

A vibrant field of red poppies under a sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. The poppies are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The background shows a line of trees under the colorful sky.

# Light

**...on a new world**

**VOLUME 29.4**

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

## In this issue

### **3** the Bible stands the test of time

Assyria and the Bible

### **11** signs of the times

### **17** from our mailbag

### **20** comment

a strong delusion

### **23** the Bible in today's world

war, terrorism, violence

### **30** from the editor

### **32** important Bible words

Forgiveness

## front cover

As this magazine goes to print the world remembers the 100th Anniversary of Armistice Day. The red poppy has been widely adopted as a symbol honouring all those who have lost their lives in war, based on the poem 'In Flanders Fields' written in 1915 by a Canadian soldier.

See article on page 23

**LIGHT BIBLE PUBLICATIONS**  
for details see page 39







**THE BIBLE STANDS**

# **THE TEST OF TIME**

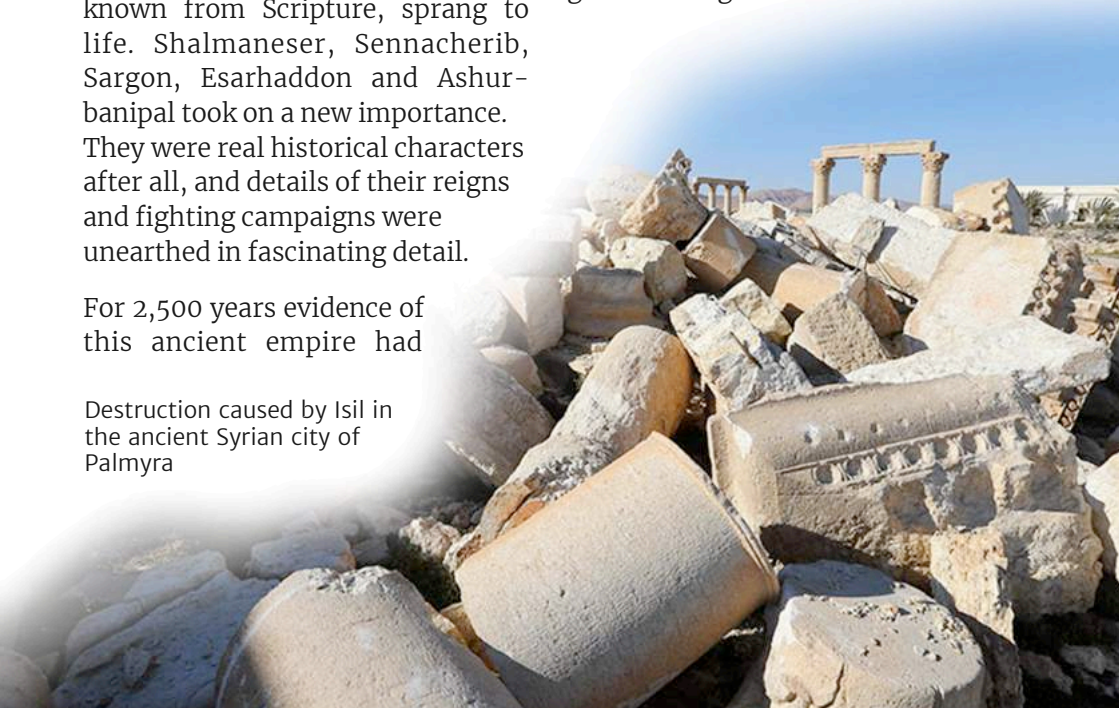
## **Assyria**

Between 2014 and 2017 extremists who were trying to establish an Islamic State, carried out gross acts of vandalism to ancient archaeological sites in Northern Iraq and Syria. Many of these sites were first discovered well over 150 years ago by pioneers in Biblical archaeology. The great Assyrian Empire, the existence of which had only previously been known from the pages of the Bible, had been unearthed. Nineveh was one of the cities discovered, the last capital of the Assyrian Empire. The names of Assyrian kings only previously known from Scripture, sprang to life. Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, Sargon, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal took on a new importance. They were real historical characters after all, and details of their reigns and fighting campaigns were unearthed in fascinating detail.

For 2,500 years evidence of this ancient empire had

Destruction caused by Isil in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra

remained buried under the desert sands. The British Museum (BM) in particular, and expeditions from other countries, extracted large quantities of clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform writing which could not be understood, as well as much larger stunningly carved objects from the royal palaces. Visitors to the Assyrian galleries of the BM in London can see displays of these incredibly ancient objects. Fortunately the vandalism is now over, and museums and institutions from around the world are co-operating with Iraqi archaeologists to help repair the damage and give training for



conservation of these unique sites. To those interested in the Bible, the study of such material can give much reassurance as to its historical reliability. In this article we will bring to your attention how the people and events of ancient Assyria underpin and support the Biblical account. Tens of thousands of tablets and fragments are held by the BM and other museums around the world. This is almost a limitless resource for study, and the material contains the evidence of the Bible's reliability.

Assyria, to the north of Israel, was a powerful and fearsome foe. It had been growing in power for some 1,500 years and by the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC had swallowed up both the Hittite Empire in the north and the might of Egypt to the south of Israel. The Assyrian tablets mention the names of ten kings of Israel and Judah:

**Omri,  
Ahab,  
Jehu,  
Menahem,  
Hoshea,  
Pekah,  
Uzziah,  
Ahaz,  
Hezekiah,  
and  
Manasseh.**

The kingdoms of Israel and Judah, in their closing years, were really under the domination of the Assyrian Empire. Providing they behaved themselves and paid heavy tribute, the Assyrian armies would leave them alone. The Assyrians had enough problems holding other parts of their far-flung empire together, suppressing uprisings and rebellions. But when, for example, Hezekiah rebelled after the capitulation of his wicked father Ahaz, Judah was invaded and *'all the fortified cities of Judah were taken'* (2 Kings 18.13).

The following table demonstrates how many Assyrian kings relate to Biblical people and specific events. All dates are BC and are approximate.

