



Light

...on a new world

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

VOLUME 30.2

in this issue

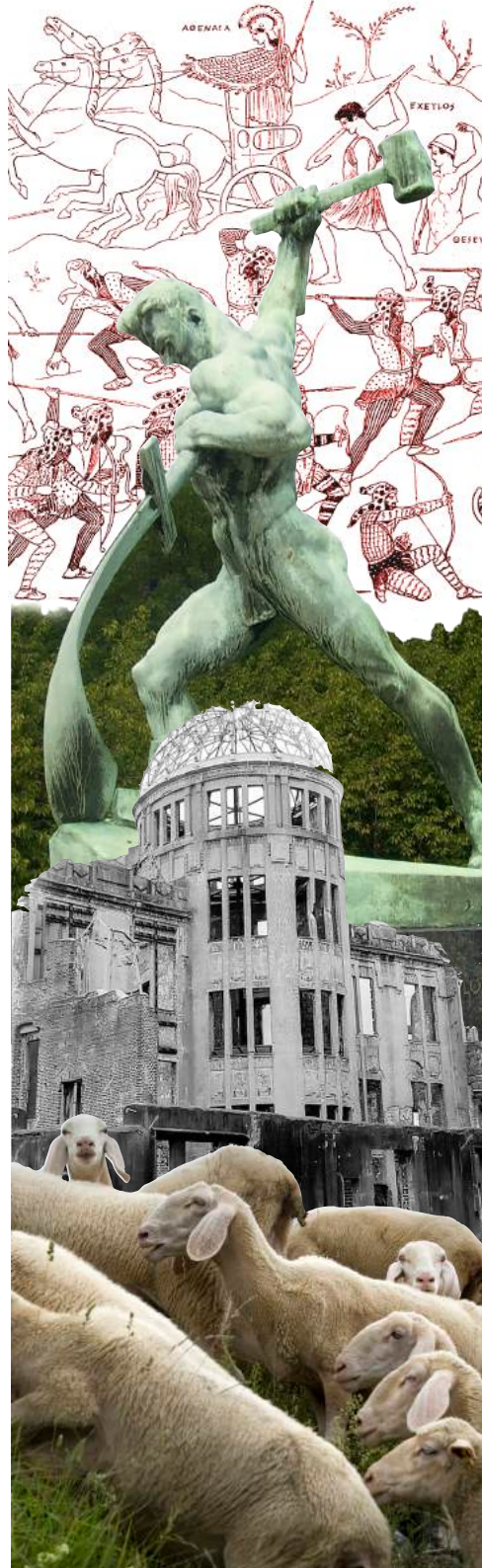
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17th century painting of the tree of life from the Palace of Shaki Khans, Azerbaijan. See article on page 10

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The kings of Media and Persia

One of the great prophecies of Scripture that readers of this magazine will be familiar with is Nebuchadnezzar's dream recorded in the book of Daniel chapter 2 (see the previous issue of Light, page 4). In this remarkable vision of a metallic image, the prophet Daniel reveals to the king of Babylon that there was to be a succession of four empires. Here is God's plan for the world set out in advance, culminating with the collapse of the image and His kingdom growing on earth like a great mountain. Babylon was represented by a gold head, but the next power was symbolised by the chest and arms of silver. That power was the

Medo-Persian Empire, which is the subject of this article.

(Send for 'Light on Bible Prophecy' for a full explanation of this vision – see page 39)

Cyrus II Medes and Persians in alliance

The Median Empire became aligned with the Persian Empire after 609 (BC as are all dates in this article), as both had assisted Babylon in overthrowing Assyria. But then a Persian prince called Cyrus was born into this dynasty between 590 and 580, his father being king of Persia, and his mother a princess of the Medes. When Cyrus took the throne the two allies became one. Cyrus then moved against Babylon and his military strategy was unstoppable.

the Bible stands

THE TEST OF TIME

The tomb of the great Persian king Cyrus at his palace in Pasargadae in modern Iran, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



In October 539 the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar, met an untimely end. He was indulging in a drunken feast with his lords, using the very cups and plates taken from Jerusalem's temple. Suddenly there was a Divine intervention that brought proceedings to an abrupt halt, and Belshazzar literally quivered with fear. The fingers of a man's hand were seen writing a message on the wall:

'MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN'

Daniel 5.25

The meaning of the message was unfathomable and the prophet Daniel was sent for. The message was from the God of Israel, a message of doom. For even as Belshazzar feasted, the victorious armies of the Medes and Persians were already closing in on Babylon. God's message to Belshazzar was this:

'God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; ...You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; ...Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.'

Daniel 5.26-28

Daniel confirms: *'That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain...'* (5.30) but otherwise the takeover was relatively peaceful according to clay tablets discovered which record the date as 12th October (an ancient Babylonian text called the Nabonidus Chronicle). The king of Media and Persia was Cyrus the Great, and his general leading the invasion was Gobryas. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus (484-425) recorded how the army diverted the river Euphrates that runs through the city, lowering the water level sufficiently for the troops to wade along through the water at the dead

The 'writing on the wall' is still a popular expression for impending disaster. Here is Rembrandt's painting of the Bible account.



of night, right into the heart of the city.

On 29th October Cyrus himself entered the city, according to the Nabonidus chronicle. Daniel 5, however, refers to Darius the Mede 'receiving the kingdom'. Though we cannot be certain, it seems likely that Gobryas (also known as Ugbaru in Babylonian sources) was the one referred to who ruled for Cyrus for the time being. This man was previously closely associated with ruling the Medes, and so could legitimately be called Darius the Mede as mentioned three times in the book of Daniel.

The Medes and Persians together were the new world power, the chest and arms of silver of the image prophecy, and Cyrus regarded himself as an enlightened ruler with new methods. Cyrus was so important in God's purpose that his name is mentioned no less than 22 times in the Bible! And His purpose was that King Cyrus should act as a 'saviour' figure to deliver the Jews from slavery and return them to their own land. The prophet Jeremiah had clearly stated that after 70 years of servitude, the Jews would return to Israel (Jeremiah 29.10).

Cyrus was named in the Bible by the Prophet Isaiah, outlining his work on behalf of God's people, some 120 years before he was born!

Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had left Jerusalem in ruins and destroyed its temple. Cyrus however was destined to change all this. The mission of Cyrus was predetermined by God 'Who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure", saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built", and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid"' (Isaiah 44.28). In the very first year that Cyrus ruled Babylon he made a decree allowing the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. This is recorded in the first chapter of the book of Ezra. Cyrus said to the Jews:

'All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? May his God be with him!

