

The Earth's Glorious Future

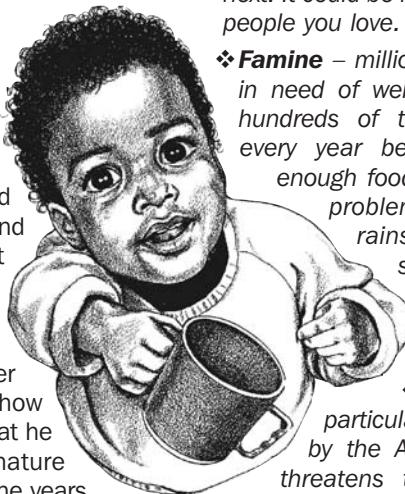
Viewed from outer space the earth looks glorious already, according to the privileged few who viewed it from shuttle or space station. We know, however, that the world has problems – some of them big ones – and that they are not easily solved. There's no point in pretending otherwise.

Those who Lose

In a prophecy about the new world order, which will be established when God takes direct rule of the earth, the Psalmist precisely identified those who lose out today, and catalogued the things that need putting right, so that God's earth can be as he intends.

It wasn't just that the writer had a good insight into how things were in his day, and that he guessed that human nature wouldn't change much over the years, although that would have been a fairly safe guess. He was a prophet who wrote like a poet, and God was speaking to mankind through him.

So what did he say? You can read the whole prediction yourself in about 5 minutes – it's *Psalm 72* – and it would be a good thing to do if you're feeling a bit depressed, and are wondering if anyone will ever get around to sorting things out. A lot of well-meaning folk are properly



concerned about a wide range of issues, like:

- ❖ **War** – the Cold War might have finished but there's still a lot of it about, and it seems to get more complicated – Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, North Korea, Israel. We know the problem areas well enough.
- ❖ **Terrorism** – ever since the World Trade Centre attack, people have been uncertain where terrorists will strike next. It could be near you, or affect the people you love.
- ❖ **Famine** – millions of people are still in need of welfare assistance, and hundreds of thousands are dying every year because they haven't enough food or clean water. The problems include failing rains, poor crops, sick soil, civil wars, trade sanctions and a host of other things.
- ❖ **Illness** – Africa in particular is hugely affected by the AIDS epidemic, which threatens to destabilise many nations by killing a large number of adults, and passing HIV infection to the next generation, and that's just one modern pandemic. Solve one problem and another – like SARS – comes and spreads fast!

Better Future?

We could all do with a better – a more peaceful, friendly, secure and safe – world, but how is it going to happen? And

how confident can we be that God is going to do something about it? That's where Psalm 72 comes in. Here's what it says. When God sends His King to Jerusalem – of all places – to rule over a worldwide Kingdom, this will be the consequence:

"He will judge [God's] people with righteousness, and [His] poor with justice ... He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence" (72:2, 12-14).

That's the first promise. The King will care about little people – like us – and will make sure that we are cared for, delivered from oppression, rescued from danger, and given safety and security. We could all do with more of that, and soon!

Peace and Security

"He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor ... In his days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace ... He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth ... all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve him" (72:4, 7-8, 11).

Here's another promise from Almighty God, through his Psalmist. What man has been quite unable to achieve – for there have always been wars and they are getting more deadly and the long-term effects more lethal – God will accomplish. His power can achieve what has been

unattainable to date. He is going to take control and that control will be absolute.

