

# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1523

An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road with double yellow lines, curving through a lush green forested mountain landscape. A dark car is visible on the road. The terrain is rugged with rocky outcrops and dense vegetation.

***What's around the Corner? – page 3***  
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# Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

127th Year

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1523



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to 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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## 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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# What's around the Corner?

Have you ever travelled along a twisting and narrow road hoping that there is no other vehicle approaching the same tricky corner at the same time? Or have you walked along a winding path wondering what you are going to see around the corner, hoping that you will get a new insight into how near you are to your journey's end?



## World Events

Things that are happening in today's world are a bit like that for some people. We seem to be turning a corner, but nobody is very sure what lies around it. The explosion of people power in Tunisia and Egypt has been caused by years of repression and perceived unfairness. Young educated people have lived without any real prospects of advancement, or even employment, whilst other sectors of society have had a really good lifestyle. So they came out on the streets to protest and to demand a change of government, one which would give them a greater share of the country's wealth and more representation. But protest is one thing and reconstructing a society is another, much harder, task.

The present impasse in Libya demonstrates that people who are in power will not readily relinquish that and for as long as their supporters are willing to uphold them and, if necessary, die for them, they will hang on to

what they have. Nor have the opponents of Muammar Gaddafi – the “Brother Leader and Guide of the Revolution” – a coherent plan of what they would do should they persuade him and his family to leave Libya. The ‘rebels’ have no obvious leader and apart from a widespread desire for “freedom”, they appear to have no plans and no policies.

## Options

The result of this upheaval in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya might be more apparent by the time you read these words but, at the time of writing, the future for the three countries is uncertain and unstable. Perhaps Muslim fundamentalists will get the upper hand and will impose Sharia – the sacred law of Islam.

Perhaps a western style of democracy will emerge and nations will begin to live together in peaceful cooperation. Maybe Egypt's ‘cool’ peace treaty with Israel will warm up and the two nations will cooperate more. Perhaps Libya's alleged support of terrorist groups will end and the world will become a more peaceful and more harmonious place. Perhaps so, but perhaps not!

There is a way of ensuring that you don't live in a way which takes you heedlessly around a corner to crash into someone coming the other way. You can find out what the future holds by reading the Bible and understanding God's plan for the future. Then you will have some idea of how near we are to the end of the road and, despite

some uncertainties, you will get reassurance about the future.

## **Bible Prophecy**

Someone who went to the trouble of counting up the number of verses in the Bible which foretell coming events discovered that of the entire Bible's 31,124 verses 8,352 contain predictive material – that's 27 per cent of the whole. So more than a quarter of the Bible is looking forward to events that are (or were) coming and the way in which these predictions have been fulfilled can give us real confidence for the future.

For the God who foretold the fall and abandonment of the ancient city and the collapse of the Babylonian empire (ancient Iraq) also foretold the return of the Jewish people to their ancient land. The prediction about Babylon was only a few hundred years in advance of its fulfilment. The prophecy about the return of the Jews to their ancient nation was given thousands of years in advance, and it has been (and is being) fulfilled precisely.

The prophets said that the Jews would return to the land of Israel surrounded by enemies and the sort of enmity that has existed from ancient times, when Jews and Arabs were equally unable to live together in peace (see Ezekiel 35:5). So it has worked out. It could have been different, as well-meaning statesmen hoped would be the case when the land was partitioned. But that was not destined to happen.

Instead the prophets foretell an increase of hatred and animosity towards Israel and its almost total isolation among world nations. So Bible readers are not hopeful that any regime changes in the Middle East will lead to a widespread recognition of

Israel's right to exist. Quite the contrary, for we are now living in the last times. The return of the Jews to Jerusalem signals the imminent return from heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ to rule on King David's throne in Jerusalem and he will come to rescue a nation that is on the brink of destruction.

## **Jesus is Coming!**

Here's just one prophetic insight about that Coming:

*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... (Zechariah 14:1-4).*

Right at the centre of international concern, the city Jerusalem will feature in God's future plans. At a time when nations are warring over whose city it really is, God will repossess it as His own. For the Coming King – the Lord Jesus Christ – is to reign there over the worldwide Kingdom of God. That regime change has been well prepared and will come about in God's good time, to benefit all who are willing to welcome a ruler of absolute integrity and perfect self control. That's what God has in store for the world and now it's just around the corner!

**Editor**

# Two Key Scholars – Erasmus and Tyndale

Two significant events in the 14th century enabled the translation and production of the Bible into several European languages.

