

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1604



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Power to Change the World - page 14
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Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

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Its objectives are - to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; 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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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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Built on the Rock



In a recent documentary about architecture, I was fascinated by the differences between New York and London. Both are major world financial and trade centres, both have many millions of inhabitants; but their skylines are different. New York's profile – particularly Manhattan – is a mass of skyscrapers, some over 400 metres high. London has some tall buildings, but many fewer and not to the same grand heights as its American cousin. The highest building in London is 'The Shard' at just over 310 metres.

The reason for this is their differing bedrocks. Manhattan is comprised of very hard 'schist', which is close to the surface and can be seen in the boulders in Central Park. This makes it comparatively easy to build very tall buildings which are stable, despite their huge weight.

In London, however, softer sedimentary rocks lie under the city, with clay and chalk in the rock layers. This means that building upwards is challenging, as the foundations have to be dug very deep indeed, and may still require additional structures to make them secure.

In each case, the strength and resilience of the buildings is depend-

ent on their foundations, and the material on which they are built.

A Common Concept

This architectural principle is one with which we are familiar in other areas of life. In science, we start with established facts which act as solid basic foundation. When learning a language, we first establish the simplest words and phrases, get them right, and then build more sophisticated structures. In any sport, players begin by learning the rules, developing their basic fitness and then progress to tactics and game-play.

The same applies in our everyday lives. Whether we consider our relationships, careers or other interests, we know that it is right to get the foundations right and to develop from there. If we do not, then we will eventually fail in whatever we are trying to do. More importantly, building on the right foundation is critical to our spiritual lives, to the way in which we construct our relationship with God.

Jesus told the well-known parable about two men who built houses on different foundations. The first was successful:



Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock (Matthew 7:24–25).

The second, however, was a failure once put to the test:

But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall (v26–27).

Spot the Difference

Let's think about these two houses. There is no suggestion that the first was better built, or looked better. Jesus did not suggest that the intentions of the first builder were different – both were building houses which we assume they wanted to be stable and survive the weather. The difference was the base on which they were built.

This teaches us something valuable about the basis for our lives. Our intentions may be good, we may put in lots of effort and we may live 'good' lives; but if we start from the wrong point, we will still fail. If we want to have a rela-

tionship with God and be in His kingdom, we have to go about it in the right way.

Many people today will argue that it doesn't matter how we live, so long as we 'try our best'. It is true that we should try as hard as we can to do the right things, but we have to do so in the right way, on the basis that God has established.

The Solid Foundation

Jesus told us what it means to build on a rock – it is to hear what he says, and to do what he asks. The man who built on the sand heard Jesus' words but failed to put them into practice.

So, we have two stages – firstly, to hear the words of Jesus. Two thousand years after Jesus was preaching in Israel, we are privileged to have his words written down for us. Not only this, but we have all of the Bible, which contains God's message, with Jesus' teachings at its core. There is nothing stopping us reading it, 'soaking up' its words and starting from the right place in building our lives.

It is a good idea to use a Bible Reading Planner to help us, such as the one on pages 10–11. If we follow this one, we will read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in a year.

Then we have the stage of doing what Jesus asks. It means acting on what we have learned, showing faith, being baptized and trying to follow his example, such as helping those in need, being kind and thoughtful, and sharing the Bible message with other people.

Why not read Jesus' words for yourself, and start building a better future?

Editor

Things of the Kingdom and of Jesus the Christ - 4

Connections in Acts

The 'things of the kingdom and Jesus the Christ' are preached throughout Acts: from the third verse to the last verse of the book. This series of articles on Acts explores these 'things'.

The Bible is the only way by which we can learn about God's offer of salvation. It was penned thousands of years ago, mostly in ancient Hebrew and Greek. Many learned scholars, who had great respect for the sanctity of the original texts, have worked hard to translate the ancient texts into English.

Nowadays there are many English versions of the Bible. These vary from 'word-for-word' versions to 'thought-for-thought' versions. Word-for-word versions are very faithful to the original words but may not read like modern English. Thought-for-thought versions are easier to read because they are more like paraphrases. But these are heavily influenced by the religious beliefs of the translators, and so can differ significantly from the original and can be misleading.

