

# Light

**...on a new world**

a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible  
and its message for today

**The Christian way of life ●**  
**Israel: a nation in conflict ●**  
**Paul's third missionary ●  
journey**

**VOLUME 25.3**

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The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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# Light on a new world

## Volume 25.3

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### Cover Picture:

*The market gateway at Miletus (see page 15), now erected in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.*

### Note:

*All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) except where another version is indicated after the text.*

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## from the Editor

### **The current state of turmoil in the Middle East has been the focus of world-wide media attention in recent weeks.**

The conflict between the State of Israel and Hamas, the organisation which governs the tiny Palestinian territory of Gaza, came to an end on 26<sup>th</sup> August with the signing of a ceasefire agreement. After five weeks of relentless terror, death and destruction of property, the people affected by this conflict hope for a period of calm – but how long will it last? Israel hopes that the devastation caused by their military response to the rocket attacks on Israel, will deter Hamas from further acts of aggression.

There is still much international cause for concern with the ongoing civil war in Syria and the emergence of a new Islamic terrorist organisation named ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) who are

now waging a war to bring down the governments of Iraq and Syria. Their ultimate aim is to establish a powerful new Islamic State in the Middle East and destroy the State of Israel. Western powers perceive this as yet another serious threat to the stability of the region and the security of the Western World.

When the Arab League was first formed in 1945, the main issues on their agenda were to free those nations still under colonial rule and to prevent the Jewish minority in Palestine from creating a Jewish State. Subsequent history reminds us that they succeeded in the former but failed to prevent the formation of the State of Israel which came into being in 1948.

These events are the subject of Bible prophecy which foretold not only the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world but also their eventual re-gathering as a nation and the re-settlement of their ancient homeland after two thousand years of dispersion. Jesus himself foretold the calamity that would overtake the Jews in these words:

‘But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near... And they

will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (Luke 21.20, 24).

This prophecy was fulfilled forty years later when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in AD 70. Those Jews that survived the attack were expelled from their ancient homeland and dispersed throughout the Roman world. In 1967 the Jews regained control of the whole city for the first time since AD 70 but the Palestinians are determined to take back Jerusalem and make it the capital of a wider Palestinian State. The Bible also predicts the future of the Jews and the land of Israel. This includes the events which we are witnessing today leading up to a final conflict involving Israel's enemies, who will unite in a concerted effort to annihilate the State of Israel and take control of Jerusalem prior to the return of Jesus to the earth.

Bible prophecy also indicates that at that time, all nations will be drawn to battle against Jerusalem, but God will intervene to save the remnant of His ancient people and destroy their enemies once and for all. Israel and the nations will then enjoy a time of lasting peace in the kingdom of God, under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ, the divinely appointed future king of the whole world (read for

example Joel chapter 3 and Zechariah chapter 14).

We believe that the current state of unrest in the Middle East is leading up to that final time of conflict. Jesus urged his disciples to prepare for that day:

'For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch...and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man' (Luke 21.35-36).

The next article in this issue is an extract from a special issue of Light magazine entitled 'Light on Israel'. This focuses attention on the events in the Middle East from 1948 onwards. These events have failed to bring a peaceful solution to the hatred which exists between the Jews and the Palestinians. The origins of this conflict and its final outcome are the subject of this special issue and we invite you to send for your free copy (see advertisement on the back cover).

**Editor**



*Israeli soldiers at the Jews' most sacred site,  
the Western Wall of the Temple Mount  
in Jerusalem*

# **ISRAEL** a nation reborn...

*but the conflict never stops*

The establishment of the State of Israel paved the way for a massive immigration of 648,000 Jews to Israel from Arab countries and Europe between 1948 and 1956. However, tensions mounted in October 1956, when the Egyptians seized control of the Suez Canal, as part of an Arab campaign to prevent shipping using it to access Israeli ports. Israel went to war against Egypt, occupied the Sinai Peninsula and landed forces on

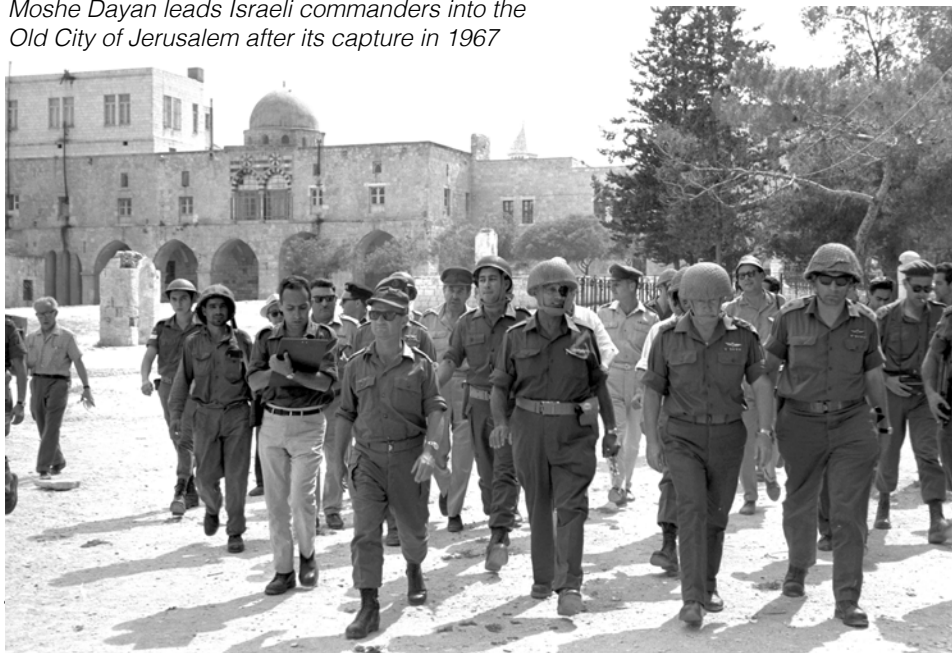
the western side of the Suez Canal. The Israelis were then in a position to open the blocked sea communications through the Straits of Tiran into the Gulf of Aqaba, and use their seaport at Eilat. Israeli forces eventually withdrew from the occupied territory in March 1957.

In June 1967 Arab and Israeli forces clashed again, in what became known as the 'Six-Day War'. Syria and Egypt mobilized their forces near Israel's borders. The Israelis didn't wait to be attacked but mounted swift strategic strikes, destroying the Egyptian air force and establishing air superiority. The Israelis recovered the Old City of Jerusalem and enlarged their borders to include the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Jordanian

occupied territory west of the Jordan River, known as the West Bank and the strategic Golan Heights on the Israeli-Syrian border.

