

Faith Alive!

Reasons to Believe

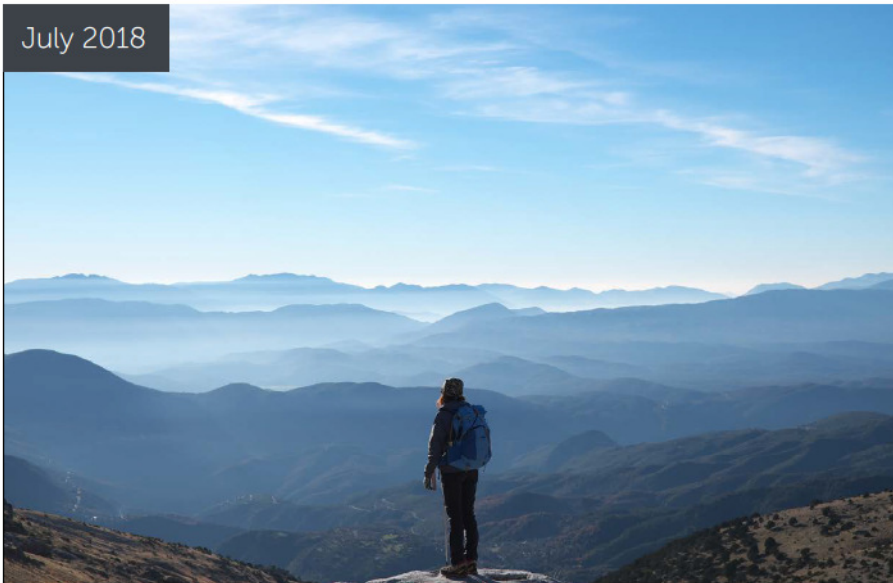
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Reasons To Believe

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

Picture yourself in a plane. You're taking part in a skydive. You're just preparing to make the jump, just about to put your trust in the parachute strapped to your back.

But then you catch someone speaking behind you. "These chutes, they're quite prone to failure in my opinion. Wouldn't trust 'em myself ..."

Suddenly doubt fills your mind. Do you jump? Do you believe the parachute will work? How do you know you can trust it? Is it worth the risk?

Doubt is a powerful feeling and it's the natural enemy of belief. It's only natural from time to time that we should feel doubts about our belief in God and His word, given that we are surrounded by people who tell us that God doesn't exist and that the Bible is not His word. But doubt is a very dangerous thing: it causes uncertainty, weakness and inaction. Who would risk jumping out of a plane if they didn't trust their parachute would save them?

Belief has the opposite effect. It makes people confident; it gives them strength and an ability to commit to difficult and dangerous tasks. The Bible is full of examples of men and women whose belief in God and His promises made them do amazing things. The ultimate example is Jesus, who was prepared to sacrifice his life for us, firm in the belief that God would raise him from the dead.

How do you feel about your own belief? Perhaps your doubts about God and His word are holding you back from truly devoting your life to Him.

It's important that we fight against our doubts, and God has given us plenty of ammunition! This issue of *Faith Alive!* is full of reasons to believe in the existence of God and reasons to believe that the Bible is His message to us.

It may be that you will find some reasons more convincing than others. But all together they build a powerful argument for belief in God and the Bible. Bear in mind that the articles in this issue barely scratch the surface, so we strongly encourage you to explore these topics further in your own reading.

Our belief is precious to God, it's the most valuable thing we can give Him, and it's the key to our salvation.

"Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

With love in Christ,

The *Faith Alive!*
Team



The First Cause of Everything

Dan Weatherall (Nuneaton, UK)

Where is God? We expect to be able to see His fingerprints throughout the universe. Is God really out there?

Look around you right now. What do you see? Whatever it is, it hasn't appeared out of nowhere without cause. Everything in this world began to exist because something caused it. People create objects; the weather and oceans make rivers, beaches and cliffs; animals reproduce to make more animals; seeds germinate and new plants emerge. Absolutely everything in the universe begins to exist as a result of something that caused it.

If you look back far enough in time, you are looking further towards the first cause of everything. Astronomers peer back in time through telescopes by seeing light that has travelled for many years and they have measured and identified the point at which this universe began.

That's right, our universe began. This is fascinating, isn't it? Our universe began to exist, from which point space-time expanded rapidly to form the galaxies and worlds that we live in. As our universe had a starting point, then it must have had a

cause. After all, we know that objects don't spontaneously appear out of nowhere! So what caused the universe to exist?

It must be something that is outside of the boundaries of time, matter and energy, since these are all features of the finite universe that we live in. In other words, the first cause of everything must be eternal, everywhere present and all powerful. What can it be?

There are, I think, two possibilities. The first is that an eternal God has caused this universe to exist. The second option, denying that a God can exist, is to claim that something else is the ultimate cause of everything. But what could that be? It would still need to have the attributes of being outside of time, matter and energy, and that is, by definition, what we call 'God'.

Even if we imagine a 'multiverse', where a universe begins, grows, dies whilst another is born in its place in an endless cycle, something must have started the whole thing off. It's actually impossible to have finite things stretching back in time for infinity. You have to have an

eternal 'something' to start the whole process off.

So, it makes much more sense to believe that something eternal is the cause of our universe.

For millennia, people have called that something 'God', and it makes more sense to believe it than to deny it. This argument doesn't tell us who that 'God' is, or whether He has attempted to communicate with people. But it's fascinating to realise that the Bible describes God as eternal, all powerful and outside the constraints of time and space: "from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:2).

