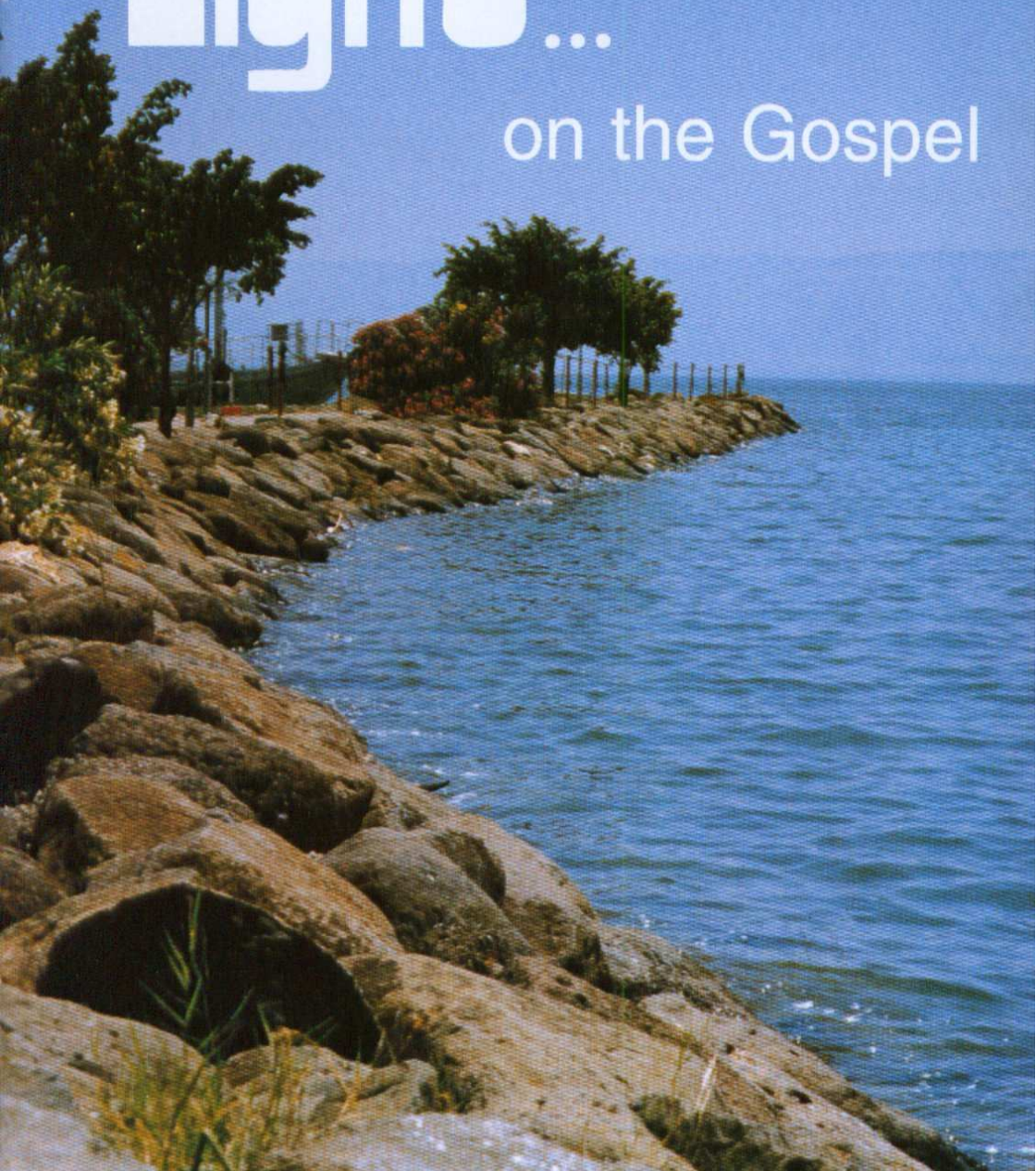


Light...

on the Gospel



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Light on a New World

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Light...

on the Gospel

THE GOSPEL IS a message of hope and joy to peoples of all races and languages. In contrast to this, the philosophies, ideals and ethical principles thought up and expounded by men, may seem to offer hope to people for a better life, but usually offer nothing of the sort. The rise and fall of Socialism and Communism are examples of the hopes and expectations that are raised in peoples minds, but which do not stand the test of time and are subject to the fickleness and uncertainty of human nature.

The Gospel or Good News found in God's word, doesn't rely on the efforts of mankind to bring lasting peace to the world. It is a Divine plan, put into effect by the power of God - nurtured by Him through the nation of Israel and brought to fruition by the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fulfilment of the hope given by the Gospel, relies on the promised return of Jesus to the earth as the all powerful Son of God.

Because the fulfilment of the Good News found in the Bible does not depend on human nature, it means we have a hope that is sure and absolutely certain of being carried out. This knowledge can lift us from despair to joyfulness, from hopelessness to hopefulness, because it is backed up by the love of God. It is based on sure and certain promises, which the Almighty, by His righteousness and justice will fulfil by sending Jesus to this earth again.

The scene shown on the cover photo is taken by the Lake of Galilee in Northern Israel where Jesus walked with his disciples and preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. It was here that his life-giving words were spoken to people from all walks of life - from those humble fishermen who became his disciples, to the Jewish religious leaders who rejected his teaching. Our aim in these articles is to help you understand the wonderful message from God which is contained in - 'THE GOSPEL.'

Cover Picture - Galilee

THE FIRST CHAPTER of Mark's Gospel record tells us that '*...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.*' In the time of Jesus the Sea of Galilee was one of the busiest centres of life in Palestine and the Western shore was ringed with towns and villages. The ruler of the region had his palace on the hill above Tiberias. The Sea, or more correctly lake, which is shown in our cover picture was a rich source of fish for food and was often crowded with fishing boats and other vessels.

