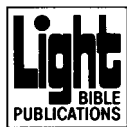




# Light

...on a new world

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*Cover: View of Dubai - United Arab Emirates,  
showing the Burja Khalifa, the world's tallest building.*

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



# *Editorial*

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THE current state of unrest in the Middle East is the focus of media attention as I write this editorial.

We are witnessing times of great upheaval in the Arab world against the rulers of Libya, Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Algeria and this seems to be driven by the animosity between the Sunni and Shia Muslims as opposing branches of Islam. The differences between these two groups stemmed originally, not from spiritual differences, but from political ones originating in a disagreement over the leadership following the prophet Muhammad's death. The Sunni Muslims make up the majority (85%) of Muslims in the world.

The Bible makes it clear that God is ultimately in control of the nations and we can only speculate that these uprisings will result in more unity among the 22 nations that make up the League of Arab States (Arab League). When the Arab League was first formed in 1945, the main issues on their Agenda were to free those nations still under colonial rule and to prevent the Jewish minority in Palestine from creating a Jewish State. Subsequent history reminds us that they succeeded in the former but failed to prevent the formation of the State of Israel which came into being in 1948.

## LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

The avowed intent of the Palestinian Arabs supported by some of their Arab neighbours and Iran, is to annihilate the State of Israel and this is the subject of Bible prophecy. The first article in this issue focuses attention on the Arab nations, their history from the time of their ancestor Abraham and their relationship with the nation of Israel, the Jews, who are also descended from Abraham.

Bible prophecy indicates that there will be one final conflict involving these nations, who will unite in a concerted effort to annihilate the nation of Israel immediately prior to the return of Jesus to the earth. Bible prophecy also indicates that at that time, all nations will be drawn to battle against Jerusalem, but God will intervene to save the remnant of his ancient people and destroy their enemies once and for all. Israel and the world will then enjoy a time of lasting peace in the kingdom of God, under the rule of Jesus Christ, the divinely appointed future king of the whole world (Read for example Joel chapter 3 and Zechariah chapter 14).

This is the true Gospel message which was preached by Jesus and his apostles nearly 2,000 years ago, a message that has largely been lost sight of by Christians today. In this issue, we begin a new series of articles entitled 'The Development of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Church' which will review the work of the 1<sup>st</sup> century followers of Jesus, the apostles and others who preached the Gospel of the literal kingdom of God on earth, based on the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies and who looked forward to the second coming of Christ.

We believe that the current state of unrest in the Middle East is leading up to that final conflict. Jesus urged his disciples to prepare for that day – to *'Watch...and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man'*. [Luke 21.36]

Editor

# Nations in Prophecy

## The Arab Peoples

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A dictionary defines the name ‘Arab’ as ‘*One of the Semitic people inhabiting Arabia and neighbouring countries*’ [*Chambers dictionary*].

This immediately links the Arabs as being both descendants of Shem (one of the three patriarchal lines from Noah identified in the Bible) and also near neighbours of the other Semitic people of the Bible, the Hebrews (later called the Israelites or Jews). The Bible is interested in the Arab peoples because they are also descendants of Abraham.

The whole history of the problems in the Middle East in the last 100 years, has its roots in the ‘family’ relationships between Arabs and Jews that can be traced back to the earliest Old Testament writings. These family relationships can be better understood by exploring the historical books of the Bible.

### ABRAHAM – THE ANCESTOR

In the first book of the Bible, we are told of the call of Abraham from the ancient city of Ur (in present-day Iraq). His great journey to the land of Canaan (now Israel) is described in Genesis chapter 12. After stopping for a while at Haran, one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, Abraham obeyed God’s call to move to a land of future prosperity and blessing. Such was Abraham’s faith and trust in God that God made promises to him concerning a future reward in the

‘promised land’ that he never actually possessed. These promises also concerned his descendants, but Abraham had to wait a long time (25 years) for one ‘special’ descendant to be born. Meanwhile his childless wife Sarai attempted to build a family by means of her slave, an Egyptian maidservant called Hagar. [Genesis 16.1-4] After mistreatment by her mistress, the pregnant Hagar ran away but was found by an angel of God who gave her a promise: ‘Go back to your mistress and submit to her...I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count’. [Genesis 16.9,10 NIV]

Furthermore, the messenger of God instructed her to name the male child, when born, ‘**Ishmael**’, which has the meaning ‘**God hears**’. Even before his birth the angelic messenger described his characteristics in these words: ‘You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers’. [Genesis 16. 11,12 NIV]

