

**The
End of
the
World is
Near**



The Christadelphians

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Published by The Christadelphians, Freepost, MID 30912, Birmingham, B27 6BR

The End of the World

If you saw someone walking down the road carrying a placard which said *"The End of the World is Near"* how would you react?

With pity, anger, irritation, or interest? If you knew the person in question and perhaps worked alongside him or her, would you try to find out why he or she felt strongly enough about it to go public? Or would you forget what you had seen and treat the matter as if it had never happened?

I once worked in the same building as an animal-rights protestor and would often pass her in the corridor – she was immediately recognisable because she had pink hair. But I never once asked her about her views; I thought it best not to, and I just took it for granted that she was against blood-sports and would adopt a pro-animal position on all sorts of issues. That's what other people had told me and I reckoned that it's sometimes best to keep your views to yourself. You know what they say: "Never discuss religion or politics if you want to keep your friends".

Protestors

Many people are concerned about the state of the world and for very good reasons. So the person you saw with the placard might have been demonstrating for lots of different reasons. Perhaps the placard was warning about:

- ▶▶▶ The world economy that threatens our financial stability and will leave the developing world in massive debt and lots of people out of work.
- ▶▶▶ Maybe it was about rising levels of crime that often follow mass unemployment, as people steal to survive or to feed their drug addiction.
- ▶▶▶ It could have been about climate change that scientists warn might result in rising sea-levels and a huge loss of life.
- ▶▶▶ It might have been about the 'war on terror' which is still threatening to destabilise Western society.
- ▶▶▶ What about the threatened loss of civil liberties?
- ▶▶▶ Or was it about nuclear power?

Let's face it, there are plenty of things that people protest about and all those things could end society as we know it, change our standard of living radically and leave our children or

grandchildren with a terrible legacy, even if this generation manages to survive somehow.

Things are not as stable and secure as we might have hoped they would be in a technically advanced society. Indeed technology is part of the problem.

Nowadays you can see things happening



in faraway places almost instantaneously, encouraging terrorists to seek maximum publicity for their cause. People can communicate with ease and efficiency, right across the globe. We have all become computer-dependent, so if those systems go down, we all feel the effects. Lose electricity for any length of time and we are all in a mess: the freezer begins to thaw, the phone no longer works, our heating and cooking fails, and we are left to worry about life, in the dark.



passage we looked at earlier.

“Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow

will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:31-34).

Forward looking

Not everybody wants to worry about tomorrow, of course. Even the Bible says that we should concentrate upon today and let tomorrow take care of itself:

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34).

There’s a great deal of truth in that, as you would expect. Many people put off things they should have done today until some other time and then never get around to it, which is why they put the matter off in the first place. We’re all going to see the dentist, have a medical check-up, fix the roof, turn the compost, and ring up an old friend – when we get around to it. But some things you have to do today and we all know that. There are things you just can’t put off, for if you do you’ll live to regret it. First things have sometimes got to be put first.

In fact, that’s exactly what the Bible says about today and tomorrow in that

Peace of Mind

Jesus was speaking to his followers at the time – men and women who had decided that he had something vital to teach them. Many had abandoned all to follow him and in return he taught them how to live in a way that would give them peace of mind and peace with God. Those two go together, like peaches and cream or love and marriage.

If you can get your life right with God and recognise that He both knows and controls what the future will bring, it is bound to give you peace of mind. If the God who made the universe is on your side, who can possibly triumph over you? The Bible is crammed full of such comforting thoughts because it reasons things through in such a logical way.

The question is, do you apply the same logic in the way you live, so that if the end of the world really is near you would be ready for whatever comes next?

New Heavens and Earth?

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah once contrasted God's accomplishments with all that mankind has ever achieved.

It was not a flattering comparison for he said that, compared with Almighty God, all nations are like the small dust on the scales (Isaiah 40:15) – like a bit of flour left on the scales after you've made a cake!

