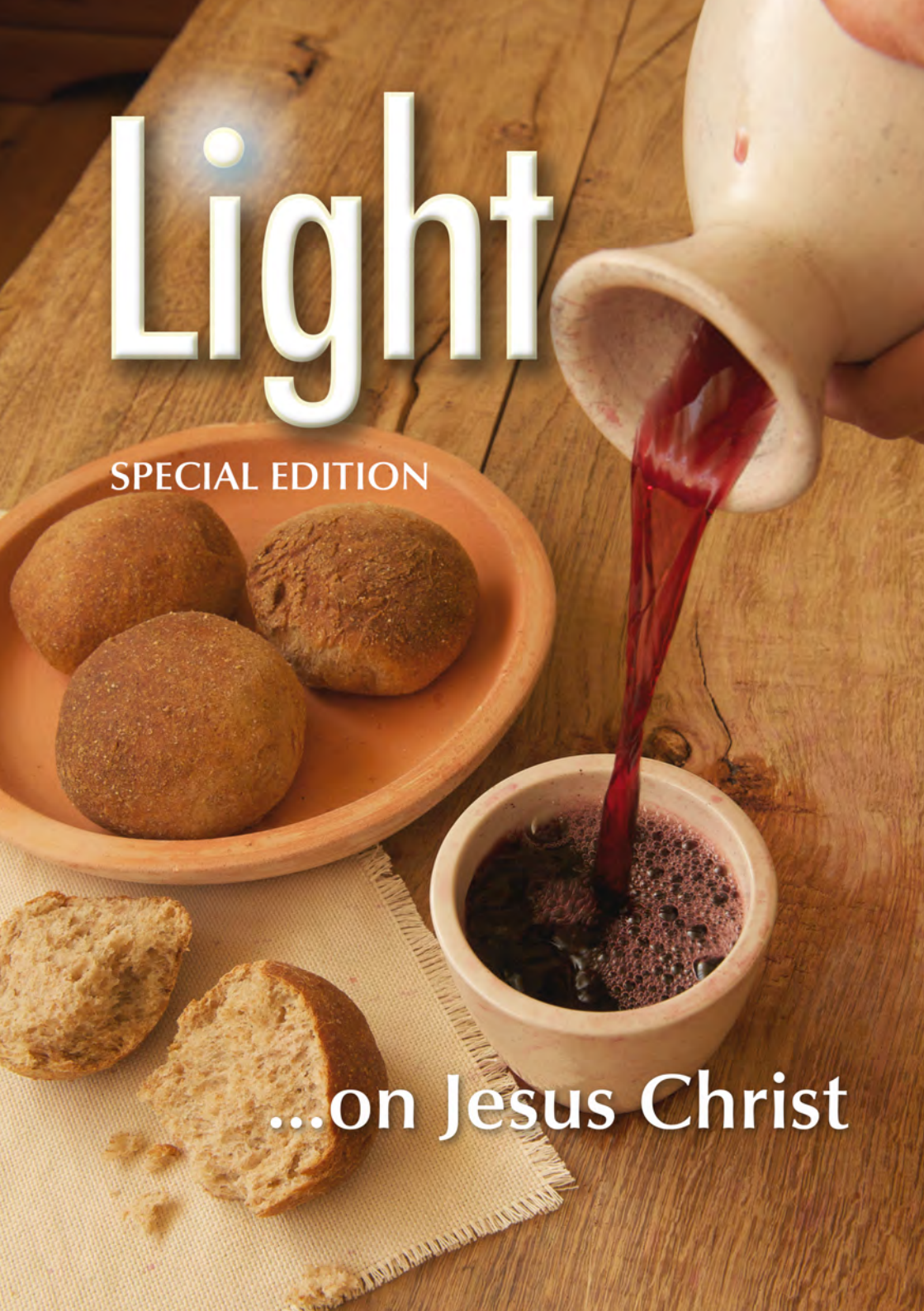


Light

SPECIAL EDITION

...on Jesus Christ



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The Christadelphians believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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Light on Jesus Christ

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Note:

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

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Introduction

A piece of bread, a cup of wine; these are the simple things that Jesus chose, by which his followers in every age were to remember him. The Apostle Paul recalled Jesus' words on the night of his betrayal when he wrote to the first Christians at Corinth:

'For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes' (1 Corinthians 11.23–26).

These two emblems of bread and wine are a focal point for the followers of Jesus today, to remember what he achieved during his lifetime and the significance of his death and resurrection.

No other man has made such an impact on the history of the world as Jesus Christ! No other man can claim to have the calendar set from the



time of his birth – the dating of history from 'anno domini' (AD), a Latin phrase which means 'in the year of our Lord'. This is a time line which stretches backwards (Before Christ or BC) and forwards (AD) from the date of his coming into the world.

During the two thousand years since the birth of Jesus, many people have been influenced by his teaching, living faithful and rewarding lives as

his disciples. Sadly, it has to be said that many others have carried out barbarous acts of cruelty and oppression, while misusing the name of Jesus Christ to justify their behaviour. It must also be said that we have now reached a point when people increasingly have no time for religion. The name of Jesus Christ is often used blasphemously, particularly in the English speaking world. The message of Christianity is ridiculed by many and Christ's teaching is dismissed as not being relevant in the twenty-first century.

The following articles have been written to direct our readers to the Divine plan centred in the work of Jesus Christ. He is the focal point of God's plan of salvation for the world. The human race without exception is subject to sin, disease and death and the need for salvation has not diminished. The Bible tells us that Jesus came into the world to remedy this situation and the aim of this special issue is to consider its teaching about the work of Jesus in the past, present and future. Jesus, the Son of God, was chosen to be the Saviour of the world and his mission encompasses the roles of a prophet and teacher, a priest and a king.

We urge our readers to think again about Jesus Christ, to consider seriously his life, his mission and his impact on the world. We also urge you to consider seriously your own

position at this eventful time in history. The future belongs to Jesus Christ and our own future is dependent on our relationship with him: *'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'* (Act 4.12). In this uncertain world one thing is very certain, as the Bible tells us:

**'Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday, today, and for ever.'**

(Hebrews 13.8)

In the first section we will look at the Bible's teaching about the introduction of sin and death into the world and the Divine plan to remedy this.

Note on Appendix (Page 51)

This booklet presents the Bible's teaching about Jesus, in the belief that the New Testament's gospel records and letters are genuine and accurate historical documents. The evidence for their truth is a separate subject, but the Appendix will give you a brief glimpse of the evidence from writers **outside the Bible** who witness to the existence of Jesus and the early days of the Christian community. In almost every case they were hostile to Christianity, which makes their evidence even more valuable.

His role in the Divine plan

Events in Eden

The record of the fall of man in Genesis chapter three is the foundation of Biblical teaching about the role of Jesus in the Divine plan. The Bible makes it clear that the mission of Jesus was to remedy the effects of what happened in Eden. The Apostle Paul wrote to the first century believers in Rome:

‘Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...For if by the one man’s offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many’ (Romans 5.12,15).

‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 6.23).

A test of obedience

These verses tell us that a careful consideration of what is written about the events in Eden is essential to a proper understanding of the mission of Jesus. Genesis chapter two tells us that the first human pair were set a test. They were told not to eat the fruit of a particular tree on pain of death: ‘...you shall not eat, for

in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die’ (Genesis 2.17).

All was well until the serpent, which ‘*was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made*’ (Genesis 3.1), tempted the woman to eat despite the Divine commandment. It is important to note that the serpent was an animal created by God, although it had been given the power of speech which makes the failure that followed more pointed.

The purpose behind the creation of man and the charge given to him was to ‘*have dominion over*’ the whole of the animal creation. This is twice repeated in Genesis chapter one for emphasis (Genesis 1.26,28). The word ‘*dominion*’ in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament means to rule over or subjugate. The point is that the woman should have treated the serpent in this way and should not have let herself be deceived by the cunning words of this animal. The temptation was subtle because what the serpent said was half true: ‘*You will not surely die*’ (not true). *For God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,*

knowing good and evil' (true). The woman succumbed to the serpent's reasoning, she looked at the tree and saw that it *'was good for food... pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise...'*. This led to her breaking the command: *'...she took its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate'* (Genesis 3.4-6).

A curse and a promise

This simple act of disobedience to a Divine command brought severe consequences – sin entered into the world and death came with it. A curse was pronounced on the serpent, the woman and the man. It is the curse on the serpent that has particular relevance in the consideration of the role of Jesus in God's plan:



'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel' (Genesis 3.15).

There is of course a natural enmity between poisonous snakes and human beings, but this is not the main thrust of these prophetic words. The problem between the serpent and the woman lay in what was thought and done. The lies of the serpent had led to sin and as a consequence to death. The enmity spoken of here was between those who thought like the serpent – who in effect said that God was not to be taken at His Word – and those who contended for the truth of God's Word.

This is the way Jesus teaches us to understand this principle. He links his teaching with the events in Eden and likens those who do not speak the truth to *'vipers'* or serpents: *'Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things'* (Matthew 12. 34, 35).