#### ISHMAEL

To Abraham, God said: ‘as for **Ishmael**, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation’. [Genesis 17. 20 NIV]

When Ishmael was about 14 years old, Abraham’s wife finally gave birth to the ‘promised son’ Isaac. After family tension she sent Hagar and Ishmael away. Again God intervened in their lives, gave them water in the desert and told Hagar: ‘Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation’. [Genesis 21.18 NIV]

At the time of Abraham’s death, Ishmael and Isaac were re-united as they buried their father in the cave that the patriarch had purchased, since God’s promise to give him the land had not yet been fulfilled. In Genesis we are told that Ishmael himself died at 137 years of age. He had 12 sons who became tribal rulers. [Genesis 25.13-17]

We are able to trace these names in the Old Testament and see prophetic connections to them as people or the areas where they lived. The most memorable event that followed was when Joseph was sold to travelling **Ishmaelites**, who took him to Egypt [*Genesis 37.27,28*]. These people descended from Abraham, had developed into a recognisable population, travelling and trading spices, balm and myrrh throughout the area of the Middle East known as ‘the fertile crescent’, with camels as their means of transport and livestock as their livelihood.

#### HISTORICAL LINKS TO THE DESCENDANTS OF ISHMAEL

As well as the sons mentioned above, Ishmael also had a daughter, Basemath, who married Esau the grandson of Abraham and brother of Jacob. Esau became the founder of **Edom** and the Edomites, meaning ‘red’ and inhabited the hill country of Seir towards the Arabian Peninsula and the great Arabian Desert. [*Genesis 36.6-8*] One of the grandsons of Esau was **Amalek**, whose descendants are remembered as the first tribe to attack the Israelites after their release from Egypt.

Other sons of Abraham by his wife Keturah, were Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, **Midian**, Ishbak and Shuah. These were given gifts by Abraham and sent away into the east country where they prospered. [*Genesis 25.2, 6*] The **Midianites** became a thorn in the side of Israel after they had entered the land of Canaan from Egypt. Such was the oppressive nature of their occupation, that the Israelites were forced to flee their homes and lived in caves and mountains. The **Midianites** carried everything before them that could be taken as food. In the Old Testament book of Judges we read:

‘Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the **Midianites**, **Amalekites** and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of

locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. **Midian** so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.’ [Judges 6.3-6 NIV]

#### GROWING TOGETHER

The account of the deliverance under Gideon is one of many that God accomplished to demonstrate His purpose with Israel. He said: *‘Because this nation (Israel) has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did’.* [Judges 2. 20-22 NIV]

This time of the Judges finds many parallels with the situation in Israel today. We see tribes or nations having a common ancestry, growing up alongside each other and competing for the best land and resources under the overall direction of God’s purpose. Great promises had been given to the Israelites but that brought a great responsibility both to serve God and to keep separate from the surrounding peoples. Peace was only achieved later under kings like David and Solomon.

#### LATER PROPHECIES ABOUT ISHMAEL’S DESCENDANTS

The name of Ishmael’s firstborn was **Nebaioth**, meaning ‘fruitfulness.’ Later in Israel’s history, at the time of King Hezekiah (around 700 BC) the prophet foretold the future glory of Zion (Jerusalem – the city of peace) which has yet to be fulfilled:

‘...the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of **Midian** and **Ephah**. And all from **Sheba** will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. All **Kedar**’s flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of **Nebaioth** will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.’ [Isaiah 60. 5-7 NIV]



The names highlighted in this passage are all descendants of Abraham listed in Genesis chapter 25. This prophecy of Isaiah looks forward to a time when the non-Jewish, descendants of Abraham will acknowledge God and come and worship at the temple in Jerusalem. In order to do this they **must** still exist, and the nation of Israel **must** be restored to the land of promise. From these verses alone we see the future of these nations inextricably linked. The outcome will be peace:

‘No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise... for the LORD will be your everlasting light.’ *[Isaiah 60. 18, 19 NIV]*

#### ARABIA BY NAME

There are two specific prophecies in the Old Testament concerning **Edom**. The first of these in Isaiah is enigmatic but calls **Edom** by the name ‘Dumah’, a word play on the name meaning ‘stillness’. This is a reference to the future decimation of many of its inhabitants *[Isaiah 21.11,12]*. In Ezekiel’s prophecy, God promised a wasting vengeance on **Edom** because they took revenge on Judah *[Ezekiel 25.12-14]*. This covers **Teman** and **Dedan**, names we have seen from Genesis. In the book of Isaiah we find this prophecy about Arabia:

‘...You caravans of **Dedanites**, who camp in the thickets of **Arabia**, bring water for the thirsty; you who live in **Tema**, bring food for the fugitives. They flee from the sword, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow and from the heat of battle. This is what the LORD says to me: “within one year, as a servant bound by contract would count it, all the pomp of **Kedar** will come to an end. The survivors of the bowmen, the warriors of **Kedar**, will be few.” The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.’

