

A full-page background image of a surfer in a black wetsuit riding a massive, curling blue-green wave. The surfer is positioned inside the barrel of the wave, with one arm extended upwards. The water is a vibrant blue-green, and white foam is visible at the top of the wave's crest. The sky is a clear, deep blue.

# Light

**...on a new world**

**VOLUME 28.2**

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

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# Light on a new world

## Volume 28.2

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Surfing a big wave at Waimea shorebreak on Oahu, Hawai in search of the ‘ultimate experience’— see page 33

### Note:

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

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## from the editor

Despite the huge cost in human suffering, we have become accustomed to seeing the Middle East in a state of war. The civil war in Syria began in 2011 and there are not many signs that it is coming to an end. This has been the focus of media attention for a while, which has to some extent overshadowed another conflict in that region that has lasted much longer.

The conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis has erupted a number of times since the State of Israel was established in 1948. There has also been a constant war of words between the two sides over the control of this small territory that has a northern border with Syria and Lebanon.

**Fifty years ago this month** in June 1967, the combined armed forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria were attacked by Israel and the BBC reported on the outcome:

‘Fighting in the Middle East has ended after Israel finally observed the UN ceasefire and halted her advance into Syria. Within the last six days Israeli troops have taken territory many times larger than Israel itself’ (see map overleaf) ‘and united the holy city of Jerusalem for the first time since 1948.

Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol justified the pre-emptive strike on

Israeli paratroopers at the Western (‘Wailing’) Wall in Jerusalem about 20 minutes after it had been captured – an iconic image of the ‘Six-Day War’.

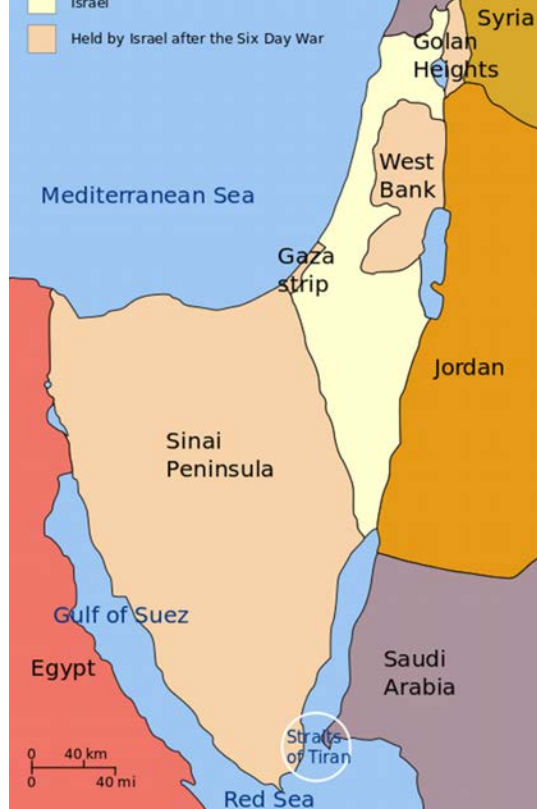


Egypt, and battles with Jordanian and Syrian forces by saying his country was acting in self-defence. He told the Sunday Times newspaper: "The threat of destruction that hung over Israel since its establishment and which was about to be implemented has been removed." He added: "For the first time in 19 years, Jews are again free to pray at the Wailing Wall and at other shrines sacred to Judaism in Jerusalem and Hebron".'

In 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in which Israel agreed to withdraw entirely from Sinai. In 2005 the occupation of the Gaza strip came to an end but Israel has retained the additional territories occupied during the Six-Day War (see map on right).

Since 1967 there has been a continuing struggle between Israel and the Palestinian militants, who are determined to regain territory lost in 1967 and to establish their own State with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The control of Jerusalem is a particularly delicate issue, with each side asserting its claim over the city. In addition to this, Jerusalem has great significance for Jews, Christians and Muslims as being a



holy city and the focus of their religious beliefs. In 1980 Israel issued a new law stating that 'Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel' but no other country in the world recognizes this. The international community is sympathetic towards the Palestinian claim and Israel is increasingly becoming isolated. The question has to be asked – where is all this leading to? Does Israel have a future?

The answer is revealed in the Bible which contains a detailed record of the history of this small nation of



Israel. It tells us about Abraham, the founder of the nation, who was called by God to leave his homeland and go to the land of Canaan (now Israel). It tells us how God chose the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, to be His special people. It recounts their miraculous survival over many centuries, despite long periods of persecution, dispersion into other countries and repeated attempts to destroy them.

The Bible reveals what is to happen to this nation in the future. It may come as a surprise to you, but it's a future that will affect the whole world, because God has promised to intervene once more on behalf of His chosen people.

The prophet Zechariah lived at a time when the Jews had just returned from many years of captivity in Babylon and had commenced to rebuild Jerusalem, their ancient city and its temple. The prophet had much to say about the future of Jerusalem. Here are some of his divinely inspired predictions:

**‘And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all**

**nations of the earth are gathered against it.’** Zechariah 12.3

**‘Behold, the day of the LORD is coming... I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem...Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle.’** Zechariah 14.1-3

The final outcome of this conflict over Jerusalem, will be a world at peace, a world that is no longer divided by religious and political factions. Jerusalem will be the centre of worship for all nations in the age to come, as Zechariah foretold in the closing words of his prophecy:

**‘And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts...’** Zechariah 14.16

There are many similar passages in the Bible that reveal God's plan for His people, the nation of Israel. Their future is assured and so is the future of their ancient capital city, Jerusalem.



what did Jesus mean?

## **“great is your reward in heaven”**

**‘Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’**

Matthew 5.11, 12

Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount, recorded in the gospel of Matthew (chapters 5-7), begins with the Beatitudes. These list eight qualities which God looks for in His servants. According to this passage, these servants should demonstrate among other characteristics, ‘poorness of spirit’, ‘meekness’, and ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’. These are qualities which contrast with humanity’s obsession with self-advancement and material wealth rather than God’s better way. Each of these blessings represents an entire Biblical theme, but our focus is on Jesus’ concluding comments to those who endure persecution for his sake:

When answering the question ‘What did Jesus mean?’ in the context of this passage, we must surely begin with the obvious – that there is a great reward for those who endure suffering for their Christian faith. This comment is placed at the end of the Beatitudes. By implication, this reward extends to all those to whom the earlier Beatitudes apply, and therefore to all those whom God considers ‘*blessed*’. It remains then to determine the nature of this ‘*reward*’ and in what sense it is ‘*in heaven*’.