Now let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (he is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever remains in any place where he sojourns, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the free-will offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.' Ezra 1.2-4

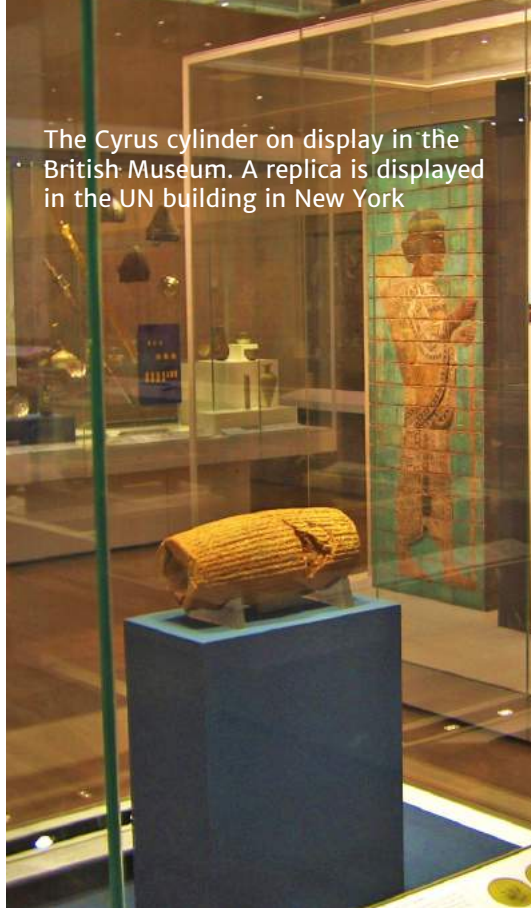
About 140 years ago an amazing object came to light in Babylon's

ruins. A small clay cylinder was discovered, closely written, with a proclamation made by Cyrus himself, dating from the exact time of his conquest of Babylon. Amongst many statements made, Cyrus includes his policy, exactly in line with the proclamation made to the Jews recorded by Ezra. Whilst extolling himself as a benefactor of the citizens of Babylonia who improved their lives, he states that he repatriates displaced people and restores their temples across the region. What an endorsement of Scripture this is. This priceless treasure is on permanent display in the Iranian gallery of the British Museum (see right).

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel contain clear prophecies of a return to the land by the Jews, some short-term and some much longer term. The return under Cyrus and later Persian kings fulfilled the short-term prophecies. The Jews' return to the land in more recent times fulfils the long-term prophecies.

Cambyes II

Cyrus died in battle, fighting a campaign against tribal rebels in December 530. Remarkably, his tomb has been revered over many centuries and preserved to this day. He was succeeded by his son Cambyes without dispute, who though not directly named in the Bible, made a



The Cyrus cylinder on display in the British Museum. A replica is displayed in the UN building in New York

conquest of Egypt in 525, a campaign that dominated his eight year reign.

The Book of Ezra tells us that the two main leaders in this restoration period were Zerubbabel, a direct descendent of the kings of Judah, and the Priest Jeshua. The rebuilding project was fraught with difficulties. Work started with enthusiasm, but then stopped during the reign of Cambyes (530-522) because of fierce opposition by the local population, who had falsely accused the Jews of rebellion, a line which gained

the sympathetic ear of the king. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus paints a picture of Cam-byses as a mad king who killed his younger brother Smerdis, the next in line to the throne, grossly offended the Egyptians, and married his two sisters! Whatever the truth of the matter, it was his lance bearer, Darius, who appears to have led a conspiracy against his master which led to Cambyses' untimely death, and Darius crowning himself king.

Darius I

This Darius features many times in the Biblical record. His reign, and the next under Xerxes, were the pinnacle of Persian power. These were the years of monumental struggles between two deadly rivals. The Persians had one aim, to conquer Greece, and the Greeks were equally determined to conquer Persia. One of the memorable events of Darius' reign was his failed invasion of Greece and defeat at the Battle of Marathon in 490. Before the battle Darius is said to have shot an arrow into the air and called "Zeus grant me to take vengeance on the Athenians" (in Greek mythology, Zeus was the king of the ancient Greek Gods). Zeus let him down badly!

The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, meanwhile, had been delayed for 16 years, and it was in the

reign of Darius I (522-486) that the edict of Cyrus was discovered and re-issued. The book of Ezra record this:

'Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives ... And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus: In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid...".'

Ezra 6.1-3

The temple was finally completed in 516 and it survived to New Testament times when Herod the Great built a magnificent temple to replace it.

Xerxes

Darius' son Xerxes took the throne in 486 aged 36 and reigned for 18 years. Again he took on the mantle of his fathers and fought Greece! Xerxes is one of the candidates for being the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther (King James version). We can't be sure, because another possibility is his son Artaxerxes I. However the New International Version translators are in no doubt as to the identification. The Book of Esther commences:

'This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who

ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials.’

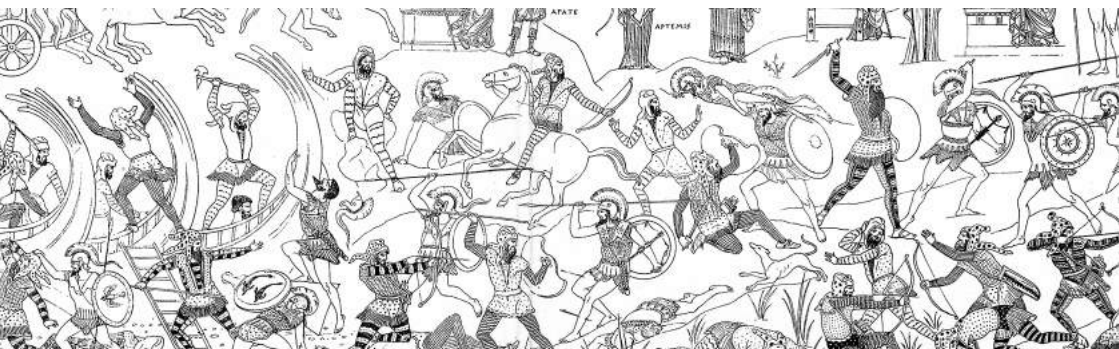
Esther 1.1–3 NIV

The book of Esther records how the Jews in Persia were delivered from annihilation (just one of many attempts in their turbulent history). It was at this point that Vashti the queen refused to obey the king’s command and was banished. Also at this point, history records how Xerxes vigorously prepared for a Greek invasion to get back at the Athenians and avenge the Marathon defeat. Herodotus says he crossed into Greece across the Dardanelles on a flimsy pontoon bridge made of flax and papyrus ropes with an army of one million men, though modern estimates are 60,000. He had 10,000 elite troops called ‘The Persian Immortals’, plus a fleet of ships supplied by his allies.

This time he beat a Spartan army at Thermopylae, gaining control for a short while of mainland Greece. This

war lasted four years, and he returned home in the seventh year of his reign. If Xerxes was the Ahasuerus of Esther, this would fit perfectly with a time of great feasting on his return and the choice of Esther as the new queen, four years after the Vashti incident. Of the Jewess Esther it is recorded: ‘*She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign*’ (Esther 2.16 NIV).

At home he completed many of his father’s unfinished projects, like the East West Royal Road, and the grand palace at Susa, called Shushan in the Bible, mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah and 18 times in the book of Esther. Susa was twice the size of the palace of Darius! The luxury of the palace described in the Book of Esther is borne out completely by archaeology: ‘*... in Shushan the citadel ...in the court of the garden of the king’s palace. There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and*



white and black marble' (Esther 1.5,6). History records that in 464 Xerxes was murdered by his disaffected son Artabanus, with the help of a eunuch, which triggered murder and counter-murder, resulting in another son Artaxerxes coming to power.