We may have imagined that Jesus preached the Gospel to simple country folk in a remote part of the Holy Land, where no whisper of the outside world ever interrupted the tranquillity of the scene. In actual fact, his ministry was conducted, not only in the most cosmopolitan region of the country, but also in a territory where the busy trade routes from Tyre and Sidon on the West, the old caravan roads from Damascus on the North-east, as well as the great imperial highways met together and branched out all over Palestine. Galilee was on one of the main highways of the ancient world, a stopover between Damascus and the Egyptian frontier and between Antioch and Jerusalem.

The meaning of the word Galilee is 'Ring' or 'Region of the Gentiles'. It is derived from the word 'Galil' which means circlet, or anything that is round. The district was never entirely Jewish, even in earliest times. Ten cities of Galilee were given by Solomon to Hiram, king of Tyre as part payment for services provided for the building of the Temple. The settlement in Galilee by the surrounding Gentile population continued down through the centuries.

When Jesus went to live in Galilee, the Western shore of the lake was dotted with towns and fishing villages in which the non-Jewish element was very strong. Jesus was brought up in Nazareth about 18 miles from Tiberias, the most important town on this Western shore of the lake, which took its name from the Roman Emperor Tiberias. As Jesus walked the roads of Galilee, he would have encountered long caravans working Southwards across the fords of the river Jordan; he would have seen the sun gleaming on the spears of the columns of Roman soldiers and he would have watched Phoenician merchants travelling into Galilee.

The shadow of this cosmopolitan world falls across the pages of the New Testament. Jesus lived and carried out his mission to the Jews, in a world which was in some respects like our own. The world of Jesus day had its Roman garrisons, tax collectors, market places and a cross-section of humanity from all walks of life. His life and ministry, but more important, the message preached by him, has been preserved down to our days. This is the Gospel message - the theme of this special issue of Light on a New World.

Mark 1.14

Introduction - What is The Gospel?

THE APOSTLE PAUL, one of the great teachers of Christianity, was commissioned by Jesus on his conversion to *'... bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.'*¹ Later on he introduced himself in the Letter to the Romans as *'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.'*² Confiding to his readers, he said:

*'...I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.'*³

GOOD NEWS

In our Bibles the word 'Gospel' is peculiar to the New Testament writings, translated from the Greek 'evangelion', meaning good news or tidings. From this root other related words have entered our language. For example, as an evangelist, Paul said *'...I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles,'*⁴ evangelising the Roman world as he spread tidings of the good news of the Gospel.

Paul appreciated the vital importance of this Gospel teaching as the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. To be unenlightened by it is to remain in the dark, for he wrote:

*'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.'*⁵

The Gospel's unique life-giving property linked with the great work of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity. When Paul urged the young man Timothy to join him in suffering for the Gospel, he reminds him how God *'... hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose*

¹Acts 9.15 ²Romans 1.1 ³Romans 1.15,16 ⁴II Timothy 1.11 ⁵II Corinthians 4.3,4

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and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.⁷⁶

THE GOOD NEWS DEFINED

But to restrict the scope of the Gospel to the work of our Saviour when he died on the cross is a mistake, ignoring the much wider plan God has had in mind from earliest times. In fact we are not left to speculate, because the Gospel preached by Jesus and the apostles is defined in very specific terms. It was after his cousin John the Baptist had been put in prison by Herod that *'... Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.'*⁷⁷ For the next three years, before his crucifixion, we learn that Jesus *'... went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him.'*⁷⁸

Similarly Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to preach the kingdom of God to the people. It is recorded that *'...they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel...'*⁷⁹ We note how the terms 'gospel' and 'kingdom of God' are interchangeable, with no mention of the crucifixion. The disciples were unlikely to preach about a matter which they did not understand beforehand. For example, Jesus taught his disciples:

*'... The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him: and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.'*⁸⁰

The substance of the good news did not change afterwards. In the forty day interval between his resurrection and ascension into heaven, Jesus was still *'... speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.'*⁸¹ His final instructions were heeded:

*'... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'*⁸²

Here are two examples of the content of the preaching of the evangelists after Jesus had been received up into heaven. When the people of the city of Samaria *'... believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.'*⁸³ The book of the Acts of the Apostles concludes with an account of how for two years at Rome Paul was *'... Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the*

⁷⁶II Timothy 1.9,10 ⁷⁷Mark 1.14,15 ⁷⁸Luke 8.1 ⁷⁹Luke 9.2-6 ⁸⁰Mark 9.31,32 ⁸¹Acts 1.3
⁸²Mark 16.15,16 ⁸³Acts 8.12 ⁸⁴Acts 28.31

INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

*Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*¹⁴

We are given a marvellous description of Paul the evangelist at work in his house at Rome:

*'And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.'*¹⁵

THE GOSPEL PREACHED BEFORE CHRIST'S ADVENT

Many Christians are under the mistaken idea that the teaching of the Gospel commenced with, and is confined to, the New Testament, and they miss the important connection with past developments in God's plan, which come to a sharp focus in the name and work of Jesus Christ. Thus Paul recognised that this Gospel of God, to which he had been called, *'God ... had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.'*¹⁶ Paul commends the readers of this Letter to the Romans:

*'... to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But is now made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.'*¹⁷

The scriptures in question were the Old Testament books and Jesus challenged his critics to *'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.'*¹⁸ In his Letter to the Christians living in Galatia Paul explains that:

*'... the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.'*¹⁹

Some of Abraham's descendants did not show the same faith, dying in the wilderness before they could enter the land promised to their ancestor. So Paul warns all of us:

*'Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.'*²⁰

¹⁴Acts 28.23 ¹⁶Romans 1.2 ¹⁷Romans 16.25,26 ¹⁸John 5.39 ¹⁹Galatians 3.8,9,29 ²⁰Hebrews 4.1,2

If we search the Old Testament Scriptures, we find that later Abraham's descendants were established as a nation in the land of promise, becoming God's people and the Kingdom of God of the past. King David was promised by God that sometime after his death '*... I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.*'²¹ Who was this descendant who features so much in the promise? The declaration of the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary about the greatness of her as yet unborn son, answers the question:

'... and thou...[Mary]... shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever: and of his kingdom there shall be no end.'²²

JESUS BORN TO BE KING

If the good news of the Gospel concerns the Kingdom of God, then the central figure of God's plan must be Jesus Christ. At his trial Pilate asked him '*... Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*'²³ At Pilate's insistence a sign, written in three languages was displayed over the cross bearing the body of the man who testified before the Roman governor of his kingship. The sign read '*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*'

We are still challenged to take seriously the claim of '*... Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*'²⁴ Nothing can prevent a risen Lord returning to the earth to rule on the throne of David, which surely explains why the evangelists were, and still are today, committed to carry on preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God.

