

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1454



Get the Message? – page 3

Lift up your Eyes – page 10

The Jesus of the Bible – page 18

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

121st Year

G 05

1454

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (Brethren in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

Magazine orders to the address nearest you:



United Kingdom – Cilla Palmer (Mrs), "Highlands", 78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely, Cambs, England CB7 5NR Tel: (01638) 723959 (24 hrs & Fax) cilla@gladtidings.fsnet.co.uk

Australia – K.G. Quixley, 22 Narallah Grove, Box Hill North, Victoria, Australia, 3129 gladtidings@optusnet.com.au

Canada – Vivian Thorp (Mrs), 5377 Birdcage Walk, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, L7L 3K5

New Zealand – Christadelphian Witness, P.O. Box 15-457, New Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand

South Africa – A. J. Oosthuizen, P.O. Box 50357, Musgrave Road, Durban 4062, South Africa antoost@mweb.co.za

U.S.A. – Pat Hemingray (Mrs), 3079 Kilburn West, Rochester Hills, MI 48306, USA.

Other Countries – Geoff Maycock, 8 Hale End, Bracknell, Berks., England, RG12 9YH gmaycock@fish.co.uk

Local information is also available from:

Fiji – Bible Mission, Box 1012, G.P.O., Suva, Indonesia – Bible Mission, PO Box 61, Solo, Java

Philippines – Mr Albert Cruz, PO Box 991, Manila, Philippines 1099

Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Pacific Islands, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea – Bible Mission, PO Box 42, Wallacia, NSW 2745, Australia

India – T. Galbraith, G.P.O. Box 159, Hyderabad 500001, India

Bangladesh – Christadelphian Bible Students, PO Box 9052, Banani, Dhaka 1213

Editor: Owen Tecwyn Morgan

26 The Crescent, Hampton-in-Arden, Solihull, B92 0BP, England, UK glad.tidings@virgin.net

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.

Contents

Get the Message?3

Let's get Back to the Bible.....5

God is Speaking – are you Listening? 8

Lift up your Eyes ...10

Have you got the Plot?.....12

The Bible and History15

The Jesus of the Bible.....18

Acknowledgements

Photographs:

Cover: Dollar Glen, Nr Stirling, Scotland
George MacDonald

Illustrations:

Art Today: 3-12,14,18; Christian Clipart 13.

Bible Versions

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

- ❖ *The New King James Version is copyrighted by Thomas Nelson.*
- ❖ *The Revised Standard Version is copyrighted 1946 and 1952 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the USA.*
- ❖ *The New International Version is copyrighted 1978 by New York Bible Society*

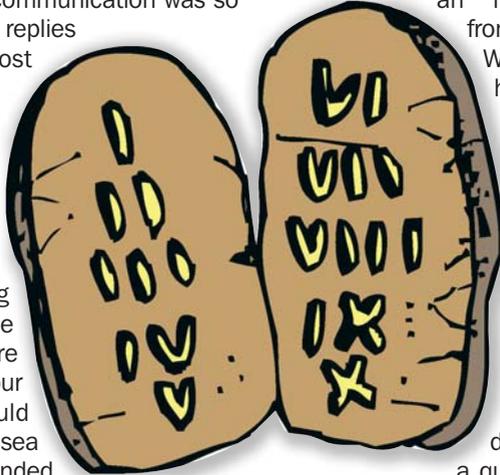
Get the Message?

The telephone rings and the caller asks you “Did you get my message?” and you suddenly remember that you haven’t checked the answer phone recently, or opened yesterday’s mail. There has never been a time when communication was so instant and when replies are expected almost immediately.

When there were no telephones or computers, communication was a much more leisurely business. If you were writing abroad, it could be many months before you got a reply to your letter, which would have made a long sea journey to its intended destination. No doubt when the long-awaited communication arrived, it was carefully read and any reply would have been fully thought out before it was sent. Without such care shown by both reader and writer, it could have been years before a matter was properly understood and the issue resolved.

Quick Fix

Not so today! The present speed of communication means that words are often spoken or written quickly, and without sufficient thought. Quick responses can lead to proposals which have not been fully thought out and to responses which lack proper consideration. Speed is not everything and a quick response may not be a good one. It was sometimes like that in ancient times as well.



When Moses came down from the mount to read out the details of the Ten Commandments God had given Israel to keep – the ones that would later be inscribed on two stone tablets – there was an immediate response from the waiting crowd.

With hardly a moment’s hesitation it would seem, they said: “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:7).

It was a good moment: one that expressed their enthusiasm for God’s purpose with them; but that initial feeling did not last. They made a quick response all right,

but they failed to think through the long-term implications of what they were being asked to do. They just didn’t get the message about what God was offering them and what He wanted from them.

Lifetime Opportunity

As it turned out, the people of Israel were to have a lot of time on their hands to think about God’s calling and what He had offered them. He had said:

“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).

Even then, before any of God’s laws had been issued, they had sworn obedience (19:8) and had shown the right attitude of

mind and heart. God was their Maker; they were His creatures. He was offering them the earth; they just had to do what He said in the certain knowledge that He would instruct them in right ways, to live a happy and fulfilling life. What could have been simpler? Yet they found it impossible to remain single-minded and obedient; life was just too distracting and demanding and many of them missed out on the best offer ever made to any nation.

