

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1507



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Well Worth Waiting For – page 5
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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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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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Finding Your Way

Some people have a better sense of direction than others. They can confidently read maps , get direction from the position of the sun, or even steer by the stars.

Others just get lost! It doesn't matter too much when travelling along a network of roads, for road signs or fellow travellers can usually help out and get you back on track. But what if you were travelling across open country or, worse still, across a desert?

Guided Tour

There is no likelihood that the tourists in Morocco, shown on the front cover, will get lost. They are on a guided tour, just long enough to give them a taste of what a camel trek might be like, and they will be journeying along a well-worn path, even if the sand blows and conceals the fact that many people have travelled this way before them.

But what would happen if their camel bolted and took its rider far away from human habitation, and he was entirely on his own? With no signposts and no other travellers, that could be tricky, even fatal.

For some people the journey through life is just like that: a trek across the unknown with no indicators to show which might be the best way, and nobody who can tell you what you should do. Others have a lot of help and guidance and never seem to put a foot wrong, travelling along a road their parents or friends have smoothed out

for them. But with regard to the things that really matter, we each have to find our own way and make our own choices, because we are all different and have distinct preferences and sensitivities.



This was especially true of Jesus, for he was the “*only begotten Son of God*” (John 3:18). There had never been anybody like him; nobody had been asked to do what he had to do. He was named Jesus because, the angel explained, “*He will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

Just think what that responsibility was like for Jesus when he was old

enough to realise what was involved. He would have read the Old Testament Scriptures and would have come to realise what he had to do, in obedience to his Father's will. In fact, the Psalmist anticipated that when he wrote, long before Jesus was born:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire; my ears you have opened; burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the Book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:6-8 and Hebrews 10:5-10).

Uncharted Territory

Nobody had ever travelled through life the way that Jesus travelled. All of us stray off the path and lose the right

way from time to time; Jesus never did. He never once disobeyed his Father and he never did anything wrong. Of Jesus alone it could be said:

*“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: **who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth**” (1 Peter 2:21,22);*

*“We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin**” (Hebrews 4:15).*

We have every reason to marvel at this life of perfect obedience and to praise and thank Jesus for the way he lived, and died. For without that we would have no hope of forgiveness and no prospect of a better life to come. But thankfully he never failed in any way and was willing to lay down his life. He died and rose again so that we too can live and not die. But if we are to take advantage of what God is offering, we must try to follow his steps.

Desert Travellers

The birth of Jesus was a hugely significant event for mankind, for Jesus was central to God’s rescue plan. It had long been predicted that a Saviour would one day come: a man who was born to be a king. In the very earliest times a promise had been given about a child who would be born of a woman (Genesis 3:15). Later it was explained that he would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).

But many hundreds of years passed before those promises came to fruition and the Son of God was born of the virgin Mary. People had been waiting and watching; hoping for the redeemer to appear, and not just people in Israel

– those who were entrusted with God’s Scriptures.

One day visitors from afar came seeking for the newborn child and went, not surprisingly, to the King’s palace asking: *“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him”* (Matthew 2:2). Something in the sky had alerted them to this breakthrough and eventually they found the infant in Bethlehem, a village near Jerusalem where Mary and Joseph were still to be found. For the visitors from far away had been told about the prediction in the Hebrew Scriptures:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

More Wise Men

These wise men who brought their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were forerunners of people who will one day come to pay tribute to the King of kings when he is reigning from Jerusalem (see Isaiah 60:1-11).