Before Jesus can establish the Kingdom of God, the present system of man's rule will have to be destroyed. Paul declared to the people of Athens, how that:

'... he [God] 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.'²⁵

The upshot of this dramatic intervention at his second coming will be that '*... The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*'²⁶

²¹2 Samuel 7:12,13 ²²Luke 1.31-33 ²³John 18.37 ²⁴Romans 1.3,4 ²⁵Acts 17.31 ²⁶Revelation 11.15

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OUR SHARE IN THE KINGDOM

The hope offered to all who believe the good news about the kingdom is a personal share in the future world order. We think of the sad company of apostles in the upper room a few hours before the crucifixion. Jesus assured them:

'Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me: That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'²⁷

What should be our first priority in this life? Jesus says we should not worry about material things:

'But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'²⁸

Those who receive this great reward will gratefully acknowledge how much they owe to Jesus, for the victory over sin and death he achieved at the crucifixion. Their personal saviour is '*... Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.*'²⁹

JESUS THE ONLY SAVIOUR

The teaching of the Gospel of Christ does not accommodate acceptance of other religions. There is only one faith, and Jesus is the only saviour. Peter declares of Jesus Christ of Nazareth '*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*'³⁰ As Jesus claimed of himself:

'... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'³¹

'... because I live, ye shall live also.'³²

Christ's example was unique, providing an assurance of a **future** hope. All other human teachers, however well-intentioned, are only able to offer hope now in this life, because their powers are necessarily limited, and death ends all. Matthew concludes his Gospel with an account of how Jesus, after his resurrection, when bidding farewell to the eleven disciples, assured them of the promise of a future life, to be enjoyed in the kingdom, as a certainty.

²⁷Luke 22.28-30 ²⁸Luke 12.31,32 ²⁹Revelation 1:5,6 ³⁰Acts 4.12 ³¹John 14.6 ³²John 14.19

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'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'³³

THE SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL

There is nothing nationally, or even internationally exclusive about the work of Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that he was '*... the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*'³⁴ '*... that the world through him might be saved.*'³⁵ One day God is going to instal His Son as king on His holy hill of Zion in Jerusalem: '*Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.*'³⁶ Then all nations will be blessed in the special descendant anticipated in the Gospel preached to Abraham.

This good news of universal significance transcends all national, cultural, language and ideological barriers, for it is stated as being:

'... made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.'³⁷

'... this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.'³⁸

'... for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.'³⁹

'... Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.'⁴⁰

Over the last two thousand years the world has undergone radical social and political change. However Bible teaching concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ is fixed, needing neither revision nor addition. Paul's strong warning to those of his time who were perverting and corrupting the Gospel of Christ is equally applicable in our day: '*... If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*'⁴¹

FINDING MESSIAH

Jesus was not the product of his age, a man just thrown into prominence by events. Jesus transcended his times because his role had been defined long before in many detailed and varied prophecies and promises. This is why the early disciples recognised the arrival of the person anticipated in the Old Testament writings:

³³Matthew 28.18-20 ³⁴John 1.29 ³⁵John 3.17 ³⁶Psalms 2.8 (NIV) ³⁷Romans 16.26 ³⁸Matthew 24.14
³⁹Romans 1.16 ⁴⁰Acts 10.34,35 ⁴¹Galatians 1.14,45,49

INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

'... We have found the Messias, which is being interpreted, the Christ' -

Andrew said to his brother Simon.

'... We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'

- Philip said to Nathanael

'... Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel'

- Nathanael said to Jesus⁴²

By our studies of these same Scriptures may we also come to find Jesus, recognising him as the long promised Messiah. The difference for ourselves who live at the end of the long interval between his two advents, is that we will have to wait for his return to the earth in power and great glory before we can see Jesus of Nazareth in person.

'And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.'⁴³

Meanwhile the request contained in his model prayer for believers takes on real meaning:

'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'⁴⁴

Duncan Cooke
Redhill, Surrey

⁴²John 1.41,45,49 ⁴³Hebrews 9.27,28 ⁴⁴Matthew 6.10

The Star of Bethlehem

ALREADY THE SHOPS are busy as they anticipate Christmas. It is good that every one remembers the birth of Jesus Christ. However, the date December 24/25 was chosen by a monk, Dionysius Exiguus, in AD 525, so that the start of the year AD 1 on the Roman calendar would coincide with the circumcision of Jesus on the eighth day,¹ on his first entry to Jerusalem.

It has long been recognised that both the day and the year are probably wrong. It would be more in keeping with God's purpose, if the '*Lamb of God*' were to enter Jerusalem at the time of the Passover [and shepherds would more likely be in the fields in the spring].

What about the year? The historian Josephus records that Herod died in BC 4, so Jesus must have been born before then.² An article in 'Science and Christian Belief' vol. 5 No. 2 page 83 (1993), by Colin Humphreys, makes a good case for the suggestion that the star of Bethlehem was a comet that appeared around Passover in BC 5.

Mr Humphreys shows that the Chinese records of these comets appearing, agree with all the details in the Bible about the visit of the wise men, [Magi] and the movement of the star from the east to the south, to appear over Bethlehem. The article also considers the time of taxation,³ the recorded fact that Mary and Joseph went every year to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover⁴ and their flight into Egypt.

