

Light

...on a new world

- ❖ *'Thy kingdom come' - but when?*
- ❖ *Baptism*
- ❖ *What are you waiting for?*

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

Volume 33.3

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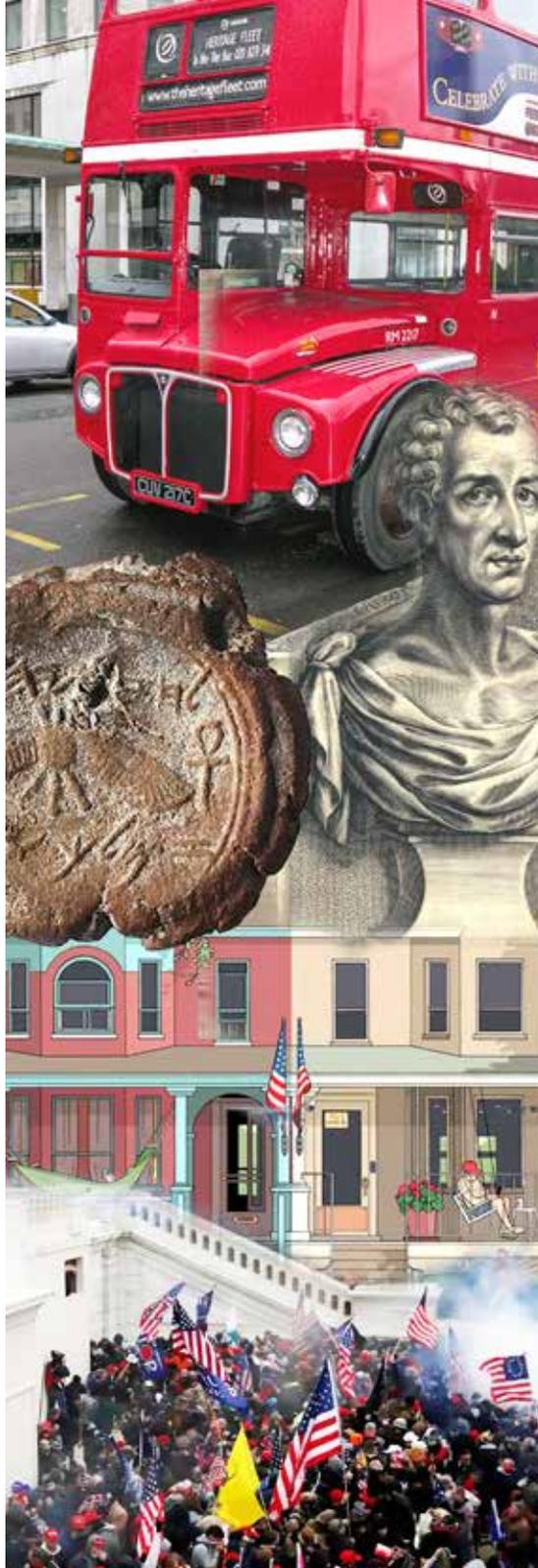
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Focus and concentration are required as a game of chess nears its conclusion. See article ‘What are you waiting for’ on page 9.

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Evidence for the Resurrection

of Jesus Christ from the dead

Part 4 - Historical evidence

References to Jesus in secular history, in contrast to biblical or ecclesiastical history, are not numerous. Tacitus was a Roman senator of a patriotic outlook, as well as being a historian, and certainly had no brief for the early Christians. In his work 'The Annals of Imperial Rome', he records the death of Jesus as having happened in the reign of Tiberius. This agrees with the Bible record. The quotation is as follows: 'To suppress this rumour, Nero fabricated scapegoats and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate.' This incidentally is the only non-Christian record in Latin of the actions of Pilate. Whilst it confirms part of the biblical record, it says nothing directly about the resurrection.

Suetonius, another pagan historian, also records the early Christians in a

manner that agrees with the biblical record. In his work 'The Twelve Caesars' he records of Nero: 'Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief'. Further reference is made when writing about Claudius: 'Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome'. This is an apparent reference to Christ whose followers at this time (AD 64) were still closely associated with the Jewish community. This record agrees with a reference in Acts 18:2, which says: '*... because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome*'.

If we look to secular references for direct evidence of the resurrection, we will be disappointed. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, who wrote in the late first century AD, is the lone voice that speaks of Jesus' resurrection, but his testimony is of doubtful authenticity. The passage from his work 'The Antiquities of the Jews Book 18.3' is as follows:

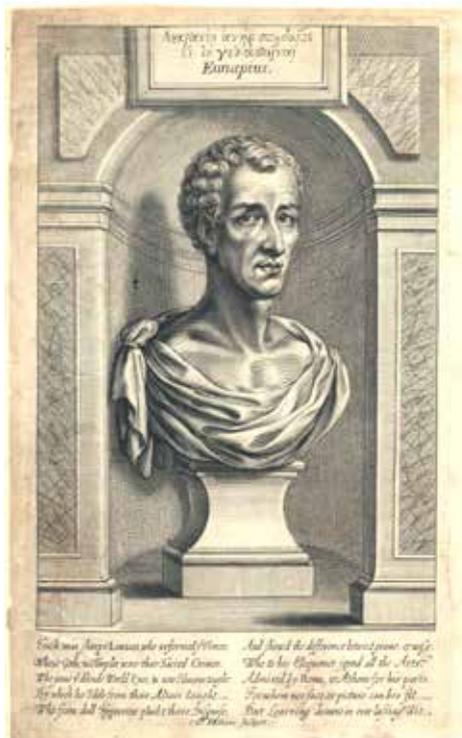
‘About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man*. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of *such people as accept the truth gladly*. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. *He was the Christ*. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. *He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him*. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.’

The italicised parts of this quotation are widely disputed as being later interpolations and we would tend to agree with this for no Jew of the late first century would hold a view such as ‘He was the Christ’, unless he became a Christian and there is no evidence that Josephus ever did that. Furthermore, no one doubted that Jesus was a man until the agitation for the doctrine of the trinity of the third and fourth centuries. This casts grave doubt on the passage ‘if indeed one ought to call him a man’. Jesus is repeatedly called a man in the New Testament scriptures, for example in

Lucian of Samosata

1Timothy 2:5 and Romans 5:15. Furthermore, the quotation reads well if the disputed passages are removed. This means that the passage is unreliable as a witness to the resurrection itself.

Oddly enough, some evidence for early belief in the resurrection comes from an unlikely source. Lucian of Samosata who was born in 115 AD, was a Greek satirist and he lampooned followers of Jesus for their strange beliefs. His writing therefore provides an independent statement about the second century Christian community. In ‘The Death of Peregrine’ he wrote:



‘You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.’

From this we can understand that, in Lucian’s view, the Christians believed in the crucifixion of Christ, they followed his laws, they lived as brothers, they were ‘converted’ to their faith and they had a contempt of death. This view is indeed indirect testimony to their belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The testimony is all the more powerful because these were meant to be words of mockery towards the Christian party. For this represented their belief, based on the words of the Apostle Paul which we have looked at in earlier articles:

‘If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable. But now has Christ risen

from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.’

1 Corinthians 15:19–22

Attempts to explain away the bodily resurrection of Jesus

There is no doubt that evidence for Jesus’ resurrection, such as we have been considering, is persuasive and cannot reasonably be dismissed. This has led some to look for other explanations as to what may have happened. For convenience we will deal with these alternative theories under the headings of ‘Swoon’, ‘Conspiracy’, ‘Hallucination’ and ‘Myth’.