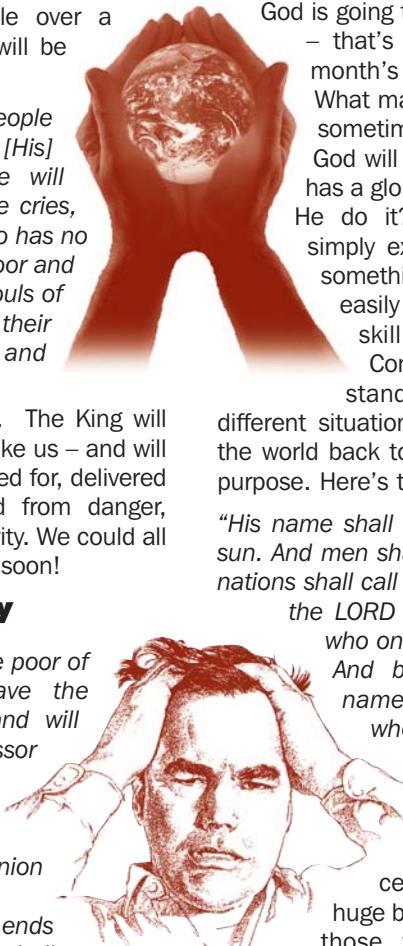
The Earth in Hand

God is going to take the earth in hand – that's what the motif on this month's front cover indicates. What man has been unable, and sometimes unwilling, to do – God will accomplish. God's earth has a glorious future. And how will He do it? By much more than simply exercising power. Pick up something fragile and you can easily break it – that takes no skill at all, only power. Combine power with understanding, and it's a very different situation. God is going to bring the world back to its rightful place in His purpose. Here's the Psalmist again:

"His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be his glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with his glory" (72:17-19).

God is going to become the very centre of everything and huge blessings will result, for all those who are privileged to share in that new age – who live in the Kingdom of God. That will be set up on earth at the coming of God's chosen King – the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are concerned about the way the world is going and want to know more about what has been promised, and how you can become part of that new age – this special issue is all about God's plan for the earth's glorious future, and for you.



What Jesus Taught about the Future

A prophet was not just someone who foresaw the future. In Bible times, prophets spoke out for God – on His behalf. The Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest prophet who ever lived for two reasons. First, he spoke for God as nobody else ever has, or ever could. Second, he foretold the future in remarkable detail. Some of that has already been fulfilled, the rest is about to be.

God's Spokesman

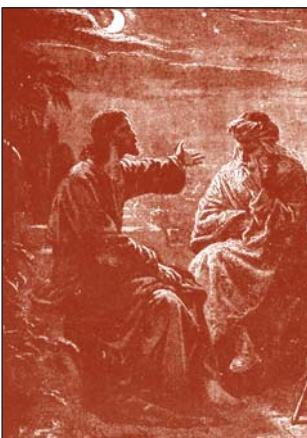
A family member is often better able to convey what the head of the family has decided, because he or she understands all the background, and knows how family things work.

Jesus is the Son of God. So, what did God say especially clearly through His Son (Hebrews 1:2)? he spoke a lot about the sort of life we should lead if we too want to be members of God's family. It was a key theme.

The world has gone backwards, not forwards, in moral and spiritual matters, since Jesus taught. Once people lived close to God and thought a lot about Him and His way of life. God's law was then practised by His nation – Israel. It was designed to give people a chance to live together harmoniously and happily, living by love.

Rebirth

Jesus taught that the future is to be built on new principles and values – ones we have to develop if we are to be in the Kingdom of God. This has to start now – we can't wait until the King returns. It is a



radical new way of living that Jesus has in mind. We have to be born again – of water and the spirit.

The Lord's encounter with Nicodemus is described in John chapter 3. Rebirth by water means Christian baptism, a practice that Jesus had already endorsed when he was baptised in Jordan (see Matthew 3:13-17). It's the first step to a new life – to signify that our life-change has begun (see Mark 16:16, and Romans chapter 6).

Being '*born of the Spirit*' means that we have to develop some spiritual characteristics. We've got to start to absorb God's way of thinking, if we want to live more like Him. If we can do that now, we will be ready for the new world, and its values, when the law of God is once more in the world.

Profound Teachings

That's why a lot of Jesus' parables start with the words: "*The kingdom of God is like...*" and go on to describe people in many different circumstances. The stories, with their profound moral lessons, tell us how we can become the sort of

people who will inhabit that new world. Here are one or two examples about this Kingdom teaching, all taken from Mark's gospel:

"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how" (4:26,27);

"Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (10:15);

When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (12:34).

There are things we have to do if we want to be there. We have to let God's Word grow in us (like a seed bearing fruit); we have to become childlike in the trust and confidence we place in God. Develop those qualities, with God's help, and it might be true of us too that we are not far from God's Kingdom.

Ways and Means

Did Jesus say nothing about *how* God's kingdom would come? He most certainly did! The point is, though, that he was concerned – first and foremost – that we should understand the importance of getting our own lives right. It's not going to help us much, if, when the Kingdom comes, we are excluded. That was a warning Jesus put firmly to the religious rulers of his day (see Luke 13:28) and, by extension, to all of us. As he said in his well-known Sermon on the Mount:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).