It is particularly interesting that, if the date of the birth of Jesus Christ was April BC 5, then we are approaching the 2,000th anniversary of his birth in April 1996. When Jesus went up to Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion, it is recorded that six days before the Passover, he entered the city to the cry:

'Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord.'⁵

Here Jesus was enacting a prophecy about his second coming, as '*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*.'⁶ We do not know the day or the hour of his return, but it is absolutely necessary for his followers to heed the warning he gave:

'Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.'⁷

Richards Griffiths
Hartley, Kent

¹Luke 2.21 ²Matthew 2.13 ³Luke 2.2 ⁴Luke 2.41 ⁵John 12.13 ⁶Zechariah 9.9-10 ⁷Luke 21.36

The Gospel in the Old Testament

MODERN USE of the word 'Gospel' limits its meaning to the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. The previous article, entitled 'What is the Gospel?' has defined the word in a Biblical context, telling us that the Gospel was known long before the birth of Christ. It has indicated that the message of the Gospel is consistent in the Old and New Testaments.

In this article, we will look at the fall of man and the necessity of the Gospel message. We will also endeavour to trace the thread of God's promises from the first recorded communication with Abraham, then through David and the prophets.

THE NECESSITY OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

If we open the Bible at the first book and study the early chapters of Genesis we find that after man was created, God commanded him in these words:

'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'

We know that following the serpent's assertion that '*Ye shall not surely die*', Eve, and then Adam, ate of the forbidden fruit. Man was then driven from the garden of Eden to '*till the ground from whence he was taken*'.² In the third chapter of Genesis, God's punishment extends to all mankind with the words, '*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*'.³

If God had decided to renounce all interest in mankind, it would have ended here. Man, by his own nature, would have destroyed his race. But, though man was sinful, we know that, '*God so loved the world*',⁴ that he was determined to provide a means of salvation. To this end, God devised a plan that was arranged according to his purpose. This is revealed in the Bible by the message of the Gospel, the 'good news' concerning God's plan.

THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

The Gospel of God is the 'good news' of future blessings expressed in the promise to Abraham which the Apostle Paul described in this way:

¹Genesis 2.17 ²Genesis 3.23 ³Genesis 3.19 ⁴John 3.16

‘The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.’⁵

Paul refers to ‘the blessing of Abraham’, which is to come upon the nations through Jesus Christ. And so Abraham holds a very important place in relation to the unfolding of this blessing. He is the father of the nation of Israel chosen by God to carry His name and fulfil His plan for the earth and its inhabitants. Paul tells us that, *‘If ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.’*⁶

These words carry great meaning, for they tell us that the promises to Abraham given so long ago, are relevant to those who are children of God today. To be of Abraham’s seed, we must believe in the promises made to him. We have to be obedient as he was, and must have faith in ‘the seed’ of Abraham, Jesus Christ, if we wish to be associated with him as ‘heirs’. We become ‘heirs’ by the act of baptism into Christ, thus demonstrating our belief in this magnificent promise.

The Biblical revelations surrounding Abraham are important for another reason. They illustrate that the Gospel was preached to Abraham by the angel of the Lord.

But what was Abraham’s background and culture?

Abraham was a direct descendant of Shem, a son of Noah. We know that Shem was a worshipper of the true God. Terah, Abraham’s father, however, seems to have departed from that belief. He made his home in Ur in Chaldea. (now in Iraq) There he and his family lived for many years serving the pagan gods of Shinar. It was at this point that God appeared unto Abraham and said to him, *‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and come into the land which I shall show thee.’*⁷

This caused the whole family to move from Ur and to journey north along the ‘fertile crescent’ through Mesopotamia. Terah, Abraham, Sarai, Abraham’s wife and Lot, Abraham’s nephew, obeyed the voice of the Lord and separated themselves from the idolaters of the Chaldean district of Mesopotamia. They settled briefly in Haran until the Lord appeared again to Abraham.

It was here that God said to Abraham:

‘I will make of thee a great nation and I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’⁸

⁵Galatians 3.8 ⁶Galatians 3.29 ⁷Genesis 12.1 ⁸Genesis 12.2,3

THE GOSPEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Referring to this promise, the Apostle Paul tells us that in making it, *'the Gospel was preached to Abraham.'* The glad tidings of blessedness to the nations will become reality, when Abraham and his descendants are renowned throughout the whole earth.

CHRIST - THE SEED OF ABRAHAM

It is important to note that Paul, in writing to the disciples in Galatia about the inheritance, says, *'The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds", meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.'*⁹ The Apostle here tells us that the land of Canaan (Israel) was promised to Christ, when God said to Abraham, *'Unto thy seed will I give this land'*¹⁰ We must understand this fact then as a basic first principle of the Gospel of the kingdom.

FURTHER PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

Soon after this, Lot, Abraham's nephew, separated himself from Abraham, and we are told that the Lord appeared to Abraham again, and said:

*'Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed (plural here) as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.'*¹¹

It was later, after the repetition of the promises, when Abraham had reached the age of ninety-nine, that God appeared to him, to confirm His promises. On this occasion, God talked with him, and changed his name from Abram to Abraham, as a memorial that He had made him heir of the world, by making him a father of a great multitude.

God said:

*'Behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.'*¹²

⁹Galatians 3.16 (NIV) ¹⁰Genesis 12.7 ¹¹Genesis 13.14-17 ¹²Genesis 17.4-8

THE PROMISES RENEWED TO ISAAC AND JACOB

After Abraham died, God appeared unto his son Isaac at the time he had decided to go down into Egypt. He said to Isaac:

'Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee and unto thy seed I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.'¹³

And so it was with Isaac's son Jacob: God appeared to him in a vision while he was travelling to Haran :

'And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;... and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.'¹⁴

To both Isaac and Jacob, God promised that at some time in the future, He would give the land or countries to them and their descendants and to a special



Jerusalem - The City of David

¹³Genesis 26.2-5 ¹⁴Genesis 28.13-15

THE GOSPEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

descendant, which is none other than Christ, and that through Christ, all nations would be blessed.