Map showing the extent of the Assyrian Empire 824–671 BC



<b>Shalmaneser III</b> 858–824	Famous black obelisk in British Museum showing Jehu king of Israel in obeisance
<b>Adadnariri III</b> 810–753	Unnamed, but he saved Israel from Benhadad III (2 Kings 13.5)
<b>Tiglath-Pileser III</b> also called <b>Pul</b> 744–727	Menahem, king of Israel, pays tribute to Pul of 1000 talents of silver for protection in 742 (2 Kings 15.19) Ahaz king of Judah, pays tribute for protection against Aram (Syria) in 742 (2 Kings 16.7). Ahaz goes to Damascus (v10). Forced deportations to discourage revolt
<b>Shalmaneser V</b> 726–722	Hoshea paid tribute in 726 (2 Kings 17.3). Captivity of Israel in 722 (2 Kings 17.6; 18.9)
<b>Sargon II</b> 721–705	Capture of Ashdod in 713 (Isaiah 20.1)
<b>Sennacherib</b> 704–681	Besieges Jerusalem, Hezekiah in rebellion builds famous water tunnel and city walls in 701 (2 Kings 18.13)
<b>Esarhaddon</b> 680–669	Mentioned in passing (2 Kgs 19.37, Isa 37.8) Responsible for influx of Samaritans (Ezra 4.2) Tablets show Manasseh of Judah a contemporary and vassal
<b>Ashurbanipal</b> 668–627 also called <b>Asnapper</b>	‘The great and noble Asnapper’ (NIV Ashurbanipal –Ezra 4.10) responsible for forced population migrations. Manasseh deported to Babylon, then returned to power: (unnamed in 2 Chron. 33.10–13). Assyria declines after his death



Panel from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

Let us now add a little detail to some of these examples, showing the relationship between Assyria and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

## Shalmaneser III (858–824)

The Black obelisk illustrating the campaigns of Shalmaneser III (BM – see picture above) was discovered by Austen Henry Layard in 1846. On one of the panels Jehu is shown prostrated before Shalmaneser (see detail above). It reads: ‘Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri. I received from him: silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves for the hand of the king, javelins’. The phrase ‘son of Omri’ simply locates Jehu as king of Omri-land, the Assyrian name for Israel at that time. Jehu rooted out all who belonged to the Omri dynasty

according to God’s decree (1 Kings 19.15–17).

## Tiglath-Pileser III

(744–727: also known as **Pul**)

We read that Menahem King of Israel paid him tribute money:

‘Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land’ (2 Kings 15.19,20).

Ahaz asked Tiglath-Pileser to save him from Rezin king of Syria, and so became an Assyrian vassal:



‘So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me.” And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king’s house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria’. 2 Kings 16.7,8

Ahaz then committed sacrilege by visiting Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser and made a copy of an Assyrian pagan altar to replace the bronze altar at the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kings 16.10–12).

We also learn from the tablets that in October 729 BC, Tiglath-Pileser assumed total control of Babylon, capturing the Babylonian king Nabu-mukin-zeri and having himself crowned as ‘King Pulu of Babylon’.

## Shalmaneser V (726–722)

It was this Shalmaneser who finally took away the Northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. We read that Hoshea the last king of Israel became an Assyrian vassal. However, Shalmaneser discovered a conspiracy by Hoshea with Egypt and characteristically destroyed all

rebels in a brutal invasion. That was the end of the Northern kingdom.

‘And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria...’ 2 Kings 17.4–6

## Sennacherib (704–681)

‘Sennacherib, the mighty king, king of the country of Assyria, sitting on the throne of judgment, before the city of Lachish. I give permission for its slaughter’. A relief from the palace at Nineveh shows the king outside Lachish on that throne.

The Prophet Isaiah records that Sennacherib sent the field commander to Jerusalem from his camp at Lachish (Isaiah 36.1–3).

The Taylor Prism (see overleaf) records Sennacherib’s campaigns including his unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem: ‘As for the king of Judah, Hezekiah, who had not submitted



to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams. ... I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for Hezekiah, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem. I then constructed a series of fortresses around him, and I did not allow anyone to come out of the city gates. His towns which I captured I

gave to the kings of Ashod, Ekron, and Gaza.'

The tribute given by Hezekiah is then mentioned, but in this account nothing is said of Sennacherib capturing the city of Jerusalem. This is because he failed, God intervening on Hezekiah's behalf according to the word of the Prophet Isaiah: *'Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: ' "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege-mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city," says the LORD. "For I will defend this city, to save it for my own sake and for my servant David's sake"'* (Isaiah 37. 33-35).

Sennacherib withdrew, his army devastated, and Isaiah goes on to record Sennacherib's assassination by two of his sons and names them: *'...Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place'* (Isaiah 37.38). Nowhere in the Assyrian tablets are the sons named, only in the Bible!

### Esarhaddon 680 -669

The youngest son of Sennacherib who described himself in this way: 'I am powerful; I am all-powerful –

The Taylor Prism



I am without equal among all kings'. At the height of his power in 671 BC, he conquered Egypt in less than a month. Around 1990 an inscription was found at Nineveh that reads: 'the one who treads on the necks of the people of Cilicia' (modern Turkey) and that he 'surrounded, conquered, plundered, demolished, destroyed and burned with fire twenty-one of their cities together with small cities in their environs...'

In 2018 another inscription was found in a terrorist's tunnel: 'The palace of Esarhaddon, strong king, king of the world, king of Assyria, governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the kings of lower Egypt, upper Egypt and Kush' (an ancient kingdom located south of Egypt in Nubia). The stela lists a number of subject kings from 'Beyond-the-River' (meaning west of the Euphrates), including 'Manasseh, King of Judah'.

## Ashurbanipal 668-627

'the great and noble Asnapper' of Ezra 4.10 (see back cover)

Ashurbanipal, who was born in Nineveh, was the last great Assyrian ruler who reigned for 41 years. After his death the empire began to crumble. The crown prince died suddenly and Ashurbanipal unexpectedly came to the throne. Educated, he wrote in three languages and assembled the first great library of cuneiform documents in the ancient world. 30,000 fragments and tablets are held by the British Museum. He rebuilt a destroyed Babylon and was utterly cruel and merciless to any who would not submit or rebelled. Little wonder that Jonah did not want to visit Nineveh! Ashurbanipal reconquered Egypt, and the Pharaohs reigned as vassals. Assyria reached its greatest extent in his reign, but constantly had to

Lion hunting, a favoured pursuit of the Assyrian kings



counter border problems and rebellions.

The Bible records how Manasseh king of Judah was taken captive (presumably having stepped out of line) but was then re-instated (2 Chronicles 33.10-13) though the Assyrian king himself is unnamed. On Ashurbanipal's death, around 627, civil war and rebellion resulted, and the Assyrian Empire declined in power.

In 612 Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar King of Babylon, rebelled and sacked and burnt Nineveh. The panels in the British Museum still bear the marks. Hence in 610 Josiah King of Judah was able to treat the former territory of the Northern kingdom of Israel as his own, and challenge Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo, who was travelling north to assist Assyria against the rebellion of Babylon. Josiah himself was killed in the battle (2 Kings 23. 29). Thus perished the last 'good' king of Judah.

## Conclusion

This brief historical survey is exciting, pointing out how the Scriptures dovetail with Assyrian records. As we noted at the start, the evidence has been buried for 2,500 years and only in the last 150 years or so has been uncovered by

the spade of the archaeologist to confirm the veracity of the Old Testament. More importantly, this adds emphasis to a greater truth. The whole Bible is reliable and exciting because as we read in the New 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' (1 Timothy 3.16,17).**

**Justin Giles**  
*London, UK*

Detail from the Esarhaddon stela showing conquered kings making supplication at the feet of their Assyrian overlord





# signs of the times

In the last issue we referred to the troubled times we live in.

We invited you to read a passage from the Bible and spend a minute or two comparing what's written with what you saw happening in the world and what you had read in the news media.

