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

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Light on a new world
Volume 24.1

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cover picture:

Egyptian demonstrators in Cairo fill Tahrir Square in protest against President Mubarak – see page 1

Inset: the Tel Dan stele, a Syrian inscribed tablet – see page 5

Note:

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

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What ever happened to the ‘Arab Spring’?

‘Arab Spring’ is perhaps a familiar phrase which was coined by the media to describe the ongoing political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa. This commenced in December 2010 with an uprising against the government of Tunisia. The result was the overthrow of the government of Tunisia followed by Egypt, Libya and Yemen. In addition, civil uprisings and major protests have broken out in Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan as well as unrest in a number of other countries in the region.

The ongoing civil war in Syria is a further sign of this political turmoil that has resulted in many thousands of deaths and millions of people made homeless through bombing and fear of the consequences of remaining in their homes. A growing number of Syrian refugees have sought asylum in neighbouring countries and this has created further major problems of housing, food and sanitation for the homeless.

With the overthrow of governments, many people thought that they would be replaced with something better, only to find that the vacuum has been filled with various factions jostling for power, unfair elections and political instability. This all adds up to human misery on an ever increasing scale and we are reminded of the words of one of the prophets of Israel. Jeremiah also lived at a time of great political turmoil in the Middle East and was soon to witness the overthrow of the kingdom of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He wrote: ‘O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps’ (Jeremiah 10.23).

These divinely inspired words sum up the human mind which is morally weak and prone to be corrupted. How often do we see this with those in authority, those who should be setting an example of good leadership for the benefit of their subjects? We could then be led to the conclusion that man
is unable solve the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and there is little hope of things getting better.

You may have heard the phrase ‘man proposes but God disposes’. This is probably based on a Bible quotation from the wise man Solomon in Proverbs. He wrote this: ‘A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps’ (Proverbs 16.9). In these words is the key to understanding the world in which we live. Despite appearances, things are not drifting along out of control.

Another prophet, Daniel, who lived around Jeremiah’s time and who was taken from Judah to Babylon as a Jewish captive, was commanded to appear before the king of Babylon to interpret the king’s dreams. One of these dreams concerned the king himself and Daniel had the unenviable task of telling this Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar who ruled over a vast empire, that he would be deposed from his position. He said to the king: ‘…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).

In these words we are reminded of an important Scriptural principle concerning God, who as Daniel said ‘removes kings and raises up kings’ (Daniel 2.21). In New Testament times, the Apostle Paul’s teaching reminds us again of this principle. He wrote to the believers in Rome who lived under the influence of another great empire. ‘Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God’ (Romans 13.1).

The teaching of God’s Word is that God has a plan for this world and one day all human rulers will be deposed to make way for a new Divine ruler and a new order of things. In the meantime the followers of Christ must be patient and cannot get involved in any form of protest, violent or otherwise, against the injustice we see all around us. We must not be too alarmed at what is happening in the world which is a sign that great changes are about to happen. However we must prepare for that time to come.

The Apostle Peter reminded the first century believers that ‘the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night’ and he added this searching question:

‘Therefore since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness...?’ (2 Peter 3.10, 11).
We read in John’s gospel record that Jesus entered into a discussion with a Samaritan woman about the true worship of God. He said to her: ‘You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews’ (John 4.22).

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria, we know that he was not speaking out of nationalistic pride. Jesus was trying to direct the woman’s attention to the fact that God’s salvation had been channelled through the nation of Israel.

Not only were the Jews God’s chosen people, but also God’s plan to offer salvation to the Gentiles required that the Gentiles must appreciate the Jewish character of the gospel – the good news of the coming kingdom of God. Jesus emphasised this aspect of God’s truth and the apostles, after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, preached the same message. The Apostle Paul for instance, referred to ‘the hope of Israel’ (Acts 28.20) for which he was bound in chains. It is this hope of Israel which is the essence of the good news of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus and the apostles in the first century.

The gospel preached to Abraham

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians that the gospel was preached ‘to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed”’ (Galatians 3.8). God had told Abraham:

‘Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

‘Salvation is of the Jews’
make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ (Genesis 12.1-3).

Abraham was a man of faith who left behind an idolatrous lifestyle in Ur of the Chaldees to obey the commandments of God. He was commanded to leave his country and kindred and to journey to a land which God promised He would afterwards give him for an inheritance. God elaborated on these
promises as we read in several references throughout the book of Genesis. These promises included blessings for Abraham and his descendants, as well as for all families of the earth (Genesis 15.5), a promised land of defined parameters (Genesis 13.1417; 15.1821; 17.18) and a special ‘seed’ (descendant) who would make all these promises a reality, for God said to him:

‘In blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the sea-shore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.’ (Genesis 22.17, 18)

Jesus is the seed of Abraham

In writing to the Galatians, Paul confirmed the identity of the ‘seed’ of Abraham referred to in Genesis:

‘Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your seed,” who is Christ’ (Galatians 3.16).

The Lord Jesus Christ therefore, is central to this entire concept that salvation is of the Jews. It is he who will bring the blessings upon Abraham and his descendants and upon all nations. Jesus, the seed of Abraham, is also the son of David, king of Israel.

God also made some very important promises to David. They are recorded in the second book of Samuel chapter seven. The entire chapter is well worth reading, of which the following is a summary:

❖ The time would come when the nation of Israel would dwell safely in their own land for ever and not be persecuted by their enemies.
❖ God would make David a house (descendants).
❖ David's ‘seed’ (descendant) would be established upon his throne forever.
❖ This ‘seed’ of David would have God as his Father.

This is because Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, a direct descendant of David.
David's throne would be established for ever before him (i.e. in his presence) and therefore David must be raised from the dead to witness this.