But don’t wait until then to show your appreciation of what Jesus means to you. That might be too late. Use every opportunity now to show that you value what has been done for you. Make it your quest to find out about Jesus and to try to be like him in every aspect of your life. For he once said this to all travellers through life:

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

Editor

Well Worth Waiting For

*In this series **Mark Sheppard** has traced a major theme in both Testaments, by examining what the Scripture has to say about the Kingdom of God. In this final article he shows just why that coming Kingdom is the solution to all our problems: something that is really worth waiting for.*

Old Testament Prophets

The prophet Micah paints very lovely word pictures of events which were to take place after his time. In chapter five he predicted the place in which the Lord Jesus would be born – Bethlehem. When he wrote it was regarded as insignificant: small amongst the cities of Judah. But it would be here that the Messiah would be born – he who would be “*ruler in Israel*”. Later, in chapter six, Micah explains the attitude the Lord God has towards people who only offer shallow observance of his laws. He spells out what God really wants:

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

So Micah has some very particular and practical advice to give as well as some impressive prophecies about the time when the Lord Jesus will return to earth.

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow

to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:1,2).



Transformation!

This coming time will be very different from what we now experience. Micah describes it as the latter or last days. These are days which are right at the end of things, when God’s Kingdom is established. Then people will want to learn about the Lord God and His ways, in sharp contrast to the present time.

Nowadays many people have no wish to know about God. Churches are turned into office buildings and supermarkets, desirable residences and carpet warehouses, or they are just demolished, to make way for some grand new building which has nothing to do with the worship of the one true God. But look what he says next, for Micah is not yet finished:

“He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall

they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (4:3,4).



The language may seem a little archaic as people do not use ploughshares and pruning hooks much these days, when farming is so mechanised. Nor do armies use swords and spears, but the idea is graphic and immediate. Whatever the tools of war, which are now used for death and destruction, they will be turned into agricultural implements to feed and support the whole of the world’s population.

The idea of sitting under a vine or fig tree may seem a little tedious after a while. Micah does not suggest that sitting is all that will be done, but the possibility of doing just that is always there. Vines take a long time to establish; only mature plantings grow vines. In many war-torn parts of this earth, vines simply do not reach maturity and produce grapes. But the Kingdom will be a time of peace and stability.

“No one shall make them afraid”

Fear is one of the great problems of the twenty first century. Old people are afraid to leave their homes at night, fearful of what could happen to them whilst they are out, and what could happen to their homes whilst they are away. Others are afraid of what would happen if their job suddenly disappears, how will they manage to keep up the life style they are so used to? Others are afraid of the scourge of

AIDS, or the spread of diseases for which they cannot afford the treatment; and many fear famine and hunger, especially if the rains don’t come or if too much rain falls.

So many fear oppressive and despotic rulers, who have no concern or care for those they are supposed to look after. They fear those who will wound and maim, rape and kill, just as long as they can achieve their own

ends and ensure their own life style, no matter what the cost to others. Micah says about the coming Kingdom of God that *“no one shall make them afraid.”* What a wealth of meaning those six words contain. If only it could be a reality!

Perfect Assurance

The Bible talks only of realities, for it contains the things which God has promised. Did you notice the basis of Micah’s confidence? In full, the sentence reads:

“But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken”.

The promise is assured because God has said so. So what must we do to be part of that coming age of blessing? Micah has yet more to say by way of instruction:

“For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever” (Micah 4:5).

The promise is only assured for those who have made a commitment to be servants of the LORD God here and now. We have to lay to one side

the other things in life that many people worship, and our wrong ideas about the God of the Bible. By reading His Word, we can get to know the God who is inviting us to be a part of His gracious purpose.

Jerusalem – Safe at Last!

Yet another picture of the Kingdom is to be found in the prophecy of Zechariah.

“Thus says the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.’ Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets’” (Zechariah 8:3-5).

At one time it might have seemed reasonable to assume that for boys and girls to play in the streets would mean the removal of the dangers of heavy traffic, fast moving cars and the like. Now, perhaps the danger to be removed may be the threat of knives and guns, of those who allow their perversions to endanger the well-being of young children. A city with children able to play safely in its streets has to be a happy place. The sort of place we should expect God’s Kingdom to be.

Paradise Restored

The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, concludes with more wonderful and beautiful pictures of what God’s Kingdom will be like.

