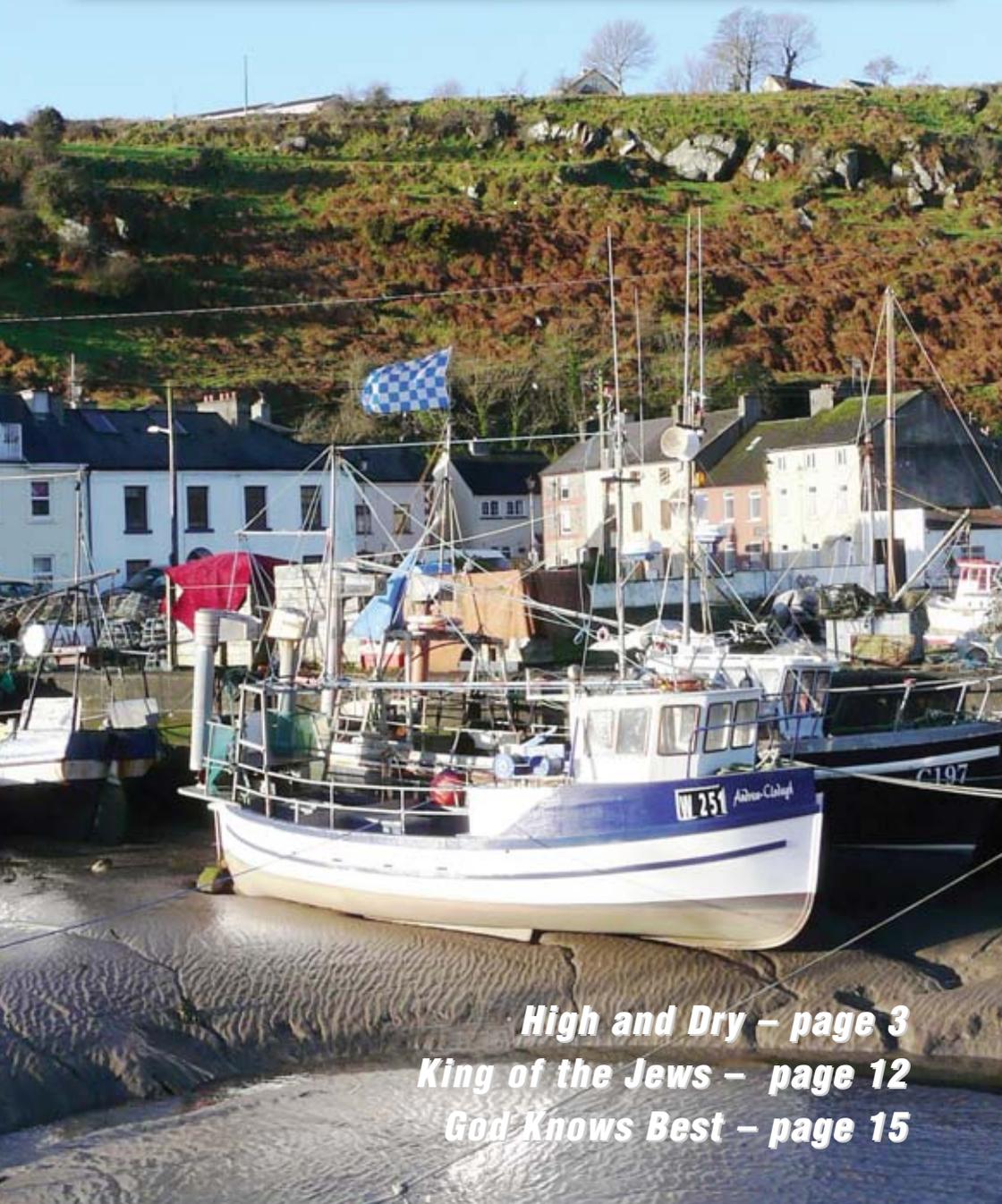


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1498



High and Dry – page 3
King of the Jews – page 12
God Knows Best – page 15

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

125th Year

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ), available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Contents

High and Dry3

The Tower of Babel.....5

The Koran and the Bible8

Poem: God's Plan11

King of the Jews12

Poem: Faith Comes by Hearing14

God Knows Best.....15

Paul in Jerusalem17

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High and Dry

Gloom and doom seem to have descended upon the world with lightning speed.

Most world economies are in a recession as bad as any since the Second World War. The one thing everybody is agreed upon is that economic life is miserable at present! The world economy is like a boat which has been grounded and is left 'high and dry'.

