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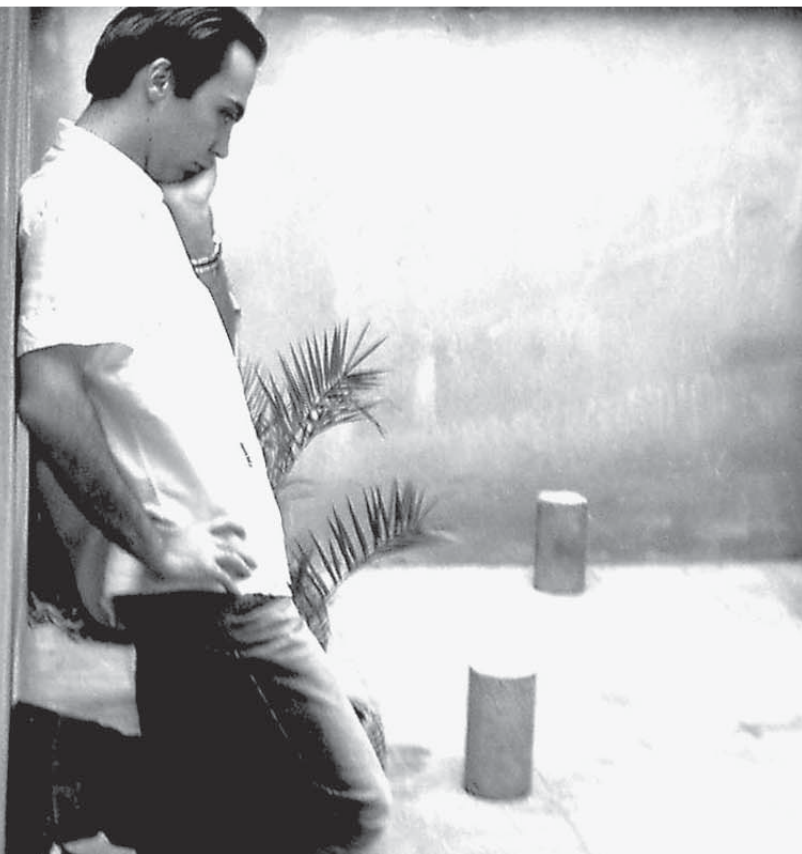
CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE



The First Armageddon

Do You Mind?

Jesus Only:

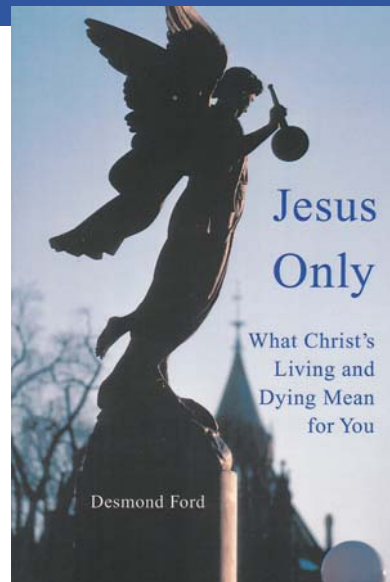


What Christ's Living and Dying Mean for You

For almost 2,000 years millions of readers of the Gospels have found them to be self-authenticating—the 'inner witness' of their divine inspiration is given to all who read with a surrendered will. Dr. Desmond Ford, who has studied the New Testament records for 70 years, believes that thoughtful readers of this devotional study will have that experience.

This book is Christ-centred, Cross-centred and gospel-centred. Those who give it close attention will conclude that compared to the knowledge of the glad tidings from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all other knowledge is chaff. Gems from scores of Christian scholars are encapsulated in these pages. To gather them can make anyone richer than Solomon.

Desmond Ford was a seminary teacher for decades in USA, Canada and Australia. He has written approximately thirty books on theological and life-style themes, as well as lecturing over radio and TV for many years. Ford has a strong interest in helping young people entering the ministry, and his wife is a strong supporter in all his efforts to that end.



by Desmond Ford

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Editorial

EVERY new generation has been a trial to its parents, but few so great as this present 'me' generation. A great deal of the problems associated with the young people of today can be laid at the feet of their parents who have failed to give them a moral foundation on which to build their lives. By ditching Christianity people also ditched the ethics of Jesus and the Ten Commandments.

When parents enter their pre-school and primary-age children in beauty pageants they are sowing to the whirlwind by giving their child the idea that the universe revolves around them. I am not suggesting that we should revert to the practices of my childhood era where children were only permitted to speak in public if they were spoken to. It was often quoted to my siblings and me: 'Children are to be seen and not heard'. That was repressive! But the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. Those in the current 'me' generation are highly opinionated and think only of themselves and how others see them.

Privileges, for the 'me' generation, don't come with parallel responsibilities. They want the freedom to drink excessively and act foolishly, which they claim is their 'right'. However, they don't believe it's their responsibility to clean up the mess and pay for the damage afterwards. That's what the Council is for. And if they need

hospital attention because of their over-indulgence, then that also is their 'right'.

Jean Tweng, Associate Professor of Psychology at San Diego University, says, 'If parents in the U.S. fifty years ago were asked what they thought the most important thing was for their child to appreciate, they would have said "obedience," but now it's "to be themselves".'

When a growing person's frontal lobes—the part of the brain that makes judgements—do not fully develop until the age of twenty-five, what insane motive permits their parents to let them freely drink alcohol, sleep around with the opposite sex, experiment with drugs and use cars like playthings, when they are still 'children'? Is it because the parents are misguided themselves? Or, is it because the parents really have no moral foundation of their own to pass on to their offspring. From my observations the latter is definitely a major factor in the production of useless, aimless, self-centred youth.

The rejection of Christianity by most people in the Western World has resulted in a society that is all at sea without a rudder. It has no idea why it is here, nor where it is going.

The Church has to accept much of the blame for this sad state of affairs. When bishops and priests abuse children in their care, when television evangelists glorify

themselves and rip off multitudes, when denominations focus on winning converts to themselves rather than to Christ, it is no wonder more and more churches are shutting their doors for the last time.

We are living in a time when, more than ever before, young people are 'lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, etc. etc.' (2 Tim. 3:1-2).

Enough of the problem; what is the solution? The solution is to start with your children at a very young age. Make it your chief task to finish each day with a Bible story or Bible reading and prayer. As soon as they can read give the children a few paragraphs to read so they feel included and important. Be consistent with your children. Make your home a place where complete honesty is the norm. Be firm with your children, but ever loving.



