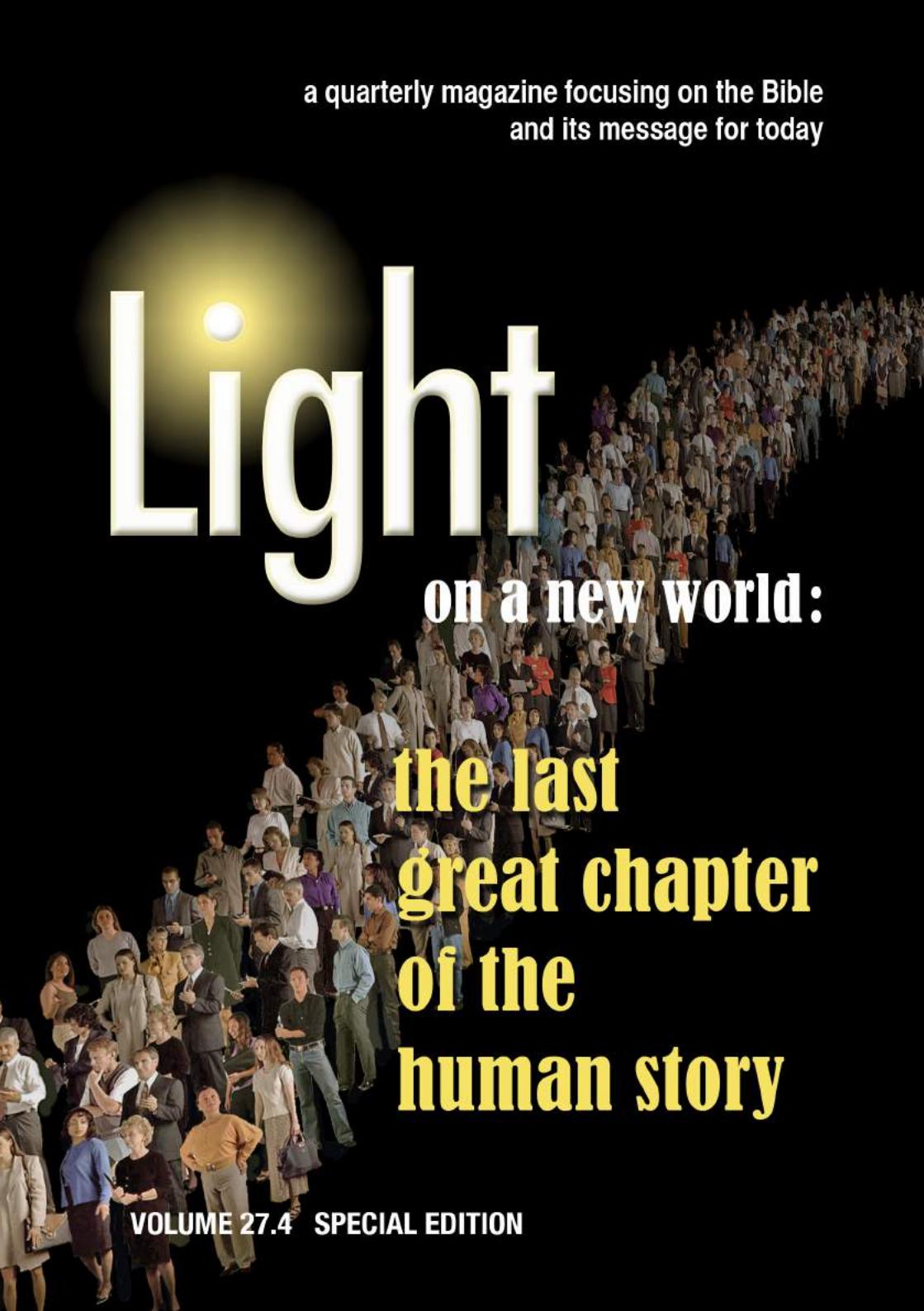


a quarterly magazine focusing on the Bible  
and its message for today



# Light on a new world: the last great chapter of the human story

VOLUME 27.4 SPECIAL EDITION

## **Light on a new world**

### **Volume 27.4 Special Edition**

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# The king

**'...all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him... There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains...' Psalm 72**



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# dom of God



# Introduction

Regular readers of this magazine will have probably noticed that the full title is 'Light on a new world'. This special edition focuses on 'The kingdom of God'. In reality 'The kingdom of God' **is** the 'new world' that Jesus' followers have as the central pillar of their faith and hope for the future – the last great chapter of the human story.

The magazine has the objective of shedding 'light' on the almost forgotten themes that are the true teachings of the Bible. They are the same teachings that Jesus Christ taught the people of his day, and for which he was arrested and cruelly executed by his fellow countrymen. The kingdom of God on earth is the main theme of both the Old and New Testaments.

What is so special about this edition of 'Light magazine'? The kingdom of God is a subject that is seldom aired in discussions or debates in the public media when it comes to religion. What is the kingdom of God? When will it come into existence? Where will it be? Who will be its king? Who will be its subjects? How can we be so sure about its coming? These are all big questions along with many others that are addressed by the following articles.

The first article centres on why the kingdom of God is the central theme of the Bible and how God's promise of its establishment is rooted right at the beginning of the Biblical narrative.

Most people who claim to be religious would be surprised to find that the kingdom of God has existed on the earth before – within the last 3,500 years. The second article deals with this under the heading of 'The kingdom of God on the earth in the past'.

The real crux of Bible teaching is the subject of the third article. It is all about how various Bible writers, separated by many hundreds of years and in different geographical locations, foretold the same event – the re-establishment of the kingdom of God on a worldwide basis in the not too distant future!

As we look at the state of the world today, most people would ask: How could this kingdom possibly come about? The fourth article addresses this very question. It uses Bible prophecy to show when and how this is going to happen. It will be preceded by a time described in the Old Testament by the prophet Daniel as '*a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation...*' (Daniel 12.1) and it will bring about a massive change in the world that will affect all nations.

The final article focuses on what these things mean to individuals like us; men and women all over the world who lead normal everyday lives. The gospel of the kingdom of God is about inclusion and not exclusion; God wants everyone to have a part in this wonderful kingdom that will be established on earth. It will be the start of a new age that will bring perfect harmony and worldwide peace for the first time ever. Although it is conditional, there is a way for everyone to be included in that great age to come. The writer uses the Bible to demonstrate how you and I can be part of the coming kingdom of God.

It is a subject that surely demands your attention. The aim of this magazine is to whet your appetite and encourage you to accept and embrace this amazing hope of the coming kingdom as your own. It will change your life.



# The central theme of the Bible

One of many remarkable things about the Bible is its consistent message, its single theme maintained through a variety of different writings over the course of several thousand years.

Whether we look at the 39 books of the Old Testament, covering a period of some 4,000 years before the time of Jesus; or the 27 books of the New Testament produced within 100 years of Jesus' birth, the message is the same. This in itself is powerful evidence that the writers of the Bible were guided and 'inspired' by God. The Bible answers our most important questions about the origin of the human race and sheds light on the course of human history. It also looks to the future, the destiny which God has in store for us.

## why did God create mankind?

In the first book of the Bible we read that, following the creation of life, this planet became a wonderful place in which to live: '*Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good'*

(Genesis 1.31). The first man was the pinnacle of God's creative work and this was to be central to God's future plan for a perfect world. Therefore He gave him dominion over all His creation:

**'So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth".'**

Genesis 1.27,28

This idyllic situation in the Garden of Eden was spoilt by Adam and Eve as a result of their disobedience. They failed to comply with one simple divine instruction and as a result their lives and those of all their descendants were changed – they became subject to mortality. So we ask the question, did this mean that God's plan for a perfect world with men and women giving praise to Him, had failed?