Artaxerxes I

King Artaxerxes is mentioned 14 times in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. He reigned for 41 years, from 465 to 424. History records him being called Artaxerxes Longimanus (longarm), a name given to him because one of his arms was longer than the other. He faced a revolt in Egypt, but he tried a new strategy against his arch enemy the Athenian Greeks, by funding their other enemies and adversaries (in the same way as modern nations still do), instead of spilling Persian blood. Artaxerxes is also a possible candidate for being the husband of Queen Esther, mainly because of his two declarations in favour of the Jews, to Ezra in his seventh year and to Nehemiah in his 20th year. First, the detailed and generous decree given to Ezra to reinstate the Temple

worship in Jerusalem is recorded in full in Ezra 7 verses 11–28. Secondly, Nehemiah 2 verses 6–8 records written letters of authority from Artaxerxes in favour of Nehemiah's request to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. Significantly verse 6 records *'the Queen also sitting beside him'*. If that wasn't Queen Esther, then why was she mentioned? If it was Esther the Jewess influencing the king, this would explain his favour towards the Jews. The Jewish historian Josephus supported this view.

Other Persian kings reigned until Alexander the Great of Greece swept Persia aside in a spectacular series of victories over a 10-year period from 334, stamping the influence of the Greek language and culture on the region that remained through Roman times. Bible students can be assured that it contains an accurate record of kings and events that can be tied in to known and provable history and authenticated by archaeology.

Justin Giles
London, UK

The battle of Marathon shown on the Stoa Poikile in Athens, 5th century BC



BIBLE SYMBOLS

the tree of



‘And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food’

Genesis 2.9 ESV

In the Bible, trees are a blessing, providing shelter from the sun, refuge, food and (though unknown to the biblical writers) precious oxygen. They are a gift from God –

‘I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.’

Leviticus 26.4

The righteous themselves are pictured as trees:

**‘He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in season,
Whose leaf shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.’** Psalm 1.3

Uniquely, as the most enduring living thing on our planet, the tree represents longevity:

‘...as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people.’ Isaiah 65.22

So it is not surprising that we find a tree used as a symbol of the greatest gift God has in store for mankind – life, life in the fullest sense of the word, uncompromised by weakness, life without end. The Book of Genesis describes the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, the way to it protected by cherubim until the time when in God's purpose its fruit would be freely available to mankind, and men and women would live for ever in perfection.

The prophet Ezekiel and Jesus himself in his last message saw that time in a vision of the future:

'Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail.

They will bear fruit every month because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for medicine.'

Ezekiel 47.12, compare with Revelation 22.2

'To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'

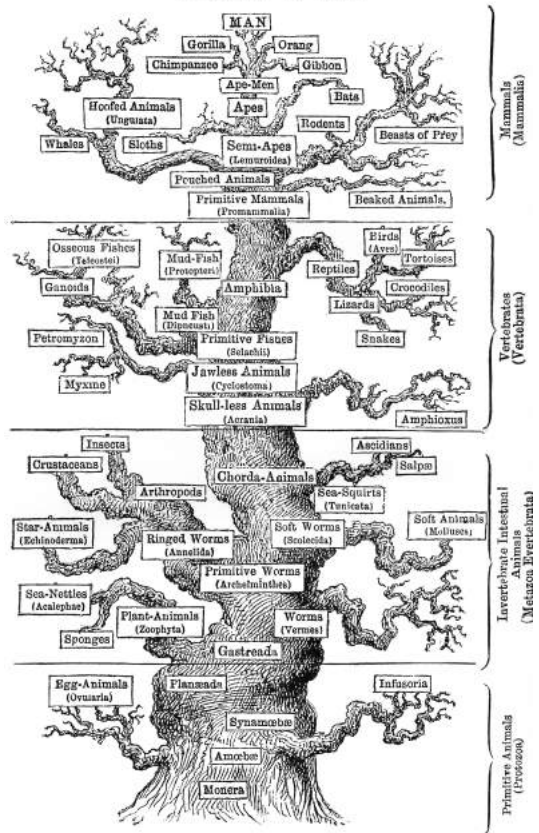
Revelation 2.7

Remarkably, the Bible is not the only place where we find this symbol of the tree of life. It seems that many religions across the world have their own version. You would expect it to be shared by the Abrahamic religions, but it appears in many others: in ancient Persia, Mesopotamia, the Buddhism of India and Tibet, Taoist China, in Hinduism, German paganism, Norse mythology and in the Americas. It is celebrated in many works of art in different cultures across the world (see cover). Why is this?

The Flood story poses a similar question. The Bible story of the great Flood of Noah's day is found in various forms in religions across the world. Could it be that all these stories of the Tree and the Flood, hugely distorted though they often are, bare witness to the earliest days of human history, and when mankind repopulated the earth after the Flood they carried with them the memory of the events described in Genesis, the record of Moses validated by the Apostle Paul and by Jesus himself?

Sadly in modern times the expression 'tree of life' has been applied to something very different. When Charles Darwin published the first edition of his 'Origin of Species' in 1859, it had just one illustration, a

PEDIGREE OF MAN.



This version of the evolutionary 'Tree of Life' was published by one of Darwin's followers Ernst Haeckel in 1879

quite sketchy diagram like a tree, showing how all living things could, according to his theory, have arisen from one or two primitive organisms by a process of small accidental changes. Starting with the original trunk, as changes take place branches grow, then twigs, with the outermost twigs representing the myriad animals and plants we see around us today. It was a powerful picture of Darwin's 'big idea' and it is still used today – but is it based on scientific evidence?

Darwin himself lamented that the fossil evidence to support his theory was missing, but he was confident that future discoveries would support it. 150 years, and millions of newly-discovered fossils later, the evidence is still missing; the myriad intermediate forms required to complete the tree are imaginary, not one but billions of 'missing links'. Seen against the generally accepted scheme of geological ages, fossil life forms appear suddenly, (even explosively as in the 'Cambrian explosion'), then flourish unchanged for generations ('stasis' is the term used for this period of stability) and then suddenly disappear, for reasons scientists can often only guess at. This is definitely not evolution.

The rapid advances in DNA research this century seem to offer a different route to supporting Darwin's 'big idea'. Surely if all living things were linked together in this chain of descent, their DNA would

show evidence of how these changes took place? Since the first publication of the complete human genome in 2001, the genomes of many other living things have now been found. (Note: the 'genome' is the complete set of genetic information, present in any particular organism. The human genome includes about 20,000 genes, which are smaller 'packets' of DNA that do a particular job).

From the genomes which have so far been established it now appears that every species has hundreds of what are called ORFan genes, commonly referred to as 'orphan' genes – genes that have no resemblance or apparent relationship to others found in similar organisms. Evolution by small incremental changes requires that each gene will have similar 'sister' or 'cousin' genes in other similar organisms, but these don't – the family resemblance that evolutionists predicted is absent. 'Each such gene is a huge challenge to the theory of evolution... ORFan genes contradict this evolutionary prediction' (Matti Leisola Dsc, former dean of Chemistry and Materials Science at Helsinki University of Technology, author of 'Heretic' 2018).

DNA evidence is now routinely used in courts of law throughout the world to establish identity and familial relationships beyond doubt. This same evidence now shows that all living things are **not** related to each other; evolution never happened.

