

The World God Created

Children ask the most innocent - and often the most difficult - questions. "Where did I come from?" "Where did the world come from?" "Where did God come from?" Parents, aunts and uncles, grannies and teachers are expected to know the answers: the first question may demand an explanation of delicate matters of human biology; the second question sends Dad hunting for encyclopaedia articles on astronomy; question number three is often left to Mum - as awkward religious matters are in many households.

Children's Questions

Most parents will do their best to find the answers. Some have been known to change the subject, or suggest a game, or a walk, or bedtime - just when son or daughter is displaying keen interest in the origin of the universe and the meaning of life. And that is a pity: our children deserve all the information we can give them. Of course, *they* may not use sophisticated phrases like 'the origin of the universe' but they do want to know where we come from and why we are here.

Actually it would be a healthier world if more adults asked such questions: perhaps it is because children are fobbed off with inadequate answers that they grow up not bothering any more with their searching enquiries. We should all be wiser if we bothered to search a little more deeply; and, having found some of the answers, if we then acted accordingly. This booklet has been produced as a challenge to those who may never have thought much about the world, how it got here, where it's going, and what we are doing on it. There are answers to these questions: clear, exciting, and demanding answers. Answers to your children's awkward questions? Yes, but (more important) answers to the questions grown-ups hardly ever dare to ask.



It is at this point, of course, that you - the reader - perhaps become suspicious. "We've heard all this before!" may be your response. Or perhaps, "These people are out to sell some book, or preach some fantastic philosophy: I must be on my guard!" Certainly you must be on your guard: the world is full of dangerous propaganda and new ideas. In fact, this is, as never before, a time for new ideas. Many today are disillusioned with the 'old' ideas: they have turned away from the Church which used to dominate men's lives;

they have even become disappointed with science which at one time seemed to offer the way to limitless power and energy and ease - yet has brought pollution and devastation.

Political ideas too are having to be reviewed: who would have dreamed that communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union would be rejected in favour of democracy and market economics? Yet the unthinkable has happened, and the terrorism in the United States that resulted in major disruption to the life of many people and that shook the world's economies shows an uncertain world that other unthinkable changes and revolutions, that can so easily upset our Western world, may be round the corner!

And it is obvious that many people are actively looking for change; they are seeking alternatives to all the failed philosophies of the past: in fact 'alternative' has become a catch-word in recent years, so that we have 'alternative' energy sources, 'alternative' technology, 'alternative' medicine. People are talking very seriously about a 'new age', an age free of what they consider to be the dogmas and straitjackets of the past.

This booklet is about a New Age - a New World - but the ideas we are going to put before you have been known for thousands of years. God's plan for the world is ageless; it is eternal, and it has never changed. It is recorded in the Bible. Man's ideas have failed; human systems have come and gone, but there is no need at all for some alternative 'new age' philosophy: the oldest plan for our planet is still the best. Please read on!

The Bible Has the Answers



The trouble is that, if we mention the Bible, many readers will 'switch off'. What is it about the Bible that makes people switch off? Agreed it's a thick book, on thin paper, in small print, most editions are all in black and often in old-fashioned language.

But go into any library, look particularly in the technical sections, and most books will appear difficult to understand: they too are in small print; to the non-specialist they may look dreary. Yet to the person whose subject it is, these are the books he loves, books that have taught him his trade, fired his imagination, got him on his career ladder.

The Bible can have the same effect. Daunting? Dreary? Perhaps to those who haven't read it. Exciting? Fulfilling? Yes, to the many who have discovered its deep fascination . . . and its up to date answers to life's questions. It may not directly help you in your trade, nor put you on your career ladder, but it will add new dimensions to the life of yourself and your family. Please don't 'switch off' if we quote fairly freely from it in this booklet. Our aim, which we are not going to hide, and which we are certainly not ashamed of, is to get you reading the Bible. You may be in for some surprises. (Of course you may already be a keen Bible reader: we are delighted if this is so, and hope you will agree with what we have to say in these pages.)