Changing Times?

In the 21st century everything has become inter-connected. So the banking crisis in the US did not just result in the collapse of major US banks. Because bundled packages of bad debts had been sold all around the world, the US problem became everybody else's problem too. Even a small country like Iceland was radically affected. When their banks failed, the entire country was plunged into financial difficulty.

A hundred years ago countries were far more self-reliant. Transport and communications were slower; institutions did fewer deals abroad; every country tended to provide for itself if it could. Perhaps this recession will start a trend towards countries deciding to grow more of their own food, providing more of their own energy, and manufacturing more consumer goods, instead of importing them from across the world. But who can say what will happen, as and when this recession ends?



Forward Look

In 1861, a 22 year old Christadelphian named Robert Roberts delivered a course of Bible Talks in Huddersfield, in Northern England, which he subsequently published as "Twelve Lectures on the Teaching of the Bible". The book was reprinted at least five times and the author published it in 1884 as "Christendom Astray", a publication which is still in print. It was a time in England when people were keenly anticipating future developments and Bible reading was much more prevalent then than it is nowadays.

One of the Lectures was about the promised Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which features very frequently in the New Testament, and it contained a quite remarkable statement about the events that could be expected before that great event takes place. Explaining that there must be a "time of trouble" on earth before Jesus comes, the author went on to describe the sort of conditions he anticipated:

"International politics will become complicated beyond the possibility of unravelment; a universal war-spirit will be evoked; general outbreak of war will ensue, and with this, commerce will become embarrassed; trade fettered; employment precarious; distrust will fill society; panic will spread; trade bankruptcies will follow in quick succession; and the social fabric will be shaken to the foundation, if not involved in ruin and reduced to chaos. Events will stride with rapid march, and anon, the superhuman will enter the scene. The

Lord Jesus will be revealed, no longer as “the Lamb slain from foundation of the world” – “the man of sorrow and acquainted with grief”, but as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, treading the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God,” – taking vengeance on this conceited, faithless, unbelieving generation that boast of themselves of great light, when lo! they are shrouded in a pall of Egyptian darkness”

This is the language of the 19th century, of course, but the predictions are stunning. How could this young man have had such foresight? The answer is to be found in the source material to which he refers.

The Superhuman Dimension

When Robert Roberts spoke about the Lord Jesus you will see that he had ample ways of describing who Jesus is and what he will do when he returns as King. At his first coming, he gave his life to save people from their sins (the slain Lamb – Revelation 13:8); and he shared our problems and difficulties (the man of sorrows – Isaiah 53:3). But when he comes again, Jesus will be like a Lion, not a lamb (Revelation 5:5).

The young man was not speculating about future conditions: he was explaining Bible prophecy. That’s a remarkable feature of the Bible: that God has made known in some detail events that have to come to pass as part of the divine programme to rescue the world from sin and death. This is something which sets the Bible apart from the writings of any other religion.

But how could he foretell the financial crisis and the effects it would have on society? Again the answer is to be found in the Bible. Asked about his Second Coming, Jesus foretold a time

of trouble which you can read about in Luke chapter 21, and elsewhere. He spoke of wars, famines, earthquakes, widespread diseases, a decline in spirituality, and general perplexity, predicting that things would get worse and worse:

“On the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:25-27).

After his ascension, Jesus sent another revelation, this time explaining in greater detail that a massive financial collapse would occur, and people would be increasingly distraught. He described it as the collapse of the world system, which Jesus called “Babylon the Great”:

“The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore ... For in one hour such great riches came to nothing. And every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance...” (Revelation 18:11-17).

So if you are willing to believe what the Bible teaches, and put your trust in the God of the Bible, there is every reason to take heart and appreciate that the dreadful things that are now happening are part of a divine programme. God is in charge and will bring His world through difficult times and keep His people safe. Indeed He has the very best things in store for those who trust in His salvation.

Editor

The Tower of Babel

In the last issue **Dudley Fifield** traced the emergence of Nimrod as a cruel and remorseless rebel against God and those who sought to worship Him. Just as at the time of the flood – when everything went from bad to worse – the same was happening again. Human rebellion was now expressed in a striking way when an attempt was made to establish a central place of worship for all mankind.

