

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1505



Colour Blindness – page 3
The Day of the Lord – page 5
The Theory of the “Big Bang” – page 12

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

125th Year

K09

1505

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ), available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message; 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: Autumn leaves in the New Forest, Hampshire, UK .
Malcolm Adams

Illustrations:

istockphotos pgs 11,12; all others from clipart.com

Bible Versions

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

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Colour Blindness

When the Autumn colours begin and a shimmering range of browns and greens appear on the trees, people marvel at this spectacular display. At least they do if they can appreciate the minute differences that exist between one shade of brown and another. The beauty is there to be seen, but not everyone can appreciate it to the full. It depends on your visual apparatus. If you happen to be colour-blind, you won't be able to fully appreciate the beauty that other people can behold.

Inherited Problems

About 1 in 20 men are said to be colour-blind, and about 1 in 200 women. In both cases this is thought to be an inherited condition. There are several forms, the most common of which is red/green colour blindness, where different shades of red appear dull and indistinct and where greens, oranges, pale reds and browns all appear as much the same hue. The retina of the eye has colour-detecting vision cells, called cones, which are necessary to see colour properly. There are three types of cone cell, sensitive to red, blue, or green light. If one or more of these types of cells is faulty, then colour blindness results. And if you happen to be born with this deficiency there is nothing you can do about it. Sufferers just have to learn to live with it.

If that condition was the only problem passed down from our forbears, things would not be too bad at all. Sadly, it doesn't work like that. Lots of things like a weak heart, or genetic

conditions like cystic fibrosis, can be inherited. Some would-be parents are so concerned about the likelihood that they would pass on their, or their parents', conditions that they decide not to have children at all. But there is one human condition that none of us can keep to ourselves.

Human Nature

When Adam sinned by wilfully disobeying God, he began a chain of events which has passed right down the line.



He was warned what the consequences would be at the outset, but that didn't stop him. So someone who could have kept on living, died and was buried.

Through one man sin entered the world and, as a result of that, death became part of human experience (Romans 5:12). It follows that we are all mortal creatures, and have no immortal entity within us which will survive death. It would have been a strange death sentence indeed if God had said to Adam that he was going to die, but actually meant that he was going to continue living in some other form. What he actually said was:

"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

Adam passed on something else too. Death was bad enough, but even sadder is the comment about the birth

of Adam's third son, which confirms what had already happened when his first two sons were born:

"Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (Genesis 5:3).

"After his image"

Adam had been made in the image of God: with the capacity and capability to develop a nature which was like that of God, his Creator. He had that God-given potential; but instead of developing that capacity he chose instead to 'go his own way' and 'do his own thing', thinking that he knew better than God. Unfortunately his descendants have inherited that tendency, as part of the nature that Adam passed down the human chain. Like colour-blindness, we can't help being as we are. But unlike colour blindness, we can do something about it. There is a better way.

Two thousand years ago a man was born who was just like us in one respect; unlike us in another. He was the Son of God, but Scripture is emphatic in explaining that Jesus shared our nature absolutely. One writer said this about him:

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same" (Hebrews 2:14);

"... was in all points tempted as we are" (4:15);

"... in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet

he learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (5:7,8).

Jesus recovered the situation for mankind by perfectly obeying his Father and never once falling into sin. What Adam threw away, Jesus recovered and made available once again. His life was a mirror-image of what God is like, because he always acted as God wanted him to. We should never underestimate or diminish in any way the wonderful achievements of the Lord Jesus. What he accomplished was not inevitable, because of who he was. It was the result of perfect obedience and a life that was completely in tune with his Father's will. No wonder it is said of Jesus that he is the brightness of God's glory:

"and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, (he) sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).

Notice that these words were written by the very same writer who said (as we saw earlier) that Jesus had been born with our nature, shared all our temptations and our weaknesses.

Like Jesus

It's not our fault that we have been born with a nature like the one that Adam developed. It's just one of those things that happen – like colour blindness! But we can take action to improve the position. We can learn how to become like Jesus and start by identifying ourselves with him, by believing all that he has said and done and then by being baptised into his death and resurrection. That's the first step we need to take if we want to become like Jesus.