Look around you again. Can you now see that the fingerprint of God's creative energy is present in everything that exists? He isn't far from us at all, for, "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Beautifully Made

Sarah Price (Rugby, UK)

God has created a beautiful world for us to live in. We don't have to look very far to notice the intricate pattern on the wings of a butterfly or stand in awe at the vastness of the night sky, stretching further than our minds can comprehend. Some people will appreciate beauty in watching a sunset, others prefer to examine under a microscope how organisms are formed at a molecular level. Everything we see in nature can remind us of the Creator, who designed it for us to inhabit.

"For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!)" (Isaiah 45:18)

It's humbling to realise that God fashioned, founded and formed the earth to provide a place for us to live. Starting in the Garden of Eden, God wanted Adam and Eve to enjoy the trees that were "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Genesis 2:9). We can experience creation with all our

senses, from the sight of a tree to the taste of its fruit. As David says in Psalm 34:8, "Taste and see that the LORD is good"! We can be constantly reminded of how good our God is, if we choose to acknowledge Him.

Of course, creation is not just beautiful, but also amazingly precise. Specific conditions are required in order for life to exist on the earth. For example, the distance between the sun and the moon was set by God to create the correct temperature so that the earth neither burns up nor freezes. As the Psalmist says, "He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved" (Psalm 104:5). We can be confident that each morning the sun will rise, bringing a new opportunity for us to remember and acknowledge our Creator.

So what is our response to this wonderfully precise and

beautiful creation? And how do our lives contribute to the beauty of the world around us? As we recognise God's creative hand let us "Worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!" (Psalm 96:9).

A young man with light brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a red sweater, is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the right. His hand is raised to his chin in a thoughtful pose. The background is dark, and there are many white, stylized letters and symbols floating around his head, suggesting a state of deep thought or intellectual activity.

Argument From Reason

Thomas Gaston (Oxford, UK)

Imagine a race of creatures a bit like human beings, with the ability to have thoughts about the world. And imagine that these creatures came into existence without God, by some unguided process (I am not saying that this is actually possible – just go with it for the moment). These creatures might have thoughts about the world, but how could they ever trust that they were true thoughts? After all, their brains – or whatever they think with – would just be the by-product of chance. Their thoughts might have little or no relation to reality. They would have reason to doubt every one of their thoughts.

Now think about the real world, about real human beings. If humans are the product of unguided evolution – as atheists usually believe – then we would be in the same position as those creatures we have thought about. The process of evolution is directed towards survival, not truth. Those creatures that survive are those best suited to avoid dangers, finding food, and attracting a mate. And animals can do all those things without having true thoughts about science, or mathematics, or

philosophy, or religion. Your thoughts might be complete nonsense as far as evolution is concerned, as long as you run away from tigers, eat enough calories, and make plenty of babies. Therefore anyone who believes that they are the product of unguided evolution has reason to doubt anything they believe, including their belief that there is no God and their belief that they are the product of unguided evolution. It is difficult, then, to see how an atheist can maintain their atheism consistently.

Consider things from the other perspective. If atheism makes truth-directed minds, at best, uncertain, then theism makes truth-directed minds very likely. If God wanted there to be creatures with whom He could have a relationship, then He would need to create them to be like Him. He would need to create creatures with minds capable of reason and capable of choice. This is what the Bible claims – that God made humans in His image (Genesis 1:26). So if you believe that there is a God and that in any sense God is responsible for your mind, then you have reason to expect that your mind is generally trustworthy and that you are capable of forming true beliefs.

The fact is we all assume that our minds are trustworthy – how else could we function? That fact would be unexpected if there was no God, yet makes perfect sense if there is a God.

Further Reading

For a more detailed look at this subject, see the chapter in *More Reasons* (edited by T. Gaston; Willow Publications, 2014).

Can we be good without God?

Neil Robin (Middlesbrough, UK)

"The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference."

Who wrote that? Can you guess?

Richard Dawkins - probably the world's most famous atheist.

To an extent, he's right. If God doesn't exist, we don't have any of those things - how do we know good and evil?

If God doesn't exist, 'good' is just personal opinion. Everyone can have a different opinion, so who gets to decide how we ought to live? You? Me? Richard Dawkins? Donald Trump? Kim Jong Un?

Or perhaps 'good' is a set of values shared by people who live together and agree on how we ought to treat each other. But what if you disagree with the values shared by everyone else? Suppose you were living in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and were appalled by that society's shared belief that persecuting the Jews was a good thing to do?

Or perhaps 'good' is simply whatever makes human beings happy and well. But why? Why should we be the basis on which good and evil are decided? That's a question which people who

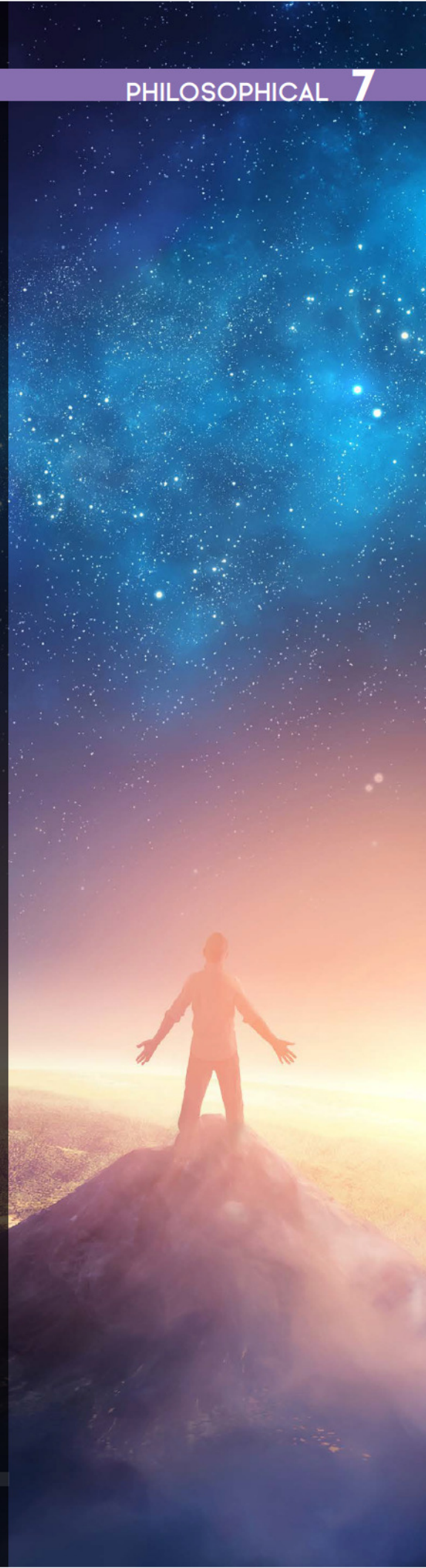
don't believe in God will almost never consider.