*[Isaiah 21. 13-17 NIV]*

This prophecy is so specific - it had a time-limited fulfilment. Yet perhaps it also explains why, for a good few hundred years until the

middle of the first millennium AD, the Arabs were mainly confined to the Arabian peninsula until the great expansion of Arabian culture throughout the Mediterranean region with the spread of Islam.

Let our readers be clear. God did not **single out** these nations. Many more are included as well as his own ‘special’ nation of Israel, who were supposed to be an example of a God-fearing people. However they were ultimately so wayward as to put their Messiah to death and so seal their expulsion from their ancient homeland with its capital city Jerusalem for nigh on 2,000 years.

#### PROMISES BECAUSE OF FAITH

It is clear from the Bible that God called Abraham and promised him eternal possession of the Land of Canaan. This promise has yet to be fulfilled. The descendants of Abraham, notwithstanding their genetic links, need to show **faith in God** to please him and so receive that inheritance in the future kingdom of God. The apostle writing in the letter to the Hebrews (Abraham’s descendants!) says that even Abraham is **still waiting** for his reward:

‘By faith he (Abraham) made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God...All these people were still living by faith when they died. They **did not receive** the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance...’

*[Hebrews 11. 9,10,13 NIV].*

#### MODERN DAY ARAB NATIONS

Since 1945 there has existed a loose confederation of Arab nations called the **Arab League** that has held many meetings and summits to discuss cultural, economic and political issues affecting the member nations. Although there has been much disagreement and schism

within this group of 22 nations, the chart below lists the members of the Arab League with their ancient geographical counterparts. Similarly, some of the oldest cities are still identifiable. For example: Damascus in Syria, Haran (or Harran) in Turkey, Amman (Rabbath-Ammon) in Jordan, Tyre and Sidon in Lebanon.

<b>NATIONS IN THE ARAB LEAGUE</b>	
<b>Modern names</b>	<b>Ancient names</b>
Algeria	Libya
Bahrain	Arabia
Comoros Islands	Cush/Ethiopia
Djibouti	Cush/Ethiopia
Egypt	Egypt
Iraq	Assyria/Babylon
Jordan	Moab & Ammon
Kuwait	Arabia
Lebanon	Tyre & Sidon
Libya	Libya
Mauretania	Libya
Morocco	Libya
Oman	Arabia
Palestine (PLO)	Canaan/Palestine
Qatar	Arabia
Saudi Arabia	Arabia
Somalia	Cush/Ethiopia
The Sudan	Cush/Ethiopia
Syria	Aram/Syria
Tunisia	Libya
United Arab Emirates	Arabia
Yemen	Sheba

Does the Bible have anything to say about these modern nations?

PSALM 83

Since the time of King David, this Psalm has been on record as a plea to God for Israel's deliverance from the surrounding nations who

are termed *'your enemies.'* We know from Christ's use of the Psalms that they are prophetic in nature. We can read here about the expectation of the Psalmist, expressed in the parallels between the history of the Judges and the development of Israel as a kingdom as he had witnessed them.

The parallels in history cannot be lost on Bible students. Israel is in the land and a confederacy of nations surround her. This is what the Psalmist says:

'See how your enemies are astir, how your foes rear their heads. With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. **"Come,"** they say, **"let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more."** With **one mind** they plot together; they form an alliance against you – the tents of **Edom** and the **Ishmaelites**, of **Moab** and the **Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon** and **Amalek, Philistia**, with the people of **Tyre**. Even **Assyria** has joined them to lend strength to the descendants of Lot' [*Psalm 83. 2-8 NIV*].



As you can see from the map, the **Ishmaelites** are here identified with those other tribes and nations whose modern territory is part of

the Arab League. For many years, the declared intention of those nations surrounding Israel has been to push her into the sea so that Israel would no longer be a nation.