Time for Reflection

If you have ever stopped on a bridge and gazed down to the river, perhaps hoping to catch a glimpse of your own reflection, you are unlikely to see anything of yourself. The water is usually moving too fast, or the surface is distorted by currents or obstacles. If you want to see your own reflection, you have to get down close to water which is still and calm. Then, as in a mirror, you should be able to fulfil your desire.

Life is like that too. When things are moving fast and there are lots of obstacles in the way, it can be difficult to see things as they really are. We need to find a way of slowing down and getting close if we are to understand the deeper things of life.

God could have communicated His message of hope and life in a quick and easy way, if not in Ten Commandments then perhaps in a Hundred. They could have been read and remembered quickly and easily: the whole process of knowing what God wanted could have been over in minutes. Instead He chose to communicate through people and their experiences, tracing that process from Adam to Jesus, and then



through his apostles. The result is a wonderful collection of sixty-six books we now call “The Holy Bible” which contain history, poetry, prayers, adventures, stories and detailed explanations about the deepest things in life. In that library there is something for everybody, whatever our interests and needs. God has chosen to communicate His message in a wonderful mixture of different approaches, and we need to find time and give it careful thought if we are to understand it and be changed by it.

Getting the Message

God’s intention is that we should both be instructed and affected, if we want to be included among His people. For the offer first made to Israel has now been extended to all nations (see 1 Peter 2:9,10). So the challenge is now ours to read His Word and learn about Him, His purpose, and His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of those aspects are covered in this issue of “Glad Tidings”. But if you really want to get the message of the Bible, try to make the time to read it a little at a time over a period of weeks or months. Get a real idea of its variety, its quality and its life-giving potential.

The last books of the Bible were written more than 1900 years ago, so it has taken a while to reach us in the 21st century! Like the recipients of a message that has taken months to reach some distant land, we need to read carefully and think hard about our response. There is no quick fix and immediate responses may not be the answer. But in God’s Word, and here alone, can be found the most wonderful things in life. Get the Message?

Editor

Let's Get Back to the Bible

Do you know what the middle verse of the Bible says? It takes a bit of counting up, of course, to work out which it is, but when you find it this is what it says:

“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8).

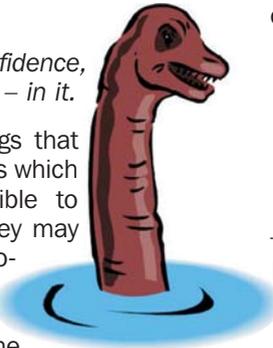
As you might expect of something that is right at the centre of God's Word, this is both very interesting and thought-provoking. It has to do with vital things in life – the things we believe and in which we place our trust. This article looks at some of those things and invites you to come to the same conclusion as did the Psalmist: that it is better to trust in God than in man. But let's start with the basics.

Belief

What is belief? The Dictionary definition is that if you believe something then:

- ❖ *You accept it*
- ❖ *Are certain of it*
- ❖ *Have faith – confidence, trust or reliance – in it.*

In other words, things that you believe are things which are absolutely credible to you, even though they may not be to other people. So belief has to be a very personal thing. Of course, the things that you believe in may not be actually true – there are still people who believe that the earth is flat. It has to be a matter of personal conviction, and



preferably of informed conviction. We ought to be able to work out whether or not a thing is right or wrong before we put our full trust in it.

Unbelief

The same argument applies to unbelief which means that you:

- ❖ *Distrust*
- ❖ *Are sceptical*
- ❖ *Are a “doubting Thomas” – you might say a statement is: Preposterous, Implausible or even Impossible.*

Again, this is an individual choice, based on knowledge, or the lack of it, perhaps a gut feeling, or because you can see no credible alternative. So, a three-year-old child might believe that Santa comes down the chimney, because that is what he or she has been told. But a 10-year-old will probably say ‘Rubbish, I don’t believe that,’ because of increased knowledge.

Personally, I don’t believe in:

- Fairies, pixies and hobgoblins*
- Santa Claus*
- The Abominable Snowman, or*
- The Loch Ness monster.*

To me those things are a waste of time – but they all have their followers – people who believe in them. Perhaps it is because we all need something to believe in; we want a crutch, a hope, a reason, an explanation of the mysteries of life.

Morals

We all live according to our beliefs,

hopes and expectations if we have any. And most people look forward to something, whether it is contentment, wealth, long life or their vision of an afterlife. And most people have a clear idea of how they should behave in society and how they expect others to behave. Some people have low expectations and behave accordingly, not caring about others and not caring much about morals. Others lead exemplary lives and try to lead by example.

We call these attributes “*morals*”, or standards of behaviour. They are something to be learned as we go through life – from parents, through the things we see, or from teachers – until we decide for ourselves what society expects from us and what we expect from society.

