

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1462



You're Never Too Old – page 3
Evolution and Morality – page 11
God's New Society – page 15

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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You're Never Too Old

Whoever said “You can’t teach old dogs new tricks” did a grave disservice to dogs, who are often more intelligent than people who say silly things about them.

And whenever that silly saying has been applied to older people, it has been equally unfair if they then thought that it was true – that they are too old to learn something new. The truth is that some people are never too old to learn new things. It’s often just a matter of application and determination. If you really want to do something, you usually can!

Sixteen or Sixty?

People are living longer than ever and older people often have more time than their contemporaries to try new things and learn new techniques. They are not quite so busy, even if they seldom have any time on their hands. So the last thing they want to hear is that they are “past it”; that they “lack the brain power to master something new”, or any of that sort of nonsense.

In Britain there are now said to be more sixty-year-olds than sixteen-year-olds, and society is gradually realising that they are a force to be reckoned with in several respects.

As Old As...

There was a time when people lived much longer than we do now. Before

the worldwide flood at the time of Noah, when atmospheric conditions were rather different according to the historical record, people lived for several hundred years. But after that occurrence God indicated that human life would be shortened, to an average of 120 years (see Genesis 6:3).

Thus it was, for example, that:

- ⌘ **Abraham** lived to the grand old age of 175 (Genesis 25:7) and was vigorous right up to the end;
- ⌘ **Isaac** died aged 180 (35:28);
- ⌘ **Jacob** was 147, Joseph 110 and
- ⌘ **Moses** 120.

All of those good people were active believers right up to the time of their death. Jacob was able to pronounce a prophetic blessing on his sons and their descendants; Joseph made commandment concerning his bones (he wanted to be buried in Hebron, not in Egypt) and Moses made a long series of farewell addresses which now form the Book of Deuteronomy.

Limited Time

Moses was told that our life expectancy was going to be reduced by God to the level that now prevails. We are not told why God decided to limit the span of human existence: perhaps it was because the people who came from Egypt with Moses were wasting their opportunities and carrying on in a godless and heedless way. Whatever the reason, in a Prayer that Moses composed under the influence of God’s Spirit, he said this:



"For all our days have passed away in your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" Psalm 90:9,10).

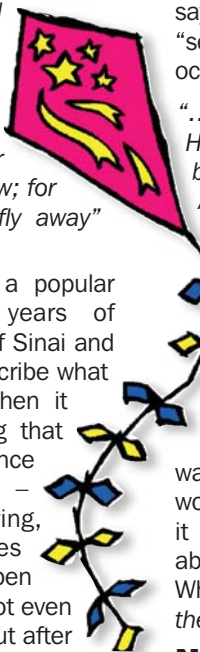
Flying kites was probably a popular pastime during the 38 years of wandering in the wilderness of Sinai and Moses uses that figure to describe what happens to our existence when it ends. Death snips the string that describes our mortal existence and then we are gone – unconscious, unknowing, unfeeling. And, Moses explained, it would now happen not after hundreds of years, not even after 120 years on average; but after 70-80 years. That's our present situation.

Seek the Lord

Generations later it was the apostle Paul; who explained to the philosophers at Athens, on mainland Greece, that we are given life so that we can use it to seek after God and get to know what He is offering us by way of endless and eternal life:

"He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord" (Acts 17:26,27).

What sort of reaction do you think he got – Paul a Hebrew who was not of their culture nor taught in their academies? They dismissed him in a patronising way,



saying that they would hear what this "seed-picker" had to say on some other occasion. Then the record adds:

"...So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:33,34).

That's precisely what God wants – men and women, whatever their social standing, sex or upbringing, who are willing to believe His promises. There will only ever be a few in each generation. It was like that in Bible times, when God worked through a believing remnant, and it is like that today. God never worries about numbers, but about inclination. What matters is our willingness to "seek the Lord".

Never Too Late

It's possible that Dionysius, Damaris and the others were getting on in years: we are not told. What is evident, however, in today's world, and it was probably the same then, is that you think a bit more about death and the afterlife when you get older, because they begin to stare you in the face.

Everyone of us will end up with a death-bed experience of sorts, and each one of us would like then to think that we are going to wake up to something better. That can happen if we have used the opportunity we have now to put our life right with God. It is never too late to make our peace with God and become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the sooner we begin or complete that quest, the better it will be for us!



