Light...
on a new world
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 the Lord Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

Visit www.lightmagazine.org for back issues, special issues and further information.

CONTENTS

The Development of the 1st Century Church                  Page 1
Important Bible Words – Faith                               Page 11
Nations in Prophecy – Israel (Part 1)                       Page 19
Marvellous are your Works                                  Page 27

Cover: View from the Fortress of Masada in Israel

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

COPYRIGHT
Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
The Development of the 1st Century Church

2. Events at Pentecost

The events on the day of Pentecost were a significant milestone in the development of the 1st Century Church. It marked the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the first public preaching of the gospel since the death of Jesus. It is important to look carefully at what the Bible records about this day. Today there are false ideas about the possession of the Holy Spirit by believers and the very meaning of the gospel message, which come from a misunderstanding of the events which took place on the day of Pentecost.

The feast of Pentecost was the second of the three great feasts that the Jews were required to keep under the Law of Moses. Also known as the ‘Feast of Weeks’, it celebrated the beginning of the harvest (firstfruits). It also marked the occasion of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. The name Pentecost comes from the Greek word for fifty. The festival was held on the fiftieth day after the Passover. In the Old Testament it usually carries the name ‘Feast of Weeks’ because they counted seven weeks from the Passover. Jesus was crucified at the Passover feast and his ascension was forty days later. [Acts 1.3] The events of Acts chapter two happened just ten days after Jesus’ ascension to heaven.

IN ONE PLACE

Acts chapter two begins with the words: ‘Now when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.’
We are not told directly what the ‘place’ was but we can work it out from other parts of the Bible. Under the Mosaic Law the Israelites were given instructions concerning the three great feast days. ‘Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which he chooses: at the feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed’. [Deuteronomy 16.16] At first the disciples of Jesus were observant Jews and so there is no doubt where they would have been assembled on the day of the feast. ‘The place’ of God’s choosing was of course the temple in Jerusalem and it was here in the precincts of the temple that these amazing events took place.

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

‘And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them forked tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.’

[Act 2.2, 3]

The idea of fire coming down from heaven echoes the events that took place when the first temple was dedicated by Solomon. The record of this states: ‘Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house’. [2 Chronicles 7.1KJV] This was not just any house, it was the Lord’s house or temple that was filled. In this way we see how the Scriptures make a parallel between ‘the glory of the LORD’ coming to the temple of Solomon and this manifestation of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. This is of interest because the body of believers in the New Testament is likened to a living temple: ‘you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house’. [1Peter 2.5] The coming of the Holy Spirit was therefore in this sense the commissioning of the spiritual house of believers.
THE EFFECT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE DISCIPLES

‘And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance’. [Acts 2.4]

The effect of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those who received it is notable – they spoke in other languages! These were not ecstatic utterances of uncertain meaning; they were languages that could be understood by the various sections of the assembled crowd.

‘Then they were all amazed and marvelled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language, in which we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontu, and Asia…we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”’ [Acts 2.7-11]

The Holy Spirit on this momentous occasion was not used to perform miracles of healing or other signs but to communicate God’s Word. This has in fact been a primary use of the Spirit of God throughout the Scriptures.

GOD’S SPIRIT AND GOD’S WORD

Starting from the early chapters of the book of Genesis we find that the activity of God’s Spirit has been equated with His Word: ‘And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said...’ [Genesis 1.2, 3] This principle continues throughout Scripture as shown by the following examples:

‘The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And his word was on my tongue’. [2 Samuel 23.2]

‘By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all
the host of them by the breath (spirit) of his mouth.’
[Psalm 33.6,9]

‘...My Spirit who is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants...’ [Isaiah 59.21]

‘The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.’
[John 6.63 NIV]

‘And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’. [Ephesians 6.17]

THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus had promised the coming of the Holy Spirit in these words: ‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.’ [John 14.26] In saying this Jesus makes it clear that a major work of the Holy Spirit when it came was to be the recall of Jesus’ words of teaching. This was indeed the process that caused the Bible to be written: ‘for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit’. [2 Peter 1.21]

Whilst the miracles which were performed by the Holy Spirit were an important witness to the people of the time that the teaching was from God, the major part of its work was the production of the Word of God. This is confirmed by the words of the prophet Joel that are quoted by Peter: ‘But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams’’. [Acts 2.16,17] Prophecies, visions and dreams are all
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH

constituent parts of the Word of God. Thus the prophecy of Joel about
the coming of the Holy Spirit testifies to the continuing work of the
Holy Spirit in this field.