Falling Standards

During the past few years of course, standards have fallen dramatically. Nowadays Society is largely concerned about getting the best deal for the individual: putting self first and “doing one’s own thing”. The result is that there is now scant regard for law and order, morals have declined sharply and the world has become in many ways a dreadful place. Religion is mocked and derided and any moral leadership given by the established church declines almost daily.

None of this should come as a surprise because this state of affairs was long ago predicted, as follows:

“Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control,



Major’s own behaviour has come under scrutiny. Perhaps it is no wonder that such ‘Moral Crusades’ are soon abandoned.

“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8).

Sad to say, we can sel-

brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Sounds pretty familiar, does it not? All these things are prevalent these days, so much so that the government decided some time ago to try and reverse the trend.

Moral Crusades

Here in the UK, Prime Minister Tony Blair tried launching a Moral Crusade, with a Bible in one hand and a book in the other that purported to inform young people to learn from Bible teaching that it is best to wait until they are old and wise enough before embarking upon relationships. It’s not the first time the UK government has tried moral leadership – there was a ‘*Back to Basics*’ campaign, when the previous government sought to point out the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, and to explain the standards of behaviour expected.

Of course, as is usual when governments get involved in this sort of thing it was a case of “Do what we say – not what we do”. Much to the embarrassment of John Major, the Prime Minister at the time, several of his government Ministers were found to have been engaging in immoral activities and were publicly exposed. Indeed, since then Mr

dom believe or trust what politicians tell us to do. Nor can we always believe leading churchmen, academics, or the media. They cannot set the moral tone however much they pontificate about the way of life we should live, because they are unable to live according to that standard themselves. Meanwhile, human behaviour gets worse and worse.

Worse and Worse

Here's the apostle Paul again, not only with a diagnosis but also with a prescription that can do something about the problem of sinful behaviour:

"Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:13-15).

Here's a solution to the dilemma we have been examining. We should put our trust and belief in the Bible's message – one that is constant and unchanging, that reassures, because it is true. Put simply – Let's get back to the Bible. It's what we were thinking about at the outset having faith or belief. Now we can see what we should become confident about – the offer made by Jesus Christ of salvation from the world's evil through the knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures. While evil men will get worse and worse, the person who wants to get better and better can do no better

than becoming more acquainted with the Word of God:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible can teach us about God's standards of behaviour and how to become acceptable or "righteous" in His sight. It can show us how to become more like Jesus, to live a better sort of life – one that is focussed upon the best things, living in a way which tries to make a difference by doing good. Do you believe that this would be worthwhile for you? This is

the way to find hope. Here is where our faith should be – where our beliefs should be centred – on the Word of God, so that we may in time become "thoroughly equipped for every good work".

The Bible gives us hope of a better life now and in the age to come. God is going to change society and, in place of this present order, establish His Kingdom on earth.

We need to become people who are learning now to live with God so that we can be waiting for the return from heaven of the Lord Jesus and be granted a place in that coming Kingdom. As the Psalmist said long ago:

"It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man".

If you agree with that you can do nothing better than get back to the Bible.

Mervyn Aucott

God Is Speaking – Are You Listening?

One of the best known parables Jesus told was about a farmer who scattered seed in his field.

The results were very mixed because not all the seed fell on good soil where it could produce a decent crop.

Some seed fell along a hard path and was promptly eaten by birds.

Some fell on shallow, rocky soil where it germinated and grew quickly to begin with, but eventually was scorched by the heat of the sun and died.

Other seed fell on to soil that was full of weeds. As with the seed on shallow soil, growth began well enough but eventually, due to competition from the weeds, they too died out.

Finally, some seed grew well and produced a satisfactory crop. This was because it had fallen into good, deep soil that provided perfect conditions for growth.

The Meaning of the Parable

The Lord Jesus gives us a detailed interpretation of this parable. The seed, he said, represents the gospel message – the good news of the kingdom of God. The different soils stand for different kinds of people who have heard the Word.

There are those who don't understand what they are hearing and dismiss it straight away.

Some, to begin with, are quite excited by what they have heard, but their interest does not last for long.

Others are equally enthusiastic but eventually, because of their busy lives and other distractions, they too cease to have any further interest.

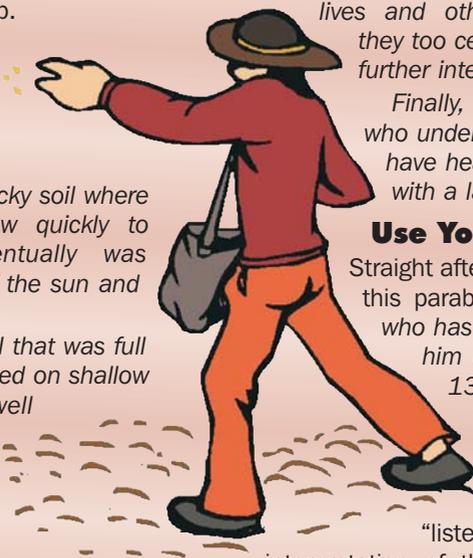
Finally, there are those who understand what they have heard and respond with a lasting interest.

Use Your Ears!

Straight after Jesus had told this parable he said: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:9). What do you suppose he meant by that? He was saying more than just "listen carefully". His

interpretation of the parable suggests that Jesus is saying that we must make sure we really do hear just what he is saying, accept its importance and act accordingly.