The answer is NO, as the Old Testament prophets made clear:

**'For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other".'**

Isaiah 45.18

**'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.'**

Habakuk 2.14

The Biblical account looks forward to a time when the perfection and beauty of the conditions in the Garden of Eden are restored throughout the earth as God originally intended. This is described in the Bible as the 'kingdom of God'.

## **the creation week – a pattern for the future**

Have you ever wondered why the division of time into days, weeks and years has become universally adopted and on what basis? The answer comes from the record of creation in the book of Genesis and is based on the relative positions of the sun, earth and moon.

We read in Genesis that God made two great lights in the heavens and said '*let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years*' (Genesis 1. 14). So we have day and night as the earth turns on its axis, months as the moon orbits the earth and years as the earth follows its precise orbit round the sun.

It is also interesting to observe from the account of creation that the work was completed in six days and then there was a day of rest (Genesis 2.1-3). This seven-day cycle was then introduced into the national life of God's people the Jews, the seventh day being set apart as the Sabbath. We read the divine instruction in the book of Exodus: '*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God... For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth... and rested the seventh day*' (Exodus 20.8-11).

This is a pattern which looks forward to a future time of rest as we learn from the New Testament (see Hebrews 4.1-11). The kingdom



of God is shown to be a special time of rest like the seventh day. God will have finished His initial work with the nations and the rule of Jesus on earth will begin, assisted by those who are Christ's true followers. The last book of the Bible projects our minds forward to this millennial rest: '*...they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years'* (Revelation 20.6).

## the promise in Eden

This promise that Christ would not only reconcile man to God, but also become a king, had its roots in events that took place in Eden, when God pronounced His judgment on the serpent after Adam and Eve's failure to obey Him. We read in Genesis:

**'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike (NKJV 'bruise') his heel.'**

Genesis 3.15 NIV

God cursed the serpent for the part it had played in bringing sin into the world. But in these words, God



revealed

from the beginning His plan of salvation centred in Jesus. The power of sin represented by the serpent and its descendants would receive a fatal head wound brought about by one of Eve's male offspring. This man in turn would be struck in the heel by the serpent's descendants giving him a temporary wound.

The New Testament reminds us of the fulfilment of this promise. Jesus was 'struck' in the heel when he was crucified by the Jewish leaders and died. This temporary 'wound' was soon relieved by his miraculous resurrection from the dead. The prophet Isaiah foretold these events and looked forward to the

fulfilment of that promise in Genesis:

**'But he (Jesus) was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief... When you make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand'.** Isaiah 53.5,10

## **prophecies about the future work of Messiah**

The Old Testament also foretold the future work of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the king of Israel. The Hebrew word Messiah is the same as the Greek word Christos which means the anointed one. Here are some examples from the many passages that support this:

**'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed (Messiah)... Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion'.** Psalm 2.2,6

**'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'.** Micah 5.2

**'For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be on his shoulder... Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this'.** Isaiah 9.6,7

**'I will raise up your offspring to succeed you (King David), who will come from your own body... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever'**.

2 Samuel 7.6,11 (NIV)

## **Jewish expectations at the time of Jesus**

If Jesus was the one to fulfil God's plan of reconciliation and be the Jewish Messiah, then those familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures in Jesus' day would have been



expecting his literal presence. This is demonstrated by the following events:

👑 The wise men came to Jesus' birthplace looking for the king of the Jews (Matthew 2.1, 2).

👑 Shepherds from the fields around Bethlehem visited the inn to see Jesus in the manger as an angel had told them (Luke 2.8-15).

👑 Simeon could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Jesus presented to him in the temple. He exclaimed: *'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation...'* (Luke 2.29, 30).

👑 The disciple Andrew's comment to Simon Peter was "*we have found the Messiah*" (which is translated, the Christ) (John 1.41).

👑 At his triumphal entry into Jerusalem the people openly acknowledged Jesus as their king (Matthew 21.8-11).

👑 Even Pilate insisted that a superscription was placed above Jesus' head as he hung on the cross. This read: **'THIS IS JESUS**

**THE KING OF THE JEWS** (Matthew 27.37). This was true, for he was a king in waiting, without a kingdom as yet.

So the Jews of Christ's day realised that the Old Testament Scriptures spoke in advance of his role as the Messiah to bring about the fulfilment of God's plan for the world. However, there was an expectation that he would deliver the Jews from Roman occupation and restore the kingdom of Israel straightforwardly. Even after his resurrection the disciples asked Jesus



the question: '*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*' (Acts 1.6). Jesus assured them that it would happen at the time set by God, but they were premature in their expectations.

## **Jesus – the focal point of God's plan from the beginning**

The Bible makes it clear that from creation onwards God had a plan for the human race and Jesus was the focal point of that plan. This was understood by the Old Testament prophets. They constantly spoke of God's intention to establish His kingdom in fulfilment of the promise made in Eden and promises made to men like Abraham and David. Both of these men are closely linked with Jesus in the New Testament which begins with the words:

**The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham'.**      Matthew 1.1

LEFT: Reconstruction of the Antonia, the Roman fortress right next to the temple court in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. The Jews expected their Messiah to free them from their hated Roman overlords.

The Apostle Paul also tells us that the gospel message, or the good news that Jesus proclaimed, was not something new. Some 2,000 years before Jesus was born, Abraham had been told about it, as Paul reminded the first century Christians: '*...the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all nations shall be blessed"*' (Galatians 3.8).

The promise of God, although unfulfilled in the lifetime of Abraham, was that an everlasting kingdom would be set up on earth. This will be achieved through the work of Abraham's special descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we have seen, the Bible's central theme from Genesis to Revelation is the gospel, or the 'good news' about the coming kingdom of God on earth. It may come as a surprise to learn that God's kingdom first existed in Old Testament times. The next section will look in more detail at the origin and development of that kingdom which was founded some 3,500 years ago.



# It existed on earth in the past

**'And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel'.**

The words are God's, recorded by Moses in the book of Exodus (19.6). Moses and his people were at Mt. Sinai, in the desert between Egypt and modern day Israel. The 'children of Israel' were a nation of slaves who had just escaped from Egypt, where they had been demoralised by years of oppression and degradation. Why should God choose them out of all nations on earth to be His special people, His 'kingdom'?

God himself supplies the answer:

**'The LORD did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because he would keep the oath which he swore to your fathers...'**

Deuteronomy 7. 6-8.

What was this oath (promise) that God had made? God does not make His promises lightly – what was the reason for making such a promise?

The answer starts with one man, Abram. Later God changed his name to the more familiar **Abraham**, which means '*father of many*' (Genesis 17.5).

In the New Testament, Stephen tells us about this man Abraham and the early history of his many descendants (Acts 7. 2-22). If you read this passage you will note from Stephen's words that Abraham was instructed by God to leave his homeland and go to a land that He would show him.