PETER’S SPEECH AT THE FEAST

In striking contrast to his public denial of Jesus at the Passover just
seven weeks before, Peter now boldly proclaimed the Gospel to those
assembled for the feast. His message is based on the testimony of the
Old Testament prophets and emphasises that:

– Jesus was a man and not God: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested
by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs…’ [Acts 2.22]

– The death of Jesus was required by God’s plan of salvation:
‘Him, being delivered by the carefully planned intention and
foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have
crucified, and put to death’. [Acts 2.23]

– Jesus rose from the dead, revealing the true way to life: ‘whom
God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not
possible that he should be held by it.’[Acts 2.24]

– There was an approaching crisis (which came in the fall of
Jerusalem some forty years later): ‘The sun shall be turned into
darkness and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and
notable day of the LORD’. [Acts 2.20]

– There was a need for personal salvation: ‘And it shall come to pass
that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’[Acts 2.21]

– Salvation is only possible through Jesus Christ: ‘Therefore let all
the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom
you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ [Acts 2.36]
– **Baptism is necessary for salvation** – ‘Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins…”’ [Acts 2.38]

**SOME DOCTRINES EMPHASISED IN PETER’S TEACHING**

– David, and by implication the rest of mankind, did not go to heaven at death but remained in the grave: ‘Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day…For David did not ascend into the heavens…’ [Acts 2.29, 34]

– Sin brings death but as Jesus had not sinned he could not remain in the grave, so God raised him up: ‘whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it’. [Acts 2.24]

– Jesus, far from having a pre-human spiritual existence in heaven, was David’s natural descendant according to the promise made to him and would return to the earth to reign as king on David’s throne: ‘Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne’. [Acts 2.30]

– The promise made to David clearly states that Jesus would be a descendant of David and that when he came God would be his father. Jesus’ promised sonship was **still future** in David’s time: ‘He shall build me a house, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be his father; and he shall be my son; and I will not take my mercy away from him’. [1Chronicles 17.12, 13]

**BAPTISM ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION**

After the detailed explanation that Peter gave to the assembled Jews they realised the position that they were in – collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. Their reaction was dramatic: ‘Now when they
heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” [Acts 2.37] It is in answer to this question that Peter says: ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins’. [Acts 2.38]

The word ‘repent’ used here is significant. The literal meaning of the original Greek word is given as follows: ‘to think differently’ or ‘afterwards’, that is, ‘reconsider’ or morally ‘to feel compunction’. Putting this together, they were morally compelled to reconsider their position and to think differently and then be baptised.

WHAT THE JEWS UNDERSTOOD BY BAPTISM

As we have noted the assembled people on the day of Pentecost were observant Jews. As such they had knowledge of the Law of Moses. In telling the people that they must be ‘baptised’, they would have understood baptism as practised by the Jews of the day. Baptism was 1st Century Jewish practice in cases of ceremonial defilement. This was in accord with the repeated instruction of the Law: he ‘shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.’ (See for example Leviticus chapter 15)

A Gentile wishing to convert to Judaism had to be baptised; this was understood on the authority of another passage of the Law. Such a person had to make a profession of faith before witnesses and was then baptised by complete immersion in water. Secret baptism was not acknowledged nor was the baptism of those under the age of majority. Such converts were considered as ‘little children just born’ [Rabbi Mammonides] on the basis of the description of Naaman the Syrian: ‘So he went down and dipped seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.’ [2 Kings 5.10-14] This was the background to an understanding of the meaning of baptism as practised in the early Church. This is vitally important to our appreciation of what is meant by baptism.
BAPTISM ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The following points come from the record in Acts chapter two and are emphasised elsewhere in the New Testament as part of what is required in true baptism:

Those who were baptised on the day of Pentecost, as observant Jews were already knowledgeable about the Word of God. What they lacked was knowledge of the work of Jesus Christ. This lack of knowledge was supplied by the words of Peter, who explained in clear terms their position after the death and resurrection of Christ.

This they had to understand and recognise by a change of heart in ‘repentance’.