Editor

The Good Life

*It used to be fashionable to talk about “the good life” as something that would enable you to leave the hustle and bustle of modern life and find a way of slowing down and enjoying life more. In this article **Marion Buckler** explains what the expression really means and how it challenges us.*

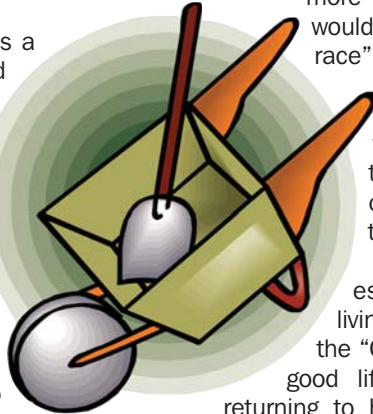
TV Sitcom

Some years ago there was a situation comedy called “*The Good Life*” in which a couple chose to opt out of the rat-race of working in the city, hankering after more money in order to buy more and more material things. They tried to convert their suburban garden into a self-sufficient smallholding, to grow their own vegetables, keep their own poultry and even keep a goat and a pig. They attempted to get back to nature and live in a healthier, simpler way.

Their efforts attracted the amazement and ridicule of their neighbours who were a couple of successful and sophisticated suburban types with all the trappings of modern living. It was the interaction between these two families, with their very different outlooks, that made the series hugely popular and sometimes very funny.

Real Life Scenario

We can easily be drawn into this artificial life-style in the Western world and the same values and aspirations are now spreading to the developing world as well. We often work in environments which are detached from the land and have forgotten what hard work it can be to grow our own food and rear our own animals. Some of us dream of a simpler,



more basic mode of life. We would like to escape the “rat-race”, the boring routine of working in an office, shop or factory – just so that we can earn enough to have everything which is offered and advertised by the commercial world.

But would such an escape to old-fashioned living really provide us with the “Good Life”? Is that what a good life is really all about – returning to hard physical labour and managing without many of the material comforts of life?

Adam the Husbandman

It is true that there is huge satisfaction in reaping a good harvest of home-grown crops. Adam’s work in the Garden of Eden was to tend the land (to till it and keep it). Maybe God knew that this would be a pleasant and fulfilling occupation for Adam. But that was before his disobedience and the fall that resulted. After Adam and Eve had been banished from Eden growing food was not quite so easy. To Adam, God said:

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till

you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19)

We all know how weeds seem to flourish while plants we nurture shrivel, fall prey to disease, mildew, caterpillars, aphids and other insects. Animals too are subject to disease and accident so that producing food is not always the easy, idyllic rural way of life we sometimes imagine. When people say they would like to “get back to nature”, they are wishing for a happy, carefree existence that they secretly long for. But it is an illusion. The perfect life style does not exist as things now stand.

Men who lived as long ago as Job and Solomon, in Old Testament times, knew the truth of this. Here is their testimony:

“Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause; who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number” (Job 5:7-9);

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and withers; he flees like a shadow, and continues not” (14:1,2);

“What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from

the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 2:22-24).

The Good Man

The “Good Life” we all want is the quality of life that Jesus Christ showed us. He lived two thousand years ago and followed God’s law in every aspect. This radically affected the way he interacted with others, his teaching, the miracles of healing he performed, his loving forgiveness – the way he gave his whole life in obeying God and serving others. He gave of himself all through his life and ultimately he gave himself completely in his death on the cross.

Once, describing himself as the Good Shepherd who had come to gather and safeguard God’s flock, he said:

“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep ... For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (John 10: 11-18).

The Lord Jesus was the only man who ever really lived “the Good Life.” But he has promised “the Good Life” – eternal life – to all who believe in him, are baptised, and then try to follow his example in the way they live.

New Life

All our work, efforts and ambitions in this life are transitory. However temporarily



fulfilling and successful they may be, we know they are all coming to an end when we die. Jesus said this so clearly when he once said to his contemporaries:

“Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you” (John 6:27).

His words were meant for us too. Only by seeking to live a life which is pleasing to God and trying to follow Jesus’ example of complete selflessness can we hope for that more fulfilling, perfect life that Jesus has promised.

All the problems and imperfections of our world will be solved only when our own imperfect nature has been changed. We are not capable of effecting this change ourselves; but God will realise His plan for us and the world, when he sends back the Lord Jesus Christ.

New World

Then we will live *“the Good Life”* in a perfect world where sin and death and all the other problems that threaten to overwhelm this planet have been

eradicated. Here’s a Bible picture of that new age which will come at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:1-5).

Now that really is the Good Life, and you can be part of it, by the grace of God, if you really want to be.