If God doesn't exist, we're just another animal which has evolved differently from other species. It's only if God does exist that we're special, made in His image, and our lives mean more than that of an animal.

Most modern societies, in the Western world at least, view good and evil the way we do because of our Christian heritage. Anyone who believes in the value of human life almost certainly got that idea from God originally, whether directly or indirectly.

Can science tell us what is 'good'? No. Science can only tell us what is, or what will happen if we perform a certain action. It cannot tell us whether we should perform it or not. There is no way to get from "is" to "ought" by science alone.

Can a person who doesn't believe in God be a good person? Of course. And most of them try to be. Yet in doing so, by clinging to an idea of good and evil, by trying to do what's good, they are living as if God exists while claiming to believe that He doesn't! How ironic is that?



The Wisdom of God's Laws

Ruth Walker (Nuneaton, UK)

There is so much wrong in our world: poverty, famine, disease, wars, refugee crises, and many other injustices.

The Bible tackles these problems fairly early on. David says in the Psalms: "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). It only struck me when reading *The Visible Hand of God* (a book by Robert Roberts) that David is referring to the Law of Moses.

What did David find delight in specifically? Maybe it was the laws about providing for the poor: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:9,10).

Maybe it was the sensible laws around hygiene and sexual purity, which have been shown to be very modern in their provision (Leviticus chapters 11-20).

Maybe it was the treatment of immigrants: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33,34).

Maybe it was the laws surrounding the jubilee and the restoration of possessions and servants (Leviticus 25).

Of course, these laws are all applications of the Ten Commandments; God is demonstrating how to put them into practice. Jesus condenses these teachings into just two simple rules to live by: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). If the standards in God's laws were kept by everybody now, the world would begin to be a better place.

Until Christ returns, there will always be social wrongs in the world, because man's heart is the root of the problem (Jeremiah 17:9). We can be confident that when the kingdom is established, "the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness quietness and trust for ever" (Isaiah 32:17). God's laws really do make sense.

1. David (Psalm 27:13); 2. Eyes (Matthew 9:28,29); 3. Storm (Matthew 8:23-27); 4. Isaac (James 2:21-23); 5. Gave (John 3:16); 6. Nails (John 20:25); Design; Israel.

Mini Quiz Solution (pg. 24)

The Case for Creation

Amy Parkin (Beverley, UK)

The complexity and splendour of the natural world is something which never ceases to take my breath away. Even in the absence of a microscope or telescope, we can notice and appreciate so much beauty. We watch as bees pollinate flower after flower and marvel at the uniformity and order found in the hive. We smile to see dewdrops on cobwebs, intricately woven from silk stronger than steel. On a clear night, we might wonder at the Milky Way or the Northern Lights and try to fathom the expanse of the universe and our place in it.

Thanks to the wonders of modern science and technology, we can delve deeper still. We learn of the sheer complexity of both plant and animal cells. We can look inside nuclei and watch as DNA replicates itself – a miniature factory inside each and every living cell. There are so many things we shall never be able to understand, many of which remain hidden from even the greatest human minds. With every new discovery come more questions.

We take it for granted that the earth is precisely fine-tuned to support life – not too hot, not too cold, with the perfect atmospheric balance of greenhouse gases. In the forest, trees, birds, animals, insects and fungi come together to form a complex network, providing each other with shelter,

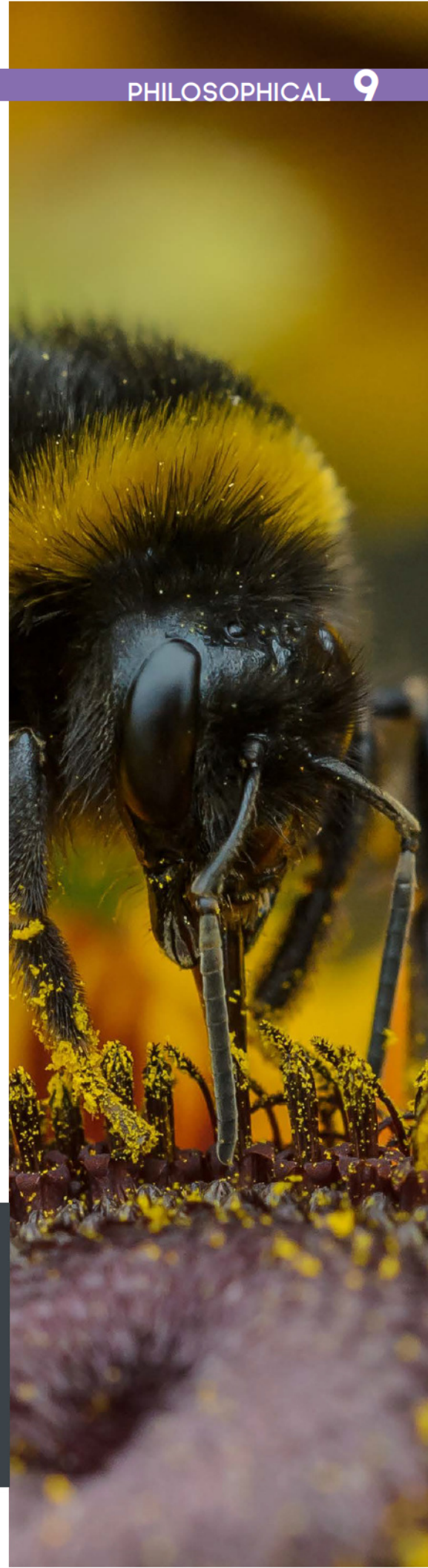
protection and nutrients. Closer to home, our bodies effortlessly regulate their temperature, pH, metabolic rate and the synthesis of myriad chemicals and enzymes.