They had to separate themselves from the world in which they lived as instructed by Peter: ‘Be saved from this perverse generation’. [Acts 2.40]

Individually and wholeheartedly they had to accept the truth of God’s Word: ‘Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.’ [Acts 2.41]

It almost goes without saying that baptism was not performed on infants but on adults who acted thoughtfully and with conviction.

Baptism by total immersion in water has already been mentioned in connection with Jewish custom. That this was the manner adopted here is demonstrated by reference to the Apostle Paul’s preaching when he spoke of baptism as a burial in water: ‘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 FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

It was from these people that the first New Testament congregation of believers was formed. Though commonly called ‘the church’, this term can be confusing as it does not accurately reflect the meaning of the original Greek word. Far from being a building or an organisation as the English word means, the original Greek word ἐκκλησία or ecclesia is derived from two words ek meaning ‘out’ and calleo meaning ‘call’ and carries the idea of an ‘assembly of called out ones’. Just as the people were exhorted to ‘be saved from (their) perverse generation’ so they were called out from the world in which they lived. Thus the true church through the ages has stood aside from the ‘established’ churches. This follows the pattern of Abraham [Hebrews 11.8], who was called out of the world of idolatry in which he lived, and the pattern of Israel [Acts 7.38], who were called out of slavery in the land of Egypt.

CHARACTER OF THE ECCLESIA

A characteristic phrase used to describe the actions of the congregation of disciples is ‘with one accord’. [Acts 2.46] It occurs seven times in the record of the Acts of the Apostles and indicates the unanimous relationship that existed between the believers who were of one mind in all that they did. Their activities are summed up in these words which have stood as a model for true believers down through the ages: ‘And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.’ [Acts 2.42]

❖ To continue in ‘the apostles’ doctrine’ it was necessary for them to be dedicated students of God’s Word. Thus they could continue to grow in the things they had been taught. [Acts 17.11]

❖ ‘Fellowship’ represented a group of people working together with a common understanding of the apostles’ faith in a practical expression of unity.
‘Breaking of bread’ is a reference to the celebration of the ‘Lord’s supper’. It was designed to renew their minds in contemplation of the crucified Christ. It was through his perfect love and sacrifice that they now stood in covenant relationship with God.

‘Prayers’ the communal prayers of the assembly maintained the constant communion with the Father through His son Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The ‘ecclesia’, as established on the day of Pentecost was the true ‘church’. The Divine principles upon which it was founded are timeless and if we wish to follow the truth of God’s Word we must make sure that we adhere to those same principles, doctrines and practices taught by Jesus and his Apostles in the 1st Century.

In his second letter addressed to ‘those who have obtained like precious faith with us’ [2 Peter 1.2], Peter reminded the believers that ‘we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty’. [2 Peter 1.16]

As ‘eye-witnesses’ of the majesty of Jesus at his transfiguration [Luke 9.28-36], Peter and the other Apostles were able to preach the Gospel (good news) of the coming kingdom of God with great conviction and with accompanying miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. As future articles in this series will demonstrate, the 1st Century church was established in Jerusalem and flourished as ‘the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved’. [Acts 2.47]

Ian Giles
Norfolk, UK
Important Bible Words

Faith

SIR ISAAC NEWTON (1643-1727)

The name I expect you will recognize. It may conjure up in your mind a picture of a man enjoying an afternoon snooze in the garden underneath a tree, until he is rudely disturbed by an apple falling from the tree above. Rather than just nursing his bruise, he gets to pondering on why the apple fell down and not up or sideways. This led to him discovering the laws of gravity, and eventually the laws that govern all moving bodies. The work of this great English scientist in optics, astronomy, mathematics and physics laid the foundations of modern science. Until the scientific revolution of the 20th century, many thought that Newton had provided the complete explanation for the working of the universe, and from then on the only role of science was to fill in the details.

What may not be so well known is that Newton was also a man of faith. He devoted as much of his time to Bible study as to science. He was fascinated by Bible prophecy. He was certainly not merely conforming to the spirit of his times, which was an age of rationalism and scepticism - and his Christian beliefs were decidedly unorthodox (he rejected, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity). He expected the literal return of Christ to the earth to establish his kingdom, and he believed that, before Christ’s return, the Jews would be restored to their land after centuries of dispersion.