## **your reward...**

The first indication of the nature of the 'reward' is found in the Beatitudes themselves, which is simply an archaic word meaning blessings. Correspondingly, Jesus details these to match each of the Christian traits which he seeks to elevate. For example:

**'the meek...shall inherit the earth'**  
verse 5

**'the merciful... shall obtain mercy'**  
verse 7

**'the pure in heart... shall see God'**  
verse 8

All of these separate blessings could easily be described as a reward in their own right. However, there is one blessing which is repeated, appearing both at the beginning and at the end of the passage:

**'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'**  
verse 3

**'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'**  
verse 10

This '*kingdom of heaven*,' it seems, is a key component of these blessings. Its placement at the

beginning and end of the Beatitudes is another clear indication that it applies to all those who are '*blessed*' by God. In fact, anyone familiar with the New Testament and in particular with the four gospel records, will recognise this notion of a kingdom from the accounts of the preaching of both Jesus and his apostles. For example:

**'... Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel".'**

Mark 1.14,15  
see also Matthew 4.17

**'Listen, my beloved brethren: Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him?'**

James 2.5

So in the New Testament, the idea of a '*kingdom*' features highly in the gospel message preached by Jesus and the apostles. It is described variously as '*the kingdom of heaven*', '*the kingdom of God*' and sometimes simply as '*the kingdom*'. Clearly the term refers to something beyond a mere human dominion; something better than the nations and societies of humankind;

something to aspire to. In total, the word *'kingdom'* appears 153 times in the New Testament (NKJV), almost every one of which refers to this special kingdom of God.

## what is this kingdom?

The kingdom would appear to be the great reward which Jesus promises to those blessed by God. But what were Jesus' hearers to understand by his promise of *'the kingdom of heaven'* or *'the kingdom of God'*? To know this, we must consult the only Scriptures available to those who were present at the time, what we now call the Old Testament.

Even here, there are clear indications of God's intention to establish a special kingdom. For example, these words were spoken to David, king of Israel:

**'When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.'**

2 Samuel 7.12,13

At first reading, this seems like a

straightforward promise to a faithful king that his *'seed'*, or descendant, should inherit his kingdom after him. However, the last word of this quotation indicates that there is more to it than this; the throne of the kingdom would be established *'for ever'*. This is quite a remarkable statement and indicates that the promise, while referring undoubtedly to David's son Solomon as the immediate heir, was also talking about a future heir in David's line at a time when the kingdom would be established for eternity.

The same promise was repeated to Solomon:

**'...I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel for ever, as I promised David your father, saying, "You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel"'**

1 Kings 9.5

So the kingdom is ultimately to be established for ever. Furthermore, we find that this *'seed'*, this *'man on the throne of Israel'*, is the one referred to in the famous words of Isaiah:

**'For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given... Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the**



throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even for ever.'

Isaiah 9.6,7

The '*child*' is, of course, Jesus, who we are to understand will rule over a future kingdom on the throne of David for ever.

This kingdom is to be something quite unlike those that have gone before. There are numerous references throughout the Bible describing some of the wonders of this glorious reign. For example, the prophet Isaiah further recorded these words in reference to God's ultimate plan for the future:

**'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.'** Isaiah 11.9

The same sentiment is repeated in the New Testament:

**"...Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no**

**more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away".'**

Revelation 21.3,4

## **...in heaven?**

Certainly then, this future time is to be one of unparalleled happiness and joy in the presence of God. This confirms the familiar belief in a blissful reward for the faithful, common to many religious teachings. However, Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter five is that the '*reward*' is '*in heaven*'. Should we understand this to mean that the faithful are transported to an ethereal realm away from the earth in order to inhabit eternity?

The verses we have selected so far would suggest not. The very first indication of God's plan for a glorious future kingdom, in His promises to David and Solomon states that it was the throne of David that would be established for ever. This throne was on earth, specifically in the city of Jerusalem in the promised land of Israel (see 1 Kings 2.11). Of course, we do not expect Jesus to physically occupy the same chair as David; the throne represents the position of power over God's people on earth. The verses



we have looked at in Isaiah mention *'the throne of David'* and *'my holy mountain'*, which is the mountain on which Jerusalem is built. This same location is mentioned by the prophet Micah:

**'Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob;... For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.'**

Micah 4.2

So there is no indication of the kingdom being established anywhere other than on earth; Jesus Christ will reign on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

How, then, should we understand Jesus' words that the reward is *'in heaven'*?

The excavation of Herod's palace in Jerusalem. It may have been here that Jesus told Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world"*.

It means quite simply, that the reward, this glorious future kingdom, is being prepared in heaven by God our Father, in anticipation of the time when He will enact His purpose on the earth. Matthew's gospel record is the only one to use this phrase *'kingdom of heaven'*; the other Gospels use *'the kingdom of God'* or similar (for example compare Matthew 8.11 with Luke 14.28). This emphasizes the point that the future kingdom will not be a fallible human institution but will be established by God, as Jesus himself said to Pilate just before his crucifixion: *'My kingdom is not of this world'* (John 18.36).

Rather than the faithful going to heaven to receive the kingdom, the *'kingdom of heaven'*, God's holy dominion will be set up on the earth. This was the fundamental hope and central message of first century Christians.

## Conclusion

Jesus' words that *'great is your reward in heaven'* remind us of another of Jesus' exhortations, about *'treasure in heaven'*. This appears a few times in the Gospel records, including the Sermon on the Mount:

**'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'** Matthew 6.19-21, see also Luke 12.33

The same phrase appears in Jesus' words to the rich young man (Matthew 19.21). In both of these cases, Jesus is comparing the things we might seek in this life to the far greater things which God is preparing — those *'treasures in*

*heaven'* which He intends to bestow upon His faithful in that wonderful kingdom of the future. Our focus should be squarely on that ultimate goal, rather than on the worldly things which naturally appeal to us: material wealth; physical gratification; social status and so on. Even though God may bless us with some of those things, our motivation is to attain the far greater blessings which God has promised for the future. After all, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, his very first request was *'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* (Matthew 6.10).

The follower of Christ looks forward, then, to his return to the earth and the establishment of the glorious kingdom of God. It is our fervent hope that the following words might apply to us at that time:

**'Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..."'**

Matthew 25.34

Joel Toms  
Surrey, UK

the Bible and today's world



new church in Sydney Australia

# ARE YOU IN THE RIGHT CHURCH?

If you go to church regularly, have you ever asked yourself the question — why? There could be a number of answers to this:

- ❖ Social reasons
- ❖ Following the example of parents
- ❖ 'Feel good' factor — it seems the right thing to do
- ❖ Fear of the consequences if I don't go

I wonder how many people go to church because they have a deep religious conviction based on a belief in God and a reverence for the Bible as His Word?

