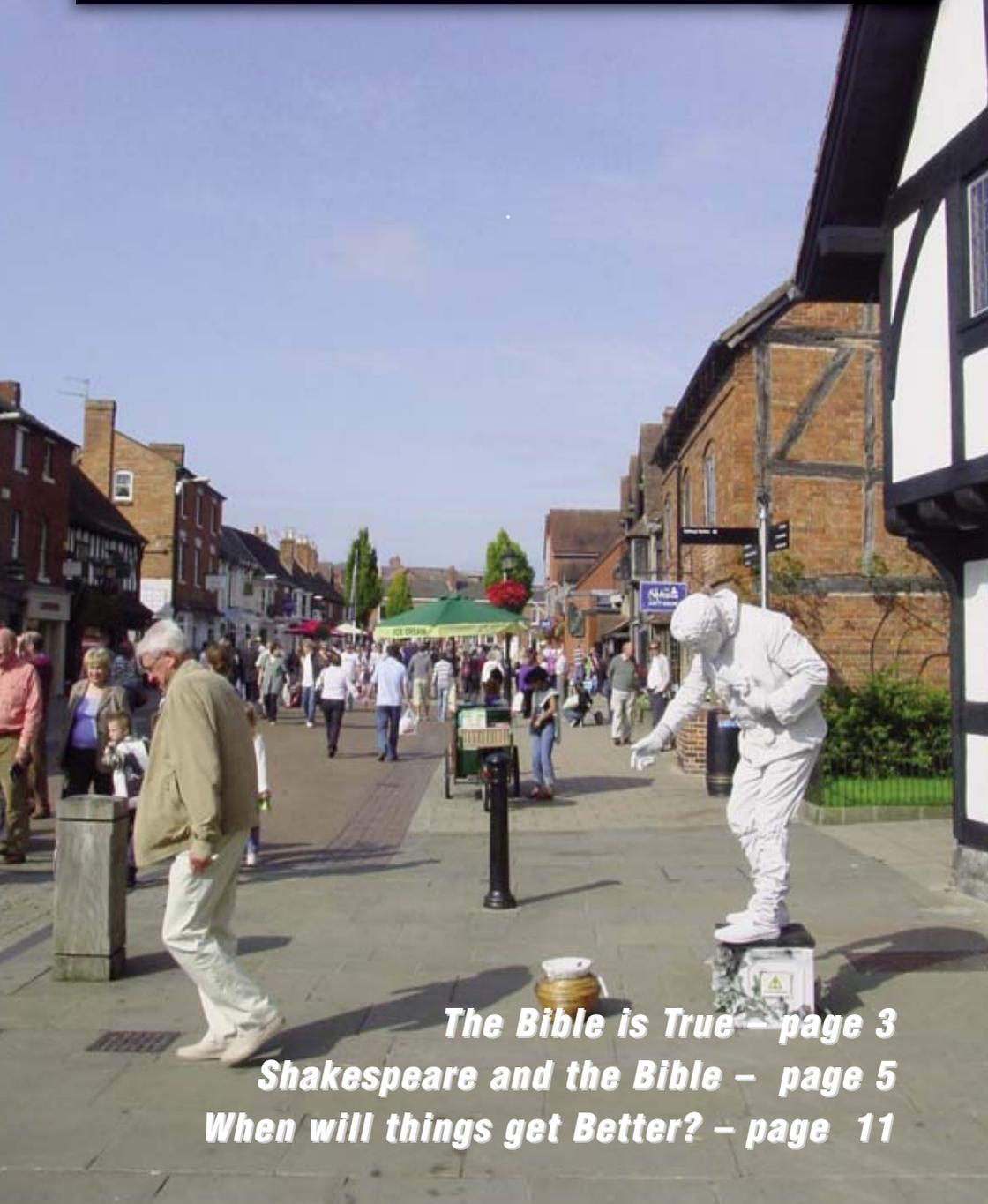


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1502



The Bible is True – page 3
Shakespeare and the Bible – page 5
When will things get Better? – page 11

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

125th Year

G09

1502

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

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The Bible Is True

Things are not always what they appear. Walking down the High Street in Stratford-upon-Avon, you might be surprised to see a statue of the famous bard of Avon, William Shakespeare, resting on a box, not a plinth.

Closer examination would show that passers-by were being invited to toss coins into a collecting tin, by which time you would realise that this was no statue, but a performer in a statuesque pose! No wonder the statue appeared to be in one position one moment but in a different posture, and even a different place, a little later.