We have already noted how the woman had failed to *'have dominion over'* the serpent. However, in these words to the serpent there is a

promise of a 'Seed' or descendant of the woman who would do what the woman had failed to do – stamp on the serpent and his lies. In the process hurt would come to both parties – in the head of the serpent, a fatal wound, and in the heel of the 'Seed', a less serious wound (see picture page 28).

This promise is the first Old Testament prophecy about the future work of Jesus, who through his sinless life and his death on the cross as a sacrifice (a temporary wound) overcame the power of sin. God raised him from the dead and in so doing he opened the way for sinners to obtain forgiveness and salvation from death. This will be considered in more detail later in this booklet (see pages 29–31).

The need for forgiveness

Although the man and woman were warned that disobedience would bring death, the punishment was not carried out in a harsh or vindictive way. The God of the Bible is just and merciful. His character is described in these words: *'...the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty...'* (Exodus 34.6,7). Nevertheless Adam and Eve and all their descendants were now subject to a

process that eventually ended with death. Consistent with His abundant mercy, God offered them forgiveness and a promise for the ultimate good of the human race.

The need for atonement

From the moment of their disobedience a change came upon the man and the woman in that they were now sinners. Their very nature had changed and they felt the change by becoming aware of their nakedness. Their first reaction was to set about trying to cover it: *'Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings'* (Genesis 3.7). However, their own efforts to cover their nakedness were futile and a better covering was provided by God: *'Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them'* (Genesis 3.21).

This clothing was a covering for their nakedness, but more importantly, it was a covering for their sin. The atonement (meaning reconciliation with God) for their sins was achieved by this covering. The Hebrew word for 'atonement' is 'kippur' and means 'covering'. The original covering provided in Eden was animal skins. In order to make a garment out of animal skin the animal has to be killed. This leads us

to consider another important Biblical principle – the covering or forgiveness of sin requires the shedding of blood. We read in the letter to the Hebrews that the principle was established by God in the Law given to Moses: *‘...the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness’* (Hebrews 9.22 NIV). However, the covering provided in Eden could only ever be a temporary arrangement. It foreshadowed something more permanent and necessary to obtain forgiveness of sins.

All men and women have inherited the tendency to sin leading inevitably to death. The human predicament and its remedy is succinctly expressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

‘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 15.21, 22).

The role of Christ envisaged

The Divine promise in Eden necessitated the coming of someone to redeem mankind. The promised seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, through his life, death and resurrection fulfilled the promise and achieved the following:

- ❖ He was the ‘seed’ of the woman, having the same human nature as all Eve’s descendants (see Galatians 4.4).
- ❖ He opposed the power of sin, represented by the serpent’s ‘seed’.
- ❖ He dealt the serpent’s ‘seed’ a mortal blow and in the process he received a temporary wound himself, destroying the power of sin by his death and resurrection (see Hebrews 2.14; 1 Corinthians 15.19–22).
- ❖ By his sacrifice he provided a permanent covering for sin for those who come to God through him.
- ❖ By his resurrection from the dead he opened the way to salvation from death.

There are many prophetic passages in the Old Testament which confirm the promise made in Eden concerning the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The next section examines some of these in more detail.

His first advent foretold

His first advent foretold

The previous section has shown that the coming of Jesus as the Saviour of mankind was foretold as long ago as the events in Eden. The whole scheme of God's plan of redemption makes sense only if this is so. Furthermore, the only valid and effective plan and promise of salvation is the one described in the Bible:

'...let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man stands here before you whole... Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4.10,12).

The promises to the Patriarchs

God's promise in Eden was followed by a series of promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. These men are referred to as the Patriarchs or 'fathers' of the Jewish race. The promise to Abraham was revealed in stages, all of which are important but we will concentrate on the aspects of the promise which refer directly to the coming of Jesus. After Abraham

had demonstrated his outstanding faith, God said to him:

'...By myself I have sworn...because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the sea-shore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice' (Genesis 22.16-18).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul explains who this special descendant is:

'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." ...Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your seed," who is Christ' (Galatians 3.8, 16).

Abraham lived around 2,000 years before Christ. The promise of his coming was repeated to Abraham's son Isaac (Genesis 26.3,4), and to his

grandson Jacob (Genesis 28.13–15). Many centuries after the time of Abraham, around 900 BC, another man of outstanding faith in God became the king of Israel. This man was David and God made further promises to him about the coming of Christ. We read about God's promise to David in the Second Book of Samuel:

'...I will set up your seed (descendant) after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house (or dynasty) for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But my mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established for ever before you. Your throne shall be established for ever' (2 Samuel 7.12–16).

The phrase '*I will be his Father, and he shall be my son*' tells us that the promise refers to Jesus, who was indeed the Son of God.

The promises to Abraham and David foretold the coming of an outstanding man who would bring a time of blessing for Israel and the world. This person would possess

the earth and rule over mankind from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem. It was the custom in those days, as it is now, to initiate new monarchs in an anointing ceremony. This future ruler was therefore called by them 'The Anointed One', or in Hebrew the 'Messiah'. The belief in the coming 'Messiah' was the very foundation of the original Jewish hope of future restoration. In this way the first advent or coming of Jesus was promised to David, just as it had been promised to Abraham.

This is confirmed by the very first verse of the New Testament which reads: '*The book of the genealogy (or family tree) of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*' (Matthew 1.1). It was as though Matthew was saying to his readers: 'Jesus Christ, who you now see before you, is the person (the 'seed', or descendant) of whom the promises to Abraham and David speak'. So the first advent of Jesus (and his second advent as well) were foretold in the promises made by God to the Patriarchs.

The words of the prophets

If you were to write 50 specific prophecies about a person in the future, who you would never meet, what is the probability that that person will fulfil all 50 of those predictions? For example, what is the



Bethlehem, the 'city of David' and birthplace of Jesus, as it appeared in this early photograph (1907)

likelihood of a person predicting today the exact city in which the birth of a future leader would take place in 700 years' time? Yet this is what the Old Testament prophet Micah did 700 years before the birth of Jesus:

'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting' (Micah 5. 2).

When King Herod wanted to know where Jesus would be born his advisers showed him this passage as Matthew tells us in his Gospel account:

'Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?"... And when he (Herod) had gathered all the chief

priests and scribes of the people together, he enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judaea, for thus it is written by the prophet..." (Matthew 2.1,2 4,5).

Then they reminded Herod of those prophetic words in Micah chapter 5.

The prophet Isaiah was contemporary with Micah. The prophetic words of Isaiah chapter 61 made 700 years before Jesus was born were fulfilled by Jesus when he visited the synagogue in Nazareth, as we read in Luke's Gospel account:

'So he (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And he was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the LORD". Then he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" (Luke 4.16–21).

If you compare Jesus' words with Isaiah chapter 61 verses 1–3, you will notice that Jesus only read part of the passage from Isaiah, the part that was fulfilled at his first coming. The rest of this prophecy which speaks of *'the day of vengeance'* for some and consolation for *'those who mourn in Zion'*, will be fulfilled at his second coming. The people in the synagogue became very angry because they recognised that by applying the prophecy to himself, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah (i.e. God's Anointed). To this day many Jews refuse to accept that Jesus of Nazareth, who their ancestors put to death, was (and is) the Messiah, the Son of God.

Isaiah chapter 53 contains a detailed prophecy about Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. We recommend that you read the whole chapter – for example:

'He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth' (Isaiah 53.7).

This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was accused by the religious leaders of the Jews, who had brought him to Pilate the Roman governor. Matthew tells us that *'while he was being accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" And he answered him not one word, so that the governor marvelled greatly'* (Matthew 27.12–14).

Again we read that *'...he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors'* (Isaiah 53.12). These words were fulfilled when Jesus was crucified between two criminals, as Mark records:

'And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and the other on his left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And he was numbered with the transgressors."' (Mark 15.27,28).

Isaiah contains many prophecies about Jesus, as does the book of Psalms. This is illustrated in the table opposite which is far from being exhaustive.

Only one person fulfilled all these prophecies: Jesus Christ

approximate date prophecy was given (BC)	brief details	Old Testament reference	Fulfilment: New Testament reference
4000	seed (descendant) of the woman	Genesis 3.15	Galatians 4.4
1920	seed of Abraham	Genesis 22.18	Matthew 1.1
1450	the Prophet like Moses	Deuteronomy 18.15	Acts 3.22
1050	betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41.9	Luke 22.47
1050	mocked and scorned	Psalms 22.7	Luke 23.35
1050	soldiers gambled for his clothes	Psalms 22.18	Matthew 27.35
1050	no bones broken	Psalms 34.20	John 19.32–36
1050	resurrection	Psalms 16.10	Mark 16.6
1050	ascension to heaven	Psalms 68.18	Mark 16.19 Ephesians 4.8–10
740	heir to the throne of David	Isaiah 9.7	Luke 1.32

Remember that these are by no means the only prophecies about Jesus. This special issue will expand on the fulfilment of some of them, particularly those concerning his death, resurrection and second coming (sections 3, 5 and 7).



Reconstruction of part of Herod the Great's Temple in Jerusalem.