- ❶ The fall of Constantinople in 1453 caused Greek scholars to migrate westward to Europe taking their manuscripts and books with them.
- ❷ By 1454, the development of moveable metal type for printing had reached the point where large numbers of books could be printed. Multiple printing of text also eliminated copyists' errors.



The convergence of these events in the 1450s set the scene for translations of the Bible to be made from Greek and then Hebrew manuscripts into European languages. The advent of the printing press enabled multiple copies of the Bible to be produced for large scale circulation. The first book known to have been printed with moveable metal type was the Gutenberg Bible (a Latin Vulgate translation) which was issued in 1455-6.

## **Erasmus the Scholar**

The Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus (1465?-1536) spent some of his early years in the Augustine monastery at Steyn where he read Latin works. He disapproved of the monastic system and was critical of the prevailing Church practices. Erasmus was one of the most outstanding scholars of Latin and Greek of his age. His contribution to the development of the English Bible was to produce the first printed Greek New Testament in 1516 which was compiled from Greek manuscripts. He then produced a new Latin translation from the Greek New Testament and published them together in the same book.

That caused a stir in scholarly circles for Erasmus demonstrated that Jerome's Latin Vulgate used by the Church contained many errors and inaccuracies, when compared with the original Greek manuscripts. Among the translation errors he identified in Jerome's Latin Vulgate was Matthew 3:2: "*Do penance for the kingdom of God is at hand.*"

Erasmus asserted that the most natural translation of the Greek New Testament word, was "*repent*". Repentance is a personal matter between sinners and God. The involvement of the clergy in providing penance was therefore unnecessary. The teaching of Jesus and the Apostles teaches us that what is required of us is a personal matter of a change of heart and commitment to a new way of life.

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but **now commands all men everywhere to repent**, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

*If anyone thirsts, (says Jesus) let him come to me and drink (John 7:37).*

## **Erasmus and the Scriptures**

In the preface to his 1516 Greek New Testament Erasmus wrote of the Scriptures:

*I wish that the husbandman may sing parts of them at his plough, that the weaver may warble them at his shuttle, that the traveller may with their narratives beguile the weariness of the way.*

Erasmus was a scholar who embraced a humanist philosophy. He travelled around visiting many European seats of learning including Paris, Rome, Strasbourg, Mainz and Turin. He made six visits to England between 1499 and 1517 and studied at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. At the invitation of the University Chancellor, Bishop John Fisher, he became Professor of Divinity and Greek at Cambridge (1511-14) where he applied himself to working on his first edition of the Greek New Testament.

Erasmus stayed with Sir Thomas More for about a year in Canterbury prior to taking up the invitation to a Professorship at Queens' College, Cambridge. More was also a humanist, who later was to become a persecutor of the protestant reformers. Erasmus' published Greek New Testament laid a foundation on which William Tyndale was to build. As more Greek manu-



scripts became available he produced further editions of the Greek New Testament. His fifth and final edition of his Greek text was published in 1535. This text, among others, became a text for the King James Version of 1611.

## **Tyndale - Father of the English Bible**

William Tyndale was one of three sons of Northumberland parents who moved to the West Country. They changed the family name to 'Hychens' also spelt 'Hochyns' during the Wars of the Roses. William is believed to have been born in Gloucestershire near the Welsh border around 1594. He has fittingly been called the 'Father of the English Bible'. For he took the next step in bringing the English Bible to the people of England and showed exceptional courage and determination in making that attempt. It fell to William Tyndale to translate Erasmus' Greek New Testament into English.

At the time Latin was the internation-

al language of Europe: it was the language of academics, the Church and the Government for diplomatic communications. Tyndale like Wycliffe before him was determined to ensure that the Bible was available for all to read in the English language. On one occasion, Tyndale was in a heated debate, arguing the case for a vernacular Bible with “a Popish Clergyman”. The clergyman is reputed to have said, “We had better be without God’s laws than the Pope’s!” Tyndale replied with similar sentiments to those of Erasmus, “I defy the Pope and all his laws and if God should spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost”.

### Early Life

Tyndale was educated in Oxford. His grammar school education took place at Magdalen Hall, preparatory for entry to Oxford University. He graduated from Oxford with a Bachelors Degree in 1512 and a Masters in 1515 and was ordained to the priest-



hood the same year. Tyndale had a keen and alert mind, and was a brilliant scholar fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and several European languages.

Tyndale found work as a tutor to the children of the Walsh family who lived at Little Sodbury Hall. The Walshes were known for their hospitality. Clergy and other men of learning were frequently invited to dine with them. Tyndale also sat with these guests, but it was here that he made enemies.