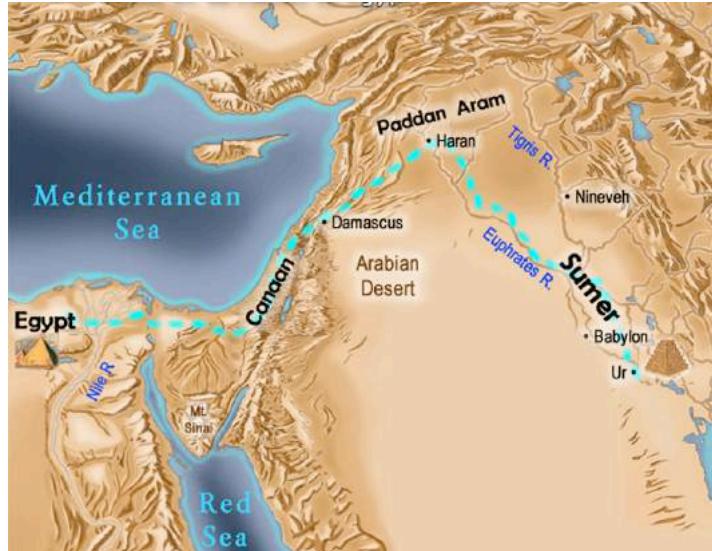
Abraham did exactly what God asked of him. He demonstrated his complete faith in God by leaving his previous way of life in a prosperous city and set out on a long journey into the unknown. At the same time, as we have noted from the previous article, God made some far-reaching promises to Abraham. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews comments on Abraham's

faith and his obedience to God's call:

'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterwards receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise'.

Hebrews 11.8, 9

This chapter is well worth reading in full. It lists a number of men and women who demonstrated their faith in God in their lives. But more than that it reminds us of an important divine principle – God calls people to obey Him. That's something we need to keep in mind as we consider the lives of Abraham and his descendants.



## the Promised Land

When Abraham finally reached his destination in the land of Canaan, God confirmed the promises made to him, including a very specific promise about the land to be given his descendants:

'...the LORD made a covenant (agreement) with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates"'.      Genesis 15.18

MAP ABOVE: Abraham's 1,000 mile journey around the Fertile Crescent from Ur to Canaan.

There were a number of branches of Abraham's family. But which descendants were the ones referred to in that far-reaching



promise? Today we hear endless debates about the claims of the Palestinians and the threats of their Arab neighbours to remove Israel from their land by force. But we note from the passage in Hebrews (see above), that it was Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel) who were '*the heirs with him*' of that promise. The Bible is very precise about God's choice of the Jews and not the Arabs or any other nation as His chosen people.

The book of Genesis tells us about the history of Abraham's family through the line of his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob (Israel). Jacob had twelve sons from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel. If you read the account in the Bible, you cannot fail to notice that time and time again God was active in the lives of Abraham and his descendants through the work of the angels. Events were guided to bring about the development of His plan based on those very special promises made originally to Abraham.

## **the Exodus from Egypt**

This brief review of the early history of Abraham's descendants brings us

to a very important point in time. Jacob's family had gone into Egypt to escape famine in the land of Canaan (about 70 people). As time went by their numbers increased. The Egyptians regarded them as a threat to their security and enslaved them.

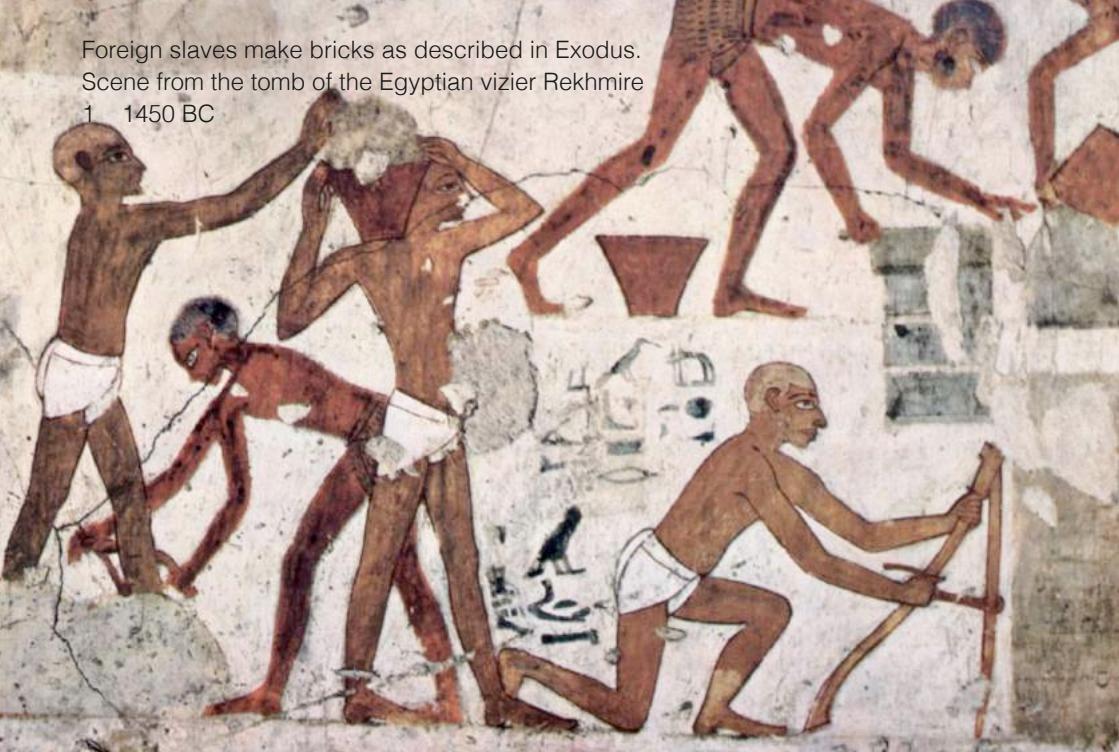
However, the divine promise was not to be frustrated. God had promised Abraham: '*...the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterwards they shall come out with great possessions*' (Genesis 15.14). These words were fulfilled when God brought plagues on Egypt and Pharaoh reluctantly agreed to let them go. The Israelites left Egyptian slavery to journey to the land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses.

## **the kingdom of God founded at Sinai**

They first travelled through the desert to Mount Sinai where God made a covenant (agreement) with them. The book of Exodus tells us about this covenant in God's words addressed to Moses:

**'... "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen**

Foreign slaves make bricks as described in Exodus.  
Scene from the tomb of the Egyptian vizier Rekhmire  
1 1450 BC



what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Exodus 19.3-6

The divine instruction tells us something extremely important – that the kingdom of God was founded at Sinai. Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, entered

into a covenant with God and they were constituted a kingdom with God as their king. The children of Israel were God's chosen people and they were commanded to be a '*holy nation*'. The word '*holy*' means '*separate*', indicating that God had separated them from the other nations to serve Him. This '*holy nation*' is described here as '*a special treasure*' to God '*above all people*'.

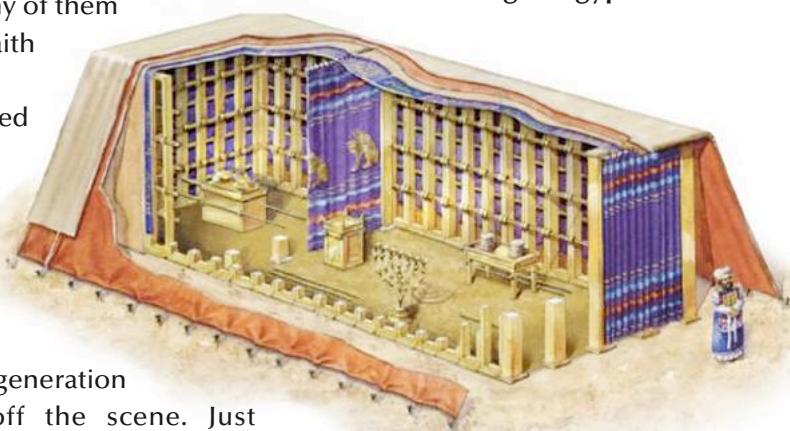
They responded with the words: '*All that the LORD has spoken we will do*' (Exodus 19.8). At the same time their leader Moses was given wise laws to guide them in every aspect



of their daily lives. The 'Law of Moses' as it became known also required them to set up a place of worship in the middle of their encampment. As a '*kingdom of priests*' with God as their king, they were commanded to appoint priests from the tribe of Levi to attend to all matters concerning worship. The meeting place called '*the tabernacle*' was a visual reminder that God would dwell with them as long as they continued to worship and obey Him.