Careful Observation

Happenings like that teach us to be more careful about life so that we are less likely to be deceived by things around us. All the time people advertise commodities that can change our lives:

- ▶▶▶ cosmetics that can make us look younger,
- ▶▶▶ medicines that can cure our illnesses,
- ▶▶▶ gadgets that can transform our lives.

People must buy these things, otherwise the advertising would cease. But can they really deliver what they have promised, or are many of the offers “too good to be true”?

Shops offer goods that are said to be hugely reduced in price, but it was necessary for a law to be passed in the

UK to ensure that such extravagant claims were somewhat justifiable. Politicians however are not above the law themselves and recent disclosures in the British press have challenged their morality, and found many of them wanting. These, and lots of other things in life, make us wary of claims that are easily made, but may not be capable of being kept. Where can we find something that is absolutely reliable and constantly dependable?

“What is Truth?”

We live in an age which dislikes absolutes of any sort. Nowadays everybody’s opinion is deemed to be as good as that of anybody else. “*Nobody tells me what to do!*”; “*I’ll do it my way!*”; and “*Who does she think she is?*” are commonplace expressions when somebody challenges views that have long been regarded as true. This is especially so when moral values are concerned, for most people want to be free to make their own choices in

life and tolerate no interference when it comes to what is “right” and what is “wrong”. But what if there is an absolute right and wrong? Wouldn’t it be best to know?

Many years ago Pontius Pilate, the governor over the Roman province of Palestine, had an unsettling conversation with a prisoner who was remarkably unruffled by the prospect of his imminent execution. Asked



about his composure, Jesus calmly replied that Pilate could have no power in this matter unless it had been granted him by heaven. Pursuing his cross-examination, the procurator elicited the confession that Jesus was indeed a king, but that his rulership was not then over an earthly population:

"You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:37).

Pilate responded with words that have a remarkable 21st century ring about them – the well-known dismissal *"What is Truth?"* after which he sentenced Jesus to scourging and crucifixion.

"I Am the Truth"

Someone once said that "without truth the world devolves into a chaos where everyone's preferences describe a personal reality disconnected from everyone else's. In that dark place no decision is good or bad, no action is right or wrong. But in the presence of truth we are exposed for what we are."

That was what happened with Pontius Pilate in his encounter with the Lord Jesus. He was exposed as someone imprisoned by his situation: easily blackmailed by the crowds who pressurised him to convict Jesus (see John 19:12). Whereas Jesus is exposed as someone who was free to choose: in this instance choosing to lay down his life, to save mankind (see John 10:18).

Jesus was the very embodiment of truth. It was not simply that he never told a lie nor sought to deceive in any way (1 Peter 2:22). His life was a

perfect expression of goodness and openness – a display of what Almighty God is like. Jesus did not simply live *"in the light"*; he was *"the light of the world"* (John 8:12, 9:5). Asked to show his followers what God is like, Jesus once said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Word of Truth

But Jesus lived 2000 years ago and now we lack the opportunity to talk with him and learn at first hand the truth that he taught and lived. How can we be sure that the Biblical account is valid and reliable? Might it be somewhat like the man who purports to be a statue, but turns out to be a performer? This is where the teaching of Jesus helps again.

When facing death by crucifixion and knowing everything that was to come, Jesus reassured his followers about the help that would be given them after his departure. In one of his earnest prayers to his Father, Jesus asked that He would: *"Sanctify them by your truth"* and then added *"Your word is truth"* (John 17:17).

The Lord had promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be with them as they recorded all that had happened as they journeyed with him. Now, in his prayer, Jesus was reminding them that God's Word is not just true – it is the truth we need to read and understand. God's Word is able to change our lives and give us the answers we need for whatever lies ahead in this life. And it can help us to find the way, through truth, to everlasting life. Read it for yourself and find the truth.

Editor

Shakespeare and the Bible

The UK radio programme “Desert Island Discs” asks invited guests to choose music they might take with them to a desert island. Finally they are asked which one book they would take, assuming that the Bible and the complete works of William Shakespeare are already there!



people would have had in their homes. That was reprinted many times to meet the demand for an English Bible that people could read. It was the first in Roman type – earlier ones used ornate Gothic letters – and the first to use chapters and verses. Shakespearean scholars, who have searched his plays

Bible Versions

Perhaps it is not obvious, but there’s a strong connection between these two classics of English literature. It is not just their influence on the way we speak and write, but rather that Shakespeare makes some 2000 allusions to the words of the Bible, an average of some 40 per play. The still popular King James Authorised Version (KJV) of the Bible was translated and first printed in 1611 at the end of Shakespeare’s life (1564-1616), after most of his plays were written. So although we may link the style of his plays with the language of the KJV, Shakespeare must have used earlier versions of the Bible.