Marion Buckler

Quotations from the RSV

The Supreme Good

The new life must be rich in deeds as well as in words: in compassion as well as in truth. Just as God *“maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust”*, so His children will generously bestow the benefits of His love in them to all, in or out of the faith, irrespective of race or creed. Many of us are neither as vigorous nor as selfless in this respect as we might be.

Good works are the fruit of the selfless spirit which develops in the saints as a result of knowing God and remembering their indebtedness to Him. The challenge is summed up in the words of Jesus: *“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.”*

John Marshall – The New Life

Growth of the Gospel - 14

Peter's Imprisonment and Release

*Having dominated the first part of the Acts of the Apostles, where he has both preached at Jerusalem and travelled from Joppa to Caesarea, Peter now gets into trouble upon his return to Jerusalem. King Herod has tolerated the early Christians and not taken action but, as **John Hellowell** now explains, all that was about to change.*

Herod's Persecution

We are not told why Herod Agrippa decided to arrest and execute the Apostle James (the brother of the Apostle John) but when he realised that this put him in good stead with the unbelieving Jews, he decided to arrest the Apostle Peter also. This was during Passover and he kept him in prison during the time of the feast, intending that Peter should be executed publicly after the religious festival was over.

Herod took no chances in ensuring that Peter was securely imprisoned. He may have been familiar with the earlier incident when the Apostles had escaped from prison under mysterious circumstances (Acts 5:22-25). In fact, an angel of the Lord had freed them (Acts 5:19). Four squads of soldiers were deployed to guard him constantly; presumably there were four shifts of six hours. Peter was secured by two chains to two soldiers and the others formed a guard outside the prison door.

Spiritual Warriors

Meanwhile, there was another group keeping watch constantly. These were the disciples, who prayed to God round

the clock that Peter might be spared and released. Humanly speaking, the probability that this would happen was negligible. However, faith can move mountains and with God all things are possible.

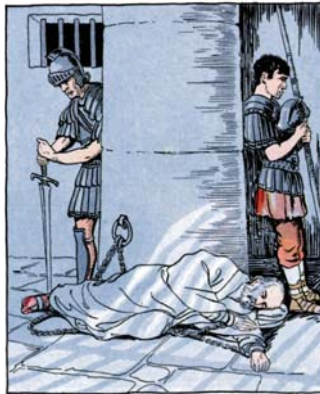
The night before Peter was to be brought out and executed he was sleeping in his prison cell. This shows Peter's faith and confidence in his Lord, who, having been given "...all authority ...in heaven and earth" had promised his Apostles: "and lo, I

am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Peter Released

Once more an angel was despatched to release Peter. The darkness of the prison cell was banished as angelic glory illuminated it. The angel wakened Peter and told him to get up. As he did so the chains which secured him to his guards fell from his wrists. He was then told to get dressed and put on his sandals. Finally he was to put on his outer garment and follow the angel.

Peter thought he was dreaming, for what happened was the stuff of dreams to a condemned man. Perhaps the



strangest part was that his guards made no attempt to restrain him. On they went past the first and second guard posts. Finally, they arrived at the great iron gate which divided the prison complex from the street outside. This opened by itself, much as our automatic doors do in the twenty-first century. Peter would still believe that he was dreaming!

Once Peter and the angel were a street away from the prison, the angel left him and he realised that this was no dream but reality:

And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people" (Acts 12:11).

Peter "Locked Out"

Peter did not go into hiding immediately, for he would be aware that his fellow-believers would be praying for his release. So, he made his way to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark where he knew they would be gathered. It is generally believed that this is the house which had the Upper Room that the Lord Jesus and the disciples occupied to celebrate the 'Last Supper' and where the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem (See Acts 1:13). There is also a belief that John Mark was the young man who fled naked from the garden when the Lord Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:51,52) and this is his 'signature on his Gospel.

Peter knocked on the door

of the gate of the house. A servant girl came to answer the door. No doubt she asked who was knocking and received the reply that it was Peter.

Recognizing his voice she was overjoyed and ran into the house to tell everyone the tremendous news that Peter was there at the gate.