Swoon

This theory suggests that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross and in the cool of the tomb revived. He then managed to escape and appeared alive to the disciples. Here are some reasons to believe the theory is false:

1. No-one could survive crucifixion. Romans were careful to prevent such a possibility. Roman law laid down the death penalty on any soldier who

let a capital prisoner escape in any way, including bungling a crucifixion.

2. The fact that Jesus' legs were not broken (John 19:31-33), means that the soldier was sure Jesus was dead. Breaking the legs hastened the death so that the body could be removed before the sabbath (verse 31).

3. John witnessed that he saw blood and water come from Jesus' pierced heart (John 19:34-35). This shows that Jesus' lungs had collapsed, and he had died of asphyxiation.

4. The body was totally encased in winding sheets and entombed (John 19:38-42).

5. The appearances of Jesus after his death convinced the disciples that he was alive and glorified (John 20:19-29). This could not have happened if Jesus had merely struggled out of a swoon, badly in need of a doctor. A half-dead, staggering sick man who has just had a narrow escape is not worshipped fearlessly as lord and conqueror of death.

6. How could Roman guards be overpowered by a swooning corpse?

Part of the skeleton of a victim of crucifixion showing an iron nail driven through the heel bone. How could anyone recover from terrible injuries like this?

7. How could a half-dead man have moved the great stone at the door of the tomb?

Conspiracy

The suggestion here is that the disciples made the whole thing up.

1. No Christian, weak or strong, ever confessed that the resurrection story was made up. This was in the face of enormous pressure from bribe, persecution and torture from both Jewish and later Roman authorities.

2. If these '*unlearned and ignorant men*' (referring to the Apostles Peter and John – see Acts 4:13 KJV) made up the narrative then they were surely the most clever and creative partisans in history. For the narrative has proved convincing, life changing and singularly enduring through the years.

3. The disciples were simple, honest, common folk, not cunning and scheming liars. Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom, a fate which befell many of the early disciples.



4. There was no motive for such a lie. Lies are told for selfish advantage.

5. If the resurrection was a lie, the Jews or the Romans would have produced a body.

6. The disciples would not have got away with teaching the resurrection in Jerusalem if it was a lie. There were simply too many eyewitnesses to the appearance of Jesus after he had risen.

7. If there had been a conspiracy, it would certainly have been unearthed by the disciples' adversaries, who had both the interest and the power to expose any fraud.

Hallucination

It is suggested that the disciples' minds played tricks, that they imagined they had seen the risen Jesus. Here are some reasons the disciples could not have been hallucinating:

1. There were too many witnesses. Hallucinations are private, individual, and subjective.

2. The witnesses were qualified. They were simple, honest, moral people, who had first-hand knowledge of the facts.

3. Five hundred witnesses saw Christ together, at the same time and place

(1 Corinthians 15: 6). This is much more remarkable than five hundred private 'hallucinations' at different times and places.

4. Hallucinations usually last a few seconds or minutes; rarely hours. This one hung around for forty days (Acts 1:3).

5. Hallucinations usually happen only once, except to the insane. This one returned many times, to ordinary people (John 20:19-21; 21:14; Acts 1:3).

6. Hallucinations come from within, from what we already know, at least unconsciously. This one said and did surprising and unexpected things (Acts 1:4,9) – like a real person and not like a dream.

7. Not only did the disciples not expect this, they also didn't even believe it at first. Neither Peter, nor the women, nor Thomas, nor the eleven believed. They thought he was a ghost (Luke 24:36-43).

8. Hallucinations do not eat. Yet the resurrected Christ did, on at least two occasions (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:1-14).

9. The disciples touched him (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27).



Jewish rolling stone tomb at Abou Gosh (Kirjath Jearim).

10. They also spoke with him, and he spoke back. Figments of your imagination do not hold profound, extended conversations.

11. If the apostles had hallucinated and then spread this story, the Jews would have stopped it by producing the body.

12. A hallucination would explain only the post-resurrection appearances. It would not explain the empty tomb.

Myth

Many people today treat the resurrection as a myth much like the traditional stories of the Greeks or the Norse people. But the Bible record is not myth for the following reasons:

1. The style of the Gospels is radically different from the style of myths. There are no spectacular, childish exaggerated events. Nothing is arbitrary. Everything fits in. Everything is meaningful. It is also done with a

notable economy of words. Myths are verbose – the Gospels are concise.

2. Myths only develop over time. Several generations have to pass for them to form. Most scholars today hold that the Gospel records were produced in the first century by the writers whose names they bear.

3. There is not enough time for the falsification of written records to have occurred. The New Testament books are cited by the Church Fathers in close succession. The text could not have been falsified before all eyewitness testimony disappeared.

Conclusion

Belief in the resurrection is fundamental to a biblical faith. This is not a question of believing something despite evidence to the contrary. Such faith is firmly grounded in supporting evidence. Jesus rose from the dead. He is alive today. He now makes intercession for the faithful at God's right hand in heaven. From here he will return to the earth to set up the long-promised Kingdom of God on the earth. This is a Kingdom in which we can play a part if we exhibit that fundamental biblical faith and live according to its principles.

Ian Giles *Norfolk, UK*

what are you waiting for?

Many years ago, I spent a lot of time waiting for buses.

My journey to school across south London from my home in Clapham involved two different buses, with a change at Brixton (later infamous for the riots of 1981). Buses then were quite regular and efficient, but even so over my six years of schooling I must have spent a good few hours standing in a bus queue. I don't remember doing anything very positive in that time. No mobile phones to gawp at, of course – daydreaming was the order of the day. I doubt whether those hours of waiting had much influence on my development towards adulthood.

Not so one of my schoolmates. I used to see him quite regularly waiting for the same bus. He was usually doing the same thing – playing chess. He had a small portable chess set often known as 'travel' chess, where the miniature pieces plugged into a very small folding chess board and could be packed away at any time for the game to be continued later on. He seemed to have a small group of friends that he played with at different times.



The famous 'Routemaster' red London bus

It was a big school – I had no interest in chess, and our paths never crossed. It was not till many years later that I discovered who he was, and what he had achieved. He had started playing chess when he was six. At 19 he wrote his first book on chess, the first of many, and in 1976 he was awarded the title of Grandmaster, the highest accolade possible for a chess player. He represented his country in tournaments across the world, and for many years up until 2019 he was the chess correspondent to The Times newspaper. Practising his moves whilst waiting for the bus was obviously just one small step of many on the road to outstanding success.



So, two young lads, waiting for the bus, but with very different approaches to the waiting experience.

Waiting for something to happen is of course a common part of the human experience and quite unremarkable. But what is remarkable is when you come across a large and diverse group of people all waiting for the same thing, and whose lifestyle is moulded by their expectations for the future.

The New Testament introduces us to such a community: committed, vibrant and expectant, the first-century model for today's community of believers in Jesus.

Jesus' promise

When Jesus left his disciples, he left them with a promise:

'... This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.' (Acts 1:11, NIV)

They never forgot that promise. It was right at the centre of their preaching, the focus of the new Christian community which exploded into life over the next few years. Essentially, they were a people 'in waiting'. How they lived reflected their conviction that Jesus was coming back to take them to himself and establish his Kingdom. Some of them took it so

seriously that it seems they gave up working to focus on preparing themselves for Jesus. Paul had to warn them that it was not going to happen straight away, that a lot had to happen before he came back, but come back he most certainly would (2 Thessalonians 2:2–4).