The kingdom of God in the past

It is important to bear in mind that the future kingdom of God which was preached by Jesus and his disciples, had already existed upon the earth at an earlier time. When God set men like Saul, David and Solomon on the throne of Israel, they were actually ruling for God – it was the kingdom of God on the earth. The territory of the kingdom (the Promised Land) had been determined by God. The subjects of the kingdom, the Jews, had been redeemed from Egypt by God. The laws of the kingdom were God's laws and the rulers of this kingdom were chosen by God.

David and Solomon recognized this fact as David himself said:

‘And of all my sons, (for the LORD has given me many sons) he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel’ (1 Chronicles 28.5).

God's intention was that the nation of Israel should act as a light to draw all nations to follow the one true God and receive the associated blessings (see Deuteronomy 4.59).

The nation of Israel failed miserably in this respect and because of the great wickedness of its kings, priests and people alike, God overturned the kingdom. The prophet Ezekiel addressed these words to the last king, Zedekiah:

‘Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord GOD: “Remove the turban, and
take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the lowly, and abase the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him”’ (Ezekiel 21.25-27).

The heir to David’s throne
This overturning of the throne of David, we note, was to last ‘until he comes whose right it is’. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one whose right it is to be king over the kingdom of Israel. We read in Luke’s gospel record how the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary. He told her what manner of child would be born to her as a result of the miraculous power of God, the Holy Spirit, acting upon her. This child was to be called Jesus, a name which means ‘the salvation of God’. The angel also reminded Mary of that great promise to David made many centuries before:

‘He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob (Israel) for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’

(Luke 1.32, 33)

Jesus was born to be king of the Jews and he was crucified with a sign over his head in three languages. This proclaimed that he was indeed the king of the Jews. However, we know that he never did reign on David’s throne in Jerusalem as king of Israel. After three days Jesus rose from the dead and after a further forty days he ascended into heaven where he sits on the right hand of God. He will not sit on his own throne (the throne of his father David) until his second coming in power and glory. At that time he will take the throne promised to him and rule over the nation of Israel, and eventually over the whole earth.

The kingdom of God in the future
The apostles of Jesus spent those forty days after his resurrection, listening to Jesus instructing them about the kingdom of God (see Acts 1.3). They asked him at that time, having a better understanding of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the kingdom: ‘will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ Jesus replied ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons’ (Acts 1.6, 7). Only God knew the time as he had told them before (see Matthew 24.36).

Jesus did not correct them in their expectations that the kingdom was to be restored to Israel. Why? Because their expectations were exactly right. All the prophets had spoken of that certainty of the restoration and the apostles had learned from Jesus to expect it. They only lacked an appreciation of the time which would
elapse between Jesus’ resurrection and the establishment of the kingdom.

The angels who were present at Jesus’ ascension into heaven told the apostles who were there that this same Jesus, who they saw go into heaven, would return just as they saw him go (Acts 1.11). Jesus would return as many other New Testament references affirm. That he would return to restore the ancient kingdom to Israel is demonstrated in the preaching of the Apostle Peter to the Jews in Jerusalem:

‘But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ would suffer, he has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by

RIGHT: The restoration of the kingdom of Israel was foreseen by the prophet Ezekiel in his vision of the valley of dry bones. Note: illustration from Peter Southgate’s book – see page 21
the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began’ (Acts 3.18-21).

The ‘restoration of all things’ includes the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, on the actual territory promised to Abraham, and with the greater son of David (the Lord Jesus Christ) as its king. It is this restoration which is spoken of so often in both Old and New Testaments. God’s dealings with mankind have almost exclusively been with the nation of Israel, the Jews. The involvement of Gentiles (non-Jews) up until the New Testament time period was only incidental, although significant. Everything concerning God’s plan with the earth, His offer of life to man and His requirements for those who desire eternal life, have come through the nation of Israel. Jesus himself said during his ministry that he was not sent ‘except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 15.24).

Only later, when the gospel message had been rejected by the Jews, did the apostles turn to the Gentiles and extend the good news of the kingdom to them (see page 17). Even then the apostles taught the Gentiles that they stood related to the stock of Israel, and that they were being figuratively grafted into the good stock of Israel as wild olive branches (see Romans 11.17-21). It is this grafting of the Gentiles into the stock of Israel which lies at the heart of Jesus’ words that ‘salvation is of the Jews’.

**LEFT:** Olive branches grafted into an old olive stock as described by the Apostle Paul in Romans ch.11
In that same chapter in Paul’s letter to the Romans he confirmed that God has not cast off his people Israel (Romans 11.2) but that the day would come when the Jews would be brought back into covenant relationship with God. Also, Jew and Gentile alike would share the blessings with Christ in the age to come. In the meantime the Gentiles have been invited to become related to the hope which previously had been almost exclusively offered to Jews (see Romans 11.23, 24, 26-32). Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman at the well are as relevant today, almost 2000 years later, as they were then.

It is only when we understand the Jewish nature of the gospel message preached by Jesus and the apostles that we can appreciate what the good news of the kingdom of God is all about. When we understand that God’s plan, to bless all families of the earth, has its roots in the ancient history of the people of Israel, and still revolves around them, then the basic message of the Bible becomes clear to us. The promises made to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, become meaningful to us only when we understand these things. We do well to consider the words of the Apostle Paul:

‘And if you are Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’.  

(Galatians 3.29)

A true understanding of the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman is therefore vital if we are concerned about our own salvation.

Editor

Note: This is a re-print of an article that was first published in ‘Light on a new world’ in March 1999 (volume 16.2)
The first verse of Acts chapter 13 refers to the newly formed Christian church at Antioch in Syria. The New Testament was originally written in Greek and the word translated ‘church’ in this verse and elsewhere is ‘ekklesia’ which means a group of called out people.