The next war came in 1973, when the Arab nations carried out a surprise attack on Israel, during their national holiday of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). They almost managed to overwhelm them but the tide was eventually turned again in Israel's favour and they defeated the attacking forces. A peace treaty was signed in 1979 by Menachem Begin, the Israeli Prime Minister, and President Sadat of Egypt. The Arabs objected strongly to this treaty and denounced Sadat as a traitor. The Egyptian president was assassinated at a military parade in October 1981.

*Moshe Dayan leads Israeli commanders into the Old City of Jerusalem after its capture in 1967*



Israel's enemies then changed their tactics from open warfare and in 1987 began the 'Intifada' or Palestinian uprisings against Israel within the 'occupied territories'. In 1993 the efforts to end this tense situation led to America's President Clinton hosting a meeting in Washington USA, at which the 'Oslo Accord' was signed by Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the P.L.O. leader Yasser Arafat, paving the way for Palestinian self-rule.

Like other peace deals, this agreement has never been implemented and although Rabin was praised world-wide for his peace efforts, it has come to nothing. Rabin was assassinated in Tel Aviv in November 1995 by a young right-wing Israeli who disagreed with his peace policies. But the search for peace still went on and despite continued Arab hostility, between 1989 and 1999 over 1,000,000 Jews emigrated from Russia to Israel and the former Soviet republics, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## Israel's enemies today – parallels with the past

We have seen that since Israel was declared a State in 1948, the surrounding Arab countries opposed to its very existence, have continuously attacked it in various ways, despite all the highly publicized peace efforts. This situation

does not come as a surprise to Bible students.

This opposition to the re-gathering of Israel to their land was foretold in the Bible, in terms that reflect the age old enmity shown to Israel by its neighbours. Here are some verses from **Psalm 83**, with the equivalent modern nations shown in brackets after the ancient names. A careful study of this Psalm shows some remarkable parallels between these ancient nations and the present enemies of Israel:

'Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold, your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate you have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more." For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against you:

the tents of Edom (part of **Jordan**) and the Ishmaelites (**Arab peoples**);

Moab (part of **Jordan**) and the Hagarites (**Syrians**);

Gebal, Ammon (part of **Jordan**), and Amalek (part of **Egypt**);



Philistia (includes the Gaza strip - **Palestinians**) with the inhabitants of Tyre (part of **Lebanon**);

Assyria (now **Syria, Iran and Iraq**) also has joined with them;

they have helped the children of Lot (part of **Jordan**)' (Psalm 83. 1-8).

We urge you to read the whole of Psalm 83. It predicted that God would frustrate the attempts of the surrounding nations to dispossess His people, just as He did in the past, until Israel's own wickedness left them for a time without His protection and He allowed them to be conquered by their enemies. Will this happen again?

Since the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 by the earlier Jewish settlers, we have seen that successive wars have been fought with the nations surrounding Israel,

whose stated intention has been to drive the Jews into the Mediterranean Sea. When we consider the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973, we note that each time Israel has miraculously survived and emerged victorious. We believe they have been helped by an unseen hand – the hand of God, who has controlled events to fulfil the many prophecies that foretold the return of the Jews to their land and their development into a strong and prosperous nation.

However, we must emphasise that the nation of Israel is protected by God, not for their own righteousness but because it is His purpose to bring them to truly acknowledge Him and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who they rejected and crucified (see Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10).

Some of their immediate neighbours, firstly Egypt and then

*Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin with US President Jimmy Carter on the lawns of the White House after signing the Egyptian/Israeli Peace Treaty – 26 March 1979.*



Jordan, have made peace agreements with Israel. Even Syria, whose government supports the more extreme anti-Israel elements of Arab society, has had to recognize the futility of trying to defeat Israel through open warfare. While refraining from open attack, Syria together with Iran, has resorted to fighting a form of proxy war, arming various Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Hizbollah to fight a guerilla campaign against God's people.

But none of these incursions or attacks on Israel have brought peace any nearer. In fact they have left the Arab population poorer and more dependant on outside aid and assistance. In the case of Hizbollah operating from Lebanon, it has left that country devastated and thrown into political turmoil and certainly no nearer solving the real problem.

## **The Palestinian problem**

Some of the causes of the present problems in this part of the Middle East, it has been suggested, could perhaps be blamed on the way the British Government 'carved up' the lands covered by the Mandate of Palestine. Although the lands to the east of the River Jordan made up as much as 75% of the area within the British Mandate, this large area of land (Transjordan), was left out from the clauses covering the estab-

lishment of a Jewish national home. The intention, no doubt, was to make this large area available to the Arab peoples by creating the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, leaving the narrow strip of land from the River Jordan westward to the Mediterranean coast as a home for the Jewish people.

This tiny strip of land was chosen for the Jewish home by the British, because of its very well known ancient Biblical connections and because Zionists like Weizmann saw it clearly as theirs, on account of its historical Jewish connections. Whatever the political 'carve up' intended, this small area of land became a distinct political entity for the first time in centuries, known as Palestine. As far as the Zionists were concerned, they accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it completely. The Arabs made it plain, even then, that they did not want the Jewish people there at all!

This decision, put into effect by the British government, created many problems and challenges for both the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionists. Both parties realised that by the end of the Mandate period, the region's future would probably be determined by the size of their populations and the amount of land they owned. So throughout the Mandate period the Jews were bent on increasing immigration and land



purchases, while the Arabs were doing their best to slow it down or halt it completely! Conflict over these issues often escalated into violence, and the British were forced to take action against both sides at times.

It must be said that British rule in Palestine during the Mandate was generally very conscientious and responsible. The British government developed laws with a fair judiciary and a good civil service. It laid water pipelines, expanded ports, extended railway lines and supplied electricity.

In spite of their efforts, the British were hampered because they had to deal with outbreaks of violence between Arab and Jewish communities and also violence against themselves. The aims and aspirations of the various parties in Palestine appeared incompatible, which, as events have proved, was the case and unfortunately still is more than sixty years later!

It is interesting to note that the term 'Palestinian' has not always been used by the Arab population in Israel. The term 'Palestinian' has come to be used when referring to the Arabs of the former mandated Palestine, excluding the Jews.