Editor

The Day of the Lord

Although the Bible has some exquisite word pictures of the peace and tranquillity of the kingdom which will be established when the Lord Jesus returns, it does not gloss over the terrible times which will face the whole world before that time.

Some Bible prophecies are quite stark and bleak in what they foretell. Zechariah was one of the three Jewish prophets who wrote after the return of the Jews from a 70 year-long exile in Babylon. He wrote many encouraging things about their resettlement but he also foretold events that are still due to happen when Jesus returns to earth to establish God's kingdom:

"Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move

toward the north and half of it toward the south" (Zechariah 14:1-4).

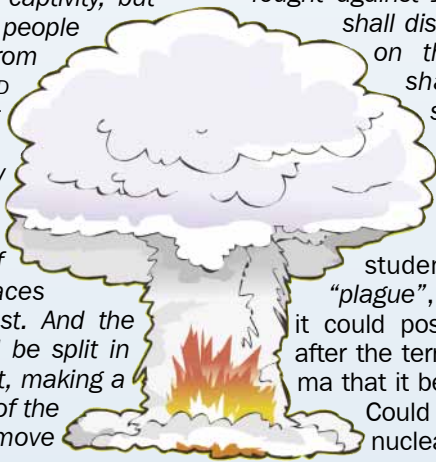
This is not a welcome message, especially for Israelis, but it clearly shows that before the Lord Jesus returns to the earth there will be a terrible conflict accompanied by the usual side-effects of war, when moral restraints break down completely. The comfort to be obtained is that the effects of war are so terrible that the LORD God intervenes to end the conflict and this intervention is dramatic in its finality.

World Remade

It is not only war that will be ended as a consequence of God's intervention. The earth will also have to be remade to some extent. Zechariah's prophecy also indicates that the warfare at Jerusalem will have brought devastating destruction:

"This shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths" (Zechariah 14:12).

For many years Bible students pondered this "plague", trying to find out what it could possibly be. It was only after the terrible events of Hiroshima that it began to seem obvious. Could this be the effects of nuclear warfare? If it is it



could also explain such Bible predictions as that by the apostle Peter:

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

We should never think that the Bible presents a wholly rosy picture without facing up squarely to the problem of the evil which is in the world. That must be removed before the Kingdom of God can be a place of beauty and tranquillity. When it comes to the removal of all forms of sin, evil and transgression, we need to remember that it is the New Testament that says:

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28,29).

God will consume all those things that do harm and are hurtful, so that the world can be the place of beauty and righteousness that He intends it to be. The return of the Lord Jesus will begin that transformation.

The Kingdom Depicted

↳By King David

Look at some of the descriptions of what the Kingdom will be like and what those who want to be there will enjoy when Jesus reigns as King and everyone acknowledges his Lordship.

“Give the king your judgments, O God, and your righteousness to the king’s

Son. He will judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice ... He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor ... In his days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more” (Psalm 72:1-7).

This is a psalm which king David wrote, possibly looking forward to the reign of his son Solomon, but it describes a time which even the glorious reign of Solomon could not ever match. Look at how it continues.

“There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth” (72:16).

This envisages a time very different even from the time of Solomon, when grain is to be found right on the tops of the mountains, a further indicator that this will be a time when there is no hunger, no starvation. Nor is this time short-lived: it lasts for ever. And how will it be received by the people who are privileged to be allowed to live in that Kingdom? You certainly catch a sense of David’s appreciation in these concluding words:

“His name shall endure forever; his name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. 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” (72:17-19).

The reign of Solomon was glorious, as witnessed by the Queen of Sheba. She travelled a vast distance to see for herself and to ask the king searching questions, because she did not believe what she had heard. But it did not last forever. After a 40 year reign Solomon died and was buried. But the kingdom about which the Psalmist David wrote is to last forever: it can only be the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

➤ **By Isaiah**

The prophet Isaiah had many visions which looked forward to the coming of the Kingdom ruled over by the Lord Jesus. Here is just one:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (65:17-19).