The Christians had been called out by God as Paul later reminded the believers at Corinth: ‘For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called’ (1 Corinthians 1.26). When the Apostle Peter preached in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost he explained that the promises of God were to ‘as many as the Lord our God will call’ (Acts 2.39). Jesus said that he had ‘come to call… sinners, to repentance’ (Matthew 9.13) – to a changed way of thinking as the word means. In Christian terms, the church is the ‘called out’ believers themselves rather than the building in which they meet.

The choice of Paul and Barnabas

The believers at Antioch received a message from God saying that He wanted Paul and Barnabas to carry out a specific work for Him: ‘…separate for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’ (Acts 13.2). We know that right from the start God had given the Apostle Paul a mission to preach the gospel message
(which up to that time had mainly been confined to the Jews) to a wide variety of people called Gentiles or non-Jews. Just a few days after those astounding events on the road to Damascus that led to Paul’s conversion to Christianity, Jesus told Ananias ‘…he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel’ (Acts 9.15). Having spent a whole year in Antioch in Syria establishing and supporting the new ecclesia there, it was now time for Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, to fulfil this important mission.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The gospel message which Paul was now about to start preaching more widely was the same that Jesus had earlier taught. The word ‘gospel’ is an old English word which means ‘good news’ and this good news was about the coming kingdom of God on earth. Matthew records that Jesus ‘went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom’ (Matthew 4.23). In what has become known as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, Jesus made it clear that this kingdom will be on earth when he said ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6.10).

This New Testament gospel message is based on teaching in the Old Testament, in particular on the promises God made to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish nation and David, one of their most illustrious kings. Both Abraham and David were promised that their reward would be on earth in the future, when Jesus returns to set up God’s kingdom. Abraham was told, for example, that, together with many of his descendants, he would inherit for ever the land on which he was actually walking (Genesis 13.14-17) and king David was promised that his throne in Jerusalem would be established for ever in his presence (2 Samuel 7.16).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul specifically confirms that God’s promise to Abraham was the gospel. In his letter to the Galatians he wrote that people of all nations who shared Abraham’s faith in God would share his eternal inheritance on the earth:

‘...the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed”. So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham’ (Galatians 3.8, 9).

Paul was now being directed to begin the mission of preaching the gospel to all nations, rather than just to Jews. He undertook three long missionary journeys. This first one was the shortest, but he would have travelled
nearly 1,000 miles and probably took between two and three years to complete the journey. Travelling was difficult and time-consuming and much of it would have been on foot. As Paul and Barnabas went, they preached the gospel and spent time encouraging and strengthening in the faith the new converts to Christianity. The places they visited (as recorded in Acts chapters 13 and 14) are shown on the map below.

**The Gospel preached on Cyprus**

Paul and Barnabas took John Mark with them as an assistant (Acts 13.5) who was a relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4.10). The first leg of this first missionary journey was by sea – the three men travelled from Seleucia, which was the seaport of Antioch in Syria, to Salamis on the island of Cyprus. Their itinerary was set out for them by God because they were ‘sent out by the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 13.4). The Holy Spirit is God’s power which is used in the furtherance of His purpose. This is a classic illustration of its use, guiding the apostles to places where believers would be found. As with Jesus and the twelve disciples, it enabled them to perform miracles, to demonstrate the truth of the fact that they were sent by God and were preaching His Word.

Barnabas was a Cypriot (Acts 4.36) and was therefore being allowed to
bring the Christian message to his homeland. At Salamis there was evidently quite a large Jewish community because the town had more than one synagogue (a Jewish religious meeting place) and it was in these synagogues that the preaching on Cyprus began (Acts 13.5). It is evident that Christianity had earlier found a foothold among the Jews in Cyprus (Acts 11.19, 20). We are not given any detail about the success or otherwise of the preaching at Salamis but are simply told that the three men, having preached in the synagogues there, made their way, probably on foot, through the island from east to west until they reached Paphos.

The phrase ‘through the island’ (Acts 13.6) indicates that they did not simply travel direct from Salamis to Paphos but covered the entire island, eventually arriving at Paphos. At Paphos they encountered two men in particular. One was a sorcerer or false prophet named Bar-Jesus which means ‘Son of Joshua’ or Elymas meaning ‘wise man’ as he had titled himself. The other was a Roman official called Sergius Paulus who was the governor of Cyprus. Archaeologists have found a stone which refers to him by name and to the position which he held, thus verifying the accuracy of the record in Acts 13 (see picture below).

Sergius Paulus was interested in hearing what Paul and Barnabas were preaching but Elymas, who was an adviser to him, tried to dissuade him from listening to them. Paul, by the power of the Holy Spirit, identified Elymas as a fraud and by a miracle, afflicted him with blindness for a period. Sergius Paulus, who is described as an intelligent man (Acts 13.7), witnessed the miracle and believed the gospel message. Thus the physical blinding of Elymas had helped to open the eyes of Sergius Paulus spiritually. The fact that the
The governor of the island was converted to Christianity doubtless assisted the spread of the gospel message on Cyprus, and allowed Paul and Barnabas to move on to the next part of their missionary journey.

A change of name for Saul of Tarsus

Paul and Barnabas sailed from Paphos in Cyprus to Perga in Pamphylia, a place on the coast of what we now know as Turkey. However John Mark went in the opposite direction back to Jerusalem. This was clearly against Paul’s wishes and he regarded it as a desertion. When Barnabas later wanted John Mark to join them on the second missionary journey, Paul refused to let him do so on the grounds that he had let them down before (Acts 15.36-39).

It is at this point in the New Testament narrative that Paul (meaning ‘small’) is referred to by that name rather than by his birth name which was Saul (meaning ‘desired’). Perhaps this is an indication of the change in his life following his conversion to Christianity – he was no longer the proud Pharisee but recognised his smallness in the sight of God.