Interestingly, the name Palestine (Palaestina) was first used by the ancient Greeks and Romans to describe the territory of the Philistines, Israel's old enemies from the times of the Judges. One of the Philistine cities was called Gaza (see for example Judges chapter 16 concerning the death of Samson).

Although the Arabs of Palestine have been developing a Palestinian identity for some time, the idea that Palestinians form a distinct people is only a relatively recent one. The Arabs living in Palestine have never had a separate State and until the establishment of the State of Israel, the term 'Palestinian' was used by Jews and foreigners to describe the

inhabitants of Palestine, but it was rarely used by the Arabs themselves.

Under the British Mandate, the majority of Arabs refused to be called 'Palestinians'! They saw themselves mostly as part of the larger Middle East Arab or Muslim community. The irony is, that you can travel to Israel today and speak to the older Jewish people who have lived there all their lives and they will tell you that they are 'Palestinians', and they have the documents issued by the British Mandatory government to prove it!

It was only after 1948 and even more so after 1967, that the Israeli Arabs

began to use the term 'Palestinian', to signify not only a place of origin, but to develop the idea of a shared past and future. So we see that the Arabs of Palestine and then the residents of the West Bank and Gaza, began using the term 'Palestinian' to develop the idea of a Palestinian people and after 1967, the idea of a Palestinian State.

Now we can perhaps see some of the difficulties, when trying to understand the Palestinian problem. The Bible tells us clearly, that long ago, God gave the land to the Jewish people. However, the world at large now refuses to recognize this fact. The Palestinian Arabs also refuse, in the face of clear written and archaeological evidence, to acknowledge Israel's historical connections to the

*Near Bethlehem, the massive security wall that now separates Israel from the Palestinians (see overleaf)*



land. They understandably resent the loss of what they have regarded in more recent times as their land as they watch the Israelis building more and more settlements on it. This breeds further resentment and hostility.

## **What is the key to the future?**

Israel has tried to negotiate peace deals and more recently has resorted to strategic withdrawal of its settlers from vulnerable areas. The building of a barrier comprising fences and a concrete wall up to eight metres high, between Israel and the Palestinian areas of Gaza and the West Bank, has managed to reduce the number of deadly suicide attacks against Israel. However, it has not stopped the frequent launching of rockets carrying explosives from the Palestinian territories into Israel.

At the end of 2007, the U.N. backed body known as the 'Quartet on the Middle East' called a conference in Annapolis in the USA, where representatives from more than 40 countries agreed to set in motion a revival of the so-called 'Road-Map' peace talks. These talks have the declared aim of setting up, within Israel, an area that will be an independent Palestinian State.

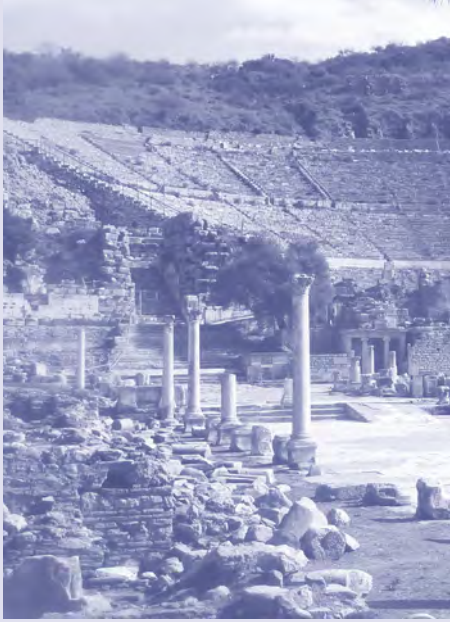
However, we must emphasize that, in addition to foretelling Israel's national return to the land, the Bible also reveals that a time of peace will come for Israel. It could be that a peace deal will be reached by the negotiators in which the Israelis are lulled into a false sense of security, even to the extent of disarming and imagining themselves free from possible attack. We must watch developments to see how this will come about.

### **Editor's note**

This article is an extract from a special issue entitled *Light on Israel* which was published in 2008. The issue considers the history of God's chosen people as revealed in the Bible. It also looks at the future of the nation of Israel as foretold in the Bible, a nation which is very much at the heart of the current problems in the Middle East.

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

### Part 13: Paul's 3rd missionary journey (2)

#### **Through Macedonia and Greece to Troas**

The first part of this article concluded with Paul surviving the dangerous drama of the anti-Christian riot at Ephesus, an example of how our best-laid plans can be providentially upset by unforeseen events (see Volume 25.2). He could now travel as he had planned. After a long and active stay of over two years, Paul left Ephesus, embarking on the second half of what we now call the third missionary journey.

*(for map see previous issue)*

He travelled northwards to Macedonia, then into Greece. In the course of his journey Paul revisited old friends at Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth, by now established and lively churches.

At Corinth he probably wrote his weighty letter to the Romans, a small collection of believers in the imperial city. In this letter, under divine inspiration, the apostle focused on the great theme of God's salvation through faith, exemplified in the example of Abraham, without which the works of the Law of Moses, coming after the patriarchs, were barren. Through their faith, the basis of the gospel message, the blessings enjoyed for centuries by the Jews, could now be enjoyed by the Gentiles through belief and baptism into the name of Jesus



*The 'sefer Torah' (scroll of the Law) so revered by the Jews. Paul said the Law was a tutor and educator designed to lead them to Christ.*

Christ. As Paul had earlier written to the Galatians, the Law should have been their tutor bringing the Jewish nation to Christ (Galatians 3.23, 24). Instead, continuing active Jewish opposition, both inside and outside the Christian community, may well have driven Paul to pen this letter.

After three months in Greece, Paul planned to sail back to Syria whence he had set out five years earlier. However, information about Jewish plots against his life, their reaction against his teaching and preaching, forced him to change his plans. He now retraced his steps through mainland Greece and Macedonia towards Asia Minor. Companionable Paul, however, was not alone as he trudged northwards on dusty, dangerous roads. Seven fellow believers were by his side and their names are given in Acts chapter 20 verse 4. We can imagine their cheerful, uplifting conversation, tuned perhaps with remembered

Psalms and other spiritual songs, as they stepped out on their return journey.

They also protected Paul against robbers who would be lurking on the route, looking out for lone travellers. Paul would have been carrying a large sum of money, a collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem that he had through hard work gathered from richer members of the churches in Greece and Macedonia (see 1 Corinthians 16.1-4), so his fellow travellers would be a reassuring presence. At last, at Passover-time, in the spring of the year, the party reached Philippi, where Paul remained while his companions continued their journey to Troas, the nearest port in Asia Minor, where Paul joined them by ship five days later. There they all rested for a week.