So what sort of soil are you? There is a saying that "There are none so deaf as those who will not hear". The fact that you are reading this article suggests that you are not like that, but which of the soils do you think you are? Does the message of the gospel, as we would say, "Go into one ear and out of the other"? Is your life



so cluttered with unimportant things that the Word of God becomes marginalized? Hopefully, you are thinking carefully about it, giving it the time and attention its importance deserves.

The Voice of God

The source of the gospel message is the Bible itself. It is to this we must turn if we are going to listen to what God is telling us. *“All Scripture is God-breathed”* wrote the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:16). The apostle Peter wrote similarly concerning the words of Scripture, *“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21), he said.

Quite clearly both these men believed that what we read in the Bible is what God caused to be written. In a very real sense therefore, when we read the Bible we are listening to God speaking to us.



Producing a Crop

To return to the parable of the Sower, the description of those who are represented by the good soil, as described in the Luke account, is *“those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop”* (Luke 8:15 NIV).

In the parable, the crop varied from thirty to a hundred times what was sown. What do you suppose Jesus wants us to understand by that? And what is the crop? The parable is all about different people's response to the gospel message. Even among those who both respond and then continue, there are varying levels of achievement. People are different. So what is God looking for? To put it in just one word – God wants us to develop Faith.

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by

the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

There are degrees of faith. Some people have great faith and others not so. But here's the point: given the right conditions, everybody's faith can grow.

Living a Life of Faith

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1 NIV). Note the two very important words here – *‘sure’* and *‘certain’*.

That kind of faith cannot be gained without a good foundation of understanding. Faith cannot grow if we only have a vague and superficial idea about God and his purpose. It is necessary to allow his word to “take root” in our minds and permeate our thinking. A healthy and good crop is a life lived in faith before God. Hebrews chapter 11 continues with an inspiring account of the lives of some faithful men and women. They listened to what God said, believed his Word and then lived by faith.

The Final Harvest

The faithful characters that we read about in the Bible lived with a daily awareness of God in their lives and they looked forward to a wonderful future. For them, the Word of God that took root in their lives was destined to produce a rich harvest of everlasting life in God's kingdom.

This can be our sure and certain hope also, as the concluding verses of Hebrews tell us.

“All these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:39-40).

Surely this is something to which we shall, if we are wise, give our full attention. As the Lord Jesus says *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

David Ogden

Lift Up Your Eyes

It's a sunny summer afternoon and as you have had a busy week you decide to take a break.

You are walking through a shady glen. A stream – in this part of the world we call it a “burn” – tumbles its way through the leafy woods. You climb up the steep rocky path and, as you emerge through the last of the trees into the sunlight, there before you stands an ancient castle and beyond it the fern-covered hills seem to go on forever.

You experience a feeling of calm as you consider the scale and majesty of the view before you. You stop and look up and marvel at what your eyes are taking in.

What do you See?

People have often stopped to gaze upwards and outwards, but they do not always see the same things. A naturalist might be able to spot and identify variations in the flora and fauna that would be missed by most of us. A local historian might see indications of events that happened at that very spot a long time ago; a meteorologist looking towards the skies might be able to foresee coming changes; and so on. But all of these specialists might miss the really important indicators.

A long time ago a poet lifted up his eyes and this is what he saw:

“I will lift up my eyes to the hills – From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be

moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:1-4).

Notice that he looked up and saw everything around him pointing to the God who made the world. So, inspired by the wonders of creation around him, he expressed his praise to God and then looked to God to help him through life.



Spiritual Insight

This is quite different from the way people think today in a secular society, but it was the norm in past times when people believed implicitly in God and trusted Him to help them in all the circumstances of life. They then recognised that there is more to life than just material things or chance happenings. They believed in a purpose and pattern behind everything, because God has designed and made the world. Here's another Psalmist expressing his appreciation of what he saw:

“He sends the springs into the valleys, which flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst” (Psalm 104:10,11).

Such an outward and upward look is not satisfied when it traces the Maker and Carer of all that is seen. Like a person following the burn back to its source, the Psalmist realises that because God made everything, and made it for a purpose, his own life must be part of that purpose. So he says:

“May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works ... I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being ... Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 104:31-35).

First Things First

There has never been anyone with a keener or better insight into spiritual things than the Lord Jesus Christ. When he lived on earth and looked around him he saw spiritual lessons everywhere, as we can readily tell from the parables he used to illustrate his teachings. They featured everyday things which he had noticed and what he saw was helpful to him in understanding the deepest things in life. Sometimes his straightforward teaching was also coloured by his keen-eyed observation. Once, while urging his followers not to become worried by daily troubles, he said this:



*“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? **Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?**” (Matthew 6:25-26).*

Nobody has ever seen rooks sowing grain – they are too busy eating it should it fall on open ground! No pigeon has a vegetable patch where it grows its own food – it raids the vegetable gardens carefully sown and planted by humans! And what is true of the birds is true also of the wild flowers that lined the hillsides of

Galilee as they do our own fields and waysides. For, said Jesus:

“Why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (6:28,29).