RITCHIE WAY

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Mission Statement

Christians united in offering to all meaning and direction in their lives through a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.



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The First Armageddon

DESMOND FORD

The drama of Armageddon will be replayed at the end of the world (consummated eschatology), but the outcome was determined by the theatre of the Cross event (inaugurated eschatology). Christ fought that battle to secure our salvation. Therefore, Armageddon should not strike terror in the believer, but assure us that our redemption is near.

ARE YOU 'a meaningless clot of coincidental molecules', or are you a child of God, of infinite worth? Upon your answer depends your life and destiny.

The greatest battle the universe has ever known was fought to answer that question. It was not Agincourt, Waterloo, Stalingrad, the battle for Berlin nor the Battle of the Bulge. It was the battle fought by Christ on the hill of Calvary. There having 'disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Col. 2:15). This was to prove to the universe the infinite worth of the children of God, purchased and made eternal conquerors by the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God.

In Colossians 2:15 Paul alludes to the famous Roman Triumphs when the Senate approved a triumphal procession for a military conqueror. The hero would stand erect in his glorious chariot led by two snow-white horses. Behind him and chained were the kings or generals he had conquered. Also in his train was the victorious army. Roman citizens decorated their houses and went to the parapets to cheer the procession.

We can only fully understand the implications of this event if we consider what theologians call inaugurated and consummated eschatology. Eschatology, of course, has to do with 'the last things', but these were anticipated in that 'end of the world' when Christ established his eternal kingdom by his atoning death (Heb. 9:26).

Passion Week, which occupies from a third to a half of the Gospels, is a miniature of the events at the close of time. It began with the Triumphal Entry, which published throughout Jewry Christ's claim to be the Messiah. That proclamation divided Jerusalem into supporters and opponents. Apostate Jewry linked with apostate government (represented by Pilate) to put Christ to death. He endured a time of trouble in Gethsemane and then the climactic agony on Calvary.

So, at the end of time, the body of Christ, the church of the twice born, will give a 'loud cry' lightening the earth with the glory of the gospel (Rev. 18:1-4). This, too, will have the effect of dividing the world so enlightened. The majority beholding a world sinking into the abyss of depravity,

violence, and disintegration will decide to silence the nonconforming minority who refuse the offered panacea of a false global religion (Rev. 13:11-18). The church will experience a time of trouble, climaxed by Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 17:14; 19:19-21).

The first (in the senses of primary and chief) Armageddon was fought at the cross. It was an invisible conflict, for wicked spirits have no bodily form. All Christians who take up the cross must contend with 'principalities and powers', the hosts of wickedness, and, thereby, they but miniature the agonies of their Redeemer in his atoning act—an act opposed by the myriads of fallen angels. See Ephesians 6:12 and compare Colossians 2:15.

Revelation 12:7-12 in graphic apocalyptic language encapsulates the three falls of Satan—first from heaven, second from his station as the 'prince of this world' and finally at the close of the millennium. But the reference to the blood of the Lamb of God certifies that this passage has its chief application to Calvary.

Rising from the communion table at midnight, Christ went forth to the battle. A little earlier he had proclaimed to the emissaries of Satan: 'This is your hour and the power of darkness'; 'Now is the crisis [judgement] of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out'. He had foretold this many times. See particularly Luke 11:21-22:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up the spoil.

Over 300 years ago, Charles Leslie in his *Truth of Christianity Demonstrated* wrote concerning one of the Old Testament types of Christ:

Samson, who by his single valour and his own strength overcame the Philistines, and slew more at his death than in all his life, was a representation of Christ, who “trode the winepress alone, and of the people there were none with him, but his own arm brought him salvation” (Isa. 63:3,5). But his death completed his victory, whereby he overcame all the power of the enemy, “and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross” (Col. 2:15).

The first skirmish seemed a tragic failure. The appointed General of God’s hosts is on his knees pleading with the Father to stop the battle. But there in Gethsemane he is strengthened, revived, and never afterwards quails before the conflict, or says a word about withdrawing. Now covered with bloody sweat he goes forth to meet the armies of his great opponent. The kiss of Judas is the sounding of the



trumpet. The scene at Pilate’s judgment hall is the gleaming of the spear, and the terrible lash of Christ’s flogging is the crossing of swords. So said C. H. Spurgeon in commenting upon Colossians 2:15:

But the heart of the battle is on “that green hill far away.” Now the pit empties out its legions—terrible as lions, hungry as wolves, and dark as midnight. The leaders of the host include the crooked serpent, Satan, brandishing his sword of the law dipped in the blood of sin’s penalty. He is accompanied by Sin with its innumerable allies, like poisonous asps tormenting the figure on the cross, and Death on its pale horse, whose darts sting to death the Saviour of men. ...

On and on they sweep, and so many darts fill the air that the sun is darkened. The angelic hosts, holding their breath, wonder whether there is to be an awful defeat or a grand conquest. Then, from the heart of the melée comes a cry that fills the angels with dread. “I thirst.” Does it mean that capitulation is near? No! Look at the heaps of the fallen around the Cross. Then the darkness is lifted and with the newborn light comes the triumphant cry “It is finished,” and Jesus is Conqueror.

In that conflict, the greatest battle the Universe had ever witnessed, it was proven that believers are of infinite worth because they are now partakers of the imputed righteousness of Christ and its fruit of life eternal. Sing and rejoice, because, however stern your present conflict, victory is assured. Soon we shall behold the ultimate fulfilment of Colossians 2:15, when the jewelled gates of the New Jerusalem will be thrown open for Christ and his people. The angelic hosts will behold the martyrs of the ages in the vanguard, then the preachers and confessors of the centuries. Next will be seen the Glorious One, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and in his train the conquered serpent and his defeated followers.

We can share that glory if now, by faith, we take up the cross daily, battle with principalities and powers, and follow him who loved us and gave himself for us. ✨

Jesus is the Truth About Truth

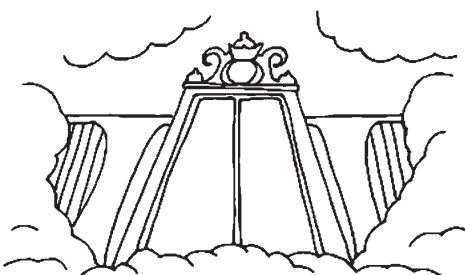
A QUESTION that arises repeatedly is, ‘As there are so many different interpretations of Scripture, and so many people telling me that their view of a biblical topic is the correct one, how can I possibly know what the truth really is?’ There is only one answer to that question: Jesus, and Jesus alone, is ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ (John 14:6). He alone is God’s final and fullest revelation of truth. All interpretations must be measured by the fail-safe standard of his life and teachings.