“He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:1-5).

This is what the Lord God planned for His creation in the beginning, when He put Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden. Now it is what is promised for those who have accepted God’s offer of salvation in the Lord Jesus. The world we live in is full of problems, its beauty has been marred horribly by the sordid greed of those who live in it. It was not what God intended, and it is not what He is planning.

There is no question about whether the Kingdom of God will be set up. The only questions are when it will come, and who will be in it. The Lord God will answer the first question for us, the answer to the second is also for Him, but clearly the answer He will give then depends upon our response now.

Mark Sheppard

How Long is “For Ever”?

*In this consideration of God’s purpose as unfolded in Genesis, **Dudley Fiffield** has shown that certain promises were made to Abraham and his descendants, including a special descendant of his, who is to reign “for ever”. Now he clarifies what that Biblical expression means in various places and, in so doing, illustrates the way that study aids can help the Bible reader come to an even deeper understanding of the purpose of God.*

For Ever and Ever?

A brief explanation is necessary to clarify what the Scriptures mean by the phrase “for ever”. The Hebrew word ‘*olahm*’ often translated ‘for ever’ means literally ‘an age, an undefined period of time, a concealed period of time’.

Similarly the Greek words ‘*aion*’ and ‘*aionios*’. They are usually translated ‘eternal’ but essentially they are the same as the Hebrew word ‘*olahm*’. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words* says (that) *aionios* “describes duration either undefined but not endless ... or undefined because endless”.

When trying to understand the meaning of Bible words the context in which they appear and the overall teaching of the Bible must be our guide. When the Bible promises believers ‘eternal life’, this clearly means ‘never-ending life’. That is God’s promise:

“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”.

However, the promise to the children of Israel that they would inherit the land ‘for ever’ as a mortal nation means, more literally, that they would inherit it for an age.

How do we know this? Because the Scriptures speak of ‘the age to come’, described in the Book of Revelation as the thousand-year long reign of Christ. This is otherwise known as the Millennium.

“I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4-6).

It is during this age that mortal nations, amongst whom Israel will be foremost, will enjoy the blessings of Christ’s reign.

Mortal and Immortal

We might liken this period of time (this age) to a pyramid. At the apex we have the Lord Jesus Christ; underneath we have the faithful of all ages, reigning

with him, endowed with immortality – the gift of never-ending life. Below them we have Israel, a mortal people, enjoying the blessings promised to Abraham and, finally, at the base, we have the mortal nations of the world, sharing all the blessings that flow from Abraham’s seed, both singular and plural.



rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For ‘He has put all things under his feet.’ But when he says ‘all things are put under him,’ it is evident that he who put all things under him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15: 22-28).

Good News!

We can be confident of this because the Scriptures speak of a time when death and mortality shall finally be eradicated from the earth:

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all

22-28).

When at last sin and death have been destroyed, God’s purpose will be complete and ‘the many sons he is bringing to glory’ (Hebrews 2:10) will enjoy the bliss and everlasting happiness that God has promised to those who love Him.

Dudley Fifield

The Answer

A melancholy shadow sometimes settles on my mind:
 I feel a painful sorrow for the future of mankind.
 This world is fast becoming such a grave and dangerous place
 And I can see anxiety on many a passing face.

Although we live in desperate times which cannot be ignored
 How few acknowledge God above and live to please the Lord;
 Yet this is where the answer lies to those who are distressed –
 God keeps His children free from fear, and grants them peace and rest.

Colleen Simons

Part Four

Evolution and the Cell

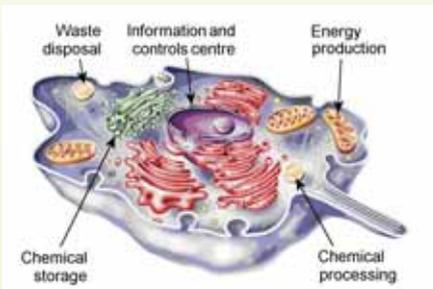
In this series **Lawrence Cave** has been examining the claims of evolution to see if it is a theory which can be proved beyond doubt or whether it is merely based upon a set of assumptions which are incapable of being verified in this way. In this article he looks at the structure and function of the cell – the so-called “simple cell” structure from which it is said that all life evolved. How simple is it?