For those who don't go to church but may be considering it, the choice is staggering. So whether you already go to church or whether you are still thinking about it, which church is the right one? Does it really matter anyway? Some say, all roads ultimately lead to the same place, but that is not true, for Jesus himself made a clear distinction in his teaching. He offered two alternatives to those who wished to follow him. For example, his teaching in Matthew chapters 5 to 7 known as 'the Sermon on the Mount' sets out the only basis for the Christian way of life. In chapter 7 Jesus draws a simple but far-reaching lesson based on everyday experience:

**'Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.'**

Matthew 7.13,14

The message of Jesus is simple but far-reaching — the path of discipleship is not an easy one. It requires real effort on the part of those who wish to be Christians in the fullest sense. Jesus then reinforced his

teaching by adding this:

**'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name... and done many wonders in your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness!"'**

Matthew 7.21-23

This is a challenging and very personal message which gets to the heart of Christianity. Jesus said that only those who do *'the will of my Father in heaven'* will enter the kingdom of God.

## **WHY SO MANY CHURCHES?**

Almost 2,000 years have gone by since Jesus was here and this long period of time has seen great changes in the Christian world. Have you ever thought why there are so many different churches? It doesn't make sense, does it? There are 45 main denominations listed in the UK as part of an ecumenical movement (source: [www.cte.org.uk](http://www.cte.org.uk)). There are more than two billion Christians in the world today of which half are Roman



Catholics. That's a very large number, but how does that affect you and me? There's no safety in numbers as we have already noted from the teaching of Jesus. The ecumenical movement is just a way of describing the move back towards the 'mother church' from where all the others broke away. Roman Catholicism is still growing whilst the Protestant churches are in decline.

## FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY LOST

The history and development of Christianity is just like a great river. It begins as a mountain stream, pure at its source but gradually becoming more and more polluted as it makes its way to the sea. Pure Christianity existed 2,000 years ago when Jesus and his apostles preached the gospel (good news) about the coming kingdom of God.

Then gradually it became polluted by human ideas down through the centuries, with the inevitable result that the original teaching of Jesus and his apostles has almost been lost sight of altogether. They warned that such things would happen. For example the Apostle Paul told the first century Christians at Ephesus 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 20.29,30 – see also Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4.3,4).

Warnings like this concerning a departure from the pure teaching of Jesus should make us think. Millions of people are rushing headlong down that broad way Jesus spoke about. Are you among them? Are you in the right church? Am I? The answer to these searching questions is found in the Bible yet how many Christians read it for themselves?

The Old Testament is not considered relevant by many Christians today. It contains the history of God's chosen people, the Jews. We learn how they departed from the worship of God and turned to idolatry. The prophet Isaiah, whose mission was to warn the nation of the consequences of their idolatry, wrote:

**'To the law and to the testimony!  
If they do not speak according to  
this word, it is because there is no  
light in them'**

Isaiah 8.20

Paul's teaching in his second letter to Timothy, just like the message of Isaiah, underlines the importance of getting back to the pure source. He wrote: *'continue in the things which you have learned'* and where had Timothy learned these things — from the Rabbi or the Priest? No, he had followed the good example of his mother and studied the Scriptures himself from an early age, as Paul reminded him: *'...from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus'* (2 Timothy 3.14,15).

These *'holy Scriptures'* which Timothy knew, were the books of the Old Testament, for the New Testament was not completed when Paul sent this letter to him. Then Paul emphasised the importance of the Old Testament:

**'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work'** 3.16,17

The Old Testament cannot be put on one side for it is an integral part of the divine message. Without the Old Testament the New Testament would be meaningless. The two together constitute what is described by Paul elsewhere as *'the whole counsel of God'* (Acts 20.27).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCTRINE

Note the emphasis in Paul's words to Timothy on doctrine first. Churches today are divided on doctrine, but in the first century this was not so. Sound doctrine no longer has its place in the teaching of the churches and for many it is not even regarded as important. The teaching of the Bible has been undermined by the ideas of modern theologians. More recently the very foundation stones of the Christian faith have been questioned, including denial of the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without this as a basis of faith there is no hope, as Paul told the Christians at Corinth: *'...if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith'* (1 Corinthians 15.14 NIV).

In the first century, the followers of Jesus were united in doctrine and practice. There was only one church –

one united body of believers who upheld the teaching of Jesus. Purity of doctrine and practice was something which characterised the first century church.

However, as time went by the pure source became polluted with new doctrines, some of which had their origin in the pagan ideas of the ancient world. In the fourth century AD the power of pagan imperial Rome united with the Papal Church, a development foretold by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians (see 2 Thessalonians chapter two). In this way the Roman Catholic Church became firmly established, although by that time many unscriptural ideas had become part of the teaching of the church.

There is one doctrine which most churches readily accept but is not taught in the Bible. We refer to 'the doctrine of the Trinity' which is almost universally accepted by the churches today. But the true relationship between God the Father and His Son Jesus is expressed very clearly in Paul's first letter to Timothy. Concerning God he wrote:

**'who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of**

**the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all...'**

1 Timothy 2:4-6

Note the contrast here between the Word of God and the ideas of men – **ONE GOD** and **ONE MEDIATOR**, not God the Son as Trinitarians believe but **THE MAN CHRIST JESUS**. The doctrine of the Trinity completely undermines the true Christian hope of salvation from death through the work of **THE MAN** Jesus Christ.

(For further information on this topic send for a free booklet entitled: 'Understanding the Bible's teaching – God')

## **A DIVIDED RELIGIOUS WORLD**

The large number of different churches that exist today are themselves a result of changes that have taken place over many centuries. We have indicated that the original message of Christianity has been lost – the pure source has been muddled by the ideas of men. The true gospel of the coming kingdom of God has been replaced with another gospel not based on God's Word, as Paul warned Timothy: *'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...and they will turn their*



Muslims worship in front of the Dome of the Rock at the end of Ramadan. Jewish prayer here is forbidden.

*ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables' (2 Timothy 4.3,4).*

The news media make us realise how many of the current problems in the world are caused by, or influenced by, religious differences of one kind or another. These include the problems in the Middle East – Judaism versus Islam coupled with the current upsurge of fanaticism in a divided Muslim world. Closer to home – there are deep-rooted divisions in the Church of England brought to a head by the decision to allow women priests and other issues such as homosexuality.

## ONE WORLD RELIGION

Can you imagine a world with only one religion common to all mankind? No Muslims, no Hindus or Buddhists and no more Christian

denominations and cults such as we have today. Just think about it – the implications are tremendous aren't they? The good news is that we believe it will soon be a reality. Jesus is to return as he promised, to establish the kingdom of God on earth, to cleanse the world of all that is wrong and to make way for the great changes that have been promised by God.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of this in powerful words which present a terrifying prospect, but not to those who have come to put their trust in the one true God. Paul encouraged the believers at Thessalonica who were undergoing a time of persecution for their faith, not to worry but to patiently await the time when *'the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thessalonians 1.7,8).*

Notice the emphasis in Paul's words – vengeance on those that do not know God and on those who refuse to obey the gospel. God is just and His Word tells us how we can obtain the salvation which He offers to all men and women, yet few accept His gracious offer.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah painted many word pictures of this time of blessing for the nations of the world. He saw a vision of the time when a pure religion will be practiced by all people:

**‘Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.’**

Isaiah 2.3

There will be one house of prayer for all people, not the diversity of chapels, churches and cathedrals of Christendom today and no more mosques, temples and shrines to gods old and new. But in contrast all people will worship the only true God and there will be one temple in God's holy city, Jerusalem.