Jesus used what he had seen to reinforce his teaching that God cares about the world He has created and that we should care about the God who made the world. It was part of his mission to demonstrate how much God cares for us and what great lengths He would go to so that we can be saved from sin and death.

Jesus said, we too must care a lot about God and what He wants from us. Here it is summed up in just one sentence. Having spoken about all the things we could be distracted by in life, Jesus says:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

We all have moments in our busy lives when we are struck by the beauty of our surroundings, whether a beautiful flower, a colourful sunset or a view of the hills. So, next time you pause to admire the wonderful world around you, like the Psalmist, take a few seconds to thank God for His creation and His continual presence in your life. And ask yourself what you can see when you lift up your eyes.

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? ... O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:3,4,9).

Lissie Faulks

Have you Got the Plot?



The film director Stephen Spielberg is alleged to have said that to make a really good movie a director needs a plot he can hold in the palm of his hand. One of his most famous films, *E.T.* – short for “*Extra Terrestrial*” – is a classic example of just that: a boy meets and befriends an alien and helps him find his way home. It’s a simple idea but one that has proved to be very appealing to the film-going public.

The Bible’s Plot-Line

When we think about the plot of the Bible we are not thinking about a film or a work of fiction, but about reality. The Bible claims to be the Word of God, His unique revelation and message to mankind. Yet much of the Bible consists of narrative – an account of both past and future with quite a definite ‘story-line’ running through it. It’s not a fictional story, however, but the history of some people who were involved in His purpose given from God’s perspective. And in the process of explaining what happened to them, and what they were told, we come to understand God’s plans for the shaping of the future.

Because the Bible is such a big book and contains many parts, written in quite diverse styles, it can be easy for both beginners and experts to miss the shape of the whole. Readers of the Bible, both new and old, can easily miss the fact that the plot of the Bible and the message it contains is essentially a very simple one.

So what happens in the Bible, and what is still to happen, according to its predictions? What is the Bible about? And can its plot be held in the palm of one’s hand?

What’s it all about?

The Bible is about God and mankind, and about their relationship. God made man and woman and has always been in charge of everything that happens. Yet he gave Adam and Eve free will to choose what they would do – whether to live in harmony and obedience to God, or to choose their own direction in life. Unfortunately, they chose to go their own way, thinking they knew better than did their Maker. Because of this mankind gradually descended into a spiral of moral decadence and selfishness that the Bible calls ‘sin’.

The consequence of such choices is still very much in evidence in the world today. Sin lies at the root of all the problems of society at large and individual men and women face in the world today – including pain and ultimately death. This is the problem, the ‘bottom-line’ which humanity must face. We are left under no illusions about our nature or condition; the reality is stark.

What’s God’s Solution?

There is the possibility of a solution – a way back to God. Throughout history, God has been calling people back to him, holding his hand out, as it were, and inviting them to return. He did this to Abraham and his descendants the Jews, and much of the Bible uses their relationship to teach a wider audience what God’s invita-

tion and expectations involves. God's requirements are not easy in one sense – it's hard trying to please someone else rather than oneself – yet the rewards are vast. God makes tremendous promises about the future to Abraham and his successors – promises which are available to all who hear and respond to the gospel message.

Unfortunately, by the end of the Old Testament (two thirds of the way through the Bible), God's people Israel have by and large rejected God's offer, just as man and woman had originally done (human nature doesn't easily change). So in the New Testament there is a dramatic development. God sent his Son to show how much He cared and how much He wants men and women to come back to him.

Unlike everyone who had lived beforehand, the Lord Jesus lived a perfect life – a life which he ultimately gave in the greatest and most perfect sacrifice ever made. Jesus died to show what men and women are capable of as sinners (inflicting such suffering on an innocent man), and what sin deserves (death).

That very same act also showed that God's love and capacity to forgive are even greater and more far-reaching. God is wonderfully able to overcome the evil of sin. God loves us so much that He has given us the most precious gift possible – His only Son – so that we can be forgiven and can have a hope of life. As the Bible says:

"For God so loved the world

that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16,17).

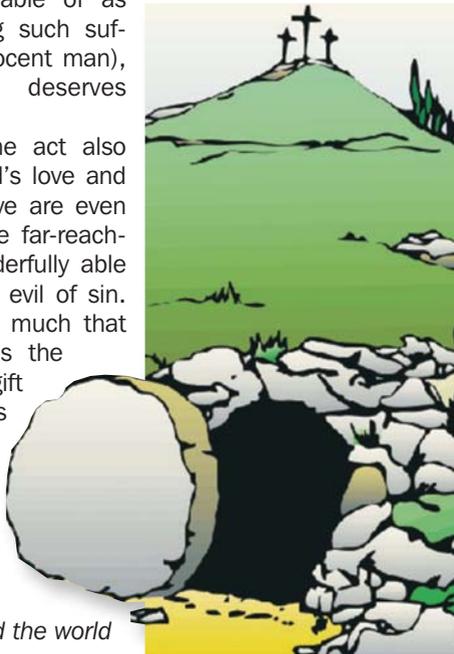
What Next?