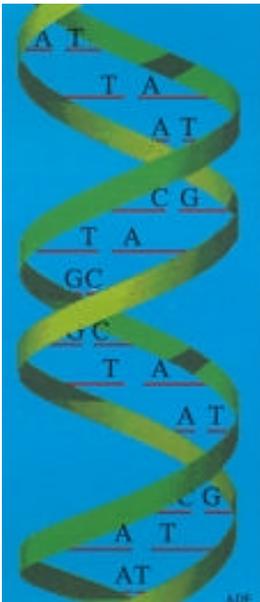
In the Beginning God

IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1,2)

Genesis is the first book in the Bible and it opens with the above words. Genesis has to do with origins, with beginnings; it has the answer to that not-so-childish question - Where do we come from? "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . God said, 'Let there be light' . . . God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass . . . let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth . . . let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind'. . . And God said 'Let us make man. . .'"

Evolution?

You prefer to believe in evolution? This is not the place to examine closely the claims of evolutionists. For the past hundred years they have had an increasing hold on people's minds; our children are taught evolution as proven fact, often with no mention of any alternative; churchmen have compromised the faith of their forefathers by trying to believe in God and believe in evolution. The truth of the matter, in our view, is that evolution as the basis of biology and as an explanation of the origin of man is not in the least proven - it is just assumed. Of course it gets into all the textbooks and encyclopaedias, it is adopted by broadcasters, and taken widely for granted. But it has never been proved!



DNA – The "Blueprint" of Life

To say that life arose by chance, evolved from simple to complex organisms by chance, and produced mankind by chance may be a plausible theory, but the proof just isn't there. Here are just three objections: (1) it requires too much of chance to suggest that the necessary building blocks of life could have formed spontaneously; (2) it requires too much of chance to say that 'simple' organisms arose from those basic building blocks in actual fact, there is really no such thing as a 'simple' organism, for even a 'simple' one-celled organism operates on unseen chemical processes every bit as complex as those in the cells of our bodies; and (3) although the human species may not appear so very different physically from other animals, there is a huge gap between the capabilities, especially the mental capacities of any animal and those of man - the gulf is enormous, and the 'missing links' have never turned up.

One more fact may interest you: some experts (as distinct from the popular broadcasters) are now seriously talking of the earliest man having lived on this planet less than 20,000 (rather than many millions of) years ago. They still won't let go of the theory that he evolved, but by allowing such a recent origin, they are coming closer to what creationists believe.

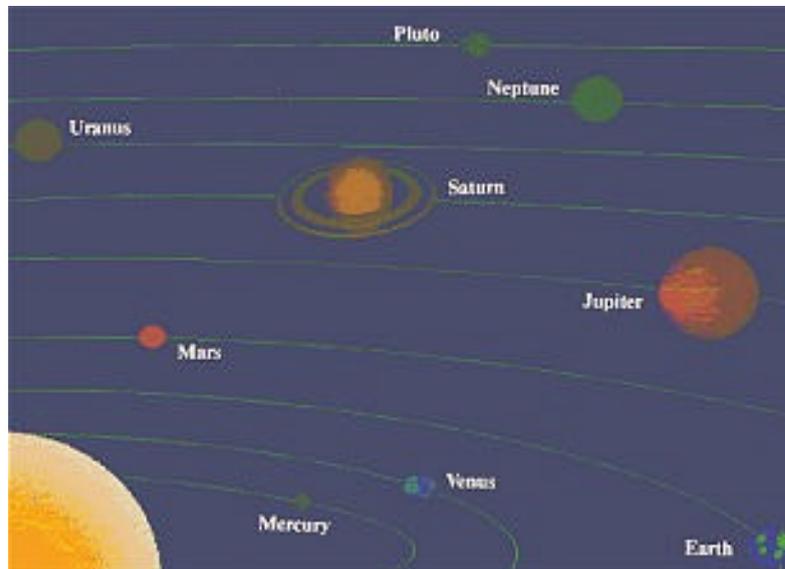
Now we cannot expect readers to take all this for granted without further evidence, but it surely isn't unreasonable to ask you at least to allow the possibility that the universe, light, plants, birds, animals and man were all *created* - created by a divine hand. Do not rule it out; do not think it unthinkable: be generous-minded enough to say that creation is possible; and then let us see where this can lead us.