It will be a universal religion under the wise leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **A PERSONAL MESSAGE**

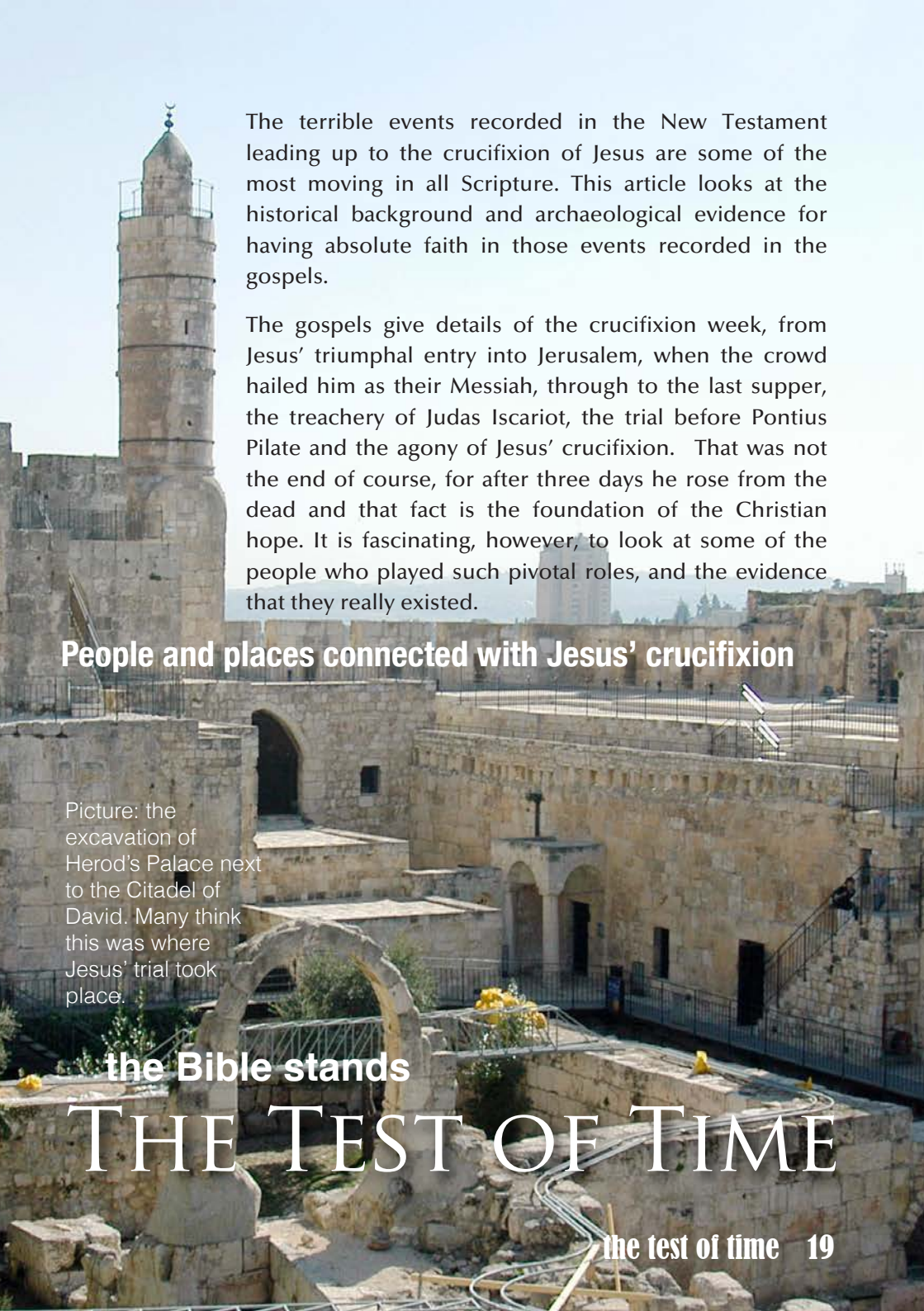
God has a plan to cleanse this world from evil, but He is also a God of mercy, as Peter wrote, *‘not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance’* (2 Peter 3.9). He has shown us how we can share the great blessings of the coming kingdom of God and He has provided the way to achieve it through faith in Jesus.

Are you in the right church? Perhaps we should re-phrase that question. Do you believe the right things? The message of God's Word is clear - get back to the source and read it afresh with an open mind, carefully and prayerfully. You will find peace of mind now and if you follow its teaching, you will be taking the first steps through the small gate along the clearly defined path. True believers have all walked this path before, one which will lead to eternal joy and peace in the age to come.

Colin Dryland

Kent UK





The terrible events recorded in the New Testament leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus are some of the most moving in all Scripture. This article looks at the historical background and archaeological evidence for having absolute faith in those events recorded in the gospels.

The gospels give details of the crucifixion week, from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the crowd hailed him as their Messiah, through to the last supper, the treachery of Judas Iscariot, the trial before Pontius Pilate and the agony of Jesus' crucifixion. That was not the end of course, for after three days he rose from the dead and that fact is the foundation of the Christian hope. It is fascinating, however, to look at some of the people who played such pivotal roles, and the evidence that they really existed.

## People and places connected with Jesus' crucifixion

Picture: the excavation of Herod's Palace next to the Citadel of David. Many think this was where Jesus' trial took place.