The subsequent history of this nation that God chose for Himself shows the fickleness of human nature, for many of them did not show faith in the divine promise and died in the wilderness of Sinai. They wandered in the desert for 40 years until that faithless older generation had passed off the scene. Just before the children of Israel entered the promised land, Moses reminded them of the terms of that covenant made at Sinai:

**'...you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because he would keep the oath which he swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of the King of Egypt.'**



The tabernacle in the wilderness, the symbol of God's presence with His people

**Therefore know that the LORD your God, he is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments; and he repays those who hate him to their face, to destroy them...'**

Deuteronomy 7.6-10

The divine promise to Abraham was not thrown off course by the lack of faith of the generation that came out of Egypt. Another leader, Joshua, took the next generation into the land of Canaan. After a period of conquest they eventually settled in the land which today is known as the State of Israel.

In this brief review of the early history of the nation of Israel, we have noted how God's promise to Abraham was carried out in a very special way; how through this one man's descendants a nation was born – a special people chosen to serve God. The hand of God operating through his angels brought about their deliverance from Egypt and led them to the promised land.

The Old Testament contains a detailed history of that kingdom which had been established at

Sinai, the kingdom of God on earth. For many years they were lead by Judges, but the time came when the people wanted to be like the surrounding kingdoms and be ruled by a king they could see.

God told the prophet Samuel, the last of this line of Judges: '*... Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them*' (1 Samuel 8.7). So Saul became the first human king to rule over the kingdom of God on earth.

## **the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem**

Saul was succeeded by David who reigned first in Hebron, the place where his great ancestor Abraham had been buried, and then in Jerusalem, which became the ancient capital of the kingdom of God.

After a long and eventful reign David was succeeded by his son Solomon. David acknowledged that both he and his son were in a very privileged position – the kingdom they ruled over was still the kingdom of God that had been established hundreds of years before



at Mount Sinai. These are the words of David's prayer of thanksgiving at the end of his reign:

**'Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head over all'.** 1 Chronicles 29.11

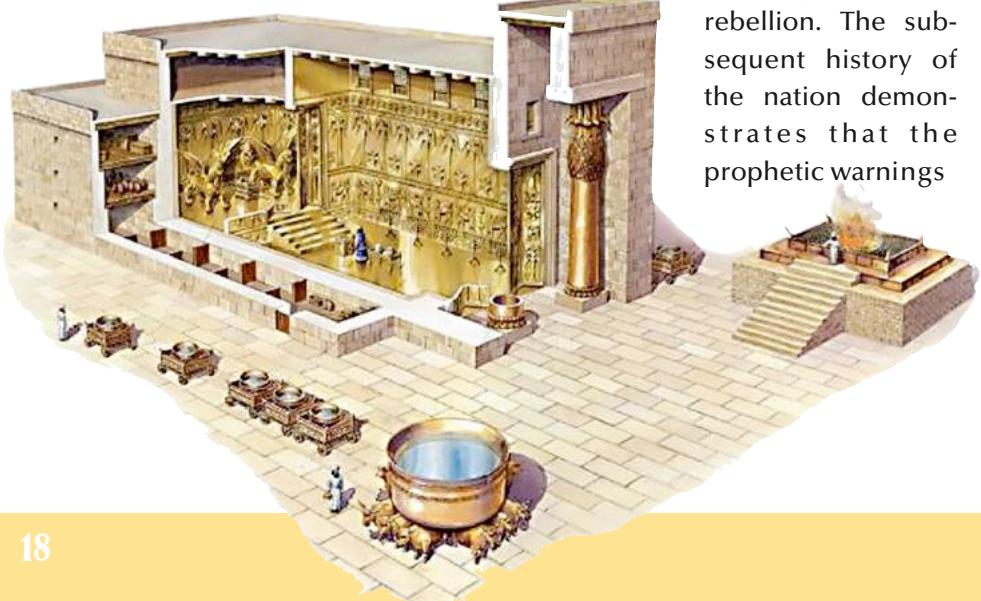
David's prayer reminds us that God still retained overall sovereignty over the nation of Israel, His covenant people, and the subsequent kings of Israel were said to sit on God's throne. For example when Solomon succeeded David '*...Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father...*' (1 Chronicles 29.23).

## **the breaking of the covenant**

This throne in Jerusalem eventually ceased to be occupied. Why?

The history of the Jewish people gives us the answer. It was a history of spiritual decline, of failure to uphold the divine law given through Moses and failure to keep the worship of the one true God at the centre of their lives. Instead they turned to idolatry like the surrounding nations and worshipped idols, gods of wood and stone. They rebelled against the God of Israel who had chosen them to be His special people and to serve Him alone. They broke the covenant that was made at Sinai, yet God, in His love for His people, sent prophets to warn them of the

consequences of rebellion. The subsequent history of the nation demonstrates that the prophetic warnings



were ignored and eventually the kingdom came to an end.

Firstly it split into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom of Israel was eventually invaded by the Assyrians and most of the Jews were deported to various parts of the Assyrian empire. The southern kingdom of Judah lasted a little longer but its capital Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed by the Babylonians. Its last king was taken to Babylon and most of the Jews who had survived the terrible siege of Jerusalem were deported to various parts of the Babylonian empire.

## a promise of restoration

Was that the end of the kingdom of God on earth?

The answer is found in some remarkable words of the prophet Ezekiel addressed to Zedekiah the last king of Judah to sit on King David's throne in Jerusalem. Ezekiel was among the captives in Babylon

LEFT: The tabernacle was replaced by Solomon's temple and God remained at the centre of Israel's national life.

and God made a promise that one day the kingdom would be restored:

**'Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord GOD:**

**"Remove the turban, and take off the crown...I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him".**

Ezekiel 21.25-27

Six hundred years went by and the land of Israel came under the domination of a succession of empires. Although some of the captive Jews returned to Jerusalem again, they were under the heel of foreign invaders. At the time of Jesus, the land was just a small province of the mighty Roman Empire.

However, despite appearances, the divine promise to Abraham had not been forgotten. God is always true to His Word. The main theme of the teaching of Jesus was the gospel or good news of the coming kingdom of God on earth (Matthew 4.23; Luke 8.1). He appealed to the Jews of his day to treat it as their number one priority – to 'seek first the kingdom of God' (Matthew 6.33).



The letters of his apostles make it clear that this is not just a Jewish hope, but includes men and women of all nations who share Abraham's faith. The next section will demonstrate how God's promise to Abraham will eventually become reality, when the kingdom of God is re-established on earth in perfection and embracing all nations.

In AD 70 The Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple. Here they carry off the 'menorah' (7-branched candlestick) from the Holy Place (relief on the Arch of Titus, Rome)



# Its future restoration worldwide

The previous section showed that the ancient kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of God. But how is this connected to the kingdom of God preached by Jesus? The answer is revealed by a question the apostles put to him just before he ascended into heaven. They asked: '*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*' (Acts 1.6).