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, The moon and the stars, which you have ordained,
What is man that you are mindful of him. . .?" (Psalm 8:3,4)

Look up into the sky!

Man is the pinnacle of God's creation, but - as the above psalm suggests - there are wonders almost beyond imagination in the heavens (if we can escape air pollution and keep away from the lights of cities). That amazing under-statement in Genesis - "He made the stars also" (1:16) - belies the fact that we can be totally lost in thinking of the numbers, sizes and distances of stars.

But let us start at home: we live on a planet, Earth, which along with the other solar planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, trace out their orbits at increasing distances from the Sun. The Sun is 'our' star: it is 93,000,000 miles from us - "Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat" (Psalm 19:6).



The Planets of the Solar System

Looking up at the night sky we see a vast number of points of light. The sun's planets account for a few of these; all the rest are stars, star clusters and galaxies - themselves great universes of countless stars. There are in fact said to be more than

100,000,000,000 galaxies visible to modern telescopes, each containing thousands of millions of stars. And the distances of the stars are astounding: the next nearest star (after the sun) is 23 million million miles away: the next nearest galaxy is about 50,000 times further than that. We are lost in the numbers of 'noughts'!

And where did all this come from? There are several competing theories about how the universe arose, and we shall not stop to examine them here. In any case they all push the important question one stage further back: Who made it? Was there a Creator? Where did He come from? - and so on. Science can help, but we need more than science to comprehend the infinite: we need faith.

Now if faith is needed to imagine the beginnings of the universe, then faith is needed, too, if we are to come to grips with life. We may be dazzled by the numbers, size and distances of stars, but we ought to be equally dazzled by the wonders of life under the microscope. The world, in other words, is as fantastic in small things as in huge things, in the microscopic and in the immense.

Atoms and Molecules

Ask an atomic physicist what is inside the atom, and he will start talking about neutrons, protons, electrons, neutrinos . . . he will try to explain mysterious features called 'charm' 'strangeness' and 'colour' - not the charm or colour we normally think of but curious properties to be found within the world of the infinitesimal. Beautiful? Yes, the experts are themselves overwhelmed, and often frankly baffled by what they find; many of them (sadly not all) recognise that this could not be here if there were not an Organiser and Inventor, a supreme and all-knowing God.

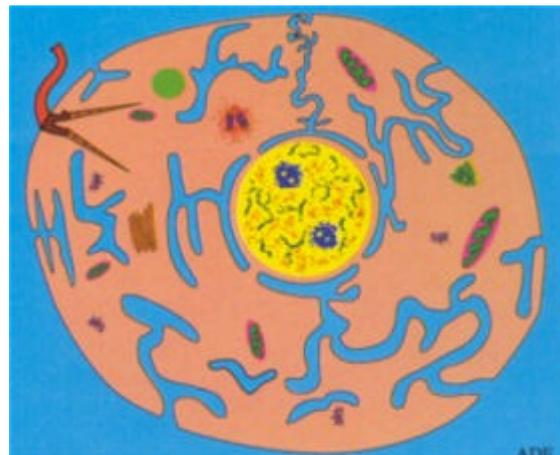


Diagram of the Living Cell

Ask a molecular biologist what 'makes' life and he will start telling you about the wonders within the living cell - the wonders of every single one of those 1,000,000,000,000,000 cells that there are, for example, in the human body. Why are they alive? What is the difference between a test tube full of chemicals and a growing organism? Where did life come from?

Questions about how life keeps going, why it dies - all these are fairly easy to answer. But "Where did it come from?" "Why is it here?" - those are the tough ones. The scientist may explain to us all the intricacies and marvels of chromosomes, genes, enzymes - what it is that makes a poppy red, or a pansy blue: what it is that makes baby look like Mum or Dad. But he will not be able to give us answers to those harder

questions. Introducing a Creator, however, answers all our questions; we shall go through life much less puzzled, and a great deal more satisfied, if we are prepared to acknowledge a Divine hand in the world around us.

As the Bible man of long ago said, when the wonder of God's works finally dawned upon him:

"I have uttered what I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." (Job 42:3)

May we suggest, then, that you stop and think before you are caught out by the idea of a world which (so they say) 'somehow' came into being, and which (so they say) does not need a God to explain it.