Here Simeon and the prophetess Anna recognised the baby Jesus as the promised Messiah; here his parents found the 12 year-old Jesus talking with the teachers of the Law (see page 16).

Here Jesus was later to expel the money-changers from his 'Father's house'.

His early life and preparation for his ministry

His miraculous birth

Very little is written about the early years of Jesus' life in the New Testament. Two of the four gospels make no mention of this period at all. The gospels of Matthew and Luke, however, do record several important incidents.

Perhaps one of the most challenging of these incidents and one that has been questioned by a sceptical, unbelieving world is the detail surrounding the actual birth of Jesus. Luke makes it clear in his account of Jesus' life, that at the time of his birth there were many in Israel who looked forward to the coming of the promised Messiah (anointed one).

'And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ' (Luke 2.25, 26).

Simeon knew that the Messiah would come because he was a student of the Scriptures. From

the words of the prophets he understood that God had promised that one would come who would be '*a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel*' (Luke 2.32). Simeon was quoting from a wonderful passage in the prophecy of Isaiah:

'I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison...' (Isaiah 42.6,7).

There were many other details that students of the Old Testament knew about the promised Messiah as shown in the previous article.

Many have questioned the miracle of Jesus' birth, including those who would count themselves Christian. They have put forward arguments regarding the Hebrew word 'almah' used for 'virgin' by Isaiah, which could be translated as 'young woman' (Isaiah 7.14). However, there is no question as to how the writers of the gospels understood the birth of Jesus:

'Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that holy one who is to be born will be called the Son of God"' (Luke 1.34, 35).

The angel Gabriel's words to the virgin Mary tell us that Jesus was to be born by the power of God (the Holy Spirit). The child would be a descendant of Adam through his mother but unlike other children he would have no earthly father; his father was God.

To the student of the Bible it would not just be Isaiah's words that referred to Jesus' birth, but another equally important Scripture. As shown earlier (see page 4), after the fall of Adam and Eve, God had cursed the serpent with the words: *'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel'* (Genesis 3.15). It was to be the 'Seed' of the woman, not of man, that would bruise the head of the serpent. He would defeat the curse, as we read in the New Testament:

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive'.

(1 Corinthians 15.22)

There was no doubt that Jesus was the one promised. The faithful servants of God who had searched the Scriptures prayerfully and examined the prophecies of the Old Testament were overjoyed at having witnessed the wonderful event of Jesus' birth. Anna, a prophetess was, like Simeon and others, moved with joy when she saw the young child Jesus: *'...she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem'* (Luke 2.38).

The Son of God, not the second person of the Trinity

The fact that Jesus was miraculously born of a virgin does set him apart from other human beings in one respect. This does not mean that he was different in nature to us. In the letter to the Hebrews this is made perfectly clear: *'Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he (Jesus) himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death...'* (Hebrews 2.14).

Jesus was a man just like us. He *'was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin'* (Hebrews 4.15). Like us, he was in need of saving from death, and *'offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to him (God) who was able*



A present day bar-mitzvah ceremony at the Western Wall in Jerusalem

to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear’ (Hebrews 5.7).

In Luke’s gospel record there is a brief but powerful word picture of the child Jesus. We are told that *‘Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men’* (Luke 2.52). This is echoed in the words of the letter to the Hebrews: *‘though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered’* (Hebrews 5.8). Jesus constantly reiterated his dependence on God his Father, in his teaching:

‘...Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do; for whatever he does, the Son also does in like manner’ (John 5.19).

‘My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me’ (John 7.16).

The New Testament writers paint a clear picture of Jesus. He was certainly special for he was the one promised from the foundation of the world, but he was a man tempted, suffering and in need of help from God.

His ‘Father’s business’

Only Luke, having interviewed many eye-witnesses, presents one other story from the childhood of Jesus. When he was now twelve years old, like all other Jewish boys, he would have been going through preparation for his induction into religious responsibility, to become a ‘son of the Law’ (bar-mitzvah). This would happen when he was thirteen.

It was the custom that all Jewish men should go up to Jerusalem three

times a year to celebrate the three major feasts, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Luke 2.42). In reality, for many, particularly the poor, it was difficult to make that journey three times every year. However, Luke tells us that Jesus' parents went up every year to celebrate the feast of Passover (Luke 2.41) and when Jesus was twelve they made that journey with a large group of friends and relatives.

When the feast was over the party of Galileans began to make the long journey back home from Jerusalem to Nazareth. As they settled down for the first night, Jesus' parents began to look for the boy, but were horrified to find that he was nowhere to be found. It was on the third day, having returned to Jerusalem, that they found him, sitting in the temple at the feet of the teachers taking part in the discussion.

Luke's presentation of the scene that follows is at once perfectly human and recognizable by any parent two thousand years later, while at the same time being unique and profound: *'...when they saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have sought you anxiously"'* (Luke 2.48).

Like any mother, relief at finding a missing child is followed shortly by

chiding and her painful love is evident. The answer of Jesus was a reminder that he was not like other children: *'Did you not know that I must be about my (heavenly) Father's business?'* (Luke 2.49). These are Jesus' first recorded words; in them he recognized that God was his Father and that he had been called for a special purpose. He had become a *'son of the law'*, and during this Passover feast had begun the work of explaining from the Scriptures God's plan for the world, the real meaning of Passover, and how the Law of Moses pointed forward to him as the Passover lamb.

Like the teachers of the Law, Jesus' earthly parents failed to understand the mission of the young man before them. Luke tells us that *'they did not understand the words which he spoke to them'* (Luke 2.50). Though they had searched for him, it would be many years before Jesus' mother would appreciate fully what he was talking about.

Baptism and temptation

Jesus' ministry began when he was about thirty years old, the age at which those who were eligible could serve in God's house (Numbers 4.35). Up until this point in his life he had been living in Nazareth, but he

RIGHT: The barren hills of the wilderness of Judea where Jesus was tempted.

now made his way to Judea where John the Baptist, his cousin, was preaching repentance. Mark's gospel account tells us that *'John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins'* (Mark 1.4).

John recognised the work that Jesus had to do, but he was reluctant to baptize him. However Jesus insisted and through this simple but profound act foretold what was to come. His baptism predicted his own future death and resurrection. It was the means by which Jesus was to bring true redemption to his followers, as the Apostle Paul reminds us:

'...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life' (Romans 6.3, 4).

When Jesus rose from the water, the Holy Spirit, God's power, descended on him as a physical witness of God's blessing and a voice from heaven announced: *'You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'* (Mark 1.11). In any other human being, this mark of Divine blessing might have sparked arrogance, but Jesus, rather than being filled with pride at his Divine selection, was immediately plunged into a spiritual struggle.

For forty days he wandered in the punishing Judean desert, fasting,



praying and bringing his own body and human appetite under control. Despite his calling, despite the gift of the Holy Spirit and the godly acknowledgement of his parentage, Jesus was subject to human temptation.

The Gospels record three specific temptations that Jesus struggled with. Firstly, he was tempted to give in to his physical needs and turn the stones into bread to break his fast. Secondly, he was tempted to test or challenge God by throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. Finally he was tempted to turn from the worship of God and give in to human ambition and seize control of the world at that time.

Jesus dealt with each of these temptations by immersing himself in the Scriptures. He subjected his own will and his own desires to the will of God as expressed in the Law of Moses and the prophets. He recognized that his life must conform not to his own desires, to his own will and understanding, but must be shaped and guided by the Divine purpose and subject to God his Father.

Though brief, the record of Jesus' early life is full of significance and illuminates how his life was shaped and prepared to fulfil the purpose of God. Born of a virgin, in fulfilment of Scripture, Jesus recognized while

still a child that his Father was in heaven. As a young boy he grew up to become a 'son of the Law', the physical embodiment of the Law that he had come to fulfil. As Jesus said, not long before he died: *'But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, so I do'* (John 14.31).

He now entered a new phase in God's purpose – ministering in the temple – a new spiritual temple into which he would gather faithful Jews and Gentiles, as Simeon had prophesied on seeing him as a baby in the temple: *'a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...'* (Luke 2.32). That light was later revealed to the Gentiles as Paul reminded the Gentile believers at Ephesus:

'Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord' (Ephesians 2.19–22).

Note: for a more detailed examination of the doctrine of the Trinity, please send for the free booklet 'The teaching of the Bible concerning God'.

His ministry

A message to Jews and Gentiles

The basis for the ministry of Jesus was announced by the angel who appeared to the shepherds just before his miraculous birth. The angel said that he was bringing good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people, and that Jesus was to be a Saviour. The announcement was greeted with a great chorus of praise by a multitude of angels, saying *'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men!'* (Luke 2.10–14). The need for a Saviour had come about as a result of the sin that entered the world when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's command in the Garden of Eden. With it came the sentence of death which has overshadowed the human race ever since (Romans 5.12).