The apostle Paul looked at God's immense power and drew a more comforting conclusion. His point was that when you think about God's power you realise that nothing can withstand it and nobody can challenge it:

"I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39).

First things First

But before you can take advantage of the wonderful care that God takes of His children, you have to become a member of His family. And before you decide to live a day at a time, with no fear about what tomorrow might bring, you have to do what Jesus told his fol-

lowers to do. It's a matter of putting first things first or, as Jesus said:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

Once you've done that, there is nothing else to worry about. Leave the rest to God, who will sort everything out in His time.

Will the world ever end?

The chances are that if you plucked up the courage to ask your colleague about the protest march he was on – as I never did about the animal-rights activities – you would find out that he had religious views of one sort or another.

In my time I have walked up and down roads with a placard that said much the same thing, so that people could do something about it – come to a talk,

an exhibition, or read some literature, like this booklet. It's the sort of thing you do if you feel that people need to think seriously about the way the world is going, and you know what the eventual end will be.

Not that the world itself is due to end, whatever scientists may predict. There is a set of data that far surpasses human calculation or human prediction. The God of the Universe has revealed His purpose and, as Maker and Creator, He should know if anyone does. So what does He say?



Compared with Almighty God, all nations are like a bit of flour left on the scales after you've made a cake

Here is a selection of encouraging passages that tell us about a better future for the earth and for all those inhabitants of the earth who make it through the difficult days we are now experiencing. They are part of a prophetic vision from just one Old Testament prophet – Isaiah – but you can find similar word pictures in many of the prophetic writings:

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain (Jerusalem), for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9);

The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (35:10);

Thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: 'I am the LORD, and there is no other' (45:18);

'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying ... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain (Jerusalem),' says the LORD (65:17-25).

God intends to transform society by making the world a place where people know God and worship Him. It follows that the earth will then be at peace – with God and between men and women. Those whom God has ransomed (or redeemed) will inhabit a world of “*everlasting joy*” (do you fancy that?). “*Joy and gladness*” will be the order of the day – every day.

The earth will be inhabited by people who obey God because they want to, not because they are forced to. Old habits and bad experiences will be forgotten and a new order of things will exist. Mankind will live in harmony with the created earth: they will neither exploit it nor savage it and even animals will then be at peace with one another. That would have pleased my pink-haired work colleague, if I had told her about it.

New Heavens and Earth

Did you notice that the prophet Isaiah described that new society as: “*new heavens and a new earth*” (65:17), which indicates that the present arrangement of things will come to an end. A great thing about the Bible is that one inspired writer throws light on the teachings of another, because the Bible has only one originating author.

The Bible is the Word of God and He has inspired the various contributors, so it's His message to mankind, not their own thoughts, however worthy.

Much later on in time, writing in the New Testament, the apostle Peter picks up Isaiah's prophecy and adds some important details. He explains that God views human society in this way:

▀ The world that existed before Noah's flood;

- ▣ The state of affairs that now exists; and
- ▣ The new society – which he also calls a “new heavens and earth” – which will be established when God’s kingdom arrives.

This explains, if there was any doubt about it, that the expression we’re investigating does not mean a new planet, or a new universe. For whilst the flood in Noah’s day destroyed the society then existing, and changed the look of things in a radical way, it was the same planet that Noah and his family members eventually started to cultivate and repopulate.

God’s Rescue Plan

God has a long-term purpose with this earth and has made promises about it and its occupants which He can never break, for God never breaks His Word. You might remember that Jesus referred to that Bible teaching when teaching his disciples for, he said, *“Blessed are the meek, **for they shall inherit the earth**”* (Matthew 5:5).

The additional information the apostle Peter provides is that God is deliberately biding His time before intervening to bring our muddled and messed-up human society to an end. He is giving us all time to think things through and prepare ourselves, so that we can be part of that new opportunity, because not everybody will be privileged to share in the new world. This is what Peter says, as God’s spokesman:

“This they (unbelievers) wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept

in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:5-9).