What Man has done to it

Through our telescope we have scanned the heavens. Through our microscope we have peered into the tiny universe of the living cell, while other instruments reveal the inner workings of the atom. These are the extremes of large and small: the infinite and the infinitesimal. Somewhere between these extremes is the 'ordinary' world of the landscape in which we live. We are talking now about our planet, this 'mother' Earth. So let's examine more particularly the state of the world in our own age. It was perfect, once. God made it "very good"; Genesis 1:31), but is it still "very good" today?

City Skylines

The world is good; from outer space, astronauts have trouble finding words to express the stunning beauty of our planet - its greens and blues, its clouds, its mountain peaks, the evidence (even from such a distance) of the magnificent cities man has built; his masterpieces of construction, like the great wall of China, canals, reservoirs, neatly planted forests, vast fields of wheat or rice.

On Earth itself, the wonders can be multiplied: with his camera, man catches the perfection of autumn leaves, the symmetry of a snowflake, the exquisite delicacy of a bat wing, the majesty of great beasts of prey. Here is beauty at close range - and we are foolish not to see in all these things God's hand at work.

But there is another picture that can meet the eye: it is the picture of smoke-stacks, of shanty towns, of sewage spilling out to sea, of devastated crops, disease-ridden animals, of famished and dying children, of terror and war.

In the distant view, perfection; in the close-up, too, perfection; but the honest reporter has to include those other less than perfect scenes. What has happened to a world that was once very good? What has gone wrong?

What went wrong?

The Bible provides a number of clues. When God made man, He gave him freewill and unhappily that freewill was immediately misused: Adam and Eve, our first parents, disobeyed God's instructions. And the result, described in Genesis, is important in understanding the environmental crisis we have today:

"Cursed is the ground for your sake (said God); in toil you shall eat from it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you . . . In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return:" (3:17-19).

Now we must be very careful in deciding what this very early Bible passage says, and what it does not say. For a start it reminds us that looking after the earth is a big responsibility, and sometimes a painful one; it requires sweat and toil, as man has to battle with weeds (and pests and other setbacks). We cannot expect life to be one long holiday, nor was it ever promised that man would live in luxury and ease. Even less was there any suggestion that he would live for ever. The opposite is true: he would return to dust. Man is mortal because God would not allow disobedient people to live for ever. Thousands of years after the words of Genesis were written, Paul the Apostle wrote about man's mortality in the words, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Though it is not the subject of this booklet, we have to ask our readers to think very carefully about the fact that there is no such thing as an after-life for souls in heaven, nor any scripture which teaches that we are basically immortal. The Bible is quite clear: death is real; man can only survive it by faith in Christ - but this is the subject of a later chapter in this booklet.

Surely this early passage in Genesis also tells us that it is actually God's will that man should learn to live with toll and pain. They are not in themselves evil, and by the frustrations and trials of life, we learn to look for higher things and appreciate God's higher purpose in it all:

"The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope: because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Romans 8:20.21).

Self-Inflicted Trouble

What we have described so far could be called the 'natural' decay, wastage and frustration of life as we experience it, and we must not flinch from accepting this. Civilisations have come and gone.



But added to the natural decay, there has, in recent times especially, been the damage that man quite thoughtlessly has inflicted upon himself and on the planet. Of course we deplore the rotting crops, the oil slicks, the polluted atmosphere, the terrible fate of thousands who die from hunger and disease: but who is to blame? Who caused these things? God is not to blame; so many of man's calamities are brought about by man himself-they arise from his greed, his selfishness and aggression. James, in the New Testament, utters some home truths about man's base nature:

"You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:2,3).

Unfair! you may say. But deep down you know it to be a true - and frightening - description of those who have misused the world in their craving for power, pleasure and profit. We may justly condemn the 'scorched earth' policies of twentieth century tyrants, who devastate the countries they conquer - and often their own as well. But in a more general and long term sense, the whole human race has been guilty of 'scorched earth' policies.

Many are the environmental catastrophes which man has brought upon himself. And what about the personal catastrophes which are also often self-inflicted? We are sorry for those who suffer the effects of drug abuse, or perverted sexual practices, but (as they often admit when it is too late) they bring disaster upon themselves: AIDS is one of



the most terrifying of those disasters, but it is only one of man's self-inflicted diseases. We have all come across the smoker who warns us about the dangers of his habit - but does nothing about it himself. Tragically, the innocent suffer as well.

