A photograph of a brick castle tower reflected in a pond with lily pads. The tower is made of red brick and has several windows. The reflection in the water is very clear, showing the tower upside down. There are green lily pads floating on the water's surface. The sky is visible in the reflection, appearing as a dark, inverted sky.

# Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1580

***Upside-Down World – page 3***  
***The Book of Revelation – page 7***  
***The Examined Life – page 14***

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# Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

132<sup>nd</sup> Year

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1580



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the 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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## Contents

<b>Upside-Down World.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Lethal Addiction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Book of Revelation ..</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>World Government by Jesus Christ.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>“Thy Kingdom Come” ...</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Examined Life .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>King Josiah.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>The Only Living God .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The Best of Books .....</b>	<b>19</b>

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## Bible Versions

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

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# Upside-Down World

Jesus once healed a blind man in two stages. First he put spit on his eyes, laid his hands on him and asked if he could see anything. The man gave a curious answer: *“I see men like trees, walking”*. So Jesus put his hands on his eyes again and this time the man’s sight was perfectly restored. You can read the full account of this miracle in Mark’s gospel, chapter 8, verses 22–26.

## Why Two Stages?

Whatever Jesus did was significant. It certainly wasn’t the case that he was struggling to give this man sight, and only just managed it at the second attempt. Jesus did many miracles with apparent ease. Paralytics were told to walk and did so easily; deaf people had their hearing restored; sick people were immediately cured, as were epileptics and the mentally deranged. So why did the Lord cure this man in two stages, when he could have given him instant sight? It seems that he wanted to teach his disciples a lesson about their struggle to obtain spiritual insight.

Read the account in its setting in Mark chapter 8 and you will find it sandwiched between two episodes where the disciples were struggling to understand what Jesus was saying and who Jesus really was. He had cautioned them to *“Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod”*. He was warning about the dangerous teaching of two groups who were opposed to everything that Jesus said and did; but the mention of *“leaven”* had the disciples thinking about food instead.



Then, immediately after the account of the healing of the blind man, Jesus asked them *“Who do you say that I am?”* (Mark 8:29) and it was Peter who made a breakthrough in their understanding when he said *“You are the Christ”* (see also Matthew 16:13–20).

## Misunderstanding

Perhaps you think that the twelve disciples, who spent years with Jesus, understood everything immediately and never had any difficulty with anything their Master said. But it wasn’t like that at all. They took a long time to understand that Jesus had come to save mankind from sin and death and that he was to sacrifice his life as part of God’s wonderful plan to rescue sinners.

Peter made his breakthrough statement, which Jesus said had been revealed to him by God, but when he began to teach them about his impending rejection, his death and his resurrection, Peter lapsed straight back to his previous confusion:

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned around and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind*

me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men (Mark 8:32–33).

## **Developing Insight**

The disciples understood something about the work of Jesus, but couldn't see it clearly. Their insight was like the developing sight of the blind man – at stage one – and it was some considerable time before they came to appreciate what Jesus was all about. When he was arrested, tried and crucified, they were bereft. When the women came to say the grave was empty and the Lord was alive, they could not believe it. Only when the risen Jesus appeared to them did they begin to understand that everything that happened had been part of God's plan of salvation. Even then Thomas was unconvinced, as he said:

*The other disciples ... said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).*

## **Second Stage**

Thomas came to believe when Jesus appeared to him as well, but it goes to show that it takes time to understand just what God is doing, as His great plan of redemption unfolds. The problem the disciples had was that they had a preconceived idea of what the Jewish Messiah would be like and his dying wasn't included in their scheme of things.

That understandable difficulty is a warning to all of us for we too can have religious ideas which don't match Bible teaching and they can prevent us from seeing things clearly.

That blind man needed his confused vision to be sorted out by Jesus. He could see, but his sight was badly impaired. The second time he got to see things as they really are. There were many people like him who saw Jesus in the flesh, but who didn't recognise him for what he really was – the Son of God. They were Bible readers but their understanding fell short, as Jesus said:

*"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40).*

## **"Come to me"**

We don't want that to be said of us – that our understanding falls short of accepting Jesus as the God-provided Messiah, who came to give his life for each of us, and who will come again to complete the work of recovery and restitution, when he establishes God's kingdom on earth.