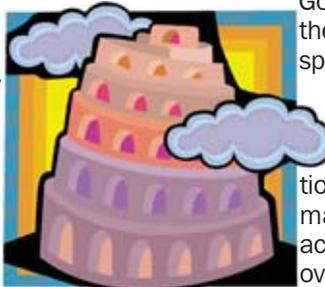
United World

- 1 We have the record of the construction of the Tower of Babel in Genesis Chapter 11 and have already considered the background to this event. Mankind was increasingly rebellious and self-assured. It seems that they were intent upon establishing their own worldwide kingdom apart from God.
- 2 The first verse of Genesis 11 reads as follows:

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech”

These words – “*language*” and “*speech*” occur throughout the rest of the chapter (in verses 6-9) and it was this facility that was confused by God’s action. Perhaps we could say that the first word involves the thought processes and with these God did not interfere. The second describes the actual words used, whereby those thoughts are articulated.

When God confounded their language, so they could not understand one another (Genesis 11:7), it was the actual spoken words that were changed, so that one group became unintelli-



gible to another group, from a different tribe or race.

- 3 We might conjecture as to which original language was then spoken universally. Given the importance of names in the early chapters of Genesis (like Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth and Methuselah), it is not unreasonable to conclude that the original spoken language must have been Hebrew. This, after all, is the language through which God chose to reveal Himself to men in the Old Testament Scriptures and the prophet Zephaniah speaks of a time when the earth will once more be of one tongue:-

“For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord” (3:9).

Interestingly the previous verse contains every letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Could this be God’s way of telling us that the language Zephaniah speaks of will be Hebrew?

Human Rebellion

- 4 It was God’s intention that, after the flood, mankind should spread according to their tribes over all the earth, thus

multiplying and filling it: “God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’” (Genesis 9:1).

It was, however, the spirit of Nimrod that prevailed “Let us rebel”. They were going to build for themselves:

“a city and a tower ... lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4).

- ⑤ They had come to Shinar and here they meant to stay. This location was to become the hub, the centre of their world empire. Here the concept of empire, afterwards epitomised in the nation and city of Babylon, was first conceived.

Their ultimate aim was to build a world in which Man’s name and not God’s was glorified. It was, no doubt, to be a society – much like today’s – in which men and women could indulge their own whims and desires without interference or hindrance. They said:

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves” (11:4).

Thus it is clear that their rebellion was not confined to their political ambitions. It was also concerned with a system of false worship.

- ⑥ Pursuing this question of the religious significance of the tower, we must appreciate that these were clever and resourceful men. However foolish they might have



been in spiritual things they were wise in worldly things and not for a moment did they believe that their tower could literally and physically reach to heaven. It was not their intention to try and

reach beyond the clouds.

Several Hebrew scholars have suggested that the words “reach unto heaven” are an allusion to the signs of the zodiac and we know that one of the characteristics of later Babylonish worship was an obsession with the sun, moon and planets, not to mention the various constellations of the stars. Almost certainly the tower was to be a temple to their false gods – a kind of giant observatory, from which they could study and observe the movements of the heavenly bodies to which they gave their devotion. It was to them like a gateway to heaven.

God’s Purposeful Plan

- ⑦ In Shinar, the human mind conceived a plan so monstrous in its opposition to God, that if it had been allowed to continue, it must surely have resulted in the light of truth being extinguished in the earth.

But God’s purpose cannot be thwarted by the intentions of mere men, however powerful or important they think themselves to be. The action that God now takes is carefully calculated. Indeed, He uses the very language that they had used. Notice the contrast:

“They said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks...’” (11:3)

“And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city...’” (11:4)

“And the LORD said ... ‘Come, let us go down and there confuse their language...’” (11:6,7).

God takes up their language, the very words which express their determination to rebel, now to describe the manner in which He would confound their purpose.

- ⑧ It was so easy for Almighty God to stop humanity in its wayward tracks:

“‘Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (11:7-9).

One has only to think of the so-called “United Nations” with its battery of microphones and its multitude of translators, all

endeavouring to make the words of one delegate intelligible to others from different nations, to realise how effective God’s action was, and how devastating its effect upon mankind’s ambitions to found a universal empire, apart from God.

Babylon the Great

- ⑨ The theme of Babylon as the great enemy of God runs throughout the pages of the Bible. At times the nation of Babylon (ancient Iraq) appears as the enemy of the much smaller nation of Israel. Later the name becomes expressive once again as a description of vaunting human ambition – mankind once again intent upon going its own way, regardless of God.

So, when the purpose of God is finally consummated in the earth, it comes as no surprise to Bible readers that the cry that goes forth – which describes the collapse of all human ambitions, and the triumph of God’s purpose – is: *“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen” (Revelation 18:2).*

Dudley Fifiield

“Babylon is Fallen”

“The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble...” (Revelation 18:9-12)

The Koran and the Bible

There are well over 1000 million people in the world today who claim to be Muslims.