How the kingdom will be established was something that featured at Jesus' trial, when he was being pressed by the Jewish authorities to say whether or not he claimed to be the Jewish Messiah – the Divine King promised in the Scriptures, who would deliver Israel from all her enemies.

He was asked directly, *"Are you the Christ (the Messiah)?"* – and Jesus answered in a way that convicted him in their eyes. This is what he said:

"I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62).

Those words were so charged with meaning to his Jewish audience – because they were a direct quotation from their Scriptures – that the High Priest actually tore his robes as a reaction: he thought it was that blasphemous of Jesus to claim to be God's anointed King. They proceeded with the next stages of the trial, no doubt well-pleased that they had extracted a full confession from the prisoner.

Jerusalem

But what Jesus said was true. He is due to return as Israel's King, the last of a long line of kings who reigned from Jerusalem in time past. But he was not about to reign then. On one occasion, as he approached the city Jesus wept, saying:

"The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:43,44).

Pinpoint Accuracy

That turned out to be a remarkably accurate prediction of what happened less than thirty years later. It was given at a time when the Jewish authorities reckoned that their co-operation with the Romans would secure Jerusalem's long-term future (see John 11:49,50).

It did not. The Jewish population became increasingly troublesome to the Romans so, in 70 AD, they besieged Jerusalem, captured it, and destroyed much of it, including the much-prized Herodian temple. Not one stone of that was left standing.

Thus was fulfilled a detailed prophecy Jesus had given to his disciples when, on one occasion, they had asked him for a glimpse of the future. He repeated his prediction that it would be thrown down, before adding a lot of detail about the sequence of future events. That prophecy – given on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem – is fully recorded in three of the gospels (Matthew chapter 24; Mark 13 and Luke 21) and is well worth reading. It contains a catalogue of events that would come to pass before his Return as King, including:

- ✿ false Christianity developing
- ✿ wars and rumours of wars
- ✿ famines and earthquakes
- ✿ increasing world troubles...

Times of Crisis

This panorama of coming events builds up to a time of crisis and calamity, indicating that Jesus foresaw that the days immediately preceding his Coming would



be traumatic and extremely stressful, as they are now for many people. He talked about a growing amount of apprehension and uncertainty:

"On the earth distress of nations, with perplexity ... 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).

Beware!

There is something else that accompanied these detailed predictions: something we have already noticed about the teaching of Jesus. Alongside the pointers of continuing trouble – including a lot of detail specifically for the Jewish nation about the fate of Jerusalem, and their exile for centuries – there is a lot of advice about how believers should cope with all this, and what their response should be.

Whilst all these things are happening, we have to be *alert, watchful, awake, faithful, prayerful and ready for whatever comes* (see Matthew 24:36-51).

Jews in Jerusalem

Exactly what Jesus predicted has been happening – including the return to Jerusalem of the Jewish nation (Luke 21:24).

There had to be Jews in charge of Jerusalem before the Final Act of God's Great Purpose could be played out. Now they are there, surrounded by enemies, just as the prophets of God predicted.

A King in Jerusalem

Few cities have such a chequered past as Jerusalem, or such a colourful one. There have been so many changes there.

Fortifications have been built, enlarged, demolished and rebuilt. Temples have come and gone, followed by churches and mosques, bringing enormous complications and religious sensitivities. Palaces have been built, enlarged, then utterly destroyed. And during all these changes ordinary people have continued to live there, building and rebuilding, as their housing needs required.

Colourful Past

Now that ancient city is a thriving modern metropolis, occupied by both Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and there is keen rivalry to make it the capital city of either the Israeli or Palestinian State – if one is established – or of both! People on both sides are anxious to establish their prior claims to the city, making even the history of Jewish and Arab occupation a matter of contention. But, for Bible readers, there is a quite different reason why they want to know about the early days of Jerusalem, archaeology or politics apart.

The Bible record is second to none when it comes to historical detail, because the people who wrote it were inspired by God. This was not done to give the Jewish nation sound credentials for their 21st century claims; it was a record of God's dealings with a land that He has chosen to make the centre of His purpose. God could have chosen

anywhere; but the Bible says that he chose Israel – because His purpose centred upon a man called Abraham (see Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

"Give us a King"

God had chosen a people, given them a land, with a law and rulers to govern and direct them, and had chosen a place where he wanted to be worshipped by them. That place was Jerusalem – for hundreds of years occupied by the Jebusites, who lived there surrounded by the new settlers.