The apostles were simply building on the foundation that Jesus had already laid in his parables: ‘... **be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.**’ (Luke 12:36)

When Paul congratulated the Christians at Corinth on their generosity in giving to the other churches, he saw it as evidence that they were: ‘... **eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.**’ (1 Corinthians 1:7) He reminded others that they should not see themselves as citizens of the world, because he says: ‘... **our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.**’ (Philippians 3:20)

Notice how many times the apostles use the word ‘*eagerly*’ to describe how they should be looking forward to Jesus’ return. Here is Paul again: ‘... **If we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.**’ (Romans 8:25, see also Hebrew 9:28)

So this waiting for Jesus is not the resigned, bored and mindless wait of my schoolboy self at the bus stop, but the chess player’s focused preparation for a future epoch-changing event. This is what it was like for the earliest Christians as they waited for Jesus.

We look around at the various Christian groups of our day, and we ask, what happened to this ‘**eager waiting**’ for Jesus? The established churches still pay lip service to the return of Christ in their formal creeds, regularly recited by worshippers, but it barely features in their services or their preaching, such as it is. Many see Christianity as just a personal moral code, or maybe a programme of social reform, but the idea that Jesus will quite literally come back and take this world by storm is ludicrously naive, so it seems. Others believe that Jesus in some figurative sense has returned already, despite all evidence to the contrary.

This is a huge change from the first century. How has it happened?

Christianity changes

The changes that took place in the early church in the first few centuries after Christ are well documented. This is how the famous historian Edward Gibbon tracks some of these changes, in particular how they affected the fundamental doctrine of the return of Jesus and the establishment of the Kingdom of God (the one thousand years reign of Christ on the earth, referred to here as the ‘Millennium’):

‘The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. The assurance of a Millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus... It appears to have been the reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers... But when the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside. The doctrine of Christ’s reign on earth was first treated as a profound allegory, was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism.’ (Gibbon: *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* chapter 15).

So it’s no surprise that there is not too much ‘*eager waiting*’ going on in most churches today. It is the tragedy of our times that when all the signs point to Jesus being very close, so few expect him and most will be quite unprepared for his return.

As a game of chess draws to its conclusion, the players enter the ‘endgame’. Only a few pieces are left on the board. Every move is crucial. Now is when hours of preparation and practice reap their reward, to bring the campaign to a successful conclusion.

Now is our time. We believe the waiting is nearly over. We can identify with the eagerness and enthusiasm of the earliest Christians, commit ourselves to Jesus in faith, embrace the promise of his return and prepare ourselves to meet him.

‘... To those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.’ (Hebrews 9:28)

Roy Toms
Norfolk, UK

'Thy Kingdom come' – but when?

I can't give you an exact date for when the '*kingdoms of this world... become the kingdoms of our Lord*' (Revelation 11:15) because no one can fix it precisely. Even Jesus couldn't: '*of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*' (Matthew 24:36) So, anyone telling you that 'the end is nigh' is almost certainly mistaken.

But we're not left in the dark. We're told to watch for signs to alert us when the Kingdom of God is close. The state of the world will be a pointer to its coming. There's a period leading up to the establishment of the Kingdom which is called '*the time of the end*', or '*the last days*'. Though it's also a time of beginning, because it heralds a new and better era for the world. But how much longer must we wait? Well, here is the news: we are in the last days.

The world is becoming increasingly unstable, politically, economically and socially. The veneer of civilisation is wearing thin at an alarming rate. World leaders are trusted less and less. Nations are becoming increasingly ungovernable. And each new advance in technology, ostensibly created for our convenience, enjoyment, or safety, seems to add to the general instability, as everything about life, including vital services, is moved unthinkingly to an inherently unstable and vulnerable digital location. With gathering speed, the world is becoming more precarious. The Judeo-Christian religions that helped unify society and steer progress for centuries over much of the world, have been marginalised. 'The Lost World' was once just the title of a book, but now it seems more like the name of our planet.

But, against the backdrop of the above cheerless observations, please read the following extracts from God's Word. Allow them to build a picture in your mind. This is a glimpse behind the curtain at what's really happening in the world, what's developing behind the headlines, regardless of the aims and ambitions of world leaders and organisations.

- ❖ Jesus foresaw a time when Jerusalem would no longer belong to the Jewish people. That happened in AD 70 when the Romans, whom he referred to as Gentiles, forcibly ejected and dispersed the people of Israel. Jesus said that this situation would not be allowed to continue: *'Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.'* (Luke 21:24) There was to be an end to non-Jewish occupation of Jerusalem and Israel generally. The people would return to their land. Then Jesus added the remarkable information that the generation which sees the Jewish people back in the land of Israel after their dispersion, will witness the end of this age and the commencement of a new age (Luke 21:32).
- ❖ The Jews began returning to Israel after the land was officially declared a homeland for them in 1948. Also significant – because *'Jerusalem will be trampled ... until...'* – was the people's full possession of the city of Jerusalem after the Six Days' War in 1967. Which generation saw these things? We did. For all of us living now, our time is unmistakably what is described biblically as 'the last days'. If that sounds apocalyptic, then you're absolutely right. But it's not bad news. It will be earth shaking, but the world is long overdue for a shake-up.
- ❖ Jesus said: The period prior to his return is going to be very like the days leading up to the big flood in Noah's day. Those days were characterised by ever increasing evil. The world was filled with violence, and most people carried on as if God didn't exist. The Apostle Peter made this comment: *'... scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of his [Jesus'] coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."'* (2 Peter 3:3-4) He went on to say that's how it was in Noah's day before the flood came. They all ignored Noah, heaping scorn on his insistence that an unprecedented deluge was soon to come.
- ❖ That's how people in 'the last days' will view Jesus' return. They'll say, 'That's rubbish. Nothing like that's ever going to happen. You surely don't believe that?!' Peter said that a general attitude of

debunking would be another sure sign that we were in the last days. It's certainly moving that way. And Peter saw it positively, saying, *'Nevertheless we, according to His [God's] promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.'* (2 Peter 3:13) Believers will see the state of the world as a sure sign that God's promises are about to be fulfilled: these bad times are drawing to a close, and a world *'in which righteousness dwells'* is about to begin.

- ❖ Here's something from Paul's description of society in the last days. You'll probably notice more than a few similarities with society today, or where it's heading: *'But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power ...'*, to which he adds, *'always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.'* (2 Timothy 3:1-7) It's almost as if Paul could see the negative effects of social media on the world, amplifying the baser aspects of human nature.
- ❖ Speaking of digital communication, the prophet Daniel said that during *'the time of the end many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.'* (Daniel 12:4) It's cryptic, but some see it as a reference to the internet which has brought an explosion of information across the world. The word *'many'* can also mean *'much'*. So, the much running *'to and fro'* could refer to the increased traffic of knowledge. It's not certain, but I wouldn't rule it out as a reference to the global impact of technology in the last days. I'm no technophobe, but we can't turn a blind eye to the cumulative negative impact of technology, which appears to be far outstripping its benefits.
- ❖ While we're on the subject of Daniel and his God-given ability to see the future, we should mention that he foresaw four major world empires. Starting from Babylon, where he lived, only three more world-wide Empires would follow. After that (following the collapse of