Because Jesus had done no sin, God raised him up to new life, never to die again. He had conquered sin and temptation. In his death and resurrection lies the hope for everyone who receives the call of the gospel to die (as it were) to their old way of selfishness, and to live to God. This is the challenge God invites us to take up. But this is not the end of the story.

In the future God will send Jesus back to the earth again to renew the world, now wracked by problems, and to establish His kingdom upon earth. Then all the wrongs of this world will be put right, and Jesus will reign for God as King.

From Bad to Good

Conceptually, most of the above is not difficult. As a plot-line (and even more so, as reality), it is brilliant because it involves the transformation of the worst story man has ever known (his own demise) into the best (his salvation). It would be easy to open out each part of the plot and to add in many others – exploring for several hours each aspect in turn. But just summed up in a few short paragraphs this glance at the Bible's overall message has shape and meaning. The apostle Paul put the message even more succinctly when he said:



“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Note the way in which the apostle involves himself in his own summary of the gospel message. The story of the Bible is even more poignant because, as human beings, we are each actors in the unfolding drama of history. You and I are personally caught up in the wonder and the challenge of the Bible’s tale. This is what Paul meant when he said that he was the chief of sinners. The Bible’s message is not a story at arm’s length. Each of us is involved and caught up in God’s plan for the world.

Can we grasp it?

Let’s return finally to the question of whether one can hold the plot of the Bible in the palm of one’s hand. We have seen that in an important way the answer to this is ‘yes’. The Bible’s message is not complicated; a child can understand its

basic story, its themes, and its plans for the future. Yet the answer is also ‘no’. To know – and to really grasp - the message of the Bible is to know something of the mind of God himself. And how can a mere human hope to do that? As the apostle Paul once again expressed it:

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Romans 11:34).

Expanding and attempting to understand God’s purpose is a lifetime’s study and more.

Yet Paul’s final conclusion is not one of frustration – that he can never truly understand his God. Paradoxically Paul goes on to explain that God has made known His mind and His plan to us – though He is infinite – by His Spirit. He has done this in his Word the Bible. This is why the plot of the Bible – simple and yet utterly profound – is so important to everyone of us.

Mark Vincent

Right at the Centre

In the very middle of the Bible, this Psalm directs our minds to those things we should be concerned about if we want to get our lives right with God.



*“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! Because His mercy endures forever ... I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? ... **It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.** It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes. ...*

The LORD is my strength and song, And he has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation Is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. ... I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD ... Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the LORD ... I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; It is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD” (Psalm 118)

The Bible and History

*It has always been the claim of the Bible that it is the inspired Word of God and as such is totally trustworthy and reliable because the teachings it contains are vital for the eternal well-being of men and women. Despite this the accuracy and historicity of the Bible has come under challenge and nowadays many people who have never really examined its message take it for granted that it is inaccurate. In this article **Trevor Maher** shows why there are good reasons to accept the Bible's claim to be the Word of God.*

Given by Inspiration

For centuries the narratives of the Bible were accepted by all as being true and no one questioned the veracity of the people, places, and events it described. However in the 18th and 19th centuries academics and scholars in Europe challenged the claims of the divine origin of the Bible.

It was a time when the humanist and evolutionary theories from men such as Darwin took hold on attitudes and beliefs. Instead of standing up to the critics many religious leaders tried to accommodate this new thinking and so watered down the authority of Scripture. Such was the influence of these "Higher Critics", as they became known, that the historical record in the Bible was openly challenged and derided as at best inaccurate and often simply fable.

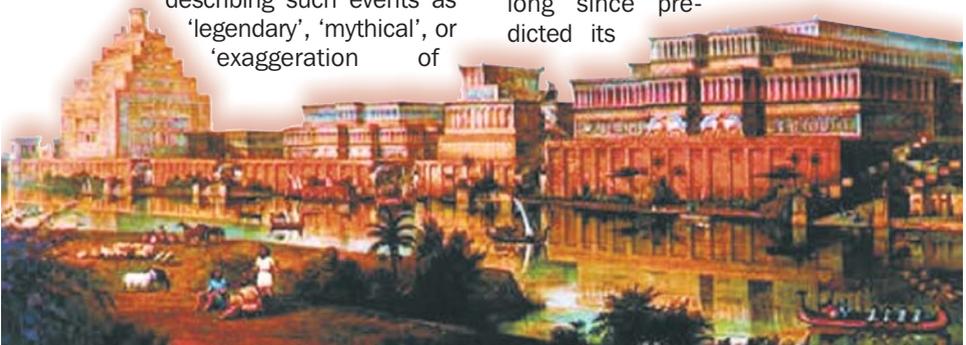
"Higher" Critics

These scholars who were so critical of the Bible denied the validity of miracles describing such events as 'legendary', 'mythical', or 'exaggeration of

events that are entirely explicable from natural causes'. They would not accept the reality of prophecy and called prophetic statements 'conjecture', 'coincidences', or 'fiction'. These Critics did not believe in the supernatural in any way and their hypotheses were based on the assumption that the scriptural records were false and certainly not inspired. They attacked the Scriptures, claiming there was no support in historical records or archaeological discoveries for the Bible narratives. Much of what they had to say was shown years later to be untrue and the Bible was vindicated but by then the damage had been done and the public had turned from the Bible to humanist philosophies and relegated it to a book with wise sayings. It was no longer venerated as the Word of God. So it is worthwhile examining just how wrong the critics were!

