

Light

...on a new world

Volume 30.4

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

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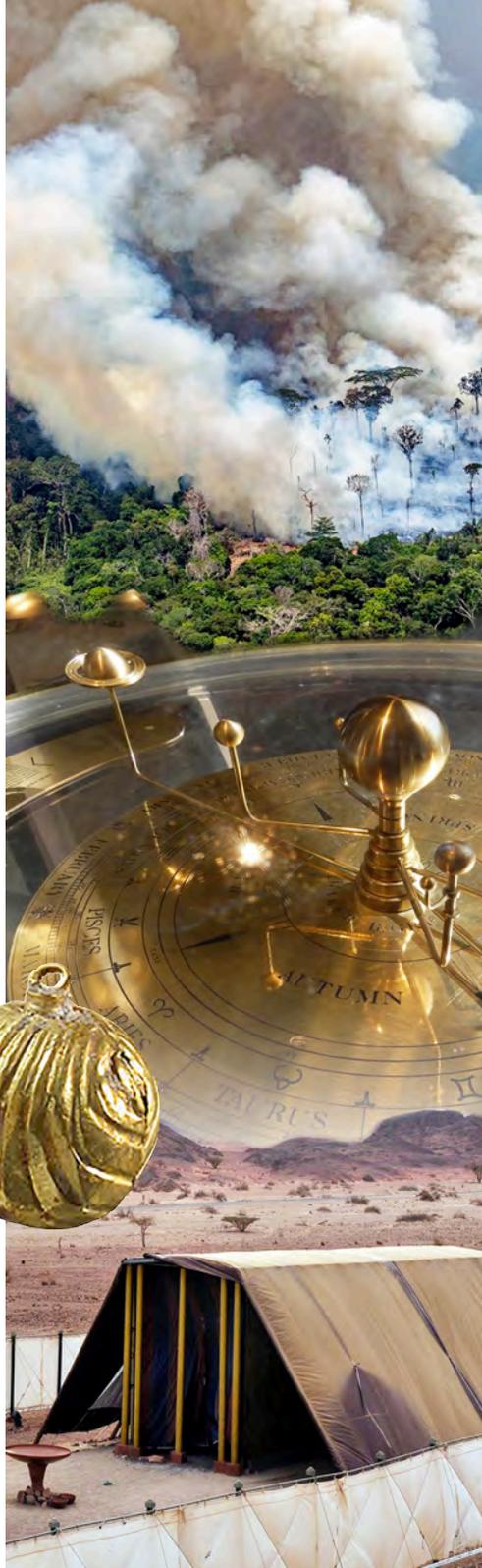
cover picture

The Iguazu Falls, Argentina/Brazil

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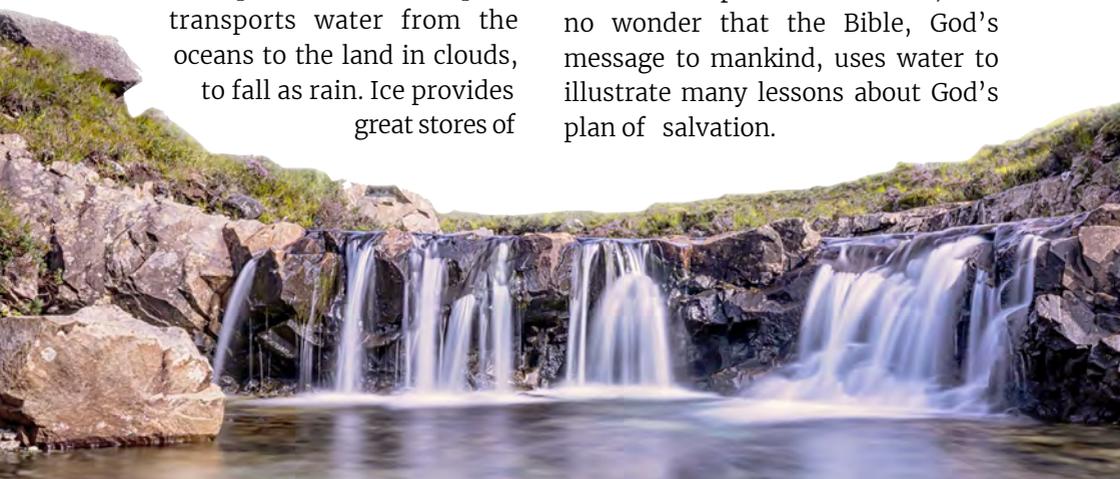
The water of life

Water is essential for all life and without it plants and animals will soon die. Water makes up a significant portion of all living beings. For example, the amount of water in the adult human body is around 50%–65%, varying with age and gender. We start to feel thirsty when we lose around 3% of our body's water, but mental performance and physical coordination start being impaired at only 1% dehydration. This means that it is vitally important that humans drink enough fluids to replace that lost by perspiration and urination.

Water itself is a wonderful substance and it covers about 70% of the Earth's surface. The cycle of evaporation, condensation and precipitation ensures that the Earth receives a regular supply of water to make plants grow and to satisfy animal life. Water is found in its three natural states of vapour, liquid and solid within a relatively narrow temperature range, and all three states are important for life. Vapour transports water from the oceans to the land in clouds, to fall as rain. Ice provides great stores of

fresh water in glaciers that help regulate the flow of rivers, while the layer of ice on the surface of lakes and rivers insulates life in the water beneath from extremes of cold.

Given the importance of water, it is no wonder that the Bible, God's message to mankind, uses water to illustrate many lessons about God's plan of salvation.



A worldwide flood

The first instance we wish to highlight is the worldwide flood in Noah's time. Mankind had become wicked and estranged from God, who vowed to destroy all life from the earth by a worldwide flood (Genesis 6.5-7). Of all that generation, only Noah pleased God. So God directed him to build an ark, so that he and his family, together with representatives of every animal species, would be saved from the impending catastrophe.

This demonstrates the destructive power of water, as all life outside the ark drowned. But it also shows how water can cleanse, for a new world awaited Noah as he stepped from the ark after the flood subsided, a world free from the evil that characterised the old world. You can read more about Noah's flood in Genesis chapters six to eight.

Crossing the Red Sea

Many centuries later, God again showed the power of water to both save and destroy, as His people Israel fled from slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians pursued after their former slaves and thought they had trapped them by the Red Sea. But God, who was caring for His people, parted the waves of the sea, enabling them to escape on foot on the dry seabed, with a wall of water on either side of them.

When the Egyptian army attempted to follow Israel into the passage through the sea, God caused the water to engulf them, so the entire army with all their horses were drowned in the sea. Thus Israel was saved and the Egyptian soldiers destroyed by the same waters. A full account of this event can be found in Exodus chapter 14.

Water in the desert

As the Israelites continued their journey towards the Promised Land, they had to cross the hot and waterless desert of Sinai. How were all those people, perhaps numbering two million, plus their herds of livestock, going to survive?