## A Meeting in Troas

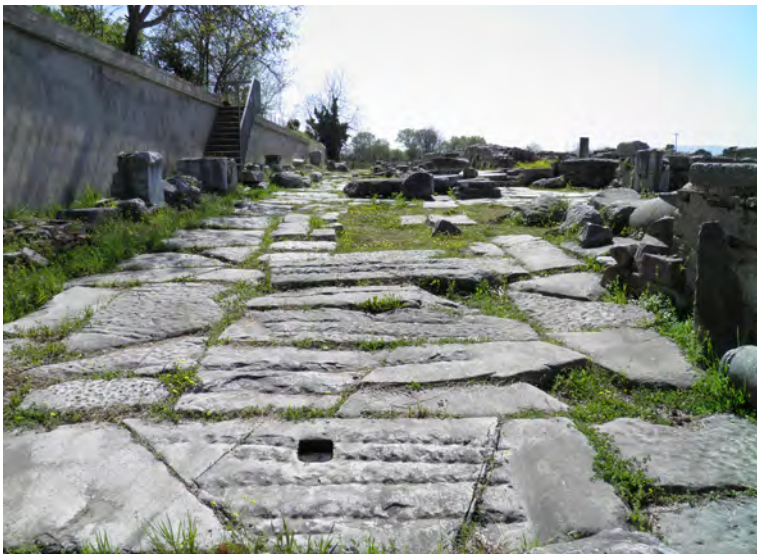
Imagine the scene. Many people were packed into a third storey room. The sun had gone down; it was dark. Smoking lamps lit the scene and with the human warmth from the press of people, the heat was probably unbearable. Many were feeling drowsy, on the point of sleep.

What was happening? It was the first day of the week, the day after the Jewish Sabbath which ended at 6pm. By now it was early in the morning, not yet light, when most of the city was asleep. But for the Jewish and Greek believers it was the only time they could get off from work to 'break bread', which was the weekly commemoration of the Last Supper, when Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his disciples just before his crucifixion. The bread and the wine symbolise the meaning of the

sacrifice he was about to make for all mankind. 'Do this in remembrance of me' was Jesus' commandment to his followers (Luke 22, 19); an act of communion, binding his disciples together as well as a way of remembering their Master, as it continues to do, until he returns. By now this 'memorial' meal had become a weekly event held on the day immediately after the Sabbath.

## Eutychus raised from the dead

Before the sharing of this memorial meal there would be a talk (i.e. a sermon or exhortation) to prepare the listeners for the act of communion. On this occasion the speaker was Paul, a much-regarded visitor who was about to leave them; so he had much to tell them and what he had to say was important. All of which meant that he spoke for



*The Via Ignatia at Philippi, one of the main arterial roads of the Empire, linking up with the Appian Way. This road would have been very familiar to Paul and his companions.*

a long time and it was now midnight. Some in his audience, drowsy in the heat, were not able to pay attention as they should. One such was a young man called Eutychus perched above the crowded audience on a window sill. While he was awake he was safe. But asleep he was in danger and 'overcome by sleep' he fell three storeys into the street below (Acts 20.9).

We can imagine the grief as his lifeless body was lifted up by his friends. We can be sure that he was indeed dead for Luke, a physician, was there to pronounce him dead. But the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit was at hand. Paul now intervened. Embracing the body he told his grief-stricken friends, 'Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him' (Acts 20.10). Life had returned

to Eutychus. Later, after Paul had broken bread and talked further until daybreak, the young man was brought back alive into the upper room, to the relief and comfort of them all. Paul could now depart to continue his journey.

The revival of Eutychus was surely a reminder to those early believers of the hope of bodily resurrection that all Christ's true followers look forward to at the return of their Master. Jesus' own resurrection was the guarantee of the certainty of this coming event. The sleep of death may cut short the lives of believers, as happened with Eutychus, but we can be '*not a little comforted*' by this powerful miracle, even as were his friends and companions at Troas (Acts 20.12).



*The remains of the thermae (Roman Baths) at Troas.*

*Engraving published in 'The Life and Epistles of St. Paul' 1856*

Paul had already written a powerful letter to the Thessalonians in which he reminded them of this hope for the future which was firmly based on the return of Jesus to the earth to raise those *'who have fallen asleep'* in death. This is in contrast to the accepted belief in the 'immortality of the soul' and 'heaven going at death' of so many who call themselves Christians today. These are the words of comfort that Paul offered to the Thessalonians:

'... I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you should sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first' (1 Thessalonians 4.13-16).

## Troas to Miletus

Following the traumatic events at Troas, it seems that Paul wished to spend time alone, doubtless in thought and prayer. And so, he went by himself on foot for the short distance that led overland to Assos,

where he joined his companions who had gone by boat. Thence he sailed down the coast of Asia Minor. Paul wanted to travel quickly, taking advantage of favourable winds for his journey southwards, so he bypassed the inlet that led to Ephesus, arriving more directly at Miletus.

## Farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus

Having decided not to visit Ephesus again in hurrying back to Jerusalem, Paul was anxious for one final contact with this church which by now meant so much to him. He needed to tell them that 'they would see his face no more' (Acts 20.38). He sent for the elders of the church and gave them a final farewell talk at Miletus. First Paul summarised the recent past, reminding them of how he had lived among them:

'...from the first day that I came to Asia ... I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials...by the plotting of the Jews; ...I kept back nothing that was helpful ... and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20.18-21).

These were the ties of struggle and growth that bound Paul and these Ephesians together as a strong



community of believers, but what of the future? His mission, as divinely stated, was to go to Jerusalem *'not knowing the things that will happen to me there'*. All he knew, from spirit-guided fellow believers *'in every city'* was that *'chains and tribulations'* awaited him. Paul, however, faced the future with equanimity:

*'But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God'* (Acts 20.24).

Paul had done his duty and his conscience was clear. He turned now to his friends, the Ephesian elders, with warnings about departures from the faith:

*'Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock ... For I know ... that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves'* (Acts 20. 28-30).

So he enjoined them to *'watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears'* (Acts 20.31). Alas, Paul's predictions of apostasy came true. By the time of Constantine (313

AD) main-stream Christianity, now the official religion of the Roman Empire, was astray in many ways from the true hope of the gospel that had been preached by Paul and the other first century apostles.