It is a huge tragedy that this powerful biblical symbol of the tree of life has been supplanted by an emblem of the atheistic, materialist philosophy of our times. It is imaginary, it is unscientific, and it is an attack on faith and purpose and hope in human life. It is not a tree of life – it is a **tree of death**.

This omnipresent and hugely damaging philosophy is one of many things that the believer in God's Word has to 'overcome', looking forward in faith to the fulfilment of Jesus' promise:

***'To him who overcomes
I will give to eat of the tree of life'***

Roy Toms
Norfolk UK

The reality of Christ's kingdom

Millions of people are familiar with 'The Lord's Prayer'; many of us learnt it as children and can recite it by heart. But do we appreciate the full significance of its words? In particular, how do we understand the familiar phrases about the kingdom of God? Jesus prayed:

'Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'

Matthew 6.10

What is the reality behind that simple petition of Jesus? That is the question we hope to answer in this article.

a heavenly kingdom on earth

Those words convey an incredible vision of this earth, as far removed from present realities as it is possible to get. They speak of a planet where God's will is carried out as perfectly as it is now done in heaven. At no time during the 2,000 years that have elapsed since Jesus first uttered that prayer, can this situation be said to have existed. Nor does it exist today. As we contemplate the violence, injustice, vice and many other crimes that surround us, we seem to be further away than ever from that blessed vision for this earth.

Since time immemorial, writers, philosophers, politicians and statesmen have dreamed of systems of perfect world government that would bathe the globe in peace and plenty. However, their dreams have been fundamentally flawed, based, as they invariably have been, on the perception that humanity can achieve perfection. They think that men and women can themselves reverse the self-destructive tendencies of human nature that lie at the root of so many of the problems that afflict this planet. The creeds, systems and philosophies that have dreamed of perfection on earth have therefore been doomed to remain nothing more than dreams. When all attempts have been made to put them into practice, the result has always been disaster and disillusionment.

the human element

In contrast, the Bible has no illusions about the nature of mankind. Take, for example, the problem of human aggression, possibly the cause of the greatest suffering on the earth. The Bible asks: '*What causes fights and quarrels among you?*' (James 4.1 NIV). The answer James gives lies within

us: *‘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...’* (James 4.1, 2 NIV).

That is the diagnosis. Can man himself effect a cure? The Bible is not hopeful here. Even a man of the calibre of the Apostle Paul had to admit that *‘what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing’* (Romans 7.19 NIV). No matter how good Paul’s intentions, human sinfulness was ever present: *‘So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me’* (Romans 7.21 NIV).

If this depressing picture of human frailty was true for as worthy a man as the Apostle Paul, it bodes ill for the rest of us. Certainly it strips away any illusions that we humans may have about transforming our world with no help other than from ourselves. However, the reality of the kingdom of God does not

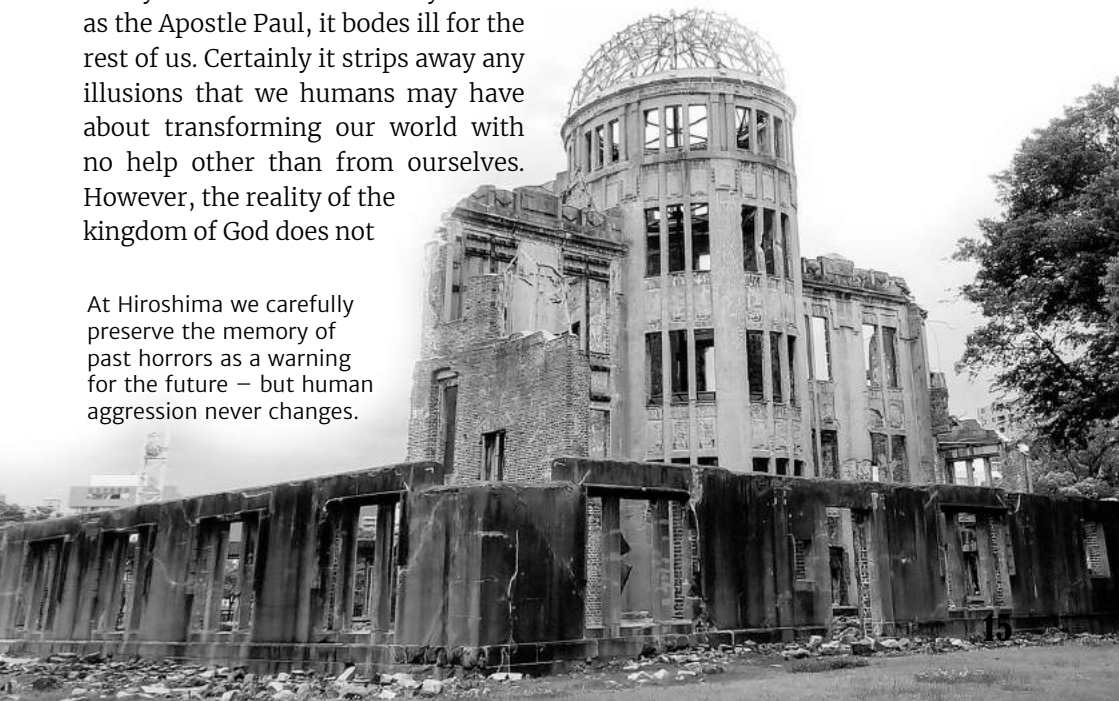
At Hiroshima we carefully preserve the memory of past horrors as a warning for the future – but human aggression never changes.

depend on frail man for it to be realised.

‘Glory to God in the highest’

One of the Old Testament prophets of Israel describes this unprecedented state of affairs in a vivid figure: *‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea’* (Habakkuk 2.14).

In other words, the subservience of men and women to God’s will in His kingdom will be universal and complete. Only then will those problems, which now appear so intractable, begin to be solved to the great benefit of humankind, as the host of angels sang at the birth of Jesus Christ:



‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!’ (Luke 2.14).

The most fundamental problem of all, human aggression and violence, will be solved only when God’s name is known and revered throughout the world, and what is true for one problem must be true for all the others. This vision of the future implies such a revolution in human affairs that it seems almost too incredible to contemplate. What guarantee do we have that God will directly intervene in human affairs to establish His kingdom? Consider first the words of the prophet Daniel, who described the time when the kingdoms of men would cease to exist:

‘...in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.’ Daniel 2.44

Additional assurance is given to us by the Apostle Paul:

‘...he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained (the Lord Jesus Christ). He has given assurance of this to all, by raising him from the dead.’ Acts 17.31

Jesus will have a pivotal role in the kingdom of God as king in the name of God. It is also a demonstrable fact of history that he was raised from the dead, itself an incredible occurrence. The fact of the resurrection becomes a guarantee of the reality of the kingdom of God as promised in the pages of the Bible.

Jesus will reign

The description ‘The kingdom of God’ tells us that it will be a literal kingdom with a king, a capital city and all the machinery of government, its divine nature notwithstanding. At its head there will be a king who is none other than the one whose resurrection guarantees the future of the kingdom. For we are told that when the kingdom of God is established: ‘...*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever!*’ (Revelation 11.15).

Jesus will reign as king over God’s world-wide kingdom and as we would expect, his rule will be characterised by divine wisdom, peace and security:

‘Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice ... The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.

My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings...'