His local church in Stratford-on-Avon may once have had a copy of the 1539 Great Bible chained to its lectern; but this would have been replaced with the Bishop’s Bible around 1568. However, it was the cheaper, earlier, smaller and more popular, but unauthorised, Geneva Bible of 1560, which

for Biblical connections, tell us that the early ones quote the Bishop’s Bible, but later ones the Geneva Bible.

Bible Allusions

Judging from the number of Bible allusions, Shakespeare must have been very familiar with its words. He doesn’t just use bits he might have picked up from the Church services he would then have had to attend, but quotes from two thirds of the Bible’s 66 books.

Scholars point to “Measure for Measure” as a Scripture-based title, using Matthew 7:2

“For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Geneva Bible).

They also see a connection to Matthew 10:29:

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground



without your Father?" (Geneva Bible).

For Hamlet tells Horatio "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow..."

So it appears that William Shakespeare knew his Bible and had it in mind as he wrote. We cannot tell what influence it had on his way of life, if any. But we can read the Bible today – whether the KJV or modern versions – and benefit from it ourselves, for the Bible can make an amazing difference.

It explains the reason for life and its purpose – to live as God's people, obedient to His ways. It shows that there's hope and something worthwhile to aim for. When we read and study Shakespeare we may be entertained and increase our knowledge of history and English. Shakespeare uses some 30,000 different English words, compared to the KJV Bible's 8,000, while we might use 15,000. But reading the Bible and obeying its instructions leads to a happier more fulfilled life now, with the promise of eternal life in the future, by God's grace.

The Meaning of Life

Shakespeare has Hamlet asking "To be or not to be? That is the question..." He is worrying about –

- ✗ his life,
- ✗ his troubled conscience, and
- ✗ what happens at death.

We have choices to make in our lives and the Bible has the answers. The apostle Paul once posed this question:



"Do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good..." (Romans 2:4-10).

Walk the streets of Stratford-on-Avon, visit Shakespeare's Birthplace and Anne Hathaway's or Mary Arden's cottage, watch his plays or read his sonnets and you will enrich your literary knowledge.

But read the Bible and study the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, search out the truths of the Bible's message at a *Learn to Read the Bible Effectively* Seminar or a Bible Reading Group and you will enrich your whole life, both now and into eternity.

The Bible might have been useful to Shakespeare as a book that could stimulate his fertile imagination and provide him with readily recognisable catch-phrases. Properly used, it can be much more useful to you, both for this life and the life to come.

Steve Harris

The God of the Bible

Many people the world over are looking for a god or gods to worship. Many belong to cultures that have handed down their religious customs for generations. Others come from no particular religious background.

The Urge to Worship

A UK television series shown earlier this year was entitled "Around the World in 80 Faiths". Anyone watching it might have wondered about some of the superstitious practices it portrayed, activities which are practised by many thousands of men and women in Eastern countries. But in fact the Western world is just as obsessed and just as superstitious.

Some people offer their worship for a while at least to someone or something that can be seen. Their gods are such people as celebrities and football teams. Hundreds will make long journeys just to catch a glimpse of someone who has made a name for themselves on television or in the musical world and tens of thousands of fans flock to "the football match" on Saturdays and Sundays.

One True God

It might seem to you presumptuous that those who publish this magazine claim that there is a source of knowledge about one Living God who is immortal, invisible and who dwells in light unapproachable. We can know about the true and living

God by reading the Bible and we believe that He has revealed in its pages everything that we, with our limitations, can understand about Him. We read in the New Testament that:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3: 16,17).

This is an almost overwhelming statement! It tells us that God has spoken to mankind. He has shown Himself as the Creator of the whole universe and that its culmination was the formation of man from the dust of the ground. God's Word is majestically and awe-inspiringly full of power.