Why did the Psalmist write this? During the reign of David and his son Solomon the threat from these nations was contained by military means. Later on **Aram (Syria)** was the ascendant power followed by **Assyria** and **Babylon**. It is only in **our own times** that the arrangement of the nations is such that there is a **confederate** threat from these **Ishmaelite** nations. The nations of the Middle East have grown-up together, achieved colonial independence from their European rulers, **only** in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century! Only God knew this!

‘ALL THE TREES’

Jesus spoke a prophetic parable to tell his followers about things at the end of the age:

‘...Look at the **fig-tree** and **all the trees**. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you **know that the kingdom of God is near**’.

*[Luke 21.29-31 NIV]*

Here Jesus is using figurative language to describe the emergence of nations. The fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. [*Hosea 9.10; Joel 1.7*] So what are we to make of the sprouting of all these new nations in the Middle East? Israel has not sprouted on its own! God’s declared purpose is to set up His kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital city. But terrible times are in store for that city as foretold by God through the prophecy of Zechariah:

‘I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when **all the nations of the earth** are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move

it will injure themselves. On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness, declares the LORD. I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations...On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.” [Zechariah 12.2-4, 9 NIV]

The implication of this prophecy is that all or most of the nations of the world will somehow be involved in the final battle for Jerusalem. The **Ishmaelite** or **Arab** nations will not triumph as intended but suffer the fate of all those who fight against God.

#### NATIONS VERSUS INDIVIDUALS

God uses the **nations** and rules in the kingdom of men [Daniel 4.17] but it is with **individuals** that He works to create a people fit for His kingdom. We have seen that only those who have a trusting faith, like that of the man Abraham, can truly be called ‘children of Abraham’. We read in one of Paul’s letters:

‘Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who **believe are children of Abraham**. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.’

[Galatians 3. 6-9 NIV]

The personal challenge for all who would inherit the kingdom of God, from whatever national, ethnic or social group, is to develop a faith and a belief in the invisible, yet all-powerful God. He is a loving God, who has revealed himself in the words of Scripture and manifested himself in the person of Jesus Christ, the greatest son of Abraham.

Roland Tremaine  
Suffolk, UK

# Basic Bible Teaching

## Jesus Christ - God or Man?

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### THE FOUNDATION

If we are to come to a correct understanding of what the Bible teaches, it is essential to put aside any pre-conceived notions (i.e. ideas taught by others) and to come to the Bible with an open mind, **seeking for the guidance of the Word of God alone.** In this way, we will be led solely by the divine mind and not influenced by human thought.

### BUILDING BLOCKS



Before any structure can be built, the raw materials must be assembled and plans must be drawn up to put them together in a structurally sound manner. Similarly, before we can understand the nature of Jesus Christ, we need to understand and be able to logically fit together certain fundamental truths, namely Bible teaching about:

- ❖ The essential qualities of human nature
- ❖ The essential qualities of divine nature
- ❖ The nature of Jesus Christ before his death

## LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

- ❖ The nature of Jesus Christ after his resurrection
- ❖ The mission of Jesus Christ as a saviour
- ❖ The future mission of Jesus Christ as a king

### HUMAN NATURE

In the beginning, as described in Genesis, man was formed ‘*of dust from the ground...and man became a living being*’. [Genesis 2.7] As a living creature formed from earthly materials, man ‘*has no advantage over the beasts*’. [Ecclesiastes 3.19, 20] However, unlike animals, man was created ‘*in the image of God*’ [Genesis 1.27] giving him the power of reason and the ability to discern right from wrong.

The first man Adam and his wife Eve were given a simple command by God to test their obedience to Him. They failed the test as we learn from Genesis chapter three and brought sin into the world by their disobedience. The New Testament commentary on the events in Eden is this:

‘Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.’ [Romans 5.12]

To summarise Bible teaching on the origin of humanity – the first man Adam was created from the same materials as animals and had no constitutional advantage over them, only a moral and intellectual one. As a result of sin, all men and women are mortal, dying creatures, like the animals, as confirmed by many Scriptures. The following references are examples of this teaching:

- ❖ The Flood destroyed ‘*all flesh*’ – man and animals, ‘*all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life*’.  
[Genesis 7. 21-23]



- ❖ Life is short and death is the end, naturally speaking.  
*[Psalm 6:4-5; 90:1-10; 146:2-4]*
- ❖ The finality of death means that no conscious existence remains after death. *[Ecclesiastes 9:4-6]*
- ❖ The 'soul' is mortal and dies. *[Ezekiel 18.4,20; James 5.20]*

Human nature is subject to many weaknesses including, susceptibility to hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, the ageing process and finally death.