### A Heretic?

At dinner table discussions Tyndale was critical of the greed and superstition of the clergy. They could not gainsay his knowledge of the Bible and in response accused him of preaching heresy. In anger, they denounced him secretly to the Gloucester chancellor John Bell, chief administrator of the diocese. He was a skilled interrogator of Lollards and suspected heretics.

Early in 1523 Bell summoned Tyndale to appear before him. Tyndale demanded that his accusers face him. Local Priests were at the hearing but none was prepared to come forward to witness against him. Bell concluded the proceedings with threats and insults and set Tyndale free with a warning about the views he was expressing.

Tyndale was apparently a member of the Society of Christian Brethren. The Society included Protestant merchants who secretly traded in forbidden Christian literature from the Low Countries and Hamburg. In this way, Tyndale obtained a copy of Luther’s 1522 German New Testament. This proved to be a stimulus for his own work on an English New Tes-

tament.

## **Tyndale's Plan**

By midsummer 1523 Tyndale appears to have first mentioned to a friend that he planned to translate the Bible into English. That carried great personal risk. The 'Constitutions of Oxford' drawn up by Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1408, was still in force.

It prohibited the production of any English versions of the Bible in full or in part without the permission of the Church authorities. In 1519 a woman and six men had been burned as heretics at Little Park, Coventry. Their crime was that they had taught their children the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed in English.

The prayer the Lord Jesus taught his disciples teaches us that we should also pray for God's Kingdom to come on earth. The opening words teach us what we should pray for.

*...Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).*

## **Unstoppable!**

The Word of God cannot be thwarted by oppression and persecution. The more the Church tried to stop the English Bible reaching the population of England, the greater became the thirst for knowledge of God's Word. Tyndale believed the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and the only authority in matters of life and death. He took it at its word when it says that it is powerful and offers us a hope of life and salvation. As the apostle Peter expressed that truth:

*All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of*



*man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you (1 Peter 1:24,25).*

Tyndale left Gloucester for London seeking a sponsor to support him while he worked on translation. He also wanted to reduce the exposure of the Walsh family to the increasing hostility they faced while he was a member of their household.

Tyndale arrived in London around July 1523 and hoped to see the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall who had the power to lift the Constitutions of Oxford and thereby enable the translation of an English Bible to take place. His hopes were dashed, permission was never obtained. It turned out that Tyndale had completely misjudged the Bishop and his circumstances.

**Peter Moore**

*Next: Tyndale goes abroad*

# Why the Bible Can be Trusted

Faith in God is not a leap in the dark; it is based on a careful look at the Bible. Some people will have doubts about reading it in the first place, but we are not left floundering. The Bible helps us by giving evidence of its dependability.

One example of the evidence is Bible Prophecy. Scattered throughout the Bible are passages where the writer foretells events far into the future. When we see these things coming true, sometimes centuries later and against all the odds, we begin to understand that the Bible is no ordinary book but exactly what it claims to be: the Word of God. This is a bold claim. Would you like to put it to the test?

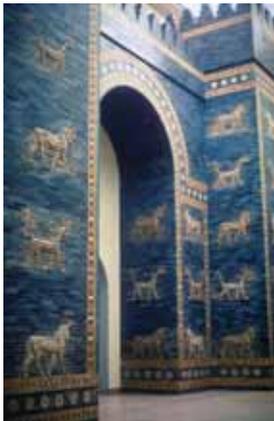
## Two Nations from the Past

Go into your travel agent and ask for two plane tickets, one to Egypt and one to Babylon. The staff will search the systems and return a little perplexed. They can book you on a plane to Egypt but there is a problem with Babylon: it doesn't exist. Surprised? Not if you're a Bible reader.

Let's go back two and a half thousand years. Around 600 BC Egypt and Babylon were two of the super-powers of their day. The Bible made a prophecy about each of them.

### ➤ **Babylon**

We are told that Babylon would cease to exist. The prophet Isaiah said:



*Reconstruction of one of the gates of ancient Babylon*

*It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there (Isaiah 13:20).*

The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

*... no one shall reside there, nor son of man dwell in it (50:40).*

That's why you can't buy a ticket to Babylon, there's no such place

today, just as the Bible foretold. It's especially interesting to us because Babylon's original location is in modern Iraq. Some years ago then-President Saddam Hussein started rebuilding the ancient city state, trying to recreate its former glory. People started to say that Bible prophecy is unreliable. Then came the war in Iraq which brought the rebuilding to an end and the virtual destruction of the site. So the prophecies were proved to be right after all.