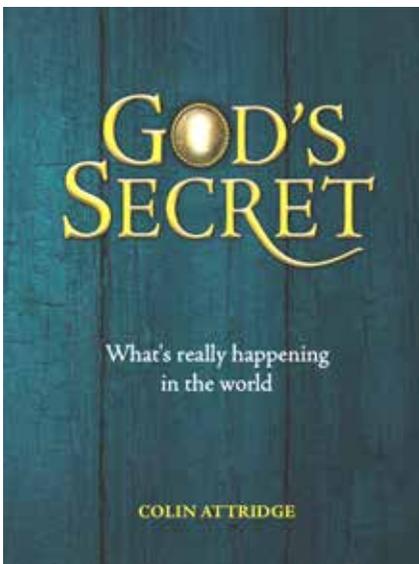
the Roman Empire) the world would become an unstable mix of strong and weak nations. This is where we still are. And in the days of these strong and weak nations, God will intervene dramatically: *'And in the days of these kings [or world leaders] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never 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 forever.'* (Daniel 2:44)

- ❖ Daniel described the final period of the last days as *'a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time...'* (Daniel 12:1) It doesn't get any worse than that. But at the same time, for many it could hardly get any better, because he adds that *'many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.'* (12:2) The believers who've been 'sleeping' in their graves will awake because the promised Kingdom is about to happen. Jesus is back! There are two sides to Armageddon. It's a bad time for the Godless and a good time for believers.
- ❖ Jesus described the final period as a time of *'distress of nations, with perplexity'*. (Luke 21:25) There will be such distress that people everywhere will be utterly perplexed over how awful things have become, and probably at how quickly things have plunged into such a fearful state. He goes on to say, *'men's hearts failing them from fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth...'* The world will be in turmoil. Having experienced the effects of a pandemic, we know that unrest and fear can be as contagious as the virus that spawned them, and how easily instant digital communication can now create and fuel global unrest.
- ❖ Thankfully God will intervene before mankind brings the world to a violent, permanent end. Jesus assures us, *'And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.'* (Matthew 24:22) For believers' sakes, God will step in. He has promised this world to them, so He is not going to allow others to destroy it.

Among the closing words of Jesus' prophecy of the last days, he offers some reassurance for believers: *'Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.'* (Luke 21: 28) When the world is in such a time of trouble, from which no escape seems possible, believers should not despair along with everyone else; they should take heart. It's a sign of the nearness of Christ.

Soon they'll see what the whole world is going to see: *'Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.'* (Luke 21:27) 'Son of Man' is a name by which Jesus sometimes referred to himself. He'll put down all unrest and put a halt to the madness of self-destruction that is the path we're currently on. We're told that God will *'...destroy those who destroy the earth...'* (Revelation 11:18) Peace activists, ecologists, eco-warriors and the like mean well, I'm sure, but they've not seen the bigger picture. God will never allow us to destroy our planet by neglect, pollution, war, or any other means.

Mock me if you will for believing such things about the events coming at this time of the end. It'll make me feel a bit like Noah. But I hope that by now you've seen enough of what's going on in this world to realise that there is something in what the Bible is telling us. And the impending upheaval is not a threat; it's a promise of better things.



This is a modified extract from the new book *'GOD'S SECRET - What's really happening in the world'* by Colin Attridge.

Send for your free copy – see contact details on inside back cover.

Bible Questions and Answers

'The virgin shall conceive...'

A recent telephone enquiry concerned the Old Testament virgin birth prophecy of Isaiah chapter seven and how this related to its fulfilment in the New Testament with the birth of Jesus Christ to Mary. Isaiah records that a sign would be given to Ahaz king of Israel with the words:

'... Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.' (Isaiah 7:14)

Seven hundred years later, Joseph was told that Mary, his fiancée, had become pregnant by the action of God's power, the Holy Spirit, and that he was not to worry at all but to go ahead and marry her. The comment is made:

'So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."' (Matthew 1:22–23)

The enquirer was puzzled as to how the prophecy might have had a double fulfilment, first in the time of

Isaiah and second, 700 years later. How could there have been two virgin births? The fact that Ahaz was a particularly wicked and wayward king is a further puzzle. Why should he deserve such a sign, and what did it mean to him? Did a virgin really conceive in his days, and, if so, who conceived, who was the son and how could that relate to Jesus Christ? The suggested answer is as follows.

The background to Isaiah

Ahaz, one of the many kings of Judah in the line of King David, turned out to be one of the worst. Everything recorded in Isaiah about him paints the picture of a young and foolish king, and 2 Chronicles 28: 1–4 summarise his shocking behaviour. Coming to the throne at the age of 20, it is likely that he would have married soon after, to ensure there was a son to succeed him. His small Kingdom of Judah was in trouble. The Northern Kingdom of Israel (often called Ephraim in the Old Testament) had allied with Syria to attack Ahaz, their southern neighbour. The confederate kings who came against Jerusalem were Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria. Ahaz was desperate. At this

very point God sent Isaiah the prophet to meet Ahaz just outside the city wall (Isaiah 7:3) and deliver a message of hope. The plots of these two kings came to nothing, and he was encouraged to believe this (verse 9), but as Isaiah pointed out it was Assyria who was to remain the real threat, all other powers being mere puppets.

The prophecy

Then a second message was given whereby Ahaz was told to ask for a sign, but the faithless Ahaz refused, saying: *'I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!'* (verse 12). But despite this obstinate attitude, the remarkable sign is spelt out by Isaiah to the *'house of David'* – and this is the sign of the virgin birth. But note that it was specifically given to Ahaz with the words:

'... Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose

the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.'

(verses 13–16)

Now we know that it is a long-term prophecy of Mary giving birth to Jesus. Of that there is no doubt, as Matthew has confirmed. However, one can also see that there must have been an initial fulfilment connected to events very close in time, because of the reference to a child that would not reach adulthood before both kings of Israel and Syria would be removed as a threat. The Hebrew word *'Almah'*, from a root implying the vigour of puberty, translated virgin in English, can mean a young woman who has not yet had a child.

The birth of Hezekiah

In the context of Ahaz's family, the most likely explanation is this. Ahaz had either just married or was about to marry his wife Abijah. She was possibly the daughter of the God-fearing Zechariah, who kept Ahaz' grandfather Uzziah on track. Of Zechariah it was said that he had *'understandings of the visions of God'*, and so it is not unreasonable to assume that Abijah was a good influence on her son Hezekiah. For Hezekiah turned out to be everything Ahaz his wicked father wasn't. When

Hezekiah came to the throne there was a spiritual revival that he spearheaded.



Seal of king Hezekiah discovered in Jerusalem in 2015. The narrative of Isaiah and Chronicles is firmly based in history.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 29 we are shown how Hezekiah lost no time in commencing his reforms, reversing all the works of his father Ahaz. He re-opened the Temple, which had become derelict and filled with rubbish. He reformed the priesthood, destroyed the idols and completely restored the Temple worship, and later united the faithful of Israel and Judah in holding a memorable Passover. He restored the monarchy to what it was supposed to be, representing God's Kingdom in Jerusalem. In so many ways he represented the true Messiah, a saviour of Judah and Israel. But he was merely a type, not the real thing. The name Immanuel is a symbolic

name meaning 'God is with us' and was certainly fulfilled in the way Hezekiah was able to influence the nation by his righteous actions.