#### DIVINE NATURE

In contrast, Divine nature is revealed in Scripture as pure, immortal, not affected by human weakness, temptation and sin; the nature enjoyed both by God and His angels. God is revealed in Scripture as 'from everlasting to everlasting' *[Psalm 90.2]* a God of love, truth, mercy and justice. The following Scriptures tell us about the attributes of God:

- ❖ God cannot sin. *[Habakkuk 1.12,13; James 1.13]*
- ❖ God is everlasting. *[Genesis 21.33; Deuteronomy 33.27]*
- ❖ God is just and merciful. *[Exodus 34.6,7]*
- ❖ God is love. *[1 John 4.8,16]*

The Apostle Peter says the Christian hope of life after death is to be made a partaker of the divine nature *[2 Peter 1.2-4]*. Compare this with the words of Jesus in Luke about those who will be made equal to the angels, to die no more. *[Luke 20.34-36]* These parallel ideas establish that the angels have divine nature.

#### THE NATURE OF JESUS BEFORE HIS DEATH

Put simply, the Bible teaches that Jesus was born with human nature. He could be and was tempted to sin; he experienced hunger, thirst, pain and anguish. He was mortal; he could and did die as the result of being crucified. Please read carefully the following passages in support of this statement:

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- ❖ Jesus had our flesh and blood nature, not the nature of angels. [*Hebrews 2.14-16*]
- ❖ Jesus was really tempted to sin, but overcame all temptation. [*Hebrews 2.18; 4.14,15*]
- ❖ Jesus was weary and thirsty. [*John 4.6,7*]
- ❖ Jesus was ‘*in an agony*’ just contemplating the cross. How much worse was the pain of actual crucifixion! [*Luke 22.41-44*]

However, we **are not** saying that our Lord was just an ordinary man. Although of our nature, he was nonetheless ‘*the Son of God*,’ by his miraculous birth brought about by the Holy Spirit power of God acting upon the womb of his mother Mary. [*Luke 1.31-35*]

Certainly for Christ to have achieved complete victory over temptation to sin, he must have had a spiritual strength that we simply do not possess. The prophetic words of the Psalmist describe him as ‘*the son of man whom you (God) have made strong for yourself*’. [*Psalm 80.17*] Christ’s divine paternity helped him in the battle to overcome temptation to sin and undoubtedly it was a great battle as we learn from the letter to the Hebrews:

‘who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.’

[*Hebrews 5.7, 8*]

### THE NATURE OF JESUS AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

After his resurrection, Jesus was subsequently elevated to divine nature, no longer subject to temptation, to the ageing process, or to death. We see this clearly from the following Scripture:

- ❖ Death can no longer touch Jesus. [*Romans 6. 8, 9*]
- ❖ Jesus is now an ever-living High Priest, interceding for the faithful before God. [*Hebrews 7.14-25; 1 Timothy 2.5*]
- ❖ Jesus was raised from the dead to immortality. This is a fundamental Christian doctrine. [*1 Corinthians 15.12-20*]
- ❖ Christ in glory reveals himself to the Apostle John as immortal and having the power to deliver believers from death. [*Revelation 1.13-18*]

After his resurrection, Jesus possessed a physical body with ‘*flesh and bones*’ and denied that he was merely ‘*a spirit*’. [*see Luke 24.39*]

#### TRINITARIAN TEACHING IS NOT SCRIPTURAL

The majority of Christians believe that Christ was both human and divine at the same time, possessing an immortal soul or spirit in a human body. Bible teaching shows us that both human nature and divine nature **have physical bodies** – they are not immaterial. Scripture teaches that Jesus grew up as a child and had to ‘*increase in wisdom*’ [*Luke 2.52*] and to ‘*learn obedience*’. [*Hebrews 5.8*] The Bible teaches that human nature has to be transformed by the power of God, before it can become immortal (i.e. possess the divine nature).

In the Apostle Paul’s well-known chapter about the resurrection, Paul presents the need for resurrection to bring about this transformation from mortality to immortality as a vital part of Christian doctrine. [*1 Corinthians 15*] Without the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead and his transformation to immortality, the Christian would have no hope of life after death. Why? Simply because believers too have to follow the pattern set by our Lord – to rise from the dead and become changed from mortal to immortal nature, if we are to achieve salvation.