Exodus chapter 17 records how God miraculously provided water from a rock in the desert. Moses, their leader, struck the rock with his rod, and then water gushed out for the people to drink. The lesson for Israel was that they were totally reliant on God and their very lives depended on His provision of water. Of course, this is still true of us today, although few acknowledge the fact. We depend on God through nature's cycle to send rain, which is essential for the growth of crops to provide food. But for Israel, dying from thirst in a lifeless desert, God's provision of life-saving water was a demonstration of His power and His mercy to them.

Later on, when the nation of Israel was settled in their land, King David, who wrote many of the Psalms, used water to symbolise God's Word, which is the source of spiritual enlightenment, just as natural water is essential for natural life. David likens a godly man to a tree that flourishes on a river bank with its abundant source of water (Psalm 1.1-3). Another Psalm likens the writer's spiritual desire for God with the longing of a thirsty deer for water:



The spring of Ein Gedi near the Dead Sea. David spent time here in his flight from King Saul and the Psalms reflect his experience.

‘As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.’ Psalm 42.1,2

‘Living water’

Not surprisingly, the Scriptural theme of water comes into focus in the life and teaching of Jesus. The Gospel of John chapter 4 tells us how Jesus came to a well as he travelled through Samaria. He sat down, tired from his journey, and longed for a drink to quench his thirst. After a while, a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water and Jesus asked her for a drink. At first the woman was reluctant to help Jesus, as the Samaritans and the Jews were not the best of neighbours and they had little to do with one another.

Jesus turned the situation around by saying to the woman that he could offer her *‘living water’* (John 4.10). The woman was intrigued, and as Jesus had no bucket to draw water from the well, she asked where and how she could get this living water. Jesus’ reply shows that the living water of which he spoke was so much more valuable than natural water:

‘...whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him

will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.' John 4.13,14

The phrase 'living water' feels energetic, dynamic, vibrant, clean and refreshing. It is the opposite of the type of water that so many people in the past, and sadly, even today in some countries, must rely on, which is stagnant and dirty, perhaps carrying diseases and contaminated with industrial pollution. But what is the 'living water' that Jesus referred to? Later, in Jerusalem, Jesus said:

'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' John 7.37,38

Again, it is evident that Jesus was talking about spiritual thirst, and the 'living water' is his teaching that can lead in God's mercy, to eternal life. His words are an echo of the prophet Isaiah's words:

'Ho, Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters... listen diligently to me... incline your ear and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an ever-lasting covenant with you...' Isaiah 55.1-3

We can conclude that the teaching of Jesus is as vital for sustaining our spiritual development as natural

water is for sustaining our physical life.

The need for baptism

In order to benefit from Jesus' death and resurrection, we need to make a commitment to him through baptism, that is, full immersion in water, to wash away our sins. Interestingly, two of the examples we looked at earlier, of how God used water to cleanse and save His people (the flood and the crossing of the Red Sea), are allegories of true baptism. The Apostle Peter had the flood in mind when he wrote:

'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God ...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which ...eight souls were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us... baptism ...(the answer of a good conscience towards God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' 1 Peter 3.18-21

Just as the flood waters swept away the old evil world and allowed a new start, so baptism cleanses believers of their sins and marks a new start in their life. And just as the Egyptians were swept away in their evil intent, whilst Israel passed safely through the sea and were saved, this was a

type of baptism. Sin was swept away and a fresh start was made in anticipation of the work of Christ, as Paul told the believers at Corinth:

‘Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers ... passed through the sea, all were baptised into Moses ...in the sea. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.’

1 Corinthians 10.1,2,4

The incident of Moses striking the rock is in fact a type, or allegory of the work of Christ. It is evident from Scripture that Jesus was referred to as a rock or stone: ‘... *the name of Jesus Christ... whom God raised from the dead... this is the **stone** which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief corner-stone*’ (Acts 4.10,11). God’s plan for the world rests on the fact that Jesus died to take away our sins but rose again to eternal life. His willing sacrifice on the cross is represented by Moses striking the rock to allow living water to flow from it. By the death of Jesus, immortal life, represented by that flowing water, has been made possible to all who become his disciples and put their trust in God.

The challenge for us

So the challenge goes out to us – are we thirsting after the salvation that Jesus offers, like that parched deer

referred to in the Psalm, that ran desperately looking for fresh water? We learned earlier how we physically underperform if we lose only 1% of our body’s water. It’s the same with our spiritual health, if we don’t let God’s word influence our lives, our faith in Jesus will fall away. David wrote:

‘O God, you are my God; early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.’ Psalm 63.1

The world today is indeed a spiritually dry and barren place. We can only hope to find salvation in God’s word the Bible, nowhere else. But there is a time coming, when Jesus will return to set up God’s kingdom on this Earth. Let us then respond to the invitation from God in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, to ‘*take the water of life*’ (Revelation 22.17):

‘And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come”.

And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.’

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The Fall of Man

The exact phrase ‘the fall of man’ does not appear in the Bible but it aptly describes a most important turning point in the history of mankind and God’s plan and purpose with His creation.

Earlier in this series we considered the evidence that God created man (see volume 29.3 page 31). The theory of evolution is in direct opposition to the teaching of the Bible and offers us no purpose in life. In the Bible, God offers a plan of salvation for us and a hope for the future. This topic explores the early stages of the development of God’s plan.

God clearly tells us several times in the Bible, the reason for the creation (see for example Isaiah 45.18; Revelation 4.11). In the beginning, God created man for a special relationship. Unlike any other part of the animal creation, human beings were given the power to reason and understand things, whereas animals are creatures of instinct.

A simple mission

God gave Adam and Eve a simple mission and a very simple code to live by:

‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; 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 1.28

The mission to *‘be fruitful and multiply’* was given before they sinned.

‘...the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.’ Genesis 2.15

Adam and Eve were given the task of looking after the garden where, we later learn, the Lord God walked with them. In summary, they were created to rule over the animal creation, procreate, subdue the earth and tend the Garden of Eden. They were given one rule to live by:

‘...the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die”’

Genesis 2. 16,17

There are some important principles established here:

- ❖ God has the right to demand obedience from His creation.
- ❖ Adam and Eve had freewill to obey or disobey.
- ❖ They had a moral obligation to their Creator.
- ❖ Death was the penalty for disobeying God.

This sets the scene for the topic of ‘the fall of man’.

Disobedience introduced sin and death

A serpent was in the garden that had limited ability to reason, and at the time was able to speak. It spoke to Eve (Genesis 3.1-6). Read this passage carefully and notice how the serpent told the woman half-truths.

The woman fully understood her position. Nevertheless she and her husband took and ate the fruit (nowhere is it described as an apple). There was conflict in the woman’s mind based on the serpent’s reasoning. Eve believed the serpent more than God. Adam didn’t oppose the suggestion of doing wrong. The act of taking and eating the fruit was a calculated decision in direct opposition to God’s simple command to eat any fruit in the garden, **except** the fruit of that one particular tree.