Hezekiah foreshadows the Messiah

Hezekiah wasn't the true Messiah, but only foreshadowed God's son through certain events recorded in Scripture. The true virgin birth, some 700 years after the prophecy was given, occurred through the action of the Holy Spirit on Mary, fulfilling the sign given to the house of David, for Jesus was descended from David of the tribe of Judah. This was predestined in God's timetable to also occur at a low point later in Israel's history, when Rome (not Assyria) was the dominant force in the world. By the time Gabriel appeared to Joseph and Mary, Israel had lost national independence to the Roman Empire, and they had to face two kings that endangered their lives. They were locally ruled by a cruel and paranoid Edomite strong man, King Herod the Great, who was succeeded for a short time by his son Archelaus. Herod had been put in charge by his Roman overlords. The evil King Herod tried but failed to put Jesus to death after his birth, and Joseph and Mary took refuge with their precious

son in Egypt for a while, only returning after Herod's death.

But there was a second evil king, Archelaus, the eldest of the surviving sons of Herod (for he had put some to death). Archelaus was in his father's mould, upsetting the Jews and causing insurrection and instability in Judaea by his inept governance and cruelty. In AD 6 he was banished by Rome and his territory put under the rulership of Roman governors, one of whom was Pontius Pilate. For this reason, on returning from Egypt, the young child Jesus was taken north to live in Nazareth in Galilee rather than settle in Joseph's home town of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:22-23). Thus, we can see two kings removed, but the Roman overlords remaining, answering to the pattern of history in the days of the young Hezekiah.

When we consider the humanity of Jesus Christ, we know that he inherited human nature with all its potential for temptations, disappointments and suffering, which inevitably ends with death. Hezekiah had a major health crisis 15 years before his death, during which not only was he sick to the point of death, but he had the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, biting at his heels in attempting a brutal siege of

Jerusalem, having besieged all of Judah's fortified cities. Hezekiah was at his wits end, turned his face to the wall and prayed to God. The prophet Isaiah was sent, and he was miraculously delivered from both the Assyrians and death itself by the hand of God. His life was extended by 15 years.

Just as Hezekiah faced a crisis from Assyria, so Jesus faced a terrible crisis inflicted from the power of the Jews and the Romans together (though all was in God's overruling power of course). The Sanhedrin council conspired to crucify him, and Pontius Pilate, the weak Roman Governor, acceded to their demands. Jesus suffered an agonising death, but God raised him and gave him eternal life.

Most important of all, Jesus was born with human nature, to overcome what the Bible calls '*sin in the flesh.*' Just as Hezekiah prayed to God in his extremity, and God answered him, so the writer to the Hebrews states this about Jesus:

'... 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. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.’ Hebrews 5:7-9

Being flesh and blood he could have sinned and was tempted in the same way as us (Hebrews 4:15), yet he did not sin but was obedient in every action towards God. Jesus’ life was a complete reversal of the behaviour of all his human ancestors, right back to Adam, and, because he lived a sinless life, God raised him from the dead.

The Immanuel name fulfilled

What about the name Immanuel meaning ‘God is with us’ as applied to Jesus Christ? This does not mean that Jesus was God himself. He was the Son of God, sent by Him to undertake the wonderful act of saving us from the consequences of our sins. One of the clearest illustrations of the fulfilment of the name Immanuel in Jesus Christ occurs in Paul’s 2nd letter to the Corinthians:

‘All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins

against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.’

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NIV)

And again, in conclusion, Romans 8:31-32 shows that God was behind everything Jesus stood for and accomplished:

‘... If God is for us, who can be against us?
He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?’

Justin Giles
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God as a Father

Let's begin with a quotation from a Psalm of David: *'The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"'* (Psalm 14:1). In contrast, those who recognise that there is a God, endeavour to learn more about Him and His dealings with us. In the New Testament letter to the Hebrews we read: *'... he who comes to God must believe that He is (exists) and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* (Hebrews 11:6)

So, why would people who do not believe that God exists be considered foolish? The Apostle Paul, when writing to the believers in Rome, gives the answer:

'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.' Romans 1:20 NIV

The best way to sum this up is for us to understand and recognise that everywhere creation carries the hallmark of design, purpose and perfect planning. Whether we are looking up at the vast universe and how it operates, or down at the

smallest living things under a microscope, design is clearly seen.

So, when it comes to us personally, we can consider any part of our body and only conclude as King David did:

'I will praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'

Psalm 139:14

Why did David say this? Partly because he wanted to express how people have a different and superior mind to the animal creation, enabling them to have a sense of morality and conscience, being able also to discuss and progress ideas; to recognise truth and God's purpose in creation.

This was God's plan from the very beginning, as we read in the first book of the Bible:

'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' Genesis 1:26

God's existence

As we cannot see God, it might seem an impossible task to decide who He

is when we read of Him being from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 90:2), everywhere present, all-knowing and the Creator of everything (Psalm 139). These attributes, when considered from a human perspective, are beyond understanding, because everything we experience has limitations, with a beginning and an ending. Many people are led to dismiss the fact of a higher being, because they cannot understand these concepts.

In life we often accept circumstantial evidence that something exists which cannot be seen. Simple logic helps us to come to that conclusion, e.g. the force of gravity and the air we breathe. The evidence all around us is clearly seen in nature. Without a Creator, how can we understand the origin of life or the precision of the planets and the workings of our galaxy, although we set our clocks by their movement?

God is the great Creator and Sustainer of all life, who established the earth with all its eco-systems, and created mankind to populate it. He has a long-term plan ultimately to populate it only with God-fearing people who will live for ever. We read in the book of Acts: ‘... *He has made from one blood every nation... so that*

they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, although He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.’ (Acts 17:26–28) The fulfilment of the promise of God about the future of the earth is still awaited, and the good news is that we can be a part of that future by God’s grace.

God the Father

How does focussing on God as a father help us to understand Him? This is something the Almighty thought about. As a result of His creativity and foresight, He made human beings different to the animal creation with a purpose in mind. He has given us this family model to think about and understand His characteristics, and His ultimate purpose in creating us.

God has told us to call Him Father, to recognise Him in this role. Jesus also made this clear when telling us how to pray: ‘*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*’ (Matthew 6:9) Throughout the Bible God is referred to as a Father, which you can check out using a Bible concordance. The interaction within families, between a father and his children, and children and their siblings, helps us to relate to God’s dealings with us

and is one of the main ways we can begin to appreciate or understand God.

Let's explore this further

Think about the general workings of a family unit, and I know there are exceptions. Modern ideology may wish to present a different view to that held in most families, but in the main we have either been part of a family or now have our own family:

- ❖ Father being considered wise and ready to give advice.
- ❖ Children part of the family for life.
- ❖ Family members being caring, loving and protective towards the others.
- ❖ Family members being dependable, ready to listen and show sympathy and empathy.

That certainly has been my experience with my parents, and I hope my children and their families see it the same way, and yours do also.

Love is the 'glue'

When we think about the bonds that can exist between family members, we recognise that the 'glue' which holds it all together in a tightknit family is love. You probably know the saying to demonstrate this: 'blood is

thicker than water'! God's love for His children is clearly stated in scripture: *'See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!'* (1 John 3:1 NIV)

We must note that God's love is conditional and specifically directed towards those who reverence Him and become recognised as the children of God in His special family. The Psalmist wrote: *'For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those who fear Him.'* (Psalm 103:11) We know how much we are, or were loved as children, or love our children. That is how God the Father displays His feelings, which in turn leads Him to be recognised for His compassion. Yes, how easy it is to forgive our children for their misdeeds, even when they need discipline.