Jesus' apostles evidently expected him to re-establish their ancient kingdom. This was not merely the deluded hope of patriotic Jews, longing to throw off the Roman yoke and set up an independent state. After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus had '*opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures*' (Luke 24.45). In the short time leading up to his ascension, he prepared them to go out and preach the gospel of the kingdom of God by themselves: '*... being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*' (Acts 1.3).

We can be sure that their question was well-informed, and in reply to it

Jesus simply answered: '*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority'*  
(Acts 1.7 NIV).

## the throne of David

Jesus' mission to restore the kingdom to Israel was announced before he was even conceived. The angel Gabriel appeared to his mother Mary and said to her:

**'...the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'**

Luke 1.32, 33

Here is confirmation of the link with the ancient kingdom of Israel. Jesus is to inherit the throne of his ancestor David, the famous king of Israel, who successfully led God's people not only in war and as ruler, but also in worshipping the true God. In recognition of his faith, God made a far-reaching promise to David about a unique descendant:



**'He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son'.**

2 Samuel 7.13,14

In repeating this promise, the angel Gabriel confirmed that Jesus' kingdom will be a restoration of David's kingdom. Like his ancestor, he will reign over the house of Jacob (another name for the nation of Israel). This is why the wise men from the East were searching for the one '*who has been born King of the Jews*' (Matthew 2.2).

## a literal kingdom

From these verses we can begin to build up a picture of the sort of kingdom Jesus is going to set up. It will not be a kingdom in heaven,

neither a kingdom of church hierarchy, nor an abstract reign of grace in the hearts of believers. But it will be a literal kingdom on earth, a restoration of the ancient kingdom of Israel. Jesus will reign over the nation of Israel just like his ancestor David.

This connection reminds us that to fully understand the kingdom of God that we read about in the New Testament, we first need to appreciate the Old Testament background. The audience who listened to Jesus' preaching was mainly Jewish; they were already looking forward to God's kingdom, waiting for the coming of their Messiah, to become king of Israel, because it had already been foretold by God.



## **the 'Promised Land'**

One of the earliest prophecies of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament was given to Abraham, forefather of the Jewish people. It took the form of a series of promises God made to him, recorded in the book of Genesis. Though they contain no mention of a king or a kingdom, the importance of these promises for us is made clear by the Apostle Paul, who told the first century Christians that God '*preached the gospel to Abraham before-hand*' (Galatians 3.8).

This gospel message that was preached to Abraham included the assurance that God would give him a certain land, for example:

**'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are –**

**northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants for ever... Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you'.**

Genesis 13.14–17

The land God promised to Abraham was then called Canaan and is now known as Israel or Palestine. There can be no question here of a figurative promised land in heaven, since the description is emphatically physical, speaking of a land he could see and walk on.

We noted in the previous section that God later gave the land of Canaan to his descendants, the nation of Israel, but Abraham himself never received any part of it, as Stephen pointed out:

Looking down on the Jezreel valley in northern Israel



*'And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on'* (Acts 7.5). So God's promise is yet to be fulfilled, and it is worth noting here that for Abraham to possess the land for ever, he will have to be raised from the dead and be given eternal life.

However, it is not only Abraham who will benefit from God's promises. After identifying these promises with the gospel, Paul went on to explain that when God spoke of '*descendants*' (literally '*seed*' in the original text of Genesis), he was referring to one key descendant, Jesus Christ. He also said that all who are baptised into Christ will share in his inheritance: '*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*' (Galatians 3.29). We do not have to be natural descendants of Abraham to share with him that wonderful future, but those who '*are Christ's*' must have Abraham's faith and obedience to God. David understood this perfectly when he wrote: '*The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it for ever*' (Psalm 37.29).

## a new world order

The Old Testament prophets of Israel provide us with many more descriptions of God's kingdom, reinforcing and building upon what was promised to Abraham. For example, the prophet Daniel revealed the meaning of a strange dream seen by his master Nebuchadnezzar, the powerful king of Babylon. It was no ordinary dream, but a vision from God that foretold the future for many centuries to come.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about a great statue of a man made of different metals, from the head of gold down to the legs of iron. As Daniel explained, these represented a succession of four great empires, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's own Babylonian kingdom and ending with the Roman Empire. It was an amazingly accurate prophecy of world history. The dream foretold that the Roman Empire would not be followed by another great power, but by a mixture of strong and weak nations. They were represented by the feet of the statue, a state of affairs that has endured to the present day. In

the dream a stone suddenly struck the feet, breaking them in pieces and causing the whole image to come crashing down and be crushed to powder which was

blown away leaving no trace. The stone then became a **great mountain** and filled the whole earth. Daniel revealed the meaning of these dramatic symbols:

'And 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

So God's kingdom will overthrow and replace all present human governments, filling the whole earth; the world will rapidly be transformed. This outcome is also foretold in the New Testament. The Apostle John saw a vision of the great changes to take place and he heard these words that confirm the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

'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 holy city

Since Jesus will be given the throne of his father David, as foretold by the angel Gabriel, it comes as no surprise to discover that the capital city of the kingdom of God will be Jerusalem, the city David captured and made his own. It will become a capital not only for the nation of Israel, but for the whole world as predicted by the prophet Isaiah:

**'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... For 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'.** Isaiah 2.2-4

Jerusalem will then be the religious and political centre of the world, and Jesus will rule all nations on the basis of God's law. Even the peoples who were once enemies of Israel and hostile to God's Word, will then undertake great pilgrimages:

**'And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles'.**

Zechariah 14.16

## the gospel of the kingdom

Reading through the Gospels, we cannot miss the emphasis on the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching, so often is it mentioned. Mark tells us that Jesus came '*preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel"*' (Mark 1.14,15).

The teaching of Jesus on this subject is entirely consistent with the picture we have discovered so far: a literal kingdom on earth, to be set up at some point in the future, over which Jesus himself will be king for ever. We find examples of this teaching among some of Jesus' most well-known words, such as the beatitudes: '*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the*

*earth' (Matthew 5.3,5). These parallel expressions reveal that though the kingdom will be '*the kingdom of heaven*' (meaning from God who dwells in heaven), it will be physically located on the earth.*

This teaching is reinforced in the following chapter in the words of 'The Lord's Prayer': '*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*' (Matthew 6.10). As we noted in Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, when God's kingdom comes, human rule over the earth will cease and will be replaced by the appointment of a divine ruler, so that God's will shall then be done on earth.

### **"Your kingdom come"**

Though the Jews already understood that the promised son of David would set up God's kingdom, most did not appreciate that he had other work to do first. Jesus' followers expected him to set up the kingdom straight away, and on one occasion '*were about to come and take him by force to make him king*' (John 6.15).

So Jesus warned them that it would not happen at his first coming:

*'...he spoke another parable, because he was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately' (Luke 19.11). The parable he then told began: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return' (Luke 19.12).*

Knowing that Jesus will be king, we can identify the nobleman with Jesus himself. The message is clear – before the kingdom of God was established, Jesus had to travel into '*a far country*' for a time and then return. There is also no difficulty in identifying the '*far country*' of the parable, as we are reminded in the book of Acts:

*'...while they watched, he (Jesus) was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. 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 1.9-11*



The kingdom of God cannot be set up while its king is absent at God's right hand in heaven, but he will return to the earth. Like the stone that struck the feet in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Jesus' coming will have a dramatic effect.