There was an immediate realisation of the magnitude of what they had done. They realised, being naked, that they should cover themselves up, so that they could hide from God. They sewed fig leaves together to make simple clothes (read Genesis 3.8-11).

The first sin in history had been committed.

The Bible teaching about sin is very clear. The problem for us is that we are descended from Adam and Eve and we have inherited their sinful human nature, which means we are similarly open to temptation. This point is made because modern thinking about sin is clouded by the same thought process that Eve went through before taking the fruit. The Apostle John wrote: *‘Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness,*

and sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3.4). This is something that a largely godless world today finds irrelevant and unacceptable.

The Apostle Paul wrote: *'Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, thus death came to all men, because all sinned'* (Romans 5.12) i.e. all mankind has descended from Adam. Christian beliefs that ignore the Genesis account, leaves us with no explanation as to why we die or how we can be saved from death. Paul also wrote that *'the wages of sin is death...'* (Romans 6.23). In other words **death is the payment for sin.**

A curse and a promise

It is important to read the entire passage in Genesis chapter 3 verses 8 to 21 and pay particular attention to verse 15 which is addressed to the serpent:

'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

The outcome of this passage is that the serpent was cursed. Most importantly, the '*seed*' or offspring of the serpent would be the enemy of the '*seed*' of the woman. Anyone exploring religion should note this verse carefully. The seed (offspring) of the serpent would fight with the seed (offspring) of the woman. Her seed would bruise the head of the serpent's seed (a fatal wound) but the serpent's seed would only bruise the heel of the woman's seed (a non-fatal wound).

The whole narrative of the Bible hangs on Genesis 3 verse 15. The seed of the serpent is sin – the serpent caused it to come into the world by tempting Eve. The seed of the woman refers to one man and points to the Lord Jesus Christ. His death was like a bruise to the heel for he rose from the dead. In succeeding in his mission he dealt a death blow (a bruise to the head) to the seed of the serpent. A very important principle is established here. God was carrying out His plan to eventually take away the sin that had been brought into the world as a result of the events in Eden.

The punishment on Eve was to suffer pain in child-bearing (Genesis 3.16). Again, important principles were established here. Ephesians 5. 21-33 and 1 Peter 3. 1-7 are very helpful in understanding this point.

The punishment on Adam was that the ground was cursed. Food would only be obtained by a continual battle with pests, weeds and disease. It would mean hard labour ending in death. Man was formed of dust and to dust he would return (Genesis 3.19).

The necessity for sacrifice

The point has already been made that Adam and Eve tried to hide from God having become conscious that they were exposed to Him (Genesis 3.7). Their remedy was unacceptable to God. He provided them with animal skins as a covering (Genesis 3.21). This introduces the concept of sacrifice. Blood was shed in the killing of animals to make 'tunics' of animal skins for Adam and Eve.

The man and woman were ejected from the Garden of Eden where they had effectively lived with God (Genesis 3.22-24). They were now subject to sin, disease and death as a result of disobeying God's command. Neither was Adam able to bring about their own deliverance or reconciliation with God.

The finality of death

The Bible teaches that death is final, apart from divine intervention. Death is a cessation of life and we return to the dust of the ground. Read Ecclesiastes 3.19,20, Ecclesiastes 9.5,6 and Psalm 6.5 to confirm the points being made above.

We can see that without God's help there is no way back to Him. But we learn from the Bible that He is a forgiving God, and has made possible a way back to Him through the work of His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Bible hope contained in the 'gospel' which Jesus preached. The word 'gospel' literally means 'good news'.

The entire narrative of the Bible is about how God has been working out His plan for men and women to be reconciled to Him. It is this good news which Light Magazine is drawing to our readers' attention.

Despite the fall of man, recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis, we have this message of hope summarised by the Apostle Peter:

'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.'

2 Peter 3.9

Bells and pomegranates

*‘...with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes
she shall have music wherever she goes.’*

from the English Nursery Rhyme ‘Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross’

The use of small bells attached to clothing seems to be part of many folk traditions throughout the world, usually associated with music and dancing and celebration of all kinds.

Jewish tradition is very different.

The Torah describes tiny bells in connection with some of the most solemn rituals of Jewish worship. Bells are specified in connection with the clothing of the High Priest in the detailed description in the Book of Exodus. One of several items of clothing is a tunic described as the ‘robe of the ephod’, a very simple garment in a plain blue fabric but with a richly ornamented hem:

‘And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarn, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around:

... And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD and when he come out, that he may not die.’ Exodus 28. 33–35

The ‘pomegranates’ appear to have been small balls of fabric in rich colours, each probably suspended from a thread attached to the hem. In between each pomegranate was a small golden bell, probably supported

A reconstruction of what the hem of the robe may have looked like, using a traditional bell shape



in the same way. These bells were essential to the most solemn rites of the tabernacle, designed to signal the presence of the High Priest as he moved through the court, into the Holy Place and just once a year into the Most Holy Place. It was God's way of constantly reminding him of the gravity of what he was doing, every movement focused on his role in God's dwelling-place. Worshippers outside the tabernacle could not see the rituals going on inside, but they would have been able to track the High Priest's movements from the sound of the bells.

In July 2011 archaeologist Eli Shukron was excavating a drainage channel to an ancient road just outside the western wall of Jerusalem, (now known as Robinson's Arch) when he found a tiny golden bell (see picture below). From the outside it appeared to be a closed sphere, but x-ray examination showed that inside it had a small (4mm diameter) gold 'clapper' suspended by a gold thread. It also had a gold ring, perhaps designed to allow it to be attached to a garment.

Attention quickly focused on the bell's resemblance to the description in Exodus (for a video see <https://youtu.be/HVcOIdkGEjE>). It is easy to imagine that with constant use of the robe by the priests over the generations, a bell might fall off and sometimes be lost. But was the site of the find significant?



First it was in Jerusalem, very close to the temple site where the priest carried out his duties. No similar find has been made anywhere else in Israel. The road where it was found has since been fully excavated and in July 2019 part of it was opened to the public for the first time (see back page of 'Light' volume 30.3). It is now known as the Pilgrimage Road. About 600 metres long and 8 metres wide, it formed a direct connection between the Pool of Siloam in the south and the Temple Mount to the north, and it was the scene of important temple rituals especially during the Feast of Tabernacles (Hebrew 'sukkot').

Every day during this 7-day celebration, a party of priests, musicians and other worshippers made their way down to the Pool of Siloam, where the priest filled a pitcher with water, and they then made their way back to the temple via the Water Gate, where the water was poured out on the side of the altar as a drink-offering.

This ritual is not described in the Law of Moses but was one of the many traditions added by the Jews after their return from captivity in Babylon. Jesus was familiar with it – it probably inspired his appeal in the temple on the last day of this Feast, ‘*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink*’ (John 7.37). It is easy to imagine that with this ritual being repeated year after year, at some stage one of the bells became detached, rolled across the road and down into the drainage channel where it lay for 2,000 years or so, its gold untouched by time.