So where would this great man of science stand today, when faith has been attacked and ridiculed by a small but vocal group of scientists? Science, we are told, has delivered us from the superstition
of religion and proved God to be unnecessary. Faith is a relic of past ignorance – atheism is the only rational way forward. Newton himself had some quite rude things to say about atheists. We can be sure that if he were alive today, he would be amazed and delighted to see Israel back in their land exactly as he had expected, based on the fulfilment of Bible prophecy (see for example Jeremiah 32. 36-44; Ezekiel 37. 12-14,21). He would undoubtedly see it as evidence that the Divine programme is being fulfilled and the return of Christ is near. Newton, like many of the early scientists who were also Christians, believed that the universe could be investigated precisely because it had been created by a rational mind, and therefore behaved in a logical way that could be analysed and explained.

The modern challenge to religion from Richard Dawkins and others has attacked the quality of faith itself, attempting to redefine the very meaning of the word faith in a quite unprecedented way. ‘Faith’ he says ‘is the great copout, the great excuse to avoid the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of the lack of evidence… Faith is not allowed to justify itself by argument’.

Is there any substance to such immoderate and extreme claims? That is the task of this article, however briefly, to examine.

FAITH EVERY DAY

Faith is a quality expressed in many different ways in everyday life. Its religious aspect is just a specific, limited application of a universal human quality. Faith (from the Latin word ‘fides’) means ‘trust, hope and belief in the goodness, trustworthiness or reliability of a person, concept or entity’ (Wikipedia). Everybody needs faith of some sort - it is impossible to go through life without at some time trusting someone or something. We trust people: our partners, our family and our friends. We trust institutions: the government, the forces of law and order, financial institutions, etc. In all sorts of ways we entrust aspects
of our lives to people and organizations outside of our control. As the English Poet John Donne wrote nearly 400 years ago: ‘No man is an island’. In other words we cannot live our lives in splendid, self-sufficient isolation from the rest of humanity - it’s just not possible, let alone desirable.

But why do we trust one person and not another? Why do we put money in one bank and not another? Because of our past experience and knowledge. If we trust somebody we don’t really know, then we can hardly be surprised if they let us down. If our investments lose money because we haven’t done our homework properly, then we may have only ourselves to blame. Our confidence needs to be based on knowledge. We may well be influenced by prejudice and sentiment, but basically our confidence, our faith, needs evidence, a rational foundation.

Faith then in everyday life is based on evidence, on experience. We have faith in other people because we think we know them and we believe we can rely on their support in the future because of their support in the past. We trust organizations because of what we know about them, their past record giving us confidence in their future performance. Belief and confidence without evidence is just stupidity and credulity – ‘blind faith’ in other words. That very expression implies that there is a faith which is not blind - genuine faith based on evidence.

RELIGIOUS FAITH

We move from faith in everyday life to faith in its religious sense. Is it really something entirely different to the everyday variety of faith that we have been considering? Here is a Christian definition of faith: ‘Faith affects the whole of man’s nature. It commences with the conviction of the mind based on adequate evidence; it continues in the confidence of the heart or emotions based on conviction, and it is crowned in the consent of the will, by means of which the conviction and confidence are expressed in conduct’ [W.H. Griffith-Thomas 1861-1924]
‘Evidence’ is the foundation. It is the word used by the Apostle Paul in his famous definition of faith: ‘Now faith is the substance (confidence) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’. [Hebrews 11. 1 KJV]

Evidence is just as much a requirement for the Christian’s religious faith as it is for faith of the everyday variety. The difference is the things that we place our faith in. Instead of the people we see every day, we are asked to place our faith in a Supreme Being who is literally invisible to us, and whose voice we cannot hear in any literal sense, although God does speak to us through His written Word, the Bible. We are asked to place our trust in His Son, whom we know only through records written nearly 2,000 years ago, whom also we cannot literally see or hear – hence Paul’s words about ‘things not seen’. However, the necessity for evidence is just as real, perhaps more so, because the objects of our trust are so much more important, and the consequences for us of our faith in them so far-reaching.