What can be done about it?

So what can be done? Does it help to sign petitions? Should we march, demonstrate or protest? Let us by every means make sure we do not ourselves add to the pollution; let us clean up where we can; let us buy from the supermarkets those products which do less damage to our environment. But in the end, we must face the fact that man, on his own, will never restore perfection to this fair planet. He may have limited success in cleaning up a few of his rivers; he may be able to stop (for a time) the wilful burning of the Amazon forests; he may do his best to relieve famine and hardship, and find cures for the chronic diseases of mankind. But there is no complete and lasting solution - man is not getting better, nor is the Earth getting cleaner.

In fact there is reason to believe that, left to ourselves, we are heading for total disaster.

Yet there is an answer, and it is the goal of this booklet to describe it. The earth will one day be once more "very good"; the environment, about which we are all so rightly concerned, will one day be cleaned up. But it will come about in God's way, in God's time, and not man's.

Jesus, the World's Saviour

The aim of these pages is not to frighten or depress: there is enough to be distressed about without adding to it. What we have said so far does look rather pessimistic but we have already hinted at answers and solutions - something much more optimistic. We must now come to that - and give the Bible a fair hearing. Please let it speak: it really does make a lot of sense. Never let it be said that you turned away from an opportunity to learn the truth about this planet's fate.



The Bible really does have the answer. The Bible is a realistic book: it is not a collection of fairy tales, nor of idealistic nonsense. It paints a realistic picture of all that is wrong with the world and with mankind; it presents a sober assessment of the problem - and it offers a sensible solution. The apostle Peter, speaking in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, and then ascended to heaven, promised:

"... that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

A Long Term Plan

There is much more to be said about this speech of Peter's and the conclusions he draws, and the demands he makes, in the words which follow on from the above; but let us just consider the short extract quoted. It speaks categorically of "times of refreshing", "the times of restoration of all things". That is cheering news: there is a plan, a longstanding and a long-term plan, to put this world in order, to make it once more "very good". And the plan was revealed long ago through "his holy prophets".



Hebrew Scroll of the Old Testament

The answer, then, lies in the books of Israel's ancient prophets. Dry, dusty, untrustworthy old myths? What relevance can Hebrew scrolls from several thousand years ago have for today? Well, let them first speak - here are a couple of examples:

"The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing . . . They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:1-10).

Too good to be true? An answer, at a stroke, to the ecological disasters of the world; to man's chronic diseases and depressions? That's how it would appear.

"THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES, AND THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS: NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP A SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE" (MICAH 4:3).

These words (Micah 4:3) became the motto for the United Nations: optimistically it was thought that by nations getting together, they could settle all disputes, and prevent war for ever: sadly it was not to be. The UN may have helped to reduce the tensions between nations but it has not succeeded, nor will it ever succeed, in stopping war. What the Lord God says through Micah, however, is that He will judge between nations, and through His intervention, wars will ultimately cease.

Bible History

How will it happen? To understand this, we have to review (very briefly!) the whole of Bible history - the whole of God's revealed purpose. It started, as we have seen, in Eden. It progressed through the time of Noah and the Flood; on to the age of Abraham and the Jewish patriarchs, who received very important promises of a Land and a People; forward then to the nation of Israel, whom God brought into the 'Promised Land'.

We move to the history of the kings (Saul, David, Solomon and their successors) and prophets (Isaiah, Daniel, Micah and many others), and learn from their writings what God had in mind for the restoration of all that had gone wrong.

Much of what the prophets wrote had to do with the Jews - their future tribulations and their final restoration one day to their own land. But the restoration of Israel would be bound up with God's greater purpose with the earth, and with the coming of one very special person - the Son of God. Speaking of the kingdom of Israel, the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel said:

"I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him" (Ezekiel 21:27).

There is no real break between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and it is in the pages of the New Testament that the spotlight falls on that special person.