Compassion

How many times have you experienced as a child the compassion of your father when you have done wrong and been chastised for it? Or as a parent being cross with your child, yet the reprimand is only for the good of the individual and given in love. The overriding bond of love allows us to understand God's dealings with us, and we can

understand how we can have empathy with our children. The Almighty views us in the same way if we genuinely love and respect Him as our Father. The Psalmist wrote:

‘As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.’ Psalm 103:13–14,17–18

Discipline

As a child I was disciplined on many occasions, but looking back, I can see that it was necessary for my wellbeing as I grew into a mature adult, although I did not always appreciate it at the time. Were you never disciplined as a child, or if you are now a parent, have you never found it necessary to discipline your children, not an act of spite but one of love for the child’s wellbeing?

Does this help us to understand God’s dealings with us? We could wonder why we have suffering and difficulties in our own lives at times,

but does it have a purpose in God’s dealings with us? The writer to the Hebrews puts it like this:

‘... “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom the father does not chasten? ... we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.’

Hebrews 12: 5–11

Dependable and a protector

A good father is someone who always protects his family and is dependable in all circumstances. We know how we must keep a close eye on our children to try to protect them from harm. In the same way God will protect those who trust in Him: ‘*I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and*

my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust”. (Psalm 91:2)

We can look to our heavenly Father for wisdom, for the Bible is full of instruction for our wellbeing. Indeed, if we recognise Him, then that understanding enables us to have true dependence and trust in Him as our rock in life. The wise man Solomon gave his children this advice:

‘Hear, my children the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; for I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law.

When I was my father’s son... he also taught me, and said to me: “Let your heart retain my words; keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding!”

Proverbs 4:1–5

A father is always approachable, someone who is prepared to listen, and this characteristic is also referred to in the Bible as the following verses show:

‘Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’ Philipians 4:6–7 NIV

‘Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us.’ 1 John 5:14

I hope after our brief consideration we can see why God has taught us to see Him in a fatherly role, and has given us family relationships so we can comprehend His characteristics. Unlike human family interaction, where our parents have done their best, God’s relationship with those who acknowledge His very existence as part of His family, is perfect for the eternal wellbeing of his children.

Knowing God gives purpose to our lives, and gives us the assurance that we can depend on His promise to offer eternal life to those who respond to Him.

‘... this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.’ John 17:3

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Baptism

Having reviewed many Bible teachings in previous articles, we might be thinking about what this means for us as individuals. In this article we now begin to look at their impact on our own lives. The subject under consideration is baptism which is an absolute pre-requisite for an individual if they wish to become associated with the promises of God.

Throughout the previous articles we have noticed various practical points. For example, in the study on creation we were introduced to the God-given concept of marriage. When we looked at the life of Abraham, we noted that God counted Abraham as a righteous man because he was prepared to separate himself from the world around him and follow God's instructions.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the message of the Gospel spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean countries. It was called 'The Way' or simply 'the truth'. People believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to his Father's side and that he would return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth; and in the first century many adopted that teaching and followed it. The precursor to being associated with these things was the simple and humble act of baptism.

Jesus instructed the apostles to '*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*' (Mark 16:15-16) The consequence of this is that knowledge about these things, but choosing not to believe, and therefore not being baptised, will result in personal condemnation.

The Acts of the Apostles, which comes straight after the four gospels in the New Testament, is an excellent book to read about how the Gospel was preached, what it means, and how it is, even today, rooted in the Old Testament. For example, the Apostle Peter preached about the death and resurrection of Jesus and his promise to return.

Some listeners were so moved that they wanted to know what they should do to be saved from eternal death. Peter said: '*repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...*' (Acts 2:38)

We are told that on one occasion 3,000 people were baptised. The work of John the Baptist in the Gospels and these passages in Acts set the standard for us.

Read Acts 2:37–41 and Acts 3:19–21.

Particularly notice in Acts 3:19 that the act of baptism is a demonstration of repentance. We already looked at sin and death in a previous lesson. This repentance is a humble acknowledgement that we are flawed in the sight of God. Also notice that the Apostle Peter is referencing the teaching of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus will return and put everything right but not until a set time.

What does this word ‘*repent*’ really mean? It calls on someone who has heard the gospel message and believes it to have a complete change of mind and attitude, a different outlook and way of life. The first step in this new way is to be baptised. Continuing to follow the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles we can observe that there were three stages to people becoming followers of Christ:

The gospel was preached to them.

They listened and believed.

They were baptised.

Read Acts 8:12.

They went on to meet with like-minded believers who had also been baptised and they worked together, endeavouring to live a lifetime of obedience to God’s commands. This theme runs throughout the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul and the other apostles in the New Testament.

What must we believe?

This is the key question. We drew attention to Mark 16:16 which in one simple sentence tells us that belief in the gospel and baptism are essential for salvation. We learn in Acts 8:12 that this belief in the gospel is bound up in ‘*the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*’. It is hoped that our readers can see that these are the points we have focused on throughout these ‘Basic Bible Teaching’ articles over the last couple of years.

The importance of this knowledge is clear from the many passages of scripture. For example, Philip preached to an Ethiopian who had been converted to the

Jewish faith and was on his way home from Jerusalem when they met. He would have understood from the Old Testament prophecies about the Kingdom of God. Philip ‘preached to him Jesus’ and after the Ethiopian said he believed in these things he was baptised. The record in Acts is a moving and humbling passage. It is important to note that the Ethiopian was a believing adult who confessed his belief and went ‘down into the water’ to be baptised.

Read Acts 8:26–40.

Another case was a man named Cornelius. This again, is a humbling passage to read. It is strongly recommended that you take the time to read and digest the narrative about his conversion.

Read Acts 10.

Similar examples are the conversion of Lydia and the the jailor at Philippi, and it’s recommended that you read through this chapter.

Read Acts 16.

What is baptism?

We can see from the examples recorded in the scriptures that baptism is complete immersion in water of a person who has shown understanding of the Gospel and declared a willingness to commit their life to follow Christ.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and we find that the word translated into English in our Bibles is the Greek word *baptizo*. This is a word that means to dip under or immerse. It was used in the cloth dying trade. To change the colour of the cloth it is necessary to entirely immerse it in the dye and not just splash it randomly. Check the text of John 3:23 – it’s a short and simple verse but loaded with meaning about the fundamentals of baptism.

Baptism represents the washing away of sins. This was explained by Ananias when he baptised Saul, later called the Apostle Paul.

Read Acts 22:12–16.

This means that the believer can make a new start in life before God.

Read Romans 6:17–18.

Baptism is a symbolic burial in water that identifies us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul describes baptism as a resurrection to a new life. In the same way that Christ died and was buried, so the believer is ‘buried’ in the waters of baptism. But just as Christ rose again to a new life, the believer rises from the water of baptism to a new life ‘in Christ’. It irrevocably associates the believer with his death and resurrection.

Jesus says in John 15:14: *'you are My friends if you do whatever I command you'*. Baptism is the first step in following Christ's commands. A newly baptised person is now associated with the salvation made possible by Christ.

Read: Colossians 2:12 and Colossians 3:1-4.

Some would ask the question, "why do I need to be baptised, I've been a good 'Christian' person and never really done any wrong?" It is a question of obedience to Christ's commands. The Apostle Paul explains that Adam brought sin into the world and as a result death (see Romans 5:12).

Everyone has inherited the curse of sin and death because everyone is descended from Adam. But through the redeeming work of Christ, his death and resurrection and our association with him through baptism, we become associated with salvation from sin and death. Put simply, those who have been baptised into Christ, look for his return and the salvation of his followers from sin and death by the giving of eternal life. These are the very things that were promised to Abraham and his descendants in the Old Testament. How poor we would be without the context of the Old Testament for understanding the Gospel.