From Perga he and Barnabas travelled about 100 miles north to Antioch in Pisidia (not the same Antioch from where they had originally set out, which was in Syria). There they went into the Jewish synagogue on the sabbath day and listened to the service. There would have been non-Jewish proselytes (converts to Judaism) in attendance. After the readings from the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) Paul and Barnabas were invited, as visitors, to speak to the congregation and Paul, who from now on assumes the leadership role, gave a
long oration based on the history of the Jewish people.

**Preaching at Antioch in Pisidia**

Paul described how God called the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and formed the nation of Israel as His special people and rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He reminded them of the 40 year long period of wandering in the wilderness as a punishment for disobedience and lack of faith in God, and how God eventually gave the next generation of His people the land of Canaan (Israel), the land He had promised to Abraham. He recalled the period of the judges and the kings of Israel and referred to God’s promise to David, identifying Jesus as David’s promised special descendant through whom salvation would eventually come to all people – not just the Jews. This was the same gospel message as was preached to Abraham some 2,000 years beforehand.

Paul then recounted events that had recently happened and the part the Jews had played in the arrest, false conviction and crucifixion of Jesus. They had failed to recognise their Messiah but Paul pointed out that Jesus’ coming, his suffering and death, had all been foretold in the Old Testament prophecies, as had the fact that God would raise him from the dead and give him eternal life (see for example Isaiah chapter 53). He gave them much food for thought when he explained that, though the Jewish Law of Moses could not bring salvation even to Jews, belief in Jesus could save a person, whatever their nationality. He said:

‘...every one of you should realise that forgiveness of sins is now proclaimed to you through this man (Jesus). And through faith in him a man is absolved from all those things from which the Law of Moses could never set him free.’


Paul’s words were well received both by Jews and Gentiles alike. The Gentiles asked him to preach again the following week and many people followed Paul and Barnabas wanting to hear more from them straightaway. A week later, on the following Sabbath day we are told that ‘almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God’ (Acts 13.44). However, the gathering that day turned nasty when the Jews became ‘filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul’ (Acts 13.45). They were envious or jealous because of the results achieved by the preaching of the apostles.
'Behold, we turn to the Gentiles'

A major turning point was reached when the Jews seriously opposed Paul and Barnabas, contradicting what they said and blaspheming. The apostles had to confront them with the fact that their failure to recognise and accept Jesus as their Messiah and saviour, provided the opportunity for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles. This had always been God’s intention, as revealed in the promises to Abraham and David. In some rather direct words they said:

'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: “I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth”' (Acts 13.46, 47).

The words they quoted are a paraphrase of prophecies given in the Old Testament through Isaiah, again showing that the purpose of God does not change (See Isaiah 49.6).

Iconium, Lystra and Derbe

Naturally, the Gentiles were extremely glad to hear this message but it enraged the Jews and they stirred up prominent people in their town to persecute Paul and Barnabas and drive them out of Antioch. So they travelled on to Iconium about 75 miles to the south east. Their experiences in that town were much the same as in Antioch. They preached in the synagogue to Jews and Gentiles and many of their audience believed. But again there were some ‘unbelieving Jews’ (Acts 14.2) who stirred up trouble. Paul and Barnabas courageously carried on preaching, their words being supported by miracles. Eventually, when substantial violence was threatened and their lives were endangered, they moved on to Lystra (about 40 miles to the south west) where they continued their preaching.

A lame man healed

At Lystra they encountered a man who had been crippled from birth. He listened to what Paul was saying and Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit, realised that he was a man who had great faith – enough to believe that he could be healed of his lifelong affliction. He therefore instructed him: ‘Stand up straight on your feet!’ (Acts 14.10). Imagine how daunting that would have been. This man had never walked, had never stood up on his feet. His feet and legs would have been weak and the muscles possibly unformed, through lack of use. Yet he responded to Paul’s
words by jumping up and walking. We know how Jesus often explained that people could only be healed if they had sufficient faith and Paul here is making the same point.

Such was the effect of this miracle that the townspeople who were idolaters believed that Paul and Barnabas were two of their chief gods, Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes). There was a temple to Jupiter at Lystra, and Mercury was said to be the god of eloquence - hence the reference to Paul being the ‘chief speaker’ (Acts 14.12). There was clearly, however, no
point in Paul and Barnabas remaining in Lystra and the next day they moved on to Derbe which was about 60 miles further on to the south east. There they preached the gospel and ‘made many disciples’ (Acts 14. 21). Then they showed amazing courage and faith in God by retracing their steps through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch for the specific purpose of strengthening and encouraging the newly converted Christians in those towns, and helping them to form their own ecclesias.

The apostles explained that the call to Christianity was not an easy one; it was a call to form a Godly character, to follow Jesus, and would involve suffering and hardship as he had also suffered. However, it would eventually by God’s grace, end in eternal life in the kingdom of God on earth. Paul said that ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14.22). After leaving Antioch in Pisidia on their homeward journey, they travelled south to Perga, from where they had started this part of their first missionary journey. They preached the gospel there before going on to Attalia, the nearby seaport where they joined a ship which took them back to their starting point at Antioch in Syria.

LEFT: The impressive remains of the Roman town of Perga – see below

The young man Timothy

It is interesting to note that there was a particular young man at Lystra when Paul and Barnabas visited that town. His name was Timothy and Lystra was his home town. His example of faith as a young man under the influence of both his grandmother and his mother is recorded by Paul (2 Timothy 1.5). He became a Christian, and a great friend and fellow-preacher of Paul. The New Testament includes two of Paul’s letters to Timothy and in the second letter he refers to the fact that he had probably personally witnessed Paul’s persecution and stoning at Lystra. Paul wrote: ‘…you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra - what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me’ (2 Timothy 3.10, 11).