The prophet foretold a complete change in what we are used to: a new heavens and earth (or society), and the end of all tears, indicating that there are no causes for the sorrow which brings them. Then he continued:



“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them;

they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of my people, and my elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them” (65:20-23).

The words suggest a permanence which is hard to find at the moment, a time when those who build houses are able to live in them and enjoy what they have planned and worked hard to build. Time after time the Bible gives us the same sort of picture, of the secure and well-looked after times which the Lord God promises in the Kingdom He has planned.

➤ **By Ezekiel**

Many of the Old Testament prophets, like Ezekiel, wrote of these coming days, for the Day of the LORD was right at the centre of their hopes and desires. Here is one of Ezekiel’s inspired predictions:

“I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them - My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods” (Ezekiel 34:23-25).

The Lord Jesus Christ is called “*the son of David*”, although David was actually an ancestor many generations before. It seems likely that this means the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is to be the shepherd of his people, the one who actually looks after and cares for his people, just like a shepherd cares for his sheep. The prophecy continues

“I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them” (Ezekiel 34:26-27).

Again this promises fruitful times without famine, and the sort of freedom that no human government is able to promise. This is a kingdom without parallel, unprecedented in the history of the world. It can only come when the LORD God intervenes in human affairs. How far away can that be?

Mark Sheppard

The Present

We only have the present; the past has come and gone,
The future is uncharted and unknown;
We only have the present in which to serve our God,
To show our love, and make His Ways our own.

We only have the present, our lives are very short,
Just like a vapour vanishing away;
But if we ask for wisdom and are guided by God’s Word,
Our time will be redeemed each passing day.

The way we live the present will determine how we fare
At God’s Judgement Seat, for all around to see:
If God has been our driving-force throughout our mortal life,
Then this present will become Eternity.

Colleen Simons

More about the Promised Seed

Abraham was given many promises by God which are foundation principles. They concerned his promised descendant or descendants – the word “seed” could mean either. In a previous article, **Dudley Fifield** explained that each promise needs to be carefully examined to see whether it concerns a nation descended from Abraham, or one special descendant. Now he summarises his findings so far and shows how those promises have begun to be fulfilled.

Summary

The following have emerged from our brief consideration of the relevant passages:

- ❶ Abraham’s natural seed, the twelve tribes of Israel, were promised that they would possess the land of Canaan for an everlasting inheritance.
- ❷ Abraham was to be the Father of many nations (this meant that both Jews and Gentiles would be descended from him).
- ❸ His seed (singular) would inherit the gates of his enemies and in him all families of the earth would be blessed.

We will now look at each of these categories of promise in turn.

Abraham’s Natural Seed

The twelve tribes of Israel sprang out of Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, and they became God’s chosen people. They were to be the custodians of God’s Truth and were commissioned accordingly in these words, spoken by God at Sinai.



“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5,6).

A priest is God’s representative amongst men. He shows God to men and he brings men to God. As a nation, Israel had this priestly responsibility among the nations of the earth (see Deuteronomy 4: 5-8).

As the apostle Paul was to express it when writing to the Romans, the Jews had these benefits:

“... to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came” (Romans 9:4,5).

The record of the Old Testament is the sad story of how this privileged people failed to live up to their responsibilities and of how, in consequence, God overthrew their kingdom and scattered them throughout the earth.

Covenant Promises

God remains true to His covenant, however, and has not given up on His people. Instead the promise is reiterated again and again that:

“He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock” (Jeremiah 31:10).

See also Deuteronomy 30:1-3; Isaiah 11:11,12; and Ezekiel 37:12,21,22.

This is not just an Old Testament teaching but it is to be found in the New Testament as well. The Lord Jesus said:

“Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

The Apostle Paul wrote this about the nation of Israel:

“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” (Romans 11:11,12).

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



Israel regathered

The promise was that the nation of Israel would be regathered to its ancient land and the people will be reconciled to the Lord Jesus Christ, their Messiah. In that day they will recognise him at last for the deliverer whom God sent, but their fathers crucified. As the prophet says:

“I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a first-born” (Zechariah 12:10).