Although Jesus was a Jew, and God had chosen the Jews as His own special people, the definition of *'men'* in the angelic message includes the whole human race. The universal impact of the work of Jesus is emphasised in the instructions he gave the disciples at the end of his ministry. He said to them:

'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 disciples did just as they were asked, but we notice from the accounts of their preaching, recorded in Acts, that they gave the Jews the first opportunity to hear the message, followed by the Gentiles, even though in the sight of God all men are equally in need of salvation. The Jews also carried a heavy responsibility, because they rejected the Saviour and put him to death. The Apostle Peter explained this to his Jewish audience on the day of Pentecost:

'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the carefully planned intention and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it' (Acts 2.22–24).

The gospel of the kingdom of God

It is important that we understand what the kingdom of God is by defining it according to the Scriptures. This will help us avoid the misunderstanding that was apparent even among the disciples of Jesus, and for different reasons is misunderstood by many people today. The Jews rejected the testimony of Jesus during his ministry because he failed to take up arms against the Romans in order to forcibly restore freedom to their nation. Instead he urged them to repent of their own faithlessness towards God.

When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, on trial for his life, he explained: *'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here'* (John 18.36). However, in answer to Pilate's question *'Are you a king then?'* (John 18.37) Jesus did confirm his claim to be a king.

Jesus referred to the kingdom in the prayer he taught his disciples to pray: *'Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* (Matthew 6.9–13).

This is plain language, but it had nothing to do with the political ambitions of the Jews. When the time came for Jesus to go into heaven after his resurrection, the disciples too thought that at last the time had come to set up the kingdom. They asked him: *'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'* They clearly understood the kingdom to be a very real and literal state of affairs, firmly established on the earth. They were absolutely correct, but Jesus told them, *'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority'* (Acts 1. 6,7).

All this would seem very strange to those who remembered the urgent words of John the Baptist before Jesus began his ministry. John said: *'The time is fulfilled, and the*



kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1.15). The kingdom did not come in a literal sense at that time, and the disciples were still waiting when Jesus ascended to heaven over three years later.

An indication of what John the Baptist meant is provided by Jesus when he was in discussion with the Pharisees in a conversation that was witnessed by the disciples. The Pharisees rejected Jesus' claim to be the Son of God and the anointed king of Israel (the Messiah). It was pointless for the Pharisees to look forward to the kingdom of God if they rejected the king, and if they thought they would enter the kingdom simply because they were Jews. Repentance, as John the Baptist called for, could not be further from their thoughts, as Luke tells us:

'Now when he (Jesus) was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there'. For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you'" (Luke 17.20,21).

LEFT: The greatest desire of the Jewish people was to get rid of the hated Roman legions that occupied their land. When they realised Jesus was not the political liberator they longed for, they rejected him.

Jesus' reply was not what they expected; he was telling them that the future inhabitants of the kingdom were being called to be his disciples and he was destined to be its king. They would respond to the gospel (good news) of the kingdom, but the Pharisees would reject him and his teaching, just as they had already rejected the preaching of John the Baptist.

Then Jesus turned to the listening disciples. He told them about his impending death and explained to them what it will be like on the earth when the kingdom literally comes. Rather than the world eagerly waiting for the kingdom, most people would be busy with their own affairs, just as it was when the flood came and destroyed the world of Noah's day, and when fire and brimstone annihilated the godless people of Sodom. That is a fair description of the world we live in today, and so there is every reason to take careful note of how Jesus tells us we should prepare for the kingdom. We cannot predict the date, as Jesus told his disciples but we can observe the signs and learn the importance of repentance.

Fit for the Kingdom

The ministry of Jesus was largely taken up by helping the Jews understand the kind of people they should be in order to inherit the

kingdom. Being Jewish was not enough. In Matthew's gospel account we read Jesus' summary of the characteristics which will give God pleasure. He described as 'blessed' those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, '*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*' (Matthew 5.1–10).

The promise of God is that anyone who seeks the kingdom of God will be given all that is necessary to sustain the present life (Luke 12.31), even though the present life will be subject to the character-building process of difficulty and trial. God never promised an easy path to the kingdom. Jesus told his disciples that all God's servants must be prepared to give up their present lives if they really want to be in the kingdom. He said:

'Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?' (Mark 8. 34-36).

Jesus said this just after he told them that he himself was going to be put to death.

It was the leaders of the Jews in Jesus' day who struggled the most to accept his teaching. The well-known parable of the Good Samaritan, recorded in Luke chapter 10, was told in response to an insincere question by a lawyer who wanted to know what he should do to inherit eternal life. We note that he wanted an explanation of the actions required, oblivious of the need to cultivate an attitude of mind as much as the performance of a deed.

Jesus challenged him by demanding to know what were the first two commandments of the Law. He was referring to the ten commandments, given by God through Moses to the children of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt. The answer was correctly given: '*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself*'. However, the lawyer hadn't finished. '*And who is my neighbour?*' he asked (Luke 10. 27,29).

The parable gave the unexpected answer. It concerned a man travelling on the hazardous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, who was set upon by thieves. The road was well known for banditry and the impact of the story would not be



lost. Two men came upon the wounded traveller, one after the other, a priest and then a Levite. In the story, they would have been making the journey to Jerusalem, the spiritual heart of the nation, and of all people they should have been the first to put the principles of the Law into practice without regard to the rituals they were no doubt going to perform in the city. But they passed by on the other side. The third traveller to arrive was a Samaritan, who carefully and generously ministered to the injured man. The irony of the story is the fact that the Samaritans and the Jews were hostile neighbours, but in the parable the Samaritan showed the Jews the example to follow. Jesus said ‘Go and do likewise’ (Luke 10.25–37).

However, not all the Jewish leaders were in need of such a pointed lesson. A scribe (an expert in the study of the Law of Moses) came to Jesus, and knowing the answer, asked him what was the first commandment. Jesus answered: *‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one, And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your*

A monastery clings to the side of the Wadi Qelt, part of the precipitous road from Jerusalem down to Jericho. This is the setting for Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

mind, and with all your strength..." Then he went on to cite the second commandment: *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'* (Mark 12.29–31).

The scribe acknowledged the truth of Jesus' reply, and went on to confirm that the keeping of these commands was more important than the ritual aspects of the Law such as burnt offerings and sacrifices. This was a most unusual admission, and a lot more discerning than the lawyer already referred to. Mark records that *'when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God"'* (Mark 12. 34).

God's love for His people

Despite the frequent illustrations of spiritual blindness, we should not forget that God loved the Jews, even though their attitude and actions were often abhorrent to Him. He loved them out of regard for the faith of their fathers, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as recorded in the book of Genesis. In John chapter eight we read of a lengthy conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees, where Jesus challenged their claim to be the real descendants of Abraham, because Abraham would have accepted that Jesus was the Messiah, and unlike the Pharisees he lived a life of faith and obedience.

God maintained His own faithfulness towards the Jews despite their frequent denial of Jesus. Later, in his writings, the Apostle Paul reminded the Gentile believers that they should not attempt to take the moral high ground over the Jews, because they too were subject to the same human weaknesses and temptations as the Jews (see Romans chapter 11).

The parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke chapter 15, was told to illustrate the depth of the love of God towards anyone, Jew or Gentile, who is prepared to turn back to Him, however sinful they have been in the past. It is an encouragement for anyone who thinks they might be beyond redemption.

In the parable, the younger of two sons persuaded his father to give him his inheritance in advance and he *'journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living'* (Luke 15.13). Eventually the money ran out and he was left destitute. He remembered the love and care he enjoyed at home, and with some effort made up his mind to overcome his pride and see if there was any way he could return to his father's house.

The reaction was not as he expected. His father had been looking out for him, and as soon as he appeared on the horizon ran to meet him. The carefully prepared speech of repentance was swept aside in the

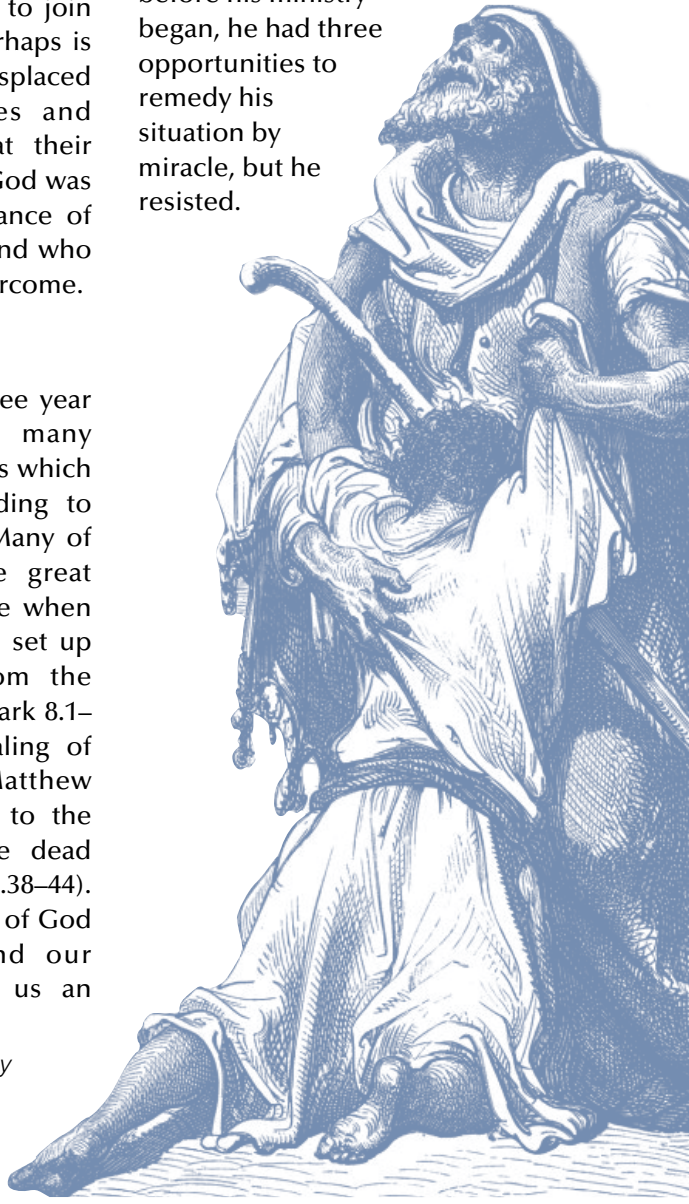
rejoicing that followed. The parable of the Prodigal Son is a wonderful illustration of the boundless love of God for those who truly seek Him, but there is another aspect to the story. The older brother, who had remained at home in apparent loyalty to his father, refused to join in the celebrations. Here perhaps is a hint of the typically misplaced indignation of the scribes and Pharisees who thought that their outward show of service to God was superior to the true repentance of one who confessed his sin and who took determined steps to overcome.