Isaiah 32.1,17, 18

'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and ...to the ends of the earth ...all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him ... And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed.'

Psalms 72.8, 11, 17

Jerusalem the capital

Government, especially a perfect world-wide government, must have a centre. In the kingdom of God,

Jerusalem will perform this function as its capital city. Thus, Jesus instructed his disciples: '*...do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*' (Matthew 5.34,35). As the seat of all power and authority, Jerusalem will be the place from which the government of the kingdom of God will emanate:

'... For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem ...the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion

from now on, even for ever. And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.'

Micah 4.2, 7, 8

'The Judgement of Solomon'

For the account of Solomon's wisdom as a judge, see I Kings 3.16–28

Jesus is described as the 'greater than Solomon'. Imagine how Jesus will transform justice throughout the world when he reigns over it!



Painting by William Blake

The aim of the United Nations organisation is to promote peace and harmony amongst the nations of the world, but we are constantly reminded of the failure of the so-called ‘peacekeepers’ to achieve this. A sculpture outside the UN building in New York (see picture) reminds us of the time when God will bring peace to this troubled world.

Let us look in detail at the benefits of this perfect world government. As we have seen, the most prominent blessing of the kingdom will be peace, a peace that will permeate the whole of human society. There will no longer be any of the preparations for war that now consume so many of the world’s resources:

‘... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’

Isaiah 2.4

a fertile earth

Another benefit of this benevolent world government will be that famine and starvation will be things of the past. The fertility of our planet will be transformed. Consider these further prophetic words from the Old Testament:

‘... the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice ...

18 the reality of Christ’s kingdom



**‘...they shall
beat their swords
into ploughshares...’**

sculpture outside the UN building in
New York

For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water...' Isaiah 35.1, 6, 7

'There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.'

Psalm 72.16

'...the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.'

Amos 9.13

The consequences of this increase in fertility will be that starvation and malnutrition, from which a large proportion of the world's population now suffers, will be banished from the kingdom of God.

perfect justice

The world today is full of crime and injustice but this will all change when a wholly righteous and divinely appointed king is ruling the earth. The reason for this perfect equity will be that Jesus Christ will not be using imperfect human methods, for in describing the future world ruler, Isaiah foretold:

'The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth ...'

Isaiah 11.2-4 NIV

No human motivation will be allowed to warp divine justice. Perfect justice will extend even to the places where people live and work. These will no longer be areas where men and women are exploited. Again the prophet Isaiah describes these great changes that are coming:

'They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat ... They will not toil in vain ... for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.'

Isaiah 65.21-23 NIV

Then at last, the dream of every working man and woman will be fulfilled:

‘...everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.’

Micah 4.4

health and longevity

This perfection will extend to the health of those who live in the kingdom of God and long life will be a blessing:

‘Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing...’

Isaiah 35.5,6

‘Never again will there be in it (Jerusalem) an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.’

Isaiah 65.20 NIV

Even the problem of the multiplicity of languages, which does so much now to promote disharmony and discord, will then be solved. One

language only will be the rule universally applied, for the prophet Zephaniah tells us:

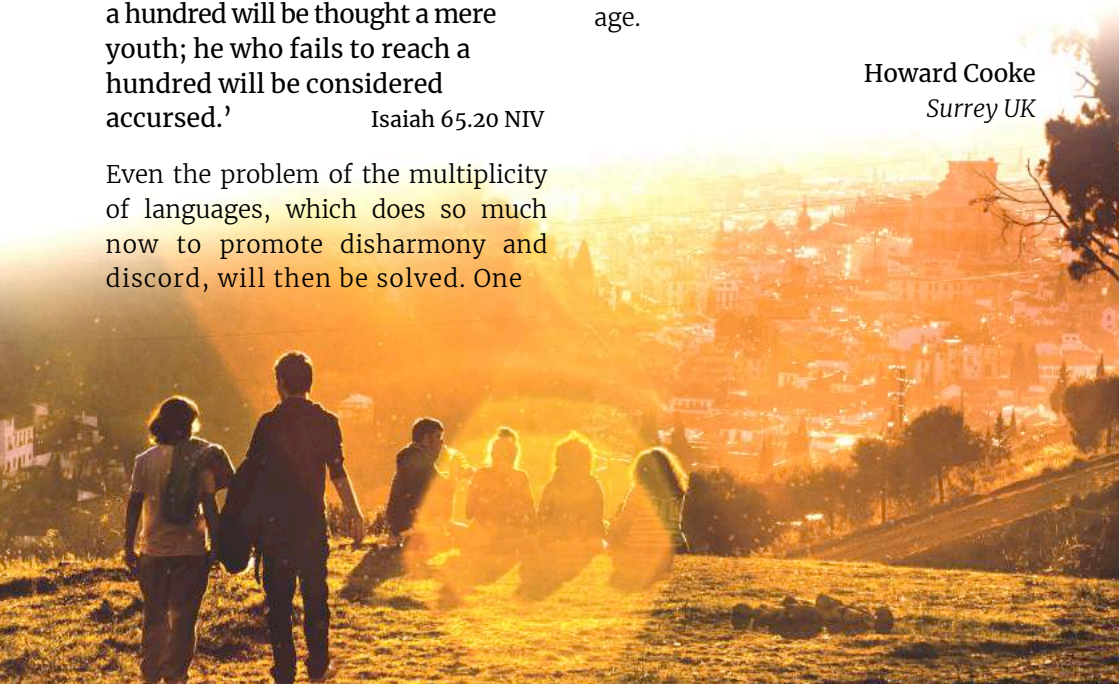
‘For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve him with one accord.’

Zephaniah 3.9

This is the wonderful reality of the coming kingdom, soon to be established on this earth, for which Jesus taught his followers to pray. It is not an impractical dream and it has God’s guarantee – the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 17.31).

Let us respond to the urging of Jesus to put away our present mundane cares, for he said: ‘...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness’ (Matthew 6.33). If we truly seek it first in our lives, we will be able to share in the blessings of that coming age.

Howard Cooke
Surrey UK





from our mailbag

We have been asked for an explanation of what was considered clean and unclean food in the Scriptures and its relevance to us today.

Old Testament teaching

The Scriptures clearly tell us in the Old Testament that there was to be a distinction between clean and unclean meat, and this difference was established from the beginning, when Adam's sons made an offering to God.

Abel offered a firstborn from his flock and Cain offered produce from his arable farming, but only Abel's offering was acceptable to God, which made Cain very angry and led him to murder his younger brother. From this incident we conclude that Adam's children had been taught to make offerings to God that were acceptable, but Cain wanted to do things his way which did not meet with God's favour.

By the time of the Flood, from which Noah and his family were saved in the ark, we read that they understood the distinction between clean and unclean animals:

'The Lord said to Noah, Come into the ark ... because I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female, two each of animal that are unclean animal, a male and his female.' Genesis 7.1,2

When the flood waters finally subsided Noah offered burnt offerings in thanksgiving to God, who had provided him and his family with their salvation from the devastation that covered the earth:

'Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.' Genesis 8.20

Afterwards, when the Israelites came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, God gave the people a divine law. The distinction between clean and unclean animals was very important, and precise details are given in Leviticus chapter 11.