The Koran is their official text book, and many of them can recite large portions of it from memory. For them, it is the equivalent of the Bible in the life of a Christian – the source of all truth.

Christians believe that the Bible was a continuous revelation from God, in the case of the Old Testament to His people the Jews – via Moses and the prophets – and, in respect of the New Testament, through the apostles. Although this library of different books has around 40 writers, whose writings were spaced over about 1500 years, they believe it has one author – God Himself. As the Apostle Peter says:

“Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Where From?

What was the origin of the Koran, the book that is so precious to a Muslim? The answer is that it was all the work of one man. Muhammad was born in Mecca, a city of Arabia, in 570 A.D. His family were merchants. He was an orphan, brought up by his uncle. He was not a scholar by training, and he probably could not read or write except for simple business documents. At the age of forty he retreated to a cave

outside the city for meditation, and there he claims the angel Gabriel came to him and spoke to him the words of the Koran. These visitations continued until his death, 23 years later.

He did not write them down at the time, but committed them to memory. It was his companions who turned the accumulated sayings into written form, and the final version of the book was compiled by his son-in-law, a few years after his death. Muhammad was persecuted by the people of Mecca, and had to flee for his life to Medina (the date when this happened marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar).

During the last years of his life, he became a warrior. He united different Arab tribes, and led his followers back to Mecca to destroy the many gods the Arabs

worshipped there, replacing their polytheism with the worship of one God, Allah. He made some extravagant claims – for example that he once travelled to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and from there ascended to heaven, where he talked to Abraham, Moses and Jesus before returning home – all in one night.

After his death his followers spread his teaching all over the Middle East, and today Muslims can be found in most countries of the world. They regard Muhammad as a prophet, like Moses and Jeremiah, but they consider him the greatest prophet of them all.



The Bible is a collection of 66 separate books, all inspired by God

Muslims and the Bible

Muslims claim that the Koran replaces all the earlier writings of the Bible, which they consider unreliable. They say the Jews and the Christians modified God's words to suit their own beliefs, and only the Koran contains the truth. Here is a quotation from Quranexplorer.com, a Muslim website – "Prophet Muhammad was the final Messenger of Allah to humanity, and therefore the Qur'an is the last Message which Allah has sent to us. Its predecessors such as the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels have all been superseded."

This is a sweeping statement, which demands a reasoned response. Let us address first of all the idea that the Jews and Christians interfered with the texts of the original writers' words to support their own beliefs. In the case of the Old Testament, copies of all the books except Esther were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls cache deposited in the cave at Qumran around 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Some of these were 200 years old when they were hidden, which fixes the texts to a time before Christianity got going.

We also have the Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament books into Greek which dates to 250 B.C., and there is no serious difference between the Greek and the Hebrew texts in their meanings. So it was not possible for Christians to have modified the Hebrew Scriptures: the facts show that they did not.

Gospel Truth

What about the Gospels? Again, we have fragments of the New Testament

gospels which have been dated to the end of the first century. John's gospel was the last to be written, and there is a fragment of chapter 18 of the Gospel of John in the Rylands Library, Manchester, U.K., which dates to within a few years of John's death.

And there are quotations from all the New Testament books in the writings of the early leaders of the Christian church, who lived in the second and third centuries, men such as Irenaeus. These do not differ significantly from the versions that we have in our New Testament, so there was no time for drastic revisions of the original writings. What has come down to us is what was first revealed and recorded.

New Revelation?

Should we expect a further revelation? The Muslims say Muhammad conveyed a final revelation from God, some 600 years after the time of Jesus. If the revelation was genuine, why was there such a long gap? At the end of the New Testament we find this statement:

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18,19).

And the Apostle Paul was equally emphatic when he said this to the Galatians:



The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls showed how God had carefully preserved the Bible message

"If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9).

That does not leave much room for additions to, or changes in, the message. Yet the Koran contains teachings that directly contradict the teaching of the Bible. This is very important in deciding how we should view it.

Contradictions?

In Old Testament times there were many men who claimed to be prophets of the Lord, but who were found to be impostors. Moses gave God's people a test they could apply:

"When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:22).

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel all made predictions which came true – for example, that the Babylonian empire would only last 70 years, because Cyrus king of Persia would conquer it. Significantly, Muhammad made no such prophecies about the future. Isaiah also gives us a rule for distinguishing the true from the false:

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

In other words, if the new prophet's teaching contradicts the previous writ-

ings, he is not speaking from God, says the prophet Isaiah.