Lessons from the Past

God has been waiting, says the apostle, to give us all a chance to think about what is happening and to repent of our faults and failures. He doesn’t want us to miss out: He wants us to accept the offer of salvation that is contained in the Bible. But notice the warning that is implicit in this offer. We must repent and turn to God if we want to be saved. If we don’t we could perish – a word which in the Bible means ‘to cease to exist’. But will there be a big take-up of this offer, or will it be largely ignored?

The apostle’s prediction is that most people will deliberately choose to ignore the lessons of history and take no notice of what happened at the time of Noah. So they will not repent nor prepare for the coming change: *“the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”*. Sadly that is what is indeed happening. Nowadays very few people accept that Noah’s flood was an actual event. And if they do think there might have been severe flooding in the past, they fail to see its relevance today, now that London has the Thames Barrier and other major cities have their flood defences!

Henry Ford once said that *“History is more or less bunk ... We want to live in the present”*. But President Dwight

D. Eisenhower made a more perceptive comment when he said: *“Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him”*.

Like Noah’s Day

The apostle Peter said that what happened long ago gives us a template for what will happen again and this was not the first time such a point had been made. No less a teacher than Jesus had made that comparison; but in making it he added an important ingredient. For Jesus explained what had gone wrong with the society that existed before the flood – the one that God destroyed. We know, from the contemporary Scriptural account, that it was extremely violent and wholly godless (you can read all about it in Genesis chapter 6). But Jesus identified some key characteristics and then added a powerful comparison:

“As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:37-39).

Did you notice the key point here in the critical observation made by Jesus? He knew the Scriptural account like no other, for he was remarkably well informed. He could have said that it was a time of utter violence: a time when people were extremely godless and wholly self-serving. That’s what the



Genesis account records: *“the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).*

What Jesus focuses on, however, is that everything was carrying on as usual, regardless of the preaching of Noah, and his extensive preparations. His contemporaries didn’t want to know, despite his best attempts to inform them and persuade them. They *“did not know”* because they didn’t want to know; nothing was to disturb their routine existence – eating and drinking, and their marriage celebrations – until it was too late.

We are told that Noah was a preacher. Who wouldn’t be, if you knew for sure that everything was about to end and that there was only one way out? We don’t know if he walked around with a placard saying *“The End of the World is Near”*, but we do know that nobody paid him any meaningful attention. For when the rain came and the floods rose, only Noah and seven members of his family survived the destruction – just eight in all. They were the survivors who started the next civilisation. But do you notice the powerful comparison Jesus makes with our day? He makes it twice:

*“As the days of Noah were, **so also will the coming of the Son of Man be ... so also will the coming of the Son of Man be** (Matthew 24:37,39).*

Jesus says that history is due to repeat itself. When his Second Coming is about to happen, very few people will pay it any attention. Most people will not want to know. How do you respond to that challenge?

Warning Signs!

Towards the end of his work on earth the Lord Jesus was asked by his disciples to give them some indication about the timing of his return from heaven.

They wanted to know how they would recognise the time of his Coming and the end of the age of human mismanagement and Jesus gave lots of pointers. He warned them to expect world events to deteriorate. Instead of getting better, things would get worse.

He spoke of wars, famines, earthquakes, epidemics, and the distress of nations. You can read the full account in Matthew chapter 24,

Mark 13 and Luke 21 and you will see that Jesus forecast everything going downhill towards destruction. At the very end, he said, there would be a time when we could expect to see:

“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”.

At that very time, he said:

“... they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:26,27).

That forecast is given in three separate gospel accounts, it’s that important. And Jesus went on to warn about the urgent action that would be needed by people living at that time.

Matthew records parables about:

- ▶ a house being broken into (which wouldn’t happen if the inhabitants were awake to the danger);
- ▶ virgins preparing for a wedding (who needed staying power if they were to be ready when the delayed bridal party arrived);
- ▶ a man who had to use his God-given talents to the full (and not bury them in the ground!); and
- ▶ a shepherd who would come to sort out the sheep from the goats (Matthew 24:42-25:46).