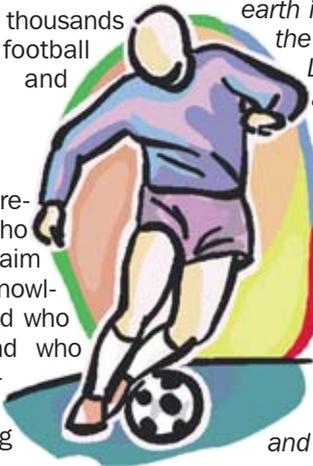
Divine Characteristics

Please pick up your Bible and read through the whole of Psalm 33, and have a special look at these verses:

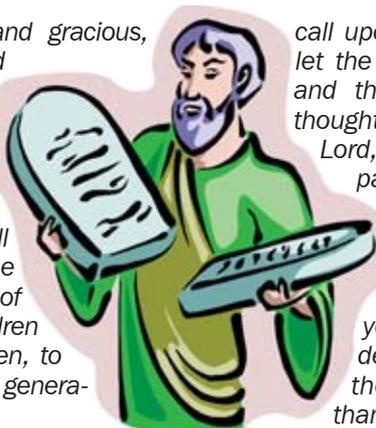
"For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host" (vs 4-6).

One of the Old Testament prophets really wanted to see God for himself, so he asked God to show him what He was like. The answer Moses received was not quite what he expected.

"The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the



Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Exodus 34: 6-7).



call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55: 6-9).

You and I have a far greater privilege than even Moses had, for in the letter to the Hebrews, in the New Testament, we read:

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things ... He is ... the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

So if we really want to learn what God is like and to come to know Him then we can in all confidence turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son. For the powerful spoken Word of God:

“... became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Christ-Centred

The whole of God's purpose with His creation is centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what God Himself has revealed to men and women. In Christ Jesus we too can see the character of God. We are invited to come to know God as the prophet tells us:

“Seek the Lord while he may be found;

So the loving, merciful God of the Bible is all powerful yet more than understanding of the weaknesses in our nature. He wants us all to turn to Him in worship and with thankful hearts for:

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Let us all then seek the Lord while there is still time.

Trevor Pritchard

Scripture quotations are from the ESV

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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



What Jesus Did

Jesus was born just over 2,000 years ago. He lived a quiet life until he was 30, and spent those years preparing for the great work God had in store for him. He worked as a carpenter in a small town called Nazareth in the north of Israel.

Growing Up

During his formative years as a carpenter, Jesus learnt much of the Scriptures (our Old Testament), and from them came to fully realise what lay in the future for him. There were many prophecies about One who would:

- ✓ be born in Bethlehem,
- ✓ go into Egypt,
- ✓ be a great Prophet,
- ✓ teach the people in parables, and
- ✓ heal their sick.

Jesus also knew that he would have to suffer at the hands of the Jews, and be killed by the Romans. Understandably, he would have relished the Old Testament prophecies which spoke of his resurrection from the dead. He would have learned that his kingdom was not to be of this world, but would be given to him after a lengthy time spent at his Father's right hand in heaven. Only after that would he return to the earth and bring it into subjection before handing the kingdom over to God.

Aged Thirty

At thirty he went out and found his relative John the Baptist down by the River Jordan, and asked to be baptised. He was totally immersed in the water, (a type of death and resurrection), and as he rose God sent His Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove, which sat on him. God's voice was heard to say,

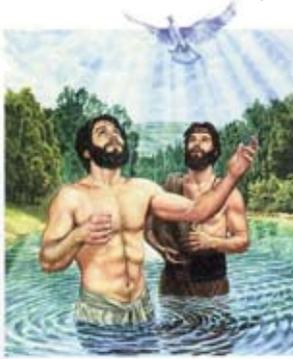
"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

With this ringing endorsement by his Father, Jesus started his public life and for the next 3½ years he travelled around the land of Israel, and occasionally went over the borders into Gentile territory. He chose 12 assistants – or disciples – who worked with him in his ministry of teaching and healing.

His Ministry

The work that Jesus was given to do over these 3½ years was to teach the people about God. He was born as a Jew, and concentrated on bringing the good news (the gospel) to the Jewish people. Jesus was the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, and he lost no opportunity to bring the God-inspired Scriptures to their ears.

Jesus' main work was in teaching the people about God and the coming Kingdom. His miracles were done to complement his teaching. But these too had been prophesied in the Old Testament. As Matthew explained, it was a fulfilment of Old Testament



prophecy when: *“He took our illnesses and bore our diseases” (Matthew 8:17).*

Jesus taught about God, about the future kingdom, and emphasised the fact that the Jewish leaders were astray from God. Jesus had to die and be buried, yet his bodily resurrection proved once and for all that he was the chosen of God. He would rise from the dead, never to die again. Man, sin and death, would have no more dominion over him (Romans 6:9).