THE PROMISES TO DAVID

David was the second king of Israel and, we read concerning him that he was a *'man after God's own heart.'*¹⁵ God had ordered Samuel to anoint him King over Israel. In this way David became the Lord's anointed, and when he ascended the throne, he ruled the nation as God's king. We learn that in the early part of his reign, he fought a number of battles to subdue the enemies of Israel, which was at length completed and God gave him rest from all his enemies. It was at this point that David decided to build a magnificent temple to house the ark of the covenant. However, the plan did not meet with God's approval and so Nathan the prophet was instructed to go and tell David not to build God a house but that *'He [God] will make thee an house.'*¹⁶

The following verses explain what God meant by this:

'And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men;And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee, thy throne shall be established for ever.'¹⁷

It has been suggested that this promise was fulfilled by David's natural son Solomon. He was indeed king of Israel after his father and he did build a beautiful temple to honour God. However, Solomon's throne was not established for ever, nor was it seen by David. These parts of the promise point to the future, and to a greater Son of David.

THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

The Old Testament prophets were men raised up when the people of Israel had turned away from God. Their message was twofold:

- 1) warnings relating to local and current conditions
- 2) predictions concerning God's purpose in the future.

It is when we examine the prophecies about those things which predicted God's purpose in the future, (i.e. about the return of Jesus and the establishment of His Kingdom), that the Gospel message is clearly seen. Fifteen Old Testament prophets speak of the fulfilment of God's plan. Only Jonah's message is confined to his specific time and place. Isaiah and Daniel both foretold the birth of Jesus.

¹⁵Acts 13.22 ¹⁶2 Samuel 7.11 ¹⁷2 Samuel 7.12-16

Isaiah's predictions about Jesus concern not only his birth, but his ministry, his death and his future kingship.

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE

Isaiah refers to the covenant made to David as '*an everlasting covenant... even the sure mercies of David.*'¹⁸ For this covenant to come alive and to be fulfilled will require a king to reign over the everlasting kingdom. Again Isaiah tells us, '*Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*'¹⁹ (This passage is quoted by Luke, when the angel appeared unto Mary and she received the promise of the birth of Jesus.)

Isaiah confirms to us the reality of this future kingdom in these words:

'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice from henceforth even for ever.'²⁰

This further confirms the Covenant that God made with David, that he would have a greater son to rule upon his throne, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Later in Isaiah's prophecy, we are given a word picture of the kingdom and the peacefulness of that future age. We learn from Isaiah that there will be a '*new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered.*'²¹ The peace and contentment that will exist on the earth will be unprecedented. The prophet concludes this chapter by demonstrating how peaceful that state will be when he says, '*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain saith the Lord.*'²²

OTHER PROPHETIC MESSAGES

The prophet Jeremiah confirms the future order of things that were promised to the house of Israel and Judah. His message also substantiates the covenant made with David, emphasising that:

'In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.'²³

¹⁸Isaiah 55.3 ¹⁹Isaiah 7.14 ²⁰Isaiah 9.6-7 ²¹Isaiah 65.17 ²²Isaiah 65.25 ²³Jeremiah 33.15-16

The prophet Daniel confirms the Gospel message in his God-given interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

'... shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.'²⁴

Later he tells us that:

'... the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.'²⁵

The prophecy of Micah confirms all of the foregoing and tells how the nations will worship God in that future age. He wrote:

'But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'²⁶

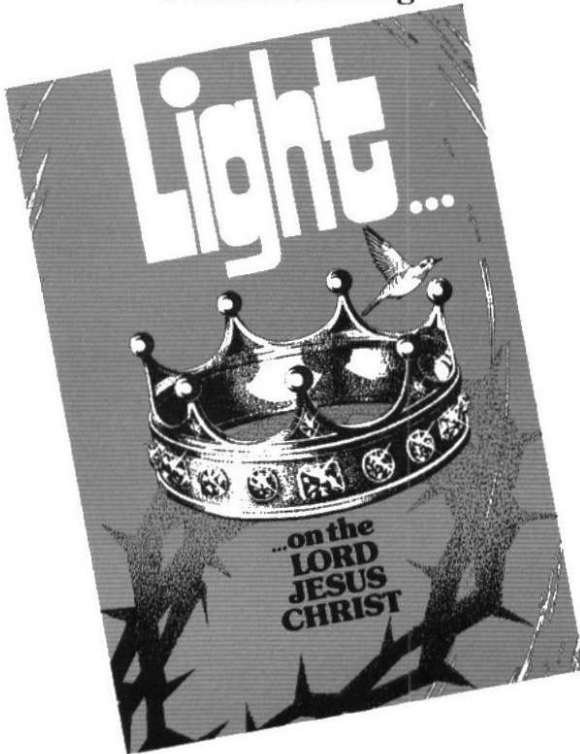
There is then a common thread linking the teachings of the Old Testament. The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David and the prophets, reveal to us the 'Gospel' or 'good news' in the Old Testament. God does have a plan for this earth and for mankind. That plan centres on Jesus as the future king, ruling over the whole earth at peace. As the following article shows, this theme is continued in the New Testament in the teaching of Christ and the Apostles which also tells us how we, as individuals, can have a part in that time of blessing to come when the kingdom of God is established on the earth.

Norman Grey
Listowel, Ontario
Canada

²⁴Daniel 2.44 ²⁵Daniel 7.27 ²⁶Micah 4.1,2

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The Gospel in the New Testament

AS ALREADY NOTED the theme of the Gospel is found to run through the Old Testament, so by now we can understand that this part of the Bible has great relevance to the true Christian, even today. This is in direct contrast to the ideas of some people who say that the Old Testament is just full of myth and folklore at worst, or who at best, concede that it does not contain any information relevant to our salvation. The error of this line of thought will be obvious in the light of the references to scripture already made, but the reliability of the Old Testament also acts as a witness to confirm the reliability of the New Testament.