Two groups of people arrived at the Pearly Gates seeking entry to the Holy City. An angel with a clipboard approached the spokesperson for the first group.

‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘what do you believe about such and such a doctrine?’

After the spokesperson had answered on behalf of the group, the angel asked: ‘And what would be your response if I told you that you were wrong?’

‘Well,’ replied the spokesperson, ‘if we are wrong we have obviously come to the wrong place because what we believe



is God’s Word. We have no doubt about that whatsoever.’

‘Thank you,’ said the angel. ‘Please wait here.’

Going to the second group the angel put the same two questions to them. After receiving their reply to the first question—which was quite the opposite of the answer given by the other group—he asked, ‘What would your response be if I told you that you were wrong?’

The spokesperson replied, ‘Of course we would be naturally disappointed, but what counts most with us is not what we believe, but the truth as it is in Jesus.’

After scribbling a few things on his

clipboard the angel stepped back to address both groups.

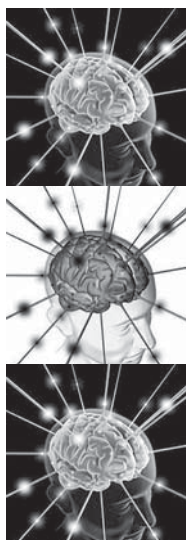
‘You will be interested to know,’ he announced, ‘that only the first group had the correct answer to the question on doctrine.’

A great cheer arose from the first group. The second group applauded them.

‘But,’ continued the angel, ‘no one is saved by their faith in correct doctrine. People are saved only by their faith in Jesus. Unfortunately, the first group has more faith in their particular understanding of the truth than it does in Jesus. For them to state that if they had to choose between their belief and living with Christ for eternity, they’d stick with their belief, is to exalt themselves above him who said, “I am the truth” (John 14:6).

Looking directly at the first group the angel continued, ‘Heaven is only for those who put the Lord before themselves and their opinions. I’m sorry but there is no place for any of you in here.’

Turning to the second group the angel said, ‘Welcome into the joy of your Lord.’ ✨



Do You Mind?

But then arises the doubt—can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the lowest animal, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions?

Autobiography of Charles Darwin, p. 93

DESMOND FORD

MY OPINION, certainly not shared by his devotees, is that this is the best statement Darwin ever wrote. He has touched the psychological jugular. Should we trust this organ on the top of our shoulders, which is, according to Stephen Jay Gould, the result of fifty billion coincidences? How are we to explain the computer given us by nature whereby we interpret all things? Is it really to be trusted?

Centuries back, David Hume wrote: 'Consider the peculiar privilege of that little agitation of brain that we call thought, that we must make it the model of the whole universe' (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*). Hume is actually quoting Philo, but the Scotsman has been given the lasting credit.

Possibly, Einstein had that in mind when he wrote that 'the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible'. C. S. Lewis was emphatic that 'we must sharply distinguish between Evolution as a biological theorem and popular Evolutionism or Developmentalism which is certainly a Myth'. Then he proceeds to blast (in his mind at least) that myth and all related ones out of the water. Again I quote *Christian Reflections*, page 89:

The Myth asks me to believe that reason is simply the unforeseen and unintended by-product of a mindless process at one stage of its endless and aimless becoming. The content of the Myth thus knocks from under me the only ground on which I could possibly believe the Myth to be true. If my own mind is a product of the irrational—if what seem my clearest reasonings

are only the way in which a creature conditioned as I am is bound to feel—how shall I trust my mind when it tells me about Evolution? They say in effect "I will prove that what you call a proof is only the result of mental habits which result from heredity which results from bio-chemistry which results from physics." But this is the same as saying: "I will prove that proofs are irrational," more succinctly, "I will prove that there are no proofs."

His essay, *'Meditation in a Toolshed'*, says something similar (*God in the Dock*, page 215):

The inside vision of rational thinking must be truer than the outside vision, which sees only movements of the grey matter; for if the outside vision were the correct one all thought (including this thought itself) would be valueless, and this is self-contradictory. You cannot have a proof that no proofs matter.

This was a popular theme with Lewis. I think it is he who reminds us that we use our minds as we use a window—seeing through it, but ignoring the medium. Put with this the fact that ambiguity and relativity characterise all our thinking. Again thoughtful people must ask, 'How reliable are my mental processes?' But only mental processes can raise the question. Is it not a catch-22?

All of which reminds one of an ancient profound joke. Socrates: 'The next thing Plato says will be false'. Plato: 'What Socrates says is true'.

When we remember that the human brain is the most complicated thing in the universe, it is not hard to understand Lewis's preoccupation with it. Something

that makes five trillion decision every second is something to be wondered at. (The brain has 100 billion neurons and 100 trillion synapses. These respond to messages from the body's trillions of cells. According to Mark Abernethy in his *Five Technologies to Watch* on the Internet, even lizards make ten trillion decisions per second.)

To paraphrase Einstein, why should it be that something in our head parallels to some degree things outside our head? While truth is polygonal, and our thought is linear, yet in everyday practice thought seems remarkably sufficient for our needs. And all this despite the fact that we are not quite sure what a thought is. Clearly no one has ever seen one. It has neither size nor weight. Almost the thinker is tempted to supernaturalism.

Everybody knows about the dictum of Descartes: 'I think, therefore I am'. But just why should we put so much stock in our cerebral behaviour? We would not dream of calling the shape of a cloud or spilled milk true or false. They just are. If the products of our minds are as accidentally caused as the shape of a cloud, why trust them?

Everybody knows the answer to that—because they work. Every waking moment establishes their adequacy. But the question remains, why should it be so? How come the mind is so efficient?

And what about memory? An old centenarian can recall events of 90 years ago. How does he do it? With pad and pencil? Not usually? With much mental sweat? Not usually. The sought after memory just pops up in a way that sought after articles never do in the filing system in my library. And it comes with pictures! Explain that! Nobody can. Remember to describe a process is not the same as explaining it. Can you imagine what life

would be like without memory? Who am I? And what name belongs to that head beside me on this bed?