The restored and repentant nation will then inherit the land in fulfilment of the promise that God made to Abraham. This great nation will inherit it for ever: it will be their inheritance perpetually – from generation to generation. They will occupy the land as mortals, serving in God’s coming Kingdom which is to be centred on Jerusalem, during the one thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ – the Millennium. And we know who it is that will guide and direct the new nation during that wonderful era, for Jesus made this promise to his disciples:

“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

Dudley Fifield

Why Doesn't Everyone Believe In Jesus?

This seems a very reasonable question to ask. After all if Jesus can save us from sin and death, why do many not accept him? Some people have not heard about Jesus, of course, so they can't be expected to believe in him.

However, there are many people who have heard about Jesus but still do not believe. This should come as no surprise, for the Bible makes it clear that even when Jesus was on earth, teaching and performing many miracles, only a minority of people in Israel believed on him.

Rejected!

On one occasion, after the miraculous feeding of 5000 men, as well as women and children, when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum we are told that:

"From that time many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more" (John 6:66).

Their only recorded explanation was:

"This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (6:60).

This teaches us that whilst Jesus' message of life should appeal to men and women, there are times when people do not find it attractive. Or they find it too hard to understand or to accept. Jesus' message is demanding

and challenging; it is not an easy option. On one occasion he said this:

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

Cast Out

On another occasion we learn that *"even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42.43).*

These were people who actually believed in Jesus but would not make an open commitment because they were concerned about what others would think about them. So we see that people would not follow Jesus' teaching even when they knew it to be true.

The reason, essentially, was that those people did not want to accept the commitment required of

those that would be Jesus' disciples. The question we have to ask of ourselves is 'Are we willing to make a personal commitment to Jesus?' Or do we make the excuse that because others did not commit themselves to Jesus, we will not either?



Peter Forbes

Part Two

The Theory of the “Big Bang”

*In the first part of this series **Lawrence Cave** pointed out the difference between observable facts – things that can be proved beyond doubt – and theories, which are based on a set of assumptions. These need to be tried and tested before they can be shown to be true. Now he examines one scientific theory which is often spoken about as though it was undisputable fact. Is it just a theory?*

The “Big Bang” theory – observable facts

Fact 1

When people use modern telescopes to look at distant galaxies they find that the light looks slightly different from sunlight. The simplest way we can describe this difference is to say that the light from distant galaxies looks slightly red. Hence this observation is known as the “red shift”.

Fact 2

When we look out into outer space using a telescope which is already in space, we detect radiation known as cosmic microwave background radiation.

Fact 3

This fact involves the elements in the universe – things like hydrogen and helium, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon and so on. Scientists have noticed that the universe contains mainly elements that are light in weight. The lightest elements, hydrogen and helium, are by far the most common elements in the detectable universe.



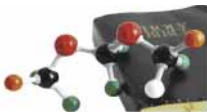
Fact 4

The fourth fact that is often mentioned is that galaxies seem evenly spread through space. It does not matter in which direction we look, the spread of galaxies looks basically the same.

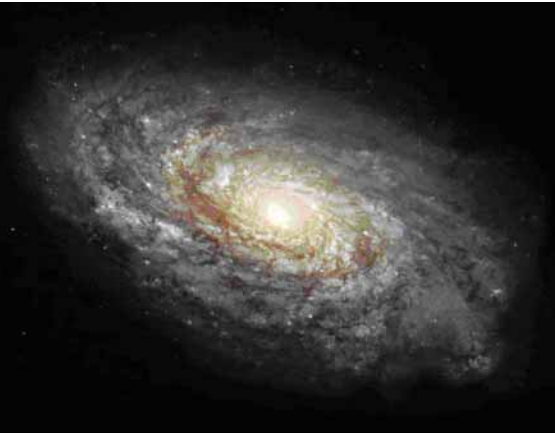
These are the four observable facts on which the “Big Bang” theory is based.