Reading the warning signs does you no good unless you do something about it. If you’re driving on a mountain road and you see a sign telling you that the corners are tricky and that rock falls can occur unexpectedly, it’s worth reading the signs. Then you have to adjust your driving to get around the corners carefully and you must be on the lookout for the unexpected. Otherwise it could be the end of your life and that of any passengers travelling with you.

World in Decline

Things started to go downhill in Judea from the time that Jesus was crucified. There were some really bad years for everyone, including famines and plagues. The Roman world was in turmoil, emperors followed one another in quick succession, sometimes rival candidates battled for

supremacy. The Jews and the city of Jerusalem were also in the thick of things as they foolishly seized an opportunity to declare their independence and then fought the Roman legions, with some initial success. But in the end the Romans triumphed and Jerusalem was captured and the Jews deported.

Within 40 years of the prophecy Jesus had given, Herod's temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and the city was almost completely razed to the ground. That short-term fulfilment proved that Jesus was a prophet, for it was always the test of a prophet that if his short-term predictions came true then you could rely upon his long-term ones absolutely.

But no-one would have reckoned that nearly 2000 years later we would still be awaiting the Second Coming of Jesus. That's the nature of the God we worship: He wants to give everyone a chance to repent and respond to the warnings given in His Word and by His Son.

Out of Control

Meanwhile things continue to slip away from our control.

- ▶▶▶ Conventional warfare has been replaced by insurgency and suicide bombing, which makes anywhere and everywhere dangerous.
- ▶▶▶ Fanatics have taken to the airways, which makes air-travel much less safe than hitherto and airport security a continuing hassle.



- ▶▶▶ Crime has become so commonplace that many of us will have had to cancel our credit cards and have them reissued. (I once bought some music over the Internet and had my credit card company ring me to ask if I was really gambling in Las Vegas over the net. I was not, so they immediately cancelled the card.)

- ▶▶▶ Weather patterns are now so variable that you never know what to expect – hot summers, wet summers or cold summers – and it's the same all over the world.

- ▶▶▶ Earthquakes continue to strike unexpectedly – in Thailand, China, Russia, Turkey, Italy and Haiti.

News correspondents find themselves scurrying all over the world to keep pace with the next disaster. And if those things are not bad enough, then human tragedies abound in peoples' personal lives.

- ▶▶▶ A man about to lose everything decides to kill his family and himself and burn down everything he had previously enjoyed.

- ▶▶▶ Innocent children are abducted, abused, murdered or scarred for life. A boy returning from a football match is shot by another youth who is cycling by.

- ▶▶▶ A man goes out to a nearby shop and never returns, having been killed in the street for no apparent reason.

- ▶▶▶ A young man goes to buy a lottery ticket and is murdered in the shop.

- ▶▶▶ A student walks into his school and guns down teachers and pupils before shooting himself.

These are the horror stories we hear about or read about every day and we just know that there are more of them in the pipeline. 'News' has come to mean 'bad news' and there is a lot of it about. But this should come as no surprise to Bible readers. We've seen already that Jesus and his apostles forecast that the world would decline; that things would go downhill.

The apostle Paul added a lot of further information in one of his last letters, writing about the collapse of relationships in society, and between families. Reading his forecast (in 2 Timothy 3:1-9) is like browsing through a Sunday newspaper. It's that up to date. For he wasn't left to himself to guess how things might work out 2000 years later; he was an inspired apostle. This warning was given specifically so that we can see what's happening while there is still time to do something about it.

World Away from God

You could be thinking that things have always been this bad, but we just haven't been aware of what was happening. People sometimes say: "It's no worse than it has always been, it's just that we hear more about it".

Of course, communication has improved, not always for the better. Now we hear about "copycat" actions, where people learn about some atrocity committed far away and then do it themselves.