## perilous times and perilous men

This is the passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy:

**'But know this, that in the last days** perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!'

2 Timothy 3:1-5


How did you get on? I suggest that nothing much has changed in the last three months. These words of Paul are an apt description of the bad side of the societies that most, if not all of us, live in now. The gap between the rich and the poor remains. Our societies are as polarised as they were then, and the gap is widening.

So, are we living in '*the last days*' referred to in the above passage from the Bible? The present state of society is a good indicator that we are, and this means that we can expect Jesus to return to this earth very soon. There is so much suffering in this world and so much wrong that needs fixing for everybody's benefit, and human governments are just not up to the task!

## environmental threat

A recent lead story in the 'The Economist' magazine had the title 'In the line of Fire' and the sub-heading was 'The world is losing the war against climate change. Rising energy demand means use of fossil fuels is heading in the wrong direction'. The catalyst for the story is explained in the introduction to the article:





**‘EARTH is smouldering.** From Seattle to Siberia this summer, flames have consumed swathes of the northern hemisphere. One of 18 wildfires sweeping through California, among the worst in the state’s history, is generating such heat that it created its own weather. Fires that raged through a coastal area near Athens last week killed 91. Elsewhere people are suffocating in the heat. Roughly 125 have died in Japan as the result of a heatwave that pushed temperatures in Tokyo above 40°C for the first time. Such calamities, once considered freakish, are now commonplace.

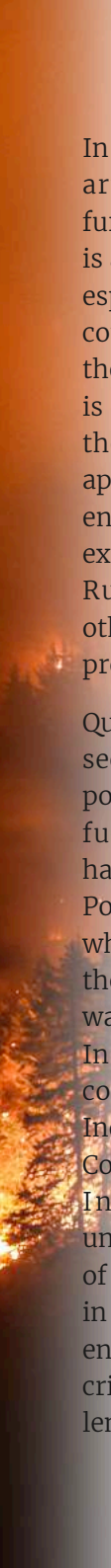
Scientists have long cautioned that, as the planet warms—it is roughly 1°C hotter today than before the industrial age’s first furnaces were lit—weather patterns will go berserk. An early analysis has found that this sweltering European summer would have been less than half as likely were it not for human-induced global warming. Yet as the impact of climate change becomes more evident, so too does the scale of the challenge ahead’.

### **why it is so hard to deal with the threat**

The article goes on to make the point that there are optimists who believe that wide scale decarbonization can be achieved. I would observe though, that the track record for getting and retaining agreement on this matter has been less than outstanding. One major example is the US pulling out of the Paris Accord.

# ***earth is smouldering***

**12 signs of the times**



In addition to this challenge the article suggests there are two further issues. The first is that there is an increasing demand for energy, especially in the rapidly developing countries of Asia. The use of coal, the most polluting form of energy, is on the rise in this region. Even as there is an increasingly 'green' approach to investment in clean energy in the West, the big oil exporters in the Middle East and Russia see a reason to invest otherwise, to satisfy and of course profit, from the demand in Asia.

Quoting from the article again: 'The second reason is economic and political inertia. The more fossil fuels a country consumes, the harder it is to wean itself off them. Powerful lobbies, and the voters who back them, entrench coal in the energy mix. Reshaping existing ways of doing things can take years. In 2017 Britain enjoyed its first coal-free day since igniting the Industrial Revolution in the 1800's. Coal generates not merely 80% of India's electricity, but also underpins the economies of some of its poorest states. Panjandrums in Delhi are not keen to countenance the end of coal, lest that cripple the banking system, which lent it too much money, and the

railways, which depend on it. Last is the technical challenge of stripping carbon out of industries beyond power generation. Steel, cement, farming, transport and other forms of economic activity account for over half of global carbon emissions. They are technically harder to clean up than power generation and are protected by vested industrial interests. Successes can turn out to be illusory. Because China's one million-plus electric cars draw their oomph from an electricity grid that draws two-thirds of its power from coal, they produce more carbon dioxide than some fuel-efficient petrol-driven models. Meanwhile, scrubbing co2 from the atmosphere, which climate models imply is needed on a vast scale to meet the Paris target, attracts even less attention'.

All in all, I see no real grounds for optimism that humankind will solve the many problems involved in even agreeing on the nature and severity of the threat, let alone finding solutions. The Bible descriptions of the nature of man make this unsurprising.

## what the Bible says

Two passages of Scripture come particularly to mind when we think about the damage humankind is doing to God's creation at so many levels:

**'The nations were angry, and your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and **should destroy those who destroy the earth.**'**

Revelation 11.18

The section I have highlighted in bold is especially interesting. That word '*destroy*' can mean physical or moral destruction. It's my view that it means both. It makes me really hope Jesus will come back soon. There is so much damage to be repaired.

The next Bible passage refers to the return of Jesus and gives an important prediction about the circumstances that will apply to our world before he returns:

**'And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; **men's hearts failing them from fear****

and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.'

Luke 21.25-28

The words highlighted in bold particularly interest me. As I was born in 1951, I lived through the decades of the Cold War between the USSR and the West. Throughout those years we all thought that the threat of nuclear destruction was a probable cause of '*men's hearts failing them from fear*'. It still might well be. But it could also be fulfilled by fear of the environment failing to the point where the continuity of life is severely compromised. I noted with particular interest therefore, another section of the story in 'The Economist': 'A poll last year of 38 countries found that 61% of people see climate change as a big threat; only the terrorists of Islamic State inspired more fear'.

## Obama talks 'strongman' politics

In the last article we talked about the rise of 'strongmen' under the



Former US President Barak Obama

guise of democracy and the threat this poses to democracy as a method of government. It was therefore especially interesting to read an article in 'The Age' (a Melbourne newspaper) in mid-July entitled 'Obama Speech in South Africa Warns Against Rise of 'Strongman Politics'. Former US President Barack Obama had been invited to South Africa to give a speech on the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. The speech lasted for 90 minutes and is 9,000 words long. It is readily available on the internet and I found it an interesting read.

'The Age' article summed it up: 'Without mentioning President

Trump by name, former President Barack Obama delivered a pointed rebuke of 'strongman politics' on Tuesday, warning about growing nationalism, xenophobia and bigotry in the United States and around the world, while offering a full-throated defence of democracy, diversity and the liberal international order... 'Look around,' he said. 'Strongman politics are ascendant suddenly, whereby elections and some pretence of democracy are maintained, but those in power seek to undermine every institution or norm that gives democracy meaning.' He said that our times are 'strange and uncertain' and that 'each day's news cycle is bringing more head-spinning and disturbing headlines.' Leaders, he said, are taking on the 'politics of fear, resentment and retrenchment' and undermining the international system established after World War II. He said of that kind of politics that 'It's on the move at a pace that would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. I'm not being alarmist; I'm simply stating the facts'.

Obama had a great deal else to say including some insightful analysis of the circumstances leading up to where we are now. He especially focused on social and wealth inequality. In passing, it's worth noting that the gap between rich



and poor is continuing to grow worldwide. I want to focus on just one more thing from his speech.