Confirmed by miracles

During the course of his three year ministry, Jesus performed many miracles, supernatural events which cannot be explained according to the known laws of nature. Many of the miracles focus on the great change which will take place when Jesus returns to the earth to set up the kingdom of God. From the feeding of the multitudes (Mark 8.1–10; John 6.1–14) to the healing of illnesses (John 4.46–54; Matthew 12.10–13 and many others), to the raising of people from the dead (Matthew 9.18–25; John 11.38–44). Jesus proved how the power of God can change things beyond our present experience, giving us an

indication of how dramatically the world will change in the future.

None of the miracles were carried out for the purpose of popularising Jesus or for his own personal benefit. During his temptation, before his ministry began, he had three opportunities to remedy his situation by miracle, but he resisted.



'The Return of the Prodigal Son' by Gustave Doré 1832–1883 (Detail)

As well as showing Jesus' compassion for those who were suffering, all the miracles were performed for one reason: to prove beyond all doubt that he was the Son of God and taught the truth for the benefit of his hearers. At the end of his gospel record, John, who recorded just eight miraculous signs, wrote: *'...truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name'* (John 20.30,31).

Conclusion

One of those who witnessed the ability of Jesus to perform miracles was Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. Early on in the ministry of Jesus, shortly after he had turned water into wine at a wedding feast, Nicodemus came to Jesus secretly at night and said: *'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him'*. Jesus answered him with a statement that should give us cause for thought. *'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'* (John 3.2,3).

The miracles had been effective in convincing Nicodemus that Jesus

was who he claimed to be. So the challenge to Nicodemus was to be reborn; to change his life, to repent, to renounce the hypocrisy of the Jewish teachers of the Law, and follow Jesus. Nicodemus probably struggled with this throughout Jesus' ministry. However, after Jesus' death on the cross, he joined Joseph of Arimathea in begging Pilate for Jesus' body, so that they could give Jesus a proper burial. (John 19.38, 39).

There is much we can learn from the account of Jesus' ministry preserved by the gospel writers. Perhaps like Nicodemus we struggle to make the changes in our present lives that Jesus asks of us. But like him we also must be reborn if we want to *'see the Kingdom of God'*.

His death and resurrection

The death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion was the greatest expression of Divine love and is the focal point of God's plan of redemption for the human race. The love of God is expressed in these well-known words from John's gospel record:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life' (John 3.16).

The tragic events of Golgotha were not solely governed by the evil plots of wicked men, or by the envy of those who clamoured for Christ's

death. They were governed by the requirements of the Divine plan of salvation and confirmed by the words of the Old Testament prophets. This is explained by the Apostle Peter: *'Him, being delivered by the carefully planned intention and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death'* (Acts 2.23). Jesus had forewarned his disciples that he must suffer the dreadful ordeal of death by crucifixion, for the Jewish leaders would *'deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day he will rise again'* (Matthew 20.19).

The meaning of the cross

This can only be understood when considered in relation to God's plan declared to Moses: *'but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD'* (Numbers 14.21). Such a state can only come about when sin and death are abolished and the earth is populated with a perfected race of beings, living to the praise and glory of an all-wise and benevolent Creator.

The striking rock formation that some have identified with Golgotha, a Hebrew word meaning 'the skull'.



Adam's sin brought the awareness of nakedness and the need for clothing. He was now alienated from God, hence the need for reconciliation. The covering devised by man was replaced by God-provided clothing made from animal skins. This required the death of the animal and the shedding of blood. A Divine principle was established that *'without shedding of blood there is no remission'* (Hebrews 9.22). In recognition of this principle, Abel's offering of the firstling of his flock was accepted by God, while Cain's offering of *'the fruit of the ground'* was rejected (Genesis 4.3–5).

During Patriarchal and Mosaic times, sacrifices were offered as a means of atonement (reconciliation). In the New Testament, the writer to the Hebrews shows that these offerings looked forward to the one acceptable sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

'For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Hebrews 10.1–4).

God's requirements could only be met by a human sacrifice, as Paul reminded the Christians at Rome: *'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous'* (Romans 5.19). It was necessary for a descendant of Adam, who possessed the same death-stricken nature, but with a spotless and sinless character, to

In 1968 the bones of a crucified man were found in an ossuary in Jerusalem, the only such bones ever found. This fragment of the foot shows a nail driven through the heel, not the top of the foot as usually thought. (see pages 4,5)



offer himself in sacrifice by shedding his blood, so that fallen man might be reconciled to God. This required Divine intervention because all have sinned – apart from one man, Jesus Christ. In Jesus we see a man possessed of human nature – yet he was sinless, as we are reminded in Hebrews: *‘For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin’* (Hebrews 4.15).

John the Baptist said of him: *‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’* (John 1.29). He was the perfect sacrifice: *‘For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified’* (Hebrews 10.14). The death of Jesus was a declaration of God’s righteousness in the condemnation of sin, but because of his perfect obedience the grave could not hold him and God raised him from the dead.

The gateway to life opened for us

We who are sinners by nature and subject to sin, disease and death, can now become reconciled to God and receive the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Christ’s own blood. Such Divine grace and favour can only be had by changing our natural relationship. We are all the descendants of Adam and bear his

sin-cursed nature and are related only to death as Paul told the Corinthians: *‘...in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive’* (1 Corinthians 15.22).

This change from being *‘in Adam’* to being *‘in Christ’* is only effected by baptism into Christ. *‘For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ’* (Galatians 3.27). To qualify for baptism we must know and express faith in the things of the kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ. In submitting to this, our sins are forgiven and we pass prospectively from death to life: *‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death’* (Romans 8.2). In the death of Christ we see God’s gracious work of reconciling the world and His wonderful plan of redemption centred in Christ:

‘But God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life’ (Romans 5.8–10).

The reality of the resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith and this requires belief in a great miracle. In this world dominated by

science and technology, belief in miracles is questioned by many. But to become a true Christian requires something more than science can offer; it requires faith. This is not blind faith but faith which comes through an understanding of and a belief in the Word of God.

If we are to become true followers of Jesus we must accept the Biblical record concerning him. This record, given by the four gospel writers, is full of miraculous events which were

A rockcut tomb with rolling stone, found in Nazareth

witnessed by many who lived in Israel some 2,000 years ago. As we have already noted, the events surrounding his birth were miraculous and throughout his short ministry of some three and a half years he performed many miracles – healed the sick, the lame, the blind, and even raised the dead.

Yet in the end he was rejected and crucified by the leaders of the Jews because they failed to see that here was their Messiah, the one who was to come and redeem them as foretold by the Old Testament



prophets. But the empty tomb and the simple message of the angels to those wondering disciples proclaimed the miracle of his resurrection.

The angelic messengers reminded them of the very words he had spoken while he was with them. He had said to them: *'The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And after he is killed, he will rise the third day'* (Mark 9.31). What was the reaction of his disciples to this news? Mark tells us that *'they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask him'* (Mark 9.32). In the end they all deserted him when threatened with arrest. Yet Luke tells us that afterwards the disciples *'remembered his words'* (Luke 24.8) and then Jesus himself appeared to them.

The Apostle Paul was originally a Pharisee and a persecutor of the followers of Jesus but he became a Christian after his conversion on the road to Damascus. Later he wrote a letter to the Christians at Corinth in which he set out the arguments for belief in the reality of Christ's resurrection:

'Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise.

For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ has 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 15.12–22).