The Bible consists of 66 books penned by various writers, using different styles. Critics often make the unfair criticism that we can prove anything we like from the Bible. If we take verses out of context this is indeed possible, as it would be of other literary works.

Real Words, Real Meanings

However, the original words of the Bible were inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) and do have a specific meaning.

Therefore, we need always to try to understand this actual meaning, what God really meant by the words. The best way we can do this is to let the Bible interpret itself, by comparing similar verses in accurate translations.

Even so, the culture, habits and customs described in it belong largely to the Middle East as it was centuries ago. Consequently, the ideas expressed, although familiar to the original readers, can be unusual to us. We cannot hope to properly understand the messages without trying to get some familiarity with the overall context. Moreover, there are some passages that even experts find difficult to translate faithfully into English. To help us understand the Bible, we can address these problems by using reliable study tools.

Expert Help

A valuable resource is given in many word-for-word versions where the translators have provided margins with notes and cross-references. These represent the views of the translators and so are not inspired, and can also vary from version to version. However, they have been created through a lot of effort by experts in the original languages.

Margins can include:

- ❖ Notes about translation, such as the literal meaning or alternative translation of a word or phrase
- ❖ Other verses where specific words or phrases (especially less common ones) occur

- ❖ Other verses explaining an idea or describing a similar event or theme
- ❖ Verses that are alluded to or directly quoted in the text, such as fulfilled prophecies.

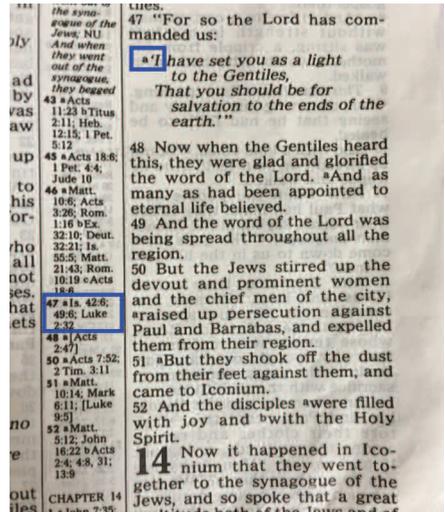
The notes help us with the difficulties of translation into English. The verses listed in the margin are called cross-references, and can help us to compare associated passages in the Bible (as perceived by the translators).

For example, the picture shows Acts 13:47 and part of the margin in a New King James Bible. There is a superscript letter ‘a’ against the word ‘I’. The corresponding letter ‘a’ in the margin lists Isaiah 42:6 and Isaiah 49:6 as cross-references. Isaiah 49:6 is the verse actually being quoted and Isaiah 42:6 is another verse with the same prophecy about Gentiles and the gospel, which actually includes the phrase ‘*light to the Gentiles*’. So, although the Jews were shocked at the hope of the gospel being extended to non-Jews, this had been stated as God’s purpose many years before in their Old Testament scriptures.

Connecting Thoughts

In fact, many aspects of the gospel are cited in the Old Testament. Table A opposite shows cross-references from Acts to the Old Testament, where an aspect of the gospel message is described. This was taken from the New King James version published by Thomas Nelson. Verses shown in blue are passages quoted word-for-word, and the others are clearly referred to.

This proves that the hope of salvation was always to be through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,



and was always intended for Jews and non-Jews.

The gospel therefore has its foundations in the Old Testament and simply cannot be properly understood just from the New Testament. In fact, we need to study the Old Testament references in the New Testament if we want to understand the New Testament.

Table B gives examples of other cross-references in Acts to the Old Testament, with comments. In fact in this version of the Bible there are more than 30 cross-references to similar events and more than 70 cross-references to similar ideas or concepts. God’s message is precious and not open to individual interpretation (see Galatians 1:8–9 and 2 Peter 1:20).

We should take each word in the whole Bible seriously and study its messages very carefully and precisely. Using cross-references can help us greatly in our quest for salvation which is so clearly offered in the gospel message.