Building Block

We want to think briefly about the cell, because it is the basic building block of life. All life consists of one or more of these building blocks. The simplest forms of life are single-celled creatures. By contrast, most forms of life consist of many cells. For example, the human body contains more than 10 million million cells of about 200 different types.

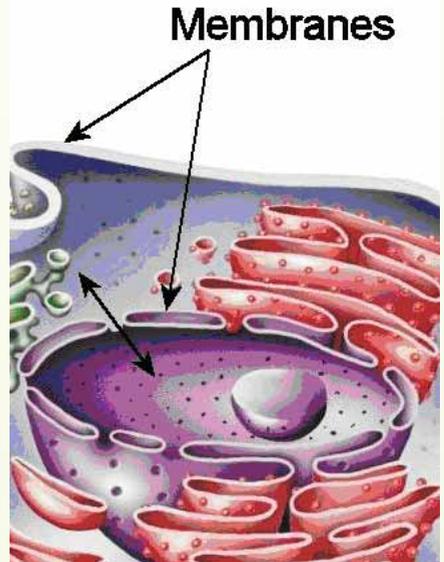
Scientists have discovered that there are many parts to a typical cell. Just as a house has a kitchen, living room, bedroom and bathroom, so a cell has specialised areas partitioned off for separate uses.

This diagram shows just a few of the specialised areas.



Separate Compartments

A room in a house is separated from the rest of the house by its walls, and then its door is used to control what comes in and out. In the same way,



each compartment of the cell is sealed off from the rest of the cell by its own membrane, which has openings to allow some chemicals in and out and to prevent others passing through. There are highly sophisticated systems to ensure that only the correct chemicals come in and out of compartments. In total there are more than twenty different sections in a cell, and these systems must accurately regulate chemical movements between every one of these sections.

One thing that is important to remember is that every cell that has ever been discovered has all of these systems in place to enable it to

survive. Here, then, are the known facts about the cell:

- ❖ the cell is the basis for all life.
- ❖ it is incredibly complicated.
- ❖ all the cells that have ever been discovered have all the essential systems in place.

We want to think about the implications of that last fact. We have no observable facts to suggest that cells have ever been anything other than complete and fully functional. Nor do we have any observable facts to lead us to believe that the complex chemicals like DNA that we find within cells have ever been anything other than complete and fully functional. Theories have been put forward suggesting that animal cells developed from more simple yeast cells. But again, we must remember that yeast cells are complete and fully functional. We should also bear in mind that they are far from simple. There are no observable facts that indicate that yeast cells developed into more complex cells.

By just looking at the observable facts, we would not be led into thinking that the basic building block of life has ever been anything other than complete and fully functional.

Summary

So far in this series we have looked at the theory of the “Big Bang”, that is said to have triggered everything off,

the fossil record which is said to show the way in which species of animals have evolved, and now the structure of the cell. Here are the conclusions we have reached:

Looking at the **observable facts** we find that the “Big Bang” theory:

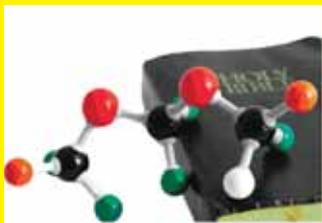
- ❖ is based on very few observable facts
- ❖ has assumptions we cannot prove
- ❖ may be missing some important information.

Looking at the **theory of evolution** we see:

- ❖ the animals in the fossil record appear fully formed
- ❖ comparing animals today gives no information on how they came into existence
- ❖ small observable changes are no evidence of the large changes required by the theory
- ❖ there are no observable facts to suggest the cell (the basic building block of life) has ever been anything other than complete and fully functional.