We have become so used to our amazing universe that it ceases to amaze us. The brain is not solitary in its power. Ever heard of the neutrino? That strange and elusive sub-atomic particle is capable of passing through a block of lead light years in thickness. Every second 600 billion neutrinos pass unnoticed through every square centimetre of our bodies.

John Polkinghorne in his *Quarks, Chaos, and Christianity*, pages 55-56, has told us that once two electrons have interacted with each other they retain the power to influence each other, however widely they subsequently separate. One can be over the moon, so to speak, and the other in the laboratory, but the odd twinship remains.

Then there is the matter of our personal bulk—it would be reduced to a pinhead were all the spaces in every atom removed! Or to be similarly personal, who is there that considers the miracle of the human liver, which has 500 known functions, including the removal of the 100,000 or so chemicals we ingest from our air, food, and water?

So the problem of the human brain has plenty of familiar company.

In *Nature's Destiny*, pages 362-363, Michael J. Denton has summarized the puzzle afforded by our brains. He reminds us that our capacity for abstract mathematical thought on which all of science is based is vastly in excess of the intellectual needs of the hunter-gatherers of Africa 200,000 years ago. He quotes Paul Davies as follows:

What is remarkable is that human beings are actually able to carry out this code-breaking operation, that



the human mind has the necessary intellectual equipment for us to "unlock the secrets of nature".

And Denton also quotes John Barrow who is likewise mystified. 'Why should our cognitive processes have tuned themselves to such an extravagant quest as the understanding of the entire universe? ... How fortuitous that our minds ... should be poised to fathom the depths of nature's secrets'.

Now, if I may be permitted to leave behind for the present the scientists, may I endeavour to attach our problem closely to the warp and woof of every day's decision-making? We are (unless we are psychopaths) characterised by convictions about the rightness or wrongness of human actions. But are we not commonly guilty of forgetting that every action is based on some hypothesis 'about the unseen Ground of the world-pattern?' Our conscious behaviour springs from our convictions regarding the nature of reality (Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, page 331).

In the last few decades more has been learned about the nature of the universe than in all preceding time. Space probes, the Hubble Telescope and computational analysis by high-speed computers have placed us a million kilometres ahead of all our ancestors. For example, if the Hubble Telescope focuses on a distant spot in the universe the size of a grain of sand, 4,000 galaxies are revealed!

But with this scientific advance the very basic problem propounded by Darwin over a century ago remains unsolved.

Part of the problem includes this: every fact has a metaphysical element. Materialism evaporates before this simple fact. Cognitive dissonance multiplies our human embarrassment as we confront issues so central to our ultimate philosophy of life. Maybe we don't recognize certain truths because they are too unpleasant for us. It is only the pure in heart who see.

We walk on a fairly solid earth. We can clutch at persons, branches, flowers, or pets. We could even be so foolish as to think that the intangible (for us pedestrians) heavens are not that important. But a little thought about air and rain can change that. Similarly, men and women can go about their daily business without examining their immaterial (heavenly) philosophies, their personal hypotheses about the nature of the universe, but is there not a terrible cost?

I think Mr Darwin is to be congratulated for his clear thinking about the risky business of thought. But simple unsophisticated followers of the Christ who pointed to the sun and declared, 'I am the light of the world' should be doubly praised. For them darkness and uncertainty have fled away, and 'the true Light shines'. ❄

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There are two prophecies in the Old Testament that are as bright galaxies outshining all other systems in the prophetic constellation of heaven. These are Isaiah 52:12-53:12 and Daniel 9:24-27. It is the latter, which I will now address.



Everlasting Righteousness

DESMOND FORD

HERE IS THE highlight of the Old Testament. We have here an inexhaustible mine, gleaming not only with prophecies which are vast and comprehensive, but also with a series of the most scintillating, all-encompassing promises to be found in Scripture. I have written an entire book on this passage. It is entitled *In the Heart of Daniel*, and I refer the reader to that.

Verse 24 is a cluster of gospel promises radiating from Calvary after the passing of 70 sevens of time. The later verses tell of the 'cutting off' of the Messiah and the resulting devastation of Jerusalem, its people and its temple. Sir Isaac Newton, the greatest of scientists prior to the modern period, wrote a commentary upon the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation and he described these verses as 'the foundation stone of the Christian religion'.

To understand this passage is to find Paradise. Here we are assured that the Son of God has taken our guilt, atoned for it, and in its place bestowed 'everlasting righteousness' on all who will receive it.

As regards the destiny of Israel, the prophecy is conditional, as is shown by Christ's words when he descended Mount Olivet centuries later. See Luke 19:41-44.

Our Lord's Olivet sermon (Matthew 24-25, Luke 21 and Mark 13) is chiefly concerned with these verses, as he foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of Antichrist and the great tribulation such as never was. That Olivet sermon was then elaborated in the Revelation given to John on Patmos. Paul also drew from it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. (See *The Coming Worldwide Calvary* by the present author.)

The greatest Bible commentator of all time, Matthew Henry, excelled himself when he wrote as follows on the Bible's superlative prophecy. His words should be read and re-read:

The carnal Jews looked for a Messiah that could deliver them from the Roman yoke, and give them temporal power and wealth, whereas they were here told that the Messiah should come upon another errand, purely spiritual, and on account of which he should be the more welcome.

1. Christ came to take away sin, and to abolish that. Sin had made a quarrel between God and man, had alienated men from God and provoked God against man; it was this that put dishonour upon God and misery upon mankind; this was the great

mischief-maker. He that would do God a real service and man a real kindness must be the destruction of this. Christ undertakes to be so, and for this purpose he is manifested, to destroy the works of the devil.