Anna Hart
Concluded

A: Cross references from Acts to the Old Testament, referring to the Gospel

Gospel Message	Reference to Old Testament <i>Old Testament reference & (Acts passage where cited)</i>
Suffering of Christ	Isaiah 53: 7–8 (8:32–33*)
Resurrection	Psalm 2:7 (13:33*), Psalm 16:8–11 (2:25–28*), Psalm 16:10 (2:31), Psalm 110:1 (2:34–35*), Isaiah 53:10 (2:31), Hosea 6:2 (10:40)
Exaltation of Jesus	Psalm 2:7 (13:33*), Psalm 68:18 (2:34–35), Psalm 110:1 (2:34–35*), Psalm 118:22 (4:11*), Isaiah 28:16 (4:11), Daniel 7:13 (7:56)
Jesus is the promised Messiah (Christ)	Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14 (3:25*), Deuteronomy 18:15,18 (3:22*), 16 examples (26:6)
Christ – David’s son	Psalm 132:11 (2:30, 13:23), Isaiah 11:1 (13:23)
Apostles and the Holy Spirit	Isaiah 44:3 (11:16), Joel 2:28 (1:5), Joel 2:28–32 (2:17–21*)
Miracles foretold	Isaiah 35:6 (3:8–9)
Gentiles can be saved	Isaiah 42:6 (13:47,26:23, 28:28), Isaiah 42:7,16 (26:18), Isaiah 49:6 (13:47*, 26:23, 28:28), Amos 9:11–12 (15:16–17*)
Salvation through Jesus	Isaiah 57:19 (10:36), Jeremiah 31:34 (13:38), Zechariah 13:1 (10:43)
Return of Jesus/Judgement/ Day of the Lord	Deuteronomy 18:19 (3:23*), Daniel 7:13 (1:11), Joel 2:31 (2:20*)
God is the creator	Exodus 20:11 (4:24), Psalm 102:25 (7:50*), Isaiah 42:5 (17:24)

Blue text means that the words are directly quoted in the Acts text*

B: Other examples of cross-references from Acts to the Old Testament

Acts	Cross reference(s)	Link	Comment
4:8–10	Isaiah 35:6	Crippled man healed	Prophecy that the ‘lame shall leap as a deer’
7:55	Exodus 24:17	‘glory of God’ seen	The glory of God is shown to the Hebrews
12:3	Exodus 12:15 Exodus 23:15	‘days of unleavened bread’	Explains Passover and why Herod wanted to keep Peter in prison (verse 4)
17:25	Genesis 2:7 Isaiah 42:5 Daniel 5:23	God is supreme and in control	Same ideas
26:6	16 references across 8 different books	‘promise made by God to our fathers’	Examples of these promises

Deborah Brings God's Blessings

God promised Israel many blessings if they were faithful to Him, and we can read these in Leviticus 26:3–12 and Deuteronomy 28:1–14. In stark contrast, the nation would be subject to severe punishments if they were unfaithful; these can be found in Leviticus 26:14–39 and Deuteronomy 28:15–68. One such curse was that God said:

I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies (Leviticus 26:17).

The people of Israel were in this sorry state before the prophetess Deborah inspired them to spiritual renewal. They were being oppressed by the Canaanites whose military commander was called Sisera. Thanks to her leadership, Israel enjoyed the 'blessings of obedience', as God freed them from Canaanite rule and the land had rest for forty years.

Female Authority

Deborah is introduced to us in the Bible as a 'prophetess'. This is a rare description and it is even rarer for the name of a godly prophetess to be provided as well (Miriam, Huldah and Anna are the others). Although never explicitly described as such, Deborah was clearly also a 'judge', or governor:

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah

and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment (Judges 4:4–5).

Her husband is only mentioned by name on this one occasion, which serves to emphasize that it was Deborah: female prophet, female judge and wife who was to play a central role in the deliverance of Israel – not a male prophet, male judge and husband as we might expect given that Israel's society was highly patriarchal.