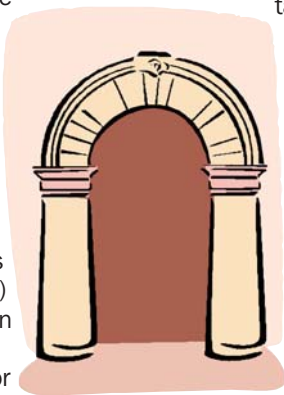
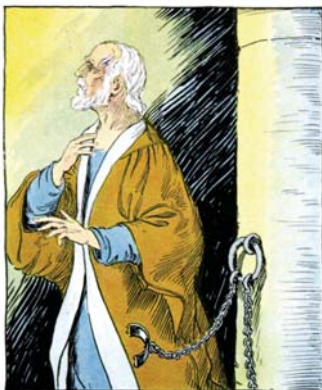
Their response was to rebuke her for teasing them with such nonsense! They said that she was out of her mind. How could it be Peter? As she persisted in her claim, they sought a rational explanation.

Perhaps it was his messenger: she had heard the name 'Peter' and jumped to the conclusion it was Peter himself while, in reality, it was some one sent from Peter. The English text says "angel", but the original Greek word means "messenger". It is also used of angels because they are, of course, God's messengers.

Answered Prayer

By this time, Peter's knuckles would be raw with his persistent knocking. He would be thinking that it had been infinitely easier for him to get out of Herod's prison, with all the measures taken to ensure that it would be impossible, than to gain admission to the house where his friends were praying for his release, in order that he could join them once more!

There is an important lesson for all of us here: it illustrates how easily we can offer earnest prayer and yet, in our hearts, have doubts that God will hear us. There are instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus



seems to be hinting that the results of prayer are dependant on our faith (e.g. Mark 11:24).

Eventually the door was opened and they realised that Rhoda had been right after all. Before they could say anything, Peter raised his hand to indicate that they should remain silent. Any commotion at the gate might give away his whereabouts. He explained how the Lord's angel had secured his release and gave orders that the news should be sent to James (the Lord's brother, who was to become a key figure in the Jerusalem congregation) and to all the others who were not present at the prayer-meeting. This suggests that the Apostles and other leading figures were in hiding after James, the brother of John, had been killed and Peter arrested. Then Peter himself went into hiding for a while.

Herod – Frustrated

The following morning there was great consternation in the prison for their key captive, Peter, was missing. The two soldiers to whom he had been secured no doubt still had the chains on their wrists and the guards would still be on duty outside the door of his cell. The strange circumstances of the earlier incident which resulted in the release of the Apostles (Acts 5: 19) had been repeated.

The matter could not be hidden from Herod for long and in due course he ordered a complete search but to no effect. Suspecting that there had been complicity on the part of the guards, he 'examined' them. We may suppose that this was not simply a consultation but rather that they were

tortured in order to gain a confession that someone had allowed the prisoner to escape.

We may feel some sympathy for these men: they were not guilty of dereliction of duty but Herod needed to convince himself that there was a rational explanation for what had happened. When no culprits were identified he ordered that those involved should be put to death. Then he went from Jerusalem to his palatial home in Caesarea.

Herod's Violent Death

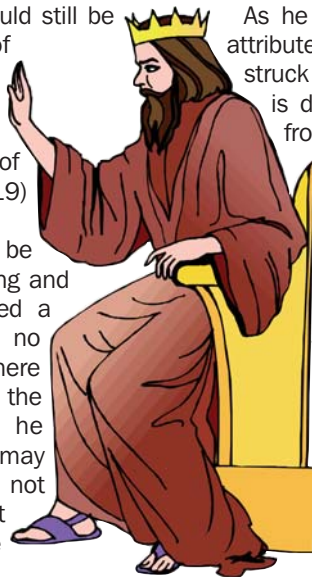
Herod was angry with the people of the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. They were dependant on Herod for supplies of food and, securing the services of the King's chamberlain, Blastus, they sought reconciliation.

Herod took the opportunity of addressing them, arrayed in splendid royal robes, and his speech was received by the crowd with shouts of acclamation, flattering him by attributing the quality of his oration to his status as a god and not a man.

As he did not reject their praise and attribute glory to the true God, an angel struck him down with a disease, which is described as "eaten by worms", from which he subsequently died.

There is an independent description by the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus, who gives a more detailed account as follows:

"There came together... a large number of the provincial officials and others of distinguished position. On the second day..Agrippa put on a robe made of silver throughout, of altogether wonderful weaving, and entered the theatre at break of



day. Then the silver shone and glittered wonderfully as the sun's first rays fell on it, and its resplendence inspired a sort of fear and trembling in those who gazed on it. Immediately his flatterers called out from various directions, using language which boded him no good, for they addressed him as a god, and invoked him with the cry 'Be gracious unto us! hitherto we have revered thee as a man, but henceforth we acknowledge thee to be of more than mortal nature'. He did not rebuke them, nor did he repudiate their impious flattery ... At the same time he was

seized by a severe pain in his belly, which began with a most violent attack ... He was carried quickly into the palace and when he had suffered continuously for five days from the pain in his belly, he died, in the fifty-fourth year of his age and the seventh of his reign" (Ant. xix.8.2)

Luke follows his account of Herod's demise with the contrasting comment:

"But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24).