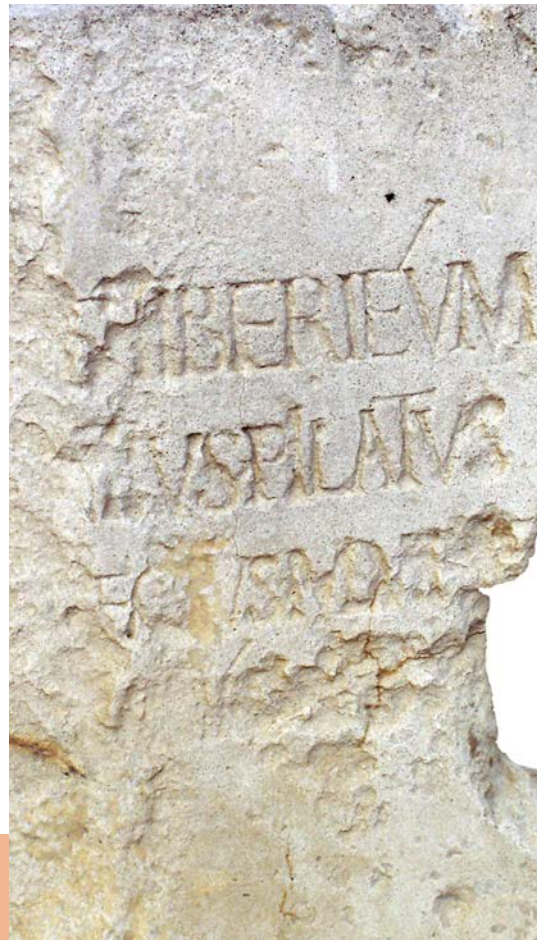
the Bible stands  
**THE TEST OF TIME**

# PONTIUS PILATE

Pontius Pilate, the infamous Roman Governor or Prefect of Judea, is mentioned 26 times in the gospels alone. Matthew 27 records in detail the interaction between Pilate, Jesus and the Jewish rulers, while the mob repeatedly cried *‘Let him be crucified!’* (verses 22,23). Possibly the action he is remembered for most is this: *‘When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person. You see to it”’* (verse 24). So he handed over the innocent Jesus to suffer the agonising Roman punishment of crucifixion.

Who was Pilate? History records that he served under the Emperor Tiberius as governor of the Roman province of Judea from AD 26–36. This was exactly in agreement with the statement in Luke’s gospel that Jesus was *‘about thirty years of age’* when he began his three years’ ministry (Luke 3.23). According to the historian Josephus, Pilate was deposed and sent to Rome (around AD 37) after brutally suppressing an uprising of the Samaritan people.

A remarkable discovery was made in 1961, which puts the historical place of Pilate beyond doubt. An Italian archaeologist, Dr Frova, found an inscribed limestone block in the ruins of an amphitheatre at Caesarea Maritima, now known as the ‘Pilate Stone’. It was probably part of a monument dedicated by Pilate to the Emperor Tiberius, but the fragment contains the all-important Latin words ‘Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judaea’ (see below).



# CAIAPHAS

Caiaphas is mentioned nine times in the gospels. He was the High Priest in the year Jesus faced his interrogation before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council. Matthew records: *'And those who had laid hold of Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled'* (Matthew 26.57). Caiaphas not only plotted to kill Jesus but was involved in his trial. He was son-in-law to a previous High Priest, Annas, to whom Jesus was taken first (John 18.13).

In addition to the New Testament, the historian Josephus gives us important information about

Caiaphas. Though shortened to Caiaphas, his full name was Joseph son of Caiaphas. He was appointed in AD 18 by Valerius Gratus, the Roman Prefect who preceded Pontius Pilate.

In November 1990, an astounding discovery was made by workers paving a road in Jerusalem. It was an intricately carved limestone ossuary or bone box in exceptional condition, containing the bones of a sixty-year-old man. In ancient times the dried bones of the dead were retrieved and packed in a small box in a family tomb for safe keeping. On this box was an Aramaic inscription 'Joseph son of Caiaphas'. It is now housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (see below).





Like all such discoveries scholars have debated its authenticity, as there was no reference in the inscription to his status as a priest. However, in June 2011 another amazing discovery was made. University archaeologists announced the recovery of a stolen ossuary plundered from a tomb in the Valley of Elah, which the Israel Antiquities Authority declared to be authentic. Its inscription stated that it contained the bones of a woman called Miriam, daughter of Yeshua, son of Caiaphas, Priest of Ma-azih. This identified Caiaphas as a priest in the course of Maaziah, one of the 24 courses of priests appointed by King David (I Chronicles 24.18).

## JESUS' TOMB

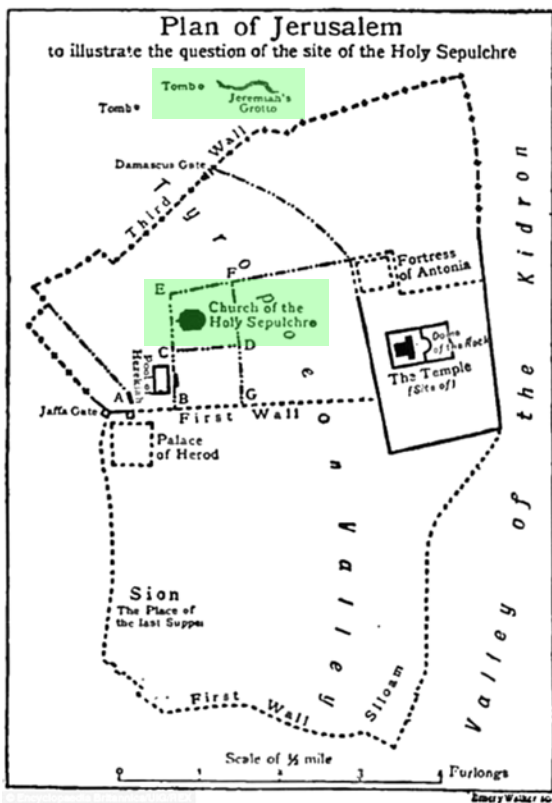
Luke records that Joseph of Arimathea *'went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before'* (Luke 23.52,53).

Whilst the identification of Jesus' tomb is of little consequence to those who believe in his resurrection, it is interesting to examine the sites claimed to be his actual resting place. By the Roman Emperor Constantine's order in AD 326, his mother Helena supervised the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was to be



built over what was believed to be the site of Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem, revered by the Catholic and Eastern churches. This has recently been restored and the supporting iron frame removed (see picture on left). The church replaced an earlier temple to Aphrodite, built by the Emperor Hadrian, that had been constructed after suppressing the Jewish Bar Kokhba rebellion in AD 135. Though myths, such as Helena having discovered the 'true cross' of Christ there, can be discounted, the church historian Eusebius (AD 260-340) supports the authenticity of the site. The historian Edward Gibbon declared however, that Eusebius was guilty of using fiction to present fact! It is claimed that the surrounding rock face was removed and the tomb left isolated. In fact a fourth century marble sheath completely envelops what is taken to be the remains of the tomb.

Other than tradition, no proof can be found that a tomb actually existed, let alone the original one. More recent analysis of the location however, does confirm that it was outside the city wall in the time of Christ, and that there were other tombs in the locality. So it is possible that it was the one, but it is by no means certain.



**This 1911 map of Jerusalem** relating to the late second temple period illustrates the problem of the location of the Holy Sepulchre. The tomb just to the left of Jeremiah's Grotto is the Garden Tomb. Today, scholars no longer accept this reconstruction of the city walls.