◆ Nineveh

It was claimed that this city was a fiction and that it never existed. But God had long since pre-dicted its



overthrow and abandonment:

"He will stretch out his hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness" (Zephaniah 2:13).

During explorations in 1843-45 the city was discovered and excavated. The critics were wrong!

◆ Assyrian King-Sargon

It was claimed that the prophecy of Isaiah was wrong when it said: *"In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it ..."* (20:1). Critics said there was no King Sargon who reigned over Assyria; he was unknown and probably never existed. However in the excavated city of Nineveh a wonderful palace was discovered. It contained a library of cuneiform bricks one of which held the name Sargon. The Higher Critics in Berlin said it must be a forgery! Once again the critics were wrong!

◆ Assyrian King-Sennacherib

The Bible account of how the King of Judah, one Hezekiah, defeated a vastly superior army of the Assyrians who had been conquering all the surrounding lands and cities came in for a great deal of criticism. The record in 2 Kings Chapters 18 and 19 was considered to be rather fanciful. Yet once more the accuracy of the

Bible record was shown very clearly by archaeologists. A stele was found which had this illuminating inscription:

"I then besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke, and I captured forty six of his strong cities and fortresses, and innumerable small cities which were round about them, with battering



rams and assault engines, and the attack of foot soldiers, and by mines and breaches ... Himself, like a caged bird I shut up within Jerusalem his royal city."

Nor was that the end of the matter because in 1838 the tunnel was discovered for the water conduit which is described in Scripture as part of the siege preparations:

"Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah - all his might, and how he made a pool and a tunnel and brought water into the city - are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" (2 Kings 20:20).

To establish the position beyond doubt, in 1880 a local boy found an inscription carved on one of the walls of the tunnel actually describing the project now known as Hezekiah's Tunnel and visitors to Jerusalem today can see it for themselves. Once again the critics were wrong!

◆ The writing on the wall!

The story in Daniel Chapter 5 is well known to many and it is probably the source of a common saying today – 'The writing is on the wall' – meaning the end of something is very close. In the Bible account a hand appears and writes a message on the wall during a feast at the time of king Belshazzar, depicting the end of the Babylonian Empire. Critics said that the last king of Babylon was Nabonidas and that the character Belshazzar never existed.

Unfortunately for the critics, a clay cylinder was found in 1854 that identified Belshazzar as having been co-regent with his father at that time. The writing was on the wall for the critics this time! Once again the critics were wrong!

◆ Ephesus

Our examples so far have been taken from the Old Testament but the critics were no less scathing in their dismissal of the New

Testament as an accurate record, and in particular the record of the Acts of the Apostles. Written by Luke who also wrote the Gospel of Luke, the book outlines some of the preaching activities of the early church and, while doing so, uses many terms and descriptions with which historians and critics were unfamiliar.

By now it will come as no surprise to you to know that they therefore dismissed Luke's record as inaccurate. However Sir William Ramsey investigated Luke's writings and although he was predisposed to find it unreliable he became totally convinced that it was in fact "marvellous truth". This is what he wrote:



"Great historians are the rarest of writers

*... I will venture to add one to the critics, by stating in the following chapters reasons for placing the author of the Acts among the historians of the first rank."*¹

So in his book Sir William Ramsey clearly identifies how truthful and accurate the words of Luke are. This comes as no surprise to true Christians who believe that God inspired Luke to set down an accurate record of his experiences and the events that God wanted recorded. When the Bible was translated into English in 1611 (at the express orders of James 1 of England – James 6th of Scotland) it was from the Bible that subsequent generations learnt that the following terms were those used in those days long before archaeology subsequently vindicated them:

- ☆ Politarchs at Thessalonica (Acts 17:6 – the term in the original Greek);
- ☆ Asiarchs in Ephesus (Acts 19:31);

- ☆ Chiliarchos (Roman Officer) (Acts 21:37)

Luke also gave very accurate information about buildings and areas long before secular historians could do so:

- ☆ The gate, market and river at Philippi (Acts 16:13-19);
- ☆ Areopagus at Athens (Acts 17:19);
- ☆ Theatre and Temple of Diana at Ephesus (Acts 19:28-31).

So once more the critic was shown to be wrong!

Absolutely True

Sadly, these so-called experts are never inclined to apologise or admit the errors of their ways and we are left to reflect on the old adage that 'today's expert opinion is tomorrow's discarded theory'. Despite all this criticism,

however, the Bible has stood the test of time. Its narratives are true and accurate and so is its vital teaching about the purpose of life and the hope of salvation centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. For God's great and precious promises remain unchanged and absolutely true.

The Bible is still the only reliable source of information concerning the Son of God and because we can see the validity of its historical records we need have no doubts about the truths contained in the gospels in the New Testament. We ought to believe what it says for as the Apostle Peter said:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68,69).