These regulations relate not only to acceptable worship but also to daily living. Two characteristics were necessary for an animal to be classed as clean:

‘These are the animals you may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth: among the beasts, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud, that you may eat.’

Leviticus 11.2,3

Similar instructions were given regarding all creatures living in the sea:

‘These you may eat of all that are in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers – that you may eat.’

Leviticus 11.9

If you read through the whole chapter you will see that further instructions were given regarding birds, reptiles and insects.

No doubt, if the Israelites followed these precise instructions, there were health benefits to the people. But more importantly, they were reminded that God’s laws, without

exception, were holy and they were commanded to be holy in every aspect of their lives: *‘For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy’* (Leviticus 11.44).

New Testament teaching

The teaching and work of Christ fulfilled the Law of Moses, and believers were no longer bound by its detailed regulations. Instead, they were commanded to put into practice the ‘spirit’ of its teaching, not the ‘letter’ (see Colossians 2.13,14; Romans 7.6). At that time Christian believers were both Jews and non-Jews and the whole question as to whether the Law was still relevant was causing friction between them. It came to a head when Paul and Barnabas attended the Council in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts chapter 15. The question was posed as to what extent gentile believers should obey the Law of Moses, but the advice of the apostles only placed minimal restrictions on them (see Acts 15.23 – 29).

The Apostle Paul advised the believers at Corinth not to be concerned about eating meat (1 Corinthians 10.25). It is



a matter of personal conscience and behaviour. However he warned them that doing so could give others the wrong idea about what you really believed (verses 27 – 29 NIV):

‘If some unbeliever invites you to a meal ... eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience sake – the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience?’

The distinction between clean and unclean food was evident before the Law of Moses was introduced. The Law also distinguished between what could be eaten and what could not be eaten. But this was then superseded by the teaching of Jesus who was the fulfilment of the Law, as he said:

‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.’

Matthew 5.17 NIV

the lamb of God

When we think about the clean animals, we also see a primary significance. It is no coincidence that the saving of the firstborn in Egypt from the angel of death at the Passover was achieved partly by the

household eating a year-old male lamb without defect. John the Baptist also said of Jesus (John 1.29):

‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’

In the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53, which is well worth reading in full, it says of Jesus:

‘He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.’

Isaiah 53.7

conclusion

We can learn a lot from our Bible studies, including the Law of Moses. They leads us to appreciate God’s plan of salvation centred in Jesus Christ. As Paul reminded the Galatians:

‘So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.’

Galatians 3.24,25 NIV

We are not restricted today by the regulations governing food given to the Jews through the Law of Moses. But that Law shows us that the role and work of Jesus as the Messiah is spelt out throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, to bring the reader to Christ.

Correspondence Secretary

BASIC BIBLE TEACHING

The Angels

The angels appear at work throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testament narratives.

Bible translations

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated into English as ‘angel’ appears about 190 times and means ‘angel’, ‘messenger’ or ‘ambassador’.

In the New Testament the Greek word translated into English as ‘angel’ appears about 180 times and means ‘angel’ or ‘messenger’. The word ‘angel’ nearly always appears as part of the phrase ‘the angel of the LORD’.

workers for God

We might consider the angels as spirit beings who obediently carry out God’s requirements. We read in the Psalms:

‘Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do his (God’s) word, heeding the voice of his word. Bless the LORD, all you his hosts, you ministers of his, who do his pleasure.’

Psalm 103.20,21

angels at the birth of Jesus Christ

Here is a well-known passage in the New Testament that tells us something about the way the angels work:

‘Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” But when she saw him, she was troubled at

his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God”.’
Luke 1.26–30

what do angels look like?

Often when they appear to humans they are not recognised as angels, they look like men. Compare the narrative of Abraham talking to the angels in Genesis 18.16–33 with the same angels referred to in Genesis 19.1–25 carrying out the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their appearance is like men.

In the New Testament we are instructed to:

‘Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.’
Hebrews 13.1,2

Nowhere in the Bible narrative are angels described as having wings or halos.

angels taking the name of God

On some occasions angels take on the name of God in carrying out His work.

In the Book of Exodus chapter three we read about ‘*the Angel of the LORD*’ appearing to Moses in a burning bush (verse 2) and in the same context God speaks to Moses (verse 4).

Again God speaks to Moses on another occasion:

‘Behold, I send an angel before you to keep you in the way ... Beware of him and obey his voice ...for my name is in him’
Exodus 23.20,21

The angels are completely in harmony with God. In acting on God’s behalf, they show us His character, His will and purpose in a way we can understand.

the role of Jesus relative to the angels

The letter to the Hebrews has this to say about the first advent of Jesus on earth as a man, before his death and resurrection:

‘You made him a little lower than the angels.’ Hebrews 2.7

After his death and resurrection Jesus himself said:

‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.’
Matthew 28.18

This would give Jesus power over the angels as well and is confirmed by the words of the Apostle Peter about his present exalted position:

‘who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to him.’
1 Peter 3.22

God’s covenant with mankind relative to the angels

Those who try to serve God and follow His son, attract the special care and attention of the angels:

‘The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear him, and delivers them.’
Psalm 34.7

‘For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.’
Psalm 91.11

‘Are they (the angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?’

Finally for this simple introduction to the angels, think about these words of Jesus:

‘But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.’

Luke 20.35,36



from the editor

‘Light on a new world’ was first published 50 years ago in July 1969. The purpose of the magazine as stated in the first issue is to ‘be the means of awakening its readers to a realisation that God has revealed His purpose with this earth and that He is going to reconstitute it and make it a new world. This revelation of His purpose and will is the Bible.’

The publishers are members of a small religious community called Christadelphians. We have included in this issue a summary of our beliefs and way of life (see page 35). We never envisaged in 1969 that the mailing list would include readers in so many countries and help men and women to search the Scriptures to find the truth of God’s plan of salvation. It is our duty to tell others about our wonderful hope, a hope for the future that can be uncovered by Bible study.

Some significant events happened in 1969. Perhaps the most memorable was the Apollo 11 mission launched in July to land the first men on the moon. It was an astonishing moment both for the astronauts and for those who witnessed the event on television. As Neil Armstrong put his foot down on the moon’s surface, he made the famous statement: ‘That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind’.

However it has not proved to be the ‘giant leap’ for man that was envisaged, as the world faces even greater problems now than it did 50 years ago. We are reminded of the words of the Psalmist: *‘The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’s; but the earth he has given to the children of men’* (Psalm 115. 16). The Bible teaches us that the earth has been given to mankind as a habitable planet and God’s plan for the human race concerns the world in which we live and no other.

The first issue of ‘Light on a new World’ included an article entitled ‘Can we rely on the Bible?’ It suggested several lines of evidence for putting our complete trust in the Bible including fulfilled prophecy, its

internal harmony, its historical accuracy and the external evidence provided by archaeology.

When we look back we realise that the world has not changed for the better and is beset by many problems not even on the horizon 50 years ago that politicians and world leaders are powerless to resolve. The advice of the Psalmist is: *'Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save'* (Psalm 146.3 NIV).

We have to conclude that it is beyond man to change the world in order that it may become the peaceful and harmonious paradise promised in the Bible. Mortality is something that affects all of us and some words of the wise man Solomon confirm this:

'For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.'