THE LINK WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT

The prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ are probably best seen linked to the New Testament through the writings of those who penned the Gospel records. Taking the record of Mark as an example, we read:

'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'

This was not a direct prophecy concerning Jesus himself but of the forerunner to Jesus, that is, John the Baptist. We note that the opening words of Mark are: '*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God....*' The other significant words in that passage are: '*As it is written*' These words immediately provide

¹Mark 1.1-3

that link back to the Old Testament, to the words of the prophet of God, Isaiah:

‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.’²

We can read about the ministry of John in Matthew’s gospel record chapter 3. This was foretold in the Old Testament as the introductory work for the teaching of Christ and we have noted that in Mark’s record this was considered to be the beginning of the Gospel **of** Jesus Christ. It is important to see the difference in words here, it was the Gospel **of** Jesus Christ not the Gospel **about** Jesus Christ! Although Christ was the keystone of the Gospel message He was not the Gospel ‘Himself’ as we shall see by searching the scriptures.

Johns ministry, as recorded in Matthew was to show the need for repentance, because ‘...*the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*’³ Both Matthew and Mark, in their Gospel records, start their witness by stating quite plainly that the Gospel preached by Christ was the Gospel of the kingdom of God. This matter of the Gospel being ‘of Christ’ rather than ‘about Christ’, can be seen quite clearly by gaining a better understanding of these verses where the kingdom of God was mentioned, particularly in Matthew’s record.

‘And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.’⁴

And again:

‘And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.’⁵

The scripture here very specifically links the working of miracles by Christ, with the preaching of the kingdom and if we consider that point carefully, it reveals the truth to us. Much debate has gone into the real reasons for the miracles of Christ. Was he just doing these things out of compassion, or was it to attract people to him and away from the established teachers of the time. No, the real reason for the miracles, was that they gave the stamp of divine authority to the work of Christ in preaching the **kingdom of God**. The Scribes and Pharisees could do nothing by their hypocritical teaching that could possibly match this outward display. Christ

²Isaiah 40.1-5 ³Matthew 3.1-24 ⁴Matthew 4.23 ⁵Matthew 9.35

was a special person with a special message from God - the Gospel of the Kingdom.

THE GOSPEL - THE THEME OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

Before the time of Christ's ministry, the promises of God had been very specific about the advent of the Messiah but had not enlarged on what was required of the individual who wished to be a part of God's kingdom. However, the emphasis on individual commitment was an essential part of Christ's teaching.

Probably the most revealing part of this aspect of Christ's teaching is to be found in the 'Sermon on the Mount', which we find recorded in Matthew, chapters 5 to 7. The teachings of Christ set the standard that is acceptable to God. One of the most telling verses in this part of Christ's teaching is:

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'

This one verse contains the essential theme of Christ's teaching concerning the Gospel - the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. The theme is this - that without obedience to what God requires of us, we cannot hope to share in the future benefits which the Gospel tells us about.

It follows that to obey God we have to know what God requires of us, and to gain that knowledge, we must listen to God - to listen to his words, which are there for us to read, in the Bible. This requires an open mind, one that is ready to receive instruction without prejudice. It was because of the lack of this attitude among some of the people of his day, that Christ spoke to them by way of parables. He made this point quite forcibly as Matthew tells us:

'Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.'

This concept of needing to be attentive to God's requirements was further underlined by Christ, in the parable of the wedding feast given by a certain king. The record quite clearly shows that the parable is connected to the kingdom of Heaven (the kingdom of God). The invitation sent out by the king is analogous to the one that God has given to us to come to his kingdom. The people who rejected the invitation of the king, reminds us that many reject God's invitation. But perhaps most importantly for our consideration, is the fact that a man was ejected from the wedding feast for not wearing the right garment. Christ teaches

"Matthew 7.21 Matthew 13.13,14

us here about the need to be prepared - to conform to the expected standard that God has set to obtain a place in the kingdom (the wedding feast).⁵

To meet the standard God has set, requires us to overcome the natural tendencies that are within us to follow our own desires; to note and copy the perfect example that Christ has set for us; to be baptised (by full immersion in water) into the saving name of Christ. In his final message in the book of Revelation given to the Apostle John, Christ referred again and again to the prize that awaited those who overcome this natural tendency to sin. This prize is a place in the kingdom of God.



A tomb in Jerusalem with the stone rolled away is a reminder of the miracle of Christ's resurrection

⁵Matthew 22.1-14

THE GOSPEL - PREACHED BY THE APOSTLES

It may be thought strange that this section has been included, because it would appear that the Gospel message given by the apostles was the very same as that given by Christ. Two things come from this line of thought:

- a) the basic teaching of the Gospel was exactly the same as taught by Christ, the point here being that throughout the divinely inspired scriptures anything of great importance is always repeated a number of times.
- b) Whilst the teaching was the same Gospel message, the emphasis shifted slightly. The apostles demonstrated the need for the work of Jesus Christ, the need for his sacrificial death and resurrection and the need for repentance and baptism followed by a new way of life in those who desire to receive a place in God's eternal kingdom.

The apostle Paul wrote:-

'For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.'

Paul emphasised this message many times in his writings, introducing different facets each time:

'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.'

Again he wrote in his letter to Titus:

'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.'

The apostles stressed over and over again that the glad tidings of the kingdom of God were there for everyone to embrace and have as a hope for the future.

⁹Romans 5.6-10 ¹⁰1 Corinthians 15.20-23 ¹¹Titus 2.11-14

They demonstrated that the mission of Jesus, his life, death and resurrection, was a great gift from God, the Creator of heaven and earth, to mankind, but it will only benefit those that accept it as a gift from God and follow the prescribed path through believing in him. Paul used almost these very words in his letter to the Hebrews:

‘But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.’¹²

These things were spoken in the same authoritative way that Christ delivered the Gospel message. It was a way that the antagonists of the time found difficult to gainsay. The reason for this of course was that it was of God and carried the power of his inspiration with it. The apostle Peter focuses our minds on the truth and hope of the Gospel in these words:

‘Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.’¹³

It would be possible to continue to quote references from the apostolic writings in the scriptures and fill a sizeable book with them, but from those referred to already it will be apparent that the Gospel proclaimed by the apostles, did have this firm emphasis - the keystone of it was the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was his selflessness, his teaching, the miracles that he performed and his great sacrifice, that persuaded the first century Christians of the need for self abasement and self sacrifice in order to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom in the face of incredible persecution. It was the reality of the hope of life unending, based on the sure foundation that Christ had laid, that the apostles built on and that the first century Christians continued to preach.