All these things are happening in a society which has abandoned God and no longer accepts moral restraints. People want to do what they want to do; they want to set their own rules and not be subject to anyone or anything else. But there is one key indicator that tells us without doubt that the Second Coming of Jesus is now very near.

The Bible is a Jewish book, mainly written by Jews and centred around events that happened in the land of Israel or with Jewish people who lived elsewhere. God chose to communicate His message through this people. He could have chosen any nation, and He chose the Jews.

They were to be the people through whom all nations of the world would learn about God and be blessed accordingly, but it didn't always work out like that. Instead of getting other nations to copy them, they copied the worship and gods of other nations, with disastrous consequences. Sometimes they were overrun by their enemies; sometimes they were exiled; eventually they were all dispersed and removed from their land. The key promise, however, was that they would return. And now that has happened.

Make no mistake about it: this is a key development in the purpose of God and one you should take very careful note of. There are few more significant events in world history.

Israel – A Nation Reborn

About the time the writing of the Bible was completed, the Jews and their land had been separated. Just as the prophets of God had warned, they were scattered throughout the nations.

That's why you'll find Abrahams, Isaacs and Jacobs in most telephone directories – they are descendants of people who once lived in the land of Israel. For nearly 2000 years the Jewish people, who remained distinct and different wherever they lived, had no land they could call "home". But that was about to change. For the very prophets who had predicted their dispersion also foretold their regathering, and there was more to it than that.

The prophets said that the scattered Jewish people would return to their land so that their long-awaited Messiah could come to rescue them and to save the world. That was something faithful Jews have been awaiting for generations – a Messiah or Saviour who would come to deliver them.

But he has to come to Israel at a time when there are Jews in Jerusalem if the prophecies are to be properly fulfilled. The trouble was that for over 1900 years there was no Jewish nation to save and there were hardly any Jews living in or near Jerusalem. No Jewish nation – no Messiah!

All Change!

Everything changed in 1947 when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine and to create Jewish and Arab states. In May 1948 Israel was declared an independent state. David ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister,

referred to the circumstances that had led up to the decision of the United Nations:



- ▶ **The Land of Israel, he said, was the birthplace of the Jewish people.** Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.
- ▶ **Their history of dispersion,** though, he said, they never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration of their political freedom.
- ▶ **Their attempts to resettle,** the support they had already received, and now their acceptance by the United Nations among the nations of the world.
- ▶ **The catastrophe which had recently befallen them** – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe – which clearly demonstrated the urgency of solving the problem of Jewish homelessness; Then he made this statement:
 - ▶ **I hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel** to be known as the

State of Israel ... Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the 'Ingathering of the Exiles'; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Israel at War

Politicians or army commanders were not surprised when war broke out as a result of the UN vote to partition Palestine. The British, who had been mandated to look after the land from 1920 to 1948, could see it coming and they found it increasingly difficult to keep the peace between Jews and Arabs when they had a military force stationed there. When they withdrew the balloon went up.

Indeed, the reason why David ben Gurion declared independence in the Library in Tel Aviv was because Jerusalem was already a battle ground. The War of Independence had broken out and the infant state had to struggle to survive against Arab armies that were far better-equipped and trained. But survive they did and although wars or military engagements were fought in 1956, 1967, 1973, 1983, 1987 (first intifada), 2000 (second intifada), 2006 and 2008/9, Israel is still a viable, financially stable and powerful nation.

Would you care to predict what the position will be in ten years time? Will Israel still exist or will Iran have fired its threatened nuclear missiles and obliterated it? Will the Palestinians have a state of their own, which includes Jerusalem, or part of the city? Will a lasting peace have been established resulting in stability and prosperity for everyone? Who can say? Things change so unpredictably. So how about predicting what the situation will be in 500 years time? Humanly impossible!

Long-term predictions

Yet that is precisely what the prophets of God did over an even longer time span. Take the prophet Jeremiah, who was writing over 600 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. These are some of his inspired forecasts about the Jewish people:

"The LORD said, 'Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the imagination of their own heart' ... therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel ... I will scatter them also among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor their fathers have known. And I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them'" (Jeremiah 9:13-16).