Such was Deborah's standing in the nation, that when she called the army commander Barak to take his men and fight against Sisera, he would only go if she accompanied him. Here Barak's fear and anxiety is contrasted with Deborah's faith and courage. Perhaps this explains why Barak was told:

There will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman (Judges 4:9).

We may be forgiven for thinking (as Barak surely did) that Deborah herself was the woman being spoken of. However, it was a different woman, Jael, who was given the honour of killing Sisera (4:17, 21).

Inspiring Leadership

Deborah's faith and spiritual understanding combined beautifully in her inspiring words of encouragement to Barak:

Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you? (4:14).

This faithful prophetess knew that it was the LORD God of Israel who fought their battles and brought about their deliverance. Neither she nor Barak nor a rejuvenated army of ten thousand men could bring about salvation through human means alone. As the Proverb states:

The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD (Proverbs 21:31).

Barak was clearly energized by Deborah's confident words – no longer was he reluctant to fulfil the command to go into battle against Sisera's army:

Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him (Judges 4:14).

This powerful transformation into a valiant leader surely helps to explain why Barak is listed as a man of faith in that great list of the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11 (verse 32). It seems that this is part of what Deborah wanted to do all along, to contribute to the spiritual renewal of men such as Barak. This is seen later, when they sang with joy:

When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the LORD!... My heart is with the rulers of Israel who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD! (Judges 5:2, 9).

It was not Deborah's objective to become a permanent leader or a com-

mander of the army; rather to inspire the leaders and commanders with her wise words, her spiritual understanding and ultimately, her faith.

Blessings from God

Israel's spiritual revival resulted in numerous blessings for them, just as God had promised. The account in Judges of God bringing about the victory for Israel refers to the blessings, and they are especially striking when the passages in question are placed side by side. These comparisons provide a fitting way to conclude this brief consideration of Deborah, who was clearly an exceptional prophetess and judge:

- *The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army... before Barak (Judges 4:15).*
- *I will... make all your enemies turn their backs to you (Exodus 23:27).*
- *Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot (Judges 4:15).*
- *The LORD will cause your enemies... to be defeated... they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways (Deuteronomy 28:7).*
- *God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel (Judges 4:23).*
- *The LORD your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you (Deuteronomy 9:3).*

Stephen Blake

Bible Reading

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1	Gen. 1, 2	Psa. 1, 2	Matt. 1, 2
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5	...	22	...	2	...	14, 15
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7	...	24	...	4	...	18, 19
8	...	25	...	5	...	20
9	...	26	...	6	...	21, 22
10	...	27	...	7	...	23, 24
11	...	28	...	8	...	25, 26
12	...	29	Isaiah	1	...	27
13	...	30	...	2	...	28
14	...	31	...	3, 4	Col.	1
15	...	32	...	5	...	2
16	...	33, 34	...	6	...	3, 4
17	Joshua	1	...	7	1 Thes. 1, 2	4
18	...	2	...	8	...	3, 4
19	...	3	...	9	2 Thes. 1, 2	5
20	...	4	...	10	...	3
21	...	5, 6	...	11	...	5
22	...	7	...	12	1 Tim. 1, 2, 3	4, 5
23	...	8	...	13	...	6
24	...	9	...	14	...	2
25	...	10	...	15	2 Tim.	1
26	...	11	...	16	...	2
27	...	12	...	17, 18	...	3, 4
28	...	13	...	19	Titus 1, 2, 3	4
29	...	14	...	20, 21	Philomon	1, 2
30	...	15	...	22	Heb.	1, 2
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JUNE