THE EVIDENCE FOR CHRISTIANITY

The big question is, if faith without evidence is not genuine faith at all, what is the evidence for the fundamentals of the Christian religion? Note first of all that Christianity is different to other major world religions, in that it is dependent on a series of (what are claimed to be) historical events. It is not a philosophy or a system of morality – it is the story of a God, who is intimately concerned with events on this planet; who has intervened directly in human history through the life, death and resurrection of one very special human being, Jesus Christ. These historical events, if they are indeed historical, should stand up to the same test as other events from the same period – the evidence for them should be of the same type.

The Apostle Paul tells us that there is one event in particular on which Christianity stands or falls – the resurrection of Jesus from the dead:
‘…if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain…if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!’ [I Corinthians 15. 14-17]

The early Christians were not followers of Jesus because they admired his character or were swayed by his charisma. They accepted Jesus because they claimed to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection, or if they had not seen him themselves, they believed the first-hand testimony of others who had. The Apostle Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus was not some ecstatic or mystical experience – he says he saw and heard the risen Christ and was left with temporary blindness, a physical reminder of the reality of his experience. He refers to more than 500 people who also had seen the risen Christ, most of whom were still alive when he wrote. [I Corinthians 15. 6]

Nearly 2,000 years later their eyewitness testimony has been preserved in the New Testament for our benefit. How can we assess its value? Are the source documents authentic and reliable? Is this evidence that we can trust, and place our faith in? Volumes could be and have been written on this subject, but here are the conclusions of two people, both members of the legal profession, used to weighing up evidence:

‘As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.’[Sir Edward Clarke KC]

‘The evidence for our Lord’s life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been shown to be
satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad...I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort...than the great sign that God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead. ’ [Prof. Thomas Arnold]

**FAITH IN GOD**

The resurrection of Jesus is perhaps the outstanding example of a miraculous event which can be dissected, the evidence assessed and faith based on the weight of that evidence. What about the biggest question of all – the existence of God Himself? Is faith in God based on good evidence, or is it just irrational sentimentality, the perpetuation of age-old superstitions?

In the letter he wrote to Christians at Rome, Paul says that the creation itself provides clear evidence to all men of the existence of God:

> ‘For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ’ [Romans 1. 19, 20 ESV]

Although Paul does not develop his thoughts in any detail, he is using the argument which has since become known as ‘Natural Theology’, after the book of that name by William Paley, an 18th-century clergyman. Paley’s basic argument was that just as a watch movement, for example, by its intricacy, its organization, its obvious purpose, provided its own evidence of its designer and creator (the watchmaker), so the natural order, the universe and the life-forms of our planet, showed clear evidence of their designer and creator, the Divine ‘watchmaker’. This argument has been widely derided by the
scientific community in recent years. Yet Paley’s basic observation has not been queried - the natural world which surrounds us looks as if it has been designed. The countless life-forms on our planet, the life processes and the organs which support life, the molecular coding, language and communication systems which control every form of life – they all appear to have a purpose, to have been designed to do a particular task; that is admitted, because it is inescapable.

Richard Dawkins and those with similar thinking tell us that this appearance of design is an illusion. The watchmaker, they say, is blind; ‘natural selection’, Charles Darwin’s brainwave, is the blind, unintelligent process which has the most remarkable property of producing this appearance of design; but it is only an appearance – so they say.

Why not accept what appears to be so obvious? Why dream up such an improbable process to get rid of the Creator? Why not accept the abundant evidence that God has given us of His Divine, all-powerful hand at work in creation? Professor Edgar Andrews, a scientist and a creationist, comments:

‘I was brought up to believe the duck theorem - ‘if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it probably is a duck. That is why I have problems with those who (1) admit that nature gives every evidence of being intelligently designed; (2) introduce an alternative materialistic explanation for the appearance of design; and then (3) without further discussion conclude that only their alternative explanation can be true. Meet the neo-duckians, whose logic demands that ‘if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is indubitably a chicken.’ Such are those who tell us that the cell’s molecular language is merely an accident of nature.’