We suggest that at this point you read the whole of that chapter

(1 Corinthians 15), but note especially the series of contrasts Paul presents there between human nature and divine nature, between the situation before the resurrection and the situation after it for a true believer (verses 19-23, 35-50).

If Jesus had been God dwelling in human form, then temptation and sin would have been impossible for him. His victory over sin would have been mere play-acting. There would have been no real battle and therefore no real victory!

This is why we said at the beginning that it is necessary to clear our minds of all pre-conceived ideas before coming to the Scriptures to find out the truth of these matters. Sadly, orthodox teaching sows confusion in our mind; it will not help us to understand the simple, logical truths found in the Bible.

#### THE MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOUR

We have already seen that Jesus had human nature so that he might really be touched with human weakness and be truly tempted to sin. We have seen that his victory over sin, despite being tested to the limits of human endurance, was achieved as a result of his divine paternity. The name Jesus, means Saviour and this was given to him by the angel Gabriel when he announced his birth to Mary [*Luke 1.31*].

It is not the purpose of this article to explain, in detail, the sacrificial work of Jesus, but we must be clear in our minds that he could only have opened up a way of escape from sin and death, through having the same weaknesses as us, but overcoming them. Anything else would have destroyed the power of his work to offer a representative sacrifice on our behalf. In the Gospels, Jesus referred to himself just four times as '*Son of God*' (see John 3.18, 5.25, 10.36, 11.4). This compares with 80 references which describe him as '*Son of Man*' (see for example Matthew 16.13; Mark 10.33; Luke 12.40; Acts 7.56). The point here is that Jesus emphasised his humanity the fact that he was one of us.

THE MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST AS KING

The word ‘Christ’ in the Greek New Testament is the equivalent to the Hebrew word ‘Messiah’ and means anointed king in Jewish usage. We have seen that Christ was elevated to divine nature and became immortal after his resurrection. When he appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, he told them: *‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth’*. [Matthew 28.18] Now, with the untiring strength of immortality at his disposal, with divine wisdom at his command Christ is equipped to fulfil the promise of the angel Gabriel at his conception:

‘He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest. and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end’. [Luke 1.32, 33]

Bible prophecy tells us that Christ will extend the ancient kingdom of Israel to become a worldwide kingdom. This kingdom will overthrow human governments and replace them with the rule of Christ and his ‘saints’ (in Scripture this refers to all true believers), who will also be granted salvation and elevated to the divine nature. Christ and the saints will teach the nations righteousness, turn the world to the true worship of God, and gradually eradicate the world-wide problems of disease, suffering, famine and man’s inhumanity to man. Ultimately, at the end of Christ’s millennial reign, even sin and death itself will become things of the past. [Isaiah 25.8; I Corinthians 15.25, 26]

This article has been built up, brick by brick as it were, from the plain teaching of Scripture concerning the nature of **the man Jesus Christ**. We have avoided the confusion created by orthodox Christianity, by adopting this ‘back to the Bible’ approach. The Bible was written with the finger of God controlling its message. Its teaching is clear and logical and makes sense.

In one of his parables Jesus said that anyone who listened to his teaching and built his life upon this foundation, was constructing a house upon a sound rock-like foundation which the ‘storms’ of life will not be able to overthrow [*Matthew 7.24-27*]. If you continue to read and study the Bible in this way you can have that assurance too.

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# The Development of the 1st Century Church

## 1. 'He is risen'

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**W**HEN Jesus died a cruel death on the cross at the hands of the Romans his disciples were devastated. They had thought this man, who they have been faithfully following, was destined to become their king and Messiah. Now he had been rejected by the authorities and by the Jews and was hanging on the cross. Their hopes seemed to be dead with him.

But their dismay was to be short lived. Three days later came news that Jesus had risen from the dead and then he was seen by the eleven remaining disciples.

This series of articles will look at the events that occurred after this time. The series will consider how the early church developed as recorded in the New Testament book entitled 'The Acts of the Apostles' and through the letters that the Apostles wrote to the newly formed Christian communities. These writings show how the gospel set out by Jesus in his ministry was preached more widely and how that preaching extended to the gentiles (non-Jews) of a number of countries around the Mediterranean area and beyond. In this first article we look at the events immediately after the resurrection. You may wish to have a Bible beside you, open at Acts chapter 1, to refer to as you read this article.