Christ's essential place in the Divine plan for our salvation is perhaps the greatest argument of all for believing in the miracle of his resurrection. We can therefore appreciate the importance of the record of his ancestry given in the gospel records, which reminds us that Jesus was, through his mother Mary, directly descended from Abraham and David, fulfilling the promises made to his ancestors. These promises were confirmed in the message of the prophets and finally became reality in the virgin birth to fulfil the words of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The road to Emmaus

After the crucifixion, Luke tells us about two of the disciples who were taking a journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were very dejected and talked about the events of the last few days. A man joined them on the road and asked them: *'What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?'* One of them called Cleopas replied: *'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have you not known the things which happened there in these days?'* (Luke 24.17,18). That man was of course the risen Christ who then proceeded to enlighten them about the real meaning of those events which had culminated in his



rejection by the Jews – his cruel death followed three days later by his resurrection. Later, to a group of disciples, Jesus enlarged on these great truths concerning God's plan centered in him – his mission to bring salvation. He said to them:

“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me.” And he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then he said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24.44–48).

This is the Divine plan in a nutshell, foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures yet completely misunderstood by the majority of those who read them. God's plan centred in Jesus was being fulfilled. When he was crucified, the Roman Governor Pilate put a title on the cross, in Latin, Greek and Hebrew so that all could read it:

JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS

Through the miracle of his resurrection his destiny was guaranteed – to become not only King of the Jews but of the whole world. The disciples received confirmation of this when he ascended to heaven. As they watched him go, two angels assured them with these words:

‘...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 1.11).

The Bible does not leave us in any doubt about the future work of Jesus, as we will demonstrate in the remainder of this booklet.

LEFT: Jesus said that every part of the Old Testament, the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, witnessed to his life and work. (see page 11)

His present role as High Priest and Mediator

What is the role of a priest? A dictionary defines a priest as ‘a minister of religious worship’. This definition does not move our understanding much further forward, so we turn to the Bible. God, speaking through the prophet Malachi, described the work of a priest in this way:

‘The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity, and turned many away from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts’ (Malachi 2.6,7).

Thus a key aspect of the priest’s work was to teach the Word of God to the people. However, the work of the priest was much more than just being a teacher imparting academic knowledge. The teaching of the priest from the Word of God was to turn men and women ‘away from iniquity’ towards an understanding and appreciation of what God required. The work of the priest is further explained in the following verse which tells us that Phinehas the priest ‘was zealous for his God,

and made atonement for the children of Israel’ (Numbers 25.13).

Jesus as a priest

All these characteristics of a faithful priest were exemplified to the full by Jesus. He taught the law of truth and no injustice was ever found in him. He walked with God, and we know of his zeal, for it is recorded of him: ‘*Zeal for your (God’s) house has eaten me up*’ (John 2.17). Jesus also made atonement, not just for the children of Israel, but for all men and women who would come to God through him. In the letter to the Hebrews we read that he was ‘*made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement (reconciliation) for the sins of the people*’ (Hebrews 2.17 NIV).

Most of these characteristics will be readily understood, except perhaps the concept of ‘*atonement*’, a word which has almost disappeared from everyday use. To understand the work of a priest in general and of Jesus in particular, we need to understand what ‘*atonement*’ means.

The Jewish High Priest dressed as described in Leviticus ch.24. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the perfect High Priest, who offered himself as a sacrifice once and for all time.

Its meaning can be explained by reference to the more familiar word 'reconciliation'. In his letters to the first century Christians, Paul explains why, without the work of Christ as our priest, we are alienated from God, and how we can be reconciled to Him:

'Once you were alienated from God and were enemies... But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight... If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel' (Colossians 1.21–23 NIV).

'...if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life' (Romans 5.10).

These verses emphasise a number of principles. Because of sin we are separated from God, and without some form of mediation, God's righteous judgments would be carried out resulting in death. The role of the priest is to act as a mediator, to obtain forgiveness of sins, and save us from the consequences of our failure to keep



God's law, that we might be reconciled to God.

In Old Testament times, there was an order of priests who provided this

role of teacher and mediator. They taught the people God's law, a law we now know as the Law of Moses. This Law revealed a code of behaviour and morality which, if followed, would result in Divine favour and blessing. The problem was that the people continually broke the regulations of the Law and repeatedly came under the condemnation of the Law. There was a continuing need for sin to be recognised and repented of, for sacrifices to be offered and Divine mercy sought.

Jesus as the perfect sacrifice

The only way to break this cycle of sin and death was for someone to lead a sinless life which was in perfect obedience to God's will. By the willing offering of his life, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. Being unworthy of death, he freely gave his life for the benefit of others. This is summarised in the following words from the letter to the Hebrews:

'And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God ... For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified' (Hebrews 10.11–14).

From this passage we see that Jesus fulfilled a dual role, being both the priest and the sacrifice. The main difference between the priesthood under the Law of Moses and that of Jesus is that he does not need to offer a sacrifice every time we approach God for forgiveness through him. His life of obedience offered on the cross is a permanently effective sacrifice, which can cover all our sins.

Just because Christ's death can cover all our sins, it does not mean that we can presume on the effectiveness of that sacrifice, if we do not strive to be like him in our lives. If we are to be 'sanctified' or separated to the service of God, there is an on-going need to examine our way of life and turn away from anything that would bring God's disapproval. Paul compared this to a slave who had been freed from his old master to serve a new one. He wrote to the believers at Rome:

'But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 6.22, 23).

The need for a mediator

Being 'in Christ' does not stop us from sinning. It does not relieve us

of the danger of turning away from God's way and so losing the hope of God's offer of salvation. This is where the greatness of Christ's priesthood lies. Jesus was born sharing the same human nature as all of us, sharing the same temptation to serve himself rather than to serve God. In the letter to the Hebrews we read:

'For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Hebrews 4.15,16).

This verse is important, since it shows the sympathy of Jesus for our plight. Having shared our human nature, he therefore had to struggle against the tendency of sin, just as we do. So when we bring our struggles and our failures to him in prayer, we are assured that he really does understand what we are going through. He has trodden the same path; the only difference is that although we often fail, Jesus never did. Often in the Gospels we read about the compassion of Jesus, his concern for the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged. He knew their suffering was the result of sin being worked out in human experience.

He is still the same compassionate Jesus, who sees the power of our old master, sin, in the lives of believers and wants to help them overcome. However, as with those who benefited during his ministry on earth, in order to receive his help, we have to come to Jesus in faith and belief and be baptized into his saving name. Then we can pray to God, through Jesus, confessing our faults and asking for forgiveness. We can, as that verse in Hebrews states, '*come boldly*' in our approach since God has assured us that He will listen, and we will be reconciled to Him through the mediatorship of Jesus.

We have already quoted several verses from the letter to the Hebrews, which above all the other books of the New Testament speaks at length about Jesus' work as a high priest and mediator. We recommend that you take the time to read this letter carefully. The effectiveness of Christ's work for his true followers is summarised in these words from chapter seven:

'...because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need...' (Hebrews 7.24-26 NIV)

His second coming

The return of Jesus Christ to the earth is a certainty!

His wonderful work as the saviour of mankind was but one vital aspect of his mission. We have already considered in some depth just how vital the work of Jesus really is. The primary aspect of his mission was to give sinful men and women the hope of life after death by resurrection from the grave. In order for them to obtain eternal life in the future, Jesus needs to return to the earth to fulfil the promises made to the Jewish fathers and to re-establish the kingdom of Israel as the kingdom of God on earth. There would be no point in raising faithful servants from the grave, only for them to inherit a world still governed and mis-managed by human rulers.

The gospel of the kingdom

The gospel of the kingdom requires Jesus to return, to remove the present system of government and to establish the kingdom of God.

The golden head of the great statue seen in a dream by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's interpretation of the dream said that all human kingdoms would be destroyed and replaced with a single Divine kingdom.

This was shown to the prophet Daniel when he explained the king of Babylon's dream. He said to the king:

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

When Jesus had completed his primary mission to give his life to take away sin, his disciples realised that there was to be a limit to human rule and that the re-establishment of



God's kingdom on earth would complete God's plan of salvation for humanity. The name Jesus Christ tells us about his dual role. Jesus means 'saviour' and Christ means 'anointed one'. In Bible times both kings and priests were anointed to their calling. Jesus also was anointed to his priestly and life-saving role, and as future king of the world.

Parables of the kingdom

Jesus told a number of parables that confirmed his promise to return to the earth. He said to his disciples: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return' (Luke 19.12). He was the nobleman, the kingdom is his by promise and by right and he is to share it with faithful servants. In the parable they are given talents with which to occupy themselves in his service, awaiting his return, for there was never any doubt that he would come back as he told them:

'And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading' (Luke 19.15).

This was a powerful way of teaching his disciples that his promise to return would be fulfilled but in the interim period they had work to do for him.

However, Jesus went even further for the benefit of his disciples. On one occasion, not long before he gave his life for the sin of the world, they walked by the magnificent temple that King Herod had spent some 46 years building (see picture page 12). Whilst it may not have rivalled the temple built by Solomon 1,000 years earlier, it was still an amazing sight as Luke records: *'Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts, he said, "As for these things which you see, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down"'* (Luke 21.5,6). We can imagine the astonishment of the disciples and those who heard what he said!