The Development of the “Big Bang” theory

It was the first of these observable facts that originally made scientists develop the “Big Bang” theory. Scien-



There is no conflict between scientific facts and what the Bible says



tists believe that the “red shift” in light coming from space indicates that the light source is moving away from us. This would mean that the universe is expanding.

The other observable facts we have looked at are also consistent with the idea that the universe started with an explosion and is expanding in all directions.

- The background radiation that we detect is considered to be the remains of the “Big Bang” explosion.
- The “Big Bang” theory predicts that the lightest elements would be produced first, the heavier elements being built up from them.
- Scientists also realised that the galaxies will be evenly distributed through space if the universe is expanding in all directions following the “Big Bang”.

Scientists then make the following assumptions:

- ❶ Nothing has ever happened to change the physical laws that we know today.

- ❷ These laws are consistent and the same throughout the whole of the universe.

- ❸ The red shift is caused by the light source moving away from us.

Using these three assumptions, together with our four observable facts, it becomes obvious that if our universe is expanding, then, if we roll back time, everything can be traced back to a single point in space time from which it all started. And that is what is called the “Big Bang”.

The “Big Bang” – fact or theory?

We must remember that this theory is based on what we can see today. No one knows what information modern telescopes would have given us thousands or millions of years ago. We must also remember that we cannot do any experiments to prove that the red shift is caused by the light source moving away from us.

Notice that, contrary to the impression you may already have, there are not many facts that support the “Big Bang” theory. The few facts we do have support the theory if we accept the assumptions that we cannot prove. Scientists are doing their best with the available information. But, like the miasma and dyscrasia theories we looked at in the first article, we may be missing some important information.

The “Big Bang” must remain an interesting theory, and cannot be regarded as a fact.

Lawrence Cave

Paul the Roman Citizen

*About to be taken into Roman custody at Jerusalem, the apostle Paul asked for an opportunity to address the hostile Jewish crowd and was granted that opportunity. He began to detail the events that had changed the course of his life but, as **John Hellawell** now explains, it ended in uproar and more crowd trouble.*

As his defence continued, Paul explained that on returning to Jerusalem he had prayed in the Temple. This demonstrated that he had not rejected his faith. There he received a further vision when he was told to leave Jerusalem immediately because his testimony would not be accepted there.

So, some 22 years earlier the Lord Jesus had foretold exactly what was now happening. The Lord knew that the Jews in Jerusalem would not believe him, any more than they had believed the Lord himself. So Paul was being sent away, far away, in order to preach to the more receptive Gentiles.

The mention of the Gentiles was the trigger for an explosion of resentment. Up to this point the crowd had listened intently, possibly spell-bound, but the mention of Gentiles reminded them why they had attacked Paul in the first place! Now they howled for his execution once more. Shouts for his death were accompanied with outer garments being flung in the air along with handfuls of dust.

The commander, Claudius Lysius (see Acts 23:26) gave orders for Paul to be brought into the Antonia fortress, for interrogation by scourging. Since the commander was unable to identify Paul's alleged crime from the crowd (Acts 21:33,34) and was still no wiser after Paul had made his speech to the crowd, he determined to get to the cause of the uproar by the time-hon-

oured method of torture.

It may be that the commander did not follow Paul's speech because it was in Aramaic, although it could be thought that anyone stationed in Judea should have a working knowledge of the local language. If he did understand it, then the cause of the problem might not have been evident to him from Paul's biographic discourse. Why would the idea that Paul should go to Gentiles cause such an explosion of bad feeling? The commander was a Gentile himself.

Roman Interrogation

There must be some underlying issue that had not been disclosed. So, he must have reckoned, there was no alternative other than to rely on the use of torture to extract the truth. Scourging was particularly brutal and could be expected to give results quite quickly, provided the victim survived long enough to confess. It seemed that Paul had been rescued from one danger, only to face another! Paul was, therefore, bound with thongs in preparation for the scourging. The phrase 'with thongs' may mean 'in readiness for the thongs', that is the multiple-thonged lash of the Romans.