Put to the Test

□ Son of God?

The Koran teaches that Jesus was not the Son of God, a doctrine which is at the heart of Christianity. "Never did Allah take to himself a son" (Surah 19), it says. "Far be it from his glory that he should have a son" (Surah 3). But right back in

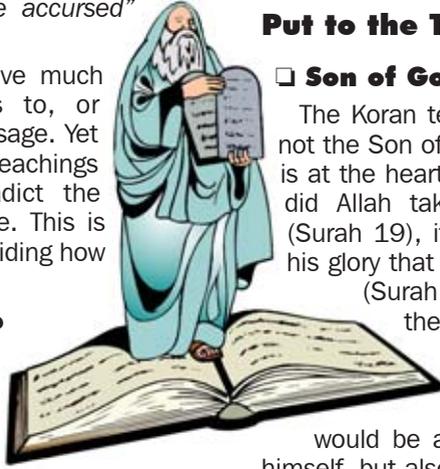
the time of King David, 1000 BC, the prophet Nathan spoke of the coming of Jesus, who

would be a descendant of David himself, but also the Son of God:

"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son" (2 Samuel 7:12-14).

□ Did Jesus Die?

The Koran teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross: he only seemed to die. It says: "they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so" (Surah 4). Yet the sacrifices of the Old Testament for thousands of years had foretold the death of Jesus as the Lamb of God, who, in the words of John the Baptist *"takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). What is the point of a sacrificial Lamb who did not die? The piercing of his body by the cruel Roman nails was clearly predicted in Psalm 22:16 and Zechariah 12:10, centuries before it happened, and long before anyone could have tampered with the text.



❑ **Many Wives?**

The Koran also rewards faithful believers with many wives: “They shall wear of fine and thick silk, sitting face to face; Thus shall it be, and we will wed them with Houris pure, beautiful ones” (Surah 44). But the Bible teaches that in the resurrection from the dead, believers neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matthew 22:30)

❑ **Prophet or Son?**

The Koran denies the central role of Jesus as Son of God and Saviour. It relegates him to the level of one of many prophets, whereas the New Testament portrays him as the centre of God’s purpose:

“God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by

himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The Bible does not teach the Trinity, which the Muslims rightly reject. But it elevates Jesus, not Muhammad, to the right hand of God.

Conclusion

Sadly, then, we must conclude that Muhammad was not inspired. We do not think that it rings true that the angel Gabriel spoke words which Muhammad memorised perfectly for years. Nor do we accept the details of his overnight journey to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven. He left no prophecies to prove his authenticity. And the Koran does not match up with the earlier writings of the Bible, which themselves are demonstrably free from serious errors. It may have wise and pious sayings, but it does not compare with the Bible, which is the true Word of God.

David M Pearce

God’s Plan

**This world can offer nothing, compared to God’s great plan,
The Blessings in His Kingdom, God has prepared for man.
This world with all its greediness, its evil and its strife,
Can in the end give only death; but God has offered Life.**

**We have to choose which path we want to walk in, every day:
The broad way to destruction, or God’s Word – which shows His Way;
So may we listen to our God, and speak to Him in prayer,
And when His Kingdom comes on earth, by grace we will be there.**

Colleen Simons

King of the Jews

Jesus had come preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, teaching mainly through parables.

His vivid stories would stay in the memory, but they always had a message. Sometimes this needed to be searched out by those who heard the parables, but Jesus explained several of the more important parables to show what he hoped his hearers would do.

His Destiny

It was not surprising that Jesus focussed his teaching on the coming Kingdom. That was why he was born, and that was what they said of him when he died.

Luke records the message of the angel to his mother, Mary, before he was born.

“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 forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32,33).

The angel was spelling out to Mary that her son was to be the king who would reign over the kingdom of Israel – the kingdom that had once existed on earth, which he would re-establish. When that happened, this time the kingdom would extend to the whole earth which would then become the kingdom of God, ruled over by the Lord Jesus.

In his gospel, Matthew tells us about the coming of the wise men from the east just after Jesus’ birth.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him’” (Matthew 2:1-2).

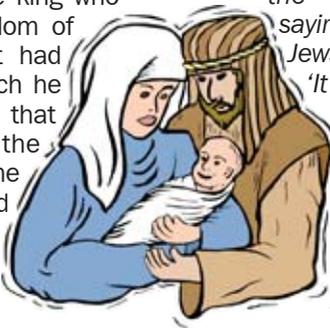
We are not told how those wise men came to understand the significance of the star, but the message was sufficiently clear for them to travel a vast distance to worship the baby who was born to be “King of the Jews”. Some think they may have been reading some of the ancient Jewish writings, now part of our Old Testament, such as the prophecy of Daniel.