John Hellowell

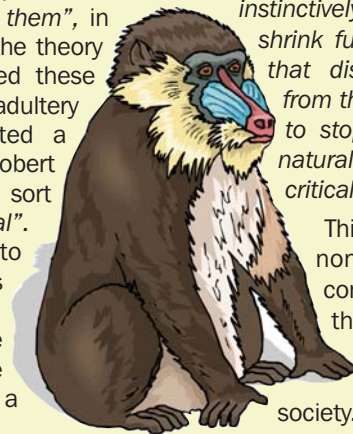
The Failure of Humanism - 5

Evolution and Morality

*In this concluding article of the series, **Malcolm Edwards** asks another pertinent question about our modern world. If God does not exist, as many people now maintain, and if everything came about by chance, shouldn't things be getting better not worse in terms of human behaviour?*

Human Behaviour

Some years ago, the English newspaper "The Daily Telegraph" had a prominent article by Anne Applebaum entitled: "We have descended from apes, but we don't have to behave like them", in which she observes that the theory of evolution is being used these days to excuse acts of adultery and suchlike. She quoted a book by American writer Robert Wright who describes this sort of behaviour as "natural". The article went on to suggest that Mr Wright is comprehensively wrong, quoting a recent article from "Time" magazine which disagrees with such a concept, and concluded:



"No one except a handful of socialists, and possibly one or two American liberals, has ever tried to say that people are instinctively good: now that Time magazine has discovered that people are instinctively evil, perhaps the group will shrink further. Surely the one thing that distinguishes human beings from the animal world is our ability to stop ourselves 'doing what is natural' and to examine ourselves critically."

This again suggests that even non-religious people today consider humanism to be on the wrong tack, and responsible for much irreparable damage to society.

'Evolutionary Tree?'

In this series we have seen that evolution is a tree without roots, in that it cannot account for the origin of life on our planet. But when we examine the whole theory itself, there seems to be no tree either.

Researchers have never produced life in a test tube and all attempts to cause species themselves to mutate have failed. A hundred years of experimentation with short life-cycle fruit flies has only produced many different varieties of that same genus.

Similarly, successful interbreeding of like-species always produces sterile hybrids. The mule and hinny are typical examples, being useful as beasts of burden, but having little ability to survive in a crisis, as World War I veterans attest.

Evolution certainly happens within species, as was demonstrated by the natural development of the Gallapagos finches observed by Darwin. But all these varieties of birds remained genus *Fringilla*. Likewise, in the controlled breeding of dozens of varieties of dogs, the animals always remain genus *Canis*. In all such cases there is strong resistance to crossing the genetic barrier, which argues that the species are stubbornly stable and do not evolve, even when encouraged to do so.

Fossil Evidence?

The much vaunted fossil evidence tells the same story. There are, for example, several different varieties of ammonites, but they are

always ammonites. There is no explanation for the huge gaps separating the different species. Connecting black lines drawn between fossils are simply artist's lines, and not evidence of evolution. Indeed, such lines are what Creationists like to see, for they invariably mean that there is no evidence of evolution for all that period, a fact frequently overlooked by gullible supporters of Evolution.

The discovery of living coelacanths about sixty years ago – a species which was said to have

been extinct for 300 million years – showed that not only were the experts embarrassingly wrong in their classification, but also that no evolution had occurred in all that long period of time. Similarly, the absence of evolution has been demonstrated in fossil sponges, sharks, platypuses, oysters, opossums and many other creatures.

Homo Sapiens

A great deal has been written about the supposed evolution of homo sapiens from anthropoids, and much time and money expended on unearthing and classifying fossil skulls. There has been lots of disagreement over the years as to what is anthropoid and what is human,

but the biggest worry for the evolutionist is the old problem of lack of abundant fossil evidence.

Why is it that the fossil bones of anthropoid and human species can be collected by the truck-load, but those considered to be



a link between the two would barely fill a wheel barrow? One anthropologist admitted that the so-called '*hominoid remains*' collected world-wide would barely cover a table-top.