In 1883 Major General Charles Gordon, an evangelical Christian, found a second possible site in Jerusalem. He found a rocky



escarpment he identified as Golgotha (the same place as Calvary), which means 'The Place of a Skull' and where the gospels state Jesus was crucified (John 19.17). It is just to the north of the old city near the Damascus Gate, which from several angles resembles the face of a skull (see picture below).

It also meets the requirement of John's gospel that *'in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid'* (John 19.41). Further evidence in favour of this identification is that there are several tombs in the immediate vicinity, together with the existence of an historic wine-press and cistern, indicating a

garden was there in ancient times. Added to this, the use of this site for executions would have acted as a visible deterrent, being close to the main highway leading north from Jerusalem. There is a slightly isolated tomb adjacent to the cistern, with a stone slot to the front which may have housed the circular stone that covered the entrance to the tomb.

In the late twentieth century, however, various objections were raised by the archaeologist Gabriel Barkay of the Hebrew University, dating the tomb to much earlier than the first century AD, and identifying the stone slot as a much more recent Byzantine era drinking trough! Though all of this is





The “Garden Tomb” as it is known today

interesting, it is of no consequence whether this may or may not be Jesus’ actual tomb. The tomb was never meant to be a place of veneration. True faith and belief are based on the much firmer foundations of Scripture itself!

We can, however, with images like this, imagine the scene on that incredible morning when the stone was rolled away. Jesus died for our sins and after three days rose again. Then after 40 days he ascended to heaven. He is coming again to establish his Father’s kingdom on earth. So following the advice of the angel to the women who visited the tomb early on the resurrection

morning, we can base our faith on the angel’s words:

‘Why do you  
seek the living  
among the  
dead? He is not  
here, but is  
risen!’

Luke 24.5,6

Justin Giles  
London, UK



“the property of the king”

LMLK

For many of us, old pottery is not the most exciting part of archaeology. To the untrained eye one pot seems to look much like another, they always appear to be broken and a heap of broken shards tells us nothing. Yet to the archaeologist, the style of pottery is one of the most useful and reliable indicators of the age of a particular level of excavation.

In 1868 when archaeology was still in its infancy, Charles Warren was digging in Jerusalem near the Kidron Valley when he found a number of handles of broken pots, all marked in an unusual and distinctive way. Before they





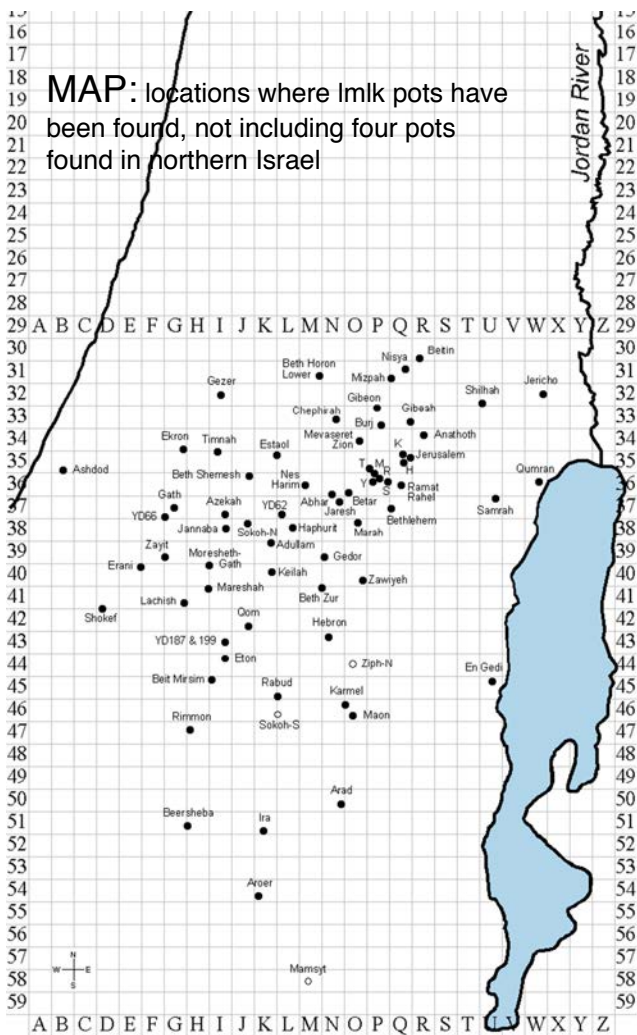
had been fired, while the clay was still soft, the handles had been impressed with a special seal. This showed what looked like outstretched wings, and four letters in an early Hebrew script, the letters L, M, L and K.

Over the century and a half since Warren's initial find, the number of pots with a similar seal impression has risen to over 2,000 and there are doubtless many more that have not yet been uncovered. They are now scattered around the world in various museums and collections, with two hundred in the British Museum alone. The Palestine Exploration Fund has 21 including the original eight found by Warren. A research website of over 800 pages is entirely devoted to this particular subject (lmlk.com).

### **So what is so special about these particular bits of pottery?**

1. It seems they were all made for the same special purpose.
2. They all originated at about the same time, a period clearly identifiable in the history of Israel in the Old Testament.
3. They all relate to a particular area of the land of Israel.
4. Last but not least, they may shed light on some of the Biblical references to pots and the potter which are relevant to all men and women of faith.

The letters **LMLK** (pronounced 'lamelech') represent the Hebrew 'lamedh mem lamedh kaph', and can be translated as 'belonging to the king' (where the term 'king' may also apply to God). All have been dated to the same period of Israel's history, around 700 BC when, according to the Old Testament record Hezekiah was king of the southern kingdom of Judah (online readers may use the 'search' button to find other references to Hezekiah in previous issues of Light). All except four have been found in southern Israel, around Jerusalem (see map overleaf).



The Old Testament describes Hezekiah as one of Judah's strongest and most faithful kings. His reign was however overshadowed by the constant threat of invasion by the Assyrians under their king Sennacherib. Hezekiah had plenty of time to prepare for such an invasion.

The construction of the watercourse now known as Hezekiah's Tunnel was a major piece of engineering designed to protect Jerusalem's water supply in the event of attack (see Light

Volume 23.4 page 18). Eventually the Assyrians invaded in 701 BC, and many of the cities of Judah were destroyed including Lachish, but with the notable exception of Jerusalem. Sennacherib decorated his palace walls with huge reliefs of the capture of Lachish (now in the British Museum), maybe to disguise the fact that he had failed to capture the most important city of all! (for the Bible's explanation, see 2 Kings 19. 32–37).



The 'lmlk' jars (and their contents) seem to fit perfectly within this period of Judah's history, with a strong king and effective central government preparing for invasion and laying up supplies in all the significant cities of southern Israel. The stores would need to be clearly identified to prevent fraud, and no doubt protected by severe punishments for any who interfered with them. Over 400 of these



The seal (circled) pressed into the handle of one of the pots. *Israel Museum*

jars have been found at Lachish (many now in the British Museum), some of them in the 'destruction layer' left when the Assyrians destroyed the city. This appears to confirm the close connection between the jars and the siege and capture of the city at that time.