Timothy would have been about twenty years of age at the time. However, by the time Paul visited Lystra again about four years later (Acts 16.1-3) Timothy was already a baptized believer of quite some standing. It may be that the young man Timothy, having witnessed Paul’s absolute commitment to the faith on his first visit to Lystra, despite the fierce persecution that he suffered there, was
baptized by Paul during that first visit without that baptism actually being recorded.

Baptism essential

Baptism according to the Bible is absolutely essential for salvation and is the complete immersion in water of a person who has heard and believed the gospel. In Romans chapter six Paul explains that baptism represents a burial of the old person and the resurrection to a new life of the new Christian believer. If Paul had baptized Timothy personally at Lystra on this first missionary journey, it adds meaning to his various later descriptions of Timothy as his own son in the faith (I Corinthians 4.17; Philippians 2.22; I Timothy 1.2). Timothy devoted the rest of his life to preaching and encouraging the believers and like Paul he was imprisoned because of his faith. He was a good companion to, and fellow-worker with Paul and was present with him when he wrote many of his New Testament letters to various individuals and ecclesias. Paul wrote his very last recorded letter to this man Timothy.

Summary and lessons for today

Even though God’s message of salvation had been primarily offered to the Jewish nation for thousands of years, He had always intended that it should be made available to people of all nations worldwide. This was promised to Abraham as long ago as about 2000 BC. Paul was the man initially used by God to carry to many people other than Jews the gospel message – the good news about the coming kingdom of God on earth which is still in the future even now. It is a place in that kingdom, and the gift of eternal life to live in that kingdom for ever, that has always been the true Christian hope and the hope of men like Abraham and David in the pre-Christian era.

Throughout the ages God has been calling people to learn about His plan for the world and if they respond correctly, to have a part in it. Belief of the gospel message followed by baptism, are essential requirements for those who will be in the kingdom. Also needed is the building of a character that is pleasing to God and this process will involve suffering and hardship as both Jesus and Paul have told us and have shown in their own lives. These great men of faith teach us that life now is not an end in itself but an opportunity to respond to God’s call and to prepare ourselves for that coming reward in the kingdom of God on earth.

Martin Southgate
Kent, UK
The following is an extract from the book entitled ‘Thine is the Kingdom’ by Peter Southgate which was first published in 1986. This extract deals with the hope of the first century Christians in the establishment of the kingdom of God at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. All references are from the King James Version.

Chapter 7 – The Kingdom Preached

Here is a summary of what we have ascertained so far about Christ's preaching:

❖ Jesus preached the gospel, or good news, of the Kingdom of God.

❖ His hearers expected a literal Kingdom on earth, as promised to their 'fathers'.

❖ They regarded Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah.

❖ Jesus taught that the Kingdom would be set up at his second coming rather than at his first ministry.

The tragic thing about the disciples' attitude was that Christ's warnings about his impending death had not sunk in. From being on the crest of the wave at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem they plunged to the depths of despair at his crucifixion. The person they genuinely thought to be the Messiah was dead! As one of them commented a few days later:

"We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel".  
(Luke 24:21)

But then the most wonderful thing happened! Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them. They talked with him, ate with him and examined
his nail-scarred hands. He indeed "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). And what did the resurrected Jesus and his disciples talk about? Luke tells us in the same passage: it was nothing less than the Kingdom of God. He was "Seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Is now the time?

It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of the disciples. Jesus had vindicated his claim to be the Messiah by his resurrection: he was talking about the Kingdom of God that the prophets had predicted: surely the time they had been waiting for had arrived at last! With eager voices they asked him if he was about to take David's throne and reign as king:

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

(Acts 1:6)

Again, what a marvellous opportunity here for Christ to correct them if their concept of the Kingdom was wrong. What better time than now to explain to them that the Kingdom he came to establish was a spiritual one: to tell them that as they went out to convert the world they would be creating God's Kingdom by building up a body of believers who would spread the influence and domain of God throughout the world.

But Jesus did not correct them. His only comment was on the timing of the Kingdom's appearance, not the fact of it:

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (v7).

These were almost Christ's last words to the disciples. As they stood there looking at him he rose into heaven and was gone. Jesus had appeared and disappeared before during those forty days after his resurrection, but this was obviously the final parting, and they watched him go with heavy hearts. Maybe the thought again crossed their minds: "Is this the end?" If it did, it was soon dispelled by two white-robed men who had silently joined the group. These angels had emphatic words of reassurance:

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (v11).

So the disciples knew that the hope of the Kingdom was not extinguished, but its fulfilment would be delayed until Jesus returned.

The first preaching of Christianity

A few days after the ascension of their Master, the disciples came under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit as
the prophets had been in the past (Acts 2:1-4). They immediately put this newfound power and authority into effect and commenced the task of convincing first the Jews and then the whole world that Jesus was the Messiah.

They started in Jerusalem. A crowd gathered and Peter started talking to them about Jesus. Here is the very first occasion on which Christianity is being preached to the world. And to what did Peter refer? Nothing else than the promise God made to David! He reminded his audience that God told David that he would have a son, the Christ, to sit on his throne. The argument was that David foresaw the death and resurrection of his descendant; and as this man Jesus whom the Jews had just crucified could be proved to have risen from the dead, he therefore must be the promised seed, the Christ:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David .... Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up (the) Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of (the) Christ ...." (Acts 2:29-31).

Having shown that the Scriptures foretold the death and resurrection of the Christ, Peter then forced home his point:

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (v32).

And he concludes:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ".

Notice that Peter was not attempting in any way to modify the Jews' concept of their Messiah. His object was simply to prove that Jesus was the one promised.

In his preaching a day or two later Peter told his audience that the blessings of the Kingdom foretold in the Old Testament would come about when Jesus returned to the earth:

"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20-21).