In the last article of this series we will look at an alternative to the theory of evolution – Creation – and will see whether or not the Biblical account conflicts with the observable facts ascertained by scientific endeavour.

Lawrence Cave



There is no conflict between scientific facts and what the Bible says

Making the Time

As part of the creative process God introduced day and night to serve as a measurement of time for mankind.

We are bound by time, seasons, days and years. It now rules our life and we have to wait for time to pass before we can get things done or see the results of our efforts.



The Master

Jesus was able to circumvent time with some of his miracles because he was given the power to do so by God, his Father. For example, he turned water immediately into wine and cured long-standing illnesses straight away. And when he said he would rise from the dead the third day, he was talking of days as we know them.

Jesus did rise from the dead; a unique event which guarantees the hope of those who listen to what God says in His Word and do what God asks. For without the hope of life after death by resurrection, we would all be subject to that “ever-rolling stream” (to use the poetic phrase of a well-known hymn) which “bears all its sons away.”

Word of Hope

The Psalmist wrote about the wonders of God’s creation in these words: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork”* (Psalm 19:1). But after marvelling at God’s handiwork he immediately talks about God’s Word, by which everything

came into existence:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean,

enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:7-10).

His point is that the Bible revelation of God’s purpose is as vital to our generation as is the preservation of the natural world. We hear a lot today about the perils of climate change and the need to conserve plants and animals that are threatened by climatic changes. But how much do we hear about the importance of preserving and absorbing the message from God contained in the Bible? Not a lot!

Learning from God

Each generation, indeed every individual of each generation, should learn the lessons of the Book of Genesis, including:

- ❖ how and why the earth we inhabit was formed and is kept in being,
- ❖ why we, descendants of Adam and Eve, die and like them return

to the dust from which they were made.

Living conditions have changed and great discoveries have been made, but the gospel remains unchanged. It is still the good news of personal salvation from sin and death, the natural consequence of the human nature we share as descendants of Adam. Unless we do something about it, we will die for ever; but it doesn't have to be like that, unless we want that outcome. The apostle Paul once said this about God's offer of life:

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16,17).

How wonderful that the Word of God has been preserved to our day! Written on different materials down the ages (available today in electronic format) it is still the same and it is true! The Bible's promises about the earth are encapsulated in just one verse from the Book of Numbers: *"Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (Num 14:21).*

Will Mankind destroy the Earth?

You may be wondering why God gave the earth to mankind, considering the mess he has made of it by mismanagement. Did God give it for man to



exploit for his own gain, to pollute, to burn up and to bring it near to destruction? Of course not! God gave the earth as a habitation for mankind so that we could use this God-given opportunity to learn about Him and His gracious purpose. For the earth was not created just for itself. God made it to be a place where His people will dwell for ever (Isaiah 45:18).

We anticipate something in going to the last book of the Bible, Revelation. But it is here that we are told that God will: *"reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and ... destroy those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).*

The kingdom of God is to be established on earth under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns he will put everything right and will remove all those aspects of human life today which are displeasing to God and which obstruct His gracious purpose. Some may ask why God did not fill the earth with His glory right at the beginning. He could have simply made it a place where angels lived. Instead He chose to create mankind, with all the flaws and failures we can now see in human society.

Willing Response

In the creation of man and woman, God was not looking for automata – beings that would give Him perfect obedience because they can do nothing other than obey. He was seeking to bring about a race of people

who would reflect His own character. The Genesis record tells us that God commanded the angels as follows:

“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (1:26).

The likeness was not necessarily physical but spiritual. God created a race of people who were challenged to take control, or “have dominion”, of the world He had created. He wanted them to overcome the challenges they would face and in doing so develop characteristics that would reflect their Maker’s personality and show that they shared His values and aspirations. By doing so they would both glorify God and be transformed themselves in the process.