God was biding his time, waiting for the time when he would appoint a King, and begin the next phase of His gracious purpose. He was going to establish the Kingdom of God on earth – exercising Divine rulership through a man he would appoint to rule on his behalf.

The people of Israel couldn't wait. They wanted a king, but for all the wrong reasons, and God let them choose one, so that they could see that kings were only a good idea if you got the right one. Their choice –

King Saul – was certainly not good for the nation; with him they got what they deserved. Big Trouble!

Another King

Forty years later God chose them a king who suited His purpose and, in King David, they saw what life could be like when a godly man took control and ruled for God. He was effective, sensible, powerful, fair, interested in his people,



talented, an excellent warrior, a prudent man, and a born leader.

Things really went well for the nation and this was the moment when God made it known that Jerusalem was the place He wanted as the spiritual centre of the nation. So David captured it from the Jebusites, built a palace there, further fortified the site, and began preparations for a Temple to be built there.

God's Covenant Promises

Just as God had made promises to Abraham, as that faithful man proceeded through life, so now he gave David some vital promises, this time concerning Jerusalem, the dynasty of kings who would rule from there, and the great end he had in mind, which would find its perfect fulfilment at a time when a perfect man would rule in Jerusalem over a world-wide Kingdom that would last forever.

Those promises – later described as a Covenant that God made with King David – are easy to read and understand. They are not like human legislation, which is so full of “ifs and buts” that you can never quite understand what it is trying to achieve. You can study them by reading 2 Samuel 7, verses 1-17, the key points being that:

- ⦿ *Israel would dwell securely in God's land (7:10);*
- ⦿ *David's descendants would succeed to his throne in Jerusalem (v12,16);*
- ⦿ *One special descendant would build God a Temple there (v13);*
- ⦿ *His kingdom would last forever (v13);*
- ⦿ *He would be God's Son (v14).*

Just a glance at that is sufficient to

show that although David's immediate successor – King Solomon – was able to do some of these things, including building God a magnificent Temple, he was far from being the perfect man God had in his sights, who would establish an everlasting Kingdom. Indeed, a careful look at the account shows that God had in mind that whilst none of this would start until after David's death, David would himself be there, with his future descendant (see 2 Samuel 7:12).

That shows that the final phase of God's purpose will only happen when faithful

David has been raised from the unconscious sleep of death. This was something that New Testament writers clearly understood and taught (see Acts 2:25-31). Meanwhile the throne would be vacant.

Meanwhile...

We are still waiting for David to be raised from the dead, and he died some three thousand years ago. There was a lot that was due to happen in Jerusalem over the next few hundred years, not all of it good.

All told, there were 21 kings who succeeded David, in a dynasty that lasted nearly 400 years (from 970 BC to 586 BC). Some of them were good and able men; some extremely talented; some good soldiers and administrators; some were very spiritual men. Others were quite the opposite: selfish, foolish, godless, wasteful and evil.

At times Jerusalem, and the people of Judah, flourished and lived in harmony with God. At other times the nation was at war – often with the rest of Israel, immediately to the north; was overrun with idolatry; was subservient to one or other of the international powers then



dominating the Middle East; or was generally in disarray.

God provided spiritual guidance by sending prophets, or by bringing pressure to bear upon His nation, in one way or another. The writer of the Sacred History described all this endeavour by God, and Israel's lack of response, then adds:

"... until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:15,16).

End Game

It all came to an end in the days of a man called Zedekiah, who was king during a difficult period of international tension and pressure. He was himself an appointee of his Babylonian overlord, for Israel had become a subservient nation. Even so he staggered along as king for eleven years in all, during which time God supported him with one prophet – Jeremiah – in Jerusalem and other prophetic guidance from elsewhere.