We were not in error therefore in going to the Old Testament to learn about the mission of Jesus. On the Apostle Peter's authority this is the place where his great work is predicted. Can you now recognise the vital role of the Hebrew Scriptures in our understanding of the work of
Christ? Can you appreciate more fully the theme that runs like the golden thread through all the Bible and, marvelling at this achievement, acknowledge that it could only be the work of God?

The theme of first century Christianity

This way of describing the work of Christ was maintained by all the first century disciples. The coming Kingdom of God at the return of Jesus was the consistent theme. Although it may appear repetitious I would like to quote several well known New Testament inspired preachers to establish this beyond doubt.

Of Philip we read:
"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5).

A few verses further on there is a definition of what his preaching about Christ involved:
"....they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ ...." (v12).

One of the greatest exponents of Christianity was the Apostle Paul, who was particularly concerned with preaching to the Gentiles. Let us eavesdrop on one or two of his addresses. At Antioch, like Peter at Jerusalem, he introduces the promise to David, and says of him:
"Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts 13:23).

Thus we see that Paul believed that Jesus was the promised son of David, with all it implied. Speaking to the Athenians near the Acropolis he tells them of God's intention to judge the world by the righteous rule of Jesus:
"He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

At Ephesus Paul went into the synagogue and:
"Spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).

He told the Ephesians that he had gone among them:
"Preaching the kingdom of God" (Acts 20:25).

That Paul preached Jesus as the ruler of a literal Kingdom is evident from the reaction of his adversaries at Thessalonica. They accused Paul of doing things:
"Contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (Acts 17:7).

Clearly the coming rule of Jesus was regarded as a threat to the Emperor. We can be sure that preaching a mystical or symbolic king would not have aroused such a reaction.

Even when he was imprisoned for his beliefs he could say to his visitors:

"For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20).

And this hope is defined a few verses later:

".... he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets ...." (v23).

The whole of his activity whilst in prison is summed up by the last verse of the Acts:

"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." (v31).

Christ’s return the hope of the early Christians

A study of first century Christian writings clearly demonstrates that the return of Jesus to set up on earth the Kingdom of God was the principal hope of the believers. As an example refer to the epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, where there are repeated allusions to it as the culmination of believers' expectations (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-16: 5:2 etc.).

The return of Jesus to the earth was considered vital by those Christians not only because it would mean blessings for the whole earth under Christ's righteous rule, but because only then would their own salvation be achieved. Any idea of instant reward at death is foreign to New Testament Christianity. Read carefully these examples of the Apostles' teaching:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick (i.e. the living) and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom .... Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:1,8).

"That the trial of your faith .... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7,13).

"When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of
gold head
BABYLON
silver breast & arms
MEDO-PERSIA
bronze belly & thighs
GREECE
iron legs
ROME
iron & clay feet
DIVIDED NATIONS
"glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4).

"But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2).

And Christ's very last message to his followers, contained in the closing verses of the Bible, is:

"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

There is therefore not the slightest doubt that the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to set up the Kingdom of God and to reward his true followers was the hope of the original Christians.

A summary of the hope of the gospel

In previous chapters I have usually placed at the end a brief summary that lists the main points covered in the previous few pages. At this point it might be useful to present a more extended summary of the things we have gleaned so far from our study of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

You may recall that in chapter 1 we saw that the Kingdom of God was the theme of the preaching of Christ and the apostles, and that the dozens of references to it could only be reconciled with each other by regarding the Kingdom as a literal one. We then looked at the remarkable prophecy of the metallic statue which predicted that the Kingdom of Men would one day suddenly be replaced by a world-wide Kingdom of God.

With this general outline in mind we then took a tremendous leap forward into the future, and from the Old Testament prophets and some New Testament references obtained the delightful picture of a world freed from all present evils, and governed by a wise, righteous, but firm divine ruler.

We then went back almost to the beginning of the Bible to trace the way in which God planned to bring about this perfect time. God selected Abraham to be the father of His nation, and made to him a solemn promise, guaranteed by His own existence. Abraham was to have a descendant in whom all the earth would one day be blessed, and who would possess the earth and rule over it, bringing all nations into subjection to him.

About a thousand years later God appeared to king David who now ruled over Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel. He too was to have a son, in fact the same person as promised to Abraham, and again the emphasis was on rulership. David's
son was to reign for ever on David's throne and establish his kingdom throughout eternity.

Combining these two great promises the Jews looked forward to the coming of the one they called their Messiah, in whom both the promises would find fulfilment. In the inspired writings of the prophets are many references to this coming Messiah and the work that he would do in bringing blessing to the earth.

Coming forward to the New Testament we found that its opening verse was an immediate link with these promises, and that at the birth of Jesus it was predicted that he was the one in whom they would come to fruition. Throughout his ministry Jesus continually demonstrated that he was the Messiah, but taught that his role as world ruler would be fulfilled only after he had gone away to heaven and then returned.

After his resurrection Jesus continued to preach a literal Kingdom, and this theme was taken up by his apostles in their bid to convert men and women to Christianity. The Kingdom of God on earth was the keynote of the original Christian message as preached by apostles such as Peter and Paul, whose writings are full of references to it.

**First century v. twentieth century**

After this review of first century belief and teaching about the Kingdom of God the question obviously arises:

Does twentieth century Christianity share these original beliefs?

**If it doesn't, why the change?**

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**Editor’s note:**

This article has been reprinted by kind permission of Peter Southgate. To receive a free copy of his book ‘Thine is the Kingdom’ see details on the back cover.
What is a friend?

A dictionary defines a friend as ‘a person whom one has a bond or mutual affection for, or a person who supports’. Abraham is called ‘the friend of God’ three times in the Bible and the words used in that relationship mean ‘one who loves him and is loved by him’.