More Questions

Nature itself raises daunting questions for evolutionists about the interdependence of plants and insects which are widely separated in the evolutionary tree. There are also intriguing questions to be answered about the origin of instinct which works prospectively, not retrospectively, as evolution demands. The development of highly complicated plants such as the Venus Fly Trap; complicated and fascinating insects like the Bombardier Beetle; not to mention camouflage and mimicry, argue strongly for Special Creation rather than evolution.



It is difficult enough to explain the evolution of the human body, but the chance development of a brain as complicated as ours taxes credulity. Scientists cannot begin to explain it, and are still baffled by many phenomena related to the human psyche. The brain far exceeds any machine man can produce with all his electronic wizardry, yet it has no electronic or mechanical basis recognisable to him, and is easily able to out-think his best computers.

An Alternative?

It should be pointed out that absolutely none of the difficulties raised in the last section are a problem to people who believe in Special Creation. In fact they are exactly the sort of wonders that one would expect to see if a Supreme Intelligence was behind it all. If it can be agreed that such a Being controls the universe and its laws, then it is

reasonable to deduce that the clothing of our planet with flora and fauna and intelligent life is also His doing.

It is also quite logical to expect that such a Creator would wish to communicate with us, and in some way or other, reveal to us His character. One would also expect Him to declare His intended purpose with our planet, and to ensure that it was recorded for posterity.

Out of the many ancient writings that describe such a Being, The Bible alone speaks the most comprehensively and sensibly about him. His character and purpose is revealed as early as the writings of Moses nearly 3,500 years ago, a revelation to which all three great religions of the world, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, testify.

The Bible Message

Vigorous attempts by some sceptics to disclaim and ridicule the Bible suggests a defence of a moral conscience rather than a fair investigation of its spiritual authority. The Bible is essentially a spiritual book, and Redemption is its main message. The basic moral teaching that we should love our neighbour is as relevant as ever it was, and it still provides an excellent guide to good honest living.

It is when the Bible questions an individual's lifestyle that there is an instinctive rebellion against it which, though understandable, is not excusable. When the Creator of the universe has compelled the writing of these moral principles, our rebellion against them – like it or not – is disobedience and therefore sin.

Faced with this perception, one can take one of two courses: either to ridicule the whole matter and try to

convince oneself that Bible teaching is only man-made morality, as so many people do, or, with a little less ego and more introspection, be prepared to investigate where a more receptive attitude would lead.

It is difficult to find any purpose in a mere man writing the following majestic words from the book of Isaiah:

“For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the LORD. “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

The statement has a particular ring of authority about it, and is a good starting point for one who has decided to give the Bible a chance to reform his life, for it challenges trust in human nature and focuses on an infinitely higher authority.

Nothing To Lose

It is a common saying of those of no religious conviction that *“You are a long time dead”*; meaning that to extract as much activity and pleasure out of life whilst one has health and strength is the chief priority. In fact, it expresses the basic hopelessness of existentialism, a humanistic concept that sees no hope beyond the grave and concentrates all effort on living now.

Surely any belief that offers infinitely more than this is at least worth looking into, for there is so much to gain and nothing whatsoever to lose. It has been said that there are no atheists on a battlefield. The same may be true in a terminal cancer ward. It is surely very sad that people must wait until eternal death stares them in the face before considering the possibility of eternal life.



The Bible consistently speaks of a future Kingdom of God on earth. The well-known “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s “Messiah”, foretells a time on earth when:

“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).

The prophecy of Daniel also confidently pronounces that:

“The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27).

God’s Great Offer

Once a person accepts the possibility of God and recognises that there is a spiritual dimension to life, the Bible itself supplies the whole grand plan of salvation from beginning to end. There is much of course that is difficult to comprehend, but this only emphasises that the Scriptures are not the work of the finite, but the infinite, mind.

It is worthy of serious consideration, that the same Super Intelligence who presides over the Universe has condescended to reveal a little about Himself to those creatures who are contrite enough to reach out for eternity.

There is nothing to lose and much to gain in seeking purpose and meaning for our existence on this planet. For it is far better to live out one’s life trusting in the Divine promise of eternal glory, than to exist for the bleak and comfortless alternative of *‘being a long time dead’*.