Before the torture began, Paul asked the centurion standing by in order to supervise the event:

"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25).

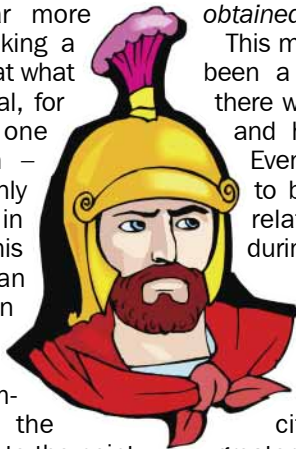
This question was far more effective than simply making a statement to the effect that what they were doing was illegal, for there could only be one answer to this question – “Certainly not!” There only remained one question in the centurion’s mind “Is this man then a Roman citizen?!” The centurion would suspend the flogging forthwith and report the problem to his commander. His report to the commander was brief and to the point: “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman”.

We might paraphrase that today as – “Do you know what you are doing? This man is a Roman!” Perhaps the stress was very much on “be careful what you are doing...” The centurion was not responsible: he ‘was only obeying orders’.

Roman Citizen?

One can imagine the speed with which the commander descended to the room in which Paul was about to be flogged. “Tell me, are you a Roman?” was his anxious but perhaps sceptical question. The bedraggled Jewish figure whom he had arrested, with his clothes torn and covered in dirt, cuts and bruises, might seem an unlikely candidate for this honour. The reply must have caused a shudder to descend the spine of every man who heard it – “Yes”.

Perhaps still in disbelief, the commander retorted, in effect, that this was a serious claim with severe consequences for anyone who made it falsely. In his case it had cost him a great deal of money to be able to claim such a privilege: “*With a large sum I*



obtained this citizenship.”

This might suggest that the man had been a foreign mercenary, of which there were many in the Roman army, and had risen through the ranks. Eventually he had sufficient means to buy his citizenship, which was relatively more easily obtained during the reign of Claudius. “*But I was born a citizen*” Paul replied.

This would not be boasting on Paul’s part, although one may presume that hereditary citizenship would command greater respect than that which had been bought. His point was that he came from a family which had been rewarded in time past for services to Rome. He was, therefore, the last person to be treated so shamefully by those whose primary duty was to protect Roman interests, especially in the provinces.

Those who were present withdrew immediately, clearly not wishing to be implicated in this illegal activity and face a later formal enquiry, should Paul have decided to make an official complaint, as well he might. The commander himself was alarmed at what he had done: putting a Roman citizen in chains and giving orders to scourge him was a serious offence.

Roman Citizenship

The events recorded here may be compared with what happened in Philippi (Acts 16:37-39). As noted in the comments on that episode, Paul and Silas may have attempted to protest that they were Roman citizens and, in the commotion of their arrest, were unable to make themselves heard. Paul defined the grounds for his complaint against the authorities in Philippi that they beat publicly, without a trial and,

therefore, without legal sentence, two Roman citizens. This suggests that no opportunity was given to Paul and Silas to make any statement. It is quite reasonable to infer that Paul protested formally in Philippi in order to give greater subsequent protection to the infant church there. Although Christianity was not a licensed religion and it may have been seen by Romans as a version of Judaism, if it was associated with those who held Roman citizenship it might be afforded greater tolerance.

Here in Jerusalem Paul used his citizenship in order to avoid unnecessary suffering. It cannot be claimed that Paul shunned suffering when it was unavoidable (see 2 Corinthians 11:23ff); but there was no merit in submitting to severe, and potentially fatal, punishment when it could be avoided.

The Turning-point

It has been suggested that Paul had begun by this time to realise that he would make no progress in converting the Jews in Jerusalem and that they had virtually excommunicated him from Judaism. It seems quite probable that Paul had cherished hopes that on this visit he would achieve two goals, firstly to counter the slide back into orthodox Judaism which seemed to be a perpetual problem in the Jerusalem ecclesia and, secondly, to win over the Jews for Christ.