1	Joshua	18	Isaiah	24	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	19	...	25	...	8, 9
3	...	20, 21	...	26, 27	...	10
4	...	22	...	28	...	11
5	...	23, 24	...	29	...	12
6	Judges	1	...	30	...	13
7	...	2, 3	...	31	James	1
8	...	4, 5	...	32	...	2
9	...	6	...	33	...	3, 4
10	...	7, 8	...	34	...	5
11	...	9	...	35	1 Peter	1
12	...	10, 11	...	36	...	2
13	...	12, 13	...	37	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	14, 15	...	38	2 Pet.	1, 2
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16	...	17, 18	...	40	1 John	1, 2
17	...	19	...	41	...	3, 4
18	...	20	...	42	...	5
19	...	21	...	43	2 & 3 John	1
20	Ruth	1, 2	...	44	Jude	1, 2
21	...	3, 4	...	45	Rev.	1, 2
22	1 Sam.	1	...	46, 47	...	3, 4
23	...	2	...	48	...	5, 6
24	...	3	...	49	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	4	...	50	...	10, 11
26	...	5, 6	...	51	...	12, 13
27	...	7, 8	...	52	...	14
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1	1 Chron.	15	Ezek.	27	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	28	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17	...	29	...	3, 4
4	...	18, 19	...	30	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	31	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22	...	32	...	3, 4
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8	...	24, 25	...	34	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	26	...	35	...	3, 4
10	...	27	...	36	John	...
11	...	28	...	37	...	2, 3
12	...	29	...	38	...	4
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	...	39	...	5
14	...	3, 4	...	40	...	6
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21	...	14, 15	...	47	...	15, 16
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29	...	26, 27	...	7	...	7
30	...	28	...	8	...	8
31	...	29	...	9	...	9

NOVEMBER

1	2 Chron.	30	Dan.	10	Acts	10
2	...	31	...	11	...	11, 12
3	...	32	...	12	...	13
4	...	33	Hosea	1	...	14, 15
5	...	34	...	2	...	16, 17
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7	...	36	...	4	...	20
8	Exra	1, 2	...	5	...	21, 22
9	...	3, 4	...	6	...	23, 24
10	...	5, 6	...	7	...	25, 26
11	...	7	...	8	...	27
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13	...	9	...	10	Colos.	1
14	...	10	...	11	...	2
15	Neh.	1, 2	...	12	...	3, 4
16	...	3	...	13	1 Thes. 1, 2	4
17	...	4	...	14	...	3, 4
18	...	5, 6	Joel	1	...	5
19	...	7	...	2	2 Thes. 1, 2	3
20	...	8	...	3	...	3
21	...	9	Amos.	1	...	1 Tim. 1, 2, 3
22	...	10	...	2	...	4, 5
23	...	11	...	3	...	6
24	...	12	...	4	2 Tim.	1
25	...	13	...	5	...	2
26	Esther	1	...	6	...	3, 4
27	...	2	...	7	Titus 1, 2, 3	4
28	...	3, 4	...	8	Philomon	1, 2
29	...	5, 6	...	9	Heb.	1, 2
30	...	7, 8	Obadiah	3, 4, 5

DECEMBER

1	Esth.	9, 10	Jonah	4	Heb.	6, 7
2	Job	1, 2	...	2, 3	...	8, 9
3	...	3, 4	...	4	...	10
4	...	5	...	5	...	11
5	...	6, 7	Micah	1	...	12
6	...	8	...	2	...	13
7	...	9	...	3	James	1
8	...	10	...	4	...	2
9	...	11	...	5	...	3, 4
10	...	12	Nahum	1, 2	...	5
11	...	13	...	3	1 Peter	1
12	...	14	...	4	...	2
13	...	15	...	5	...	3, 4
14	...	16, 17	...	6	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	18, 19	...	7	...	3
16	...	20	...	8	Zeph.	1
17	...	21	...	9	...	3
18	...	22	Hag.	1, 2	...	5
19	...	23, 24	Zech.	1	2 & 3 John	1
20	...	25, 27	...	2, 3	Jude	1, 2
21	...	28	...	4, 5	Rev.	3, 4
22	...	29, 30	...	6	...	5
23	...	31, 32	...	8	...	6
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25	...	34	...	10	...	10, 11
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By courtesy of The Christadelphian

The God of the Bible - 1

God Does Exist

This series will explore what the Bible tells us about God, what He is like, and what He plans to do with the world He created.

Let's start by thinking about whether there is a God or not. We can't see or hear Him, but that does not mean that He does not exist. But where is the proof that He does? Here are three pieces of evidence which you might like to consider.