### ➤ **Egypt**

Now let's look at the prophecy about Egypt which is different. It was the prophet Ezekiel who said:

*"It shall be the lowliest of kingdoms; it shall never again exalt itself above the nations, for I will diminish them (the Egyptians) so that they will not rule over the nations anymore" (29:15).*

This prophecy foretold that, unlike Babylon, Egypt would remain on the

map. It would be diminished, that is, it would no longer be a super-power; but it would continue to exist. That is exactly what has happened.

And that's why today you can buy a ticket to Egypt but not to Babylon.

## Your Choice!

Think of it this way. Suppose that someone asked you to choose two important nations in the modern world and make a definite statement about them. You had to choose one that will cease to exist and one that will still be around in two and a half thousand years, only no longer as a super-power.

What are your chances of getting it right? How confident would you be? The Bible does it with assurance because it's what it claims to be, the inspired Word of God. It is wholly reliable and so we can read it to expand and build our faith.

## The Nation of Israel

Prophecy coming true is evidence for the Bible's claim to be a sound basis for faith. People can't tell the future: God can. We only have to look at today's media to see Bible prophecies being fulfilled. Have you thought about Israel in this light? The creation of the modern state of Israel is an incredible story.

The Jewish people were scattered around the world for most of the last two thousand years. Persecuted everywhere, especially in Europe, it is a miracle that they have survived. Yet survive they have, and during the first half of the twentieth century they returned to their homeland to create



the modern state of Israel. But this has long been expected by those who take the time to see what the Bible says. Over two and a half thousand years ago the prophet Ezekiel recorded these prophetic words about the Jewish people:

*I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land ... Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land (Ezekiel 36:24; 37:21).*

This is another example of passages which speak about our world today.

## Jerusalem Today

The establishment of modern Israel has of course led to a conflict with the Palestinians, a conflict which is reported almost daily in our media. It is virtually impossible to listen to the news without hearing something about the Middle East as claims and counter claims are made about the land of Israel.

If you follow carefully what is going on you will see that the city of Jerusalem is one of the most sensitive issues. Muslims, Jews and Christians have a long religious and emotional interest in the city. King Abdullah of Jordan said in May 2009:

*'Jerusalem unfortunately has been a symbol of conflict for centuries...'*

Disputes about who 'owns' it have become a major stress-point. The city is an obstacle to finding peace in the Middle East. Speaking on

the UK programme “*Newsnight*” the TV presenter, Jeremy Paxman described it as a ‘...*religiously-charged, historically-loaded, geographically-confused cauldron ... It defies neat and apparently sensible political solutions, not because of the people who live in Jerusalem, but because Jerusalem lives in so many other people’s hearts*’.

## **Heavy Burden**

Jerusalem is indeed a major sticking point in resolving a conflict which affects most of the world. But that’s not news to Bible readers. The prophet Zechariah, writing nearly 500 years before Christ prophesied this about the days in which we live:

*It shall happen in that day that I will*

*make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zechariah 12:3).*

Today we can see how accurately that prophecy has been fulfilled. So, get to know your Bible and keep an eye on the news. You’ll come to realise that the Bible is no ordinary book but a divinely inspired, reliable and fascinating basis for the building of faith. Above all you will come to rely on the greatest prophecy of all, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God.

**Michael Lewis**

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# **The Great Unknown**

Are you concerned about the future?  
Do you fear the great unknown?  
Then put your trust in God, our Saviour  
With faith and hope in Him alone.

He has given words to guide us,  
To teach us how to live, and why,  
So we can share this hope with others,  
And serve Him till the day we die.

For someday soon there’ll be great changes  
When Christ our Lord returns as King  
To cleanse this earth from sin and sorrow,  
True peace and righteousness he’ll bring.

Be not concerned about the future;  
Do not fear the great unknown  
Put trust and faith in God our Saviour,  
Our future’s bright in Him alone.



**Colleen Simons**

# The Voyage to Rome: Caesarea to Crete

*After the fruitless attempt by Festus, the governor of Judea, to seek to clarify the grounds of the hatred of Paul by the Jews, even after calling in the help of King Agrippa, it was finally decided that Paul should stand trial in Rome, since he had claimed this privilege, which was his right as a Roman citizen. **John Hellawell** now explains that events took an unexpected turn.*

## Waiting for a Ship

Luke – the inspired writer of the Acts of the Apostles – gives no indication how long it was before the decision was made to ship Paul to Rome for his trial before the Emperor. Since other prisoners were involved it may be that it was necessary to wait until a reasonable number had accumulated. It seems probable that most of the contingent were being sent to Rome for punishment rather than for another trial. The prisoners were consigned to the care of a centurion named Julius who was a member of the Augustan cohort (Acts 27:1).