Wonderful Opportunity

So creatures made out of dust could (and still can) be given everlasting life and live forever with God in a perfect world. Adam and Eve seemed to have thrown the opportunity away and were excluded from the close relationship they once enjoyed in Eden. But God’s

rescue mission involved sending Jesus to redeem the situation and make it possible for us to be forgiven and to be transformed to become like him. By faith in that other Adam (called Jesus, the Son of God) we can become part of a “new creation”.

The Bible calls upon us to repent: to change the direction of our lives and be baptized into the saving name of Jesus. Then we are to live “in Christ”; “bearing the image of the heavenly” (read 1 Corinthians 15:22 & 49). We can thus see that God’s statement: “*Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness*” was more than a direction to the angels. It was a statement of His intent to fill the earth with people who have a real relationship and communion with Him.

God has given us the time and opportunity to find about Him and to learn just what it is that He wants us to do, so that we can be ready for the Lord Jesus when he returns. Now the challenge is for each of us to make the time to learn about God’s purpose by reading His Word and preparing ourselves for the great things that lie ahead, when all things are made new.

Roy Waddoup

All Things New

Then I, John, 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 heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful”.

(Revelation 21:2-5)

Paul's Trial Continues

*Being tried by the Sanhedrin, so that the Roman commander could understand what the charges were against the apostle Paul, the high priest ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth for his boldness in addressing the Court before he had been asked to speak. Paul responded that God would strike him, likening the high priest to a whitewashed wall. But was he right to have responded in this way? **John Hellowell** now investigates.*

Turning the other cheek?

Comparisons have been made between Paul's reaction to Ananias here and that of the Lord Jesus when on trial before Annas, the father-in-law of a former high priest, Caiaphas. Annas seems to have conducted a pre-trial enquiry before the formal meeting of the full Sanhedrin (see John 18:13,24).

The circumstances were similar: in both cases the charge was not clear and witnesses, whose task it was to lay the formal charges, seem to have been unavailable. So, Annas conducted an enquiry to see what he could obtain from the prisoner and asked the Lord Jesus about his disciples and his 'doctrine' (AV and NKJV) or 'teaching' (RV).

"Jesus answered him, 'I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.' And when he had said these things, one of the officers who stood

by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, 'Do you answer the high priest like that?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike me?'" (John 18:20-23).

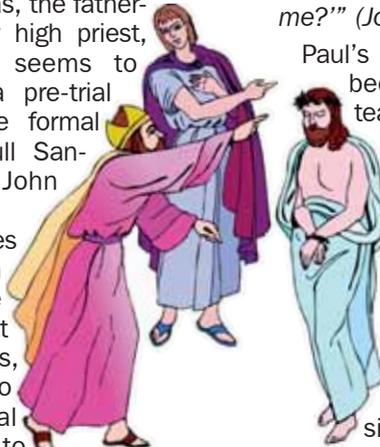
Paul's response may seem to have been contrary to the Lord's teaching:

"But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matthew 5:39).

Critics have complained that, by protesting, the Lord Jesus did not comply with his own teaching on this occasion. However, they have overlooked a vital aspect: the Lord Jesus only protested that the action was illegal. They had not produced witnesses to assert his guilt or innocence but were, in effect, asking him to accuse himself!

The Lord Jesus seems always to have accepted personal insults without complaint but when his Father's Word or the work that he undertook on his Father's behalf was criticised, the Lord retaliated. This is borne out by Peter's declaration:

"...when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to



him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Following the Master

Paul normally followed the Lord's example, as he explained:

"We labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure" (1 Corinthians 4:12).

Yet we are in no position to pass judgment on Paul if he did, in fact, lose his temper and his response in verse 5 of Acts chapter 23 was an apology. However, the circumstances are such that Ananias fully deserved Paul's rebuke; for his action was unlawful, and Paul's response was prophetic. He did not make an empty threat on his own part but declared that God would strike him. This would be in accord with the principle which Paul declared in Romans:

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19), which is itself a citation of Deuteronomy 32:35.