1. Nature

Look around you at the world in which we live. Is it reasonable to suppose that it all came about by chance? Surely it is more realistic to believe that this wonderfully complex and beautiful world could not have just 'happened'. Nature itself is witness to the work of a Divine Designer. As the Bible says:

He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

The seasons are just one example of the things which God has made. Year in and year out, spring, summer, autumn and winter come and go without fail. And we have a saying, "As

night follows day". Where does that regularity in nature come from, if there is not a God who has designed it that way?



Think of the wonder of a rose's petals, a beautiful face, snowflakes and icicles in winter. If we were each to compose a list of the things that we find beautiful, each list would be different. Put them all together and we would run out of paper. This suggests there is a God who has made them; there is no other sensible explanation.

Complexity is another feature of nature that we take for granted, but that too is part of the evidence that God has given us of His existence and power. Take the workings of the human body, for example. Then think of how the brain works, or the eye. It's too awe-inspiring for words.

Different things impress different people. One Bible writer had this list:

There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock,

the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maiden (Proverbs 30:18-19).

Imagine you received a 5000-piece jigsaw puzzle as a present. Inside the box is a complete jumble of pieces. After struggling to finish it, you now see a picture. Could you have done that by tipping the pieces onto the table and waiting for them to sort themselves out? Of course not.

Now go back a step to its manufacture. Could the jigsaw puzzle – and you know how complex it is – have been made by accident? Could the 5000 pieces have suddenly appeared out of nothing? Of course not: an artist or a photographer produced the picture and a factory turned it into a puzzle.

Likewise, it is unreasonable to suppose that our world is an accident, the result of chance.

2. The Bible

The internet and the broadcasting media inform us about many people we have never met or even seen. People can communicate with us by e-mail and talk to us in internet chatrooms. We don't doubt that these people exist in the real world.

In the same way God speaks to us through His written word – the Bible – and shows us not only that He exists but what He is like, what He has done and what He intends to do. In it He predicted events, because He planned them, and those predictions came true. It is an amazing book that cries out to be taken seriously as written evidence for a living active God.

Surely the LORD God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

We shall return to this subject.



3. The Jews

There is a group of people who are living, breathing proof of how God controls events to advance His purpose with our world. It's the Jewish people. Their remarkable survival as a people, and their re-emergence as a nation in the last century, show us that God is in control. He said to them:

"You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God" (Isaiah 43:12).

That witness has not ended, as future events will show, and we will consider those events in this series.

If there is no God and we are just the products of chance, we must assume that this is all there is in life. But there IS a God and the Bible reveals that He has a plan that can give our lives a deeper meaning and give us hope for the future. So finding out about God is much more than just curiosity. It really matters!

Rod Hale

Power to Change the World



Do you ever feel annoyed as you pick up your post, only to find that it consists entirely of holiday adverts, invitations to make use of this or that pizza delivery service and similar information that you don't want? Almost daily I feel irritated by this sort of thing. However, my attention was caught the other day by one leaflet that came through my door with these words on it: "The power to change the world".

There is a great deal that needs changing in this world. Our news is full of wars in various parts of the earth, refugees fleeing and taking enormous risks to find a safe haven, global warming, the harmful side effects of various kinds of spraying on our crops, our failure to deal with plastic waste properly. How much damage are we storing up for ourselves in failing to face up to these things? They are large problems and becoming ever more serious in a world that is growing in population. What, if anything, can be done about it?

Some efforts are being made. However welcome, these are only scratching the surface of the problem. We can see many examples of men and women who are struggling to

improve conditions of life in different parts of the world. Unfortunately, although their efforts may be valiant, well intentioned, and even self-sacrificing, they are counterbalanced by the hate, greed and corruption that hurts so much of the world.

All through history it has been the same. Some people work hard to make the world a better place. Many things have been invented to make life much easier, but they haven't made the world a better place.



What is the basic problem? Mankind is imperfect and fragmented. It is impossible to get total agreement between all nations. There is no one thing that humankind can do to make the world perfect, and we do not have the collective will to take such steps.