Eventually they embarked on a ship of Adramyttium, which was bound for various ports on the coast of Asia. Adramyttium is on the coast of northwest Asia Minor, north of Pergamos. The ship was probably relatively small, plying its trade between ports in the eastern Mediterranean.

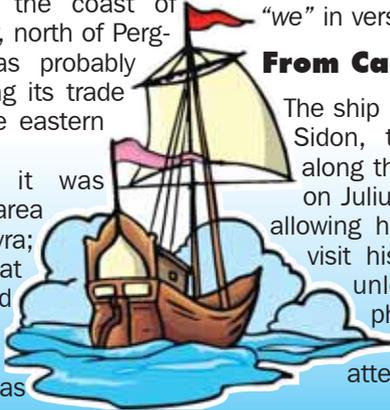
On this voyage it was heading from Caesarea at least as far as Myra; but it is possible that the ship was destined ultimately for its home port of Adramyttium. Myra was

located on the south coast of Asia Minor between Attalia (from where Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch at the conclusion of their First Missionary Journey; Acts 14:25) and Patara. (It was at Patara that Paul had changed ship during his voyage from Miletus, where he had said farewell to the elders from Ephesus, on his way to Tyre as he went up to Jerusalem at the end of his Third Missionary Journey; Acts 21:1.) Paul would be quite familiar with this part of the coast.

He did not travel alone but, as befitted a prisoner of distinction, was accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian, who was probably allowed to act as Paul's servant and Luke who would be his personal physician. (Notice that the pronoun changes to "we" in verse 1.)

## From Caesarea

The ship left Caesarea and called at Sidon, the next port northwards along the coast. Here the centurion Julius treated Paul courteously, allowing him to leave the ship and visit his friends while cargo was unloaded and loaded. The phrase "receive care" is literally, in the Greek, receive attention, which may suggest





that Paul was unwell. The friends would, of course, be brothers and sisters – believers who had become members of the family of God. The Lord himself had visited Sidon, as part of his ministry (Mark 7:24,31). There is no other indication that there were believers in Sidon, apart from this reference.

Putting to sea once more, contrary winds necessitated that the ship sailed north of Cyprus in order to avoid the prevailing south-westerly winds and then across the sea adjacent to Cilicia and Pamphylia, finally putting into port at Myra in Lycia. In order to continue their journey, the centurion found a ship bound from Alexandria to Italy. This was, in all probability, a large grain ship since Egypt was the ‘bread basket’ of the Roman Empire (see Acts 27:37).

Myra was not on the direct route and it could be that this ship had also suffered contrary winds. This seems to be borne out by the subsequent slow progress in attempting to reach Cnidus at the south-west extremity of Asia Minor and the southward diversion to

the eastern end of Crete at Cape Salmone. Eventually they arrived at Fair Havens, the port of the city of Lasea in Crete.

### **From Crete?**

The normal season for sailing was now coming to an end and their journey was only partly accomplished. Luke states that “the Fast” was already past. That is a reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement, which occurred at the end of September. The weather in the Mediterranean made sailing hazardous in the winter months and so it usually ended in September or October and resumed once more in the spring. Paul, who was by this time an experienced traveller across the Mediterranean, gave advice to the effect that to continue further would be dangerous, resulting in the loss of the ship and the lives of those who were on board.

However, the advice of the owner and the master of the ship was to continue and their view prevailed with the centurion Julius over the advice given by Paul. It is interesting to note that

the final decision rested ultimately with the centurion. Julius might not have been aware of Paul's considerable experience of Mediterranean voyages. Another factor was the unsuitability of Fair

Havens as a place to over-winter, in spite of its name. After some discussion it seems that the majority favoured sailing on to Phenice [Phoenix], another Cretan harbour some 40 miles further west, which offered better protection for the winter.

### Taking a Risk

The arrival of a softly-blowing south wind seemed to be a good omen, supporting the majority view, and so they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. However, this gentle breeze soon gave way to the powerful 'Northeaster', the infamous "*Euroclydon*". Under these conditions, the ship could not continue to make westward progress.