The natural world is a beautiful, intentional work of art containing feats of engineering so complicated, so precise, that to argue that they came about through chance or evolution seems much more far-fetched to me than to conclude that the universe does indeed have an intelligent designer. Cultures and religions have given this designer many names and forms.

Through observation alone, we cannot deduce who or what designed and created the world. This is why God has revealed Himself to mankind, through prophets and apostles, especially through His Son and the written word that has been preserved for us. Although it is just one piece of a far greater picture, the beauty and complexity in nature is, to me, a profoundly convincing one.

Acts 14:15-17

"God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them ... did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."



The Bible Manuscripts

John Thorpe (Manchester, UK)

How do we know that the Bible we have today is the same as what was originally written? There are almost 6,000 Greek manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament and over 19,000 manuscripts of translations of the New Testament into other ancient languages such as Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic and Armenian. In addition to these there are many writings from the early church which quote from the New Testament; so many in fact that virtually every word of the New Testament is found in one or more of these books.

Sceptical critics of the Bible will point out that no two manuscripts of the New Testament are identical, but this comment is misleading. There are variations between manuscripts; this is almost impossible to avoid in the process of copying by hand without an amazing apparatus of cross-checks. Most of these variations, however, are trivial. Occasionally there are more significant variations, but usually it is very clear which is the correct variant. No part of the message of the Bible is compromised by any variation between witnesses to the text of the New Testament.

The history of the Old Testament is different. The scribes who copied Old Testament manuscripts took tremendous care over their work and when they had finished a page they performed a series of extremely demanding tests to discover whether there were any mistakes in the new

manuscript. Everything that could be counted or measured was considered; the result was an extremely accurate copy. As a consequence of this care there is no variation in text at all between different modern printings of the Hebrew Old Testament; the only variation is in the marginal comments.

But this method didn't start to be used until a few centuries after the time of Jesus, so earlier witnesses are important. The most significant of these is probably the Dead Sea Scrolls, which include many manuscripts of books of the Bible – every book except Esther is represented. Other witnesses include early translations of the Old Testament into other languages (such as Aramaic, Greek and Latin) and quotations in other early books such as the Mishnah and the New Testament. Again, the evidence is that there is no significant variation in the text of the Old Testament where the choice of the correct variant is not clear.

Of course, there are many other witnesses to the accuracy of the text of the Bible. If the manuscripts were badly copied, minor details in the narrative would be lost or altered. This would have made the Bible's correspondence with the evidence of archaeology less likely, and reduced the possibility of so-called 'undesigned coincidences' (see next article).

Considering all this evidence, we can be confident that the text of the Bible has not substantially changed.

Undesigned Coincidences

Joanna Cherry (Stockport, UK)

An 'undesigned coincidence' is where different verses in the Bible agree with each other in a way that could not have been deliberately planned by human authors. By noticing these connections, we gain confidence that the writers of the Bible were telling the truth. They were not making up stories, but were recording true history.

One particularly interesting coincidence is this: Joseph and Mary appear throughout the story of Jesus' birth and also in the record of the family's visit to Jerusalem. After that there is no further mention of Joseph. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all exclude Joseph from their records. Here are some of the verses where we might expect Joseph to be present:

Matthew 12:46: "... behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him."

Mark 6:3: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"

Luke 8:19: "Then his mother and his brothers came to him ..."

John 2:12: "... he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples."

So all four Gospel writers agree that Joseph was not present during Jesus' ministry – maybe he had died earlier.

This consistency is evidence of the writers' reliability.

A similar coincidence is found in Genesis 24. Bethuel was Rebekah's father but although he is alive (Genesis 24:50), he is not involved in any of the events relating to her betrothal to Isaac. Instead, Bethuel's son Laban takes the lead and acts as head of the household. There is no explanation for Bethuel's absence, but the record is consistent in not mentioning him. If Moses was making up the stories written in Genesis, it is unlikely that he would have missed Bethuel out of all the arrangements for Rebekah's marriage without an explanation.

There is another coincidence regarding Rebekah's marriage to Isaac. Abraham and Nahor were brothers (Genesis 24:15), but Abraham's son Isaac married Nahor's granddaughter Rebekah. You might think Rebekah would be too young to marry Isaac. However, we know from earlier in Genesis that Isaac was born when Abraham and Sarah were very old (Genesis 18:11). This would mean that Isaac and Rebekah were probably a similar age. The details of different parts of the story match up in a coherent fashion that adds credibility.

There are more than a hundred undesigned coincidences throughout the Bible. They give us confidence that the scriptures are recording real events and that we can believe everything written in them.

PSALM 89:11

11 The heavens *are* thine, the earth *is* thine: *as for* the world and the fulcrum thereof, thou hast founded them.
12 The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.
13 Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, *and* high is thy right hand.
14 Justice and judgment *are* the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.
15 Blessed *is* the people that know thy glorious sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.
16 In thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.
17 For thou *art* the glory of their strength, and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.
18 For the LORD *is* our defence; a Holy One of Israel *is* our king.