He does not say to finish *your transgressions and your sin*, but *transgression and sin in general*, for he is the propitiation not only for our sins, that are Jews, but also for the sins of the whole world. He came, first, to finish transgression, to restrain it (so some), to break the power of it, to bruise the head of that serpent that had done so much mischief, to take away the usurped dominion of that tyrant, and to set up a kingdom of holiness and love in the heart of men, upon the ruins of Satan's kingdom there, that, where sin and death had reigned, righteousness and life through grace might reign. When he died he said, It is finished; sin has now had its death-wound given it, like Samson's, *Let me die with the Philistines*. ... To make an end of sin, to abolish it, that it may not rise up in judgment against us, to obtain the pardon of it, that it may not be our ruin, to seal up sins (so the margin reads it), that they may not appear or break out against us, to accuse and condemn

us, as when Christ cast the devil into the bottomless pit, he set a seal upon him, Rev. 20:3. When sin is pardoned, it is sought for and not found, as that which is sealed up. Thirdly, to *make reconciliation for iniquity*, as by a sacrifice, to satisfy the justice of God and so to make peace and bring God and man together, not only as an arbitrator, or referee, who only brings the contending parties to a good understanding one of another, but as a surety, or undertaker, for us. He is not only the peacemaker but also the peace. He is the atonement.

2. He came to *bring in an everlasting righteousness*. God might justly have made an end of the sin by making an end of the sinner; but Christ found out another way, and so made an end of sin as to save the sinner from it, by providing a righteousness for him. We are all guilty before God, and shall be condemned as guilty, if we have not a righteousness wherein to appear before him. Had we stood, our innocence would have been our righteousness, but, having fallen, we must have something else to plead, and Christ has provided us a plea. The merit of his sacrifice is our righteousness, with this we answer all the demands of the law; Christ has died, yea, rather, has risen again. This Christ is the Lord our righteousness, for he is made of God unto us righteousness, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

By faith we apply this to ourselves and plead it with God, and our faith is imputed to us for righteousness (Rom. 4:3,5). This is an everlasting

righteousness, for Christ, who is our righteousness and the prince of our peace, is the everlasting Father. It was from everlasting in the counsels of it, and will be to everlasting in the consequences of it. The application of it was from the beginning, for Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and it will be to the end, for he is able to save to the uttermost. It is of everlasting virtue. It is the rock that follows us to Canaan.

3. He came to seal up the vision and the prophecy; all the prophetic visions of the Old Testament, which had reference to the Messiah. He sealed them up, that is, he accomplished them, answered to them to a tittle; all things that were written in the law, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning the Messiah, were fulfilled in him. That is he confirmed the truth of them, as well as his own mission. He sealed them up, that is, he put an end to that method of God's discovering his mind and will, and took another course by completing the Scripture-canon in the New Testament, which is the more sure word of prophecy than that by vision, 2 Peter. 1:19; Heb. 1:1.

4. He came to anoint the most holy; that is, himself the Holy One, who was anointed (that is, appointed to his work and qualified for it) by the Holy Ghost, that oil of gladness which he received without measure, above his fellows, or to anoint the gospel-church, his spiritual temple, or holy place, to sanctify and cleanse it, and appropriate it to himself (Eph. 5:26) or to consecrate for us a new and living way into the holiest,

by his own blood (Heb. 10:20), as the sanctuary was anointed, (Exod. 30:25), etc. He is called Messiah in verses 25-26 which signifies Christ—anointed because he received the unction for himself and for all that are his.

5. In order to do all this the Messiah must be cut off, must die a violent death, and so be cut off from the land of the living, as was foretold, Isaiah 53:8...

6. He must confirm the covenant with many. He shall introduce a new covenant between God and man, a covenant of grace, since it had become impossible for us to be saved by a covenant of innocence. This covenant he shall confirm by his doctrine and miracles, by his death and resurrection, by the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are the seals of the New Testament, assuring us that God is willing to accept us upon gospel terms. ... He confirmed it with many, with the Gentile world.

Concerning the final destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish church and nation; and this follows immediately upon the cutting off of the Messiah, not only because it was the just punishment of those that put him to death, which was the sin that filled up the measure of their iniquity and brought ruin upon them, but because as things were, it was necessary to the perfecting of one of the great intentions of his death. He died to take away the ceremonial law.

(Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Daniel 9:24-27) ❄

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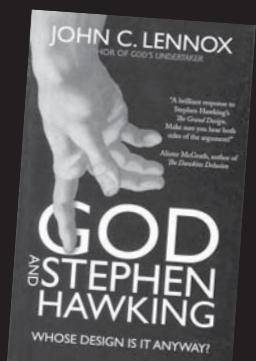
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The Gospel According to Peter



SANTO CALARCO

WE ARE TOLD that it is the gospel that 'saves' (1 Cor. 1:17-18, 21; 15:1-2). It is generally accepted that Paul has provided a technical and expanded definition of the gospel in Romans (Rom. 1:16-3:26).

Romans has been my favourite book for explaining the gospel, but of recent days I have found the gospel proclamations within the sermons in Acts to be helpful in understanding the gospel on a more basic level. In the stories in Acts we see the gospel at work resulting in salvation. We are presented with working models of how salvation takes place when the gospel message is shared. In these sermons we see apostles and others proclaim the gospel to crowds (Acts 2:14-39) and then at other times to individuals (Acts 8:26-39).

We are told that the 'gospel to the circumcision' (Jews), preached by Peter and his colleagues, did not differ in content from the 'gospel to the uncircumcised' (Gentiles) entrusted to Paul (Gal. 2:7). Let's consider what Peter says the gospel is as he presented it to Cornelius in Acts. This story is referred to in a number of places but let's look at it in Acts 15, as Peter presented it to the Jerusalem council.

A heated dispute arose in the early church regarding whether or not Gentile Christians had to become Jews through circumcision and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). We need to remember that it was 'the believers [in Jesus] who belonged to the party of

the Pharisees' who made this claim. They were 'believing' Pharisees! (Acts 15:6). As believers they would never have called people to abandon faith in Jesus nor would they have said that faith in Jesus was not necessary for salvation. What they claimed was that faith in the doing and dying of Jesus was not enough.

If the Pharisees had said that salvation came only by obedience to the law without faith in Jesus they would never gained an audience of the whole church! (Acts 15:6). They taught that Gentiles had to obey the law in addition to the faith in Jesus to be saved (Acts 15:1-2). Salvation is specifically being discussed within the setting of obedience to the law and its relationship to faith in Jesus. In response to this salvation issue Peter said to the crowd, and specifically to the Christian Pharisees, that no Jew had ever kept the law completely! (Acts 15:10). Peter concluded and affirmed, 'No! We believe it is through the *grace* of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are' (Acts 15:11). Peter told them about the way God had chosen him to proclaim 'the Gospel' to the Gentiles so that they would come to faith in Jesus (Acts 15:7). Peter emphasised the fact that God had *accepted* the Gentiles by faith alone and demonstrated it by giving 'the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us' (Acts 15:8). He is referring specifically to his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10. We will turn to this passage shortly. But before we do, I want to point out a number of things about Peter's reference to the Gentiles receiving the Spirit; it is very important

and it is the evidence that Gentiles did not have to keep the law in order to get or stay saved.