The answer to the apostles' question about the exact time of Jesus' return has not been revealed. But the day is set in the divine calendar, as the Apostle Paul explained when he visited the city of Athens. He reminded the idol-worshipping Athenians that there was only one true God and urged them to repent – to turn from idols to worship Him.

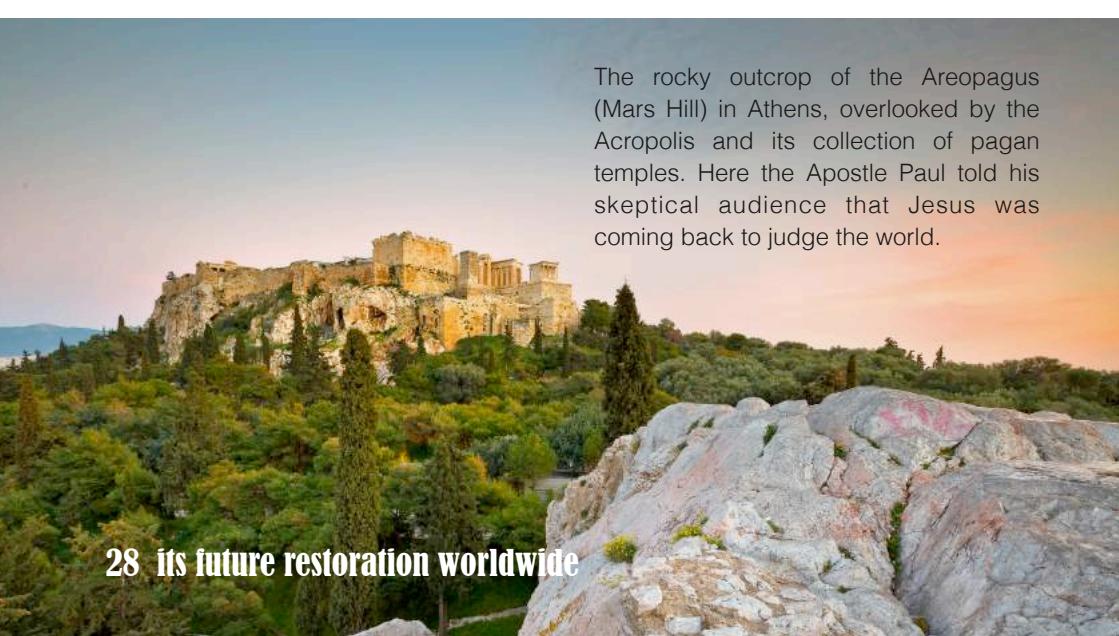
Why? The answer is given in Paul's words:

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

Acts 17.31

Although we do not know the exact date when Jesus will return, in modern history and recent events we can see the fulfilment of many Bible prophecies. These are signs or pointers that tell us to get ready for that world-shaking event.

What changes will take place when God's kingdom is established? The next section takes us through a number of Bible prophecies that contrast the world of today with the very different world of tomorrow.



The rocky outcrop of the Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens, overlooked by the Acropolis and its collection of pagan temples. Here the Apostle Paul told his skeptical audience that Jesus was coming back to judge the world.



# The coming time of great change

Nobody would question the fact that we live in a rapidly changing world. In some places people are becoming healthier, wealthier, better educated and living longer. Elsewhere our world is more corrupt, congested, warmer, dangerous, divided and unemployed – and the pace of change is increasing.

All of us have an interest in ‘the world of tomorrow’. We want to know where the jobs will be, where to live, what skills to acquire, how to feed our families and how we can live well. If we could know the future more accurately, then we should be able to prepare for it. The question is, what will the world be like?

Will it be as many people expect:

- ❖ a familiar world, a world with winners – but also losers?  
or
- ❖ a world in crisis, on course to self-destruction and where natural resources are wasted?  
or will it be, as the Bible predicts:
- ❖ a world with a single government and leadership that can be

trusted, where resources are well managed, in which the quality of life is drastically improved, and where there is a long-term vision for the planet?

There are very good reasons to believe what the Bible predicts about the future. A time of great change is coming on our world very soon.

## what the whole world is waiting for

The early Christians did not believe in human ‘progress’ and neither should we. They did not think the world was getting better and better under its own steam. They knew God had to intervene and do something significant to put things right.

Neither did they believe that the world was getting worse and worse and that they should try and escape it altogether. They had heard and believed the gospel or good news about the coming kingdom of God, when corrupt and inept human governments would be swept away and replaced. They believed God’s



promise that He would eventually make His own Son, Jesus Christ, king over all, giving him the task of mending our broken world.

Meanwhile, as Christians, they tried to copy the example of Jesus and live in a way that helped their bit of the world to be a better place.

## a mended world

The Bible says that when God finished creating the world he was pleased with what He had done. It was excellent in every way. Unfortunately, it didn't stay that way for long! It soon stopped reflecting God's glory, as it once did in the beginning.

So our world now needs mending. Given the state it is in, that might seem impossible. But God, who had the power to create this world originally, also has the power to '*make all things new*' (Rev. 21.5).

The result will be amazing! The Bible tells us what it will be like:



## a peaceful society

We all need peace and security, with freedom from the threat of danger. God's kingdom will be entirely peaceful. Wars and war preparations will be unknown.

Violence between individuals or nations will be a thing of the past.

**'The Lord will settle international disputes; all the nations will convert their weapons of war into implements of peace... all wars will stop and all military training will end'.**

Isaiah 2.4 The Living Bible (TLB)

**'Come, see the glorious things that our God does... how he... causes wars to end throughout the earth, breaking and burning every weapon'.** Psalm 46.8,9 TLB



## plenty of food and water

Another world problem is famine. While rainfall is decreasing in some places and deserts expanding, floods in other places are destroying crops and homes. Millions starve to death, while food elsewhere is wasted. In God's kingdom there will be plenty for all, with copious supplies of food and water.

**'...the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose... The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon'.**

Isaiah 35.1,2

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

Isaiah 35.6,7

**'There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains... and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth'.**

Psalm 72.16



### **honesty and justice**

One of the tragedies of our present world is that the poor and the weak are often denied justice. They cannot defend themselves and are frequently exploited. Organised crime is endemic, with drug use

increasing. When the kingdom of God is established there will be care for the underprivileged and mis-carriages of justice will stop. Jesus, as king over God's worldwide kingdom, will:

**'... bring justice to the poor of the people... save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor'.**

Psalm 72.4

**'He will not judge by appearance, false evidence, or hearsay, but will defend the poor and the exploited. He will rule against the wicked who oppress them'.**

Isaiah 11.3,4 TLB

The Atacama desert in Chile is one of the driest and most desolate places on earth. But every ten years or so it bursts into flower, in what seems like a preview of the kingdom age described by Isaiah.