GOD EXALTS HIS CHOSEN ONE

19 Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help for the mighty; I have exalted one out of the people.
20 I have found David my servant; with holy oil have I anointed him:
21 With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.
22 The enemy shall not exact upon him: the son of wickedness shall afflict him.
23 And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him.
24 But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall he be exalted.
25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.
26 He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* my God, and the rock of my salvation.

GOD'S COVENANT STANDS FIRM

27 Also I will make him *my* firstborn, more precious than the kings of the earth.
28 My mercy will I keep for him for ever, and my covenant shall not fail with him.
29 His seed also will I make to *endure* ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.
30 If his children forsake my law, and do not in my judgments;
31 If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments;
32 Then will I visit their transgressions, and their iniquity with stripes.
33 Nevertheless my lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor will I fail in my faithfulness to him.
34 My covenant will I not break, neither will I alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.
35 Once have I sworn by my holiness: I will not lie unto David.
36 His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.

Old Testament Archaeology

John Thorpe (Manchester, UK)

The Old Testament was written over a period from about 1400 BC to about 400 BC. It contains accounts of kings and prophets, of battles and destruction and of the building of cities. Such things leave traces in the ground which can be discovered by archaeology. Such traces have indeed been found and are to be seen in museums around the world.

For example, the Bible tells us about the conquest of Judah by Babylon and the Babylonian captivity that followed. Jerusalem was first captured by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC, after which he installed Zedekiah as king (2 Kings 24:10-17); this action is also recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle, some tablets of which (including the one that records Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem) are in the British Museum. The collection there also contains tablets which confirm the existence of Belshazzar, second ruler in the kingdom at the time of Nabonidus (which is why Daniel is promised the position of third ruler – Daniel 5:16), and which confirm that the kings of Babylon were considering the idea of monotheism (see Daniel 4:37).

Jehoiachin (the king deposed by Nebuchadnezzar) was taken

to Babylon where he was given rations by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:27-30). Some of the receipts for the issue of these rations have been discovered in a large archive of cuneiform tablets found in the ruins of Babylon and are currently in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

There are similarly detailed sets of discoveries from the time of Hezekiah, when the Assyrian armies invaded Judah but failed to capture Jerusalem.

Finds from before the Assyrian invasions are less common, but they do exist. Sceptics used to claim that David had never existed, but a tablet has been

found which contains his name. The period of Judges is even harder to excavate as many Israelites lived in tents, which leave no trace. However, even here there are pottery finds and evidence of diet from animal bones (the Israelites didn't eat pork) which confirm a gradual takeover of the land from 1400 BC to about 1000 BC. The Bible dates the Exodus to before 1400 BC, which matches both the start of a culture change in Canaan and the evidence of destruction in Canaanite cities.

Archaeology can never prove that the Bible is inspired by God, but it can show that the people in the Bible are real people who lived in real, historical places. And that goes a long way to confirm the reliability of scripture.



*Quotations from the NIV

New Testament Archaeology

Shaun Maher (Stirling, UK)

Most people are completely unaware of the vast amount of evidence that supports the authority and accuracy of the Bible. One of the most amazing and powerful sources of evidence comes from the field of archaeology. Only two hundred years ago archaeology was used by critics of the Bible to try and discredit it, but today there is far more archaeological evidence that supports the Bible than casts doubt on it. Below we consider just two of many examples.

The chamberlain

One of the preaching journeys of Paul recorded in the book of Acts links with a wonderful discovery made in the ancient city of Corinth in Greece. Paul was at Corinth when he wrote the letter to the Romans, in which he implies the conversion of a prominent citizen named Erastus who was the city's treasurer (Romans 16:23). Erastus is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:20 and Acts 19:22.

In 1929 archaeologists discovered an inscription in the

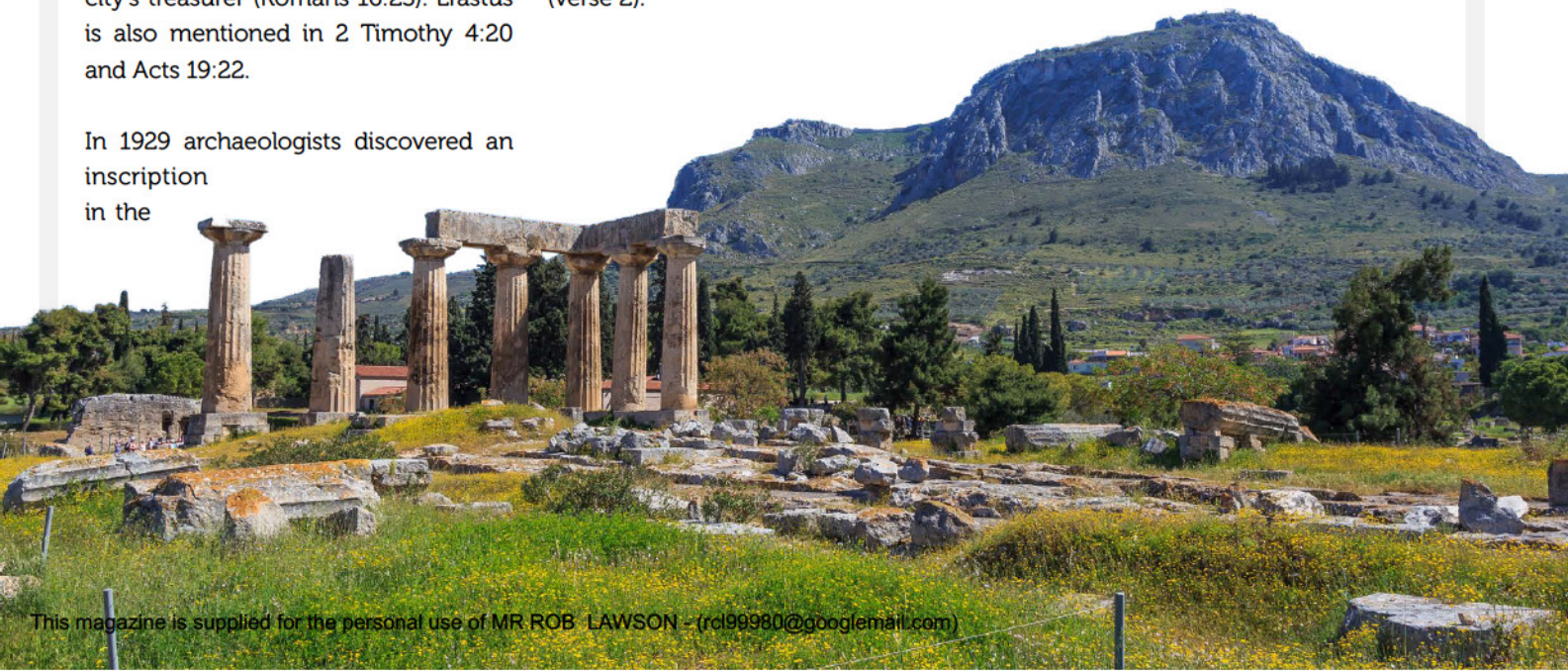
ancient city square from the mid-first century AD which read: "Erastus in return for his aedileship [an official position in the Roman Empire] paved it at his own expense". Just a few words that seem of little importance, but there would not have been more than one Erastus in charge of the city's public finances – this is the same man! The discoveries of archaeology confirm the accuracy and remarkable detail of the Bible record.