The signs of Christ's second coming

The disciples asked for clarification: *'Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?'* (Luke 21.7). Jesus then gave them a broad scenario of events to come, both in the immediate future and over a longer period of time. He spoke of the dissolution of the kingdoms of men and gave warnings for the benefit of those who would be alive when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans. His message was a simple

one: *'But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come'* (Matthew 24.13–14).

Jewish history shows what happened in the thirty or so years after Jesus ascended to heaven. The Romans sacked Jerusalem in AD 70. Those who took note of the warnings of Jesus escaped, but most of the Jews were slaughtered or sold as slaves throughout the Roman world. The temple was destroyed and by AD 135, the city site was desolate. For nearly 2,000 years since the first century AD, the Jews have remained in dispersion, but the promise of Jesus to return stands firm. The disciples were reassured by an angelic message as soon as Jesus

ascended to his Father:

'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).

There is no doubt then that Jesus will come back to establish the kingdom of God and rule in righteousness as God's appointed king, as the Apostle Paul told the Athenians: *'...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).

The disciples of Jesus were given a number of signs or indicators that

A relief on the arch of Titus in Rome shows the temple furniture being carried away after the destruction of the temple.



would precede his return to the earth. Through their writings, we too are privileged to know what these signs are. In essence, they are three-fold:

- ❖ The times of Noah and the times of Lot
- ❖ Turmoil among the nations of the world
- ❖ The restoration of Israel

Lessons from the past

First of all we have the answer of Jesus to the Pharisees who asked him when the kingdom of God would come. His response was to refer to the times of Noah:

‘And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man, they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all’ (Luke 17.26, 27).

The most important lesson we can take from this example given by Jesus is the need to prepare for his return. We can be all too absorbed in our daily lives and ambitions and miss being ready for the day when God intervenes in world affairs. In the first book of the Bible there is a parallel with our own times:

‘Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually’ (Genesis 6.5). The Bible warns that God will not tolerate evil forever but will act at the appointed time, just as He did in the time of Noah and later at the time of Lot.

Lot was a righteous man, living in a city full of immoral practices, where men and women went about their daily lives, oblivious of the coming destruction, as Jesus said: *‘Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed’* (Luke 17.28–30).

A close reading of the account in Genesis of both the lives of Noah and Lot leaves us in little doubt as to the nature of the immorality being practised in both periods. That there are parallels with our own times is inescapable! Immoral behaviour, greed, drugs misuse and dishonesty have sadly become the hallmarks of our times. Jesus warned that in such times he would return to sweep away the existing order and establish a new world order based on Divine principles.

A world in turmoil

The second sign is referred to by the prophet Daniel as *'a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,'* (Daniel 12.1). When we look at the world scene, there are numerous problems that human governments are facing for which there are no lasting solutions. This leads to distress, anxiety, political turmoil and war. Jesus warned his disciples that such times are an indication that his return is imminent:

'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 for fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near' (Luke 21.25–28).

The significance is in the detail here. Jesus was not necessarily referring to the literal sun moon and stars, although there could be a literal fulfilment of these words. The Scriptures sometimes use the heavenly bodies as symbols of ruling powers, referring to the responsible

***'The sea
and the waves
roaring'***

authorities in the political 'heavens'. The distress of the nations is with 'perplexity' and the Greek word used here is 'aporia' which literally means 'at a loss for a way' in the sense of being at one's wit's end (Vines dictionary of Old and New Testament Words).

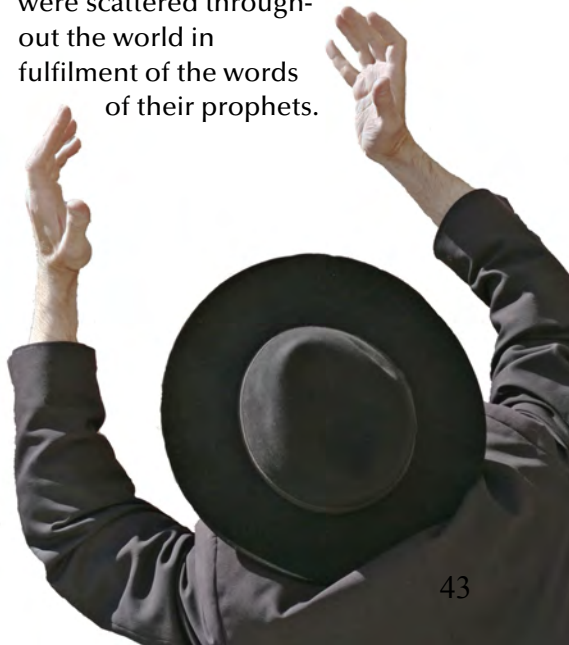
That sums up the acute problems in almost every sphere of life today. There is genuine anxiety among world leaders and people all over the world about the future for mankind. The followers of Christ need not be in doubt for he assured them *'then they will see the Son of Man coming...'*

The dispersion and regathering of the Jews

The third powerful sign is that of the Jews. God declared long ago that this amazing people were His witnesses: *"You are my witnesses", says the LORD "and my servant whom I have chosen"* (Isaiah 43.10). So, we must ask, in what way are the Jews, the nation of Israel, God's witnesses? When God called the Jews to be His special people and established them as a kingdom, He did so based on the promises He had made to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It was a solemn covenant that brought the nation of Israel into being and our readers are directed

to read Deuteronomy chapter 28 in which God warned his people that if the nation as a whole was disobedient to His commands, then He would punish them. This would entail both economic and physical punishments, and the Jews would be ridiculed and hated by other nations, who saw the effects of God's disciplining of His people. We need to recognise the nature of the covenant with Israel if we are to appreciate their role as God's witnesses in fulfilment of His words to Moses: *'And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will lead you'* (Deuteronomy 28.37). These prophetic words were eventually fulfilled when the Jews were removed from their ancient home-land by the Romans who besieged Jerusalem in AD 70. They were scattered throughout the world in fulfilment of the words of their prophets.





The Jews are regathered to their ancient homeland: the ship 'Exodus' loaded with Jewish refugees from Europe, in harbour at Haifa, 1947.

However, they are an even more powerful sign or witness in their regathering, a sign which has only become evident since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The return of the Jews to their land *'in the latter days'* (Hosea 3.5) is the subject of many Old Testament Bible prophecies (see for example Ezekiel chapters 36 to 38). So the disciples of Jesus were expecting this to happen, although they were ignorant of the timescale involved. Jesus had spoken about this restoration, following a time of dispersion among the Gentiles (non-Jewish nations). He said: *'they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by*

Gentiles are fulfilled' (Luke 21.24). The words in bold type in this passage are most important, for they point to a time when Jerusalem will be entirely freed from Gentile influence and this can only happen when Jesus returns.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent wars fought by God's people are modern history. They are not as yet the restored kingdom of Israel which will be the nucleus of the coming kingdom of God. This must await the return of Jesus to the earth as he promised. What we see today is a continued witness to the Divine plan to fill the earth with God's glory through the reign of Jesus Christ as the future king of the world.

The need to be ready

The signs we have considered were given by Jesus to warn his followers in every age that God's plan is progressing and they need to be ready for his return. Just as Jesus referred his listeners to the days of Noah and Lot, so he continued with the same warning about being ready for the day of his return, in Mark 13.32-37:

‘But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the door keeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming – in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the cock, or in the morning – lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.’



David Ben Gurion announces the foundation of the new State of Israel. The revival of the Jewish nation and restoration to its ancient homeland is one of the greatest signs that Jesus' return is near.

‘And what I say to you, I say to all:

watch!’

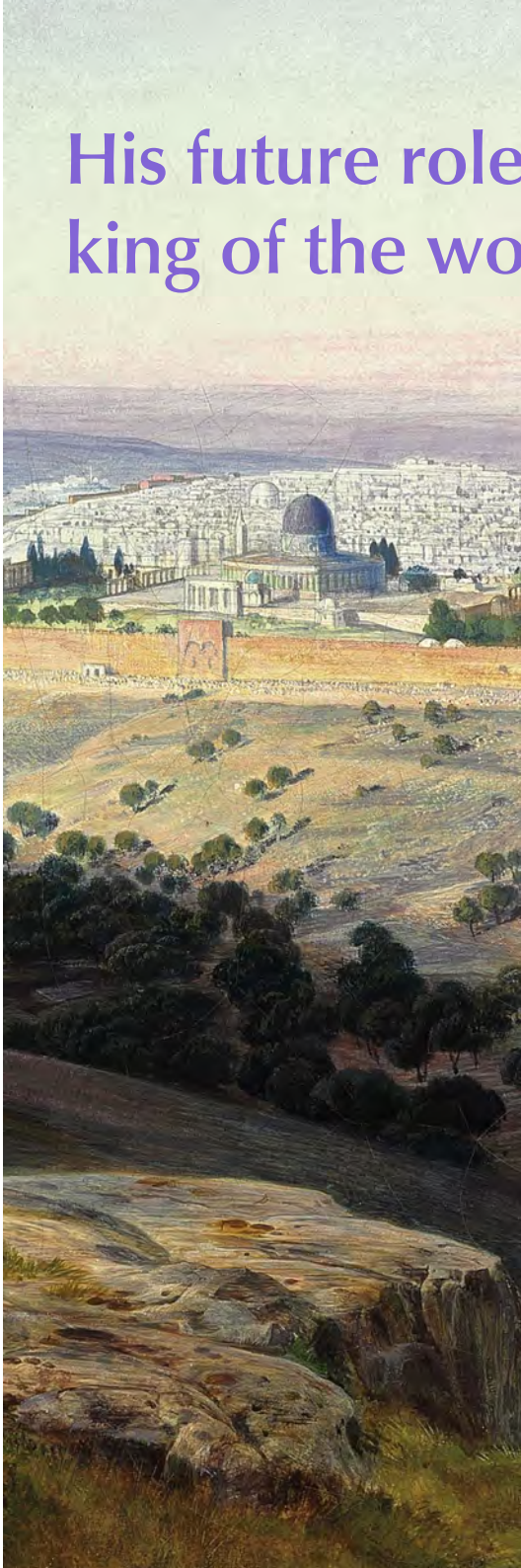
watch!