Peter is saying that God had *accepted* the Gentiles solely through faith in Jesus and confirmed and demonstrated this by giving them the gift of the Spirit (Acts 15:8). Paul says the same thing in his writings. In Galatians 3:8 Paul tells us that:

Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and [so] announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "all the nations will be blessed through you".

Paul equates the promised blessing of the Gentiles through Abraham with the Gospel, which he calls 'justification by faith'. These are very significant correlations by Paul. Later he clarifies how this blessing actually came about. He tells us that this blessing in reality came through Abraham's Seed, Jesus (Gal. 3:16). What is significant is the way Paul connects this promised blessing of the Gospel for the Gentiles (of justification by faith in Jesus) with the giving of the Spirit. 'He redeemed us [on the Cross] in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we *might receive the promise of the Spirit*' (Gal. 3:14). The blessing promised to Abraham came to the Gentiles through Jesus so that through faith they would receive the promise of the Spirit. Putting this together we can conclude that the

promised blessing through faith in Jesus for the Gentiles means the same thing as being justified by faith at which point in time the person receives the Spirit.

How does the Spirit figure in all of this? Paul has already connected redemption from the curse of the law with the promise of the Spirit in Galatians 3:13-14 and now he comes back to this link in chapter four where he fills out what he means. He says that 'God sent his Son ... to redeem those under the law, that we might receive full rights as sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out "Abba Father". So you are no longer a slave but a son' (Gal. 4:4-7). The promise of the Spirit is directly linked with adoption to sonship and intimacy with the Father. The word 'abba' was used in Jewish families by little children in reference to their 'daddy'. It is a term of endearment, intimacy and affection. Receiving the Spirit is connected with sonship at a heart level where the believer experiences God as their heavenly Daddy.

When Jesus was baptised the Spirit came upon him and the voice of the Father proclaimed, 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased'. What is little known is the fact that 'beloved' actually means 'darling'. It is a term of intimacy and endearment. Jesus is the 'darling of heaven'. The Spirit is connected with intimate acceptance by the Father. Paul says that when we believe the gospel of salvation we are sealed by the Spirit which signifies that we are 'God's possession' (Eph. 1:13-14). Significantly these verses follow soon after Paul's declaration in verse 6 where he tells us that God has 'made us *accepted* in the beloved'. This acceptance is the basis of Paul's ecstatic expression of praise to the Father: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has [already] blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus ... He made us [already] accepted in the beloved' (Eph. 1:3, 6). Here again we find the words 'accepted' and 'beloved' and they are found within the setting of the giving of the Spirit; God's seal signifying his prized possession. Paul is telling us that God gives the seal of the Spirit as proof positive that we are his treasured possession, his beloved child. Through union with Jesus we too become God's 'darling'. Salvation is accepting our acceptance as sons through faith in Jesus the Son of God.

This is the background behind Peter's statement in Acts 15:8 where he says

that the giving of the Spirit is God's endorsement that both Jews and Gentiles are accepted. In referring to his meeting with Cornelius, when the Spirit first came upon the Gentiles, Peter says that he presented the 'gospel' to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7).

Let's consider Peter's encounter with Cornelius and examine the content of his gospel message about Jesus. In Acts 10:14 we read that Cornelius was told that he was to meet up with Peter and that as a result of this encounter he would hear 'a message through which you and all your household will be *saved*'. Peter has told us in Acts 15:7 that the message he proclaimed to Cornelius was nothing less than the gospel. The gospel is clearly the message of salvation; salvation through faith in Jesus resulted in God granting 'the Gentiles repentance unto [eternal] life' (Acts 11: 14, 17-18). It is the message about faith in the grace of our Lord Jesus. Acts 15:11. This 'package' is referred to in the book of Acts as the 'gospel' that saves.



Let's unwrap this 'gospel package' and consider the actual encounter between Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. An angel told Cornelius that he would meet Peter. We know that the purpose of this meeting was for the salvation of Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:14). The Lord knew however, that a Pharisee still lurked inside of Peter, and so he softened Peter's heart through a vision and taught him that he must accept Gentiles and proclaim the gospel to them. Salvation is not only for Jews! (Acts 10:9-17, 28).

When Peter and Cornelius finally met, Peter realised 'that God does not show favouritism but *accepts* men from *every nation*' (Acts 10:24-25). Peter then delivered his gospel presentation. Let's consider the elements that Peter

included in his gospel message to gentile Cornelius. In the verses that follow, Peter tells Cornelius about Jesus' ministry in general (Acts 10:38) and then focuses on his death and resurrection (Acts 10:39-41). He even highlights the fact that God has appointed Jesus to be judge of all mankind (Acts 10:42). He then comes to a climax and tells Cornelius 'that everyone who *believes* in him receives *forgiveness* of sins through his name' (Acts 10:43). And then, 'While Peter was still speaking *these words* the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message' (Acts 10:44). What words were they all hearing that resulted in the falling of the Spirit? To be sure the key words of Peter related to forgiveness through faith in the name of Jesus. But Peter placed these words within the setting of Jesus' earthly ministry, death, resurrection and post-ascension role as Judge of the whole world. These words constitute the content of the Gospel message from Peter to Cornelius; the gospel that saves (Acts 15:8). This good news is that God grants 'the Gentiles repentance unto life' (Acts 11:18). The falling of the Spirit was evidence that these folk had accepted their acceptance by the Father. As a result of receiving the Spirit after hearing the good news about the doing and dying of Jesus the Gentiles spontaneously broke out into tongues.

Why did they break out into tongues after receiving the Spirit on this occasion? We are given a direct hint as to the purpose of the tongues: 'they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God' (Acts 10:46). They heard the Gospel; they received the Spirit and then spoke in tongues spontaneously to praise God. The Father accepted Gentiles the same way he accepted Jews, and the falling of the Spirit had testified of this truth (Acts 10:34; 11:17; 15:8).