The One Person Who Can

However, there are good grounds for expecting this can be achieved. Of the millions of people in the whole history of mankind, there has been one man who offers us real hope. He was brought up as an ordinary craftsman, until he left home and family and lived a wandering, often uncomfortable life



with a small band of faithful followers. Amazingly, within three and a half years he made such an impression that it remains to this day. He was the one man who never did or said anything wrong. That man is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He knew exactly what was wrong with men and women. He understood us. He knew what it was to be uncomfortable, to be without a home, to be hungry and in need of food. He knew what it was like to be tempted, as we are sometimes, to do something mean or wrong. However, Jesus never for a moment gave in to temptation.

In the three and a half years he spent preaching, he did more than any other person to influence the world. With ordinary people, he was popular because he healed their sicknesses and gave them good advice. He was hated by the authorities because he spoke out against their corruption and deceit.

The rulers sought and schemed to bring about his downfall. By manipulation of the crowd they managed to sway public opinion. Their opportunity came after Jesus rode into Jerusalem like a king. The crowd expected Jesus to use his power there and then to release them from Roman domination and set up the Kingdom of Israel. When he didn't do that, the disappointment made it relatively easy for his

opponents to sway the crowd so that in three days they were shouting for him to be crucified. The authorities gave way to the crowd and Jesus was put to death. But his story didn't end there: miraculously, after three days, God raised him from the dead.

The Day He Will Change it

For 40 days after that, Jesus spent time with his closest disciples, telling them that from then on, they were to go into all the world and share his teaching with all who would listen. When he finally left them, there were angels present who spoke to his disciples saying:

Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

There are many things that were foretold in the Bible years before they actually happened. For example, the birth of the Saviour and prophet was recorded by Moses some 1400 years before it happened:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The Old Testament also foretold the place and circumstances of Jesus' birth, as well as his life, death and resurrection.

There is every reason to believe Jesus will return. We have been clearly told to expect it, and there will be a time of great change. For Jesus will have the power to change the world.



This may sound difficult but the New Testament is full of good advice to help us live like the Lord Jesus. The choice is ours.

The Bible gives a very clear picture of what will happen when Jesus returns to the earth. The world will be ruled over by Jesus himself, the only perfect man who ever lived. Those who have made him their role model will be given a place in helping

him. The work will be to establish a world where God will be honoured and His laws obeyed. It will be a world where there will be peace instead of war, and justice instead of lawlessness.

Before that can come about there must be a dramatic change; all opposition to God will have to be eradicated. The world will be populated by people who want to please God, who respect Him and His laws. We can be there.

We cannot change the world, but we can change ourselves.

Power to Change Now

We have the opportunity now to change – not to change the world, but to change ourselves. We all have the free will to make choices about how we live and what we believe. We can refuse to believe the Bible and turn instead to the philosophy of the world. We can take the short-term opportunities which the world has to offer, spending our time trying to have a good time now, but ignoring the future.

On the other hand, we can spend our time preparing ourselves for the return of the Lord Jesus, making sure we are ready for him. The way to do that is to believe his message and live according to the example he left us. It was summed up in this discussion:

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:35–39).

Michael Buckler



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Living in the Kingdom of God

When Jesus returns, he will set up the worldwide government of the Kingdom of God, a new world order. Not the despotic regime of a cruel tyrant, nor the indecision caused by political weakness. Jesus will be the good, caring king over a united earth, ruling by the principles of God.

Perfect government will create a world of wonderful conditions for those privileged to live in it, wherever they are. Let's consider this coming world order in a little more detail.

Good Government

A common theme in political election campaigns is 'good government', or the ability of rulers to apply sound principles for the good of all. It seems that many people have lost faith in human governments to achieve this, and turnouts in elections are often very low. In popular surveys, politicians seem to be less recognised and less trusted than celebrities!

Many families and individuals throughout the world are struggling with life and want support from their government in the basics: paying the bills, educating their children, being looked after if they are ill. If that support seems absent, they will inevitably become cynical.