Read Romans chapter 6.

Just a few words about Abraham. We saw in an earlier article that Abraham was promised that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. We made the point that it was a promise concerning a singular seed or descendant who is Jesus Christ. It is strongly recommended that you read Paul's letter to the Galatians chapter three. This is a very powerful chapter that brings the 'loose ends' together.

Read Galatians chapter 3.

The only way to salvation

In this world today where there are so many religions with conflicting and quirky philosophical ideas about life, often prefaced with 'I think...'; we are seeing in this lesson that the Bible has this powerful and consistent thread running right through it that concerns every one of us. It is the only way to salvation from sin and death leading to eternal life. Remember God said to Abraham: *'... in you (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed'* (Genesis 12:3) i.e., through Christ. And again: *'... all the land which you (Abraham) see I give to you and your descendants forever'* (Genesis 13:15). Therefore, we can say with confidence that this is the only way, through

baptism and association with Christ, and therefore the family of Abraham, that any of us can be saved.

Biblical baptism associates us with Christ and differentiates us from other religious systems. Christ's followers are regularly described in the Bible as being '*in Christ*'. As we have seen, naturally, by birth we are all '*in Adam*' and would die without hope. But if we are '*in Christ*' through the waters of baptism, we have the wonderful hope of eternal life.

Read Ephesians 4:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 15:19-23.

The privileges and responsibilities of being '*in Christ*'

Paul reminded those who were '*in Christ*' that they had the special privilege of being Christ's brothers and sisters. They had become, through baptism, children of God (because Jesus Christ is the son of God). Believers in Paul's day were, through the waters of baptism, part of a community bound together by having the same beliefs, sharing the same way of life and looking forward with the same hope to the return of Christ. It is the same today for likeminded believers who are '*in Christ*'. *Read: 2 Corinthians 6:11-18 and Ephesians 4:15-16.*

In conclusion

The scriptural command to be baptised is a test of our attitude and response to God. He has provided a way of salvation by sending His son as a sacrifice for sin, but He has told us through the scriptures that we can only receive salvation by believing the Gospel message and obeying Christ's commands. Baptism is the first step on this journey of following Christ and being one of his followers. It requires humility and a faith on our part to take that step. He said to his disciples: '*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*' (John 15:14) and '*He who believes and is baptized will be saved...*' (Mark 16:16).

God willing, in the next issue of Light we will look at how the believers who were baptised and became '*in Christ*', grouped together and how the Gospel message spread as we consider 'The First Century AD'.



the *signs of* *times*

Denial and lies

Is it just me, or does there seem to be an increase in lying in the public arena, or perhaps just a sense of reluctant acceptance that this is just the way it is? And the thought that it always will be! I focus on a couple of events in the US to highlight this, but I am not in any way suggesting that these things are unique to the US. Far from it. But they are vividly highlighted there as I write this article.

And there's another reason to focus on the US. They hold a unique place in the world. They are militarily the most powerful nation on earth, and as such are the guarantor of the nation of Israel's existence. The US and China vie for the most economically powerful nation. However, it is the US dollar that is the base currency of the world's financial systems. The US believe that their system of government is an

The attack on the US Capitol, now under investigation by the January 6 Committee

exemplar. They export their sense of values and culture. In short, their influence on the world is great even if, as many feel, their power is declining.

At this point it's worth noting, as mentioned in previous articles, that my comments are not intended to be political. I believe God is in control of everything and therefore I do not take any part in politics. Rather I observe what I see going on around me and ponder on the degree it points to the return of Jesus to this deeply troubled world. I firmly believe we need a righteous dictator with the total power and ability to rectify the terrible mess humankind is making of God's world. The poor standards of many of those in power both heighten the need for Jesus' return, and signify that it may very well be soon. I certainly hope so!

Back to the theme of denial and lies. It seems to me to run through much of what's happening in the US (and of course in so many other places wherever you care to look) as I write this article.

Specifically, I focus on:

- ❖ The January 6 Committee's public proceedings
- ❖ The continuing election result denial

In both instances a great number of people are challenging what are simply facts. They do this for a variety of reasons, ranging from being wrongly informed all the way through to outright lying.

It's worth pointing out here what God thinks of lying. Here's an example from God's book. It covers more than lying, and, sadly, it is a good description of so much of the actions of humankind:

**'These six things the LORD hates,
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:
A proud look,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent blood,
A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that are swift in running to evil,**

**A false witness who speaks lies,
And one who sows discord among
brethren.'** Proverbs 6:16-19

Compare those words with a prophecy in the New Testament. It has the heading 'Perilous Times and Perilous Men' in the Bible version I'm quoting from:

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

2 Timothy 3:1-5

The prevalence of the behaviour described in both quotes from God's Word is a sign to me that we are living '*in the last days*' and that Jesus' return is near. But whatever your view, I note that it's a perfect description of so much that we can see around us wherever we are without looking very hard. I believe Jesus is coming back because he said

just that. I quote two examples from the scriptures (my bold text for emphasis).

‘Now when he had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward 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 1:9-11

Here’s another one. It also has a very appropriate heading in the Bible version I am quoting from - ‘The Coming of the Son of Man’:

‘And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.’ Luke 21:25-28

Is the first part of this second passage a good symbolic description of our times? I certainly believe so. And I note especially the last part; that Jesus will come. And that when we see such times rather than be afraid, we should ‘*lift up*’ our heads. But back to this article’s theme – denial and lies.

Here is a brief summary of each one.

The January 6 Committee’s public proceedings.

There have now been a number of public presentations from the committee putting forward their findings. They conclude that the former US President encouraged the mob that tried to have the confirmation of President Biden’s election win set aside, by violently invading the House of Congress to disrupt the certification proceedings. All this even though the former president received multiple advice from many of his circle of appointees that the certification could not legally be set aside.

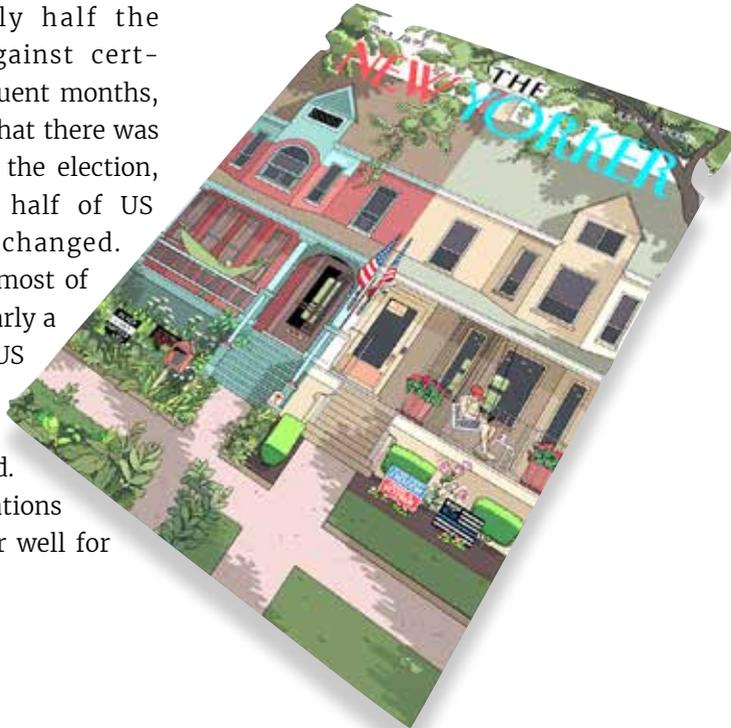
But what will happen with the committee's findings when the process concludes? Nobody knows for certain. But with around half of the active voting population believing the current president was not legitimately elected (see next section) the committee's findings are in danger of becoming a footnote in US history.