Today's world has got everything out of perspective. Mankind is glorified; human laws and justice systems ignore God's law and establish man-made morals and values in their place. Greed, exploitation, money, power and privilege are everything.

This world-system is about to be replaced by the Kingdom of God and the man who will rule the world is the one who can give sight to the blind and health and healing to mankind. He is the saviour the world needs and God will send him soon. Meanwhile we need to read about him, listen to his words, and come to him that we might have life.

**Editor**

# The Lethal Addiction

“Please help me”, pleaded Mark. He looked totally forlorn and desperate. “I’ve tried to stop but after a while I just do it again. It’s like I can’t help it.” The counsellor smiled encouragingly. “Well, you’ve made the first important step. You’ve admitted that you have a problem and you’ve come to the right place for help. Please try to follow exactly what we tell you, because, as you know, continuing as you are would be life-threatening. Fortunately, you have not left it too late, and we do know what can work for you.”

## The Problem of Sin

In this world of stress many people turn to addictive behaviour such as comfort eating, drinking, smoking or drugs. None of these addictions is good for us, but some are particularly dangerous. While most people manage to live contented lives without resorting to these, there is one thing to which we are all naturally addicted. This addiction is sin – doing things that God does not like.

We are all, without exception, naturally self-centred and not God-centred. There is only one person who never displeased God: His Son Jesus Christ. Everyone else has been and is addicted to sin. The great apostle Paul described his struggle:

*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me,*



*but how to perform what is good I do not find (Romans 7:15–18).*

## What is Sin?

We do well to consider what God regards as sin. According to His Word, the Bible, sinning is not just doing what we would consider awful things like murder or stealing, although they definitely are sins. Sinning is not even necessarily unpleasant – in fact it can be quite enjoyable (Hebrews 11:25). The Bible says that our ‘natural’ thoughts and reactions can be sinful ‘works of the flesh’.

*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:20–21).*

None of us can say that we have never been guilty of these things. This sort of thought and behaviour is so instinctive that we are addicted to it.

## **Sin and its Consequences**

Like other dangerous addictions, this way of life is killing us. In fact left to our own devices our position is so serious that we are even enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Our sinful nature stops us entering the kingdom of God and inevitably results in eternal death. As the apostle Paul said:

*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).*

Like Mark, we all need to admit that we have a serious problem which we simply cannot solve by ourselves. We need to recognise that there is a solution, provided by God. That is why Jesus came – to live a sinless life, to give his life as a sacrifice for sin and to be raised from the dead so that he can now sit in glory at his Father’s side, to help his people.

*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 (John 3:16).*

## **The Solution**

There are many myths about addictions and many false beliefs about what the Bible actually says. Some people do not even base their beliefs on the Bible. Mark needed professional help and we need help from the God of the Bible. There is no other way. As the counsellor said to Mark, we must conform to what the Bible says if we want to be saved. This means we must:

- ❖ Admit our desperate problem and helplessness,
- ❖ Come to God in the way He has provided,
- ❖ Do what He asks of us, in humility and obedience.

This also brings great blessings here and now, helping us to cope with the stresses of life which could lead to the other sorts of addictions:

*Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:1–4).*

## **Stage by Stage**

At what stage are you? Are you happily indulging in your addictive sins, enjoying life and hoping for the best, but allowing your sins to destroy you? Or are you genuinely searching the Bible and trying to obey God? God cannot save you unless you respond to His message of hope. He asks you to be baptised and to follow Jesus. Jesus commanded his disciples:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).*

When Jesus returns your opportunity to be saved may be over. If this addiction to sin is killing you, don’t leave it too late.

**Anna Hart**

# **The Book of Revelation**

This last book of the Bible was penned by the apostle John, probably towards the end of the First Century. He writes in a time of persecution, when he has been sent into exile by the Roman authorities, marooned on the island of Patmos “on account of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus” (Revelation 1:9). Patmos is a tiny island off the coast of Turkey, about 13 square miles (34 square kilometres) in area.

## **Inspired Visions**

The Revelation is the record of a series of inspired visions in which John sees and hears his Master Jesus talking to him, passing on a message for the Christian brothers and sisters. The opening verse is important – “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1).

The vision was to show John things that must take place, so it was a prophecy, like the prophecies of Isaiah or Jeremiah. It predicted the course of events far into the future, so that God’s servants would be prepared and strengthened in times of persecution, knowing that world events are in God’s hands, and move steadily towards the goal of His Kingdom being established on earth.