The Accusation

Those who were standing near Paul said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" It was probably one of this group who had carried out the order to strike him. Paul replied that he did not realise that he was the high priest and then quoted the relevant part of the Law (Exod.22:28) regarding speaking evil of the ruler of the people which, as a lawyer, he would know well enough.

This may sound like an apology but it would seem that Paul was attempting to uphold the provisions of the Law. Several explanations have been given for his comment "I did not know,

brethren, that he was the high priest" for it is written, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people".

- ❶ Paul's eyesight had been poor since he was blinded on the road to Damascus and he could not recognise that the person who had spoken to him was the high priest.
- ❷ He had been away from Jerusalem for so long that he was unfamiliar with the present incumbent of the post. This is possible, but Ananias had held the office for about a decade at this time.
- ❸ Perhaps he meant the comment ironically: he could not believe that a president who behaved like that could possibly be the high priest! But now he knew his identity he would respect the office, even if he could hardly respect the holder.

Eye Trouble?

The explanation that Paul's failure to recognise the high priest derived from impaired eyesight is supported by his comment in Galatians 4:

"You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. ... For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me" (Galatians 4:13-15).

This last phrase suggests that Paul had visual difficulties and, if they could, the Galatians would have remedied the trouble by giving Paul their own eyes. Later in this same letter he writes: "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!" (6:11). The fact that Paul used a scribe for his letters also suggests that he may have had difficulty in

seeing well enough to write.

It is also interesting to note how Luke describes Paul *“looking earnestly at the council”* as though trying to discern who was present (Acts 23:1) and then later *“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees”* (v.6) there is a distinct impression that the make-up of the court was not evident to him from the start.

Thorn in the Flesh

Some link Paul’s *“thorn in the flesh”* (2 Corinthians 12:7) to the possible eyesight problem. There is, however, no reason why the visual impairment and the *“thorn in the flesh”* should be the same problem. His explanation of this impediment was that it was *“the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure”*. The link between poor natural eyesight and enhanced spiritual perception is attractive but equally it must be significant that, if he is referring to visual impairment, this occurred before his visions!

There is a substantial case for believing that the *“thorn in the flesh”* was, in fact, the opposition of the Judaisers. It is highly probable that Paul, steeped in the Word, would use an idiom from Scripture. In the Old Testament we have warnings to Israel about the need to drive out the Canaanites otherwise they would become:

- ❖ *“irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides”* (Numbers 33:55);
- ❖ *“scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes”* (Joshua 23:13) and

- ❖ *“thorns in your side”* (Judges 2:3).

The appropriateness of this idiom for the opponents of the Gospel is quite clear. Wherever Paul went, his main opposition was from the Judaisers whose aim was to subvert the Truth.

Paul seizes the initiative

Having taken the initiative at the start of the hearing, by declaring his conscience was clear, Paul now seized the initiative once more by taking advantage of the differences between the two major groupings in the Sanhedrin. Perhaps he realised that he was unlikely to gain a fair hearing, and certainly not from the Sadducees. He had nothing to lose by setting the two groups against each other and it would demonstrate to the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, that the court was unable to deal with his case. So Paul called out

“... I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6).

The two groups were divided by the things that they believed and Paul, who knew that only too well, now exploited those differences to his own advantage. It resulted in a lively end to the trial as the accusing parties now fell out between themselves and violence ensued. Where was this all going to end and what was going to happen to Paul, who was right at the centre of all this strong feeling?

John Hellowell

No More Death, Sorrow, Crying or Pain

This may sound a rather dramatic statement to read in print and yet this is what the Bible promises.

Chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation tells us what things will be like when Jesus Christ returns to the earth with great power and glory, to rule over all nations in the glorious Kingdom of God. This wonderful chapter portrays just how tremendously the world will be changed, for it tells of a “*new heaven and a new earth*,” that is, a new divine government which will result in a world of righteousness, justice and peace.