This prophecy was fulfilled on two separate occasions: once a few years later and then over 650 years later, when the Jews were dispersed as a result of the Roman conquest of Jerusalem. But that was not all. Here's Jeremiah again:

"I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their

folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking”, says the LORD. “Behold, the days are coming”, says the LORD, “that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is his name by which he will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (23:3-6).

That’s just one of many of Jeremiah’s prophecies (check out 29:14; 31:8-10 and 32:37-41) which predict both a worldwide dispersion and a national regathering and Jeremiah is one of many prophets who make similar prophetic predictions. And if you thought 650 years foreknowledge was impressive, bear in mind that the regathering that God masterminded did not take place until about 2500 years after Jeremiah had made the prediction.

Coming King

You might have noticed, if you read Jeremiah’s words carefully that the Jewish people were to be regathered as part of God’s Plan for a better future, one that comes to its final stages. Look again, if you missed it:

- 1 God said He would regather His people out of “*all countries*” (Jews are to be found in almost all countries of the world);
- 2 He would bring them back to the land they once inhabited (they occupied the land now known as Israel for about 1400 years before they were evicted by the Romans);

- 3 Back in the land they would “*be fruitful and increase*” (Israel now has a Jewish population of 5.3 million people, more than any other country in the world);

There are other developments to come:

- 4 They will be given leaders who make sure they will dwell safely, happily and at peace;
- 5 They will be given a King who is descended from their former monarch, King David (who ruled about 1000 BC);
- 6 The king will bring righteous judgment “*in the earth*”
- 7 He will be called “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*”.

So everything that has happened so far is a lead-in to great things that are shortly to take place. For now that the Jewish people are back in their ancient land, as predicted, the scene is set for the final drama to be fulfilled. Surrounded by enemies, the prophets foretold that their long-awaited Messiah would then come to deliver them. The huge surprise that awaits them, however, is that the Messiah is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, who was rejected by their fathers nearly 2000 years ago.

Other Predictions

Look at other prophets to find out about wars in the last days and you will find detailed coverage of what is due to happen.

- ▶ **Zechariah** speaks about all nations attacking Jerusalem and being partially successful (see Zechariah chapter 14), but he also explains that Israel will find that their deliverer is the one who was wounded: “*Then they will look on me whom*

they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn” (12:10).

▶▶ **Joel** predicted a swarming multitude coming against Israel and being judged by God: *“I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of my people, my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up my land”* (Joel 3:2).

▶▶ **Ezekiel** gives a dramatic portrayal of Israel’s national resurrection – seeing a huge pile of bones coming together, bone to bone, and then watching the skeletons grow muscle, flesh and skin to become *“an exceedingly great army”* (37:10).



Then he describes how a confederacy of nations – whose ancient names are listed – comes against the mountains of Israel and is destroyed there (chapters 38 and 39). For the regathered people are rescued by their newly-arrived King: *“Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land ... and one king shall be king over*

them all ... Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (37:21-23).

Prophetic Jigsaw

Piece by piece you can fit these prophecies together if you want to see the entire picture, though nobody can be entirely sure about the sequence of events. Jesus once explained, when asked about the end of human rulership: *“Of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be”* (Matthew 24:36,37). And you will recall that when the flood came, in Noah’s day, hardly anybody was expecting it and it took the vast majority of people completely by surprise.

Be Prepared

The key thing to remember is that these pointers and indicators are given so that we can be ready for whatever comes, in the sure knowledge that the eventual outcome will be really good! God is to establish a Kingdom on earth, ruled over by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we want to share in the good times that are coming, we must do something about it now. There’s not a moment to lose. None of us is good enough to get into that coming Kingdom because of what we have done. We all need to be counted good enough by God because of what Jesus has done for us.