[‘Who Made God?’ by Edgar Andrews]
OPENING OUR MINDS TO THE EVIDENCE

Gospel record tells the story of Thomas, a disciple of Jesus and one of the twelve, who for some reason was not present when Jesus made himself known to his disciples after his resurrection. Thomas was simply not prepared to believe that Jesus was alive. He was surrounded by a number of different men and women who all claimed to have seen and spoken to and even eaten with Jesus on different occasions. These were all people he knew well – yet he was adamant he would never believe what they told him until he had seen Jesus himself and touched the wounds that proved his identity. With so much evidence in front of him, what was it about Thomas’ character that made belief so difficult? Did he perhaps feel superior in some way to the others? He was not about to be hoodwinked by some impostor, or swayed by some emotional trauma of extreme grief. He could so easily have spent the rest of his life in a self-imposed, hopeless vacuum of disbelief. But Jesus was gracious and gave him the evidence he demanded. At the same time Jesus promised a blessing on all those who in the future would believe on him, without making the demands of Thomas: ‘because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’. [John 20. 29]

The attack on faith in our day should not discourage us in any way; rather the reverse, because Jesus predicted it: ‘when the Son of Man comes, will he really find faith on the earth?’ [Luke 18. 8]. The atheists and sceptics of our day have their role to play as God’s unfolding purpose nears its conclusion. If we acknowledge the power that brought one man back from the dead; if our minds are open to the evidence of God’s creative work; if we value the things that are not seen above those that are, then that faith will save us from the futility of human thinking and bring us to God’s kingdom.

‘…this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.’ [I John 5. 4]

Roy Toms
Surrey, UK
Nations in Prophecy

Israel (Part 1)

Israel is a very small country. It ranks a lowly 148th in terms of size (8,019 square miles) and 95th by population (7.6m) [Source: worldatlas.com]; yet Israel is rarely out of the world’s news bulletins. It is a nuclear power, in constant threat of invasion or insurrection, but with a thriving economy. It is a comparatively young nation, the State of Israel having been formed in 1948 and yet it is also a very ancient nation, able to trace its roots back thousands of years. It is a nation which was expelled from its homeland in Roman times, its people were scattered throughout the Roman world, suffering regular and harsh persecution, only to return to their land 1,900 years later.

Most importantly for Bible students, the land and nation of Israel are an important Bible theme. In the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God made a series of promises to a faithful man called Abraham, which included an undertaking to give the land (then known as the land of Canaan) to Abraham and his descendants, and another similar undertaking that a great nation would descend from him. The name Israel first occurs in Genesis chapter 32 where an angel changed the name of Abraham’s grandson Jacob to Israel, which means ‘Prince with God’. [Genesis 32.28]

The Jewish people (Israel) are little loved in the world and the UN General Assembly has passed around 500 resolutions condemning Israel, a similar number to the total number of resolutions listed against all other nations put together. But God loves Israel and in the prophecy of Zechariah we read about the people of Israel that ‘he who touches you touches the apple of his eye’. [Zechariah 2. 8] The apple of the eye refers to the pupil, the dark spot in the middle of the eye and perhaps
the most sensitive part of the human body. The phrase is saying that if a nation harms Israel this is to God like the feeling we get if we are poked in the eye. So for anyone who takes the Bible seriously, Israel is an important nation.

The reason for this article is to focus on the very many parts of the Bible which contain prophecies foretelling the future of Israel. The prophecies are listed in the order in which they occur in the Bible to make it easier for you to look them up as there is only space in this article to give a brief summary. As we consider the accurate way in which many of these prophecies have been fulfilled we have great confidence that those which have not yet been fulfilled will also come to pass.

You will readily see just how much of the Bible is devoted to this subject. You will also see a clear pattern. The people of Israel were in their land and blessed by God, but then they abandoned Him and followed the practices of the nations around them. After many warnings Israel was defeated by foreign invaders and the people taken away from the land as captives. After a period of punishment they were then allowed to return to the land, only for the cycle to begin all over again. The points to note are that God will never completely abandon His chosen nation and their long and eventful history will one day be interrupted when God directly intervenes in human affairs.