To appreciate the book of Revelation we need to have read the rest of the Bible first, because it is full of links and allusions to the earlier writings. Practically every phrase and theme has been plucked from the Old Testament (in some cases the New Testament), and

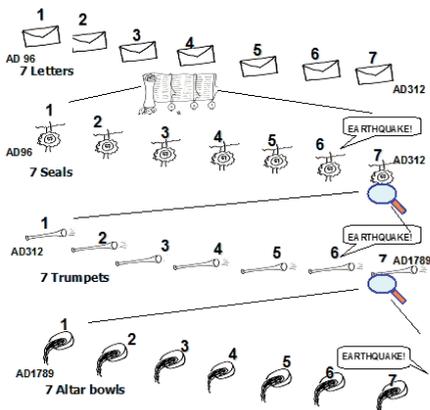
applied to a new but similar situation. We will find strong links to the visions of the prophet Daniel, who saw four amazing beasts with features that foretold the course of history from his day up to the First Century. John’s visions take over where Daniel’s left off, and we shall meet Daniel’s beasts in a new guise, used this time to predict the events of European history through many centuries.

## **Perfect Number**

A key idea in the Revelation is the number seven. Seven is the perfect number, the cycle of days that completes a week and then starts again. The book is divided into groups of sevens – seven lampstands and seven letters, seven wax seals on a scroll, seven trumpets that blow in turn, and seven altar bowls poured out on the earth. There is another twist – seven in seven. This concept comes from the conquest of Jericho by Joshua.

The soldiers of Israel marched round the city of Jericho once a day for six days. But on the seventh day they marched round seven times, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> circuit, the walls collapsed and the city fell. So in the Revelation there are six seals, but when the seventh is cut through it is found to enclose the seven trumpets, and when the seventh trumpet begins to blow it conceals the seven bowls. Only when we reach the seventh bowl does the Kingdom of God finally arrive in all its glory.

Here is a schematic diagram which illustrates the way the book of Revelation is laid out in sets of sevens:



## Unfolding Drama

In the opening chapter John sees his master, the Lord Jesus, in heavenly glory. Jesus is walking amongst seven golden lampstands, which John is told represent seven Christian congregations in the province of Asia. Each in turn is given a written report, dictated to John, outlining their successes and their weak points, just like the traditional end-of-term report at school. Each letter ends with a beautiful promise, held out to *“him who conquers”*. It is a surprise to find seven churches in the same area with such a variation in their spiritual health, from Ephesus – patiently enduring and bearing up for Jesus’ sake; to Laodicea – smug and complacent, but in Jesus’ view close to death (see Revelation 1:11 to 3:22).

At this point John is invited to come up into heaven so that he can watch history unfold before his eyes. Unlike the Seven Letters, which were sent to his contemporaries, the rest of Revelation relates to events after John’s lifetime. To understand the setting from this point onwards, we need to

imagine a drama, a historical pageant acted out as a series of scenes on the stage of a theatre. John the observer is invited up into the royal box for the performance. Looking down, he sees the earth and the sea below him.

As each act is announced, the characters come and go, accompanied by appropriate sound effects. As an added refinement, the ‘royal box’ is defined in chapter four as the Temple from the Old Testament, complete with:

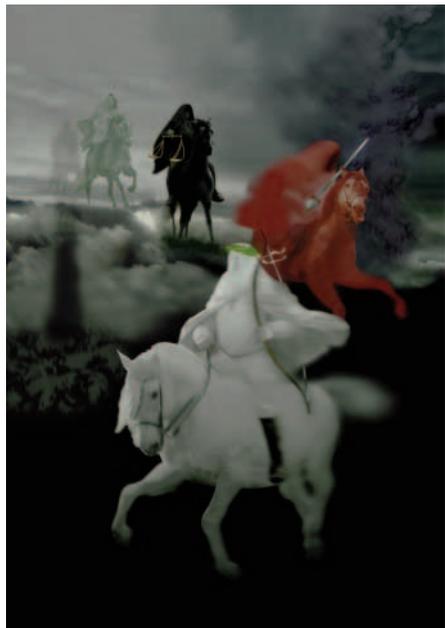
- ❖ an Ark (the ‘throne’ on which God’s angel once sat as His representative),
- ❖ an incense altar, an altar for sacrifices,
- ❖ a great reservoir or ‘sea’ for water,
- ❖ a lampstand, and
- ❖ four cherubim or ‘living creatures’.