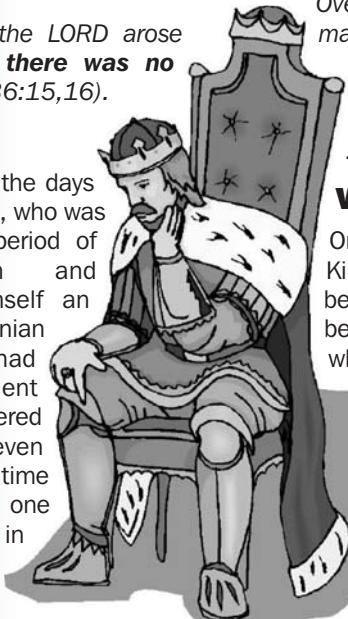
But Zedekiah could not bring himself to put his trust entirely in God; he was a man much inclined to change his mind and to be influenced by his courtiers and nobles. At last the inevitable occurred. There was a rebellion against Babylon and that nation decided to make an example of Israel, to make sure all their other subject people learned their lesson. The Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem and deported all the people of Judah.

From exile in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel sent this message to King Zedekiah – it declared the end of the kingdom of God on earth, but held out a promise of hope for the future, when a

different King was available:

'Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord God: 'Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the lowly, and abase the exalted.

Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him' " (Ezekiel 21:25-27).



Whose Right is It?

One Day, Ezekiel promised, the Kingdom of God on earth would be restored. The fatal flaw had been the nature of the 23 kings who had reigned – including Saul and David. None of them had been capable of resisting the attractions and opportunities of office; they were all found wanting. But when a King appeared who demonstrated a different capability, and who was seen to be wholly the master of every situation, he would be the One to reintroduce God's Kingdom.

Long before Zedekiah, King David had spelled out the responsibility of Kingship in Jerusalem when he said this of his successor:

"Of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons) he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (1 Chronicles 28:5).

So saying, David had shown that he realised that this throne was unique. It was not a humanly-arranged dynasty, when one family could get dominion over

all others, and then share power and influence with friends and relations. The Kingdom was God's, and He was – and is – the One who would appoint the King. No wonder there was such excitement in Israel when – nearly two thousand years after David – an angel appeared to a simple village girl and said of the Son she was to bear that:

"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).

Here, at last, was the One who was to fulfil the covenant God had made with David. Here was the One God was appointing to establish an everlasting Kingdom. For God's own Son – just as David had been promised – was about to be born of the virgin Mary. He was the One who would demonstrate, by the quality of his life, that he was qualified first to rule himself and then to rule over others, for God.

The Kingdom – When?

It is a tribute to the Lord Jesus that his contemporaries believed that he was indeed the One who would rule as King. And how they wanted a King! The nation had returned from exile in Babylon to start again as a nation, but they had always been in subservience to one Empire or another.

At the time Jesus lived on earth it was the Romans who were the ruling power and some of the Jews were desperate to throw them out and establish a Jewish nation. That desire would be their undoing, as things turned out. But you

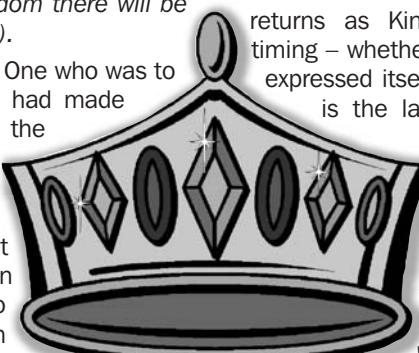
can see how anxious many people were to know when the Kingdom would be established from the question the disciples put to the risen Lord Jesus.

He had been with them, on and off, for nearly six weeks after his resurrection and, the record says, he had been instructing them about the Kingdom of God. This was, as we have seen, a major topic in Jesus' teaching plan. It concerned the importance of right living, for would-be citizens of that kingdom, as well as providing information about the things that were due to happen before Jesus returns as King. Their concern about timing – whether in their lifetime or not – expressed itself in this exchange, which is the last recorded conversation between Jesus and his closest followers. It gives us an insight into the message that was at the heart of what the apostles believed and later taught:

When they had come together, they asked him, saying, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And he said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority' (Acts 1:6-7).

There was no doubt in their minds that Jesus was coming again to rule as King. Their question was "When?", and the answer Jesus gave was not a rebuke – that they were on the wrong track, or that they had quite misunderstood his message. It was that everything would happen according to God's timetable.

Meanwhile, they had to get on with their part of the arrangement, and share the good news of God's Coming Kingdom with all who wanted to know. The Kingdom would come, Jesus said, when the time was right.



The Poetic Vision of a New Age

God's Word was written over several thousand years by a very mixed group of people. Some writers were narrators, or historians; some were prophets; some apostles; and some were poets.