The jars themselves, whilst quite large, are otherwise unremarkable – they are ovoid in shape (see picture above), undecorated and unglazed, around 60cm high and 40cm diameter, holding about 40 litres (9 gallons). Their unique status depends on the king's seal impressed into one of the clay handles. Hezekiah's personal seal is known from other sources (see Light Volume 28.1 page 7) and has the same winged motif that marks out the 'lmlk' pots. This pottery is a good example of how rigorous archaeology can flesh out the sometimes sparse Biblical account and confirm its authenticity.

**But there is something more important for us.**

comment

Isaiah was God's prophet at the time of Hezekiah, and he described the Jews of his day as like pots being formed by the divine potter, God Himself:

'...You are our Father; we are the clay, and you our potter; and all we are the work of your hand' (Isaiah 64.8; see also Jeremiah 18.6).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul takes the same idea and uses it to illustrate God's absolute authority over our lives:

'...O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour?' (Romans 9.20, 21).

What did Paul have in his mind when he talked about a 'vessel (or pot) *for honour and another for dishonour*'? Do more recent



translations help? Not really, as the following examples demonstrate:

‘Doesn’t the potter have the right to make a fancy bowl or a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?’ (Contemporary English Version).

‘...making with one part of the lump a lovely vase, and with another a pipe for sewage’ (J. B. Phillips New Testament).

‘...a potter has a perfect right to shape one lump of clay into a vase for holding flowers and another into a pot for cooking beans?’ (‘The Message’ Bible).

I think we may seriously doubt whether Paul had flower-arranging in his mind, and is it really dishonourable to cook beans? The translators’ emphasis on surface appearance is quite absent from Paul’s words.

It seems unlikely that Paul knew about the ‘Imlk’ pots, but in a way they seem a perfect example of his ‘*vessel for honour*’ – remarkable and honoured not because of any special beauty but because they were stamped with the king’s seal, they were royal property, designed exclusively for the king’s use and to preserve the lives of his people in a time of great trouble.

We too are clay in the hands of the potter, a work in progress. If we place our faith in Him and devote our lives to Him, we are stamped with His mark, we become His property, His ‘*special possession*’ (Malachi 3.17 RSV). As the world of unbelief batters us every day, we can be sure we will not be broken and lost in the siege, but live to serve and honour the ‘King of Kings’ for ever.

Roy Toms  
Norfolk, UK

LEFT: **“we are the clay, and you our potter”**

comment





Walking on the glass of the 'Coiling Dragon' in the Tianmen Mountains of China

## THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE

Many people are obsessed with amusement and the search for a bigger, better and more prolonged 'buzz' from whatever activity is presented, in an effort to obtain the ultimate experience. Just think of all the things in life which people really get a kick out of. Some spend their entire lives and resources on extreme sports and other exploits, in a never-ending search for a thrill which they believe will provide them with the memory of that ultimate experience.

Those who have conquered Mount Everest may think they have found it, but then there is the possibility of a flight into space aboard the Virgin Galactic spaceship, which has now received an operator's licence. The plan is that one day soon space pleasure trips will become a reality for those who can afford it.

'Heaven's Door Mountain' in China is noted for its stunning views. Thrill-seekers can now try the Coiling Dragon Cliff glass-bottomed walkway, one of three skywalks at Tianmen Mountain in Hunan

province. At 1,433 meters, the 1.5 metre wide glass walkway winds around the cliffs for 100 metres, overlooking the road aptly called the 'Avenue Leading to the Sky' (see picture opposite).

The facts of life are that we are born, grow old and die. During this time we experience good and bad health. Some are fortunate in the quality of their health throughout their lives. We might also have memories of some thrill which enhanced our feelings of exhilaration or fear for a brief moment in time. However, if we accept that human beings exist on this planet because they were created by God and are not here as a result of blind chance, then eventually we have to ask the question:

### **'Why are we here?'**

Many people during their lives have asked this question. Few pay little more than passing attention to the question and most dismiss it out of hand. The pleasures and ultimate experiences of life provide a distraction far more exciting than



determining for sure the answer to what is, on the surface, a philosophical question.

Acknowledging that there is a God and that He created all things for a purpose, places us in a position of responsibility to God and poses some fundamental questions:

- ❖ Why did He put us here?
- ❖ What does He expect from us?
- ❖ Is there a contract between God and man?

## GOD'S OBJECTIVE

Those who study the Bible would answer these questions positively, with the knowledge that God has made an offer to mankind. It is open to anyone who chooses not to amuse themselves to death, but rather to respond to His plan in order to achieve the divinely appointed objective.

### **This is the ultimate experience!**

According to the inspired words of the Bible, God has a plan with the earth and with the human race. Mankind has been placed in a position, superior to the animals, complete with the powers of reasoning and with a conscience. We are able to dominate the world's