He also sees in the foreground 24 elders, who serve the Lord as did the 24 orders of Levites in the Temple of Solomon.

## The Scroll Opened

In the opening scene, John sees the Lord God, seated on the throne, holding a scroll in his hand. It is made up of seven sections, each separately sealed with a string and a wax pendant. Nobody could read the scroll until the strings were cut. John sees a wounded Lamb approach the throne. It is Jesus, the Lamb of God, and he is given the right to open the scroll.

He cuts the first string, and as the scroll flies open a white horse gallops across the stage with a warrior on his back. The next seal introduces a red horse ridden by a man with a dagger. The third horse is black. His rider



*The four horsemen of the Apocalypse depict events that were “shortly to come to pass”. Illustration by David Miles (with permission)*

carries scales for weighing out daily food rations. The fourth is the colour of a corpse, and the skeleton on its back is accompanied by a symbolic grave, shovelling up the dead over a quarter of the earth.

## **Four Horsemen**

The four coloured horses are taken from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. It is not difficult to line up the four seals with the history of the Roman Empire after John’s death – an initial period of prosperity and peace, followed by civil war, then famine and pestilence, especially in the Italian division of the Empire, which was divided into four quarters at this time. The time period covers AD 100 to AD 270.

The next Seal introduces an altar splashed with blood, and the blood is

said to represent the lives of Christian believers. Many of them were indeed martyred for their faith by the pagan (idol worshipping) Emperor Diocletian around 300 AD. The Sixth Seal opens with dramatic sound-effects – an earthquake, and the removal of the sun, moon and stars – a traditional Bible symbol for a change of rulership. This links with the revolutionary change that took place when Constantine battled successfully for control of the Empire. Pagan Rome became Christian Rome as he removed, once and for all, the persecution of those who refused to worship the ancient gods. Constantine came to power in AD 312.

## **The 144,000**

During the quiet time that follows, John sees in chapter seven 144,000 people, marked in the forehead by an angelic messenger, like those faithful men Ezekiel saw set aside for God before the fall of Jerusalem in his vision (Ezekiel 9:4). They come from the 12 tribes of Israel, but one is omitted from the list, for these are not literally Jews, but a harvest of believers, reaped under the new and favourable regime, in the lull before the destruction of the Empire by the barbarian tribes.

They form part of a huge multitude, from all nations under heaven, that John now hears praising God, in a comforting vision of the Kingdom of God. But before that reward can be given, there are others who must be called out to join them, and so Seal number seven introduces the seven trumpets – the next phase of “those things that must soon take place”.

**David M Pearce**

*To be continued*

# **World Government by Jesus Christ**

Men and women have always longed for good government. There have been rare periods when there has been peace and security for some people but sadly that has been at the cost of much suffering for others.

The 'Pax Romana' of New Testament times (the time when the Romans brought a sort of stability to Europe and the Middle East), was enforced by physical force and hideous cruelty, the worst example being when they crucified Jesus.

It was the same during the 'Pax Britannica' when Britain ruled a big empire, whilst many people in the UK itself and in other countries endured terrible sufferings.

## **Four Essential Qualities**

The fact is that unaided human beings are too flawed to rule their fellows properly. There are four problems. Men and women lack:

- ❖ the necessary wisdom,
- ❖ the essential goodness,
- ❖ the power to enforce good government, and
- ❖ immortality; so that if – very rarely – a really honest, well-meaning, capable person does arise, before long he or she is removed by death.

The difference between Jesus and everyone else is that when he was here he demonstrated that he does have the first three of these rulership qualities. Now, in addition, he has

been given eternal life by God, so that when he rules he can rule for ever. Jesus has all these qualities in perfection.

## **Foretold!**

The coming of Jesus had been prophesied 700 years before in Isaiah 11:1–9, where Jesus is compared to a new strong shoot springing from the roots of an old tree (the family of King David):

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:1–9).*

The Gospels show us how Jesus had the first three qualities, even as a mortal man, and he gained the fourth after his resurrection.

- ❖ **Wisdom** – *When he had come to his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were*

astonished and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? (Matthew 13:54);

- ❖ **Goodness** – Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? (John 8:46);
- ❖ **Power** – They were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, “What a word this is! For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Luke 4:36);
- ❖ **Eternal Life** – He laid his right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:17–18).