Ships of the period were unable to sail close into the wind and so they had to give way and allow it to be driven. This resulted in their sailing in the lee of the island of Clauda, where they attempted, with some difficulty, to secure the auxiliary boat. Having hoisted it up, they then strengthened the hull by securing ropes around it.

The ship was, it seems, clinker-built and this measure would help prevent the planks starting to come apart and the hull disintegrating under the violent buffeting of the sea. The next action was to lower the sail and other tackle in order to reduce the impact of the wind. They were concerned that the ship would be caught on the Syrtis



sandbanks.

In spite of their endeavours, the ship was at risk of becoming swamped as a consequence of insufficient free-board. As the ship was almost certainly a grain-ship, if

they took on too much water, the cargo of wheat would swell and cause the hull to split. Therefore, they jettisoned the cargo and the next day there was no choice but to discard the ship's tackle. Conditions deteriorated to the point where all hope was gone. They had not seen the sun by day nor the stars by night, so they were totally disoriented and the tempest had not declined. It would only be a matter of time before they sank or ran aground and were shipwrecked.

### Paul's Counsel

In the storm, neither the crew nor the prisoners had been able to eat anything and they would now have been weak as well as disheartened. Paul stood forward and reminded them that this would not have happened had they listened to him! It must be expected that this comment would hardly have been deemed helpful. Yet Paul had some good news for them.

Just as he had been right about the folly of continuing their journey, he now assured them that there would be no loss of life, only the loss of the ship. By now the master and the owner would have come to the conclusion that the ship was doomed. If so, they would also have assumed that loss of life, including theirs, was an inevitable consequence.

**John Hellowell**

# The Book of Numbers

*This series by **David Pearce** has followed the development of the nation of Israel – from the Books of Genesis and Exodus – and now we meet up with God’s chosen people en route to the Land that God had promised to Abraham. But their journey was destined to be a long and difficult one, as we shall see.*

## **Organisation**

The large number of Israelites that Moses was leading to the land of their ancestors had to be organized. The first six chapters of this fourth book of the Bible describe the precision with which this was accomplished.

One of Moses’ earliest assignments was to hold a census. The adult males amongst the twelve tribes or family groups, each descended from one of the twelve sons of Jacob, added up to more than 603,000, excluding the tribe of Levi. The Levites, official priests for the nation, added another 22,000.

## **Discipline and Order**

To preserve discipline and safety, the tribal groups were allocated specific zones in the giant encampment. The layout was in the form of a square, with the Tabernacle in the centre, guarded by the Levites. Each tribe had its own flag or standard, with an emblem (probably a Lion, a Calf, a Man and an Eagle), enabling a lost child to find his or her way home.

Latrines were made outside the camp for hygiene and, in chapter five, lepers

and those with potentially contagious diseases were kept away from the assembly. Even the order in which they were to march was prescribed, each tribe having an allotted place in the mighty column as it wound its way through the wilderness.

The 12 tribal leaders each donated a new cart for carrying the heavy Tabernacle curtains and equipment (the ark and the internal furniture were to be borne on shoulder bars), a handsome gift that Moses accepted on behalf of the Lord. The following chapters describe the dedication of the Levites to their new role, and the signalling system, using trumpets that controlled public assemblies and movements when the Angel of the Lord in the pillar of cloud moved on in front of the camp.

## **Rebellion**

Chapter 11 begins a long list of rebellions against God. First the Israelites complained that the manna, their staple diet, was boring. Then Miriam, Moses’ sister, encouraged Aaron, their elder brother, to find fault with Moses, and was punished by a week outside the camp.

Coming at last to the



*Artist's illustration of the Tabernacle in the wilderness*

border of the Promised Land, the people persuaded Moses to send twelve spies to reconnoitre the country. They confirmed that it was indeed a desirable place to live, but insisted that the local inhabitants were too strong to conquer. Two of them, Joshua – Moses' understudy – and Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, dissented, but could not persuade the people to put their trust in God. They were overruled, and panic spread through the camp. God was so angry at the Israelites' lack of faith He decreed that only Joshua and Caleb would enter the land. The rest of the Israelites would die in the wilderness, and their children would take their place. The long march resumed.

### Challenge

The authority of Moses was soon assailed again, this time by 250 tribal leaders headed by Korah, Dathan and Abiram. It was ended by a fiery judgment from the Lord (chapter 16). The next challenge came when the water supply dried up, and Moses once again found an angry deputation at his tent door. This time the Lord instructed him to speak to the rock that had dried up, but in his fury with the people Moses struck it with his rod instead, earning a rebuke that cost him his right to enter the land. He was to die in the wilderness, like the people he had served so well. Such is the responsibility of leadership.