The great news is that good government is at the heart of God's kingdom. And not just 'good'; the rulership will be God-given, following His principles.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his

glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32).

We are given a picture of the quality of the government:

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 (Isaiah 11:2).

This is not like today's leaders, however well-intentioned they may be.

Justice

As we continue to read Isaiah chapter 11 (see verses 3-4), we see that this leads to justice – for everyone. Jesus will not be fooled by clever lawyers or influenced by the wealthy and powerful, but will judge with true fairness to everyone, providing support for all who need it. He will not be weak though, and he will not tolerate wickedness or opposition to his benign rule. The impact of this is amazing:

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 (v9).

Education

Education is really important. Having education provided is a great benefit, and the quality and content of that pro-

vision is a big talking point for those who have children or are just interested in the development of young people. So in the coming kingdom, what will people be learning about? We are presented with a picture of the nations of the world coming to Jerusalem, to learn from God's appointed king. The 'syllabus' is as follows:

"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).

The people of the world – young and old – will be learning about God, His laws and purpose. Putting these into practice will be part of the perfect world in which they will live.

Defence

Defence tends to be a huge preoccupation for most governments. Foreign policy is fundamental to their rulership, and the ability to fight and make war is a major spending area. This clearly will be different in the kingdom of God. With no competing rulers or countries, the need for foreign policy and weaponry will be eliminated. Staying in Isaiah chapter 2, we see exactly this:



He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (v4).

With Jesus in charge, the weapons of the world will be made harmless, turned into agricultural tools. In fact, the people of the world will no longer learn the so-called 'art' of warfare. This will be a world at real peace.

Environment

We are right to worry about the environment, whether it is changing weather patterns, global warming or the pollution of our air, rivers and seas. There are a variety of views on the causes, but all agree that our environment is less clean, less safe and less stable than it used to be. The Bible gives us insight into what the earth will be like in the Kingdom of God:

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing (Isaiah 35:1–2).

And all of this we read, because the glory of God is present. The world will thrive, be clean, healthy and productive, as we see throughout this chapter. Verses 6–7 contain a graphic picture of springs in the desert and pools of water in the driest of places.

Health

With the power of God in play, we also see in Isaiah 35 (especially in the

verses 3–6) that illnesses and disabilities of all sorts will be healed.

There will be no need for a health service or for medical insurance; doctors and nurses will not be needed to care for the sick; *“and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”* (v10). This will be accompanied by a great long life (Isaiah 65:20) where someone dying at 100 years old would be considered ‘a child’. Ultimately, death will be removed altogether.

Security

An important part of any government or social order is whether people feel safe. This could apply to going out at night, to the threat of crime or oppression of some other sort. Without this type of security, it would be hard to enjoy the benefits of the coming age.

Please read Isaiah 65:17–25, which includes the verse we looked at last. The existence described here is very different from today. The mood is one of rejoicing and peace. The inhabitants of the kingdom will be able to live in complete security, occupying their houses and enjoying the fruits of their labours.

They will live with a special relationship to their God, where peace reigns throughout the animal and human kingdom, a truly blessed existence, as Isaiah describes it.

A World at Peace

The descriptions we have looked at show the effects of the good government of Jesus: a world at peace, with plenty for all, and the citizens enjoying a special relationship with the God who created everything.

Most of the Bible verses we have used here come from the book of



Isaiah. This is unsurprising as he spends large parts of his prophecy describing the kingdom of God in remarkable detail. However, the same picture emerges from across the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments.

So the kingdom of God is a wonderful new world order, where men, women and children can live in peace and safety. Eventually, it will culminate in an even more awe-inspiring situation. God will ultimately live with His people, who will never suffer and will never die. The kingdom is going to be established on our world, as we read in Revelation:

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

We have the opportunity to live in that kingdom, to enjoy its conditions and look forward to the splendour of its final state. To be a part of it, God asks that we believe Him, are baptised to show that we do, and live God-centred lives of purpose, preparing for that kingdom. Now that’s not much to ask is it?

Andrew Hale

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