The continuing election result lie

After the disruption and danger had passed from the mob invasion on January 6, the US Congress reconvened and voted on whether to certify as correct the election of the now current president. The majority of one party (nearly half the politicians) voted against certification. In the subsequent months, despite clear evidence that there was no significant fraud in the election, the stance of nearly half of US politicians has not changed. Likewise, the views of most of their supporters. So clearly a massive percentage of US citizens don't believe their current president was legitimately elected. The continuing ramifications of that fact don't augur well for the future of the US.

To finish off, here's a couple of quotes from the media about the current state of the US. The first refers to the US Supreme Court's decision on abortion but it is the conclusion of the author's opinion piece that is most relevant to this article. It sums up the consequences of denial and lies in the US as I see it:

'America today feels like one country that contains two very separate nations, inhabited by two tribes that have completely different values, beliefs and goals. Now, they have just moved farther apart.' (From Roe vs Wade: 'Why this is a seismic day in America.' by Sarah Smith, North



America Editor, BBC Online, June 25, 2022).

The second is part of an interview published in The New Yorker magazine with the US artist Chris Ware, Chris Ware's 'House Divided'. The artist discusses America's fractured present and his fears for the future. (By Françoise Mouly, The New Yorker, June 27, 2022).

'Am I laughably naïve to think we might all somehow grow up and continue this relatively youngish two-hundred-and-forty-six-year-old experiment? I'm starting to think I am', the artist Chris Ware said. His cover for the July 4, 2022, issue of the magazine captures the divides underlying this year's Independence Day celebrations (see opposite).

The article's author asks him this question: 'You have never been an optimist, but does this moment feel worse than usual?'

He responds: 'I was taught in school that the American experiment was rooted in consensus and compromise. But Internet algorithms have put us at an uncompromising moment of nonconsensual reality. Sometimes it seems the only thing that the left and right can agree on is that compromise is laughably naïve. I was

buoyed by the brief flirtation with reality that the January 6th hearings have resurrected in a sliver of the G.O.P., but now the Texas Republican party's vote to adopt a platform that asserts the illegitimacy of Biden's electoral victory makes it feel as if something very, very, very bad is about to happen.'

Conclusion

So far in this article I've focused on the US. But concurrent with events in the US, and indeed everywhere, the timer on the bomb of continuing damage to the environment and ongoing climate change is ticking (see editor's footnote). How long before time's up? No wonder Jesus in Luke 21:26 speaks of '*men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*'

Of course, these concerns can easily be overshadowed by another gun outrage in the US or war somewhere else or ...insert your own crisis - after all there are plenty to choose from. Just depends on where you live and your circumstances! But this is where the '*look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near*' part in the verse I quoted from Luke comes in.

Jesus will come!

That's the only real and constant positive in a world which is progressively being crushed under the weight of so many different adverse pressures. Only Jesus can set everything right and He will have the total power to do just that!

I said last time that I hope there will be lots of people waiting eagerly for him and the wonderful future in a new world that he will usher in, and that in a time of turmoil believing these words is a great comfort to me. That remains my hope. As does the wish that it will become your hope too.

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

Editor's note: Since this article was written, on 19th July 2022, the UK experienced record-breaking temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius, another reminder of the inevitable consequences of the damage to our environment, which could have dire implications for the human race.



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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.

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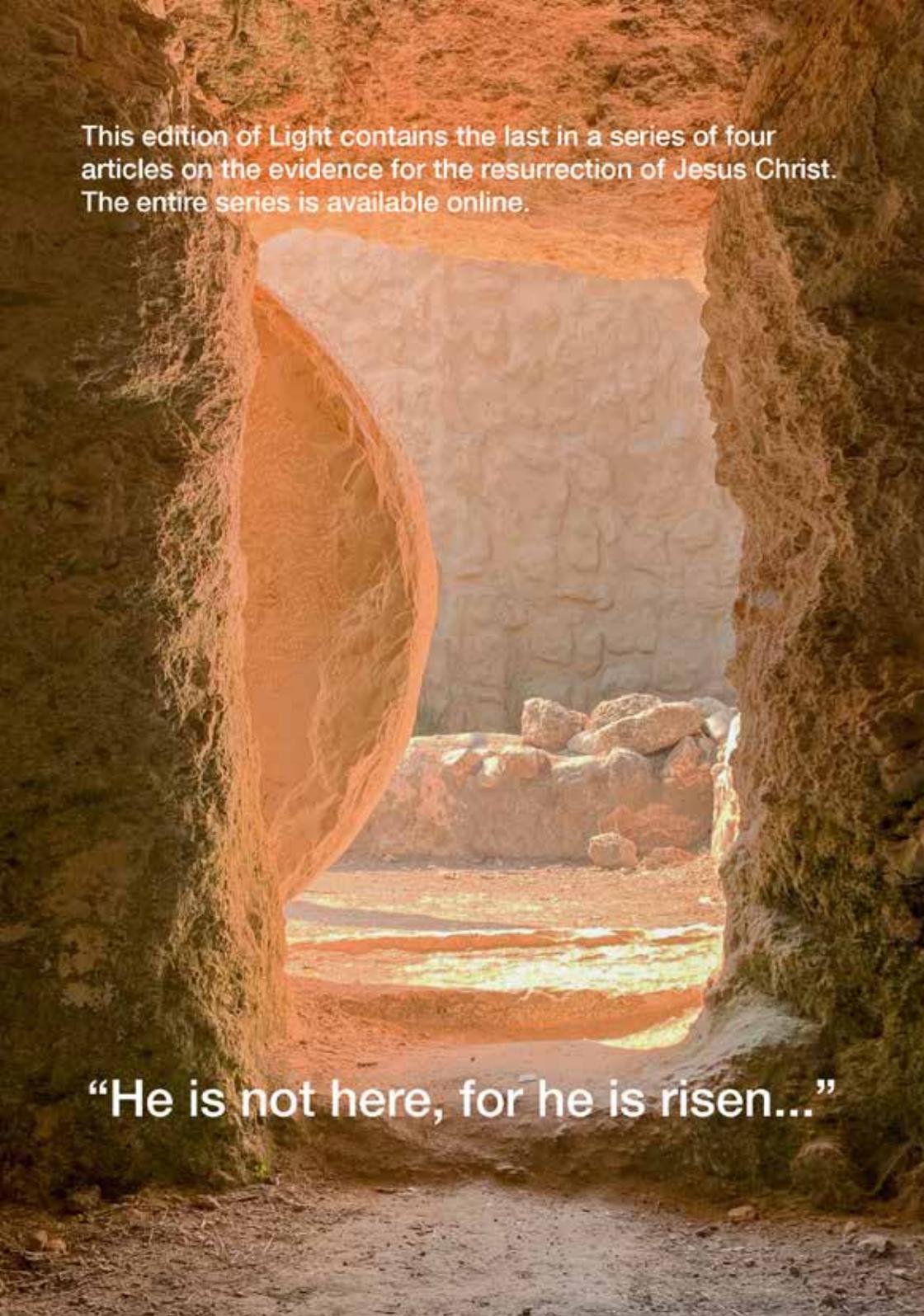
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“He is not here, for he is risen...”