This was Jesus' view over Jerusalem as he descended the Mount of Olives on his way into the city for the last time. In this painting the Dome of the Rock sits over the location of the Most Holy Place of Herod's Temple, so familiar to Jesus.

Painting by Edward Lear (1812–1888):
'Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives – sunrise'.



His future role – judge and king of the world



The future kingship of Jesus was recognized by his disciples when he entered Jerusalem for the last time before his crucifixion, in fulfilment of the words of the prophet Zechariah:

‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation...’.

(Zechariah 9.9)

Luke tells us that *‘as he (Jesus) was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God...saying: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!”’* (Luke 19.37, 38).

Later, after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to his Father, Peter was in Jerusalem boldly preaching this good news (the gospel) to the Jews. He said:

‘Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the carefully planned intention and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have cruc-

ified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it' (Acts 2.22-24).

To Peter, the man who had denied Christ, it all made sense; God had planned it all! Peter went on to remind his hearers of that great promise made centuries before to King David:

'...being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his (David's) throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that his soul was not left in Hades (the grave), nor did his flesh see corruption' (Acts 2.30,31).

Peter was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus had to be slain as a sacrifice and rise from the dead and he would inherit King David's throne in Jerusalem. For this to happen, Israel must be restored as a nation with Jerusalem as its capital city. The plan of God was now very clear – there was to be a second coming of Christ.

The future king – to judge the world in righteousness

Peter then told his hearers to '*Repent...and be converted*' (Acts 3.19). He referred to the second coming of Jesus – *whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began*' (Acts 3.21). As Peter emphasised – all the '*holy prophets*' had foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, firstly as the saviour, then as the future King of kings!

Peter then said to the Jews: '*You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your seed all the families (nations) of the earth shall be blessed"*' (Acts 3.25). The teaching of Peter shows that the only way for all families of the earth to be blessed is by the return of Jesus with power to restore the kingdom of Israel, to rule the world from Jerusalem and bring an unprecedented time of peace and prosperity for the nations of the world.

When the Apostle Paul preached in Athens he said that Jesus was coming again to set up his kingdom: '*...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 (Jesus) from the dead' (Acts 17.31).

The importance of these words of Paul cannot be ignored by any who would become followers of Jesus Christ. The benefits of having an immortal righteous ruler on the earth are obvious. The age in which we live is full of injustice, inhumanity and ungodliness. When Christ rules the world from Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah tells us what a different place the world will be:

'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it...out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Isaiah 2.2-4).

The future king – to set up a new world order

What a change will come upon the world when Christ rules from Jerusalem! What a contrast Isaiah's

Only the reign of Jesus can release mankind from the violence and evil of every kind that plagues our world today.

words portray! The world's leaders at the United Nations talk about peace; of the nations disarming and spending their wealth on solving poverty; but what actually happens? We see the growth of nationalistic factions, civil wars and countries at war with each other. We see the increase of religious and racial intolerance accompanied by terrible acts of violence.

We put it to you that the only hope for mankind is in the hands of God. The early Christians were urged to look for and pray for the return of



Jesus to establish his kingdom. His disciples need not worry about world problems – for as we noted in the previous section, they are a sign of his near return. Christ's followers were told to be ready and watching. The Apostle Paul assured believers with these words:

‘...to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ... when he comes... to be glorified in his saints and to be admired among all those who believe...’

(2 Thessalonians 1. 7–10).

The last book of the Bible sets the final scene, the great climax of the Divine plan centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle John saw in vision the end of man's rule on earth and he heard voices saying: *‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever!’* (Revelation 11.15).

The true benefits of Christ's reign will then be seen and enjoyed by all nations. We urge you to study God's Word, to realise that the coming of Jesus Christ is near and to respond to the gospel message that Jesus preached, the good news about the



coming kingdom of God on earth. We believe that day is very close and soon the opportunity to prepare for it will be lost. Now is the time to act, so that you may recognize him when he appears, and be recognized by him:

**‘...for he is Lord of lords
and King of kings;
and those who are with
him are called, chosen,
and faithful’.**

(Revelation 17.14)

Appendix

Evidence from a selection of historians **outside the Bible** for the lives of Jesus and his earliest followers.

Pliny the Younger (61–113 AD)

In a letter to the Roman Emperor Trajan, Pliny describes the lifestyle of the early Christians:

“They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds...”

Suetonius (69–140 AD)

Suetonius was a Roman historian under the Emperor Hadrian. His writings about Christians describe their treatment under the Emperor Claudius (41-54 AD):

“Because the Jews at Rome caused constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (Christ), he (Claudius) expelled them from the city (Rome).” (Life of Claudius, 25:4)

This expulsion took place in 49 AD. In another work, Suetonius wrote about the fire which destroyed Rome in 64 AD in the reign of Nero. Nero blamed the Christians for this fire and he punished Christians severely as a result:

“Nero inflicted punishment on the Christians, a sect given to a new and mischievous religious belief.” (Lives of the Caesars, 26.2)

Tacitus (56–120 AD)

Tacitus is among the most trusted of ancient historians. He was a senator under the Emperor Vespasian and also proconsul of Asia. In his “Annals” of 116 AD, he describes the Emperor Nero’s response to the great fire in Rome:

“Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, 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 Pilatus.”

Mara Bar-Serapion (70 AD)

Sometime after 70 AD, a Syrian philosopher named Mara Bar-Serapion refers to Jesus as the “wise king”:

“What benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death?... Or the Jews by murdering their wise king?...After that their kingdom was abolished. God rightly avenged these men...The wise king...lived on in the teachings he enacted.”

Phlegon (80–140 AD)

Julius Africanus (221 AD) mentions a historian named Phlegon who wrote a chronicle of history around 140 AD. In this history, Phlegon also mentions the darkness surrounding the crucifixion in an effort to explain it:

“Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth to the ninth hour.” (Africanus, Chronography, 18:1)

Phlegon is also mentioned by Origen (an early church theologian and scholar):

“Now Phlegon, in the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events ... but also testified that the result corresponded to His predictions.” (Origen Against Celsus, Book 2, Chapter 14)

Lucian of Samosata: (115-200 AD)

Lucian was a Greek satirist who spoke sarcastically of Christ and Christians, but in the process, he confirms that they were real people and never referred to them as fictional characters:

“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... 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. (Lucian, The Death of Peregrine. 11-13)

Celsus (175 AD)

Celsus was quite hostile to the Gospels, but in his criticism, he unknowingly affirms and reinforces the authors and their content. He alludes to 80 different Biblical passages, confirming their early appearance in history. In addition, he admits that the miracles of Jesus were generally believed in the early 2nd century!

“Jesus had come from a village in Judea... While there (in Egypt) he acquired certain (magical) powers which Egyptians pride themselves on possessing. He returned home highly elated at possessing these powers, and on the strength of them gave himself out to be a god.”

Josephus (37-101 AD)

In more detail than any other non-biblical historian, Josephus, a Jewish historian, writes about Jesus in his “Antiquities of the Jews” (93 AD). Josephus was born just four years after the crucifixion and was an eyewitness to much of what he recorded in the first century AD. Under the rule of Roman Emperor Vespasian, Josephus was allowed to write a history of the Jews. This history includes three passages about Christians, one in which he describes the death of John the Baptist, one in which he mentions the execution of James and describes him as the brother of Jesus the Christ, and this final passage which describes Jesus as a wise man and the Messiah:

“Now around this time lived Jesus, a wise man. For he was a worker of amazing deeds and was a teacher of people who gladly accept the truth. He won over both many Jews and many Greeks. Pilate, when he heard him accused by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross... To this day the tribe of Christians named after him has not disappeared”.

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Light on a new world

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clouds gather

over the Sea of Galilee, a sight that would have been very familiar to Jesus and his disciples. On one notable occasion as they sailed across the lake, Jesus calmed the sudden storm that threatened to engulf their tiny boat.

That astonishing miracle is going to be repeated on a much bigger scale in the future. It is Jesus' destiny to bring peace and calm to this troubled world, to still the storms that threaten mankind.

'He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.'

(Zechariah 9.10)