Just as a river gets more polluted the further it is from its source, so the beliefs and teaching of the early Christians has been lost in a morass of man-made traditions and doctrines that undermine the purity of the original message taught by Jesus and his apostles. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Timothy, written not long before he was put to death in a Roman prison, Paul urged Timothy to *'Preach the word! ... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but ... they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables'* (2 Timothy 4.2-4). The following is a list of some of the important beliefs of the early Christians based entirely on the teaching of God's Word. Compare these with what is taught in many churches today:

- ❖ There is only one God the Creator
- ❖ Jesus Christ is the Son of God
- ❖ The Holy Spirit is the power of God
- ❖ The Bible is the inspired Word of God
- ❖ Man is mortal and dies because of sin

- ❖ Resurrection is the true hope of believers
- ❖ Salvation is only possible through Jesus
- ❖ Belief and baptism are essential for salvation
- ❖ There is only one Gospel
- ❖ The Gospel was preached to Abraham
- ❖ The Jews are God's witnesses
- ❖ The kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of God on earth
- ❖ Jesus will return to re-establish the kingdom of God on earth
- ❖ Jesus will be king over the kingdom of God
- ❖ The reward of the righteous will be eternal life on earth

Before he left them, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had laboured with his own hands to provide for himself and his companions. In the same way they must now labour to support the weak among them. He quoted Jesus' words to them: *'It is more blessed to give than to receive'* (Acts 20.35). They were all in it together *'and had all things in common'* (Acts 2.44) – no 'them and us' in the community of believers. It was little wonder that his hearers wept as they hugged and kissed their departing friend, *'sorrowing most of all ... that they would see his face no more ...'* (Acts

20.37) as they accompanied Paul and his companions to the ship.

## On the journey to Jerusalem

He journeyed onward to Jerusalem, regardless of whatever dangers awaited him despite inspired prophecies of his fate there, as we shall see. Paul was determined to go, following in the footsteps of his Lord and Master, Jesus, of whom we read that *'when the time had come ... he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.'* (Luke 9. 51). Departing from Miletus, the ship running before the fair winds prevailing at that time of the year, Paul and his companions sped past Cos and Rhodes arriving speedily at Patara, where they found a ship setting out for Phoenicia. Swiftly passing Cyprus, their ship landed at the port of Tyre; from there the party hastened to Caesarea.

## At Caesarea

Paul was determined to complete his mission to Jerusalem, although by now he could have had few illusions about what awaited him. A number of spirit-guided prophecies had been warning him about the *'chains and tribulations'* (Acts 20.23) he would suffer there. Now he was to experience the final and most dramatic of these warnings.

On the final stage of the journey, he was resting in Caesarea at the house



*The remains of the Roman port of Caesarea, extensively rebuilt by Herod the Great.*

of Philip the Evangelist, who years earlier had converted the Ethiopian Eunuch (see Acts chapter 9), and now had four daughters *‘who prophesied’* (Acts 21.9). It was, however, a visiting prophet called Agabus from Judea, who made a most striking prediction. He bound his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt and said: *‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles’* (Acts 21.11).

Understandably all those there, Luke and his other companions, Philip and his family pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. How reminiscent this was of Jesus’ own last journey up to Jerusalem over twenty years before, determined to meet the cruel fate that awaited him there. Paul was now following in the footsteps of his Master and he was just as resolute: *‘I am ready not only*

*to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’*, he declared (Acts 21.13).

Seeing that nothing could dissuade this determined man, Luke and his other companions accepted that all was in the hand of providence, as all God’s servants must. *‘The will of the Lord be done’* they affirmed (Acts 21.14).

## Arrival at Jerusalem

Now Paul and his friends prepared for the fateful journey through the plains and hills of Judea, to their longed-for destination. With some of the disciples in Caesarea and Mnason from Cyprus, with whom they were to lodge, they ascended on foot, to be met eventually by the sight of its splendid temple and greeted warmly by the church at Jerusalem. And so the third missionary journey was accomplished.

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# BIBLE TEACHING ABOUT:

## The Christian way of life

**On the face of it, this seems like a subject about which you may well come to the conclusion: 'I already know about this...'. However there are some aspects of a Bible-based Christian way of life that are often overlooked, ignored or forgotten about and this article is intended to shine a light on some of these.**

Writing this from the perspective of the society I live among in the UK, I know from first-hand experience that in other countries around the world the Bible-based values explored in this article are more of

an integral part of people's lives. Hopefully the points raised remain useful and valid to all our readers.

This article will not cover every aspect of becoming a follower of Christ, but will look at some of the characteristics of being a true Christian. It also assumes that true Christians understand that their lives should be based on the example of Jesus, and the guidance that God gives us within the pages of Scripture. Many people call themselves 'Christians' today but not many lead lives consistent with the teaching and example of Christ. In using the word Christian in this article we are referring to its original meaning as applied to the first century followers of Christ whose lives are recorded as examples for us in the New Testament.

## Speech and language

The words that come out of our mouth are a reflection of our inner values and beliefs. Jesus said:

‘But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies’ (Matthew 15.18-19).

We use speech and language every day and so this seems like a good place to begin our consideration. One thing that a true follower of Christ should never do is to use the name of God or Jesus Christ *‘in vain’*. One of the Ten Commandments states this clearly: *‘You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain’* (Exodus 20.7).

This commandment is vitally important for anybody who professes to be a Christian. Our language can become less Christ-like in times of anger, stress or extreme emotion. While this may be understandable from a human point of view, followers of

Jesus should be continually aiming to become more like him. The attitude that says ‘I only curse or swear when I am really angry which I think is OK’ isn’t a Bible-based Christian attitude.

Jesus experienced anger, stress and extreme emotion without his language ever being sinful. In trying to follow his example, we can recognise faults in our speech and work on developing our spiritual mind to overcome them. In his letter to the first century Christians, James *‘a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ’* (James 1.1) acknowledges human weakness but reminds us that followers of Jesus should be acutely aware of the language they use:

‘But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and





Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so' (James 3.8-10).

True Christians must be distinguished from other people by the language they use. Paul wrote to the Christians at Colosse: *'But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth'* (Colossians 3.8). Paul continued in this same letter to emphasise the positive side of the Christian way of life: *'Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one'* (Colossians 4.6).