## **honesty in politics**

In talking about the current situation in the US regarding politicians' use of exaggerations and lies, Obama said that he was stunned that the notion of objective truth was now up for debate and how politicians make up facts and stand by baseless claims even after they are proved wrong (see also 'Comment' article page 20). 'We see the utter loss of shame among political leaders, where they're caught in a lie and they just double down and lie some more,' he said.

Consider this situation compared to what the Bible has to say:

**'Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool, much less lying lips to a prince.'**

Proverbs 17:7

**'Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal truthfully are his delight.'**

Proverbs 12:22

**'These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to him:**

**A proud look,**

**A lying tongue,**

**Hands that shed innocent blood,**

**A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that are swift in running to evil,**

**A false witness who speaks lies,  
And one who sows discord among brethren.'**

Proverbs 6.16-19

Compare the description of the things that God hates with the behaviour that features daily in the news media.

## **conclusion**

It's a pretty dire picture, isn't it! But did you notice the last part of the quotation from Luke 21? It reads: *'Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.'* Superficially this is a strange instruction! It's addressed to the disciples of Jesus and is saying to them: when you see the world in a mess – don't be alarmed – be happy! The reason is because Jesus is coming back, and he will fix the mess completely.

You and I can be a part of that wonderful positive future if we want to!

David Gamble

Melbourne, Australia



## from our mailbag

A reader has asked a question about the meaning of Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 10, as he felt betrayed by his siblings. The record in the gospel reads:

**'Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me'**

Matthew 10.34-37

It is clear from our reader's comments that he has been involved in a family conflict which resulted in

him feeling betrayed and in a state of mental turmoil.

There are several examples of this type of behaviour in the Scriptures and the most obvious seems to be the case of Joseph. We can read the account of what happened in Genesis chapter 37. Joseph was the favoured son of Jacob and hated by his ten half-brothers who were jealous of him. When he was sent by his father to see how they were getting on, he found them looking after the flocks in a remote place. The Bible says that *'when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him'* (Genesis 37.18).

Reuben the eldest brother persuaded them to lower him into a pit, intending to rescue him. When they saw some Midianite merchants making their way to Egypt, Judah persuaded them to sell him as a slave, which they did for 20 silver shekels.

When situations arise where we are not accepted by our siblings, it is very difficult to get matters into perspective but for peace of mind

we must try to move on and overcome the hurt that is felt. In Joseph's case, the outcome of his brothers' evil plan was for his good and for theirs also. He would be able to look back with hindsight to see all that happened was part of God's plan for the preservation of his whole family.

The first instance of sibling rivalry found in the Bible, is in Genesis chapter four and relates to Adam's sons. Conflict and jealousy drove Cain to murder his brother Abel because Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God as opposed to Cain's sacrifice which was not (see Genesis chapter 4.1-8).

In the New Testament we learn how Jesus' brothers were at first antagonistic towards him, not believing that he was fulfilling God's work by restricting his preaching to Galilee. They challenged him to do more saying

'... "Depart from here and go into Judea, that your disciples also may see the works that you are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world"' John 7.3-5

Later, Judas betrayed Jesus to the authorities for money. After this,

the ultimate denial of Jesus was to come from Peter who, when his own life was threatened, claimed he did not even know Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus is that we should forgive others, including siblings, for their hurtful behaviour, allowing the matter to be put behind us for our ultimate good. Although our natural thoughts are to bear a grudge and even seek revenge, the followers of Jesus need to learn from his example of forgiveness and forbearance as the following verses remind us:

'...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.' Matthew 5.44

'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' Matthew 6.14,15

'... be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.' Ephesians 4.3

'bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.' Colossians 3.13

Now in addition to these verses which help us not to bear a grudge (for our own benefit), often we cannot be sociable, friendly and at peace with our siblings unless they also wish to forgive and forget as well.

In the 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus is also encouraging us to love our enemies, which can be difficult and may not mean that they will necessarily reciprocate our feelings. But it does stop us from being overburdened as our feelings can eat away at us if we hold on to our hurt (Matthew 5.43-48).

So we come to the verses in Matthew chapter 10 which we need to read in context with the rest of this chapter. It is about the 12 disciples being sent out to preach, although it does also broaden out to apply to *'whoever confesses me before men'* (verse 32). Jesus is speaking here about conflicts which might arise due to an individual openly acknowledging God, his Son Jesus, believing the gospel message, being baptised and following Jesus as his disciples.

In the context of expressing this commitment, family conflicts can arise. However, one's family must not come before our allegiance to Jesus as expressed in verse 37. This includes believing the gospel message concerning the coming

kingdom of God to be established on earth and living our lives by his teaching as an expression of our love for him.

Jesus also experienced this family conflict at the beginning of his ministry:

**'When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind"'**  
Mark 3. 21 NIV

So, in conclusion, the verses in Matthew speak about family conflicts, where the cause is a person's beliefs and their desire to preach the gospel message. This resulted in persecution and even death for the followers of Jesus. Jesus has taught us that, when a choice must be made, we may also suffer family rejection in holding fast to our beliefs.

**Correspondence Secretary**



# comment a strong delusion

**‘a lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on.’** (Mark Twain, American author)

Mark Twain died in 1910. 200 years earlier an equally famous English writer, Jonathan Swift (‘Gulliver’s Travels’), had said something very similar:

**‘Falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it’.**

Today, truth and falsehood can be round the world in a few seconds – and it is more difficult than ever to separate one from the other. ‘Fake news’, ‘alternative facts’ and disinformation of every kind is a huge problem in our modern world.

Just where do we go for the truth?

How do we know what is true and what is not?

How much does it matter to us?

The great corporations that run the internet, the providers of the social media to which millions across the world subscribe, are under attack for not doing enough to control the ignorant and often deliberately malicious information they circulate. And it is obvious that many people choose to believe what they want to believe, whatever supports their own view of the world. They assess what is presented to them not on the reliability or otherwise of its source, but whether it affirms their own prior beliefs and prejudices.

A major new study by MIT Lab published earlier this year (2018) in the journal ‘Science’, found that false rumours travelled ‘farther, faster, deeper and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, but especially politics. On average it took true claims about six times as long as false claims to reach 1,500 people, with false political claims travelling even faster.’

None of this will come as any surprise to those familiar with the Bible and its view of human nature.

Only three chapters into the first book of Genesis we encounter the first lie: 'you will not surely die' (Genesis 3.4). The serpent in Eden claimed God had lied. The fruit which God had forbidden to Adam and Eve was attractive and the knowledge it promised very desirable. They chose the lie, not the truth. The course of human history was determined by their subsequent action.

The truth is often unattractive or inconvenient or demanding – the lie may offer short term satisfaction, immediate reward. The history of God's people in the Old Testament is a constant battle between truth and error, God's teachers and prophets fighting a losing battle against the false prophets who told the people just what they wanted to hear. When Jesus came he told them the unvarnished truth: '... you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition' and '... you are like whitewashed tombs' (Matthew 15.6; 23.27). He refused to tell them what they wanted to hear, that he would free them from the tyranny of Rome. So they put him to death, the one who was 'full of grace and truth' (John 1.14), and they preferred Barabbas, a murderer and a robber.