According to Jewish tradition there were 72 bells on the hem of the robe. The sound of this single bell has been recorded (a frequency of about 250HZ, the musical note B3) and the sound of 72 of them recreated by a sound engineer. Today it is possible for us to hear the same sound heard by the Jewish people as they gathered round the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

One tiny bell; one more tiny link in the great chain of evidence that supports the Bible narrative and confirms the Jews’ presence in their land and the existence of their temple 2,000 years ago. Jewish temple worship came to an end, as a result of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. Today the Jews are back in their land – but the best is yet to come. The great spiritual revival foretold by the prophets has still to take place:

‘In that day “**HOLINESS TO THE LORD**” shall be engraved on the bells of the horses.’

Zechariah 14.20

‘In that day’ – that is the day we are waiting for, the ‘new world’ that is the message of this magazine.

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The Bible stands the Test of Time

In the last three articles in this series we have looked at the amazing way in which the Bible has been vindicated. We have noted that world history was predicted in advance, in learning about the empires of Babylon, Persia and Greece. We found that the 'image' prophecy of Daniel chapter two (circa 600 BC) was remarkably fulfilled in a way that Daniel could never have predicted alone.

In this article we are to complete this demonstration of the fulfilment of God's declared purpose by looking briefly at the Roman Empire, its role in the ancient world, what happened to it after it broke up and its living legacy in today's world. More importantly, the climax of that image prophecy is about the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth.

The growth of Rome

To the west of the Greek Empire a new military power was emerging. In its early days, a monumental struggle for domination of the Mediterranean took place between Rome and the North African power of Carthage. Ultimately Rome was the victor and by 146 BC Rome had defeated their maritime rival, including much of the North African coast, and added all modern Spain to their territory. Then, extending its

The ROMANS

Reconstruction of the Roman Forum when the power of Rome was at its height.



tentacles to the east, it swallowed up Greece, Macedonia, Egypt and Syria, retaining the wisdom, gods and culture of the Greeks.

Rome was the fulfilment of the 'legs of iron' part of the 'image' prophecy and was the fourth kingdom to dominate the earth. Daniel puts it like this:

'And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.'
Daniel 2.40

This is exactly what the invincible Roman legions did. Province after province was added to the Empire.

Judea, the Roman name for the homeland of the Jews, was initially put under the rule of the brutal King

Herod the Great, a friend of Caesar. But in AD 6 it was placed under direct rule by Roman procurators and became a Roman province. Julius Caesar expanded the empire to the north, adding Gaul (a large part of modern-day Western Europe), and seized power on the strength of his popularity. Augustus Caesar, the first Roman Emperor, eventually drew the northern boundary in Europe along the Rhine following a disastrous defeat in Germany in AD 9. After AD 43 Britain was successfully invaded and was mostly subdued. However, a 73-mile-long northern defensive boundary wall was built around AD 122 by the Emperor Hadrian, in a line between the Solway Firth and the River Tyne, most of which can still to be seen today.

Map showing the extent of the Roman Empire



The period 30 BC to AD 180 is known as the 'Pax Romana' or Roman Peace. The whole of the Mediterranean world was now effectively ruled by the Romans. As long as the provinces stayed on peaceful terms with Rome, they were allowed self-government and were able to keep their own language and religion. It was during this period that Jesus lived, and the gospel was preached and spread throughout the Roman Empire.

The reign of the warrior Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117), who even died fighting, marked Rome's zenith in territorial gains. You could travel from the North of England to the Persian Gulf in the Middle East, without leaving Roman territory.

The Rome of Jesus' day was a pagan power, based on the authority and influence of the gods of Rome. The emperors themselves were initiated into the highest office of these gods, known as Pontifex Maximus (Latin for greatest priest). Emperors were also worshipped by the people as Roman gods. Fine buildings and gates were erected to mark the visit of an emperor god, such as Hadrian, when he visited Miletus (now a ruined city in Western Turkey).

As their empire expanded, the Romans adopted Greek and even Persian gods. Roman authorities persecuted those of the new

Christian faith as troublemakers, who denied the Roman gods in favour of Israel's true God. Faithful followers of Jesus, although living within it, kept themselves separate from the Roman system, and rejected the pagan gods of Rome. They often paid for this with their lives under the likes of the infamous Emperor Nero, who for example, blamed Christians for the great fire of Rome in AD 64. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of them 'being thrown to the beasts, crucified, and being burned alive'. In later times many lost their lives in the Colosseum in Rome where, for barbaric entertainment, wild animals were let loose on prisoners.

Rome in the Bible

In addition to the Old Testament prophecies about Rome, the New Testament abounds with references to this great power that dominated the political scene.

Luke records the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus:

'And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city'

Luke 2.1-3

Joseph went to his home town, Bethlehem, to be registered.

Look how precisely Luke dates the commencement of the ministry of John the Baptist:

‘Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came to John...’

Luke 3.1,2

All these characters are affirmed by external records, Pontius Pilate (see

On the second line down, the letters ‘... IUS PILATUS’ can be clearly seen on this stone found at Caesarea, now in the Israel Museum.



picture) probably being the most infamous, because of his role in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Tiberius was appointed as emperor by the Roman Senate on 15th September AD 14.

The Roman historian and senator, Tacitus, wrote that ‘Christus, from whom the name (Christian) had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus’.

Jesus himself gave a remarkable prophecy concerning the unbelieving Jews of his day. Specifically he foretold the fall of Jerusalem after a brutal siege by the Roman legions, which occurred following the Jewish Zealot revolt in AD 68–70:

‘For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation’

Luke 19.43,44

Again Jesus warned his disciples:

‘But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is

near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled ...For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.'

Luke 21.20-24

The words of Jesus were fulfilled to the letter 37 years later, when God used the might of Rome to humble and punish His people, for failing to recognise Jesus as their long-promised Messiah.

The break-up of the Roman Empire

In AD 312, Constantine, the first so-called Christian Roman Emperor, made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. By this time Christianity had strayed a long way from the teaching of Jesus and his Apostles. It was enforced by the sword, and battles were fought under the flag of the cross. Rome gave its bishops great political power, and made the Bishop of Rome supreme Pontiff, giving him

the old pagan title Pontifex Maximus that is still used by the Pope to this day. It was this Papal power that held Europe together for over 1,000 years.

Rome survived in the East in the form of the Byzantine Empire. But Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, fell at length to Islam in AD 1453, when Ottoman Turkish invaders took the city. Now called Istanbul in Turkey, it remains to this day as a last bastion of the Ottoman Empire which came to an end in the First World War.

In the West the political glue was the authority and power of the Roman church. In this way the iron lumps remained in the feet, whose separate rival nations often fought bloody battles.

The iron legs of Daniel's prophecy developed into the feet, made up of iron lumps and dried clay. These represented both strong and weak nations which emerged as the power of Rome declined. Some of these nations had the strength of the iron but they would not unite fully.