## He is Worthy

In Jesus, God has provided a worthy ruler for the whole earth. He is the key to those promises about the future Kingdom of God that we find in the Old Testament: statements like these:

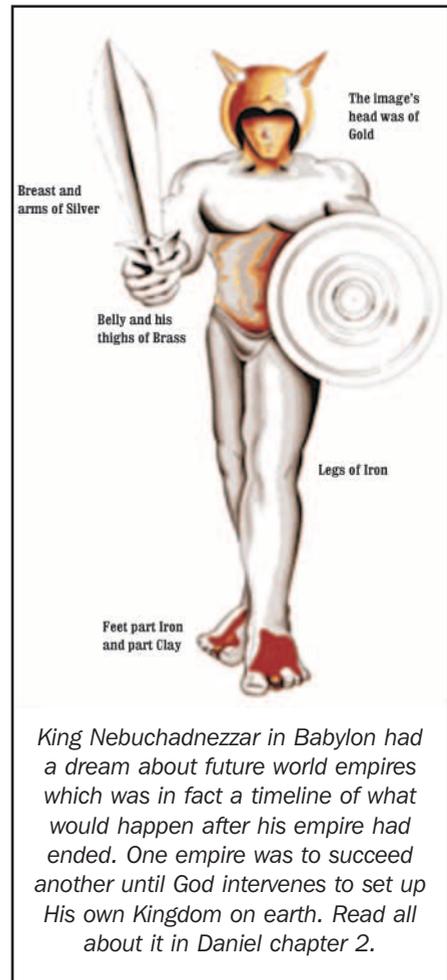
*In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44);*

*“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before Him. Then to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion,*

*which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13–14).*

The Bible gives us a clear idea of what this world-wide rule by Jesus will be like. Read Psalm 72 for an insight into the sort of life God has promised when Jesus is King. Read the rest of the Bible to find out what God wants of you if you are to be there with the Lord Jesus when he comes.

## John Woodall



*King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon had a dream about future world empires which was in fact a timeline of what would happen after his empire had ended. One empire was to succeed another until God intervenes to set up His own Kingdom on earth. Read all about it in Daniel chapter 2.*

# “Thy Kingdom Come”

Some people say that God’s Kingdom is here already, as a state of being in the hearts of men and women who have embraced it and seek to live according to its principles. You have to admire their attitude, but the coming Kingdom of God on earth is very much more than an attitude of heart and mind.



leaves a legacy of hundreds of orphans, and murder and strife is part of daily life for so many. In the Kingdom there will be no more boundaries, and thanksgiving will dwell in every heart.

*He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:8).*

## Hard Times

The Bible says that before God takes over the rulership of His world, things will have deteriorated in many ways and that is what we now see happening. Troubles beset the nations on all sides: immorality, lawlessness, racism, famine, disease, tears and overmuch sorrow. The threat of modern warfare is enough to drive terror into the hearts of many. Their fears are justified, for the Bible is categorical in telling us that war will sweep the nations, and morally things will get worse. There will be no improvement until that glad day when the Lord Jesus returns in glory, to set up his rule over all the nations.

## Righteousness

Psalm 72 resonates with hope. It speaks of the coming king, and says that in his days the righteous shall flourish, and there will be an abundance of peace. It speaks of an everlasting kingdom, ruled by the greatest man who ever lived. Some find it difficult to imagine what that will be like given that today’s warfare

## Salvation

The modern world needs a supreme monarch who, with God’s authority, will reign over all nations. We need someone who can solve the world’s problems for all people, not just for the rich and famous. Today the needy are often trodden underfoot, exploited, driven from their homes and treated abominably. He will be their champion, and none will dare resist him. He will not only be victorious over world forces, but his justice and righteousness will be acknowledged everywhere. Listen to what the Psalmist promises:

*He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper (Psalm 72:12).*

## Abundance

The poor and helpless are often seen queuing up for welfare handouts from various charities and agencies, but it will not be like that in God’s wonderful kingdom:

*There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and*

*those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth (Psalm 72:16).*

What a vision! No more pot-bellied children, their eyes covered with disease-carrying flies. The change will be dramatic. The harvest will be so abundant that there will be hardly time to gather it before it is time to sow again. The Father of all blessings will shower His abundance on the whole world. There will be freshness, beauty and vigorous growth as never before.