Malcolm Edwards

Part Three

God's New Society

*Christianity may now be regarded as 'belonging to the past' and therefore outdated, but it is in fact quite revolutionary and ahead of its time. It offers something quite unique and it introduced a way of life which has never been bettered, life which was first demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In this consideration of the new society Jesus founded, **Tom Barling** now shows how this was open to Jews and Gentiles alike.*

Listening to Jesus

There is one final reflection on the parable of the Good Shepherd – recorded in John chapter 10 – which should not be missed. There Jesus constantly declares that his sheep hear his voice. They listen to him, and do as he directs. We cannot exaggerate the importance of this. If we want to be members of God's new Society, we must listen to the teaching of Jesus, and do as he tells us. Let us note these words:

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

We need to take note of this promise: the Lord Jesus assures his followers that if they listen to his voice and do as he tells them, he is able to give them eternal life. This is a unique claim, but there is abundant evidence that we can have the fullest confidence in the Lord's claims.

God's Developing Purpose

We now turn our attention to two incidents late in the Lord's ministry which bear upon our subject of God's new society and at the same time show how Jesus can foresee the future



development of God's purpose with mankind. First, we look at an incident recorded in John 12; there are some Greeks in Jerusalem and they have come to worship God at the feast of the Passover.

Passover was a Jewish feast that took place in the Spring to commemorate the deliverance of the nation from Egypt and this was that feast which was to precede the death of the Lord Jesus. These

Greeks approach Philip and say they would like to see Jesus (12:20-21). The interview was duly arranged. The Lord said a number of interesting things to these Greeks but we concentrate our attention upon one of his sayings:

"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself". He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die (12:32-33).

This idea of being lifted up is the way the Lord chose to speak of his being lifted up on the cross. Twice before he had used precisely the same language (see John 3:14-15). Here, too, early in the ministry the idea of the Lord's sacrifice on the cross is linked with

eternal life (v.15). The other mention of his being lifted up is in John 8:28. So we must take note of the fact the Lord Jesus was well aware that his sacrifice on the cross would concern all mankind, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Parable of the Vineyard

The other passage in the Gospels of interest to us is the parable of the landowner and his vineyard. This is so important that it is recorded in all of the first three Gospels (in Matthew 21:33-41, Mark 12:1-9 and Luke 20:9-16).

In this striking parable the Lord reviews God’s dealings with the Jewish nation. He had delivered them from bondage in Egypt and brought them to the land of promise. There He had planted them, making them the tenants of the land. Instead of rent, God required of them fruit. But they rejected his representatives, and they were all treated shamefully. As a final gesture, the landowner sent his own son and heir, to no avail: they seized him and killed him. After his hearers had listened to him intently, Jesus put to them a simple question:

“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” (Matthew 21:40).

The answer was obvious and, without knowing it, the Lord’s Jewish listeners were pronouncing judgement upon their own nation:

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who

will give him his share of the crop at harvest time” (v.41).

We need to consider carefully the implications of this truly remarkable parable. For about 2,000 years, since the time of Abraham, God had dealt almost exclusively with the Jewish nation. While it is true there were exceptions – like Ruth the Moabitess who was one of the Lord’s ancestors (see Matthew 1:5) – as far as God’s revelation was concerned, it was Jews God used. As the people so privileged, they were required to be obedient to God’s will. However, as the parable shows, they had failed.

So all was to be changed, and God was going to turn away from them; and the privileges they had enjoyed were to be given to others. If we place the Lord’s prophecy around the year 30 A.D., by the end of the century a new society had come into existence – the Christian church – which, as we have already seen, included Jews and Gentiles, male and female, bond and free (Galatians 3:28). Differences of race, and social class, had disappeared, and the force which united them was the Lord Jesus: “*Christ is all, and is in all*”.

Jerusalem Destroyed

What had happened in these seventy years to the Jewish nation which, with exceptions, had rejected the Son of God, had even crucified him? As a proud nation, the Jews had deeply resented being subject to the Romans who had occupied their land. After a period of unrest, they tried in 70 A.D. to rebel against the Romans. This led to the long siege of Jerusalem, during which there



was appalling suffering. Finally Jerusalem was taken, the city was destroyed, as was the Temple in which the Jews took such pride, and thousands of Jews became slaves.

What we must take into account is the remarkable way the Lord Jesus had foreseen the tragedy which was to overtake the Jewish nation. We must wonder at the unique foreknowledge possessed by him: he truly spoke by divine inspiration. But it gave the Lord Jesus no pleasure to foretell the tragedy to be suffered by his own people; in fact, it deeply grieved him. When on his last journey to Jerusalem, he came within sight of the city which was to reject him, and put him to death, what did he do? He was deeply moved and uttered these words:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to

you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37,38).