The Roman Empire in the West collapsed in the 5th century AD. This was caused by invasions of Northern European tribes (Huns, Goths, Vandals and Visigoths etc) and another power emerged. That power and influence was the glue that held

together another political alliance. It was the Roman power in another form - the Roman Church, headed by the Pope in league with the Holy Roman Emperor and his European band of rival Catholic princes.

The Holy Roman Empire in Western Europe was dissolved by the French emperor Napoleon in 1806. The ruling Habsburg dynasty took the title of Holy Roman Emperor to Austria, and it was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, in 1914, that precipitated a chain of events bringing about the First World War.

The Second World War was Hitler's failed attempt to annexe the old Austrian territories and unite them with the rest of Europe. Today, the European Union under the 1958 Treaty of Rome, resembles in many ways the old rival nations of the Holy Roman Empire. The 'iron and clay' symbology fits perfectly.

What is the legacy of Rome today?

Without doubt our world owes much to Rome, and its influence has moulded us. In this sense the strength of the iron remains, though the nations are badly fractured and at enmity with each other. Government, law, language, architecture, engineering and religion all contain elements of Rome.



The seal of the US Senate with its Latin (Roman) motto 'E Pluribus Unum' – 'one out of many'.

Government: Many modern-day governments follow the pattern of the Roman Republic. Political concepts such as balance of power, veto, and representation are Roman in origin. The US political framework is modelled on Rome. The Executive President mirrors the elected consuls of Rome. The U.S. even named one house of Congress, the Senate, after the Senate of Rome. Many other countries have similar systems.

Law: Roman law has had a marked influence on the laws of many countries today. Trial by jury, legal wills, and the concept of civil rights, all find their origins in Rome.

Language: Latin (the language of the Romans) spread throughout much of Western Europe during the time of the Roman Empire. Modern

languages, using the Roman alphabet that have evolved from Latin include French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian. Around 800 million people around the world speak a ‘Romance language’ today. Many words in the English language have Latin roots.

Religion: From the 4th century, Rome was the home of the Catholic Church which would hold great influence over Europe for the next thousand years. Today, Christianity (in its many different shades), is the largest religion in the world. The majority of Christians are either Roman Catholic or belong to churches that have developed from the Catholic system.

We can see how the divided Roman Empire has developed into today’s unstable and dangerous world of weak and strong nations striving for supremacy. According to Daniel’s

‘image’ prophecy, we are to witness a huge change when Jesus Christ, the ‘stone’, returns to break up the ‘kingdom of men’ and establish God’s kingdom that will stand for ever. That image was crushed to dust and blown away, being replaced by a great mountain filling the whole earth – the kingdom of God, with Jesus Christ as its divinely appointed king (Daniel 2.34,35).

‘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 forever.’

Daniel 2.44

Justin Giles
London, UK



St Peter's Basilica, Rome. The Roman Catholic Church has wielded enormous power throughout European history.



the *signs* of times

A common thread

‘Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided.

...And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.’

Daniel 2.41-43

These words describe a time when men ‘*will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay*’ which will occur just before Jesus comes back to establish God’s kingdom on earth (Daniel 2.44).

What a fitting description for so much of our world today! It so often feels like nobody can agree with anybody else over anything. That’s the **common thread** that runs through the three items below.

Right wing ideas grow

In July this year President Trump re-tweeted the following words from the UK commentator Katie Hopkins:

‘**God-willing/jihadi-failing I am going to be alive to see:**

- ❖ **Trump in the White House**
- ❖ **Boris in Number 10**
- ❖ **Netanyahu building Israel**
- ❖ **Bolsonaro, Salvini, Orban, Kac-zyński, & the Right-Minded bringing strength in depth.**

**What a time to be alive!
The fightback by proud
nations is on.’**

LEFT: The Amazonian rain forest (Brazil) has been described as ‘the lungs of the world’. Recently vast areas have been consumed by fires, many of them lit by those wanting to exploit the forest area for profit. President Bolsonaro says the problem has been ‘exaggerated’.

Boris Johnson did indeed become UK Prime Minister –

At the time of writing Netanyahu has not yet been able to form a new government in Israel –

Bolsonaro is President of Brazil –

Salvini is Deputy Prime Minister of Italy –

Orban is Prime Minister of Hungary –

Kaczyński is an influential politician in Poland –

the ‘Right-Minded’ are those who support these right-wing leaders and others with similar views.

It is more than a little ironic that the quote above starts with the words ‘God willing’. The implication in the words is that the situation described is something that God wants because it is somehow an improvement. The words from the Bible quoted below show that God is indeed ‘willing’ in the sense that He allows this to happen. But He has His own reasons for this, and it is not an endorsement of what is being described.

None of the world’s governments are ruling with God’s viewpoint in mind.

They are being permitted to govern for a time ‘*in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever he will, and sets over it the lowest of men*’ (Daniel 4.17). This makes God’s priorities and purpose quite clear doesn’t it!

The increasing prevalence of right-wing attitudes is a common factor affecting many of the world’s problems. But it is far from the only reason for the shocking polarisation of governments and societies. A sad example of this polarisation is the state of the great Atlantic democracies, the US and the UK. Will the UK’s Prime Minister Johnson solve Brexit? Will President Trump be impeached? Two questions with complicated answers that are the



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Donald Trump – two world leaders facing an uncertain future.

source of acute disagreement. There are so many more such questions – decisions to be made that could have far reaching effects.



President Rouhani standing outside Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor

The main cause of all the problems facing man is simply human nature. The Bible is clear on what man is naturally inclined to do unless this tendency is checked. Here is one example of many:

'For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.' Romans 7.19

This example is extraordinary, because the writer was the Apostle Paul who was a 'good' man, but even he admitted that he was prone to do evil!

Iran, the US, the UK and Europe

Four years ago, Iran signed a deal with six powers - the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany. The agreement limited its nuclear activities in return for sanctions relief. The deal restricted Iran's enrichment of uranium, which is

used to make reactor fuel but can also be used for nuclear weapons. Iran was also required to redesign a heavy-water reactor that was under construction, whose spent fuel would contain plutonium suitable for making a bomb. Lastly Iran was required to allow international inspections to check they were complying with the terms of the deal.

President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the deal in May 2018 and reinstated US sanctions. He also required that other countries comply with the US sanctions and threatened action against any who did not comply. His actions were taken, even though international inspectors confirmed that Iran was complying with the terms of the agreed deal. His withdrawal from the deal was over the strong objections of all the other powers involved including, of course, Iran. Trump said he wanted a new deal that would also curb Iran's ballistic missile programme and its involvement in regional conflicts.

Iran's refusal to make another agreement with President Trump has had disastrous effects for them. The value of their currency has plummeted. The inflation rate has soared as the sanctions targeting the

oil and financial sectors have taken effect.

At the time of writing we are seeing increasing trouble in the Persian Gulf. Oil tankers are the target, and this is causing serious tension, not only between Iran and the US, but also many other countries including the UK and the Arab States that border the Persian Gulf. The risks of that tension escalating are widely recognised as very high. There could easily be yet another war in the Middle East.