THE BOOK OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

It is generally accepted that the 'Acts of the Apostles' was written by Luke who was also the writer of the gospel bearing his name. The opening words of the book confirm this by referring to '*Theophilus*' to whom the gospel record was also addressed. It is not known who this man was but Luke's Gospel addresses him as '*most excellent Theophilus*' [Luke 1.3]. This form of title may indicate that Theophilus was of high rank. Paul uses the same title of the Roman governors Felix and Festus in Acts chapters 23 and 24. Apart from this nothing more is known of Theophilus, although some commentators suggest that he may have been a gentile and may have lived in Rome.

It really does not matter who Theophilus was, but what is important is that the book was a record set out by Luke to confirm to him the truth of what he had been told. At the start of his Gospel, Luke wrote: '*...it seemed good to me...to write to you...that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*' [Luke 1.3, 4] The message is also there to assure us of the truth of these things. To this end Luke starts the book of Acts by speaking of the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus. He says that Jesus showed himself to the disciples '*...to whom he also presented himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*' [Acts 1. 3]

THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Having set out his reasons for writing the account Luke then launches straight into an account of the events that took place. He says that Jesus commanded the apostles to stay in Jerusalem to wait to be baptised by the Holy Spirit. We must note that it is only the apostles to whom this command is given. This was not a general command for all of the Christians to stay at Jerusalem but just for the apostles. The Holy Spirit was promised to those apostles and was given to them because they had special parts to play in God's purpose. That purpose was to develop the early church and to spread the gospel message to gentile nations as well as to Jews.



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH

This commandment from Jesus also seems to have encouraged the apostles in their hope that Jesus would soon proclaim himself as king of the Jews. So they ask him *'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'* [Acts 1.6]

We can understand this enthusiasm of the apostles because, having seen the events of the crucifixion and resurrection they knew that Jesus had established his authority. Why, in their eyes, was there any further reason for delay? But the reply of Jesus was a further disappointment for them: *'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority'*. He continued by telling them that they had a particular role to play in the development of Christianity: *'you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'* [Acts 1.7, 8]

The power of the Holy Spirit to be given to the apostles would assist them in this work of being witnesses to Jesus. They were to spread the gospel message throughout the world. We can but wonder what these men, who had probably not travelled outside Palestine (Israel), thought of the concept of travelling much more widely in the service of their Lord.

The other part of the message of Jesus was that it was still not time for him to become king. God had determined a time when that event would take place but it was not to happen yet. The gospel message still had to be spread to other peoples. Nevertheless there was a time fixed in the mind of God. Some years later the Apostle Paul told his audience about this when speaking on Mars Hill in Athens as recorded in Acts chapter 17. He said:

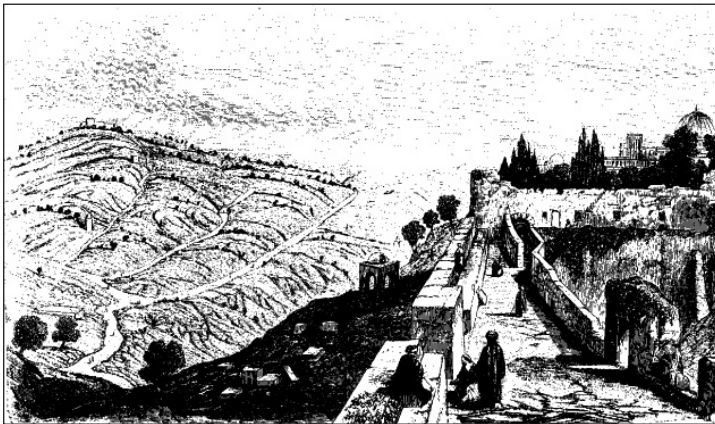
*'...he (God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead.'* [Acts 17.31]

## LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

Paul was confident that God would act at a time that he had set. With the benefit of the passage of time Paul was able to look back at other events whereas the apostles with Jesus were still unsure about what was to happen.

### JESUS TAKEN INTO HEAVEN BUT PROMISED TO RETURN

The uncertainty of those apostles was to become even stronger when Jesus was taken from them. Acts tells us that *‘when he had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight.’* [Acts 1.9] Imagine the surprise of the apostles! They thought they had lost Jesus when he died on the cross; now they seemed to have lost him again as he was taken up into heaven from the Mount of Olives in front of them.



*View of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem*

Further reassurance was soon to come:

*‘And while they looked steadfastly towards heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven.”* [Acts 1.10, 11]

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH

This was a wonderful promise to the apostles and is also a wonderful promise to us. Although Jesus went up into heaven, there is the assurance that he will come again to the earth. The apostles were doubtless disappointed that he was taken from them but the promise of these two angels (which is what the two men in white apparel must have been – perhaps the same two angels that appeared to them immediately after the resurrection – see John 20.12) was one of great hope for the future. Having once lost Jesus through death, but then seeing him raised from the dead, the apostles would have been more ready to accept these words as being true.