Born to be King

It was at the end of his earthly life that the kingship of Jesus really became an issue, at his trial before Pontius Pilate. It was the accusation about which Pilate interrogated the prisoner:

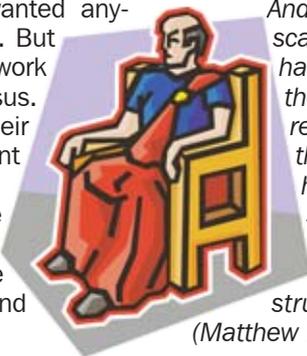
“Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked him, saying, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ So Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you say’” (Matthew 27:11)

This was the issue which the Jewish rulers found fault with, and they felt they could make sufficient of his claim to get rid of him. It was a



travesty really; for they wanted anything but Roman overlords. But they were prepared to work with them to get rid of Jesus. They wanted a king of their own, but they did not want him.

In his account of the gospel, the apostle John records a little more of the interplay between Pilate and Jesus.



And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And they bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Then they spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head"

(Matthew 27:27-30).

"Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ... Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to him, 'Are you a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice'" (John 18:33,36-37).

"Not of this world"

Quite clearly Pilate was having difficulty with the concept that Jesus was already the king of the Jews, although he was not ruling over his nation, and that he was content that this should be so. Jesus himself fully understood that whilst he was God's appointed king of the Jews, he would not reign until after his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension, and his return to the earth.

As the trial of Jesus progressed, his accusers used his claim of kingship as a way to mock him:

"The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around him.

It was a barbarous way to treat a man who had taught only gentle ways to those who followed him. The trial ended and the crucifixion followed. Jesus had become too weak to carry his cross to Golgotha, and so it had been carried there for him by Simon of Cyrene. At Golgotha they crucified him. It was normal to write over the criminal the offence for which he was crucified, but for Jesus they could write nothing. He was the sinless Son of God. To overcome this difficulty:

"Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

The gospels give slightly different accounts of what was written, for it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and the text may have been slightly different in each language.

"King of the Jews"

The Jewish authorities were incensed at what Pilate wrote. They said he should not have written that Jesus was the King of the Jews, but that he said he was King of the Jews. For once, Pilate stood firm. Although normally a weak man, who could be manipulated by the Jewish authorities to achieve their own ends, on this occasion he refused to budge. "What I have written

I have written" was all that he would say.



So Jesus died with the clear declaration alongside him – in Hebrew, Latin and Greek – that he was the King of the Jews. But even then the refusal to accept this was not over. Hanging on the cross, with his life ebbing away, the crowds mocked him.

"The chief priests, also mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him

deliver him now if he will have him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:41-43).

It was the final rejection of Jesus by some of the crowd. Shortly after, the Lord Jesus breathed his last, and was taken down and laid in the tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea.

For those who had followed him there was a period of desperate hopelessness. All their hopes were shattered. Some days later, one follower would tell a stranger,

"We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

They had wanted him as their king, and now he was gone, killed by the alliance between Jewish rulers and the Roman authorities. Yet it was not the end, for three days later the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead.

Mark Sheppard

Faith Comes by Hearing

There are some ways to overcome
The weakness of the flesh,
That 'law of Sin', that 'enmity',
Which does the mind enmesh.

But first we have to realise
The law of Sin is there,
And that it is so powerful
It sets out to ensnare.

It needs the entrance of God's Word
To shed on us the Light
Of understanding and of truth,
Against Sin's law to fight.



We pray for wisdom from above
To give us hearing ears,
For happy is the faithful one
Who God's wise counsel hears.

Gwen Marley

God Knows Best

I get another date for the operation. It's about a week after the previous date when I was sent home from the hospital because of the virus and the staffing problems.

I decide to write this account of my experiences. I am becoming so conscious of all the people involved in getting me well again.

Can you trust them?



How difficult it must be to provide a hospital, a fully trained, suitably experienced team of nurses, a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a theatre nurse, hospital managers, medical secretaries – all of whom have to deal with a group of people who certainly are not at their best and are clearly anxious about their condition.

Sometimes I doubt their competence. They weren't that well organised the first time round when I was sent home again because of difficulties with the virus. How well will they cope with the operation and my aftercare? I'm reminded of the warning given by the Psalmist:

"Don't put your trust in human leaders, no human being can save you" (Psalm 146:3 TEV).