BBC News reported on 29th July 2019 that there have been more talks on the nuclear agreement with all the original parties - except the US of course. As things stand, the countries involved want to maintain the deal. However, there was resistance even to the original deal in Iran. It seems likely that President Trump, in breaking the agreement, has hardened Iran's resistance to any future deal. They are now taking steps to continue along the path to developing nuclear weapons. That leaves the whole situation in the Middle East in a very volatile position.

Gog and allies attack Israel

Iran (known in earlier times as Persia) is mentioned directly in the Bible, in Ezekiel chapter 38, as one of a group of nations that will invade

Israel in the future, before the return of Jesus. Consider these words from the chapter under the sub-heading 'Gog and allies attack Israel':

'Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, "Thus says the Lord GOD:

"Behold, I am against you... I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops— many people are with you."'

Ezekiel 38.1-6

The next few verses clearly talk about an invasion of a country named explicitly as '**Israel**' (verse 8). To identify all the other countries mentioned is open to interpretation but Iran and Israel are notable exceptions. There's no question about who they are. And it is easy to see how Iran's current anti-US and

anti-Israel attitudes could lead to the war these verses are describing.

Climate change

Yet another issue which is subject to much disagreement is climate change. By extension, this debate can logically cover the damage being done to the earth in so many ways. Here are just two examples. There is a staggering amount of plastic in the oceans, and the rainforests are shrinking. (Mr Bolsonaro, President of Brazil, claimed that the rate of destruction is exaggerated –see picture at head of this article).

I read two news items, both on BBC News, within a day of each other:

The first :

Greta Thunberg speech: French MPs boycott teen ‘apocalypse guru’ July 23rd BBC News:

‘Ms Thunberg, whose solo protest outside the Swedish Parliament inspired the school climate strike movement, has been lauded for her emotive speeches to politicians. But lawmakers from French parties, including the conservative Republicans and far-right National Rally, said they would shun her speech in the National Assembly. Urging his colleagues to boycott Ms Thunberg's speech, leadership candidate for The Republicans, Guillaume Larrivé, wrote on Twitter: "We do not need gurus of the apocalypse."’

The second:

‘Climate change: 12 years to save the planet? Make that 18 months’ July 24 BBC News:

‘Do you remember the good old days when we had ‘12 years to save the planet’? Now it seems, there's a growing consensus that the next 18 months will be critical in dealing with the global heating crisis, among other environmental challenges. Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that to keep the rise in global temperatures below 1.5C this century, emissions of carbon dioxide

Thousands of fires burning in the Amazon

Fires active: ● in the past seven days ● in the past 48 hours



Note: Data correct to Friday 30 August, 11.00 GMT

Source: MODIS

BBC

IPCC: Pull the Emergency Brake on Global CO₂ Emissions

Global CO₂ emissions to 2017 and reduction recommendations of IPCC (in billion tonnes)



would have to be cut by 45% by 2030. But today observers recognise that the decisive political steps to enable the cuts in carbon to take place, will have to happen before the end of next year.’

Immediately one thing stands out! Both news items cannot be right! And what are the chances that decisive, political steps to enable the cuts in carbon to take place will happen before the end of next year in this divided world, despite the evidence that climate change is a crisis?

The last part of Revelation 11.18 reads ‘... And should destroy those who destroy the earth’. Revelation was originally written in Greek. The Greek word translated in the New King James Version of the Bible as ‘destroy’ can mean physical or moral destruction. I think it means

both. God will not allow man to destroy His creation. The Bible speaks of a time when the problems associated with climate change will be resolved (see for example Psalm 72.16; Isaiah 35.1,2).

Conclusion

I feel blessed that I don’t have to be anxious about the terrible things that are happening in our world. God is in control. Jesus will return. The second to last verse in the Bible says it all for me! (Revelation 22.20):

‘He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly”’. Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!’

David Gamble
Melbourne, Australia

Tabernacle and Church

The word tabernacle occurs several times in the Bible. Two different Hebrew words have been translated as tabernacle in the Old Testament (OT). One is 'ophel' and the other is 'mishkan'. It is interesting to find that the meaning of the two words is different, and certainly worth noting. The word 'ohel' is better translated as 'tent', whereas 'mishkan', translated in the NIV as tabernacle, means 'dwelling place', among other closely related meanings.

The first use of 'mishkan' in the OT is found in the book of Exodus:

'Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.'

Exodus 25.8,9

In these verses some very important principles are firmly established which must be accepted by any who would commit themselves to a relationship with God. We will come back to these verses later.

In the early chapters of Genesis we learn of the failure of Adam and Eve to be obedient to a specific command. Before their fall (see article 'The Fall of Man') the couple had had a wonderful relationship with God and were able to communicate with Him. Sadly, after their disobedience it all changed. The 'fall' and subsequent banishment from the garden of Eden is graphically described in Genesis chapter 3. However, God's plan was declared right back in Eden to bring about a reconciliation.

We move forward to the time of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt. Initially the Israelites, having miraculously escaped their Egyptian oppressors, should have entered 'the promised land'. But because of unfaithfulness, they were prevented from doing so for 40 years and wandered in the wilderness of Sinai. As God's people they had been established as a nation at Mount Sinai. They were given detailed instructions through Moses as to how their relationship with God should develop.

The tabernacle in the wilderness

The command to build a tabernacle was a very important part of these instructions. The details of the structure and its contents are clearly set out in Exodus chapters 25 to 40. The importance of accepting God's instructions and carrying them out completely, cannot be overstated. Following the failure of Adam and Eve, all their descendants were in need of salvation – it was that serious! Any half-hearted approach to God would be of no benefit. God was prepared to meet his people, and in effect dwell with them, on condition that they kept close to him in obedience to his commands.

A full-size replica of the tabernacle in the Timna National Park in Israel

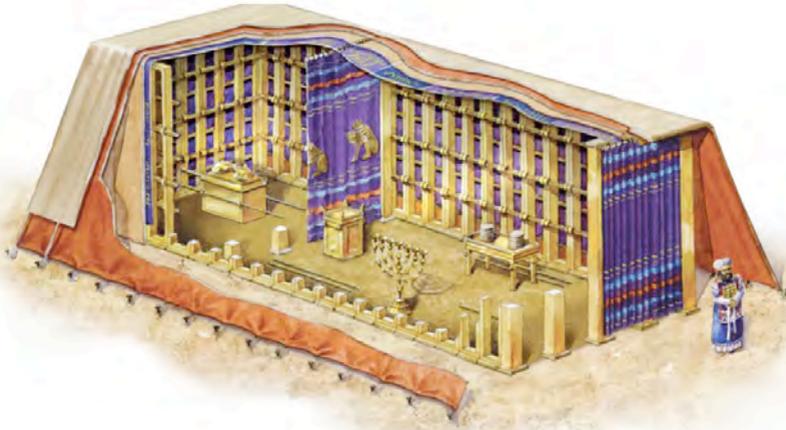
We go back to that first quotation from Exodus. It is of utmost importance to take each point one at a time. *'Then let them make a sanctuary for me'*. This was a sanctuary for God, and for what purpose? The answer is in the words that follow: *'and I will dwell among them'*. What a privileged people they were, for when the tabernacle was completed, we read that

'...the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.' Exodus 40.34

The last part of this instruction was: *'Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you'*. Here we are faced with a challenge, and it is as relevant today as it was then. Note the phrase, *'exactly like the pattern'*. This



THE TABERNACLE TENT



A cut-away view showing the Holy and Most Holy Place.
Every detail of the tent's construction is specified in the book of Exodus

underlines God's pre-eminence over His creation; it is He alone who can give life beyond our present existence. It is only through obedience to God's instructions that we can obtain eternal life. We cannot make up our own rules.