### FAITH DEMONSTRATED IN PRAYER TO GOD

This acceptance by the apostles is demonstrated by what they did next. We are told that *'they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying.'* [Acts 1.12, 13] A Sabbath day's journey indicates that the distance was not very great. The eleven apostles were there together in the room with women including *'Mary, the mother of Jesus and...his brothers'*. We are told that they *'continued with one accord in prayer and supplication'*. [Acts 1.14] In other words they were fully united in their prayers – they were of one mind.

The apostles demonstrated their faith through their desire to pray to God together. They had no doubt that the things that they had witnessed were of God. They recognised Jesus as their saviour and they were ready to follow him and do what he had commanded them. The Apostle Peter emphasises this in a speech which he gave to about 120 disciples as recorded at the end of the chapter.

### CONFIDENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Peter confirms the truth of the Old Testament by showing the disciples that the work of Judas Iscariot in betraying Jesus was the fulfilment of the words of David in the Old Testament. He goes

further than this and says that David spoke the words because of the work of the Holy Spirit through him. So we read the words of Peter: *'Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.'* [Acts 1.16]

Here Peter is giving us two important lessons. Firstly, he is telling us that words of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament. Secondly, he is demonstrating how the words of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit working through men who God had chosen for His work. In this case we see the relevance of the words found in one of the Psalms of David where we read: *'Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.'* [Psalm 41.9] We remember that Judas had been at the last supper with Jesus and the other disciples and had eaten the meal with them after which he had gone out into the night and betrayed him.

Peter tells the disciples that Judas had been regarded as part of their number and part of their ministry but, after betraying Jesus, he had hanged himself and was buried in a field that had been bought with the money given to him for the betrayal.

The death of Judas reduced the number of apostles to eleven and so it was necessary to appoint another to make up the number. Peter describes the need as being to appoint *'a witness with us of his (Jesus') resurrection'*. [Acts 1. 22] The disciples cast lots and Matthias was chosen as the twelfth apostle. The twelve were now ready to develop the early church by taking the message of the gospel out across the world. Their work is recorded in the subsequent chapters of the book of Acts.

#### LESSONS FOR US

So we reach the end of the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It is a chapter that contains important lessons for us. These can be summarised as follows:

## *THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH*

- ❖ Jesus rose from the dead.
- ❖ Jesus is the king of the Jews.
- ❖ God has determined a time when he will set up his kingdom.
- ❖ Jesus will return to the earth to establish the kingdom of God.
- ❖ Events in the New Testament fulfil Old Testament prophecies.
- ❖ The words of the Bible were inspired by God, the Holy Spirit working through men that God had chosen.
- ❖ Like the apostles, we can have confidence in the teaching of Jesus and the words of the Old Testament.

These themes were fundamental to the beliefs of these early Christians as they set out to spread the news of the gospel. As this series progresses, these themes will recur in the teachings of the apostles and in the message which they carried across the world. Like the writer of the book, Luke, they were sure that they were basing their beliefs on a firm foundation and we too can have that certainty if we put our faith in the Bible as the Word of God.

The return of Jesus is a particularly important concept to understand and accept because there are good grounds for believing that the day of his return may be very soon. The Bible tells us that, when he comes, he will decide who will be in the kingdom of God. It is clear that there will be a judgement and Jesus will separate those that are considered worthy of eternal life from those that are not.

We urge our readers to make every effort to understand the teaching of the Bible about these vital issues which concern our eternal wellbeing. Jesus will say to those who are found worthy:

‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’

*[Matthew 25.34]*

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**CHRISTADELPHIAN BELIEFS**

- ***There is only one God the Creator***
- ***Jesus Christ is the Son of God***
- ***The Holy Spirit is the power of God***
- ***The Bible is the inspired word of God***
- ***Man is Mortal and dies because of sin***
- ***Resurrection is the true hope of believers***
- ***Salvation is only possible through Jesus***
- ***Belief and baptism are essential for salvation***
- ***There is only one Gospel***
- ***The Gospel was preached to Abraham***
- ***The Jewish people are God's witnesses***
- ***The Kingdom of Israel was the Kingdom of God on earth***
- ***Jesus will return to re-establish the Kingdom of God***

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