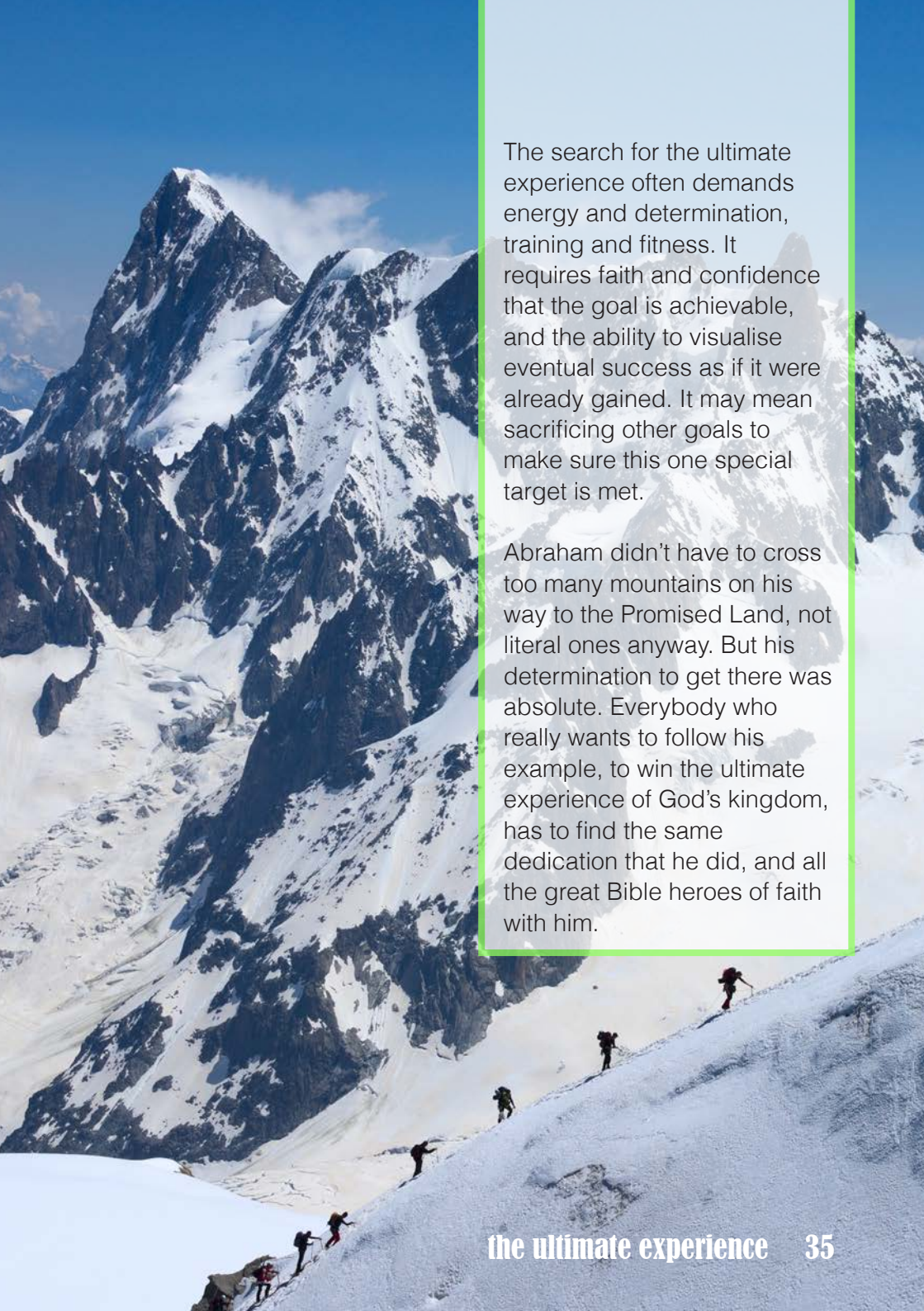
resources, because God arranged it that way from the beginning, as we read in the book of Genesis:

**'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth".'**

Genesis 1.26

God has an end result in mind for mankind, so our commitment must be to determine what that is and what we have to do as individuals to take part in that ultimate experience. The starting point has to be belief or faith in what has been promised. We can do no better than consider the promises made to Abram (name later changed to Abraham). He was a special God fearing person who was selected by God to be the ancestor of a great nation we recognise today as the Jews. God instructed Abram:

**'Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be**



The search for the ultimate experience often demands energy and determination, training and fitness. It requires faith and confidence that the goal is achievable, and the ability to visualise eventual success as if it were already gained. It may mean sacrificing other goals to make sure this one special target is met.

Abraham didn't have to cross too many mountains on his way to the Promised Land, not literal ones anyway. But his determination to get there was absolute. Everybody who really wants to follow his example, to win the ultimate experience of God's kingdom, has to find the same dedication that he did, and all the great Bible heroes of faith with him.

a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’.

Genesis 12.1-3

When Abram was in the land of Canaan, later to be called Israel, the promise was endorsed by God and further information was given to him:

‘...“Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants for ever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you”.’

Genesis 13.14-17

## GOD'S PROMISES

These promises were repeated to his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, (later renamed Israel) and their descendant King David. To all of these faithful men there was a common factor in the promises made – the inheritance of the land

would be given to them and their descendants for ever.

The ultimate experience identified was one that would last for ever not just an experience in their lifetime, the thrill of which would only become a lasting memory until they died.

Some 2,000 years after the promises were given to Abraham, the New Testament letter to the Hebrews explains why he and his descendants were selected. Read Hebrews chapter 11 for yourself as it makes it very clear that faith is the important characteristic that God is looking for. But the promises made to those heroes of faith were not experienced in their lifetime and that is explained as well:

‘...all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.’

Hebrews 11.39,40

How could they inherit the earth for ever as God’s reward for faithfulness, when the same reward has been offered to all generations from the earliest times to our own day? No, it is totally logical that the

reward is to be given to all the faithful at the same time in the future.

It's also important to confirm that those promises extend to us and you may be surprised to learn that the concept of the gospel message was preached and understood by Abraham through faith:

'...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness". Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all nations shall be blessed". So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham... For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise'.

Galatians 3.6-9,26,29

## GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH

We read in the Gospels that Jesus' mission whilst he was on earth, was

to preach the gospel or good news of the kingdom of God to all who would listen. He still speaks to us through these preserved records in the New Testament.

Jesus encouraged his disciples and in turn us, to pray for the kingdom. Many will be familiar with his model prayer, one line of which is '*Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*' (Matthew 6.10). In the previous chapter Jesus spoke about one of the characteristics of those who will inherit this heavenly kingdom: '*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*' (Matthew 5.5).

God's reward for faithfulness will be everlasting life in the kingdom established on earth which surely would be the ultimate experience. But as we think about our world today we realise that there need to be many changes to make this time a future which we can look forward to.

Here are six major points relating to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth:

- ❖ The Lord Jesus Christ is going to return to the earth (Acts 1.11).
- ❖ Jesus is going to destroy those who rebel against him and rule



as king on the earth (Psalm 2; 2 Thessalonians 2.7-10).

- ❖ The throne of the king will be in Jerusalem and will last for ever (Isaiah 2.2-4; Isaiah 9.6-7; Luke 1.32).
- ❖ There will be a great multitude of believers who will share in the kingdom with Jesus (Revelation 3.21, Revelation 5. 9-11).
- ❖ Many of these will be raised from the dead and among them will be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David (Daniel 12.1,2; Acts 24.15).
- ❖ Jesus' reign will result in peace and happiness for all mankind. This will be the kingdom of God on earth (Psalm 72; Isaiah 11).

This is just a small selection of Scriptural texts which demonstrate these points. There can be no doubt that eternal life in the kingdom of God will be the ultimate experience for everyone involved.

## GOD'S TIME FRAME

It is absolutely clear from the Scriptures that God has promised to establish His kingdom on earth. He has chosen a time frame in which to bring this about and everybody has the opportunity to become joined to the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

**'...he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead'.**

Acts 17.31

Whatever we experience in life is only fleeting and then just a memory. But a future beyond our wildest dreams has been planned by God. If we choose to follow the guidelines in the Bible and become interactively involved with His plan then we can look forward to enjoying the ultimate experience of eternal life on the earth, as the Apostle Paul told the believers at Corinth:

**'..."Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him." But God has revealed them to us through his spirit'.**

1 Corinthians 2. 9,10

The third part in this series about God's interactive plan is whether our destiny is just a matter of chance and this will be addressed in the next issue of 'Light on a new world'.

John Carpenter *Kent, UK*

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