The apostles warned the early believers against constant attempts to corrupt the true gospel by those 'who exchanged the truth of God for a lie' (Romans 1.25). By the time Christianity had become the established religion of the Roman Empire, 'the truth' had been lost, the original message corrupted by pagan philosophy. The Apostle Paul had warned Timothy: '...they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables' (2 Timothy 4.4).

Today, one of the biggest lies of all has taken possession of most of the world – the falsehood that we are here by accident, a stroke of luck; there is no purpose to our existence and the future is unknowable. The 'big lie' generates a myriad smaller lies and the inundation of our world in lies, distortions and half-truths is the inevitable result.

Paul wrote:

**'God will send them strong delusion,  
that they should believe the lie'.** 2 Thessalonians 2.11

# comment

If we are following Jesus, it is clear that we have nothing in common with such a world, and we need to make sure we are not corrupted by it. 'You (God) desire truth in the inward being' says the Psalmist.

'... send out your light and your truth; let them lead me' (Psalm 51.6, 43.3 NRSV). Jesus' very last message to us describes in poetic terms what he has in store for those who follow him and who long for his truth – life in a radiant holy city, a 'new Jerusalem':

'... they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.'

Revelation 21.26.27

Outside the city, excluded from it, are 'whoever loves and practices a lie' (Revelation 22.15).

The writer of this Psalm was looking forward to that time when he wrote:

'Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.'

Psalm 85.11

## **Light 'on a new world' indeed!**

**That's what God has promised –  
*that's what we are waiting for.***

Roy Toms  
Norfolk, UK

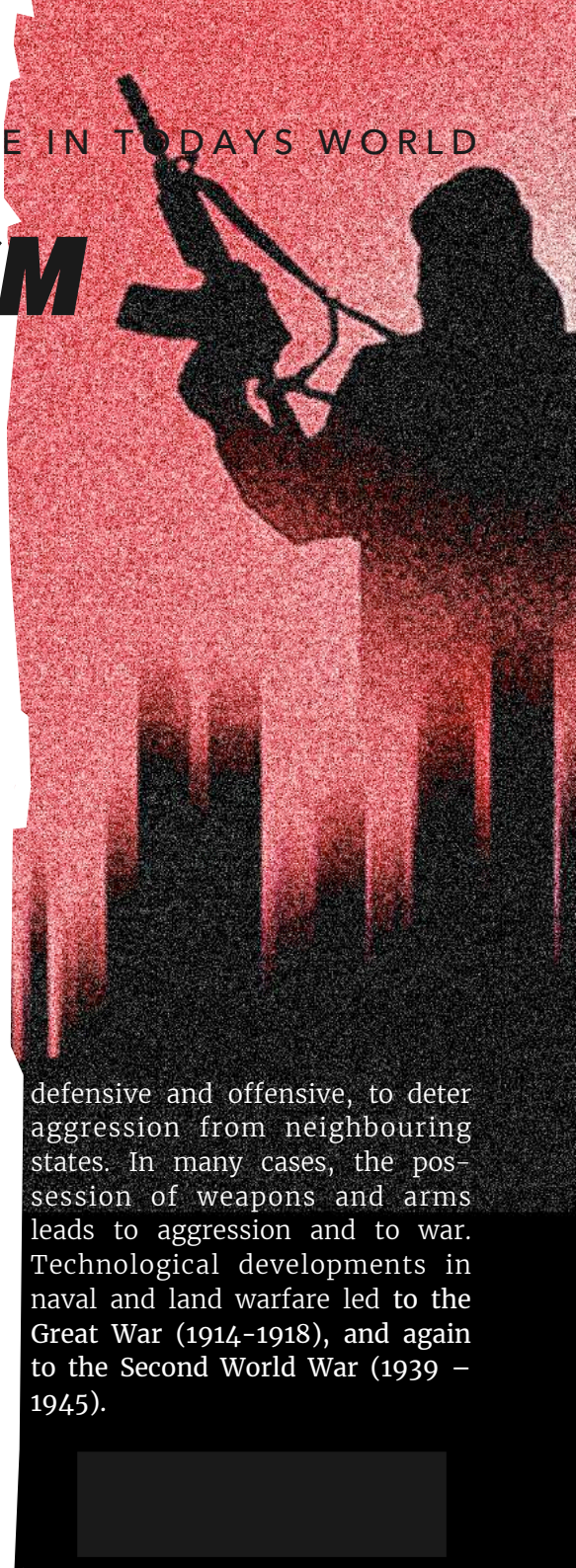
'send out your light and  
your truth;  
let them lead me.'

# **WAR** THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD **TERRORISM** **VIOLENCE**

You may think this is a depressing title for a magazine that is promoting the gospel! Surely the gospel (good news) is all about *'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests'* (Luke 2.14—all quotes from the NIV). True indeed! Jesus came preaching non-violence and said: *'Blessed are the peacemakers'*. (Matthew 5.9). His message was one of non-resistance to evil, not retaliating against aggressive behaviour from others; most important, loving your enemies!

This teaching that makes up the core of Jesus' message about interpersonal relationships, is totally at odds with the philosophy of mankind in general. They say 'you have to be strong; stand up for yourself; give as good as you get; do not show weakness'. Governments see the protection of their people as their prime responsibility. They spend vast amounts of money and resources in developing weapons,

defensive and offensive, to deter aggression from neighbouring states. In many cases, the possession of weapons and arms leads to aggression and to war. Technological developments in naval and land warfare led to the Great War (1914-1918), and again to the Second World War (1939 – 1945).



What does the Bible say about war?

Surprisingly, the Bible contains much history of war right from the early pages of the book of Genesis. It does not condemn war. It recognises it as a feature of human relations. In some cases, God commanded His people, the Jews, and others (e.g. the Babylonians) to make war where it was God's intention to punish, dispossess or destroy people or nations.

Bible teaching is about the battle between 'good and evil', between those who believe in God and those who ignore God completely. Ironically this is presented as a conflict, called warfare. The Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy to '*Fight the good fight of the faith*' (1 Timothy 6.12). The personal striving of the human spirit to overcome evil is described as a conflict, a war!

In the last book of the Bible, the enactment of God's judgements against the ungodly are described as wars, the outcome of which will be a new world order of everlasting peace and harmony; something the world craves but cannot achieve.