The next complaint arose over the length of the journey, because of which a plague of poisonous snakes attacked the people. Significantly, God offered them healing if they had faith to crawl to the door of their tents and look up at a bronze serpent that Moses had made, which he then fastened to a pole. Those who were sceptical

stayed indoors, and died. Later, in John chapter 3, Jesus would liken himself to the serpent nailed to the stake. The serpent in the Bible represents Sin – human rebellion against God. By nailing sin to the cross, Jesus brought salvation to all who will join themselves to him.

### The East Bank

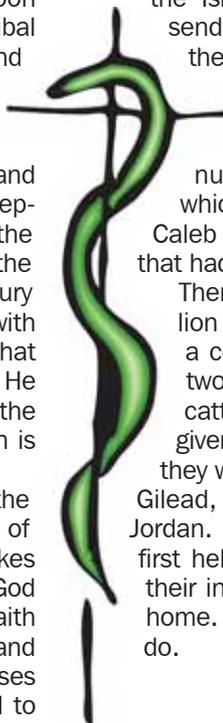
At last, after years of wandering, the people crossed to the east of the River Jordan and, with Moses in charge, subjugated the inhabitants in that region. Their relatives, the Moabites, were left unmolested, but the Moabite king in panic hired Balaam, a soothsayer, to curse Israel. God turned the curses into blessings. However Balaam, determined to win big money

from his employer, got him to tempt the Israelites to idol worship by sending Moabite girls to seduce their young men. This worked,

and many of the people were punished by death.

This led to a second numbering of the people, which found only Joshua and Caleb left from the original group that had left Egypt 40 years before.

There was nearly another rebellion but that was avoided when a compromise was found. The two and a half tribes who were cattle ranchers asked to be given their inheritance where they were, on the grassy plains of Gilead, instead of crossing the Jordan. Moses insisted they must first help their brethren settle into their inheritances before returning home. And that they promised to do.



**David M Pearce**

# When Disaster Strikes

**It sometimes seems as if the whole world is an accident and emergency ward. Countless people are accidentally or purposely killed or injured daily.**

The frequency of all types of disaster is increasing and the actions of people and governments to help are never very effective. Evil, pain and suffering are facts of life and living seems to be the process of dying, which is a grim thought!

## **Disasters Abound**

### **↳ Human Conflict**

It's amazing to note that the world has seen less than 300 years of peace in the last 4,000. Usually there is war of some kind going on. Thousands of people are killed every year, whether from genocide, terrorist acts like the destruction of the Trade Towers, or wars – like the one now being fought in Afghanistan. The 20th century was expected to be a period of unparalleled peace and prosperity. Instead, it was the most violent century in history. Why does a loving God permit this?

### **↳ Accidents and Tragedies**

These occur every second of every day; passing with little or no media attention bar those with devastating impact, like airline crashes. Cars collide, ships are lost, buildings explode and oil is spilt. Machinery malfunctions, human negligence, contamination and structures collapsing are all part of daily life. Is a caring God presiding over this mayhem?

### **↳ Natural Disasters**

These happenings kill or injure millions of people, often wiping out huge numbers within a few hours. Our planet can supply all our needs, yet it is teeming with things that can wipe us out, from bacteria, poisonous plants and venomous snakes, to a lack of water supply, disease and harmful radiation.

Earthquakes, volcanoes, tidal waves, hurricanes and forest fires ravage our world. The Haiti earthquake in Jan 2010 was followed by the quake in Jiegu, Tibetan China. Whilst the Christchurch earthquake, in New Zealand, was of less intensity, it was followed by the seventh most powerful earthquake every recorded, in Japan, which was followed by an even more devastating tsunami.

It's little wonder that people ask "Has God deliberately placed these hazards in our path?"

### **Is God to Blame?**

So what is the answer to these perplexing questions? What is God's role in all this? First, we have to accept that He exists. If He doesn't, as atheists maintain, then there is no moral problem to discuss. If there is no Creator and we are just the product of blind chance, then we have to accept that this is how things are and we will just continue evolving to extinction.

But this is not God's intention. In fact, the disaster summary listed above proves God's very existence. The presence of evil, for example, points us to God. How? The first two sets of tragedies – Human Conflict and Accidents – are, on the whole, directly

related to man's choice of activity, and we have an unrestricted ability to choose. Choice has its consequences. Natural disasters, on the other hand, stem from the living planet we inhabit. However it is possible that mankind's activities have affected the balance of nature.