What wonderful stones, what wonderful buildings

For our second example we look at the time of Jesus. Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem and the disciples were extremely impressed by the grandeur and scale of the buildings around the temple complex (Mark 13:1). Jesus' response was shocking! "There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (verse 2).

During the 1970s and 80s archaeologists began to excavate the area at the base of the Temple Mount. As they dug down through 2,000 years of dirt and rubble they came across an enormous pile of higgledy-piggledy stones all along the base of the Temple Mount. They concluded that these were the stones thrown down from the top of the platform during the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Wow! As you look at these magnificent giant stones and touch them with your hands, you can hear the words of Jesus sounding down through the ages: "There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Luke 21:6).

The same Jesus who spoke these words 2,000 years ago also promised he would come again to this earth and set up his kingdom. Are you watching? Are you ready?



The One Message

Martin Evans (Manchester, UK)

God could have given us one very large textbook, written by one person containing everything we need to know, in a concise and orderly fashion. Everything would be where you would expect it, everything explained for us, with an index and a glossary of terms. So why isn't the Bible like this? Firstly, such a book would be far less exciting to read than the Bible and secondly it would be much less effective in changing hearts and minds, which is what God seeks to do by speaking to us by His word.

Instead of the textbook approach, God has spoken to us (see Hebrews 1:1) or revealed Himself (His character, His Son, His purpose, His ways) through real people and real events. These are seen through the eyes of many very different people in different circumstances and over a massive time span. This is far more compelling, more instructive and more life-changing than a textbook (see 2 Timothy 3:16,17 and Romans 1:16), but would have been beyond the powers of any human compiler.

The Bible is made up of many books but still has an internal harmony that points to one great mind behind it all. For many, this is convincing proof in itself of the divine origin of the Bible. How could so many different people, so widely separated in time and circumstance, writing in so many styles, manage to form a complete and

unified picture of God, His Son, His ways and His plan?

The more you look at the Bible, the more convinced you become that no set of human authors could be responsible for this book. Just like a watermark shows that something is genuine, so the harmony of different parts of the Bible shows that it is what it claims to be. I repeat, "the more you look at it", and therein lies the reason that those who study it with an open mind become more and more convinced of its inspiration and those who don't do this see only confusion and contradictions. The Bible doesn't easily give up its secrets any more than any great work of art or music does. It needs application, familiarity and thought.

This is too much for many today who want instant information and are unwilling to wait for anything. Jesus told us to "seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). This demands effort, diligent enquiry and a search for truth. So keep reading, keep thinking and keep praying, and God will bless your efforts.

2 Timothy 3:16,17

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

The Meaning of Life

Tommy and Debbie Evans (Dundee, UK)

Think of the world's greatest philosophers and you might have the same mental picture as I do – an old guy with a long grey beard sitting on a boulder in a wood with a quill and some parchment, pondering the Meaning of Life. It's an issue that the human race has been fascinated with for a long time, because the more you look at the world, the less it seems to make sense. Unlike animals, this lack of obvious purpose bothers humans. What is the point in life if it ends up just being a cycle of non-existence, followed by complete dependence on our parents, then adulthood, dependence again when we are old, and finally death? What did we actually achieve, and will it last beyond our death anyway?

It's questions like these that the Bible had already posed and answered long ago. The whole book of Ecclesiastes was written by someone observing

the way life runs and thinking, "It's just emptiness and grasping after the wind" (paraphrasing Ecclesiastes 1:14). The book works through several different scenarios explored in order to find happiness and purpose, and finds none except the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Isaiah also weighs in on the discussion. In his prophecy, God makes it very clear that He created the earth, and that "He did not create it empty, He formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18). God is declaring that there is a purpose to our existence, and the "earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

You see, a belief in a God explains things that don't make sense about our world. Once we put God and eternity into the picture, we can see a purpose beyond our otherwise short, pointless life cycles. We can understand that this life isn't 'it'; it's just our probationary time. It's our time to pick a path and try our best to serve God, so that we might be part of filling the world with God's glory in the future. Because of this hope, we can be comforted that even if our life doesn't work out as we wish, there's something greater worth hoping for.