From the time when God graciously gave the opportunity to men and women to obey Him, the vast majority have preferred to 'do their own thing'. We can see the results everywhere. However we learn from the Bible that God is long-suffering and His promise to renew this world remains. It is His intention to again dwell with mankind.

The New Testament church

If we refer to a Bible Concordance, we find that the word 'church' found in the New Testament (NT) has been translated from the Greek word 'ekklesia' or 'ecclesia'. It needs to be understood that the word 'church' or 'ecclesia' in the Biblical context is never a building or a meeting place. A definition given by Robert Young in his Analytical Concordance is 'that which is called out'. It is interesting to connect the record in Exodus and the use of this word 'ecclesia' in the NT.

Israel were 'called out' of Egypt by God and came together as an assembly in the wilderness. They were constituted as a nation with

God as their king at Sinai (Exodus 19.4-6). Israel were summoned by God and specific instructions were given to them with regards to the manner in which they should leave Egypt. It is worth noting that they didn't leave Egypt in a way that would suit their own timing, requirements and needs. United they left, directed to take a certain route, and the timing of their departure was clearly given. They were miraculously saved by the parting of the Red Sea. This again underlines the lesson that it is God who gives life. Therefore we should give careful heed to His requirements and conditions if we are to obtain the everlasting life promised in His kingdom when Jesus returns.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, the tabernacle was replaced, first by Solomon's temple and later by Herod's temple, seen here in a model. The earliest Christians met from house to house.

The word 'ecclesia' has a Hebrew background. The Hebrew word is 'qahal'. This denotes an assembly or congregation. There is an important element to the meaning in the original Hebrew and that is 'to summon'. It refers to those who are called out and summoned by God. Unity and fellowship are the hallmarks of those who make up the assembly of God, the 'ecclesia.'

William Barclay in his book, 'New Testament Words' wrote:

'In essence, therefore, the Church, the 'ecclesia', is a body of people, not so much assembling because they have chosen to come together but assembling because God has called them to himself; not so much assembling to share their own thoughts and opinions, but assembling to listen to the voice of God' .



Linking the three words that we have briefly considered, they are all to do with God's methods of communicating with His people. In all cases there must be a willingness on the part of the people to listen carefully, and accept unconditionally, the requirements set out by God. If this is done in all humility, at the same time accepting that all people are in need of forgiveness because of human frailty, then in effect God dwells with them. Jesus said: *'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him'* (John 14.23 NIV). The Zondervan Bible Concordance gives the meaning of the original word translated 'home' as 'dwelling place'.

The Israelites in their time were given the provision of meeting with God. In the Christian era we are given the provision of assembling around God's Word, the Bible. This is all with the purpose that our hopes may rest on the promise of God to send Jesus back. He will raise the dead and gather together all those throughout history who have been 'called out'. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that the promise of life for ever in the kingdom of God will not be realised before the return of Jesus. Concerning those who have served God faithfully in the past we read:

'...all these, having obtained a good report through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.'
Hebrews 11.39,40

Those approved at Christ's judgement seat are forgiven and made righteous because of the atoning work of Jesus our Saviour (Matthew 25.31-34; 2 Corinthians 5.10). In the last book of the Bible the Apostle John heard these words about the culmination of God's plan:

'And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling-place ('tabernacle') of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"

Revelation 21.3 NIV

You and I have a personal invitation to be there.

Alan Rich
Norfolk, UK



from the editor

The secret to everlasting life

The title of this editorial, is taken from a recent article in a UK national newspaper headed **‘how Silicon Valley billionaires claim they’ve discovered the secret to everlasting life’** (Daily Telegraph 14-10-2019).

It’s a fact that we are living longer on average than our ancestors. Since the 1850’s life expectancy has almost doubled in the UK. But as this article noted, for some this process is not happening quickly enough. For the mega-billionaires of Silicon Valley in California, the fight against ageing is worth spending huge sums of money on.

In 2013 Google’s co-founders set up ‘Calico’ – The California Life Company, to try and combat ageing and its effects. After 5 years of scientific research they discovered the world’s first non-ageing mammal, the naked mole rat which lives far longer

than other rodents and doesn’t seem to suffer from old age. The so-called ‘immortalists’ see in this small animal the promise of everlasting life for human beings! Those who pour vast sums of money into scientific research to find the secret of immortality are undeterred.

But true Christians are convinced that their search will be fruitless because there is only one place to find the secret of immortality, and that is in God’s Word the Bible. The Bible’s teaching is very clear about this. In the first instance, only God is with-out beginning or end. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about the attributes of the Almighty who is the *‘King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light...’* (I Timothy 6.15,16 NIV).

The Bible also explains why we are subject to death, and humanly speaking have no prospect of living for ever. We are subject to a law called by the Apostle Paul *‘the law of sin and death’* (see Romans 8.2). Mortality and death have been the lot of all men and women that have ever lived:

‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’ Romans 3.23

Ageing is therefore a slow but inevitable process which will culminate in death because we are all sinners (see Romans 5.12). For most people the process is irreversible and there can be nothing better to hope for. But there is an alternative, for the Bible does not leave us without hope.

The secret of immortality is a topic that runs throughout the Bible like a golden thread. It will never be achieved by scientific research or any other form of human endeavour. The Bible reveals God’s plan of salvation from death, which is centred in the work of one man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that *‘God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’* (Romans 5.8).

Paul goes on to tell us how we can be *‘set free from sin’* (Romans 6.22) and have the prospect of living for ever, through the work of Jesus Christ. This can only be achieved through repentance from past sins, belief in God and His promises, followed by baptism into the saving name of Jesus Christ by full immersion in water. Paul describes it as being *‘buried with him’*:

‘...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

The *‘newness of life’* referred to by Paul, is a conscious effort on the part of the believer to overcome the human tendency to sin, and to follow the teaching and example of Jesus. Only by so doing can we obtain forgiveness and the prospect of a new life that knows no end. The whole of Romans chapter 6 should be read through carefully because it describes the way in which men and women of faith can become related to the Bible hope of everlasting life.