Jesus of Nazareth, born to Mary, was truly the Son of God, and in him all the predictions of the prophets were fulfilled. His sufferings were foretold:

"He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth . . . He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:3,7,12).

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

There is no doubt about the historical truth of the life and death of Jesus the preacher. We have little difficulty in imagining that someone who said the sort of things he said would indeed get into trouble with the authorities, and it is not hard to believe that he was sentenced to a cruel death - crucifixion. But what about "He bore the sin of many..."? Again there is no great difficulty in understanding the words, especially if we look a little more deeply into the background of the Old Testament.

To be brief, we can say that Jesus Christ died because, unlike Adam and Eve (and the rest of us), he would not rebel against God's wishes. His desire was always to obey God - his Father - and he was prepared to submit even to death. Yet he had done no wrong! He is the only one since creation who has not been disobedient to God's commands.

Because of his obedience, God did not leave him in the grave: He miraculously raised the murdered Christ calling him out of the stone tomb never to die again.

We refer to the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice, because it was the death of a man giving himself willingly for the sake of all who would be his followers. Through that sacrifice God can accept us back into His favour, and has promised that (if we believe and associate ourselves with His Son), He will grant us eternal life in a restored and perfected earth.

Forty days after he rose from the dead, Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven and he is there now as the Lord and Saviour of those who want to be his disciples.

But in God's plan the Lord Jesus Christ is destined to return literally to the earth. When he was taken up to heaven, angels reassured his puzzled followers:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Jesus' Second Coming

So Jesus is alive now and only his coming back to the earth will bring about an end to all the havoc that mankind has wrought upon it. But how can he achieve this? What power has Jesus to stand up against all the vested interests and might of superpowers and the evil intrigues of men and nations? They killed him once before - could it not happen again?

The reply we give is that Jesus is not this time to be the "babe of Bethlehem", nor the dying man on the cross. He is the risen Son of God, and has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). He, the first of all mankind, has been granted an immortal nature; and when he comes back to earth, he has no need to fear the world's politicians. He will have his own laws, his own government, and will set about forming his own Kingdom in which he will rule for God. He will be opposed, certainly, but he will achieve his purpose and man's ambitions will be put down. "Doesn't this sound like a dictator?" you may say. Perhaps it does, but not a merciless, selfish dictator; rather a dictator in the better sense of a leader who will rule with complete authority in the world's best interests.

That, in fact, is what Peter was thinking about when he talked of "times of refreshing" and "the times of restoration of all things". This, very briefly, is the Bible backdrop to God's New World.

Baptism, a New Start

We have come a long way from the brief survey of the wonders of nature with which we began. We started there because it was important to see today's problems in the context of the original design and purpose which God had with our planet. It was vital to go to the Bible for essential background: there is no other authority, no better source of information about the future of the world.

But our search has already shown us that we are not like spectators viewing events from a safe distance and clapping when all goes well. We ourselves are part of the drama. Christ's coming was for us; his death, if we will accept it, was for us; his second coming to the earth will be for us, if we want to be with him and assist him. If we thought that the world could be improved and perfected without any demands being made of us, then we are to be disillusioned. Like Jesus, we have to end one life and begin a new one, recognising - as we saw from Genesis - that God still will not allow disobedient folk to live for ever. He wants us to recognise that He is our Maker, and respond by serving Him.

God's Command - Our Commitment

You may prefer to move on quickly to the fifth and final chapter of this short book, and discover what we have to say about the New World of God's Kingdom, but this chapter is a necessary prelude. We may never see, and we shall certainly not be part of God's New World, if we do not take the word "commitment" seriously, and show by our way of life that we really do want to be in His kingdom.

What are we to do? "Wait and see" is not a safe response, for events are already gathering momentum and the signs that Jesus Christ will soon be here are multiplying - showing to the believer that the time of these great events is near. What we have to do is what Peter asked his audience to do:

- Change their ways
- Be baptized into Christ
- Start a new way of life
- Prepare for God's New World.

We actually left out an important introduction to what Peter said, and omitted other words of Peter to the crowds in Jerusalem:

"Signs of the Times"

Wars
Political Upheavals
Earthquakes
Famines
Pestilences
Pollution
Pleasure-seeking
Greed
Lack of Respect
Immorality
Disbelief in God

*See Luke 21:8-28;
2 Timothy 3:1-5;
2 Peter 3:3-13.*

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord ... Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ... Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 3:19; 2:38-40).