Crucified By Man

During the last week of his life, Jesus concentrated on teaching the people of Jerusalem. He rode into the city on a young donkey amid wild cheering and excitement. Next day he cleared unjust trading out of the Temple, quoting passages from both Isaiah and Jeremiah. His Father’s house should have been a house of prayer, Jesus said, but the buyers and sellers and their illicit practises had made it a den of thieves.

He taught about Jerusalem being trodden down of the Gentiles, until it was time for him to return to earth from Heaven (see Luke 21:24-28). He spoke about the coming Judgement, and how some would be accepted and some rejected (Matthew 25:31-46).

He then arranged for his disciples to eat one last meal with him, and that evening he was arrested. Hearings and trials were hastily arranged by the leaders, in which they agreed that he

should be put to death.

Persuading Pilate, the Roman Governor, to crucify him was harder than they had envisaged, but finally:

“Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified” (Mark 15:15).

What a terrible end to a good man’s life!

Raised Again

But that terrible crucifixion wasn’t the end. Very early on the Sunday morning God raised His Son from the dead. As Peter said later:

“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:24).

Sin and death were no longer the masters. Jesus could not stay dead, because he was an innocent man.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and forty days later he ascended to Heaven, to sit at his Father’s right hand. Almost 2,000 years later, he is still there, waiting for the moment when God will send him back to earth to set up His kingdom.

David Simpson

Bible Line



Telephone message
for UK readers
Ring 08457-660668

When will things get Better?

There was a time not so long ago when things seemed to be getting better and there were more optimists than pessimists. There were good reasons for that optimism:

- ▣ The sudden collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe some 20 years ago and the wild celebrations that followed;
- ▣ The transition from the apartheid regime in South Africa to majority rule and the release of Nelson Mandela;
- ▣ In Britain a new government was elected in 1997 under the slogan “Things can only get better”;
- ▣ The troubles in Northern Ireland were brought to a peaceful conclusion;
- ▣ In the Middle East there was at least talk of peace.

So the Millennium was celebrated in 2000 as bringing in an era of peace and plenty.

What Happened next?

For a while the optimism seemed justified. Economies around the world boomed, problems seemed to be capable of resolution. It looked as though things really were getting better. Then the Credit Crunch shattered the illusion. Suddenly news reports were full of bad news again and the difficulties which had never really gone away – wars, famines, diseases, inhumanity to others, greed and selfishness, suffering and death –

began to be more noticeable. Pessimism prevailed.

The bright hopes of the democracies in Eastern Europe, Africa and elsewhere faded as the old corrupt regimes reinvented themselves. In some countries life expectancy began to fall whilst across the world the worrying implications of climate change started to provide alarming headlines about the state of the planet.

Where do we stand now?

The Bible gives us good news and bad news about the future of our world.

❖ The bad news

Even if the world recession is less damaging than currently appears the case, Jesus and his disciples agree with the Old Testament prophets in foretelling the accelerating deterioration of our world as the worship of God and obedience to His ways declines. Consider these passages:

“The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left” (Isaiah 24:5,6).

The prophet Isaiah describing a time when God will intervene to judge the world

“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21: 25-26).

The Lord Jesus fore-telling the state of the world prior to his return to the earth

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4)

The apostle Paul’s final letter to Timothy

What this amounts to is quite clear: things will get worse before they get better!

But there is good news!

The full title of this magazine is *Glad Tidings of the Kingdom of God* – because the Bible offers a clear picture of a world restored to the wonderful state in which God made it. The features of this world are set out over and over in the Bible and are given us so that we can put our trust and faith in God. Here they are:

❖ **A global solution**

Despite the euphoria in some parts at the election of President Obama, the problems of the world are beyond the capabilities of politicians. Yes, global problems do require global solutions, but this can only come about through the intervention of God.

❖ **A world ruler**

When the apostle Paul visited Athens he brought an exciting message to the Greek intellectuals and anyone else who would listen:

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

There is no doubt about the identity of this ruler – it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is coming back as God’s King.

❖ **God’s Laws**

The Bible promises that the world will be transformed not by human laws, but by the institution of a government which will follow the wisest laws ever proposed, those of God himself:

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

❖ An end to warfare and suffering

Isaiah goes on to show the effects of this change:

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4).

In this new world, the consequence of the good government of Jesus will be an end to chaos, suffering, disease – and eventually even death itself. Inequality, oppression, famine, natural disasters and injustice will become a thing of the past as God’s government is implemented, with King Jesus ruling from Jerusalem:

“The LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one” (Zechariah 14:9).

“Will things get better for me?”