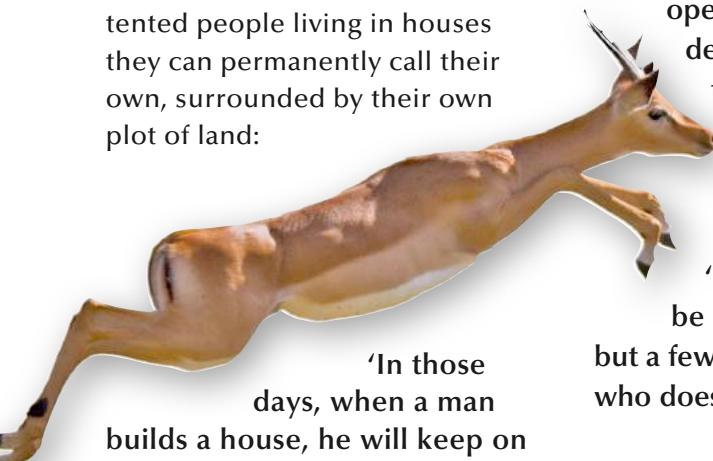




## homes for all

There are few greater inequalities in the world today than the type of houses people live in. Housing has always been high on the agenda of many governments, yet still the problem remains. Shanty towns are a world-wide phenomenon and make-shift camps for vast numbers of refugees provide very little shelter, encouraging crime and disease.

By contrast, the Bible's picture of the future is of a serene and contented people living in houses they can permanently call their own, surrounded by their own plot of land:



*'In those days, when a man builds a house, he will keep on living in it. It will not be destroyed by invading armies as in the past... People will plant vineyards and eat the fruit themselves – their enemies will not confiscate it'.*

Isaiah 65.21,22 TLB



## long and healthy lives

Such an idyllic picture would be ruined unless the inhabitants of the kingdom of God were given good health to enjoy the blessings. Healthy minds and bodies will be a feature of that future age. Long, happy and healthy lives will be quite normal. A person dying a hundred years old will be considered just a child!

When Jesus comes:

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

Isaiah 35.5,6

*'Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years'.*

Isaiah 65.20 NIV

*'For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands'.*

Isaiah 65.22 NIV

These passages from the Bible, and many others like them, build up a picture of life in the kingdom of God. Peace, happiness and security will replace the evils and injustices that cause so much pain, anxiety and anguish today. Everybody will be given food, shelter, health and a very long life to enjoy these blessings to the full.

## cause and effect

You could be excused for thinking that this picture in the Bible is of a completely materialistic society, living for its own gratification and satisfaction. That's not correct. These changes have another purpose:

'... the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea'. Isaiah.11.9

These great and far-reaching changes will happen because of a change in peoples' attitudes. These God-given benefits are not an end in themselves. They are the result of men and women turning to God and knowing Him better.

Many people are familiar with a Bible quotation that is linked to the

birth of Jesus, when the angels used these words in praise to God:

'Glory to God in the highest, and  
on earth peace, good will  
towards men!' Luke 2.14

Luke 2.14

These words represent ‘cause and effect’. When there is glory to God then, and only then, the world and its inhabitants will enjoy peace.

The Bible clearly states that men and women throughout the world need to change and be changed. Everybody will eventually acknowledge God as the Creator, who gives the blessings this world enjoys now, and will give even more blessings when Jesus rules as its king:

'The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him will praise the LORD... All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you'.

When you consider the vast number of different religions in the world today, you get an idea of how much the world needs change. Some religions are completely incompatible with others and some



are atheistic. Even within the same religion there are different beliefs, often causing hatred and violence.

God's kingdom will change all that. There will be just one religion and many will recognize that they have been mistaken in their past beliefs. With God's help, the prophet Jeremiah was able to look forward to this time of change:



'...to you (God) the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good. Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods!".

Therefore I will teach them – this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the LORD'.

Jeremiah 16.19-21 NIV

This wide-spread recognition of the true God will bring about a tremendous change to the world. Men and women will be willing to live and worship in the way God wants:

'Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths". The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem'.

Isaiah 2.3 NIV

Today, razor wire frames the view of the Temple site in Jerusalem. In the future the Temple Mount will no longer be divided by religious hatred.

Rightly or wrongly, people often blame religion for many of this world's problems, including wars and terrorism. But a world with just one religion will be a vast change for the better and bring with it those countless blessings.

## **making the change**

Bringing about this change will need to involve God Himself. But first of all He will fight, and win a final battle against all those who threaten the land of Israel (God's favourite land – see Deuteronomy 11.8-12) and who oppose His plan to use Jerusalem as the capital of His kingdom. The end-result will be the removal of everything that is evil in the world and a change in the way everyone thinks about God:

**'...When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness'.**

Isaiah 26.9 NIV

**'...the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer'.**

Isaiah 26.21 NIV

**'...I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD'.**

Ezekiel 38.23 NIV

Meanwhile, there is work to be done – and another war to be won – a battle with ourselves!

## **changing ourselves first**

To share this hope of being part of God's plan for the future, we may have to change too. When Jesus preached the 'good news' about the coming kingdom of God, he made this very clear:

**"The time has come"..."The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"**

Mark 1.1 NIV

For some, that change may be a complete 'U-turn'! For others, simply a change in the direction of their lives. But that change must happen... and the time left to do so is short. Why not make that change now, while you still have time?

The last section is a summary of the steps required to make that all-important change.



# The kingdom of God and you

The changed world of the kingdom of God is almost beyond our imagination. As we have already noted, the sorrows and hardships of this life will be greatly alleviated for the remaining mortal population of the world. But people will need to change too – to focus on the worship of God and to lead righteous lives. The Bible tells us that the benefits of this will be felt by all: '*The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever*' (Isaiah 32.17).

This will fulfil the promise to Abraham that '*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*' (Genesis 12.3). God's declaration to Moses about His plan for the world will then be accomplished:

**'...truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD'**

Numbers 14.21

## resurrection and judgment

When Jesus returns a process of 'cleansing' the world of ungodliness will take place before the time of righteousness and peace

can be established. Those who he calls his '*friends*' will assist him. He said to his disciples '*You are my friends if you do whatever I command you*' (John 15.14). The friends of Jesus will not be like the mortal population of the earth. They will be made immortal like Jesus because when he returns his first task will be to raise '*the dead in Christ*' (1 Thessalonians 4.16). This will be followed by a gathering together of believers to the place of judgment (2 Corinthians 5.10).

Those who have tried to develop characters like that of Jesus will be rewarded by him with the gift of eternal life. They will then be privileged to assist Jesus in bringing all nations under his control and teaching the mortal population to develop godly characters.

## the time to prepare

If we believe that Jesus is soon to return and bring about these far-reaching changes, then we need to prepare for that time now.

How can we do this?

Just before his ascension to heaven, Jesus gave his apostles a very clear commission, to continue the work that he had begun:

**'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 apostles responded to these instructions immediately. Only a few days after Jesus' ascension, Peter preached in Jerusalem and his words touched the hearts of many who heard him. '*What shall we do?*' they asked. Peter responded without hesitation:

**'...“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”.**

Acts 2.38

## **repentance**

Repentance is a word that literally means 'to perceive afterwards'. It implies a change of mind and a change of direction in our lives.

It always means a change for the better – understanding and believing God's Word, and forsaking our former way of life. The Bible tells us about our natural state as sinners and what God requires of us to become His servants rather than the servants of sin. It teaches us to follow the example of Jesus rather than our natural inclinations.

Once we have learned what God requires of us and we want to be a part of the things He has promised, then we need to act on this. In following Jesus we learn that we too must be baptized. Jesus himself set the example by being baptized (Matthew 3.13-17).

## **what is baptism?**

Baptism is the first active step to take as part of our preparation for that new life in the kingdom of God, but what is it? The established church teaches that sprinkling holy water from a font on a person's head is sufficient. Others teach that it is necessary to have moving holy water, so this is poured on the head from a jug rather than sprinkled. Then there is baptism by full



immersion, which means that the person is completely covered with water. But what does the Bible say about baptism?