Repent . . . be baptized . . . remission of sins: what strange old-fashioned language! We have quoted from a modern version of the Bible, yet still it may sound a little quaint. You and I live in a digital, computer-aided, plastic-wrapped society. We have become clever and sophisticated. We may enjoy accelerating in the fast lane. Even the least materialistic of us keep up with the latest hi-fi, we read the glossy holiday brochures - or if not holiday brochures, then gardening catalogues or keep-fit magazines. Let us not pretend we are not part of the world of the 1990s with all its comforts and opportunities. We have benefits our parents never dreamed of and we understandably want our children to do better still.

So are we really expected to "repent and be baptized"? Isn't this something out of a Gospel movie? something you associate with Christians in Roman times - not with computer-age Christianity? If these are the pictures the word 'baptism' conjures up in your mind, then you are well on the way to understanding baptism, for certainly it was in the early Christian era that adult baptism a ceremony where the new believer is fully immersed in water - took place. Remember how John the Baptist used to baptize people in the River Jordan (Mark 1:9)? Remember how Philip the Evangelist found a pool of water, and how both he and the Ethiopian believer "went down into the water" (Acts 8:38)? Archaeologists have unearthed very early Christian churches which have a built-in bath of sufficient depth and length for an adult to be baptized - to be completely covered in water.

Adult Baptism or Infant Christening?

Against the clear teaching of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, Bible baptism was replaced by an act of infant sprinkling: a few drops of water from a font is all that survives in most churches of the ceremony which even Jesus himself - at the age of 30 submitted to, and countless thousands of early Christians. Should we not do as they did?

But the difference between old-fashioned baptism and modern 'Christening' is not just to be seen in the quantity of water used. Another major important difference is in the fact that an adult can have a full understanding of what is going on, while a baby cannot have the slightest idea. Baptism is a ceremony in which a new believer knowingly takes part. It is carried out only when he or she understands what it means.

And now we can introduce that other word which Peter used, "repent". Repentance is the humble response of someone who comes to know the Gospel, understands its demands on him or her, confesses a need of Christ's sacrifice, acknowledges his or her

own waywardness (what the Bible calls "sin"), and desires to be associated with Christ. He or she will then want to be baptized. As Paul explains in one of his letters:

"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk, in newness of life" (Romans 6:3,4).

So there is more to baptism than some readers may perhaps have imagined. And it really isn't so quaint or old-fashioned. It is a dignified and humble act of belief, confession and commitment. When it takes place in a Christadelphian meeting-room, it is not with handclapping or emotional displays, but with joy on the part of the candidate and delight on the part of those whom he joins in fellowship.

Baptism - The Way Into God's New World

So Christadelphians have a rather different answer to the environmental problem. Our view is that:

- The environmental crisis is real.
- We can try to do something about it ourselves, particularly in moral matters, but we must not expect that much will be achieved by joining the 'green' movements.
- Our hope must centre on the certainty that Jesus Christ will come, and when he is king the earth will be restored.
- Meanwhile what is important for us is to become associated with Christ, to become a true Christian, by repentance, belief in the original Gospel, and adult baptism.

Some readers will be reasonably familiar with these lines of argument, yet may never have taken any action to put them into practice in their own lives: we urge them to do so. To others the whole story may appear unlikely and unreal: to them we say, Give it further thought; go back over the points we are making, ask yourself whether you can find any more promising solution to the world's ills, any more certain answer to man's insoluble problems. But to all readers who have got as far as this point, we now say: Come with us into the final chapter of this booklet: we want to tell you what the Bible really has to say to you and to your children about God's New World.



The New World of God's Kingdom



Earlier in this booklet we set out Bible teaching on the second coming of Christ. Returning to that speech of Peter, we now quote:

". . . that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets" (Acts 3:19-21).

What will happen then?