That depends entirely on your response to the good and bad news. God wants people like you and me to be there in His kingdom – but we have to recognise our faults and the inherent flaws of our society – what the Bible calls “sin”.

God has specified a way in which our sins can be forgiven. Once we understand the true message of the gospel, we have to be baptised to identify ourselves with the saving work of God in Christ.

Then we must resolve to follow Jesus’ teaching and change our way of life. If we do this, then whatever may happen around us, our lives will be better, not only now but for ever!

So, please don’t just read this. Start doing something to ensure that your future is better NOW!

John Botten

Quotations from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Negative Thoughts

Negative thoughts are so lethal
If allowed to remain in the mind,
They will take root and grow, and soon start to show
A dark outlook that’s spiritually blind.

So what is the remedy when we’re conscious
Of negative thoughts running round in our head?
With prayer to our Father, and reading His Scriptures
Our faith will get strong, and these thoughts will be dead!



Colleen Simons

Sin and Salvation

He was there in the market place every Saturday morning, gripping a cardboard placard. As people pushed past with their bulging bags of shopping, he would shout out loud "Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved from your sins!"

The thing was, he never explained what sin is, and why we need to be saved from it. You were just supposed to know.

Why do we need to be saved from our sins? What exactly is sin? Well, the place to find out is in the Bible, God's handbook for human life. Here we have the story of the very first sin, and what happened afterwards.

Stepping out of line

The first man, Adam, it says, lived in a beautiful garden where he could help himself to all sorts of food, except for the fruit of one particular tree, the Tree of Knowledge. This was forbidden, on pain of death. Adam, persuaded by his wife, who had in turn been persuaded by the Serpent, ate the forbidden fruit. As a result, he and his wife were condemned to suffer and toil and die.

That action, breaking God's Law, is what the Bible calls "Sin". It is like setting us inside a circle drawn on the sand, and saying 'You must not cross over that line!' The line represents God's rules. He

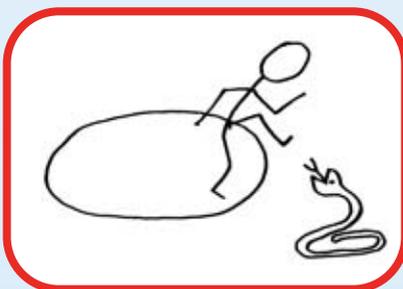


says for example, we are at liberty to dig the ground and grow food, but if we steal someone else's food that is wrong. As long as we stay inside the circle, that is fine. But when we cross over the line, we are sinners, and we find ourselves condemned to death. The Apostle Paul puts it neatly in Romans: "*Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*" (5:12).

Missing the Mark

Actually, there is more to sin than that. The Greek word translated 'sin' in the Bible literally means "to miss the mark". It is like an archer aiming at a target. He needs to hit the bull's eye, but most of the time he misses. That is how we all are. The target we should be aiming for is perfection. It is the kind of life lived by Jesus, who always did what his Father asked. He is our role model. But every night we go to bed sad that we have failed to live up to his example. We have crossed God's line and we have failed to match up to the amazing grace and love of the Son of God.

So, where does that leave us? If there was no way to escape from the condemnation of sin and death, we should be in a sorry state indeed. But God is merciful. He has prepared a way for our sins to be forgiven. And, by a dramatic irony, the way to forgiveness and hope is



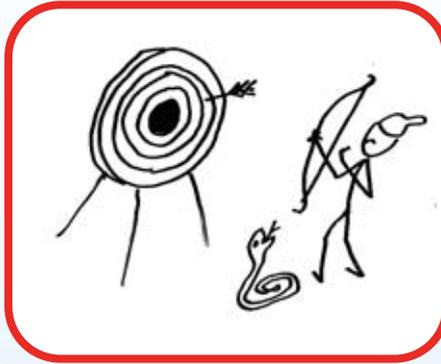
through the death of His Son.

Sinless One

How could this work? How can the crucifixion of Jesus set us free? The answer is logical, but awe-inspiring. Jesus never sinned. Not once in his 33 years on earth did he cross over the line of God's Law. Every day he hit the bull's eye square on.

He was the perfect example of obedience to God. So, when he allowed evil men, consumed by envy and hatred, to have him executed, he was laid in a tomb which he did not deserve to be in, for he was not guilty of sin. He had volunteered to share death with us, so that he could deliver us from it. As the Apostle puts it in Hebrews chapter two, he tasted death for everyone.