So what was the Gospel that Peter preached on this occasion? It focussed on Jesus and not what we have to do. It centred on the provision and not our response. Faith came by default as the message of Jesus was heard (Rom. 10:17). What did they hear? They heard that Jesus ministered, died, rose again, and ascended to heaven where he functions as Judge of humanity. As a result of hearing this good news, faith came and the Spirit came down. People fell in love with the One who demonstrated that he had accepted them in Christ Jesus. They heard the message; 'You, too, are my beloved sons. In you I am well-pleased.'✳

Christianity 101 Part 9:

Victory over Evil

RITCHIE WAY

She was a primary teacher at a Christian school in New Zealand.

It was her goal to instill worthwhile values into the lives of her pupils. He was in life for what he could get out of it. Any spare money he had was spent either on his car or on booze-ups. She was on her way home in her second-hand car. He was roaring around town with his mates in his souped-up coupé. And he had had too much to drink. They met at an intersection as he was running a red light. At the hospital she was declared DOA (dead on arrival). A member of her church was heard to say, at the graveside, 'Why? When I meet God face to face the first thing I'm going to ask him is, "Why?" There's got to be a reason for this.'



HAVE you ever heard people talk like that? Perhaps you have asked the same question yourself. Would you be shocked if you were told that there is no answer, and that there never will be an answer to that question? Do you find that disturbing?

Let me take you to another scene, closer to home; maybe just next door to your place. A baby is born to a couple on the dole. Due to the stress of their circumstances the mother smoked a lot during pregnancy, so the child is born with a nicotine addiction. Nicotine is one substance that is able to pass through the placenta into the baby's bloodstream. But the mother, unaware of this, is unable to explain why the child cries so much. Because the baby's craving for nicotine is no longer being satisfied, it is going through withdrawal and cries incessantly.

Her husband comes home in the evening after a day of job hunting during which he received one rejection after another. He is tired and irritable. The baby cries on and on. 'Shut that kid up!' he bellows at his wife.

'I'm trying,' she protests weakly. 'She's been like this all day. I don't know what's wrong with her. I would take her to the doctor but we've got no transport.'

The fact that they don't have a car angers the husband even more. The child's constant crying irritates him. Finally he leaps to his feet, snatches the baby from its bed, and yells, 'Will you shut up!!' The baby screams with terror, so he hurls it against the wall.

At the hospital doctors repair a greenstick fracture of the whimpering infant's left arm, tend to her extensive bruising and one eye which is bulging unnaturally from her head. Their hearts are heavy. They can repair the physical damage, but not the emotional damage. They ask themselves, 'What are we fixing this baby up for? To go back into that environment again?'

Is there any rational person who could say that God had a purpose in this child's trauma, or that such a thing was in his plan? To even suggest such a notion is to make God the author of evil. You can't give a

logical and rational reason for sin because sin is illogical, irrational, unreasonable, unjust and unmerciful. The moment you start seeking a reason for sin, you are trying to justify it. If it is possible to give just one valid reason for sin, then it has an excuse for its existence. But there is no just reason for the existence of sin, and therefore it has no excuse. So don't look for an explanation for evil. There is none. Sin often hurts the innocent and rewards the guilty. That's why God hates it.

God never intended that sin should come into this world. It never was a part of his eternal plan. Sin comes from the devil, and the devil has never produced anything good. So don't seek a good reason for evil. Evil is always evil, never good.

So what can God do for people who suffer evil?

Jesus is not called the Son of David (Matt. 1:1) for nothing. David never lost a battle; neither did Jesus. Jesus has conquered both sin and the author of sin, Satan. He encourages us with these words: 'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). Note that Jesus doesn't promise to free us from trouble. He said while we are in this world we shall have trouble. He promises, however, to stand by our side through our troubles. We can, therefore, boldly say, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me' (Psa. 23:4).

While God can't make evil good, he can bring good out of evil for those who will let him. He won't turn ashes back into whatever got burnt, but he will make a flower grow out of the ashes of your bad experience. As Christians we cannot expect to escape all evil. Jesus was unjustly executed as a common criminal. That was a terrible evil because he was innocent of the charges laid against him. But look at the universal good his death accomplished. Ten of his apostles were martyred for their faith. That, too, was evil. But the blood of the apostles was like seed sown in a fertile field.

For each apostle who died, scores arose to take his place.

Because the apostle John was a leader in the early Church he was exiled to the copper mines on Patmos, but there he wrote the book of Revelation. Martin Luther was shut up in Wartburg castle while his enemies hunted for him, but while there he translated the Bible into German. John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* while imprisoned in Bedford jail for his faith. And the apostle Paul wrote his prison epistles while in chains. What was done to these people was evil, but by God's grace the evil was overcome and turned into a blessing. The anger of man was made to praise God. Romans 8:28 says: 'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him....' This verse does not say, 'All things are good,' but, 'In all things [whether they be good or bad], God works for the good of those who love him'. Whatever your problem is, God can turn it to good. The problem itself is not good, but he can make good come out of it.

Fanny Crosby, who wrote scores of greatly loved hymns, was blind from the age of six weeks. When people sympathised with her because of her blindness she would tell them that it was because she was blind that she was able to receive God's gift better than others who were distracted by all the things they could see. She attributed her great powers of concentration to the fact that she was able to focus all her energies on a single objective.

Blindness is not a blessing—otherwise we would all be better off blind. But, by God's grace, the curse of blindness can be turned into a blessing. The evil that troubles you can't be changed into good, but it can be conquered. God will give you the grace to overcome the evil in your life so that what is your weakness will become your strength. By the power of his Spirit, who lives in you, you can be victorious over your afflictions. He, who has the power to turn a death into a resurrection, is waiting for your permission to work with you to convert your defeats into victories. ✨

A Tribute

We thank God for the fruits of the ministries of Dennis and Pat Tedman (right) over many years. This wonderful couple were the glue that held GNU together in tough times, but they have decided that the time has come for them to hand their major responsibilities over to others and take time to smell the roses.

We put some questions to them. Here are their responses:



Patricia Tedman:

Q. When and how did you become involved with GNU?

A. I became involved with GNU when Pastor Ron Allen needed someone to run the Good News Unlimited office around 25 years ago.

Q. What roles have you filled over the years?

A. For the first few years I did everything required to run the office, and when this became too much I hired a number of different staff at various times to help out. Carolyn Wagemaker was the last person I interviewed, and she, by God's grace, has proved to be a real gem.