However, I feel very privileged to have all these people working on my behalf and I hope they will be able to put me right again. What is really interesting is that I have very few symptoms and no pain associated with what I have. It is the doctors who have diagnosed the problem and told me what it means and ultimately what has to be done. So we pray again.

It may seem obvious to you what I should be asking God to do, but I am also conscious of others who are even more in need of help than I. The more you think about it, the longer the list grows every day. There are so many people who are afflicted, oppressed and in mourning. And people like the hospital team also need our prayers, for they often have to exercise their skills in very trying circumstances.

There are so many problems around nowadays that if we try to pray about them all we can feel overwhelmed and we seem to be spreading our prayers so thinly. That highlights the wisdom of the Saviour's guidance when he taught his disciples to pray:

"Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy Name,

Thy kingdom come,

*Thy will be done on earth as
it is in heaven ..."*

Something going wrong?

My illness is a bit like sin. Most of the time we don't acknowledge what is happening inside us; we just go on pleasing ourselves. Then, one day, we wake up to the fact that something is not quite right. It might just be old age creeping up on us; a bad tooth; stiff limbs after a bit of rigorous exercise; or

sometimes it's more serious. But our physical condition is not the only problem we have to face. We have to face the reality of human corruption and eventual death because of a much deeper malady. There's something profoundly wrong with the human frame and here is the divine prognosis:

"As through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Adam's disobedience was the starting point for all of us who have chosen to follow his bad example. All sin and come short of what God asks of us (Romans 3:23). But it is only when something makes us face up to our condition that we even begin to worry about it – just as it was with my diagnosis. I felt all right, until the problem was pointed out to me, and not just the problem but the solution too. God does the same in His Word; for the gospel is about salvation from sin.

While the Bible tells us to face up to the reality of sin, it also tells us that the whole organisation of heaven is available to us to bring about our salvation. Remember that very famous Bible sentence draped over the stands at the last football World Cup?

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

He Died for Us

Jesus suffered pain, and sorrow, just as we might, with some illness or disease we would rather avoid. Then he died on the cross – died just as we have to. The difference was that he died in an agonising way, being taunted and evidently rejected by those he had come to save. For him

death was a merciful release after the agonies of the cross.

But he rose on the third day – came back to life again, this time to live forever! Now he acts as a mediator for us – showing us God's love and bringing us God's forgiveness. Just as I need all those people at the hospital to make me well again, He is there to help us through all the difficult circumstances of life. The difference is that He is totally effective. Heaven's organisation will never let us down. God never fails with anything. There is never any doubt about whether we can be healed (forgiven); and there is no doubt about His promise of everlasting life.

God Knows Best

Trust God, for He always knows what He is doing! I hope that by the time you read this the surgery will all have been successful and that ultimately I will be restored to full vigour. But there is always a chance that my date with the surgeon could mark the end of my life. I have to face that reality. It makes a huge difference, however, to know that my life is in God's hands. So as I come to the end of this diary extract, my prayer has to be, as for Jesus just before he went to his death: *"Thy will be done"*.

And then, of course, my prayers are for my family and for all my brothers and sisters in Christ, that they in their turn might learn to follow Jesus in the way that I have done and hopefully better. Should I survive the operation, when it comes, clearly the Lord has something that I need to learn. And there is still a service that I can offer – if it is only to complete this diary, as a witness of what has happened.

David Nightingale

Paul in Jerusalem

At the end of his third Missionary Journey, the apostle Paul has at last reached Jerusalem, coming with a company of Gentile Christians from Europe and Asia, who travelled with Paul in the hope that perfect unity would prevail between Jew and Gentile believers. But Christian prophets had foretold that there was trouble ahead for Paul, as

John Hellawell now explains.

Meeting the Jewish Elders

In Jerusalem Paul would have met James (the Lord's brother; see Acts 12:17 and 15:13) and the Christian Elders (probably not the Twelve), to whom he made a detailed report of his ministry amongst the Gentiles. One must assume that this account was taken up at the point where the former report of the First Missionary Journey (Acts 14:27) left off.

This report resulted in praise to God, not only for the effective work of the Gospel amongst the Gentiles but also with some relief that the rumours about Paul's preaching were false. The Judean disciples, in return, declared how many thousands (lit. myriads) of Jewish converts there were in Jerusalem, adding:

"... and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:20,21).

These converts were zealous for the Law much in the way that Paul con-

fessed that he had previously been "extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14). They also walked according to "the customs", those teachings received by tradition (cf. Acts 6:14).