Ecclesiastes 9.5 NIV

Ultimately our lives come to an end, as David observed: *'For in death there is no remembrance of you; in the grave who will give you thanks?'* (Psalm 6.5). The reality of these words strikes me when I sometimes walk round a churchyard and look at the old worn headstones, some of which refer to people who died a long time ago, and I wonder who celebrates their lives now.

The person whose life has been remembered for over 2,000 years by his followers is the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to remember every day how his perfect life can offer us hope for the future and give real purpose to our lives now. The promise that Jesus will return to the earth is repeated many times in the Bible. Jesus asked his disciples to pray to his Father *'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* (Matthew 6.10). Each day that passes brings us one day closer to that special day appointed by God when Jesus will come to set up the kingdom of God on earth (see article on page 14). That day has been guaranteed by God as we read in the book of Acts:

'... 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

That day will be like no other – will you be among those who Jesus will recognise as his friends and be invited to celebrate with him and share that glorious future in a renewed world?

Editor

signs of the times

climate change protest in Berlin



The last issue referred to some of the threats to our environment and why it is so hard to deal with them. A quote from an August 2018 lead story in 'The Economist' had the title 'In the line of Fire'. The byline was 'The world is losing the war against climate change. Rising energy demand means use of fossil fuels is heading in the wrong direction'. Nothing seems to have changed since then.

As an example, the governments of the US and Australia seem unable to even recognise the threats. This is no surprise to us. There is big money involved for example in coal mining, and human nature is not naturally altruistic. Greed is a big driver. The Bible makes it clear what mankind is really like at his worst and the Bible verses quoted in earlier articles describe many of man's worst attributes (see 2 Timothy 3.1-5).

'Strongman' politics was another inclusion. With the complexity of modern problems, there seems to be an increasing incentive for people to support politicians who offer simple solutions to what are complex problems. So often they become dictators even if they don't start that way. Again, this is no surprise, given what the Bible tells us about human nature at its worst.

The article also referred to the lack of honesty in much of today's politics. President Trump is probably the exemplar of this. The number of outright lies and misleading statements he has made is truly extraordinary, whatever your view is of the man. It is important to note though that he is far from alone. Honesty seems to be increasingly unusual in politics in general. Given what the Bible says about God's view of lying, this trend to dishonesty is

interesting in itself (see for example Proverbs 12.22).

At this point it's probably worth repeating that I, like all Christadelphians, don't take any part in politics and my opinions expressed in these articles are observations only. They are made with the view that it is God who determines who is in government and that He does this for His reasons, the specifics of which we may simply not know. The prophet Daniel reinforces this:

'... till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses.'

Daniel 4.25

'... he (God) changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.'

Daniel 2.21

As I was considering what to include in this article, I happened to read this:

'May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.'

*May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you.*

May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples

justly and guide the nations of the earth.

*May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you.*

Then the land will yield its harvest and God our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.'

Psalm 67.1-7 NIV

I couldn't help but contrast how different our world is from the world described in this Psalm: God's ways being known on earth and His salvation to all nations – that means quite literally everyone on earth. Everybody praising God means everybody accepts Him. No atheism or agnosticism or any other 'ism'. No religious confusion or conflict. Everybody glad and singing for joy and being ruled with equity. How many happy people do you know? Are you happy? As for equity, our world today is characterised by decreasing equity.

In total contrast with the problems that affect the world we live in, this Psalm describes a perfect world. I believe it is coming, and signs that it may well be very soon is the main theme of these articles. Let's look at a few of these signs.

dysfunctional government

In February the BBC correspondents from the UK and the US had a discussion about which of their

respective governments was the more dysfunctional. It was noteworthy from the start that they both considered that their governments were dysfunctional. What was under discussion was the degree of dysfunction as opposed to its existence. The US and the UK are arguably world exemplars of how democracy works. It is therefore extraordinary they can both be regarded as dysfunctional. The Bible says it is not in man to rule himself (See Psalm 118.8,9 and Jeremiah 10.23,24). Both 'Brexit' in the UK and the US shutdown over Christmas and early New Year certainly demonstrate that!

There are wider ramifications too of this dysfunction beyond the UK and the US. If democracy demonstrably fails to effectively govern, countries that look to the US and UK as examples may be encouraged not to be democratic. Their failures may

well encourage the continuing rise to power of 'strongman' politicians riding populist recipes for solving all manner of problems. The Englishman, Lord Acton, expressed a biblical truth when he wrote 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

Back to the correspondents' discussion. They concluded by giving each country a score out of 10 for dysfunction. The score was 9 for the UK. This was because of the bitterly divided march to Brexit. The US scored a 6 or 7 mainly due to the government shutdown, and of course the bitter divisions over that and other matters. The logic given for the difference in scores was that the UK

Volodymyr Zelensky, actor and comedian, has recently been elected president of Ukraine. Democracy is changing – many voters are disillusioned with their established political parties and leaders



is heading for serious problems that will likely compromise the well-being of much of the country. The US on the other hand isn't threatened in a way that affects the day to day life of the majority of the population. More a national inconvenience with serious but not potential existential consequences for the nation as a whole.

Democracy seems to be declining worldwide in its effectiveness. This is being accompanied with internal turmoil in many countries. This could easily lead to international turmoil and worse – exactly the conditions we can expect shortly before Jesus returns!

US support for Israel a constant?

The Middle East has been a hotbed of complex strife for many years. Its problems, whilst being reported in the international media, have perhaps been overshadowed by Brexit and the deluge of news revolving around US President Donald Trump. Make no mistake though – the problems are still there.

This is an appropriate place to consider a way we can look at the signs in our times. Wherever the events we are looking at are taking place, we need to ask ourselves – is there a direct or even an indirect connection with Israel?

The US is a prominent example of this. What happens in the US connects to Israel, because the US is in effect the guarantor of Israel's continuing existence. It is US support in an otherwise largely hostile world which maintains the balance of power in the Middle East. This has



been so from the founding in 1948 of the State of Israel. That support has certainly had a chequered history. Depending on the governments in the two countries the relationship has varied from warm to lukewarm and sometimes close to hostility.



US President Donald Trump with President Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel

However, there has never been any real doubt, both among allies and enemies of the US, of their support for Israel, politically, economically and militarily. Until now, President Trump, though he appears to be very pro-Israel, is causing doubt with his 'America first' rhetoric and his wildly inconsistent approach to international relationships. We note that President Trump has now said that the United States recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights (see map on left) which were taken from Syria during the six day Arab-Israeli war in 1967. He said this is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and regional stability.

Then there is America's arguably diminishing standing in the world amongst both friends and enemies. If

they keep going in the present direction will they be willing or even able to intervene if Israel is attacked? I think there is doubt. The Bible tells us that Israel will be invaded and overwhelmed (see Ezekiel 38.1-17; Joel 3.1-3; Zechariah 14.1-2) At a time when all human support will have failed, their rescue will come through divine intervention, when Jesus returns to the earth.