Nations in Prophecy Puzzle Solution
 Babylon, Israel, Philistia, Judah, Sheba, Canaan, Greece, Nineveh, Moab, Lebanon, Ammon, Assyria, Edom, Tarshish, Egypt, Dedan, Tyre, Persia, Samaria, Gog, Gomer.



He's Alive! The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus

Richard Benson (Cardiff, UK)

Jesus Christ rose from the dead: this claim is central to the Gospel message. If Jesus rose from the dead, he must be who he said he was, God's promises must be true, and death is not our inevitable end. But if Jesus did not rise from the dead, Christianity is a false religion. It's based on a lie, and it promises a false hope of life for which there is no evidence. As Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14,15,17).

It's a bold claim: a dead man came to life and now lives forever. But the writers of the New Testament are bolder still – they make this a falsifiable claim. Let me explain. Imagine I claim that fairies are living at the bottom of the garden. "I

haven't seen them!" you reply. "Ah, but only I can see them," I continue, "They are invisible to the unenlightened". How can you disprove this claim? You know that I must be mad or lying, but I can dismiss any evidence you present of their non-existence since "they are invisible". This is a non-falsifiable claim – it cannot be proved false.

By contrast, the writers of the New Testament present the resurrection as visible, tangible and evident, even to sceptics. It wasn't something mystical or invisible or seen only by a select few. The early believers based their claim on evidence which was easy to prove false. By focusing on the physical body, they laid themselves open to the possibility of someone producing the body of Jesus, or locating the sealed tomb. By telling of the presence of the angels, they gave opportunity to the Jewish leaders to bring forth as opposing witnesses the men who had guarded the tomb. By claiming that Jesus had been seen alive by hundreds of people (several of them named), they risked the possibility of someone breaking ranks and admitting they hadn't seen Jesus after all.

So what do we conclude from this? Firstly, the first disciples really did believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. They were witnesses to his resurrection, and were confident that their witness could not be undermined. Secondly, their enemies were unable to

disprove their claim. Christianity could have been destroyed within weeks if contrary evidence had been presented. But it wasn't.

In fact, when the priests and Sadducees brought Peter and John before the council because of their preaching of the resurrection, they did nothing to disprove their claim (Acts 4:1-22). When they saw the power that now lived within these men, "they had nothing to say in opposition" (verse 14). When the disciples persisted in their preaching, they were arrested and beaten (Acts 5:18,40) – but the Jewish leaders presented no evidence to show that their preaching was untrue.

Something did really happen – something which transformed people. Think of Peter, who denied his Lord, or Thomas who doubted, or the other disciples who "all left him and fled" (Mark 14:50). Weeks later, they were testifying to thousands that Jesus was alive (Acts 2). Think of Jesus' own family: "not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5). Yet after the resurrection, they joined the disciples (Acts 1:14). Think of Paul, who was so sure that the Gospel message was a lie that he made it his mission to travel to Damascus to arrest any believers he could find (Acts 9:1,2). Yet when he got there, "he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20).

Further Reading

Who Moved the Stone?
by Frank Morison

**WHO MOVED
THE STONE?**

Frank Morison



More Info

For more about the evidence of the resurrection, take a look at:
www.theholeinhistory.com
 or watch this video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwXx_EQuQdQ



This was no nine-day wonder. These believers maintained their claim that Jesus was alive, even in the face of imprisonment and death (Acts 12). These trials were not limited to the first disciples, but continued as the Christian community grew. The Roman historian Suetonius (c. AD 69 – c. AD 122) writes of the time of Nero (c. AD 50), when “punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition” (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*). Even people who had not themselves seen Jesus alive were sufficiently convinced by the evidence to remain faithful through persecution. Against all the odds, the message of the resurrection spread.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians shows that these people weren’t gullible. There were some who doubted – even in the ecclesia. But he reminded them to consider the evidence. There were witnesses to the resurrection, “most of whom are still alive” (1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul himself had seen Jesus and been transformed (verses 8-10). There was no doubt: Jesus Christ was alive!



The Witness of Israel

Hannah Dawson-Bowman (Glasgow, UK)

You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he' (Isaiah 43:10).

Israel were warned that if they walked contrary to God they would be scattered and persecuted among the nations and that the land would become desolate (Leviticus 26:33). This was ultimately fulfilled by the Romans in AD 70, exactly as Jesus had prophesied: "They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

For over 1,800 years the Jewish people wandered in the wilderness of the world; their lives "hanging in doubt" before them (Deuteronomy 28:66). They were universally despised and rejected and their homeland lay desolate, occupied by successive hostile powers. The restoration of the Jews to their inheritance must have seemed nigh impossible, but the hope was never extinguished, because the God of Israel keeps His promises.

God had promised to preserve them and never to make a complete end of them (Jeremiah 30:11). This was evidenced during the Second World War when the Nazis attempted the total annihilation of the Jewish people, but a remnant survived the horrors of the Holocaust and desperately sought a new life in the land promised to their forefathers (Ezekiel 37).

"... And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future', declares the LORD, 'and your children shall come back to their own country'" (Jeremiah 31:16,17).

On May 14, 1948 the modern state of Israel was established, formally creating a homeland for the Jewish people, and in June 1967 Israel regained control of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War.

Seventy years on: Israel is still far from being the fully restored kingdom of God as promised throughout scripture. However, I believe they witness to the faithfulness and lovingkindness of our God because their presence in the land of Israel shows that God keeps His promises. Through God's great mercy and baptism into Christ, we too can become part of the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of promise (Ephesians 2:12,13).