Poetry in the Bible

It would be wrong to think of Bible poets as people sucking their pencils, or quills, waiting for a good idea or a nice phrase to come into their minds. God inspired the people who wrote down His message, so that when they spoke it was with such authority they could declare: "Thus says the Lord..." or "The Word of the Lord came...". God's inspired spokesmen communicated His message to mankind. That was equally true of Bible poetry.

Israel's Hymns

It should not surprise us that the Psalmists of Israel expressed their prayers in poetic form; hymn writers have done that all through the ages, in hymns like:

"O God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come..."

But Israel's hymns, which now comprise the Book of Psalms, are quite different in kind from the hymns written today. As King David said:

"The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and



his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me" (2 Samuel 23:2,3); and again,

"My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalm 45:1).

Hymns with Meaning

God inspired these hymns, or Psalms, in poetic form so that the words would stick in the minds of people who read or sang them. They were capable of being set to music and sung, to make Israel's worship even more attractive and uplifting.

None of the Psalms are poetry for poetry's sake – they contain a great deal of information about God's nature, character and purpose. In fact, they are a treasure-trove of information about God's coming Kingdom. They tell us what life will be like when the Lord Jesus returns as King, just as they depict what was due to happen to him when he came to live on earth. Because they were written thousands of years ago, the credentials of Bible poetry are firmly established by now.

Life-Story in Advance

If you are wondering if the musings of a poet can teach you anything positive about the future, consider these predictions about what was due to happen to the Messiah when first he came to

Israel, all of them taken from the Book of Psalms:

"I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children" (69:8);

"They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul" (35:12);

"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (41:9);

"False witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence" (27:12);

"All those who see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the LORD, let him rescue him; let him deliver him, since he delights in him! ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within me ... I can count all my bones. They look and stare at me" (22:7,8,14,17);

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken" (34:19,20).

Breath-taking isn't it! Here, in a sample from just six Psalms, is a prophetic portrait of the Lord Jesus, written a thousand years before his birth, yet accurately predicting his – estrangement from the family, rejection by the Jewish nation as a whole, betrayal by Judas, the false accusations made against him, and the taunts that followed his crucifixion.

That was described graphically, at a time when Roman Crucifixion had not

been introduced. Even the detail was given that his bones would not be broken, though the legs of the two thieves crucified with him were. For he was God's Passover Lamb (see Exodus 12:46).

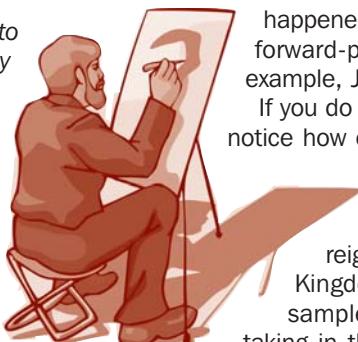
Forward-Looking Hymns

If you think that's impressive, read through all 150 Psalms for yourself looking out for such predictions and pointers. If you have a Bible with cross-references, keep an eye out for New Testament references which will help you spot the way in which those writers themselves dipped into the Psalms, to show that everything that happened to Jesus had been forward-planned by God (for example, John 19:36, 37).

If you do that, you cannot fail to notice how often the inspired poet looked forward to the time when God's appointed King will reign on earth over God's Kingdom. Here are some sample verses, this time taking in the order in which they appear in the Psalms – the sort of thing you will find for yourself when you read through and note some of them down:

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed ... Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession" (Psalm 2:2, 6-8);

"You have made him (the Son of Man) a little lower than the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honour. You



The Psalms contained a detailed portrait of what Jesus would be like.

have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet" (8:4-6);

"The LORD ... shall judge the world in righteousness ... The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion!" (9:8-11).

New Testament Commentary

That's just a little way through the 150 Psalms, but you will notice that the various inspired poets foretell, in the order we quoted, extracts from the Psalms:

- ❖ The hostile reception Jesus will receive when he comes to Jerusalem, from there to reign as King;
- ❖ The dominion that God will confer upon His Son, when all things are put under him;
- ❖ That Jesus will judge the world, and call it to account, on God's behalf, at which time he will keep his people safe.