It was Jeremiah, in the prophecy we looked at earlier, who said that the Coming King will be called *“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”* (23:6). Only Jesus can make us right with God – and it is only the Bible that explains how we can get to be like that in God’s sight.

God's Offer to Mankind

The Bible says that God wants men and women to be in His Kingdom. He doesn't make it difficult, or put problems in our way. He wants us to be there.

The Kingdom of God is not an exclusive club for "Members Only". It is God's good pleasure to give people a new and better life on earth. When Jesus rules as King, the world will become a really wonderful place. Earlier we looked at Isaiah's prophetic portrait (on page 6) of a world free from sorrow and pain. He foretold a time when the earth will be filled with the glory of God, where people (and animals) live together in harmony.

The Bible is full of pictures like that –

- ▶ a King who reigns in righteousness;
- ▶ people who rejoice at all that God provides;
- ▶ the earth teeming with plenty;
- ▶ justice and righteousness abounding, and
- ▶ everyone being at peace.

Want it?

Ask yourself if those things really appeal to you. Do you want to live for ever in a world whose inhabitants are at peace with God? Do you want a life where violence, cheating, selfishness, ruthless competition and exploitation



The kingdom of God is like a man who found hidden treasure and then sold everything he had to make it his own

not only belong to the past, but are not even remembered? Or would you find that sort of life utterly boring and tedious, as some people might?

If you do want a better world and really want to live in harmony with the God who can make all this happen, you are already halfway there. For wanting it is the first step.

Whilst the Old Testament spends a lot of time explaining what the Kingdom of God will be like, the Lord Jesus concentrated much of his teaching on explaining what sort of people

we need to be if we are to inhabit God's kingdom. Many of his parables start with the words "*The kingdom of God is like...*" and go on to describe characteristics we need to develop, with God's help.

Jesus once told a parable about a man who stumbled across hidden treasure and proceeded to sell everything he had to get his hands on it. That's the sort of desire we need if we are to get our lives right with God: a willingness to put first things first. If we do that, God will see that we are provided for. Remember that Jesus said:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow..." (Matthew 6:33,34).

The Bible is given to help us become the sort of people God wants us to be. It is unlike any other book because it comes from God and contains His message of salvation. This is a message that can change your life if you want it to. Read it regularly, prayerfully and carefully, and you will find God's offer of salvation. The promises God has made can redirect your life and help you to seek the Kingdom of God as your first and foremost aim in life. This is what the apostle Peter once said:



In Athens, the apostle Paul challenged people to think seriously about their lives and then to act accordingly

“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3,4).

Let the Bible inform you and transform you by reading it every day and learning more about what God wants. It will give you sound reasons why you can believe what God has promised, for we are not asked to make ‘a leap in the dark’ but to reason out of the Scriptures and then live by faith or belief in God.

Turn around

God wants us to change direction and to stop living selfish and self-serving lives. We are asked to repent and that means turning our lives around to try

to please God in the things that we do. The Bible contains many accounts of people who did that, with God's help. One man was a persecutor of Christians but he became a committed follower; others were fishermen who abandoned everything to follow Jesus. There were prominent officials who lost their high office to

follow him, and people who lost their lives for his sake. These details are given to show us what God asks us to do in turning the direction of our lives towards Him. It's something we will never regret.

The apostle Paul once challenged men and women in Athens to face up to this reality in these words:

“God ... now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30,31).

A lot of Paul's listeners turned away, back to their previous beliefs – worshipping things instead of the living God. But some believed and ordered their lives accordingly. Even in the Greek city of Corinth, which was a notoriously immoral place at the time, we are told that: *“... many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).*

Sensible people in all ages have listened to what God has to say and have then acted accordingly. Fortunately there is still time to learn about God's purpose and to do something about it, but time is running out.

A New Start in Life

Not one of us is good enough to get into the Kingdom of God on our own merits. It's a sad fact, but there's no getting away from it.