PROPHECIES IN GENESIS

‘I will make you a great nation...To your descendants I will give this land...all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.’ [Genesis 12. 2; 13.15]

These fundamental promises to Abraham have only partly been fulfilled. Although the nation directly descended from Abraham occupies part of that land, there are other parts which are now occupied by other nations. In addition to this the New Testament commentary in
Hebrews chapter 11 concludes that Abraham must be raised from the dead for this promise to be completely fulfilled: ‘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...These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, they were assured of them’. [Hebrews 11. 9, 13]

In Deuteronomy chapter 28 God lists the many ways in which He will bless Israel as long as they keep their side of the covenant (or agreement) they have made with Him, but this is followed by a long list of curses for disobedience. These curses have had chilling fulfilments in history with the Babylonian captivity of the 6th Century BC, the Roman invasion of the 1st Century AD, the long period of scattering among the nations from the 1st to the 20th Century and especially the holocaust of the 20th Century, but there is also a promise that eventually Israel would return to their land. Here is an extract from this chapter which should be read in full to fully appreciate the prophetic nature of the message:

‘The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion and rebuke…the LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies…you shall become troublesome to all the
kingdoms of the earth...A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land...you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the L ORD will lead you...he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. The L ORD will bring a nation against you from afar...as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand...You shall eat the fruit of your own body...You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude...Then the L ORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other...And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place...Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night...you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.’

[Deuteronomy 28.20,25,33,37,48,49,53,62,64-66,68]

The sufferings of God’s people are graphically portrayed in these verses. They were fulfilled to the letter as their subsequent history shows. But in Deuteronomy chapter 30 we see the opposite being foretold – the compassion of God for His chosen people and a prediction that they would not be scattered for ever:

‘...return to the L ORD your God and obey His voice...that the L ORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the L ORD your God has scattered you...the L ORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it.’ [Deuteronomy 30.2-5]

These two chapters contain very detailed prophecies about the various deportations and persecutions that the nation of Israel was to suffer, prophecies which have incredibly been fulfilled again and again.
over the course of 2,500 years. Equally remarkable is the fulfilment of those prophecies assuring the Jews that they would, one day, return to their land. The Babylonian captivity ended after 70 years with a return to their own land during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, the much longer period of captivity, when the Jews were scattered throughout the full extent of the Roman Empire only ended in modern times. This happened after the worst period of Jewish persecution which was carried out in 20th Century Europe by the Nazi regime in Germany, which like the Roman army used the eagle (see Deuteronomy 28.49) as a symbol of its power.

PROPHECIES IN THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

The historical books of the Old Testament contain a promise to David, Israel’s greatest king, that one of his descendants will reign on his throne (in Jerusalem) for ever: ‘I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son’. [2 Samuel 7. 12-16, 1 Chronicles 17. 11-14, see also Isaiah 9 v 6-7] The commentary in the book of Psalms about this passage leaves no doubt that the promise will have far reaching consequences. God anticipated that David’s immediate descendants would not prove up to the job of governing His people in a Godly way but this would not prevent the fulfilment of His promise that ‘His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven’. [Psalm 89.28-37]

In the New Testament the Apostle Peter explains that this future
king will be Jesus Christ: ‘...being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne...This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses’. [Acts 2. 30-32] Again this is a prophetic promise which has only been fulfilled in part. David’s sons did indeed prove to be far from perfect as predicted. It remains then that at some point in the future Jesus Christ (a direct descendant of King David) will reign over Israel from Jerusalem.

PROPHECIES IN THE PSALMS

It may seem odd that a book made up of poetry and song would contain prophecy but as you will appreciate by now, predictions about the future of Israel permeate throughout the Bible and the Book of Psalms is no exception. Some indeed have been alluded to above; others echo other prophecies in Scripture: ‘Oh! that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! (a term used to refer to Jerusalem) when the LORD brings back the captivity of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad’. [Psalm 14. 7; see also Psalms 48, 53 and 72]

There is even a prophecy predicting the opposition of Arab nations which Israel has experienced since her return to the land in recent times: ‘They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more”’. [Psalm 83. 4] The ancient names listed in this Psalm correspond very closely to the modern nations who have fought against Israel on several occasions since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.
PROPHECIES IN ISAIAH

Isaiah’s prophecy is full of encouragement, listing on many occasions, promises that one day the Jewish people would return to their ancient homeland. The truly remarkable thing is that when Isaiah began writing the part of the Bible named after him, the Jews were still in their land:

‘He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth...For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land...I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, “Give them up!” and to the south, “Do not keep them back!” Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.’