Rather than hope in that scientific breakthrough that will never materialise, we urge you to take these vital steps that will give assurance in an uncertain world and a real hope for the future. Paul sums up the alternatives in the last verse of this chapter:

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

Romans 6.23

A golden mechanical model of the solar system, known as an orrery, is shown on a circular base. The base is inscribed with zodiac signs (ARIES, TAURUS, GEMINI, CANCER, LEO, VIRGO, LIBRA, SCORPIO, SAGITTARIUS, CAPRICORN, AQUARIUS, PISCES) and seasons (WINTER, SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN). The model features a central sun and several planets on orbits, connected by thin metal rods. The background is a bright, sunlit sky.

GOD'S TIME

This mechanical model ('orrery') reproduces the movement of the solar system

For many years the concept of time has exercised the minds of great scientists like Albert Einstein, and it is still the subject of debate. Time is abstract - it cannot be detected by our human senses. However by observing movement like the hands of a clock we can distinguish one point or moment from another and use this as a form of measurement with which to regulate our lives and record our actions.

Time as we have defined it, is related to the rotation of the earth upon its axis to provide us with day and night. The rotation of the moon around the earth gives us months and the orbit of the earth around the sun records the years. How encouraging it is to read that in spite of gloomy forecasts about environmental issues, the Bible tells us of God's promise:

'While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.'

Genesis 8.22

Due to the precise movements of the heavens, we can make watches and clocks which have been designed and manufactured with precision, to record the division of time with great accuracy. To believe that the man-made watch has all the hallmarks of design and precise planning, and at the same time believe that the God-made movement which it records is random chance, is absurd, as both must be viewed using identical standards of enquiry and observation.

We cannot see time and yet we experience it by observation. Time is the experience of movement, as Leonardo da Vinci said: 'Movement gives shape to all forms. Structure gives form to all movement.' This was his way of saying that a link exists between time and motion. Objects only have dimension by some form of movement. If time is recognised by movement and observation, we can understand, for example, that a person with loss of memory loses their perception of time because they have no comparison with the present.

Our limitations compared with God

Our whole experience is limited by our finite concept of time. This is why it is very difficult for us to understand that God lives for ever. As Moses put it in his prayer recorded in Psalm 90: *'from everlasting to everlasting, you are God'* (Psalm 90.2). Our minds find this very difficult to grasp, like the vastness of space and the distances to the farthest stars which are billions of light years away. So straight away we see the great truth which lies behind the findings of scientists, that our time experiences are only a part of something greater and more far reaching.

Time is irrelevant to God, yet in His dealings with mankind, time has been introduced. This encompasses the history of man from the beginning, with the creation of Adam and Eve to the establishment of God's kingdom when, at the end of the Millennial reign of Christ, everything will be perfectly balanced and controlled *'that God may be all in all'* (1 Corinthians 15.28).

Within this timeframe of human existence, the Almighty has seen fit to provide details and demonstrate that a way exists for individuals to participate in His long-term plan. The Scriptures are provided for this purpose and whilst they may not

answer every question we may have, they nevertheless provide enough information for a person with faith to believe His Word.

Milestones in God's plan

The Bible demonstrates that historically, and into the future, there is a divine timetable. In God's timetable definitive milestones have been provided so that the Bible student can detect the passage of man's time by Divine intervention down through the ages. This is shown by Bible prophecies concerning people, events and nations. The greatest moment in history was the birth of Jesus. The Apostle Paul tells us that *'when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law'* (Galatians 4.4).

This great event and its consequences will be matched only by one other future notable date, again spoken of by Paul as he addressed a gathering in Athens:

'...(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

In the Scriptures we learn not only about God's immortality, but also that He is present everywhere and

knows everything that is going on. This is what you would expect of an Almighty Creator who had the vision to design and create the intricacies of all forms of life on this planet. Paul's words to the men of Athens, referred to above, remind us of God's all-pervading power as the Creator (see Acts 17.22-28). And so David the Psalmist asked: *'Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?'* (Psalm 139.7). The whole of Psalm 139 is well worth reading for we are humbly reminded of our limitations and of the greatness of God in all senses of the word.

Where are we going?

Our thoughts naturally lead us to conclude that our whole experience in life is bounded by the constraints of time. This is an artificial element introduced into the world because of the limitations of our human nature and mortality.

Outside our sphere of activity on earth, God looks upon His creation without the limitation of finite time and views it rather like the scientists' illustration of the time train. If you were high enough to be far above the earth, then you could observe both the starting and the finishing point of a train journey at the same time, but the passengers on the train see only a time sequence of events along the route.

But how can we imagine eternity which is God's time? The simple answer is that we cannot, any more than an insect whose life span is a day, would be able to grasp the significance of day and night, or a butterfly understand the seasons to realise that they rotate. James, the Lord's brother also had an interesting way of reminding us of the relationship of time for us and time in its limitless form: *'For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appears for a little time and then vanishes away'* (James 4.14).

The past and the future

So we find in Scripture that God has tried to give us some indication of the vastness of eternity, when, as Peter wrote: *'...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day'* (2 Peter 3.8).

This principle of a day being represented by 1,000 years in God's eyes is a concept which He has introduced from the very beginning. When we read of Creation in the early chapters of Genesis, we note that God's creative work took six days, and on the seventh day He rested (Genesis 2.1-3). So with God's plan, we see a pattern of events unfolding over a period of 6,000 years followed by Jesus ruling for 1,000 years after his return to the earth. This seventh period we call

the Millennium and it is referred to in the book of Revelation: ‘...they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years’ (Revelation 20.6). After this the earth will only have an immortal population and time as we know it will no longer be relevant.

Whilst we wait for the return of Jesus, we must recognise that our finite experiences cannot and do not in any way limit God, who knows no bounds. Our whole thinking process is influenced by our environment and concept of time, but we must not be guilty of applying the same standards to our Creator.

During our short lives we have but a limited time frame in which to study the Bible and recognise God’s promise that life can be forever, if we use our time and opportunity wisely. We can only achieve this by fully understanding God’s requirements, applying them during our life and placing our hope and trust in Him. As the Psalmist prayed:

‘...teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of
wisdom.’ Psalm 90.12

John Carpenter
Kent, England



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CORRECTION

In our previous Issue (Vol 30.3) page 9, the term milliseconds was used in error in place of microseconds.

this magazine

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

We believe that over the centuries the original message of Christianity has been corrupted. Light is published to provide a better understanding of the true Christian hope.

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

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This is the **ATACAMA DESERT** in Chile, one of the driest and most desolate places on earth.

But every 5 – 7 years ‘El Nino’ brings the rain, and within days the floor of the desert is a miraculous carpet of over 200 species of wild flowers – the ‘desierto florido’, the flowering desert that you see here.

This is just a foretaste of the future the Jewish prophet Isaiah looked forward to, when the earth’s deserts would be blessed and restored:

‘The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing’ (Isaiah 35.1,2).

For the remarkable properties of water and how the Bible uses it as a symbol, see article in this issue ‘The water of life’.