By nature we are inclined to do our own thing and go our own way through life. Most people do just that and, sad to say, they will end up dead, with no way out of that unconscious state. It's a grim assessment, but one the Bible makes, so we can rely upon it. The Psalmist said this about people who don't want to know about God and His offer of salvation:

"He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man who is in honour, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:19,20).

The inspired writer had much better things to say about men and women like him, who have used their lives wisely and have accepted what God offers:

"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me" (49:15).

True Christian Hope

Some confusion exists about God's offer to mankind. Some people think the Bible promises life in heaven when this mortal existence is over; but it does not. However long you spend searching for it, no such promise exists in God's Word. But He does promise life after death for some people: for those who have listened to what He has to say, have taken the time to understand it, and who have made

those promises their life's aim. There is nothing more important in life than establishing and then developing a relationship with God, and that is now possible because of what Jesus has done on our behalf. He died so that we might live: and he rose from the dead to show us that the true Christian hope of life after death is resurrection from the dead.

That's precisely what the Bible promises: that, when he comes again, the Lord Jesus Christ will raise from the dead all those who are true members of the family of God and will grant them eternal life in the Kingdom that he will establish at his return. Believers who are still alive at his coming will not have to be raised from the dead, but their nature will still need to be changed – from mortality to immortality – and all of this is carefully explained in the New Testament. If you want to study the details, read 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Some people will be raised from the dead when Jesus comes and others will sleep forever in the dust of the ground. What makes the difference, and how do we get to be part of a people who are reborn and who will live with Jesus in the age to come?

A New Start

Once we understand and believe the gospel of salvation we have to make a new start in life: putting an end to our old way of living and starting life as a believer, trying to live according to Bible teaching. To mark the change that has begun to take place in our lives and to identify with the saving work of God in Christ, the Bible

explains that we must be baptized if we want to enter the Kingdom of God and start to live with Him, here and now. It was the Lord himself who said: *“unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3) and he went on to explain that this means that we must be born again *“of water and the Spirit”* (3:5).

Being born *“of water”* means that we must be baptised or immersed; and being born of *“the Spirit”* means that we must fully understand what we are doing and believe what God has promised, so that we begin to live *“in the Spirit”* (Galatians 5:25). And if we are to be reborn we must first die to self and selfish desires. For a follower of Christ has to make him the centre of their life’s ambition and the kingdom of God their chief aim in life. As Jesus said:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). By *“all these things”*, he meant all the things in life that people worry about. If we put God first, He will sort out those things for us and make sure we have what we need.

Burial and Resurrection

Just as Jesus was buried, baptism is a symbolic burial (if only for an instant), and it starts us off on a new life. As a simple act of obedience, being baptized shows that we really want to live with God, now and for evermore. It was Jesus who told his disciples:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15,16).

That is how we start to live in fellowship with God and with other believers, learning to live happily

together and worshipping together, so that we can praise God and get strength and help from one another. It was how all New Testament believers accepted the faith and became members of God’s family and that is still the only way to begin a new life with God and make a fresh start in life.

Making that decision can make all the difference. The first followers of Jesus were ordinary people, mostly working class, whose lives were transformed by their encounter with him. Before that, they had spent their time doing all the usual things in life – working, sleeping, eating and drinking. It was Jesus who gave their lives meaning and purpose and that same transformation can be ours if we choose to follow him. The apostle Paul had his life turned right around and his values were totally changed. He once urged rich people to remember the most important thing in life – God’s promise of eternal life – and look at the language he used:

*“As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy ... so that they may take hold of **the life which is life indeed**”* (1 Timothy 6:17-19 RSV).

That’s the fresh start that God is offering. When Jesus returns to earth, to rule as God’s appointed king, he will start a new phase in God’s purpose. God’s kingdom on earth will demonstrate what life is really meant to be about and we can begin that transformation now. It’s always a good time to make a new start: to learn to live with God, and to find out about *“the life which is life indeed”*.

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The Christadelphians

Published by the Christadelphians, P O Box 10817,
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