Later, when he was on the way to the cross, he turned to the women who were weeping because they knew what was awaiting him and said:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28).

If we wish to belong to God's new society, we must follow not merely the teaching of the Lord Jesus, but also his example. In our next study, we hope to see how the great barrier between Jews and Gentiles was broken down. In many ways this is an exciting story.

Tom Barling

A Christ-like Mind

No private interpretation
Can profit anyone:

But God has given us His truth,
Through Jesus Christ His Son.

By reading all God's Holy Word,
Old Testament and New,
We'll find that everything agrees,
It proves God's will that's true.

Christ understood his Father's plan
From what the Scriptures said,
Discerning with a hearing ear,
God's teaching as he read.

There is a need to prove God's will,
And all His laws obey,
For fleshly minds, at enmity,
Will always be astray.



So let us sit at Jesus' feet,
The greatest preacher yet,
To cultivate a Christ-like mind,
That God's laws won't forget.

Gwen Marley

Have You Read?

About the Resurrection of Jesus

What is it about?



When Rome occupied Palestine (Israel), Jesus, a carpenter from Nazareth, preached to his fellow Jews for three years. Popular with the people, he stirred the envy of the leading religious leaders. After a trumped-up charge and a Roman mock trial, Jesus was killed by crucifixion, just outside Jerusalem's city walls. His body was removed and hurriedly placed in a tomb. Three days later a group of women visited the place so that they could properly anoint his body. A large boulder covering the entrance had been rolled away and the body had disappeared. Jesus had been raised from the dead.

What was life like in Israel at that time?



Life in Israel was edgy. The Jews hated being ruled by an occupying power and the new governor, Pontius Pilate, was keen to make a good impression back in Rome. Periodic Jewish uprisings against the occupiers had been quashed; but now, around Passover time, when Jerusalem expanded with an influx of Temple worshippers, both the Romans and religious leaders were anxious there should be no trouble. Jesus' hastily arranged 'trial,' execution and burial took place before the important Passover period began.

When did this happen?

Between 29 and 33 A.D. (the calendar got muddled up around the time of the birth of Jesus)

Where will I find it?

Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20

What should I look out for?



Sceptics say that Jesus' resurrection was an idea thought up by his despondent disciples, after his death. The gospel accounts show this to be quite untrue. Although Jesus had clearly told his disciples that he would die and be raised again (Mark 10:33-34; 14:28, Matt. 20:19; Luke 18:33; John 2:19-22), it is obvious they had not accepted an idea that disturbed them so much. Note how Jesus' followers behaved after Jesus' death:

- Mary Magdalene stood at the empty tomb, puzzling over where his body had been taken (John 20:13); she and the other women were *'trembling and bewildered'* (Mark 16:8, NIV).
- The disciples were scared and in hiding, in case they too should be executed (John 20:19)
- Peter, one of Jesus' most ardent followers, thought he should return to his old job (John 21:3)
- There were many convincing appearances of Jesus (Acts 1:3) from individuals (Peter and Mary) to over 500 (1 Corinthians 15:5-6) at different times and places (Luke 24:15-36; John 20:19, 26; John 21)

Now look at Jesus' followers once they were convinced of his resurrection:

- ✦ Visited by the resurrected Christ, two disciples said how 'their hearts burned within them' and, late at night, hurried many miles in the dark to tell others the news (Luke 24: 13-35)
- ✦ The disciples, incredulous but delighted at seeing their Lord, were full of 'joy and amazement'
- ✦ After his ascension the disciples were full of great joy (Luke 24:53)
- ✦ Convinced that Jesus was alive, once-fearful Peter and all the disciples became ardent preachers, (Acts 2:14-36, Acts 8:4) with the resurrection a vital part of their message (Acts 2:31-33, 4:2, 2 Tim 2:8)

What does it mean for me?

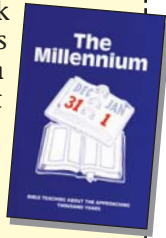
- ★ Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no valid faith (useless says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:13-14, NIV.)
- ★ If there is no resurrection then Jesus lied to his disciples; he told them he would die and rise again on the third day (Matt. 20:18,19)
- ★ Jesus is the only person to overcome the power of sin (death). He proved the grave could not hold him, by being restored to life through the power of His Father (Acts 2:24)
- ★ Now those who associate themselves with Jesus, by identifying themselves with His death and resurrection through baptism, can have the same hope of everlasting life (Romans 6:4).

Joan Lewis

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Michael Ashton

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