THE HOPE OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS

To conclude this section on the Gospel in the New Testament we will consider the hope of the first century Christians, the hope as it was first delivered in its untaunted and unaltered form before being affected by the errors of mans inventive and misguided thinking.

¹²Hebrews 11.6 ¹³1 Peter 1.2-5

The primary point of belief is that there will be an everlasting kingdom of God:

'For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'¹⁴

The second point is that the kingdom will be set up on earth:

'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also.'¹⁵

These verses are often mis-quoted to demonstrate that the reward of the righteous is in heaven. But a logical look at them will expose this as an erroneous belief. Christ said that if he went away, he would come again and then 'where I am, there ye may be also'; in other words here on earth! This was supported by the angels comment at the time of the ascension of Christ into heaven:

'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.'¹⁶

The words '*...shall so come*' form a definite statement about Christ's return to the earth.

The next point of belief, is the need to be related to the Divine promises confirmed by the Gospel message. The hope of life eternal in the kingdom of God was made possible through the waters of baptism after belief in the Gospel.

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, '*...they were baptized, both men and women.*'¹⁷

The hope of the kingdom was not considered to be theirs by right following baptism, it was conditional on maintaining the standards set and taught by Christ:

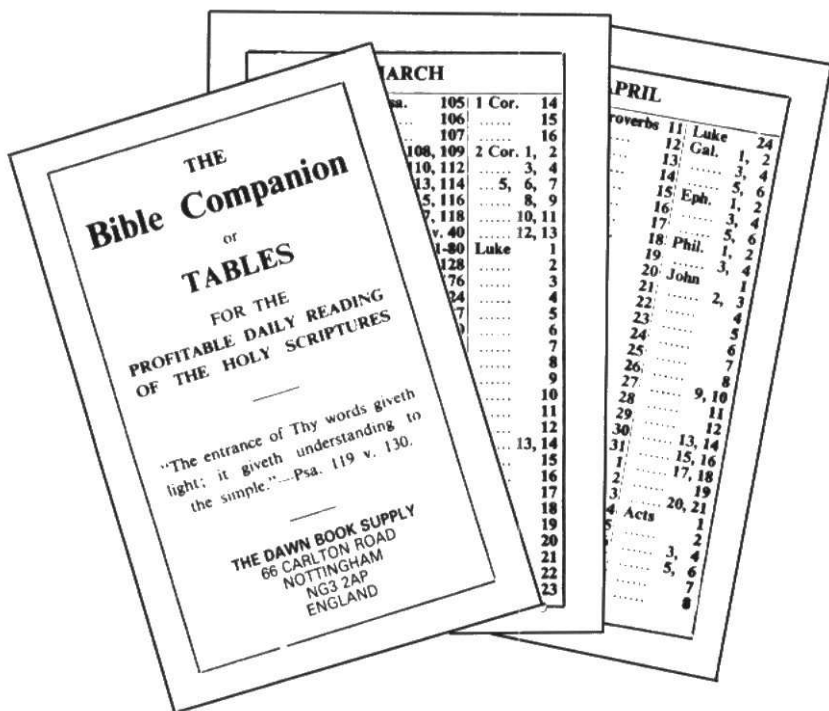
'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'¹⁸

The salvation referred to by Paul is to be saved from the finality of death, which is mankind's lot due to the effects of sin. Salvation is the gift of God, eternal life to be enjoyed in the kingdom to be set up on earth at Christ's return. This was the hope of the first century Christians! **This is the true Gospel message!**

Peter Meadows
Birmingham

¹⁴2 Peter 1.11 ¹⁵John 14.2,3 ¹⁶Acts 1.11 ¹⁷Acts 8.12 ¹⁸2 Timothy 3.14,15

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The Gospel and You

WHERE ARE YOU GOING ?

MOST OF US at some time in our lives have a wish to travel. It may be just to visit a long lost friend in another part of our own country, or to visit friends and relatives in other countries. Usually before we set out, we make plans for the journey - we look at maps and consider the availability of transport. We also think about the cost, the clothes and other essentials we may need to take with us including passports and visas.

Now you may be wondering what this has to do with the Gospel. Its simply this -the principle we have set out above is the sort of process we have to go through in life to achieve our goals. It applies equally to things related to God which are more important than any other plans we may have for the future - for they concern our eternal well-being. We may be good at making plans for a future journey or some other activity but when it comes to our spiritual well-being the planning seems to lack direction.

The purpose of this article is to show that the Gospel can affect you personally; now is the time to resolve to plan for the future, rather than just let life drift by without any clear direction.

THE REALITY OF THE GOSPEL TODAY

It is a long time now since Jesus walked this earth and preached about the coming kingdom of God, a kingdom which figured highly in the hopes and aspirations of the 1st Century Christians. We are now in the 20th Century, living in a sophisticated world where in most developed countries the need for God has, in the main, been lost sight of.

Yet if we stop and think, whilst man has made great strides in technology and medicine, little has changed as far as human life is concerned. Mankind is still plagued by disease, unhappiness and death. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow still eludes us and even though many may feel they live a more fulfilled life, at the end of the day what lies ahead ?

Sadly the flower of youth soon fades giving way to the aches and pains of old age and ultimately to death itself, a prospect which although gloomy, is the only certainty in this life of ours.

Things have not changed. We are faced with the same problems that Jesus addressed nearly 2000 years ago. This being the case then the Gospel message, the GOOD NEWS of better things to come, is as relevant today as it was when Jesus first spoke to a crowd in the hills of Galilee.¹ Now is the time to stop following the rainbow, sit at his feet and listen to what he has to say.

THE PROMISES - SOON TO BE REALITY

In the earlier articles in this issue it has been made quite clear that the Gospel relates to a very real situation, where God is to intervene in world events and establish a Kingdom which will exceed any Utopian² dreams we may have. The key question is, when? We have already seen that the 1st Century Christians expected this 2000 years ago; has God forgotten or changed his mind?