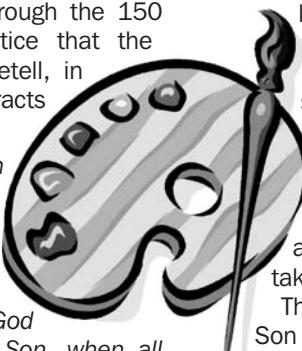
If you think that some of this is a bit far-fetched or fanciful, bear in mind that it is interpreted in just that way in the New Testament by further inspired writers who believed in the authority and accuracy of the poetic vision and who said so, in the clearest possible terms. Sometimes:

- * the apostles saw an initial fulfilment as well, in their own circumstances – for example, Psalm 2 is referred to in Acts 4:25,26, to demonstrate that hostility already existed against the followers of Jesus, but see also Revelation 2:26,27;12:5 and 19:15;

- * the same Psalm is referred to over and over – Psalm 8 is cited in Hebrews 2:6-8, but it is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 and Ephesians 1:22;
- * the message of one Psalm is repeated in other Psalms as well – Psalm 9, about God judging the world, features in Acts 17:31, but the same wonderful truth is repeated in Psalms 96:13 and 98:9.

Painter's Palette

In a way the Old Testament writings are like the preparatory work a painter will do before tackling the final painting. He will mix colours, do sketches, study possible angles, or experiment with different lighting effects. In themselves, the Jewish Scriptures are remarkable, in that they anticipate such wonderful things taking place.



They speak of the Coming of the Son of God and describe the saving work he was to accomplish for us. They delineate his future work, when he will rule from Jerusalem as God's anointed King, and they detail the sort of society that will then exist – God's New World.

But they did not identify precisely who the King was going to be – except to say that he would be God's Son, virgin-born in Bethlehem of Judea, acclaimed by Kings at his birth, rejected by the people he came to save, that he would die as a sacrifice for the sins of the people, and that God would raise him from the dead, and set him at his right hand in glory.

It is the New Testament that completes the portrait, joyfully declaring that it is "Jesus of Nazareth" who is the finished product – God's masterpiece! Jesus is the very embodiment of the poetic vision – God's appointed Saviour, for all who will find God through him.

Prophecy's Witness – A King is Coming

Wherever you look in the Scriptures the message is about the Coming of a King. He is the One who will reign for God and establish a new society on earth.

Big and Small

There are 17 books in the Old Testament that would be reckoned as the writings of the Prophets. In fact, they all say the same thing in general terms, but they each add different bits of detail. The result is a remarkable jigsaw of predictions, all of which are entirely consistent and complementary.

All the prophets agree about their main message – that God is going to intervene to take over the government of the earth. They state that mankind is astray from God and that, if left unchecked, human sinfulness will destroy the world. So, God will have to intervene to stop the downhill slide to destruction and take control.

Details, Details...

What sort of world is it going to be when a King rules in Jerusalem? Will things carry on as they are now, but be centred in the Middle East? Or will life be utterly different?

If you were to compile a checklist of the things you think need changing, for the world to be a better place, what sort of things would they be?



- Perfect Health** – all diseases cured, all hurts healed
- Food for all** – no more famine or mal-nutrition
- Impartial Justice** – all Criminals brought to account promptly and effectively
- No more Crime** – people able to live in safety
- No more War** – nations living at peace
- Education** – everyone having the chance to learn about important things
- Morality** – people knowing right from wrong, and living properly
- Religion** – one true religion in place of the present religious confusion
- Fulfilment** – people having real job satisfaction and getting just rewards
- Environment** – no more damage to the environment by exploitation or pollution
- Happiness** – everyone living in harmony in real enjoyment.

People don't compile lists like that, even for their amusement, because they find the exercise a bit depressing. Such a list highlights the difference between what we would like and what we've got. "What's the point", we say, "of dreaming about the impossible? We'll just have to make the best of what we've got."

Impossible Dream?

Yet any exercise of self-improvement or future development has to start with an assessment of where we are and where we would like to be, before we start to

set ourselves targets. And all human governments, of whatever political persuasion, are trying to improve things in line with the checklist we have just produced. It's just that it takes time, costs a huge amount of money, and that progress in one area seems to be offset by setbacks in another area.

And the stakes are higher than ever. Man can now destroy the world, if not with weapons of mass destruction, then by upsetting the global ecology and polluting the planet. It only takes a madman to gain control, and who knows what might happen.