[Isaiah 11. 12; 14. 1; 43. 5-7]

Other noteworthy prophecies in this book picture Jerusalem in the future as the most important city in the world and a centre of religious worship when ‘out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem’. [Isaiah 2. 2-4]

PROPHECIES IN JEREMIAH

‘I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity...though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet will I not make a full end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished.’ [Jeremiah 30. 10,11]

It is only with the benefit of hindsight that we can see how spectacular is this particular prophecy about Israel. No one at the time the prophecy was given could have had any idea that the Jewish people would be separated from their land for 1,900 years, and suffer
devastating persecution during that period climaxing in a systematic attempt using mass extermination methods to destroy them as a race. And yet, in spite of the worst efforts of mankind, unparalleled in human history, the prophecy that they would survive, whilst many of the nations which persecuted them would themselves disappear, can be seen to have been fulfilled exactly as God said it would through the prophet’s words.

In another of Jeremiah’s prophecies the exact duration of their captivity in Babylon is predicted [Jeremiah 25. 12]. This prophecy is referred to by Daniel who was one of the captives living in Babylon. He witnessed Babylon’s overthrow by the Medes and Persians, paving the way for the return of the Jews to their own land after 70 years of captivity. [Daniel 9.2]

CONCLUSION

So far we have considered less than 50% of the Bible prophecies relating to Israel. We have seen how important to God Israel is and how the future of the whole earth is closely linked with the future of Israel. We have seen that their defeats and their victories, their scattering throughout the world and eventual return to their land have all been predicted hundreds and in some cases thousands of years before their fulfilment. And we have noted that in spite of all the hardships and disasters that the Jews would suffer, God would make sure that they would remain a distinct race of people.

In the next article we will look at prophecies about Israel in the rest of the Bible, including prophecies given by Jesus himself. We will also look at a book which contains more prophecies about Israel than any other, predicting not only recent events which have occurred in Israel, but also those which are to happen in the near future – events which will affect not just Israel, but the whole world.

Jonathan Rowland
Kent, UK
Marvellous are Your Works

The bombardier beetle is so named because it can squirt a jet of boiling liquid into the face of its predator. How it does this is a marvel of design that could not possibly have come about by evolution. The jet results from a mixture of two very reactive and usually poisonous chemicals—hydroquinone and hydrogen peroxide, which are produced and stored in special sacs in the beetle’s abdomen. Normally these two chemicals react violently, but the sacs also produce an enzyme that prevents this happening.

At the lower end of each sac is a one-way valve, controlled by special muscles that allow the chemical mixture to be squirted into another chamber. Here there is an enzyme that counteracts the action of the first one, with the result that the mixture reacts with explosive force and becomes very hot. The increased pressure closes the one-way valve and a lethal cocktail of hot gas and liquid is propelled out in the direction of the beetle’s assailant through a tube that it can control with
great accuracy. This process can be repeated up to twelve times in one second – an amazing phenomenon in an insect less than two centimetres long.

One writer has commented on the impossibility of all this occurring by accident:

‘Such a complex sequence of events could hardly have taken place by piecemeal development. If a beetle in the remote past ‘happened’ to make one or more of these chemicals, they might have exploded and that would have been the end of that unfortunate insect, losing the benefit of his ‘experiment’ for that generation! In addition he would have to arrange his nervous system so that he could control the reaction so that it operated only when it was needed. This and many other factors must be correctly designed to work in the right sequence, otherwise the explosion would either be useless or more likely lethal. There is no satisfactory explanation other than that the bombardier beetle was designed the way it is, right from the very beginning’ (M. Bowden: Science vs Evolution).

Truly, as the Psalmist says of all creation including ‘creeping things’: ‘Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven’. [Psalm 148. 13 KJV]

Peter Southgate
Surrey, UK
Light on a new world is published to provide a better understanding of the true Christian hope and the correspondence secretary will be pleased to arrange for the magazine to be mailed to an address on request. Other Bible related publications are available on request and we will be pleased to answer your questions.

Please write to, the correspondence secretary at the address shown on the inside front cover. Alternatively you can Email us at: mail@lightmagazine.org.

For further information about the magazine, Bible related topics and publications visit the following web sites:

www.gospelofkingdom.co.uk
www.the1way.net
www.neshamah.info
www.dawnbooksupply.co.uk

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Light Bible Publications retain subscriber addresses on a private and secure database. They are not distributed or made available to any organisation and are removed following a request by a subscriber to cancel the magazine subscription.
A Special Issue of Light on a New World

Light

...on Creation

Send for your FREE copy now