Trevor Maher

¹ Quotation from "St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen" Wm. M. Ramsay, Baker Book House, 1962, pp 3-4,8.

The Jesus of the Bible

*Do you really know what the Bible teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you really informed about the true nature of God's Son? Over the years there has been a lot of debate about it and many controversial books have been written presenting a range of different views. Some people claim that Jesus never existed, or that the stories surrounding him are more myth than reality. In this article **Mervyn Aucott** examines what the Bible says about the nature and person of the Lord Jesus.*

It Really Matters

The Christian faith is centred on the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Bible says quite categorically that it is vital for us to understand the true nature of Jesus if we want to have eternal life. So it clearly matters very much.

What matters most of all is that we should be informed by what we read in God's Word, not by what we read in other publications however well meaning they may be. That includes this publication, of course, which serves a helpful function only if its message is properly based on what the Bible teaches.

At the Centre

The Scriptures emphasise time and again how important Jesus is in the plan and purpose of God. Without knowledge of him and an understanding of what that means to us we would be helpless and hopeless. Let's take the words of Jesus himself as our starting-off point:

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you, as you have given him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal

life to as many as you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:1-3).

Here are several points to think about:

- ☞ *Jesus called God his Father*
- ☞ *He referred to himself as God's Son*
- ☞ *He has the power and authority to bestow eternal life*
- ☞ *It is important that those that believe know the real Jesus*
- ☞ *God sent Jesus to the earth for a special purpose*

Let's now look at a short history of Jesus, and examine his true nature and humanity.

Christ's Place in God's Plan

The virgin birth of Jesus, as recorded in Luke's gospel, is well known, but here are some of the relevant verses for your further consideration:

"Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob



forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:31-35).

Mary conceived while still a virgin through the influence of the Holy Spirit – God’s breath or power – acting upon her. Thus Joseph, to whom she was betrothed at the time, was not the true father of Jesus, and without the Holy Spirit’s interaction Jesus – the Son of God – would not have been born nor would he have come into existence. We read in John 3:16 that Jesus was ‘begotten’ by God, and this is in marked contrast to Genesis 2:7 where we are told that Adam was “created” or “formed” from the dust of the ground. This different terminology helps us to understand the closeness Jesus had with God and the special relationship that existed between Father and Son.

Long-Promised Saviour

Christ was in God’s plan and purpose from the very start. We can tell that because his coming and the work he would undertake had been long promised. Even in the Garden of Eden there were indications that one day a special child would be born who would be “seed of the woman”, but not begotten of a human father (Genesis 3:15). God was to provide a Saviour Himself to bridge the gap (Genesis 22:8-14), which enabled the faithful of old to look forward in keen anticipation to that coming child (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7).

It was promised that a Son was to be born of a virgin and he was destined to be outstanding because he would be God’s own Son. So it was that Jesus came into

existence physically through his birth of Mary and thus fulfilled the long-standing promises to the Jewish fathers. Now it was that God’s plan was wonderfully realised, as the New Testament fully recognises when reflecting upon the great events that followed his birth:

Consider the following:

- ⇒ *Jesus was the central pivot of the gospel. He was “promised before by his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Romans 1:1-4).*
- ⇒ *Because he was to die, his status was less than the angels in his mortal life (Hebrews 2:7) – angels being immortal – for Jesus had to be subject to all the temptations that beset us (Hebrews 2:14; 4:15).*
- ⇒ *Because of his faithful obedience, Jesus was afterwards exalted to great honour both because he was God’s Son and because of his perfect obedience to his Father’s commandments (Philippians 2:5-11).*

To summarise, Jesus was:

- ⇒ *Promised in the Old Testament – his birth was a crucial part of God’s purpose*
- ⇒ *Created as a physical person through the virgin birth, and thus he became a descendant of King David – God being his Father*
- ⇒ *Because of his perfect life of obedience, Jesus was both resurrected from the dead by God’s power and exalted to glory and honour in heaven.*

No wonder we are told:

*“Neither is there salvation in any other: **for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**” (Acts 4:12).*

Mervyn Aucott

Two Free Offers

Can Angels Help Us?

Angels have existed since the foundation of the world; they exist today and they will be in the Kingdom of God on earth. They have been given tremendous power: they maintain the universe and they bridge the gulf between the unapproachable glory of the LORD God and those human beings on earth who are prepared to reverence Him.



Stanley Owen

To obtain a *FREE* copy of the above booklet fill in the coupon below and send it to one of the Free offers addresses.

Your Name (BLOCK CAPITALS please)

Address _____

Post Code _____

Country _____

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

If you are not yet receiving the *Glad Tidings* magazine and would like it delivered *FREE* for 6 months – write your name and address here and send it to one of the addresses below.



Your Name (BLOCK CAPITALS please)

Address _____

Post Code _____

Country _____

Addresses for the Free Offers:

In the UK write to: Glad Tidings Magazine,
Freepost NAT7259, Ely CB7 5BR

In other countries, to: Cilla Palmer (Mrs)
"Highlands", 78 Mildenhall Road, Fordham, Ely,
Cambs, CB7 5NR, England

Local Information