## **Glorious Earth**

When the Lord Jesus rules over a worldwide empire many will be attracted to follow him and make his teaching and his law the centre of their lives, for Jesus will bring a blessing when he returns from heaven:

*His name shall endure forever; his name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed (Psalm 72:17).*

The sense of joy will be so contagious. The evil of the present day will contrast with the contentment of the time to come. We try to contemplate the healthy, glowing faces of the new paradise, and can only exclaim, "Blessed be God". The Psalmist is clearly exhilarated himself as he looks forward to everything he has been inspired to reveal, for he concludes the Psalm with these uplifting words:

*Blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen (Psalm 72:19).*

## **Jerusalem - a Joy**

A kingdom must have a centre, and God has decided that it will be at Jerusalem. What a transformation

awaits that city. As a river flows gently to the sea gathering springs on the way, so the peoples of the world will flow to the place where they will learn of the mercy of God. The Lord Jesus will be enthroned there, and immortal saints will have the privilege of offering words of life to all. The prophet Isaiah adds to what the Psalmist has said with these heart-stirring words:

*Many people 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 shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).*

Right-thinking men and women from all nations will want to worship God and meet His appointed King – the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be no reticence then in talking about religion, but a zeal to hear the words given. What a change for those people who have been starved of Bibles for years. It will be a splendid time. So the Christian prays, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth", knowing it is the only hope for a hopeless world. God's will is already done in heaven, but not yet on earth. That must change.

That kingdom is not here yet, but all the signs suggest we are living in an age that is the overture to Paradise. The Lord Jesus is inviting you to be with him in that day. He is the answer to mankind's need. He asks but one thing of us, "Follow me". It means self-denial now which, God willing, will result in a wonderful transformation in the future. God grant that you will answer the call.

**Ken Clark**

# The Examined Life

A few weeks ago I was in a doctor's waiting room, and was going to be there for two or three hours. In my hurry I had forgotten to bring anything to read, but there on the table beside me was this book, *"Philosophy for Dummies"*. It looked brand new and was clean—no germs—something I always wonder about in doctors' offices. I picked it up and started reading.

## Daily Routine

It began with a statement by the philosopher Socrates who said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Really? Author Tom Morris explains:

*"Unfortunately, it's one that far too many people live: getting up, dressing, eating, going to work, breaking for lunch, working some more, going home, eating again, watching TV, leafing through magazines, exchanging a few words with family members in the house or with friends on the phone, changing for bed, and falling to sleep—just to repeat the same thing over and over and over without ever thinking what it all means or how life should be really lived.*

*"We wake up already in motion in this life. Rarely, if ever, do we stop to reflect on what we truly want in life, or who we are and want to become, on what difference we want to make in the world, and thus on what's really right for us. And that is the unexamined life—almost as a sleepwalker, on automatic pilot—a life based on values and beliefs that we've never really looked at, never really tested, never examined for ourselves."*

## Self-Examination

When we correctly examine ourselves, we become wise. But don't confuse wisdom with 'education'—book learning; wisdom is insight on life and how to live it. Natural man struggles to find the good and sometimes he will, but what was it Paul told the Jews at Rome about natural law? He said to the Jews, you've got the law and you can't keep it. Look at the Gentiles around you: they don't have the law but they do by nature the things required by the law; they are a law unto themselves for its requirements are written on their hearts:

*Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them (Romans 2:15).*

Paul's conclusion was shattering to Jews who were so proud of their circumcised state:

*He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Romans 2:29).*

## Know Thyself

Cervantes, creator of Don Quixote, urged us to make it our business to 'know thyself'. He called it the most difficult lesson in the world. Turn to the Bible itself, and look at the lives and teaching of the people it describes. King David for example, is often found seeking to know himself, with God's help:

*Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the Lord; I shall not slip. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth (Psalm 26:1–3).*

But on another occasion, after he has lost his integrity:

*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin ... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:1–2, 17).*

## **Examine Yourself**

When our lives do have meaning in the eyes of God, the implication for us is that we should live an examined life. An examination implies a test. You are being compared to a standard. We can't examine ourselves against the standard of wisdom; success requires a substantive, defined focus against which to be measured. The apostle Paul suggests this:

*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

How do we examine ourselves? A good test for Paul's counsel may be to look to yourself to see if you are pure in heart – the essence of wisdom. Why? Because we're told that it is the pure in heart who will see God. Is your heart impure? What makes it so?