These definitions also describe Jonathan the son of Saul who first comes to our notice in the first book of Samuel, where we read about Saul going to war with the Philistines. Saul had raised an army which he split in two – with himself in charge of 2,000 men at Michmash and Jonathan in charge of 1,000 men at Gibeah (1 Samuel 13.1,2).

Here we are introduced to the eldest son and the heir of king Saul as a mature man, a soldier, a warrior and a commander in charge of part of Saul’s army. When we read more about Jonathan in God’s Word we visualise him as a man of great daring and bravery. When we read about Jonathan, we get the impression that he was older than David – who comes on the scene later as a young man. It probably makes Jonathan around the same age as David’s elder brother Eliab, who was possibly 20 years older than David.

Jonathan the warrior

The chapters that follow tell of Jonathan’s daring exploits in the battles against Israel’s enemies. Abner the cousin of Saul was the commander of his armies and
coupled with Jonathan’s leadership, the armies of Israel were able with God’s help to establish Saul’s sovereignty over Israel and begin a campaign to free the Israelites from their enemies.

Saul’s rash vow
Jonathan was already a greatly admired and respected man in Israel as we learn from the events recorded in 1 Samuel chapter 14 where Saul makes a rash vow that Jonathan was unaware of. An awkward situation developed which resulted in Jonathan being sentenced to death by his own father to fulfil the vow Saul had made to God.

But the popularity of Jonathan with the Israelites was such that they protested to Saul: “Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great salvation in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die’ (1 Samuel 14.45).

Jonathan was held in high esteem by the people, despite having a father who had a flawed character and who was eventually rejected by God as king over Israel. This led to David, the youngest son of Jesse, being chosen as the future ruler of God’s people. The events that followed in Saul’s reign were to bring Jonathan and David into close contact and to develop a friendship that is perhaps unique in the whole of the Scriptures.

David and Goliath
David, the lowly shepherd boy from Bethlehem had burst on the scene by his slaying of Goliath on the battlefield in the valley of Elah. The victory over the Philistines that followed could not have gone unnoticed by Jonathan as one of Saul’s army commanders. We then read how these two men were drawn closer to each other. David had been brought before Saul by Abner with the head of Goliath in his hand (1 Samuel 17.57). Saul on that occasion questioned and talked at length with David. Jonathan was there it seems, as a party to the discussion, or at least a listener to this conversation because we read: ‘And it was so, when he (David) had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul’ (1 Samuel 18.1).

A life-long friendship
Here was the start of a life-long friendship, a bond of affection between these two men that began when David was first introduced to the royal household. As Jonathan listened to David conversing with Saul we wonder what David said as he stood there holding the severed head of Goliath. It must have been a
gruesome sight – but what was it about David that so impressed Jonathan? It wasn’t the sight of this simply dressed shepherd boy holding the gory head of the Philistine giant. It was no doubt what he said to Saul about this victory over the Philistine, the enemy of Israel.

As Jonathan listened to this young man talking to king Saul his father, he would have heard David saying much the same as he had already said – expressing his complete faith in God and the power of God to deliver this enemy of Israel into his hand. No doubt there was no boastful talk or self-praise but a statement of his total reliance on and his belief in Almighty God. This is what would be apparent to Jonathan and it was this frame of mind in David that must have drawn Jonathan to him. So as we have read: ‘...the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul’ (1 Samuel 18.1).

The word ‘knit’ by the way means ‘to tie, bind or join; to come or bring together to form one mass or whole’. The NIV renders the words here: ‘Jonathan became one in spirit with David’. Here we see a meeting of minds – a realisation that they both had the same respect and love for the things of God.

David had previously been accused by his elder brother Eliab of having ‘pride’ and ‘insolence’ in his heart (NIV ‘wickedness’ and ‘conceit’). This was when David suggested he should go out to battle against Goliath. But this accusation of pride and insolence or conceit does not fit with the character of the young man David.

The Philistines, seen here in an Egyptian relief, were constant thorns in Israel’s side
When we consider some of Jonathan’s brave exploits, for example in chapter 14, he used similar words to David, as he went into battle, showing his complete trust in the over-ruling hand of God. We read phrases like:

‘the LORD will work for us’;
‘the LORD has delivered them into our hands’;
‘the LORD has delivered them into the hand of Israel’;
‘nothing restrains the LORD from saving, by many or by few’ (1 Samuel 14.6-12).

From that day, David is brought into the royal court, not only as a warrior but also to soothe Saul’s growing moods of depression by using his musical talents as a harpist. We wonder if there was already a realisation by Jonathan that David was God’s choice as the next king of Israel. Whatever the answer, it did not affect that firm friendship that now existed between these two men.

The friendship confirmed

We then read that ‘Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armour, even to his sword and his bow and his belt’ (1 Samuel 18.3, 4). Was this presentation by Jonathan to David of his princely garments just a token of friendship and confirmation of the covenant they had just made?

Was it that Jonathan wanted David now to appear dressed as a prince, or was it also recognition on Jonathan’s part that David was God’s choice as the next king of Israel?

As the story unfolds we see these two friends now being drawn closer together. David was sent on military expeditions by the king and we read that ‘David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul’s servants’ (1 Samuel 18.5).

Saul plots David’s death

This success of David caused the evil characteristics of Saul to come to the surface. The record tells us that he ‘was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him’ (1 Samuel 18.12). We see the cunning mind of Saul at work in the following verses. He devises a plot to ensure that David is killed in battle in exchange for the slaughter of a hundred Philistines and the offer of the reward of marrying one of the king’s daughters. However, the plot failed and David became part of the king’s family through his marriage to Michal the sister of Jonathan (1 Samuel 18.17-27).

Although David was now Saul’s son-in-law, he continued to plot David’s downfall. He was an evil man
indeed, so much so that we read: ‘Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David; but Jonathan, Saul’s son, delighted much in David’ (1 Samuel 19.1).