Paul also wrote to the Ephesian believers that none of the following should be present in their communications *'... filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting...'* (Ephesians 5.4). The task of developing the language and communication which God requires is a huge challenge in today's world – one that cannot be ignored by someone who professes to follow Jesus Christ.

## Humility

Human beings struggle enormously with the concept of humility. We are naturally selfish creatures who

instinctively look out for our own survival and comfort. If we do things that are recognised as successful, it is hard not to take the credit and applause of others without a sense of pride in our own achievements and taking all the praise to ourselves. A true Christian needs to work at being humble in all things giving God the glory. The words of the prophet Isaiah remind us that God is pleased to dwell *'with him who has a contrite and humble spirit'* (Isaiah 57.15).

How often do we publicly acknowledge the blessing and support of God when being praised for something we have done? This applies particularly to charitable donations. Fundraising in the UK and in similar societies is transparent. Giving to charity is often very public, especially when large sums of money are involved. You don't see many celebrities make donations to causes without their name and photograph appearing in the newspapers, on TV and the Internet. What did Jesus say?

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is

doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will himself reward you openly' (Matthew 6.2-4).

Following this command requires complete humility, avoiding the accolades of our fellow human beings as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi in the first century:

'Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others' (Philippians 2.3, 4).

## **Ambition and attitude to wealth and possessions**

As humans, we have a real tendency to want more. The Bible doesn't tell Christians to be lacking in motivation or lazy. In fact, God instructs Christians to be the complete opposite! What we need to understand is the motivation for being hard-working Christians. We find very clear guidance in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving' (Colossians 3.23,24 NIV).

So a follower of Christ should be of the mind that whatever they are working at, they should be working as if Jesus was their master and with the humility to acknowledge God in every aspect of their lives.

## **True Christian love**

On one occasion, when challenged by a lawyer, Jesus said:

"'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". On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 22.37-40).

This kind of self-sacrificing love is clearly the most important characteristic for a follower of Christ who is striving to live a God-centred life, focused on Bible teaching and the example of Jesus. Without love, a person cannot be a Christian in the fullest sense. Paul makes that abundantly clear in his words to the Christians at Corinth:

'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove

mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing' (1 Corinthians 13.1-3).

Paul continues in his letter to the Corinthians:

'Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Corinthians 13.4-7).

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians urging them to *'Imitate me, just as I*

*also imitate Christ'* (1 Corinthians 11.1). A true Christian has to work at developing a loving character based on the example of Jesus Christ. He said to his disciples:

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you' (John 15.12-14).

We note from the above quotations that both Jesus and the Apostle Paul emphasise the kind of love that we should be developing as the most important part of the Christian way of life.

*Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was his response to the question "who is my neighbour?"*



## Summing up

This article has concentrated on some of the things that a true Christian should be doing as part of a God-centred, Bible-based life, following the example of Jesus Christ. There are verses in the Bible which list activities and actions that should be avoided and these are useful to highlight the contrast between the things that God looks for in a Christian and the things He does not. An example of this is in Paul's letter to the first century Christians in Galatia (now part of Turkey) in which he contrasts *'the acts of the sinful nature'* with *'the fruit of the Spirit'*:

'The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.'

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires' (Galatians 5.19-24 NIV).


There has to be a core faith that permeates outwards, that a person is committed to in their hearts and minds. If a follower of Christ has this, then he or she will be in the position that Paul describes in his letter to the believers at Rome. For context, read the whole of Romans chapter 7, but we will focus on the last few verses. Here Paul writes to the Romans about the struggle between his human instincts and his desire to please God:

'So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members' (Romans 7.21-23 NIV).

So there it is. A Christian has to *'delight in God's law'* in their *'inner being'*. Paul continues with an assurance to all those who like Paul are fighting a battle to overcome what he calls *'the law of sin at work within my members'*:

'What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Romans 7.24,25 NIV).

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*The hills of today's kingdom of Jordan, where the ancient kings of Moab raised thousands of sheep and paid tribute to the kings of Israel.*

*the bible stands*

# THE TEST OF TIME

## THE MOABITE STONE

The Second Book of Kings tells us about a man called Mesha who was a king of Moab around 850 BC (2 Kings 3.4). Moab, a small kingdom to the east of the Dead Sea (see map overleaf), was continually antagonistic towards Israel. The reason for this was that they believed Israel under Moses had stolen the northern part of their territory. The Israelites actually won this by conquest, not from Moab, but from Sihon king of Heshbon (see Judges 11.14-21). However people do tend

to believe what they want to believe when it comes to historical detail, so there was continual conflict over a perceived historic injustice. During the reign of Ahab king of Israel, of the dynasty of Omri, Moab were a subject people under tribute. We read a lot about this infamous king and his wicked wife Jezebel in the First Book of Kings (see 1 Kings chapters 16 to 22).

The Bible tells us that Mesha was a sheep breeder and he regularly paid Ahab a huge tax of 100,000 lambs and the wool of the same number of rams. We read that Moab rebelled after Ahab's death in these words: 'But it happened, when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel' (2 Kings 3.5). The rest of this chapter recounts





how a confederacy of Judah, Israel and the king of Edom sought to quash the rebellion, without apparently achieving their desired object as the record concludes: 'So they departed from him and returned to their own land'. Moab survived to fight another day (2 Kings 3.27).

A remarkable confirmation of this event came to light with the discovery of a black basalt inscription written by Mesha king of Moab himself! On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1868, at Dhiban (Biblical Dibon) a German missionary, the Rev F Klein, was shown an inscribed slab by an Arab sheikh containing 34 lines of writing. Klein copied a few words and alerted the German consul who began negotiations to buy the stone for the

Berlin museum. Unfortunately competition from the French consulate resulted in further attempts to procure it for the Paris museum and a plaster of Paris 'squeeze', an impression of the whole stone was taken so that the writing could be studied and deciphered.

A fierce dispute subsequently arose and 'the squeeze' was broken into several pieces. Worse was to come. The Arab villagers now aware of the value of the stone increased the price. Interference from Turkish officials resulted in the superstitious villagers lighting a fire under the stone, cooling it with water to break it into fragments to make charms to bless their grain! This was a terrible disaster to occur to such a unique find. Only some of the fragments could be located and purchased, and together with information from the pieces of 'the squeeze', the stone, with only two thirds of the original fragments was reconstructed, its message deciphered, and is now in the Louvre in Paris. If you look carefully at the photograph you can clearly see the cracks and the lost parts where the mould was used when it was put back together like a jigsaw puzzle!