This might explain his initial compliance with the request to sponsor the four men who were under a vow. It may be that Paul, in attempting to be all things to all men, had accepted this obligation and would, once accepted by Jewry at large, make a con-

certed attempt to argue his case for Christ.

This was in spite of the witness of the Holy Spirit in all the cities and towns on his route back to Jerusalem that he would be bound and delivered to the Gentile authorities. Now it was evident that the final rejection by the Jews had come. So, it has been suggested, from now on Paul would rely on his Roman citizenship. As far as we know, he never returned to Jerusalem after this and in his later writings his concern seems to be solely directed to Gentile believers.

Remanded in Custody

Claudius Lysius still had a problem. He had in custody a Roman citizen, caught up in a severe civil disturbance which had evoked cries for his death, and yet the nature of his alleged crime was still unknown. He could not detain him indefinitely without a charge and yet he could not release him in case a serious offence had been committed. He must act carefully since a Roman citizen was involved.

He arranged for Paul to appear before the Chief Priests and the rest of the Sanhedrin in order to determine why Paul had been accused by the Jews. This formal hearing would have as its object the provision of a definitive statement of the grounds of his alleged offence. Then the commander could decide whether the case was within Roman jurisdiction, that is, an offence against Roman law, or whether it was just another squabble amongst the Jews regarding their own religion.



John Hellowell

What do you want out of life?

For the majority of people in the developed world, their material needs in life are few. They have a roof over their heads, more than sufficient clothes to wear and ample food to eat every day. Oh yes, some might want a little more of these things – more comfortable or more spacious accommodation, a more exotic holiday and a bit more money – enough to keep them from having to worry about how much they spend. But they don't really *need* it.

Desperate Needs

Now think of people who are really in need. Their wants are not mere whims or desires; they have desperate needs. People who are generously provided for are not desperate for clean water and enough to eat. Sadly, many people in developing countries have those needs and many besides.

How often do we see pictures in newspapers, magazines or on the television of people who are starving and children with swollen bellies who are crying and near to dying because of the selfish greed of their rulers and the inability of foreign aid-workers to get much needed supplies through to them? Our hearts go out to them and some of us in the western world quieten our consciences by giving of our abundance to CHRISTIAN AID, OXFAM, WATER-AID or some such charity.

There are other quite different things that people want, apart from the necessities of life. You may well have experienced some real tragedy in your life at a relatively early age causing

you to wish that life itself had been better for you. Or you might have a frustrated ambition which you would have given anything to have realized. So people who are asked "What do you want out of life?" might have quite different answers.

It all depends

Our lives and life expectations are affected by a whole variety of factors – the very circumstances under which we were brought up or where we happen to live in the world. Think of the USA and Europe with their unstable economies, Pakistan with its struggling government, Iraq trying to develop a stable government after years of warfare, or countries in the Middle East, affected by the conflicting claims of Israelis and Arabs.

Does the Bible tell us how to deal with the contingencies I've already described or indeed with others beside? And is this life all that there is or is there a prospect of sometime yet future, when all the adverse things we've been thinking about will no longer pertain in the earth?

Root Problem

The Bible tells us that human nature is essentially selfish and that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. It's a bad start, but we must be realistic. Jesus Christ told his hearers in no uncertain manner all those years ago just what we are like. Open your Bible and have a look at what he said when asked by someone

in the crowd: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me".

Jesus took the opportunity to say a few important things about human life and the desire to accumulate even more. You can read the full account in Luke chapter 12, verses 13-34, a passage which includes a parable about the man who has so much he didn't know what to do with it:

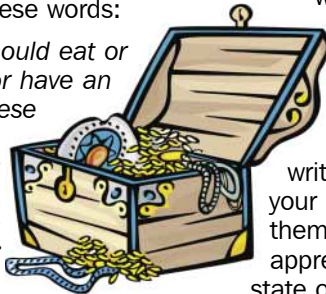
"But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (12:20,21).

There is no reason to suppose that things have changed since the time of Jesus. All the evidence is against it. Selfishness has been more than evident on a grand scale in the western world in recent months despite the sophistication of modern life. 'Much' wants more and 'very much' wants 'very much more', whether the person in question is a banker, a politician or some other person in a responsible position on whom the searchlight just happens not to be focused at the moment.