Wise Man

The prophets of God forecast a better future because they understood that God will provide a truly wise man to reign as King, and that he will be imbued with all the power he needs to take and exercise control. Looking at just one of the longer prophets – Isaiah – notice what he says about the man, who was to be born of a virgin (7:14), and who would be God's appointed King:

"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David [in Jerusalem] and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isaiah 9:6,7)

"The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His

delight is in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked" (11:1-4);

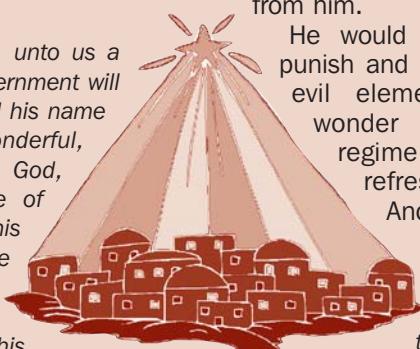
"Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice. A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (32:1,2).

New Start

What an opportunity it would be to start everything from scratch if such a man was in control of the world. His perfect understanding and insight into things would qualify him to know what was best in every circumstance. His insight into the human condition would enable him to decide the trickiest issues. His total control would make sure that his will prevailed, and nothing would be hid from him.

He would save the needy, but punish and destroy the unruly and evil elements of society. No wonder Isaiah describes this regime in terms of refreshment and revival.

And he has much more to say about the coming Kingdom:



"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; he will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths.' For out of

Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:2-4);

New World

"The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing ... He will come and save you. 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 ... A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness ... the redeemed shall walk there, and 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" (35:1-10).

Isn't this the sort of world you want to live in? It will be a world –

- ☛ in harmony with God,
- ☛ where people live together in peace and happiness,
- ☛ with all illness cured, all disease removed,
- ☛ where all problems are solved,
- ☛ with all needs met,
- ☛ which never knows hunger again,
- ☛ where there is proper education, including about the things of God,

- ☛ with God's law in operation, and it will be obeyed,
- ☛ where people grow in grace and in favour with God and man.

"All Things New"

That's the world that's coming – when the promised King comes to reign on earth over God's Kingdom. We looked at just one prophet, and then only at a little of what he predicted – there are 66 chapters of Isaiah's prophecy altogether. But wherever you look, because the Bible is a perfect unity, the message is always the same.

Here's the Lord Jesus Christ himself prophesying, in the last book of the Bible, what the Kingdom will be like:

I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, 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 away 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." Then he who sat on the throne said, "**Behold, I make all things new**" (Revelation 21:3-5).

It's exactly the same set of promises – "exceedingly great and precious" ones. This vision of the Kingdom is given to help us understand that God is not content with the world as it is now. He wants something better – for us!

He wants us to be New People, so that we can live in that New World with Him.

The End and the Beginning

This issue of "Glad Tidings" has been a little different from the usual format of the magazine in that there has been just one main topic – the Kingdom of God which is to be established on earth at the return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But how can you be sure you will be in that Kingdom?

... of the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is fundamentally important. It was important to Jesus and it should be our top priority, too.

When the Lord Jesus began his public ministry, do you remember how he began it?

"Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

Then he added a comment that shows we have to do something about it, if we want to be there:

"Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14,15).

Jesus had come to "fulfil" the purpose of God by establishing a new way into God's Kingdom, what the Bible calls a "new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20). If we want to be part of God's purpose, we have to travel along that way. It's the only way to life.

First Creation

From the very beginning God wanted men and women to live with Him in Paradise on earth. That's why he created the world in the first place, so that it would be "inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18) by people who



would live in agreement with Him, sharing His values, obeying His laws, becoming God-like in their behaviour.

Adam was created with that capacity (Genesis 1:26), but could not live up to his God-given potential. He chose an easier way, or so he thought at the time, and it has been a hard path along which his descendants have had to travel.

Yet, all the time, God has kept in mind His original intention. He means to fill the world with His glory – by having the world occupied by people who share His attributes, and who also live by love. But only such people will be there – those who want to live with God, both now and then.



God's Glory

Ten people who thought that following God was more trouble than it was worth once confronted Moses. They thought that getting into the kingdom was impossible. Fortunately there were two who took a different view. But, when the challenge came, God passed sentence on their unbelief, whilst reminding Moses of his long-term plan:

"Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD – because all these men who have seen my glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put me to the test now these ten times, and have