If an innocent man was laid in a grave which he did not deserve (and we mean innocent of all guilt, not just of a single charge), then God could, in justice, bring him back to life again. That is exactly what He did, after three days. And if we have the humility to go down on our knees before God and



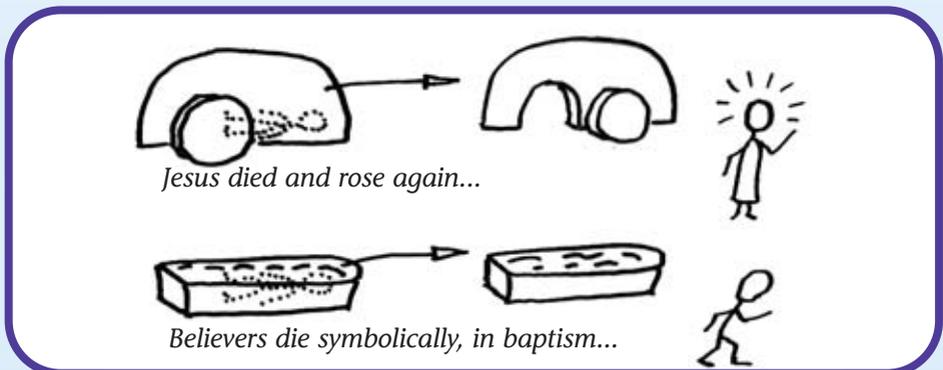
admit that we are sinners, and ask to be forgiven then, for the sake of His dear Son, He will count us 'not guilty'. Our sins will be covered over with the goodness of Jesus, like the coat of skins God provided to cover the nakedness of sinful Adam.

Identification

The point at which the would-be Christian joins himself to Christ is at his baptism. Here, he or she confesses publicly the need to be forgiven, and is symbolically buried with the Lord, before arising the next moment to a new life, free from sin.

From this time on, the baptized believer aims to live in a way which is holy to God, keeping separate from the evil world and its ways and waiting in hope for the day God has promised when those who have died in faith will be raised, like Jesus, to a new and immortal life. That is what being saved truly means.

David M Pearce



A Man Like David

DAVID, with nothing more than his sling and a stone, killed Goliath the giant.

That is the simple story most of us have grown up with – the compelling story of the Jewish shepherd boy who dared to defy the Philistine (1 Samuel 17).

Multi-Skilled

But there is more to David. The lad who slew Goliath grew up to be the king of Israel, and at the same time a gifted musician and poet. Here was a man with so many noble attributes that he has become one of the best loved characters in the Bible – an example of loyalty and faith in God that we can still admire today.

⇒ So did David lead a charmed life?

⇒ Was his life free from all difficulty?

In the Old Testament books of Samuel and the opening chapters of Kings and Chronicles we have a very full account of David's exploits which included both successes and setbacks. We follow him during the reign of Saul, when he was in and out of favour, one moment playing his harp to soothe the king, the next moment dodging the king's spear which was hurled at him, and then fleeing for his life with his band of outlaws.

"I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul" (1 Samuel 27:1) was the

fear he once expressed but God had destined him to be king.

Blessed by God, encouraged by his good friend Jonathan (Saul's son), and adored by the people of Israel, David became king on Saul's death, but only after many years of patient waiting



Israel's King

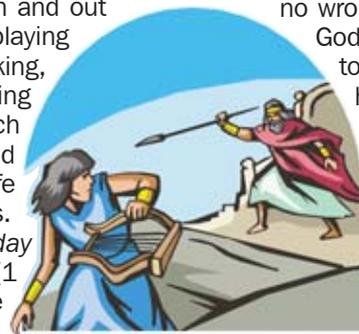
As king, he had great plans. His ambition was to consolidate the kingdom of Israel. The lad who had slain the giant now led the armies of Israel against not only the Philistines but also other enemies – Syria, Ammon, Moab and Edom, and he was victorious for, says the account:

"The LORD preserved David wherever he went" (2 Samuel 8:6).

He wanted to build a temple for God in Jerusalem, and started to assemble the materials, although the completion of that project was ultimately left to his son Solomon (see 1 Kings 5:3-5).

Faultless?

It certainly sounds as if David could do no wrong: did he never displease God? It is perhaps reassuring to know that, like all of us, he succumbed to temptation. In fact, he sinned very grievously in taking Bathsheba the wife of one of his generals, Uriah, and then causing his death in battle. When the prophet Nathan came to tell David



of God's displeasure, David was contrite; he confessed,

"I have sinned against the LORD",

and he knew his sin deserved death. Nathan, however, assured David,

"The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

Repentant Sinner

David did not take God's forgiveness for granted. He regarded it as a very precious thing. Just look at the way he expresses first his sorrow for his sin, and his gratitude for God's mercy:

"I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight – That you may be found just when you speak, and blameless when you judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:3-5).