First things First

Jesus establishes the priorities of life when explaining that God his Father always took first place in his life and then urging those who would follow him to do the same, in these words:

*"Do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. **But seek the kingdom of God, and all these***



things shall be added to you ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:29-34).

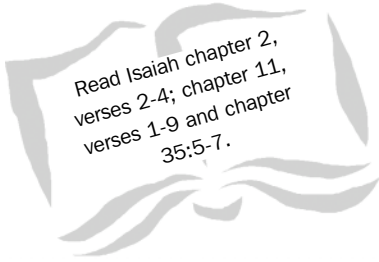
If we are to gain a better outlook on life, so that we see the problems of the world in a different light and turn our own backs on selfishness, then we need to look seriously at what Jesus teaches. A believer's faith in the Creator as revealed in Scripture can become "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19).

Those who publish this magazine believe that God is the Creator and that He has a purpose with the earth and with mankind. In a future time, the people who inhabit the earth will be changed so that they become filled with His glorious character. We have come to hold this belief because of all the evidence for the authenticity and reliability of the Bible which each of us has evaluated for ourselves.

Better Life to Come

No, this life is not all that there is! Those who have come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and their King look forward to a life beyond this present life, with all its imperfections, to a new state of affairs in the earth when Jesus Christ, God's only Son, comes to reign as world ruler. Reigning from Jerusalem, he will establish a kingdom of peace and goodness, when all of God's creation will respond to Him in love and obedience.

One of the Old Testament prophets pictures this new state of affairs for us in a number of passages in his writings. Again, please open your Bible and have a look at them, so that you can begin to appreciate just what this new state of affairs will be like.



That's a world well worth waiting for. But how can any of us share this new kingdom of God on earth? Won't we be dead long before Jesus comes?

Momentous Event

Don't forget the most momentous of all historical events. That's a sweeping statement, but I believe it to be true. Think of:

- * Napoleon Bonaparte – who at one time held Europe in his hand:
- * Julius Caesar;
- * Ghengis Khan;
- * even Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin.

If you want to know about these men and their exploits you have to read those historians who have studied their lives and then draw your own conclusions. I'm asking you to do the same with the accounts of the life of Jesus – the gospels. Please read them and draw your own conclusions. The publishers of this magazine have come to believe that the Bible writers are God-inspired.

There is, however, one very considerable difference between Jesus Christ and any of the other great men of history. Every single one of them is dead. Jesus Christ is not: he is alive for evermore. Open your Bible again and have a look at 1 Corinthians 15: 12-20. There he is described as the firstfruits of the harvest of the dead. And the careful use of the word “first-

fruits” shows that the full harvest is yet to come (1 Corinthians 15: 21-23).

What do you want?

By our nature we are all descended from Adam and Eve and are therefore inexorably tied to sin, disease and death. That is a consequence of the flawed nature we share. The very real resurrection of Jesus from the dead provides hope for all who believe in him and belong to him. So when a believer dies it can honestly be said that he has “*fallen asleep in Christ*” because there is to be a great resurrection when Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 15: 50-57).

Have a look at some more words of the prophet Isaiah – chapter 65, verses 17-25. Here he paints in majestic words a picture of what it will be like in that new kingdom age heralded by Christ's return to the earth. Then all, yes ALL of the frustrations and difficulties which face mankind, and us as individuals, will be things of the past. There will be safe places to live, more than enough to eat and a sense of peace, security and fulfillment, which is so lacking at the moment.

What then do you want out of life? Surely, above all else you would love to share this new age of peace, security and fulfilment to be ushered in at Christ's return to the earth. Just resolve to think about it all, take your Bible from your shelf more often and, prayerfully reading it, draw your own conclusions. Let us all pray that we might personally share the wonder of God's kingdom on earth and thus have not only everything we could ever want out of life, but a life sharing the glory of the Creator.

Trevor A Pritchard

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Dennis Gillett

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