*RIGHT: The Moabite Stone in the Louvre, Paris. The darker areas are those restored from the plaster 'squeeze'.*

This remarkable ancient account relates how Mesha the king of Moab boasted that he had thrown off Ahab's domination by rebelling. So here we have an external and independent record completely backing up the Biblical account. It is of course very much from Mesha's viewpoint. He relates how he threw off the yoke of Israel and honoured his god Chemosh: 'As for Omri king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years for Chemosh was angry at his land. And his son followed him and he also said "I will humble Moab." In my time he spoke but I have triumphed over him and over his

house, while Israel hath perished for ever!' The account describes how the House of Omri and his son Ahab had occupied Moab for 40 years. Clearly a triumphant Mesha gloats over his new found freedom!

The language is close to Hebrew, and both Chemosh, a pagan god, and Yahweh the God of Israel are mentioned, together with an interesting insight into Moabite beliefs, in which one may possibly detect elements of a shadowy original Truth in badly apostate form. The people of Moab, it should be remembered, were descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew, as recorded in the book of Genesis. Lot separated from Abraham and went to live in Sodom. Moab and Ammon were his two sons who settled east of the Jordan. The reference on the stone to Yahweh as the God of Israel is the earliest recorded in any artefact found so far.

### Ahab's ivory house

When Ahab died, the Biblical commentator summarised his achievements and mentioned in passing 'the ivory house which he built' (1 Kings 22.39). Omri his father had moved his capital from Tirzah to Samaria (1 Kings 16.23, 24) and Ahab's palace was there in Samaria. When the royal palace in Samaria was excavated evidence of this ivory house was found. Exquisitely carved





*Carved  
fragment of  
ivory from  
Ahab's palace  
in Samaria.  
About actual  
size  
(British  
Museum).*

ivory ornaments and decorations carved in the Phoenician style included winged sphinxes with blue glass inlays, winged goddesses, scenes of the child Horus, an Egyptian god, seated on a lotus, as well as patterns of palm and lotus. The ivory house would probably have been a palace or pavilion with chairs, thrones and beds decorated with ivory, and possibly with ivory panelling on the walls. The prophet Amos, a little earlier than Ahab, had

condemned such decadence with the words: *'I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; **the houses of ivory** shall perish...'* (Amos 3.15). He also prophesied:

*'Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria...who lie on **beds of ivory**...I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore I will deliver up the city and all that is in it'* (Amos 6.1-4, 8).

Proof of the destruction of the ivory houses of Samaria thus prophesied can be viewed in the British Museum in London.

### ***What does all this mean for students of the Bible?***

- ❖ This is external proof corroborating the Biblical record.
- ❖ The smallest historic detail in Scripture is accurate.
- ❖ We can be reassured that this and other ancient events recorded actually happened.
- ❖ This is another small but fascinating piece of evidence to support faith in the Word of God.
- ❖ Anyone who visits Paris or London can see the evidence for themselves in the Louvre and the British Museum.

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## IMPORTANT BIBLE WORDS

### Resurrection

When the Apostle Paul wrote his second letter to his young friend and 'son in the faith' Timothy, he was keen to emphasise the need for careful, discriminating study of the Word of God:

**'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing ( NIV 'who correctly handles' ) the Word of truth'** (2 Timothy 2.15).

Paul knew that there were already powerful forces at work corrupting and distorting the original Christian message. Peter feared the same; he used strong words to remind his readers to be on their guard against those who *'wrest (NKJV 'twist') the... scriptures, unto their own destruction'* (2 Peter 3.16 KJV). (see also pages 16–17).

So, in order not to 'wrest' or 'twist' the Word of God we need to be prepared to put in some serious effort to read the Bible, to consider how different teachings compare with its message and to challenge ourselves. We are told to study the Scriptures and to test everything:

**'Test all things; hold fast what is good'** (1 Thessalonians 5.21).

With these studying and testing recommendations in mind, this

article looks at this most important word which is found in the Bible. We will look at the promise of resurrection, and address questions such as:

- ❖ who will be raised from the dead?
- ❖ will people be raised mortal or immortal?

We need to establish whether widely held beliefs about the afterlife and the reward of the faithful are in fact supported by scripture or not. We shall find the Bible's teaching is consistent and logical throughout its pages, both Old and New Testaments. The certainty of the resurrection is supported by three main lines of thought. These are :

1. God's promises to Abraham and David.
2. The teaching of Jesus and Paul.
3. Men and women of faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

## 1. God's promises to Abraham and David

In the book of Genesis, we read that God promised to give Abraham the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. The following is a rather long quotation, but it sets the tone for the promises of God to His people and is therefore one of the key planks of Bible teaching:

*RIGHT: The Huleh Valley north of Galilee in Israel. God promised the whole of the land of Canaan to Abraham as a personal possession, but he never received it in his lifetime.*

'When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.

**And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God"** (Genesis 17.1-8 RSV).

The words in bold type remind us of the long-term nature of God's promise to Abraham. However, to





demonstrate that we haven't just plucked out a passage from the Scriptures to suit our needs, consider the promise that God made to King David many years later. God made a number of promises to David, but in particular, God told David that he would see one of his descendants sitting on the throne in Jerusalem for ever. Clearly, in order for this to happen, David must be raised from the dead. The promise is contained in the Second Book of Samuel chapter seven and it is well worth reading the whole chapter. The God-given words that the prophet Nathan addressed to David included this assurance:

'And your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you. Your throne shall be established for ever' (2 Samuel 7.16).

There are a number of references to this great promise to David in the New Testament. It was confirmed by the announcement of the angel Gabriel before the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1.32, 33). After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Apostle Peter preached to the crowds assembled in Jerusalem at Pentecost and his message underlined the importance of the promises to David (see Acts 2.29-36).

Both Abraham and David have been dead for thousands of years and have turned to dust, so without resurrection (literally a 'standing again' on the earth) God's promises cannot be fulfilled. However the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus that '*God...cannot lie*' (Titus 1.2) and it is unthinkable that God would make a promise and not fulfil it.

## 2. The teaching of Jesus and Paul

The Sadducees were a religious group who did not believe in the resurrection. They spoke to Jesus in an attempt to prove their point using a hypothetical case concerning a woman who had been married seven times. They asked Jesus whose wife she would be in the day of resurrection to try and show how absurd his idea was and discredit him in the eyes of the people. His reply not only answers the question directly but also tells us plainly that there will be a resurrection. He said to these so-called religious leaders:

‘...You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven’ (Matthew 22.29, 30).