War is endemic, and it is institutionalised in our society. It provides employment for many millions of people across the world; not only fighting but making preparation by designing and

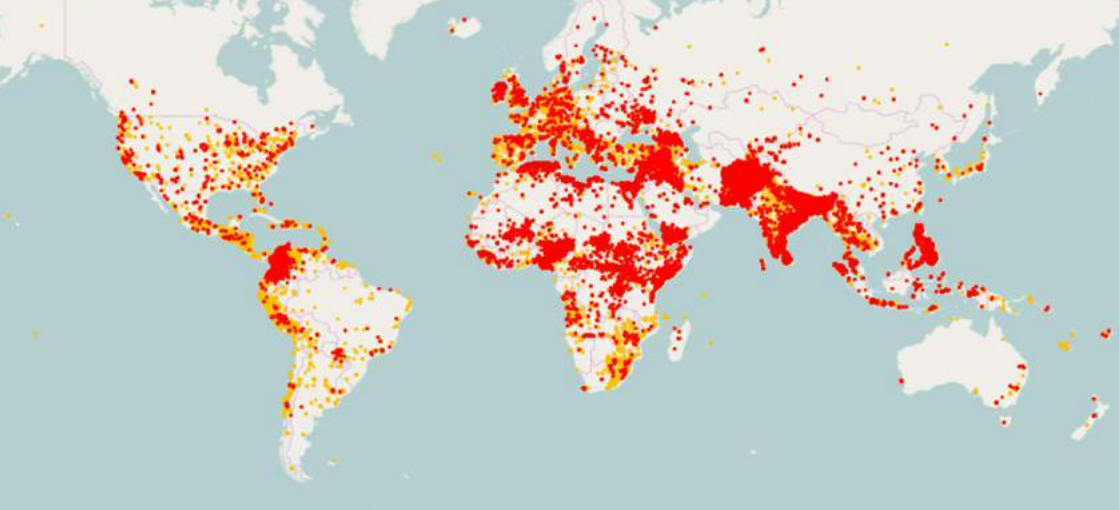
building the next generation of weapons and equipment. If all the effort and expense that goes into war was diverted to humanitarian causes and to helping the so-called enemy, the world would be a much better place!

## **are wars and terrorism signs of the end times?**

There are many things we might think of as indicating an inevitable progression to a climax – the end of the world. The Bible student can quote these words of Jesus: '*You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth-pains*' (Matthew 24.5–8). This may lead us to look at the events of our times and to wonder if we are experiencing a significant change in the frequency and effect of warfare.

Are our times any different from the rest of history? In an article in 'The Guardian' newspaper in 2002 entitled "War and Peace" the historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote: 'The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the most murderous in recorded history. The total number of deaths caused by or associated with its wars has been





The increase in worldwide terrorist activity over the last 45 years. Orange areas 1970–1999, red areas 2000–2015. Based on a total of 157,000 terror incidents.


estimated at 187 million, the equivalent of more than 10% of the world's population in 1913. Taken as having begun in 1914, it was a century of almost unbroken war, with few and brief periods without organised armed conflict somewhere. It was dominated by world wars: that is to say, by wars between territorial states or alliances of states.'

## how has war changed?

The newspaper article highlights many changes. Firstly, armed operations are often no longer in the hands of governments where the objectives are clear. Today's combatants have many objectives (the main one being a willingness to use violence!) Secondly, the distinction between soldiers and civilians has eroded to a point where increasingly civilians are not

only the victims but the focus of military operations. An example quoted is that in the first world war 5% of deaths were civilians, whereas in the second world war civilians made up 66% of the total number of deaths.

The blurring of lines between war and peace have led to the continual state of conflict, terror and civil breakdown, together with a willingness to break the so-called 'rules of war' using forbidden (e.g. chemical) weapons and brutal methods. We could summarise the trends as follows: there has been more war, more conflict, more suffering in our times, even as society has benefited from more advanced technology and a higher standard of living. But, as with earthquakes, floods and famines,



which have always existed, more people are affected because there are more people and more living in dangerous locations. War now affects civilians not just the armed forces.

## **individuals cause war**

We might think that national governments cause war. But generally it comes down to individuals: kings, queens, dictators, generals, politicians, usurpers, revolutionaries and oppressed peoples. Think how a few individuals caused the conflict in the so-called Caliphate of ISIL. Having been supplied weapons, they succeeded in terrorising large areas of Iraq and Syria. This caused Russia and the Western powers to be drawn into a conflict that was not in their backyard.

Much terrorism is revenge for past acts of war.

We can look back now and see that the 9/11 attacks in 2001 followed the shooting down of an innocent Iranian airliner over the Persian Gulf by a US warship. The Lockerbie airliner bombing has its roots in the reaction of Libya to rocket attacks on their country. This revenge terrorism is at the root of many atrocities in the Middle East among the Iraqis, Syrians, Israelis and the Palestinians.

In truth we could say that war always leads to more war. it is a negative spiral of hate and violence.

Nobody ever wins a war – the losses are too great.

## brother versus brother

The Bible records the earliest conflict between Cain and his brother Abel: *‘Cain said to his brother “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him’* (Genesis 4.8). This was a result of uncontrolled jealousy and resentment and Cain wanting something that Abel had – approval and status. The act of murder did not achieve anything positive for Cain; rather it brought banishment and isolation. How much better it would have been to talk to his brother and understand his feelings and resolve differences successfully!

The Apostle James wrote this about conflict:

**‘What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you. You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.’**  
James 4.1-4

This establishes the principle that conflict comes from within a person. Desire, greed, lust; all these

contribute to a feeling that you are entitled to have something that someone else has. James says this leads to quarrels and fighting. It is unrestrained human greed that leads to war.

## the Christian way

The teaching of Jesus is the opposite of this. It tells us to be unselfish, to seek the best for others and suppress our own desires. This is how Jesus lived and he gave his life as a ransom for the world. A true Christian would follow the path of seeking the highest good of others before self.

This attitude is incompatible with the human philosophy of strength and power which leads to war. Many Christians have suffered death for refusing to fight against oppression and persecution. The Christian has no answer to the problem of war in the world. He or she has only one battle to fight – against their own sinful human nature. The solution to war is in God’s hands. There will be a day of reckoning for the world when *‘he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead’* (Acts 17.31).

That man is Jesus Christ.

## **a time of trouble**

Wherever we are in the world, war and terrorism seem to be the headlines in our world's 24 hour, rolling news. This makes people concerned that they are at greater risk. It certainly makes people worry. Jesus prophesied of a time of confusion and bewilderment at the time of the end, just before his second coming: *'On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory'* (Luke 21.25).

In this figurative language, Jesus refers to the people and rulers on earth being in a state of perplexity; having no solution to the problems besetting them. Now it seems that global warming, however caused, is insoluble (see article 'Signs of the Times' page 11). If the nations cannot work together to solve the problem of war and suffering, how can we expect them to solve global warming? A dilemma indeed!

## **but God is in control**

God says in Isaiah: *'... I am the LORD and there is no other... I bring*

*prosperity and create disaster, I the LORD do all these things'* (Isaiah 45.6,7). This tells us that God is ultimately in control of the world and He will not let human beings destroy the Earth unless it is in His plan and purpose. If we keep this in mind we should not be afraid of the future but look at it from the viewpoint of God in the Bible: *'He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers... He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.'* (Isaiah 40.22,24) If we trust in an all-powerful, all-wise God then we will not have to fear the consequences of man's violent activities.