These are relevant questions and the answers are in God's word of Truth. In this changing world we can be sure of two things. The first is the certainty of death, the second is that God does not change. The latter is a fundamental point which is supported throughout His Word.

Consider these two passages from the Old and New Testaments:

'For I am the Lord, I change not.'³

'Every good endowment that we possess and every complete gift that we have received must come from above, from the Father of all lights, with whom there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency.'⁴

It is evident that, unlike us, God does not change his mind. Therefore if the Kingdom that was promised has not yet been established there must be some other explanation. A study of the Bible makes it quite clear that, in causing the Gospel to be preached over the centuries, God has also set out a plan of events - for He does not leave the future to chance. We can understand this plan and God has in His infinite wisdom communicated it to those who take the trouble to read and listen.

God declared through the prophet Amos:

'Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.'⁵

When we study God's word and look for an indication of the timescale for setting up the Kingdom of God, we soon realise that it is an imminent event and that the fulfilment of the Gospel message is near.

These indications are referred to as 'Signs' in the Bible and they are just like a street sign that points the way to a particular place.

¹Mathew 5 ²Utopian - an imaginary state of perfection described by Sir Thomas More in his book *Utopia* (1516) ³Malachi 3.6 ⁴James 1.17 - J.B. Phillips ⁵Amos 3.7

THE SIGN OF THE FIG TREE

The first of our signs was given by Jesus in answer to a specific question by the disciples:

'And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?'

If you read this passage from Matthew's Gospel record, you will see the context of the question that the disciples asked. It concerns the signs of the second coming of Jesus and the reply that Jesus gave to them, painted a picture of subsequent events down the ages.

He included this parable:

'Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.'

The use by Jesus of the fig tree in a parable, tells Bible students that he was referring to Israel, who have long carried this emblem as a "Sign" of their nation. This can be seen from the following reference concerning the nation of Israel, where we read:

'He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white.'

The inset shows the fig tree emblem used on Israeli postage stamps. The point Jesus was making relates to the fig tree 'budding' and if you think about that, it is a SIGN of life.



If we look at the history of this nation from the time of Jesus, we learn that Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation scattered by the Romans in AD70. Then in 1948 a most significant event happened. The State of Israel was established and since then the nation has indeed 'budded and blossomed'. Today Israel is a significant power in the modern world.

⁶Matthew 24.3 ⁷Matthew 24.32 ⁸Joel 1.7

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

The Jewish FIG TREE nation is re-established today after nearly 2000 years of dispersion.

Jesus went on to tell his disciples (concerning his return):

‘So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.’⁹

Jesus is telling us here that our generation will be alive when he returns. This starts to concentrate the mind and can give our planning for the future something to focus on!

The second important sign for us to consider concerns the general state of the world just before Christ’s return. He refers to it in the earlier part of the chapter in Matthew. This describes a rather fearful situation in the world, prior to the return of Jesus to establish the Kingdom as depicted in the following illustration:



If you compare Matthew’s Gospel record and the parallel record in Luke chapter 21, you will be able to identify most of these problems described by Jesus.

Now let’s ask a question - Does the list of problems Jesus spoke about sound familiar? We believe that it does. We only have to pick up the daily newspapers to find them all there. Reader, these signs are a reality of the world in which we live. What a great urgency there is to plan then for the future !

⁹Matthew 24.33,34

If space permitted we could refer to the message of the prophets, and in particular the book of Daniel¹⁰ where specific time periods are referred to and these also support the view that the promise of the Gospel is soon to be fulfilled. In fact some bible students pin-point 1996 as a strong possibility for the culmination of God's plan and the fulfilment of the promises.

Of course we cannot be dogmatic, for we recall the words of Jesus to the disciples:

'But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.'¹¹

If we were given a precise date, then we might well be tempted to delay our preparation. However a day has been set in God's calendar for some world shaking events as we read in the book of Acts:

'Because he (God) 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.'¹²

Surely the need for planning your future is now becoming increasingly obvious.

THE CALL OF THE GOSPEL - ARE YOU READY?

Clearly we live in momentous times; so what are you going to do about it ?

The options are few and quite simple, but they lead to vastly different consequences, as can be seen in the table below:

YOUR ACTION PLAN	OUTCOME
1 Do some serious thinking	Accept the Gospel - Eternal life
2 Do nothing	Reject the Gospel - Death
3 Delay planning	Miss the opportunity - Death

¹⁰Daniel 12 ¹¹Matthew 24.36 ¹²Acts 17.31

Our advice to you is to take the first option. It is in reality the only sensible one with a far better outcome. We hope this will be your choice and you will then consider the words of Jesus as he instructed his disciples to preach the Gospel:

'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'¹³

Now the steps that Jesus set out to enable you to take advantage of the 'Good News,' contained in the Gospel message, are carefully designed to make your planning easier. The four stages are listed below for your consideration and action:

- 1. Listen to the word of God with an open mind**
- 2. Believe in God's word and His son Jesus Christ**
- 3. Be Baptised into the saving name of Jesus**
- 4. Live your life in obedience to his commandments**

It is only human to delay, or leave things undone and that leads to missed opportunities. Today is the day of opportunity - your day to plan for the future. There is nothing to lose but everything to gain, so why not take that vital step forward and accept the Divine invitation ?

God's plan will soon be realised and the outcome will be far beyond your wildest dreams, as the apostle Paul reminds us:

'..... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.'¹⁴

Finally, as a practical suggestion to help you with your planning, why not offer a simple prayer now, asking God to guide you to His Kingdom. Then resolve to do some serious study of His word so that you will be ready for the return of Jesus.

This is the reality of THE GOSPEL - it is the TRUTH as Jesus said:

'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'¹⁵

John Lowe
Bexley, Kent

¹³Mark 16.16 (NIV) ¹⁴1 Corinthians 2.9 ¹⁵John 8.32
Suggested further reading: *Thine is the Kingdom* - Peter J Southgate
(Published by Light Bible Publications)

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.

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LIGHT on a New World is published to provide
a better understanding of this true Christian hope
and the Correspondence Secretary will be pleased to arrange for the
magazine to be posted to any address on request.