The Scriptures have plenty to tell us about the events that will take place when Jesus Christ returns. There is more to be done than just to clean up a polluted planet (though that is a task he will certainly undertake). More important, initially, will be the raising of the dead, and the judgement, for only after those processes are complete can the new King implement his plan for earth's restoration-employing his followers to help him in that work. There is ample Bible proof that many of the dead will be raised. And this teaching of resurrection isn't just to be found in the New Testament. For example, in the prophecy of Daniel:

"There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:1,2).

And in Jesus' own words:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31,32).

The last book of the Bible has much to say which will please the environmentalist. Revelation is a remarkable prophecy, according to its opening words, of "things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1) and it contains some cheering and reassuring promises. But notice that the Bible doesn't stop at giving an answer to the environmental issue: it deals with the much more basic problem of man's mortality:

"Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name . . . and should destroy those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

"The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (21:3,4).

"And he (the angel) showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal . . . On either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits . . . And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse" (22:1-3).

An End to Earth's Woes

Instead of polluted streams, a river clear as crystal; instead of withered forests, a tree of life; instead of disease, healing. The words of Revelation may sound a bit poetic, for so they are: but they are meant to be taken literally so far as the cleansing of the planet is concerned. Degradation, destruction, aggression, greed, pain and pollution - and whatever you would want to add yourself to a list of the earth's woes - all these will vanish. The "curse" of Eden will be removed. Children will play in safety: old people will venture out without fear or threat:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets" (Zechariah 8 4.5).

What will it be like in God's Kingdom?

- "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks."
 - "They shall not learn war any more."
 - "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."
 - "There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying."
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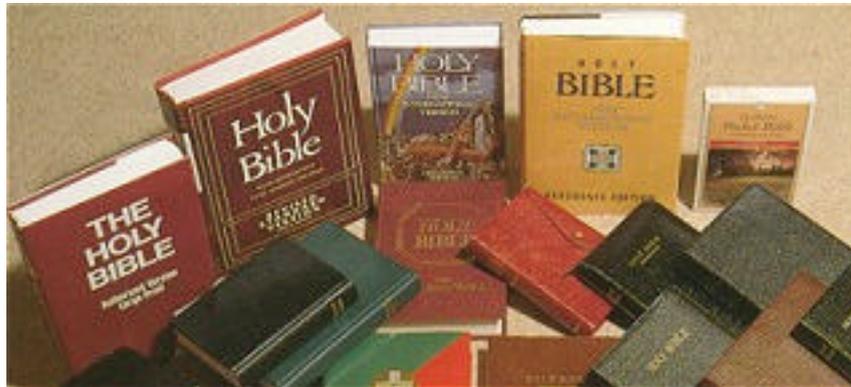
What sort of King will Jesus Christ be?

- "He will bring justice to the poor."
- "He shall have dominion from sea to sea."
- "He must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet."
- "The kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

A dream? Wishful thinking? Fairy tales? Escapism from the harsh reality and awesome responsibility which we must bear? All we can say in answer to those challenges is: See for yourself, if the Bible hasn't many times spoken poetically, yet been proved true. You may regard it as wishful thinking on the part of God's prophets who foretold the first coming of Christ: but it came true. During the last 100 years it was certainly the dream of many that the Jews might find a homeland after the centuries of persecution and scattering. The Holocaust seemed to spell the end of those dreams, whereas it turned out to be the grim prelude to their fulfilment as foretold in the Bible. And this further and final dream will also come true. Christ will come, and God will set up His Kingdom.

"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 17:31).

A Personal Challenge



If, when you have pondered these things, you feel you would like to do something about it, then we believe we can help you.

Get in touch with Christadelphians near you; call in at one of our meetings, read one or two of our other publications - but, more important still, read your Bible. Talk it over with your family: ask the children what they think is the answer to the world's problems. We started by referring to the wonderful questions children ask: is it not time we put one or two questions to them, for young people often show sound sense on current issues? Ask them if they know of a human plan to help this planet. Ask them what they think of God's plan!

But don't walk away from what you have read. The Bible is not threatening you, but offering you untold blessings, eternal joys and relief from all your sorrows-for ever. Don't turn away. God's promises are coming to a long awaited climax: the end of the world, as we know it, could be very near:



"There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and 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. Now when these things begin to happen, **look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near**" (Luke 21:25-28).

"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 . . . but is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8-10).

JOHN MORRIS

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