## **reassurance and future peace**

Mankind is totally incapable of preventing war and conflict. Why is this? The Bible tells us it is down to human nature and man's total rejection of God. This is summarised in the prophet Isaiah's words:

**"There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."**

Isaiah 48.22

Those who trust in God and believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and follow the path of discipleship that Jesus has shown by his teaching will be saved. He said to his disciples:



**‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom’** Luke 12.32.

The kingdom that Jesus referred to will replace all human rule and authority as the prophet Daniel foretold. Like Jesus in that passage from Luke 21, he predicted a time of trouble and turmoil in the world, when there would be a mixture of weak and strong nations and then there would be a world-shaking change:

**‘In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed...It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever.’**

Daniel 2.44

The effect of this will be enduring peace. The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the time when the kingdom of God will be a reality:

**‘...The Law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruninghooks.**

**Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more’**

Isaiah 2.3,4.

**This is no pipe dream – it is a divine promise that cannot fail! !**

Rowland Tremaine  
Suffolk, UK

***after the storm,  
the peace***

**war, terrorism, violence 29**





## from the editor

### ‘What’s in a name?’

This well-known phrase has its origin in one of Shakespeare’s plays (Romeo and Juliet: Act 2 Scene 2) and reminds us that our names are not important when it comes to assessing character. Apart from personal names, most organisations are given a name to distinguish them from others. This magazine is published by the ‘Dawn Christadelphians’, a name which may not be familiar to you.

The name ‘Christadelphians’ simply means ‘brethren in Christ’. We are a community of believers active in the United Kingdom and many other parts of the world. As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that the ‘gospel’ we preach is a true reflection of the beliefs and practices of the first century Christian church. The Christadelphians’ aim in life is two-fold – firstly to understand God’s will and secondly to try and carry it out.

We believe that God’s will is only revealed in His inspired Word, the Bible. Therefore, reading and understanding the Bible is of primary importance to us. Jesus frequently rebuked his contemporaries for their ignorance of the Scriptures and pointed out that their problems arose from their lack of knowledge of God’s Word. For this reason we attach great importance to reading and understanding the Bible message.

We believe in one God, the Creator of all things. The Lord Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son, who is central to God’s plan for the redemption of the human race (1 Corinthians 8.6; 11.3). By his sinless life, during which he overcame all the weaknesses and temptations that are part of human nature, he laid the foundation for the forgiveness of our sins and salvation from death. By his sacrifice on the cross he died as our representative, not as a substitute, for we are still sinners in need of forgiveness.

God raised Jesus from the dead, which the Scriptures show was a physical, bodily resurrection. By this means, God has given us an example of the true Christian hope of resurrection (1 Corinthians

15.20-24). Death is a state of unconsciousness from which the only escape is by the resurrection of the body. The resurrection of Jesus is God's guarantee that He will send him a second time, not as a suffering servant to live and die for the sins of the world, but as God's appointed king (Acts 17.31).

We believe God's promise that those who accept this 'good news', which is the meaning of the word 'gospel', can share in the glory that shall be revealed when the kingdom of God is established on earth. We believe that God has made known certain conditions which it is vital that the true Christian accepts. These are firstly, that '*without faith it is impossible to please him*' (God) (Hebrews 11.6). Secondly, that baptism by immersion in water is essential for salvation (Mark 16.16). Faith or belief comes first, followed by baptism. We cannot neglect these two fundamental principles if we wish to be associated with the saving work of Jesus.

We believe that the follower of Christ must be a light in this dark world which, in the main, knows neither God nor the power of His Word. He or she must be active in overcoming evil, first in themselves, then, by good example, seek to guide and influence others. Difficult as it may be, we believe

that the use of violence against anyone is un-Christlike, as is also the refraining from doing good when it is in our power to do so.

The knowledge of God, received from His Word is profitable for directing a person's life in the right way. Giving honour to God is of the greatest possible benefit to us. Without this source of Divine wisdom, men and women will only do what is right in their own eyes.

As the Lord Jesus gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, so we believe that only the Word of God can enlighten the mind. With this gift of seeing and hearing, Jesus' followers stand equipped to live, not just to exist. We can then, through faith, stand firm and secure in all the experiences of life, looking beyond the temporary interruption of death to resurrection and immortality at the coming of the Lord.

This briefly, is the basis of our beliefs and the foundation of our hope. To know the will of God is not a 'one-off' gaining of technical expertise – it is the dedication of a life in service to Him. It is our desire to impart something of the enthusiasm and joy this knowledge brings, to the readers of this magazine.

Editor

# Forgiveness

The Bible reveals to us a God who is essentially loving and forgiving towards His children. His Son Jesus was the same, reflecting the character of his Father, and he is the model and inspiration for our own lives. He shows us how we should be loving and forgiving to those around us when they offend or hurt us in some way.

What is it about us that God needs to forgive, and why is it so important? Early in the book of Genesis, we read that Adam and Eve did something which was contrary to a specific divine command – they sinned against God. As a direct consequence of this all their descendants became subject to sin and death. The Apostle Paul put it very succinctly in these words:

‘Therefore just as sin entered the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.’

Romans 5.12 NIV

The Bible gives us information about how we can escape from the problems which have resulted from that first sin. The New Testament tells us to recognise when we have done wrong (1 John 1.8). It also explains how we can seek mercy and forgiveness from God through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4.15,16).

The Bible tells us so much about the goodness of God and it can be hard for us to think that if we’ve done something wrong, God can still value us and want us to be part of His plan for the world. This includes a future place in His kingdom on earth and eternal life, even though we might think we are not worthy. But if we look for complete forgiveness, the Scriptures tell us how we can find it.

## the example of David

David was a king of Israel, and he is recorded in the Bible as having led a godly life. He is described in the Old Testament as ‘*a man after his (God’s) own heart*’ (1 Samuel 13.14). However, sometimes he failed. His

biggest failure led him to write Psalm 51, which explains his trust in God when he realised he had done wrong. Many Bibles have a heading over this Psalm which alludes to David's sin (see 2 Samuel 11). It reads 'A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba'. David's prayer is:

**'Have mercy upon me, O God,  
according to your loving-  
kindness; according to the  
multitude of your tender mercies,  
blot out my transgressions. Wash  
me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.'**

Psalm 51.1,2

David's words describe God's forgiveness in a way that we can all relate to. Although you may have spilt something on the pages of a book and made it quite hard to read, the act of deliberately blotting something out is much more focused than that. It describes the act of erasing or removing all visibility and memory of the original, so that it's not possible to make out the original text. This is an excellent description of the way God has planned to work for men and women who have faith in Him; those who recognise their sinful state and seek God's forgiveness and reassurance for the future.

God wants to make it obvious that there's no point trying to remember our past sins. Through the act of forgiveness, He is able to completely '**blot out**' what happened and write over it entirely with something better. But to achieve this forgiveness and loving care from God, there are some other steps we must observe and follow.