And so, our hope is bound up in the hope of Israel. The days are coming when God will magnify His name through them when they recognise their Messiah – His Son, who will reign as King on the throne of David in that kingdom we so long for.

Ezekiel 37:2

"Then say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land."

Jesus: A Messiah Foretold

Graham Yuile (Adelaide, Australia)

All four Gospels introduce Jesus as the 'Christ' (the equivalent of 'Messiah' in the Old Testament), the individual anointed by God. God had told His people, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Just as priests and kings in the Old Testament were anointed, so the Messiah (called "an anointed one, a prince" in Daniel 9:25) was to be anointed High Priest and King.

Jesus wanted people to work out for themselves that he was Messiah, so when he was preaching and healing in the north, around Galilee, he often asked those he helped not to say who he was. Although he pushed his disciples to consider it, he let them find their answers in scripture.

The breakthrough came in Luke 9:18-22 when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was: Peter answered (correctly!) "The Christ of God", but Jesus immediately warned them not to tell anyone.

In Luke 22:37, Jesus refers to his role as Messiah once more before his arrest. Speaking to his disciples, he quotes Isaiah 53:12: "For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfilment". This is one of many times that Jesus is linked to Isaiah's prophecies to prove that he is the expected Messiah.

We know that these prophecies pre-date the time of Jesus. From 1947 to 1956, thirteen scrolls and thousands of written fragments were discovered concealed throughout eleven caves in Qumran, near the Dead Sea. Among these was an almost complete text of Isaiah that the Israel Museum in Jerusalem dates to around 125 BC. Before it was found, the earliest Isaiah text dated to around AD 895! So the Isaiah Scroll from Qumran gives us absolute confidence that the prophecies relating to Jesus were not forged after his death.

In Romans, Paul talks about how Jesus is the King promised in the Old Testament, explaining that Jesus came to serve Gentiles as well as Jews. He supports this with four Old Testament passages, the last of which is from Isaiah 11: "And again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope'" (Romans 15:8-12).

Because of all these things we can be completely confident that the Bible can predict the future, that Jesus is Messiah, the Christ, and that we can have hope through him.

Isaiah 53:10

"He shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."

Signs of the Times

Roger Long (Birmingham, UK)

It is said that when British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, was asked what he most feared, he replied: "Events, dear boy, events". Political leaders can so easily be thrown off course by unexpected happenings and struggle to deal with them. The Bible is a great comfort in this respect: it teaches us that through the mass of seemingly random events of history, God is working out His purpose; He is in control. He is never taken by surprise or thrown off course. The Book of Daniel reminds us that God "rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Daniel 4:25, NKJV).

We see turmoil in many countries of the world at the present time, and this is particularly true of the Middle East. There has been, for example, the so-called "Arab Spring". It began with a revolution in Tunisia in December 2010 that unseated a long-serving president, one who had ruled with an iron fist for twenty-three years. Commentators at the time asked whether there might be a domino effect, and that is what happened. Major protests and civil disobedience broke out across the Middle East and North Africa, in places like Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, Bahrain, Libya, Iran, Egypt – which brought to an end President Hosni Mubarak's nearly thirty years in power – and then, of course, Syria, where the uprising which began in March 2011 has grown

into a conflict that is now destabilising the entire region.

The West's reluctance to intervene has allowed Russia and Iran especially to fill the void – countries that Ezekiel suggests will be involved in the confederacy of powers invading the land of Israel about the time of Christ's return (Ezekiel 38:1-5). Perhaps other nations, and indeed Israel herself, will be taken completely by surprise when it happens. This is implied by the language Ezekiel uses, expressions like "the land of unwalled villages ... that are at rest, that dwell safely" (verse 11). The invasion will be "like a cloud to cover the land" (verse 9) – an overwhelming force. Nations more sympathetic to Israel protest, but the invader can only be defeated by divine intervention (see Ezekiel 38 & 39).

As world events get closer to the end predicted by the prophets, we do not know and cannot predict every twist and turn, but the direction of travel is clear and, as we would expect, in harmony with the words of scripture.

Ezekiel 38:23

"I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

One-Day Conference

Ruth Legg (Swansea, UK) and Hannah Wesley (Birmingham, UK)

On March 10, 2018, around 75 people gathered for the inaugural One-Day Conference (ODC), held at Sale ecclesial hall. The theme for the day was, "O taste and see that Yahweh is good – a discovery of Psalm 34".

Brother Stephen Palmer led the studies throughout the day, beginning the five sessions with a short talk. In each of these sessions we looked at a different aspect of Psalm 34, including the context of when it was written, its structure and sections, links to elsewhere in scripture and Messianic connections.

After each introductory talk, we split up into groups to discuss what we had discovered having completed the study guide prior to the day. This study guide had been sent to everyone to help them prepare for the discussion groups – this was a great way of ensuring that we all had something to contribute and got more out of the day.

What made the day so amazing was the fact that everyone was so eager to learn from God's word. It was wonderful to be able to share so many discoveries with each other. Everyone seemed really to enjoy the day and found it a profitable experience.

We ended by thinking about the significance of the Psalm for us and

how we can apply the lessons in our lives.

As a follow-up, further ideas are being studied by all who attended. These ideas will be collated into the ODC book alongside the notes gathered from the discussion groups. The book will be published and distributed to all those who attended and will be available to anyone else interested.

A second ODC is being planned for Spring 2019, God willing – confirmation of details and bookings will be available later this year. A Three-Day Conference (3DC) is also being planned for winter 2019!

"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them. O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psalm 34:7,8, KJV).

Across:
1. Died (Romans 6:8); 4. Where (Matthew 21:25); 5. Eyes (Numbers 20:12).
Down:
1. Down (Matthew 27:42); 2. Every (1 John 4:1); 3. Jews (John 9:18)

Mini Crossword Solution