

# The Big Picture

Have you noticed, that as you get further away from something, especially something large, you begin to appreciate its form and proportions better? If we want to look at a house, we will tend to do this from the opposite side of the street, to see it better. Many landmarks are best viewed from a distance in order to get the best perspective. If we travel by air, it can be fascinating to look down at familiar towns or villages – maybe our own – and see them laid out like a map below us.

In recent years, space missions have been able to share with us pictures like our front cover, seeing the whole Earth at once. This is quite amazing and would have been unimaginable 100 years ago.

Astronauts writing about this wonderful image give emotional responses to seeing Earth from space:

*It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small. (Neil Armstrong, first person to walk on the Moon)*

*What we really learned was about the Earth... from the distance of the Moon you can put your thumb up and you can hide the Earth behind your thumb. Everything that you've ever known, your loved ones, your business, the problems of the Earth itself – all behind your thumb... how fortunate we are... to be able to enjoy living here amongst the beauty of the Earth itself. (Jim Lovell, Apollo 8 & 13 astronaut)*



*As we got further and further away, it [the Earth] diminished in size. Finally it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a man. (James B. Irwin, Apollo 15 astronaut)*

This is perhaps the ultimate in literally 'seeing the big picture', having our perception heightened by seeing the whole thing at once. Viewing it from the right distance clearly plays a part in our being able to appreciate the full extent of an object or situation which we are considering. It is a concept we are familiar with in a practical way, for example in art, photography or design. It is a vital approach to problem-solving, strategy and philosophy, and the expression is used regularly in business. More importantly, it helps us consider our life, our purpose and our relationship to God.

## The Ultimate 'Long View'

The Lord God has the ultimate 'big picture' view. Not bound by time or space, He is all-knowing. From before He created the Earth, He knew its purpose and how history would unfold.

*For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18).*

More than this, He directs history – small events as well as large – to bring about His purpose. It should be a great comfort and excitement to us that He also chooses to tell us about this:

*Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9–10).*

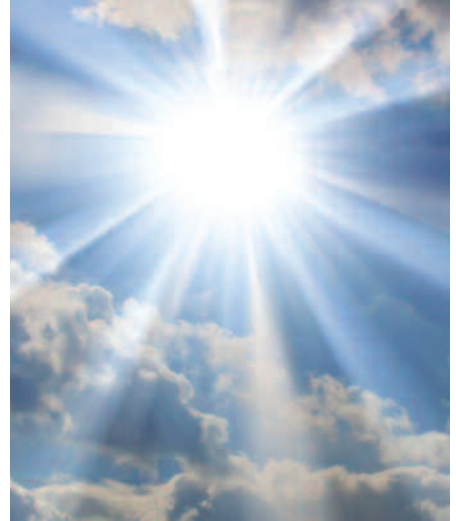
In fact, whilst the Bible has a huge amount of detail about how God is working out His plan, events in the past and prophecy about the future, we are given a very succinct description of His purpose and the ultimate fate of Earth. Returning to Isaiah 45, we read in verses 22–23:

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

This is summarised for us in Numbers 14:21, where we read:

*But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.*

We find exactly the same message in Psalm 72:19 and Habakkuk 2:14.



The fulfilment of God's plan, and our opportunity to be part of it, is one of the themes in this issue of *Glad Tidings*. We see how the Book of Revelation shows that the Kingdom of God will come about, and then we consider how that Kingdom will expand to fill the whole world. The article on the meaning of life is designed to help us put this into a personal perspective, to understand where we can fit into God's plan, and 'Cockroaches' challenges us to respond to it. We will fill out the 'big picture' by looking at God's power and love, as well as considering the authority of Jesus, through whom God is fulfilling His purpose.

**Editor**