But we need to acknowledge that this is an examination of ourselves and not others. If you spend all your time talking about how bad everybody is, you are not looking at the real enemy. All we're doing then is making ourselves look good by comparison, like the Pharisee, depicted in the parable Christ told (Luke 18:9–14). His (unanswered) prayer included the words "God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector..." (18:11). By saying this he demonstrated a problem we all share: he was self-absorbed. What we don't want is to be gold-plated, our religion being a veneer over a base metal, like the Pharisee in the parable.

## **Make Time**

You know, you can't spend your life in self-examination. That will result in paralysis by analysis. But you can set a time – daily, weekly, monthly – mark it on the calendar – when you commit or recommit your life to obey God in your thoughts, words, and actions. All of them need to be tested regularly.

One way to set the stage for our self-examination is to bring to mind the need for baptism – the way that God has appointed by which we make a commitment to follow Jesus and find salvation. Here's a prayer that might help us at that time:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23–24).*

**Leroy Canoles Jnr**

*From: [thepreachersays.com](http://thepreachersays.com)*

*With permission*

# King Josiah

Josiah was the last good king of Judah. After him three of his sons reigned, and one of his grandsons. None lasted very long; two reigned for just three months. Finally the people of Judah went into exile in Babylon. Although they returned about 70 years later they never had another king.

Josiah's reign seems like a chapter of missed opportunities. He was only 39 when he was killed in battle, although he had been king for 31 years. He introduced some excellent reforms in the nation, but very quickly after his death the nation forgot all about them, and reverted to their wicked ways. That may well have been because he led the way in everything and the people did what they were told to do but did not share their king's enthusiasm.

## **Promised and Promising**

Josiah is one of the seven men in the Bible who are named well before they were born. Josiah's birth was prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam I, about 300 years before he was born. "Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name" (1 Kings 13:2). Josiah, son of Amon, became king at the age of eight, when his wicked father was overthrown. His mother's name was Jedidah, but little else is known about her except where she came from. Was she the good influence in the young king's life? Presumably there was someone who provided such, because we are told that "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way

of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2).

When he had reigned for 18 years, Josiah began to institute reforms. He sent a messenger, Shaphan the scribe, to Hilkiah the High Priest to arrange for the temple to be repaired and cleaned. In the reigns of the two predominantly wicked kings before him – Manasseh and Amon – it had become neglected, dirty and in disrepair. In the process of setting things back to rights, Hilkiah found a scroll described as "the book of the Law". He gave this to Shaphan, who read it. It is extremely unlikely that Hilkiah was unable to read, but quite possible that his eyes were unable to see the text on the scroll. I am not quite sure exactly which book is described. It could have been Leviticus, or more likely a scroll of Deuteronomy, perhaps the original copy (see Deuteronomy 31:26).

## **Reforming Zeal**

When Shaphan and Hilkiah had read it they took it to King Josiah, and read it to him. The effect was electric: the king tore his clothes, realizing that the book condemned much of the life of the nation, despite his best intentions. He was now even more determined in his zeal to bring the people back to the true worship of the LORD God for he recognized the danger the nation were in if they ignored the word of the living God:

*"Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has*

been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us” (2 Kings 22:13).

If there is one thing we should learn from Josiah it is the need to read God’s word for ourselves, to take note of what it teaches and put it into action in our own lives. Fortunately Josiah had godly men and women amongst his advisors and counselors, one of them was Huldah, the prophetess, the wife of Shallum. She sent messengers back to Josiah with the message that evil would come to the nation, but that because Josiah had sought to obey God’s word the judgment would not come in his time.

*“Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place” (v 20).*

## **Second Reformation**

A period of intense activity followed. Josiah now made a determined effort to remove all vestiges of idol worship from the land and to bring the people back to the true worship of the Lord God. The most obvious sign of this was the keeping of the Passover. The people should have kept the Passover each year on the anniversary of the nation leaving Egypt (Exodus 13:10). The Passover kept in Josiah’s time was unparalleled.

*No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of*

*Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 35:18).*

It was a very joyful time for the nation. They remembered their redemption from slavery in Egypt, and also the happiness of a return to godly ways. Sadly it did not last.