These attributes would cause no difficulties for Paul, for he accepted that Jews could continue to be Jewish so long as they did not rely for their salvation on the works of the Law rather than faith in Christ. To claim that Paul had told Jews not to circumcise their sons was false: his circumcising of Timothy demonstrated this. His

view was that there was no merit in circumcision itself and certainly none in insisting that Gentiles observed the rite in order to be acceptable (see Galatians 5:11).

Reassurance

Now that Paul had arrived in Jerusalem the Jewish converts – who were under the mistaken impression that he was denigrating the Law – would need to be reassured. So the elders continued:

"What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come" (Acts 21:22).

James and the Elders now proposed



After all his journeying, Paul had reached Jerusalem – at last!

a course of action to demonstrate the error of the Jewish gossip regarding Paul. There were four men under a vow. This was probably a temporary Nazirite vow (see Acts 18:18) based on Numbers chapter 6. The Mishna (the Oral Law handed down by tradition and then written down and edited around 200 AD) states “A Nazirite vow that is vowed without a fixed duration is binding for thirty days” (Nazir.vi.3). Paul was to take these men, join in their purification rites and pay the expenses involved in order that they could complete their vow and have their heads shaved. Then everyone would know of Paul’s compliance with the Law and the false reports would be stopped.

The Law and Christians

Some may think it strange that Paul was prepared to acquiesce in this matter for during his ministry and in his letters had he not demonstrated that the Law was completed and fulfilled in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ?

In reality, what Paul championed was the importance of faith, as opposed to mere religious observance of rules. This was a continuation of the work of the Lord Jesus in exposing the errors of the religious hierarchy who paid lip-service to the Law but found ways to avoid its requirements whenever these were inconvenient. These men appeared righteous in their public observances but, in reality, were no better than the sinners they despised.

Paul taught that reliance on outward observance of rituals and customs was ineffective in becoming righteous. Men and women needed

to show faith in the promises of God centred in His Son and, like Abraham, their faith would be accounted to them for righteousness (see Galatians 3:6 and Romans 4:20-24).

To understand the apparent paradox here in Acts 21: 23,24 we need to consider how Paul understood the purpose of the Law. In one of his earliest letters to the Galatian converts, he wrote:

“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:23,24).

The incorporation of Gentiles into God’s redemptive plan was explained in his letter to the Ephesians:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:13-16).

By writing about the “middle wall of separation” Paul was referring to the barrier in the Court of the Gentiles of the Temple in Jerusalem that prevented Gentiles from approaching any further into the sacred



Inscription in Jerusalem forbidding Gentiles to go any further on pain of death: “Trespassers will be executed!”

precincts on pain of death. (We shall see later that this wall was the cause of Paul's arrest in the Temple.)

To the believers in Rome he explained that: *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).*

The Law was God-given

Yet there was nothing wrong with the Law, for it was God-given. As Paul was to write to the Romans:

"The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practise; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good" (Romans 7:12-16).

The Law was given to ensure that certain principles were understood by God's people. These included an appreciation of the character of God: His holiness and righteousness. God also demonstrated His justice in the Law, for example by legislating for redress for those who had been wronged. There was also His mercy and loving-kindness towards those who tried to serve Him faithfully (Exodus 34:6).

Many of the precepts of the Law, such as not committing theft, murder or adultery are still binding on Christians and many of the other commandments enhance the quality of life of those who observe them. But they are not the means to salvation.

The only 'problem' with the Law was that it highlighted the problem of sin, as indicated in the quotation from Romans 7:13 above. The Law demonstrated human fallibility and inability to comply with its requirements. By faith in Christ, men and women receive God's grace, that is, undeserved favour from God:

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Paul's Compliance

Making it clear that the Law was not to be regarded as binding upon Gentiles (Acts 21:25), the elders now asked Paul to show that he was still keeping the requirements of the Law. In due course it would be fully explained to the Jews that they need not keep the Law: indeed they would be unable to do so a few years later when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed. But, for the moment, Christian Jews were still keeping its requirements.

So the next day Paul took the specified men into the Temple and fulfilled the purification rites, giving notice of the date when these would be completed and the offerings made for each one. These would consist of one he-lamb, one ewe-lamb, one ram and the accompanying meal and drink offerings (Numbers 6:14ff). Seven days had to elapse before a Nazirite who had contracted defilement could be purified. He shaved his head on the seventh day and brought his offering on the eighth day.

So far, so good, but things were about to take an unexpected turn.

John Hellowell

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