictators and ‘regime change.’ What politician would dare to ignore the voice of the people?

No wonder people are full of fear and expectation about the things which are coming. Most of us find the future too awful to contemplate. Should world events trigger another financial crash in the stock market, for example, the consequences could be grim for everyone. But Jesus added that: “the powers of heaven will be shaken”, which suggests that he was warning about the possibility of nuclear weapons actually being used.

Better Times Ahead

Happily, Jesus’ prophecy did not end there, for he added:

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:27,28).

Remembering that the prophecy is focussed upon Jerusalem, Israel and its people, the Old Testament tells us that Jesus will return at a time of terrible crisis for them to deliver them before restoring peace and God’s rule to this troubled earth. That is a wonderful prospect to look forward to. For

Jesus was saying that we could be there to share in that ‘golden age of peace’. But the bad times have to be endured first. And we have to listen to what Jesus says!

Jerusalem was in Gentile hands until 1967 – just forty years ago. Now the situation is such that Jesus could return at any time. It is really important that we take note of what is happening and prepare ourselves for all that lies ahead. As Jesus said:

“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:32-36).

In Scripture, a generation is generally reckoned to be 40years. It was true in relation to Jesus’ words for his generation. In the years following AD 70 the Jews were literally cleared from the map of Palestine.

Could what Jesus said be true for our generation? We should not put too much stress on actual dates, but it is difficult to see how our world can go on tottering from one crisis to another. The situation is that Jesus could come at any time – the sooner the better!

David Nightingale

One minute Gospel

What is Sin?

Here are two questions to make you think about right and wrong:

- 1 When were you last selfish, failed to be kind or told a lie? Sometime today or yesterday?
- 2 Who decides what is right and what is wrong?

Most of us want a natural justice, to be fair to oneself and others. The Ten Commandments direct us to this idea and these rules set by God some thousands of years ago were summarised by the Lord Jesus as follows:



"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

What went Wrong?



When in our lives we fail to maintain that love to God and for each other, we are committing sin. Put simply, that's how our world got to be as it is. Adam and Eve failed to love God sufficiently to want to please Him. Selfishly, they ignored His instructions about the tree of the Knowledge of good and evil. Equally they did not love each other enough to prevent the disaster that followed through eating the fruit of the tree. Adam did not protect Eve from eating the fruit and she pulled Adam into her foolishness by giving him the fruit. The result was that evil entered the world (Romans 5:12) and the result was fatal – for death also came, as a direct result.

From that day to this, the selfishness in which they indulged and this lack of love has had to be challenged and fought. Fortunately God's love is greater than ours. He has directed that the voluntary sacrifice in love of the Lord Jesus' own life, in total unselfishness, will be the method by which we can gain salvation.

So here is another question for you to think about:

- 3 Is your appreciation of God's love, selflessness and care, strong enough to accept the challenge?

God offers salvation from sin and death for all those who want it enough to repent of their sin and to be baptized into the saving name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can be saved from Sin, if you really want to be.

Cynthia Miles

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A man can be compelled by legislation not to harm his fellows, even to act benevolently, but he cannot be compelled to love them. Christ, on the other hand, expects those who follow him to love both him and one another, not because he compels or induces them or because they are afraid of the consequences of disobedience; but because he has demonstrated the depth of his own love for them.

Paul Wasson



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