Try to imagine a world without war, ethnic strife, disease and starving peoples, for that is what it will be like in the Kingdom of God. Faithful and humble people will be rewarded with everlasting life as we find indicated by King David in the psalm that he wrote, in which he says:

“The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37: 11).

We learn from the Bible that David was a great king in Israel, a man approved by God as “*a man after mine own heart*” (Acts 13:22). So we can fully rely on his predictions, especially as they were confirmed by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 5:5).

Abundant Peace

Words like this stand in sharp contrast to our present experience. There are wars taking place now in many different parts of the world, with much

attention being paid to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, all countries at the centre of the “war against terror”, or at least against terrorists and nationalists. And where actual hostilities have not broken out, there is still a lot of tension about Iran, and its alleged nuclear ambitions, Israel and the Palestinians, between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, between China and Taiwan, and between North and South Korea.

World problems have increased greatly in recent years, one of the most vexing being the sad plight of the hungry millions in Africa, the Indian sub-continent and Asia, problems caused by droughts and degradation of the land and excessive water use that has left rivers with seriously reduced levels. And now there’s climate change!

Hope or Hopelessness?

We know, only too well, that our lifespans are limited to something like seventy years, and experience teaches us that there is no immunity from the adversities and misfortunes that occur from time to time. But true believers take comfort that they have been given the hope of something better – a hope that can console and comfort them when troubles come. Indeed the trials can themselves be seen as intended to test and develop character. The Bible gives many examples of people who have emerged from such troubles, stronger and better than ever.

Job was a good man of monumental patience and endurance when placed

under great duress. But the supreme example in suffering, personal denial and discipline was, without doubt, to be seen in the incomparable life, example and unique teachings of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

“No Time!”

Sadly, many people find the pace of life too much for them today and we find an allusion in the Bible to the way in which the tempo of things will quicken in the last times. We are told clearly by the prophet Daniel that this would happen, and also that there would be a proliferation of knowledge, for he says that *“many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase”* (Daniel 12:4). We have seen this development in the fast modes of transport available today, and also in the great advances in all fields of learning, including medical discoveries that have eradicated certain life-threatening diseases.

Jesus offered the best formula for a happy, balanced life, and we find it in his answer to the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, who asked him whether it was in order to pay taxes to their Roman overlords in the land of Palestine. This question was one among the many put to Jesus which tried to trap him into saying something detrimental of the Roman authorities. But he was fully aware of the devious methods employed by the Jewish leaders in trying to bring false accusations against him, and the answer by Jesus exposed their duplicity as he said:

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

That was to say, that they were to fulfil their legal obligations to the state

by obeying its laws, but that they were also required to devote time in acknowledging God in their lives by obeying His commandments and by living in conformity with His laws as contained in His Word, the Bible.

It seems reasonable to suggest that no person is so busy that he or she is unable to devote a certain amount of time daily for the purpose of reading a portion of Scripture and for prayer to the Great God of the universe, who provides for all His creatures. This is the least we can do to show respect and reverence for His Great and Holy Name, bearing in mind that what He has promised to those who turn to Him in faith, obedience and humility will be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God when Christ returns as King of all nations.

Never Too Busy

The Apostle Paul was one of the busiest men who ever lived. But he was busy doing the Lord’s work. For, in spite of being a tent-maker by profession, it was he who established many of the places of Christian worship in the countries abutting the Mediterranean Sea, cities such as Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, Thessalonica, and also in the region of Galatia. In addition to these tremendous achievements Paul was also able to undertake three missionary journeys in his great work of converting Gentiles and Jewish people alike to the life-saving teachings of Jesus.

His example shows us that however busy we are, we must find time for the things in life that really matter. Be sure to make time to prepare your life for the kingdom that is coming, when there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain.

Dennis Elliott

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