Saul’s determination to kill David cemented the bond of love and friendship between Jonathan and David. This friendship went even further and deeper and we see how Jonathan put his own life in danger more than once on David’s behalf. Jonathan was in many ways David’s saviour – more than once he warned David of Saul’s intentions to kill him, enabling David to escape his murderous father. The intrigue came to a head when Saul demanded to know why David was missing from the royal court and Jonathan told Saul that he had given David permission to go to Bethlehem to attend a family gathering (I Samuel 20.28,29). Saul reacted angrily against his own son and said:

“You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die”. And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, “Why should he be killed? What has he done?” Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food...for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him so shamefully’ (1 Samuel 20.30-34).

A sad parting

The bond of friendship between these two great men now surfaced publicly in the royal court. The outcome of this event was that David fled from the court to begin life as a hunted man. We then learn of the sorrowful parting of the two friends: ‘...David...fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so’ (1 Samuel 20.41).

The close bond between these two friends was never broken. It is seen later when Jonathan had a secret meeting with David in the wilderness of Ziph, even though Saul’s soldiers were scouring the area. Jonathan had eventually managed to find his friend David in the forest and we read that he ‘strengthened his hand in God’ (1 Samuel 23.16).

These words tell us what an exceptional character Jonathan was
and how his mind worked. He had sought out David in dangerous circumstances, to help him in his hour of need to comfort him and encourage him to find strength in God. He then said to David: ‘“Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that.” So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD...’ (1 Samuel 23.17, 18).

We can appreciate how these two men were motivated by a shared belief and unswerving faith in God. Jonathan, the heir to the throne of Israel, was ready to accept as God’s will, a lesser role in the affairs of the nation, a man who believed with all his heart that God would bring David eventually to rule as the divinely appointed king. It was on this understanding that they made this covenant with each other and Jonathan looked forward to the time when he could serve David.

A tragic end to Jonathan’s life
But tragically it wasn’t to be, God in His wisdom had decreed otherwise and this friendship ended with this extraordinary man Jonathan dying as the warrior he was on the field of battle. Despite all the hatred and bad feeling that came his way, his loyalty to his father Saul was demonstrated to the end. There he was at Saul’s side, as they fought their last battle for God’s people on the mountains of Gilboa.

David’s lament for Jonathan
In the 2 Samuel chapter one we have recorded perhaps one of the most
moving parts of Scripture – the lament of David when he learned of the death of Saul and his sons. David was heartbroken over the death of his friend Jonathan, as this record shows. In some translations this lament is entitled ‘The Song of the Bow’ (verse 17), perhaps as a dedication to Jonathan’s prowess as an archer. It is the depth of feeling in these words that brings out the wonderful character of David, ‘a man after his (God’s) own heart’ (I Samuel 13.14).

Here was a man who could have rejoiced at the death of Saul - after all it was the end of a man who had persecuted him for many years. But David did just the opposite – he mourned and he grieved for this man and that reveals the wonderful disposition of David. It shows firstly a spirit of forgiveness and secondly his love for Saul, despite all his failings, a love that he no doubt had in the earlier years of his relationship with Israel’s king. This lament seems to call to mind the fact that David was taken into the royal household and virtually adopted by Saul.

Whilst the lament speaks kindly of Saul after his death, it is also a fact that there is nothing in the Scriptures to suggest that David ever said a bad word about Saul before his death. Instead in this moving eulogy he refers to some of the things that were admirable in Saul. Saul was anointed as king over God’s people and David’s lament expresses his grief. Here are some of the words taken from 2 Samuel chapter 1:

> ‘The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!’

> ‘O mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, nor let there be rain upon you...For the shield of the mighty is cast away there!’

> ‘...The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty’.

(verses 19-22)

Then putting aside Saul’s disgrace and fall from God’s favour, David unites him with his friend Jonathan in verse 23 as ‘beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided’ (verse 23). Most moving though is the grief that David pours out for his beloved friend Jonathan:

> ‘Jonathan was slain in your high places (Mount Gilboa). I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love for me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women’ (verses 25, 26).

Here was a love between two men that has nothing to do with unnatural sexual relationships as has been
incorrectly suggested by some. These two men were like brothers, added to which was their shared love for the God of Israel. It was a love and friendship that was kindled at that first introduction of David to the royal household, when as we have already read ‘the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David’. Here is demonstrated in the Biblical record, the sharing together through a very special friendship, the thoughts, feelings and the faith of these two great men, coupled with a realisation that they both had a deep love for the things of God!

**Lessons for today**

We have considered the record of the friendship of Jonathan with David concluding with this heartfelt lament. The examples of these two Bible characters show us that spirit of friendship, love and forgiveness that should be demonstrated in the lives of those who wish to become part of God’s family. We are also shown the spirit of forgiveness in David’s mind who never showed hatred to Saul despite the extreme provocation and danger that he constantly faced.

This reminds us of the teaching of Jesus about forgiveness and loving our enemies in the New Testament (Matthew 5.43-48). Jesus in his life demonstrated those same characteristics that are so pleasing to God. By his example and his teaching he shows us how we should live our lives if we want to become his true followers. He said to his disciples on one occasion: ‘You are my friends if you do whatever I command you’ (John 15.14).

We read in the letter to the Hebrews that David was counted among those men and women who demonstrated in all the circumstances of their lives an enduring faith in God (Hebrews 11.32). This chapter also refers to some ‘who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies’ (Hebrews 11.34 NIV). No doubt Jonathan was in the mind of the Apostle when he wrote these words and he is included in those who ‘were all commended for their faith’ (Hebrews 11.39 NIV). The chapter concludes with some words that reassure all who try to follow their example. They can look forward in anticipation, to the day of Christ’s return and the resurrection of the dead:

‘These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect’

(Hebrews 11.39,40 NIV).

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