The Gospels record that John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea to the east of Jerusalem. The people of the cities and villages went out to hear what he had to say and those who accepted his message were baptized by John in the river Jordan. He didn't go into the cities and villages with a supply of holy water and sprinkle people there. No, they went to him and were baptized in the Jordan where they would be immersed in the water just like Jesus.

## a lesson from the Old Testament

Long before the time of Jesus we read in the Old Testament about a man, a successful Syrian army commander called Naaman, who was a leper. He was told by the prophet Elisha that he would be cured of his leprosy if he washed in the river Jordan seven times. This was something his pride would not allow him to do and he was indignant at this instruction, feeling

that the Syrian rivers were far better than the river Jordan.

Naaman was reminded by his servants that if he had been asked to do something grand he would certainly have done it. He realised his error, swallowed his pride, washed in the Jordan as instructed and was cured of his leprosy. You can read about this in 2 Kings chapter 5.

We can learn much from this incident. First, sufficient water is required for us to be completely cleansed of our 'leprosy', which is used in the Bible to represent sin. Second, we need to humbly submit to baptism by full immersion in order to please God and obtain forgiveness of past sins. Once cleansed in this way, we can start our journey along the path that leads to eternal life in the kingdom of God.

## a lesson from the New Testament

This need for immersion in water is also shown in the record in Acts about the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch. He was reading a Bible passage as he returned home after a visit to Jerusalem. Philip



joined him in his chariot and explained the meaning of the passage from Isaiah chapter 53, a prophecy about the work of Jesus as the Saviour.

When he understood what he must do to be saved through the work of Jesus, the Ethiopian asked Philip: '*...See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?*' Then Philip said, '*If you believe with all your heart, you may*' (Acts 8.36,37). On hearing the Ethiopian's confession of his faith, the record in Acts tells us that '*both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him*' (Acts 8.38).

## baptism unites us with Jesus

Baptism unites us with Jesus Christ. We become his friends, with the aim that the rest of our lives are willingly spent in his service. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, the Apostle Paul sets out the full significance of baptism for those who wish to become the friends of Jesus. We recommend that you

The original word for 'baptize' was used in the dyeing industry, where cloth or leather was submerged in the dye to bring about a complete change of colour. Picture: traditional dyeing vats in Morocco



read Romans chapter 6 carefully for a clear understanding of the significance of baptism. The teaching of this chapter clearly shows why we need to be completely covered with water when we are baptized ):

**'...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

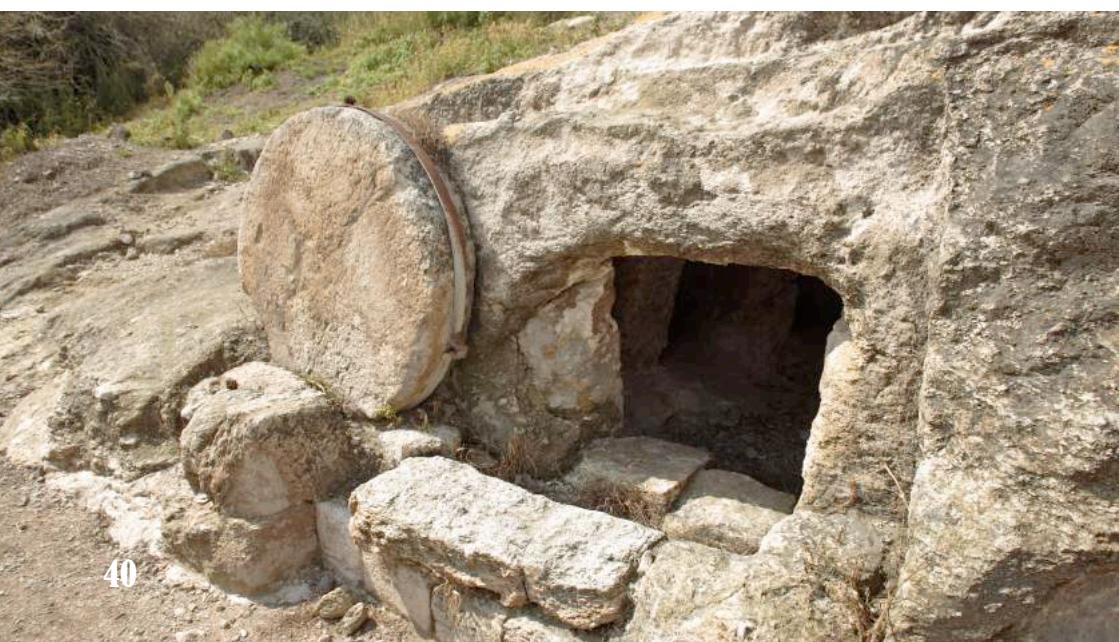
How can we be '*buried with him through baptism into death*' if we

are not completely covered by the waters of baptism? Jesus rose to a new life and Paul shows that at baptism we also start a new life. We should no longer please ourselves but dedicate our lives to God and make it our priority, in Jesus' words, to '*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*' (Matthew 6.33).

## **the hope of resurrection**

What happens if we die before Jesus comes? The answer to this is given in Romans chapter 6:

**'For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection.'**



**... Now if we died with Christ,  
(through baptism) we believe that  
we shall also live with him'.**

(Romans 6,5,8)

The Gospel accounts explain that after three days in the tomb Jesus was raised from the dead and this was the main theme of the apostles' preaching. Peter wrote to those '*who through him believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God'*. (1 Peter 1.21)

Paul reminded the Corinthians that '*Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*' (1 Corinthians 15.20). The resurrection of Jesus as the '*first-fruits*' of the harvest, gives his disciples the assurance that they too will be raised from the dead at his coming when the full harvest is gathered in. This is not a vain wish but a confident expectation of the fulfilment of God's promises.

If we have been baptized into this hope, then there is no fear that we will be overlooked at Christ's

LEFT: on the morning of the first day, the tomb was empty. Jesus had risen from the dead, the first-fruits of a new creation in which we too can have our place.

appearing if our present life ends before his coming. We will be raised from the dead and if found to be among the friends of Jesus, we will be given divine nature. We will be fitted for the role of ruling the nations and teaching those who have not heard or understood the gospel message.

The hope of the resurrection is not just a New Testament doctrine. In the book of Job we learn about a man who lived many centuries before Christ. He is described as '*blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil*' (Job 1.1). Despite undergoing very severe trials he maintained his confidence in God and expressed his hope in this way:

**'...I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God'.** Job 19.25,26

The prophet Daniel was told about the state of the world just prior to the return of Christ. It is described as '*a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation*' and the passage continues: '*at that time your people shall be delivered*' (Daniel 12.1). Not only will the living

be delivered but the dead will also be raised, as we learn from the next verse:

**'And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament (heavens), and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever'.**

Daniel 12.2,3

## Conclusion

We have thought about the need for change in our lives. Before anything else, we must come to know what the Bible teaches and be moved by a real desire to be involved in its wonderful promises. A conviction of the truth of these things will lead us to repentance and baptism into the saving name of Jesus.

Baptism associates us with the work of Jesus, bringing forgiveness of our former sins. It is also a public confession of our beliefs before witnesses and a figurative burial and resurrection to a new life 'in Christ'. This sets our feet on the path to God's kingdom.

There is nothing else in this life that offers so much promise for the future and is so certain to be fulfilled. It is our sincere wish that you may be among those who share the honour of being with Jesus in his coming kingdom.

**'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne'**

Revelation 3.21

The Christadelphians who publish this magazine 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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*'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea'*

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk (2.14)