## **Early End**

Nothing further is recorded about Josiah until the thirty-first year of his reign. Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt was on his way to fight against the Assyrians at Carchemish. He sent a message to Josiah saying that he had no quarrel with him, nor with Judah, and that God had commanded him to make haste to battle at Carchemish, but undeterred Josiah went out with his army to fight in the plain of Megiddo. Like another king before him he was struck by a stray arrow, and was mortally wounded.

It was a tragic loss, for the reforms he had begun were not sufficiently embedded in the lives of the people to survive his death. Jeremiah the prophet was one of the foremost to lament his death:

*“Weep not for him who is dead, nor grieve for him, but weep bitterly for him who goes away, for he shall return no more to see his native land” (22:10).*

The world is full of “what ifs” and it is tempting to ask “What if Josiah had not intervened with Neco, would the effect on Judah have been very different?” It is impossible to answer that, because what happened was part of God’s plan. The time for Judah to be restored fully was not yet. That has to await the coming of the Lord Jesus.

## **Mark Sheppard**

*Quotations from the ESV*

# The Only Living God

We really only understand what life is when we have seen death. To see a dead animal, a bird, or sadly a loved one brings the message home that death is the end of life. There is nothing there anymore. All signs of life and animation are gone: the canvas is blank.

## Dead gods

Yet there are many people who worship inanimate, and therefore dead, gods – images made out of metal, wood or stone. They have no life in them, having been carved or shaped by craftsmen trying to imitate life. Long ago a Hebrew man summed up idol worship in this graphic way:

*Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk (Psalm 115:4–7).*

Then he added this devastating assessment: *“Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them”* (Psalm 115:4–8); in other words, worship a lifeless god and expect to become lifeless yourself!

## The Living God

The God of the Bible states that He is full of life, always has and always will be full of life. He alone has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16); has always existed (Psalm 90:2); for, as Jesus explained, *“The Father has life in Himself”* (John 5:26). Throughout the Bible God is

called the *“living God”* – from Deuteronomy 5:26, when Moses marvels at having heard the voice of the living God, right through to the Book of Revelation.

Even a king who worshipped gods made of wood and stone came to recognize the difference: that the prophet Daniel's god was *“a living god”* (Daniel 6:20, 26).

## Immortality

God's life has always been there and always will be there. It is inextinguishable, for God is immortal. At present, our lives are of limited duration because we fail to think and behave as God does. But He has a plan to deal with that and Jesus Christ has shown us that we too can have immortal life. When Jesus said that *“the Father has life in Himself”*, the statement continues *“He has granted the Son to have life in himself”* (John 5:26).

## Redemption

Jesus is the first human to gain life in himself – to become immortal (Psalm 21:4) – and the whole plan of redemption centres on the idea that many others will follow.

This can happen to us, if we follow the example of Jesus in our attitude to God and in our behaviour to each other. We must believe what God has told us about the coming Kingdom on the earth. Then we can look forward to being truly living beings – full of life, energy and zest for doing what is right. The emptiness of death will then be gone for ever.

**Cynthia Miles**

# The Best of Books

On a visit to our local library recently, I decided to browse in the section labelled “Religion”. I found a wide range of books covering world religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, atheism, agnosticism, even magic. There were very few on Christianity and not a single Bible.

It is a sad reflection of society in many parts of the world today. Of course we don't want to return to the days of compulsory adherence to State religion but hasn't the pendulum swung too far the other way? Is it really the case that nobody wants to know what Christianity is all about?

## Self-Improvement

The next section of books was labelled “Mind Management” and contained books on self-help, feeling good, Yoga, etc. There are innumerable theories on offer to help us feel better but, if effective, they only have a temporary benefit. They may help us cope with the strains and stresses of daily living but they can't solve the basic problem of our human frailty. Nor can they show us how to face the ultimate problem of life: death and oblivion.

Only God can do that and He has revealed the reason for our existence and has explained why we are mortal creatures. Fortunately, He has also provided the solution to all our problems – in the Bible.

## Bible Reading

Why are we so resistant to opening the book of books and reading it for ourselves? Do we think that we know what it says already and that it has nothing for us? Just look at what it claims:



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

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).*

Why not start reading the Bible, with an open mind? If you don't know where to start, I suggest the short gospel of Mark which will give you an overall picture of God's message to us through the life and death and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ. Why not start reading it today?

**Marion Buckler**

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