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity" (Psalm 32:1,2).

The wonder of such psalms is that they are true, not just for David but for anyone who humbly confesses their sin before God. We may not sin in the way David did, but whatever our failings we can be forgiven. Our way of forgiveness is through the work of Jesus, whose coming David foretold in a number of his 'Messianic' psalms.

Son of David

Jesus is often referred to in the New

Testament as the "Son of David" (e.g. Mark 10:47): although God was his Father, his mother Mary was descended from David. Jesus, even though he was the Son of God, was a man like David. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, "because he was of the house and lineage of David" (Luke 2:4).

Remember how the angels told the shepherds, as they watched over their flocks on the same hills and under the same stars that David knew:

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord" (2:11).



Do we begin to see David in a new light? David is so much more than a giant-slayer. He is a key person in the plan which God has been working out all down the ages. Like many other men and

women from times past who have believed in the true God, David himself will be raised from the dead when the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven, and will be ready to accept Christ as his King. As the angel Gabriel said about 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 of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32,33).

For 40 years David was king of ancient Israel. Jesus Christ, the greater "Son of David", will be King for ever, ruling the whole world.

That is certainly a kingdom worth waiting for!

John Morris

Earthquake and Famine

Some people had expected the Lord Jesus to remove the Roman overlords from the nation of Israel, but he had been crucified and buried instead.

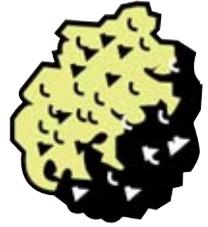
He had told them this must happen, but the disciples had not expected it. Nor had they expected him to be raised from the dead, but once they had got over the immediate shock they were anxious to find out if Jesus was now about to restore the kingdom to Israel. But all that Jesus would say is that they could not know when the kingdom would be restored. God alone knew.

Signs and Portents

Before his crucifixion Jesus had told them what signs to look out for and after his resurrection he further explained the Old Testament prophecies (Luke 24:27,46). That heart-warming exposition was not recorded, but it soon becomes clear that much of the Old Testament talks about a coming king and his worldwide kingdom.

The prophecy of Daniel contains the record of the dream which Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon saw. It was of a great image made of different metals, standing on feet made part of iron and part of clay. God gave Daniel the ability to interpret this prophetic vision and to explain it to the king. The four metals – gold,

silver, bronze and iron – represented four great empires. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire was the first:



"You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, he has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all – you are this head of gold" (Daniel 2:37-38).

The Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires would follow, and then would come a time which is represented by the feet.

"As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:43-44).

This was a vision about the coming kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus is pictured as a stone (here and elsewhere) which hits the image on the feet and grinds the whole



image to powder. For the establishment of God's kingdom will bring an end to all other rulership on earth.

Widespread Destruction

In another remarkable Old Testament prophecy the prophet Isaiah tells us what the kingdom will be like when it is restored, and what will happen just before the return of Jesus to earth.

"Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants ... The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word" (Isaiah 24:1,3).

This describes a remarkable desolation in the earth so that the earth can no longer support its inhabitants. The chapter is well worth reading but its detail is a little harrowing.

"The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again" (Isaiah 24:19-20).

This is a picture of the earth after some terrible catastrophe, perhaps even a nuclear explosion. Whatever the cause, it is of horrific proportions. The comfort, however, is that again God's hand is seen to be at work. For the prophecy continues:

"Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders, gloriously" (Isaiah 24:23).

However the devastation is caused, the outcome is the return of Jesus and the establishment of God's kingdom.

Blessed Transformation

Isaiah then predicts a time of great fulfillment:

"O LORD, you are my God. I will exalt you, I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth ... And in this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees" (Isaiah 25:1,6).



This is a promise of an earth changed almost beyond recognition. There is no longer famine and starvation and no one goes hungry. It is easy to dismiss such a picture as being merely wishful thinking, but the Bible promises that it is a picture of a reality which

will happen. The Bible has a happy record of being proved true, even in the most unlikely events. At the last supper which he shared with his disciples before his crucifixion Jesus told them:

"Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25).

Clearly Jesus believed that Isaiah's words would come true. And if we want to be in that kingdom with Jesus, we too should believe that the Bible is true.

Mark Sheppard

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