But Jesus didn’t stop there, he reminded his listeners of the words that God addressed to Moses at the burning bush, confirming God’s promise that Abraham would be raised from the dead:

“But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob’ God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22.31,32).



*Pilgrims visit the 'Garden Tomb' where some think Jesus was buried. Paul describes the certainty of Jesus' resurrection as the absolute guarantee of the Christian hope.*

Later, after the ascension of Jesus to heaven, the Apostle Paul had to deal with those who did not believe that there would be a day of resurrection in the future. In his first letter to the Corinthians he argues that if there is no resurrection then Christ was not raised from the dead (although more than 500 people had been witnesses to this – see I Corinthians 15. 6) and all men and women therefore are without hope. Paul succinctly and directly tells the believers:

**‘Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain’**

(1 Corinthians 15.12–14 RSV)

So, clearly, if we are to be followers of Christ like the Apostle Paul, then we surely cannot doubt the teaching of Jesus and the Apostle Paul on this subject. Quite simply, there must be a resurrection of the dead.

### **3. Men and women of faith in Hebrews chapter 11**

This brings us to consider Hebrews chapter 11, where the apostle lists a number of men and women of faith who died in the certain hope of being raised from the dead at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. They include men like Abraham and David and women like Sarah, Abraham’s faithful wife. Many of them suffered for holding fast to their faith in trying circumstances and died in hope of the resurrection. He concludes his argument with the following words:

**‘And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had**

**foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect’** (Hebrews 11.39-40 RSV).

The words of Scripture give us a compelling argument concerning the promises made to men and women of faith in times past. They have not gone to heaven for we are told that they haven’t yet received their reward. No, they died in faith and ‘sleep’ peacefully in the dust of the earth, waiting for the day of resurrection.

### **Who will be raised from the dead?**

This is quite an emotive topic as the obvious conclusion is that if you are not raised, then you will not ‘be made perfect’ and inherit eternal life. So, will everybody be raised or only certain people? The Old Testament prophet Daniel referred to the time just before the resurrection which he described as *‘a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time’* (Daniel 12.1). But it will not only be a time of great trouble, it will be a time when God will intervene by sending Jesus back to the earth and *‘many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt’* (Daniel 12.2).

This passage clearly demonstrates that not all men and women will be raised from the dead. But some people still hold on to the hope that there is to be a universal resurrection and in support of this they quote from John's gospel record where we read these words of Jesus:

'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation' (John 5. 28-29).

They point to the '*all*' mentioned in the quotation as proof of this. However, instead of '*wresting*' those two verses, we can by expanding our study see that the true teaching of God's Word is very different. In the same chapter and at verse 24 we note that Jesus was referring to '*he who hears my word*'.

Later the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome reminding them of their responsibilities. He told them that they (the believers) '*shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... each of us shall give account of himself to God*' (Romans 14:10,12).

So, putting the Old Testament teaching and that of Jesus and Paul side by side we can see that the '*all*'

mentioned in the Gospel of John refers to those who hear the voice of the Son of God and become believers. These will be raised from the dead and appear before Christ's judgement seat.

There are many who have heard the message of God's Word, failed to respond to the gospel message and rejected it in total unbelief. These are like the ones described in Jesus' parable of the sower as the '*seed*' that '*fell by the wayside*' (Mark 4.4). There are also those who have never heard or understood the teaching of Jesus and as such are not responsible. Consequently there would be no value in these people being judged. We must conclude therefore that sadly they will not be included in the resurrection at Christ's return – they will remain in the grave.

## **Will people be raised mortal or immortal?**

The idea of emerging from the grave immortal is based on the following passage from Paul's treatise on the resurrection in his First Letter to the believers at Corinth:

'Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed' (1 Corinthians 15.51,52 RSV).

It is argued that men and women of faith like those described in Hebrews chapter 11 are already known by Christ and therefore there is no need for them to be judged when he returns. However, to solely take this verse and base a belief on it does a disservice to the Word of God.

The meaning of the original Greek of the New Testament in the phrase *'the dead will be raised imperishable'* does not imply an instant change from mortality to immortality. If this were the case it would contradict Paul's words in his Second Letter to the Corinthians in which he reminds the believers that *'we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ'* (2 Corinthians 5.10). Rather it implies a process of change that depends on the outcome of Christ's righteous judgment.

We have already noted that many (not all) will be raised from the dead, and we learned from the teaching of

Jesus and the Apostle Paul that there is to be a time of judgement. In the parable of the *'sheep and goats'* Jesus underlined the importance of this teaching (see Matthew 25. 31-46). This judgement will have consequences for those who are deemed to be Christ's *'sheep'* and for those who are classified as being among the *'goats'*. Jesus concluded the parable with these telling words: *'And these (the goats) will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life'* (Matthew 25.46).

In another passage Jesus again differentiates between two classes of people. In answer to the question: *"Lord, are there few who are saved?"* he said to the people: *'Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able'* (Luke 13.23, 24). Then he continued with this solemn warning:

*'There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and*

*A flock like this was the inspiration for Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats.*





Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out' (Luke 13.28).

For these disbelieving Jews to be *'thrust out'* they must first be raised from the dead, and to be raised from the dead they have to be responsible to Christ's judgment and judged unworthy of eternal life. However it is not just a New Testament view that we have taken, for we also have the clear words of Daniel in this respect which are worth repeating: *'...many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt'* (Daniel 12.2).

Note the emphasis – two classes of people will be raised from the dead – both cannot be raised from the dead in an immortal state. The truth of the matter is that resurrection is a process of being raised from the dead with the same mortal nature we possessed before death and then being clothed with immortality if accepted at the judgement seat of Christ.

## Summary

Whilst the main purpose of this article has been to underline the Bible teaching about the resurrection and key aspects associated with it, the secondary purpose is to encourage you to

study the Bible for yourself with an open mind.

Jesus, in what has become known as his Sermon on the Mount, encouraged his listeners not to be over concerned about the things of this life but to get their priorities right. He said: *"...But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6.33).

It is our belief that the *'time of trouble'* for this world foretold by the prophet Daniel, is almost upon us. Jesus will soon return to the earth and those who are responsible to his judgement will be raised from the dead and together with those who are alive will be judged. It is our hope that you will leave no stone unturned in order to understand this important Bible teaching with complete clarity and act upon it. May God bless you in your further studies of His Word.

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