Let's look at the last time Israel was invaded and what happened in relation to US support. In 1973 Syria and Egypt simultaneously carried out a surprise attack from the north and south respectively. Initially they caught Israel unawares, so much so that Israel was in real danger. The US conducted a huge operation to re-supply Israel. Wikipedia sums it up like this:

'Operation Nickel Grass was a strategic airlift operation conducted by

LEFT: CIA map of the Golan Heights



the United States to deliver weapons and supplies to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In a series of events that took place over 32 days, the Military Airlift Command of the US Air Force shipped 22,325 tons of tanks, artillery, ammunition and supplies in C-141 Starlifter and C-5 Galaxy transport aircraft (see above) between October 14 and November 14, 1973. The U.S. support helped ensure that Israel survived a coordinated and surprise attack from the Soviet-backed Arab Republic of Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic.'

Israel survived then; but what will happen if they are invaded again and the US does not support them? Who else is there to do that? The signs are that this situation could well be developing now.

American C-5 transport aircraft with its front loading bay open, on a wet runway. From the beginning Israel has been supported by American technology and hardware.

conclusion

I believe God is in control and that Jesus will return in God's good time. Without this hope the world would be a depressing place indeed. But I do have that hope and so can you. The closing words of the Bible give us this assurance in the words of Jesus (Revelation 22.20 NIV):

***"Yes,
I am coming soon"***

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

who are the Christadelphians?

We are a religious group who follow the beliefs and teaching of the early Christian church in New Testament times. This involves a return to biblical doctrines and practices as taught by Jesus and his apostles.

what does the name mean?

It comes from two Greek words, *Christos* (Christ) and *adelphos* (brother), and this simply means 'brothers in Christ'. Jesus describes his followers as his brothers: '*... (He) is not ashamed to call them brothers ...*' (Hebrews 2.11 NIV – see also Matthew 23.8).

where are Christadelphians found?

We have members in many countries throughout the world. We meet in homes, rented rooms or our own halls.

how did we begin?

Many believers since the times of the apostles have held the same faith as we do. There have been and there still are many independent Christian communities throughout the world. The modern Christadelphian move-

ment originated in the 1840's in the USA and the UK.

In 1832 an English doctor, John Thomas, was on a voyage to New York when his ship suffered damage in a devastating storm.. He realised he did not fully understand the Bible and resolved that if he reached land he would study until he found out what it really taught. As a result of his studies he became aware that church teaching was very different from the Bible, and he devoted the rest of his life to spreading the Bible message. The name 'Christadelphian' was first used during the American Civil War in 1861 when Christian groups who did not fight were required to register with the government

why be different?

We try to follow Christ and his apostles in both belief and practice, as taught in the Bible. However, in the second century some Christians began to tamper with the original faith. The result is that in at least some aspects of teaching and practice every Christian group now differs radically from the original message. Yet Peter, one of Christ's

apostles, said that there is only one way by which we can be saved:

‘Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’ Acts 4.12

So it is clear that to have a part in God’s plan of salvation we cannot persist in beliefs and practices that He says are wrong. The teachings of Christ and his apostles are of vital importance in our understanding of God’s plan for the world and the standards that we need to aim for.

For these reasons we wish to be distinguished from the vast mass of Christianity. We differ from other denominations in some of our beliefs and, sometimes, in our way of life.

our way of life

How is our way of life sometimes different from other Christian groups?

THE BIBLE - our guidebook

We believe that as the inspired Word of God, the Bible is the sole authority on which our lives should be based. Fulfilled prophecies, internal harmony and the clear message of hope for the future point to a divine author. Its truth has been confirmed

by modern discovery, archaeology and history.

We read from the Bible every day, using a systematic reading plan, which covers the whole Bible in one year. The importance of this was emphasized by the Apostle Paul:

‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.’

2 Timothy 3.16 – see also Acts 17.11; Romans 15.4; 1 Timothy 4.3–16; 2 Peter 1.21

prayer

Jesus taught his disciples to pray and instructed his followers to pray to God. We make a habit of daily individual prayer, when we praise and acknowledge God, and ask him for forgiveness for our sins.

The Apostle Paul instructed believers to *‘be anxious for nothing, in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God’* (Philippians 4.6 – see also Matthew 6.5–15; 1 Thessalonians 5.17).

worship

Just before his death Jesus showed his disciples, and all other subsequent followers, how they were to remember his sacrifice. This involves

all baptised believers breaking bread and drinking wine each week. Our participation in this meeting is the focus of our religious life. Jesus said: *‘Do this in remembrance of me’* (Luke 22.19 – see also I Corinthians 11.23 – 26).

preaching

Many groups of Christadelphians hold additional Bible study evenings and seminars. We try to tell people about the gospel (‘good news’) of the kingdom of God that is coming on earth in the near future. After his resurrection Jesus told his apostles to preach throughout the world and this is what we attempt to do, both in our local area and by travelling abroad (Mark 16.15 – see also Matthew 28.18–20). We also communicate this ‘good news’ worldwide by advertising and use of the internet (see inside back cover for details of websites).

baptism

Jesus taught his followers that belief, repentance and baptism are all necessary for salvation. We therefore always follow the early Christian practice of baptising responsible adult believers by complete immersion in water. Christening small babies has no Bible basis and bears no resemblance to the command of Christ. In baptism the believer re-enacts the death and resurrection of

Jesus (Romans 6.3,4). It also symbolises the washing away of sins and a change of heart to follow God:

‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’

Mark 16.16

work

We work in a variety of jobs but choose our occupations carefully so as not to conflict with Christ's commands. Following the teaching and example of the Apostle Paul we aim to support our families and ourselves by working (see 2 Thessalonians 3.6–12).

family life

Jesus taught his disciples that the relationship between a husband and wife is parallel to the relationship between Christ and his followers. This means that marriage should be life-long and family life should be treated with the utmost respect. Children are brought up in the knowledge of God, usually attending Sunday School. They are encouraged to read the Bible regularly with their parents. If possible the elderly are cared for by their family and other Christadelphians (see Ephesians 5.22–33, 6.1–4; 1 Timothy 5.3,4).

organisation

We are a lay community who follow the pattern of the first century Christians. Each group of believers is called an 'ecclesia' (from the Greek New Testament word for church). We have no paid clergy or church hierarchy. Members are addressed as 'brother' or 'sister', and all help in the organisation of our activities, although only 'brothers' conduct services.

We do not take part in politics. All members contribute their time, resources and energy voluntarily in service to God. A strong common belief binds us together. Membership is open to all with the same beliefs, following their baptism.

Graham Lake
Surrey, UK

Editor's note:

For further information send for the booklet 'Light on the Christadelphians'. This is also available on our website (see opposite for address, email and website details).



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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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3 billion trees should do it !

The Committee on Climate Change has advised the UK government (see the Times for 2 May 2019) that amongst other things it needs to plant 90 million trees a year between now and 2050 to reduce carbon in the atmosphere and consequent global warming.

Trees and other plants have this remarkable ability to take in carbon dioxide and, in the presence of light, convert it to food (sugars), with oxygen as a by-product. This process, called photosynthesis, is largely responsible for maintaining the oxygen in the earth's atmosphere. This complex chemistry, which is still not fully understood, did not happen by accident. It is part of God's benevolent design of the earth and its finely balanced environment as a cradle for human life.

The Bible describes trees as a blessing from God, and the 'tree of life' as a symbol of the good things that He has in store for the future.

See article on page 10 of this issue.