## **a way of escape**

Decay followed by death was the punishment meted out by God when the first human pair, Adam and Eve, failed to obey Him. This brought sin into the world and all their descendants are subject to what the Bible calls '*the law of sin and death*' (Romans 5.12; 8.2). But God made a way of escape from the punishment of death. In the process of rescuing the faithful from the permanent fate of death, and to allow them to change their way of life into something better, Jesus Christ was born and carried out his mission to save sinners (Matthew 1.21; 9.13). He was born a human being like us, but he was also the Son of God through the operation of the Holy Spirit on his mother Mary (Luke 1.35).

Against the contrasting background of the rituals and sacrifices that were required under the Law of Moses, which couldn't bring lasting

forgiveness of sins, the teaching of Jesus brought a new message of grace and mercy to the people of his day:

‘But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them ... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For he is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven’.

Luke 6.32-33, 35-37

## the importance of Christ’s sacrifice

This teaching of Jesus reflected on the work he was committed to doing during his ministry. He said: ‘*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance*’ (Luke 5.32). It was also a reminder of his future work to be accomplished when he returns to the earth, to cleanse it from sin and death and

establish the kingdom of God. The culmination of his work was to commit himself to a sacrificial act – his crucifixion at the hands of his enemies. This would be a once-for-all offering, no matter the sins or shortcomings of those he was representing. If believers would acknowledge their sins, they would always be able to seek forgiveness. That applies to all those who take to heart and respond to the gospel message, even in this present day!

Jesus died and was raised from the dead. He had followed his Father’s commandments to the letter, and there was no way death could have permanent power over him (Romans 6.9). He knew very well that his life would end in suffering and a cruel death. He prayed for God’s will to be done and went through the gruelling preparation for his death. He was alone in the darkness of Gethsemane – his disciples had fallen asleep (Luke 22.39-46).

This sacrifice does not only show how much love Christ had towards his followers and those that would become his followers down the ages; it also shows how God in His love for us always had a plan from the beginning. He determined to carry it out even though it involved the sacrifice of His only begotten Son (Acts 2.23). The Gospel writer



John summed it up in these well-known words: *‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life’* (John 3.16).

The Apostle Paul wrote similar words to the believers at Rome:

**‘But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.’** Romans 5.8-11

## **Christ as a mediator**

Paul’s words remind us that Christ’s saving work actively continued beyond his resurrection and ascension to heaven. This is confirmed by the letter to the Hebrews where we read that *‘he (Jesus) has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant,*

*which was established on better promises’* (Hebrews 8.6). Note how the writer contrasts the Law of Moses (the old covenant) with a *‘better covenant’* and *‘better promises’*. The way to approach God has been opened up to all who have faith in the saving work of Jesus. We can come closer to God through our mediator Jesus and obtain forgiveness of sins if we truly desire to repent.

This better ministry as a mediator, means that Jesus watches over the lives of the faithful and can represent their plight before God. Having been subject to the same temptations as us he can sympathize with us in our weakness (Hebrews 4.15). In this way, those who come to God through him in prayer, can be forgiven and look forward to the fulfilment of those *‘better promises’*, to be saved from the eternity of death and receive the gift of eternal life (Romans 6.23).

## **forgiving others**

At the start of this article, we mentioned the importance of forgiving others. We do not have the power and authority to *‘blot out’* the sins of others as God did for David. However, it is an important feature of Biblical forgiveness that we must still actively forgive those for the wrongs done to us. To do

this we demonstrate that we have the mindset which accepts that God is willing to forgive us beyond our understanding.

**‘The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory is to overlook a transgression’.** Proverbs 19.11

The words of the Lord’s prayer are another reminder of this responsibility:

**‘forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us’.** Luke 11.4

It can be observed that, in this model prayer of Jesus, and in the passage that we looked at in Luke chapter 6, there is a need for us to forgive those who wrong us if we are to receive the ultimate forgiveness from our Heavenly Father. We need to be constantly able to forgive and overlook the evil someone may do us, knowing that there is even greater forgiveness waiting for us, if we follow God’s way as demonstrated in the life of His Son Jesus.

When Jesus returns we want him to find us being generous and forgiving to those who may owe us something, or those who have harmed us, perhaps having hurt our innermost feelings. The objective of a follower of Christ must be to try

and imitate his example and this may be hard for us to do. Even when he hung upon the cross his words were: *‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’* (Luke 23.34).

By showing true forgiveness, we also show the Christian way of life to others. Sometimes our efforts to talk to others about Christianity are not successful. But on many occasions, the good character of



ordinary people has led others to trust them, and eventually to share their faith in Christ.

## **an example of true forgiveness**

There are some well-known examples of people who have forgiven at a moment's notice, opening up a new way of life to the people they forgave. One example will suffice. In Acts chapter 9, we read about the Lord sending Ananias to a man called Saul, who became the Apostle Paul. Saul, in his misplaced zeal for his religion based on the Law of Moses, had done an enormous amount of harm to the early believers. He was the sort of person who alienated himself from understanding and receiving the message spread by the followers of Jesus. Ananias had heard of his reputation and was fearful of it.

Yet Ananias only needed one simple instruction to go and connect with Saul, and to strengthen him in his new-found way of life. Saul's life had changed, and in an instant. His past sins had been forgiven and Ananias had to show that same forgiveness. In a few words, he was

instructed to put aside his fears, to show a forgiving spirit, go to Saul and baptize him into the saving name of Jesus (Acts 9.15).

This reminds us that it is right to forgive others and show them God's way. So quick was this forgiveness that we don't even explicitly read words recording it. But it was necessary, otherwise the full weight of the message of Christianity would never have impressed itself on Saul. And Saul would never have become Paul, that person who trusted God enough to spread the gospel message to the Gentiles.

## **conclusion**

The importance of forgiveness is clearly spelled out for us in a number of Bible passages. When reading your Bible, think about the times when somebody had to forgive someone else, otherwise the amazing work of God could not have been done. In summary, we can remember the teaching of these key passages:

### ***the words of Jesus to his disciples –***

**'Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven**

LEFT: Jesus' parable known as the Prodigal Son illustrates God's overflowing love and forgiveness towards his wayward children.

Etching by the Dutch painter Rembrandt

times in a day returns to you,  
saying, “I repent”, you shall  
forgive him’. Luke 17.3,4

***the words of Jesus to Saul after  
his conversion –***

‘I will deliver you from the Jewish  
people, as well as from the  
Gentiles, to whom I now send  
you. To open their eyes and to  
turn them from darkness to  
light...that they may receive  
forgiveness of sins and an  
inheritance among those who  
are sanctified by faith in me’

Acts 26.17,18

***and the words of the Apostle  
John to believers –***

‘If we say that we have no  
sin, we deceive ourselves,  
and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins,  
he is faithful and just to  
forgive us our sins  
and to cleanse us from all  
unrighteousness’.

1 John 1.8,9

James Wharton  
Surrey, UK



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## this magazine

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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.

We believe that over the centuries the original message of Christianity has been corrupted. **Light** is published to provide a better understanding of the true Christian hope.

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

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