### **Freedom of Choice**

We have a choice to make. Do we just want someone to blame? Or do we seek to understand how God works? We agree that pain and suffering exist, however they were caused. So, "Why?" has to be the question, followed by "Will it ever end?" What's wrong with our world?

Actually, we are! By natural tendency men and women are mostly concerned about themselves. The ingrained use of me, myself and I words reflect this.

### **God's Plan**

In the first three chapters of the Bible God is described as creating a perfectly balanced world where total harmony existed. Man and woman were given freewill to make choices but they rebelled by not following clear directions. The Bible calls this "sin". It had catastrophic consequences. Mankind became subject to decay, disease and death; things that were not built into God's original design. The apostle Paul sums up that happening in these words:

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).*

In other words, Adam's sin infected the entire human race; every generation inherits the same genes and it also affected the planet's state of perfection. The increase in natural

disasters reflects its decay, a process which has been aggravated by having earth's resources stolen or contaminated by human activities.

### **God's Intervention**

God could still have intervened, but why should He? Would you accept losing your freedom of choice? If God tweaked the laws of nature to ensure everyone's safety, science would be impossible. If He prevented wars, then what about thugs and thieves? What about drunk drivers and child abusers? What level of control of human activity would be necessary to create zero pain and suffering? Divine control would need to permeate to thought level, leaving mankind effectively without free will. Would you accept that sort of life?

The Bible points to a very different way. It lays a path for man to reach out for harmony and promises a future time when disasters are but a dim memory. The way that God offers in the Bible guides the godly committed person to a life filled with God. We know from Adam that we are naturally motivated by "self". A key message of the Bible is that this innate selfishness can be replaced by putting God at the centre of our lives.

The world is on the road to destruction. You have only to read a newspaper and count the disasters to see that the trend is increasing. The world's powers are battling daily. This will soon trigger another big war. The Bible predicts this will be focused in the Middle East. At this time God will intervene and start the process of returning the world to harmony. Only the Bible offers that real hope for an otherwise hopeless world.

**David Bilton**

# Dividing Up the Bible

Finding your way about the Bible is not as difficult as some might think. Try this simple experiment. Hold your Bible closed in front of you. (It must be a basic copy without a concordance etc. at the back.) Now, find the centre of the pages and open it. It is almost certain that you will be in, or near the five poetical books, consisting of **Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon**. All these provide a great amount of interesting reading, and are just so easy to find.

## History

Now, holding, or clipping, those pages together, divide the left hand pages into two and you will be close to the division between what is termed **The Pentateuch** or the main historical books. The five books of the Pentateuch tell first about God's Creation, and the earliest times of God's people Israel, plus all the laws that governed them.

The historical section beginning with the book of **Joshua** leads on to the period of the **Judges**, and then **Samuel**, which begins the period of the **Kings**, taking us right through to the sad period of the captivity of the nation into Babylon and their return, in the times of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**. In a nutshell, that is the left hand part of your Bible, but you are still only halfway.

## Prophecy

Now, on the right-hand side of the

poetic section, take those remaining pages and divide them fairly equally in two. The left hand section contains the **prophetical books** of the Old Testament; four Major prophets and twelve Minor prophets. These are conveniently grouped, but historically, they relate to different periods in Israel's history. The final book is **Malachi**, which concludes the Old Testament.

## New Testament

You will discover that the right-hand side of this division contains the whole of the **New Testament**, which forms less than a quarter of the Bible itself. It may be short but it contains all the information about God's plan of salvation for mankind, centred on the Lord Jesus Christ.

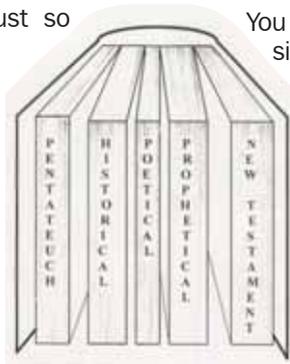
It begins with the four **Gospel** accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

It is followed by the exciting period of the **Acts of the Apostles**, telling how, in miraculous ways, the Gospel (good news), was spread abroad. Then follow twenty one apostolic letters, or **Epistles**, each containing valuable teaching about Christian living. Finally comes the **Book of Revelation**.

This is a book of sign and symbol containing amazing prophecies, leading up to the triumphant return of Christ to earth, and the establishing of the Kingdom of God.

Once you know the basic layout of the Bible you get a lot of encouragement to begin reading it. If you haven't started already, why not begin today?

**Malcolm Edwards**



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