For the last 17 or 18 years I have been the typesetter and graphic designer of the Good News Unlimited magazine, and then the Good News for Adventists magazine when it was introduced to the readership in 2005. I was also the GNU office manager until Dennis and I moved to the Alstonville area five years ago.

Q. What are your impressions of the ministry of Good News Unlimited? How has it helped people?

A. Good News Unlimited has been a real force for bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore great comfort, to the community of Adventists who were disenfranchised from their Church and its fellowship.

Good News Unlimited has also, through its Christ-centred gospel, been able to reach people of different faiths, or no faith, making plain to them how much God loves them. Over the years the office has received many heartfelt letters and phone calls from around the world saying how much the outreach of GNU has meant to them in their daily lives. These encouraging reports from so many over the years have kept me involved with GNU.

Q. In hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently in your role with GNU, or anything you think the organisation should have done differently?

A. No doubt there are many things that could have been done differently, but we did the best we knew, and the Lord used that for his glory. With so many dramatic changes now taking place in the media, particularly in electronics, the time has come for younger people to put their ideas and energies into bringing the outreach of GNU up to date with modern technologies.

Q. What are your most treasured memories of your time with GNU?

A. The fellowship with people from all walks of life. The wonderful talks and writings of GNU presenters such as Des Ford, Ron Allen, Ritchie Way, Smuts van Rooyen and many others who have blessed this outreach.

Q. How do you see its future? How does GNU fit into our current world environment?

A. The future of GNU is assured while ever its focus remains on the Christ-centred gospel. It also needs to remember where it has come from and continue to help others struggling with the same problems of Church-dominance instead of Christ-dominance, as will always be the case when denominations demand allegiance to the 'system' rather than to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dennis Tedman:

Q. When and how did you become involved with GNU?

A. I walked past the open door of a GNU Board meeting, and lo, I was invited in.

Q. What roles have you played over the years?

A. I have been the Secretary/Treasurer for around 25 years.

Q. What are your impressions of the ministry it has undertaken? How has it helped people?

A. Its ministry, initially, had a confused focus, but when it focused on ministering to its support base it became an immense blessing.

Q. In hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently in your role with GNU, or anything you think the organisation should have done differently?

A. GNU needed to support those who supported it by ministering the 'everlasting gospel' in the context of the Adventist culture. It did not consistently do this. For a long time it failed to see its obligations and opportunities.

Q. What are your most treasured memories of your time with GNU?

A. A series of meetings by Smuts van Rooyen.

Q. How do you see its future? How does GNU fit into our current world environment?

A. When GNU, perhaps with the support of Mango Hill Farm, establishes a clear focus and ministers grace to those who support it, its future is assured.

(These are my opinions, which my wife, Patricia, rather unkindly reminds me are often wrong!)

God bless, Dennis.

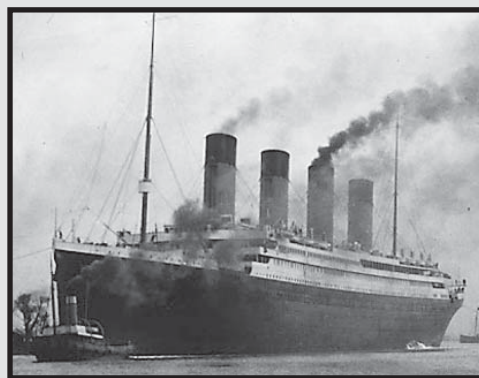
Solomon wrote: 'I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may ... find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God' (Eccl. 3:12-13).

Dennis and Pat can rest in the assurance and satisfaction that they have been used by the Lord to have a significant part in bringing people into the kingdom, and to encourage and support people who were isolated from their former support base when they stepped out to be with Jesus.

While they will still be involved with GNU in areas that are not time critical, their life should be more relaxed. We thank them for their extraordinary contribution over the years and we wish them every blessing in their retirement. They will be missed at our annual GNU meetings. ❄

The Flick of a Switch

MALCOLM FORD



It's All So Simple?

'The captain can, by simply moving an electric switch, instantly close the doors throughout—practically making the ship unsinkable.' This was White Star Line's official description of the watertight door mechanism that would inspire complete confidence in *Titanic's* passengers. The massive 45,000-ton *Titanic* could simply be saved by the flick of a switch!

What astronomical advances in electric and electronic computer switching have been made since *Titanic's* day! 'By simply moving an electric switch' (translated into today's terminology, by simply pressing a computer key) what wonders can be wrought—what dangers can be averted? Or, conversely, what damage can be done?

It is generally believed that, on its tragic maiden voyage, the ill-fated *Titanic* was attempting to break an Atlantic speed record and, in spite of iceberg warnings, the ship's speed was not decreased. The captain and crew were sailing a ship reputed to be

unsinkable. And even if it was seriously damaged, its watertight compartments could be sealed off 'by simply moving an electric switch, instantly close the doors throughout—practically making the ship unsinkable.'

Many of our modern electronic wonders are translated in terms of 'simply'. We don't necessarily understand the technology involved—all we have to do is 'simply' believe instructions and things happen! But this simplistic approach can be misleading if we place unrestricted confidence in an electronic technology, that can inherently have built-in faults, which can be exploited and manipulated by a depraved segment of society.

Michelangelo's artistic depiction of God's extended hand and finger (Sistine Chapel) 'switching' as it were, Adam into life, could be read in modern terms of the transmission of an 'electric' charge. The famous artist's index finger metaphor of God, switching Adam 'on' is perhaps a more simple, yet profound statement than what humans can do with *ten* fingers. Michelangelo's Adam is 'switched on' with one divine finger!

With *ten* fingers microbiologists and genetic engineers are playing their keyboard computer concertos trying to harmonise the secrets of life. Some of them are playing a kind of *danse macabre*, and one slip of the finger could mean annihilation for millions!

The world (like the *Titanic* was in its period) is now in its most advanced form in technological terms. But if, through the arrogance of the 'designers' of its present hi-tech state, it is hurtling into a dangerous future at record breaking speed, what device 'by simply moving an electric switch...' can avert any potential global disaster? Or conversely, what catastrophe might be ignited by the flick of a switch?

Salvation for our planet lies in Someone outside—beyond, yet within! Someone who is described in one of King David's beautiful poems:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your *fingers*, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him? (Psa. 8:3). ❄

Update on Translations of Ukrainian and Romanian Versions of **Jesus Only**

Readers will be pleased to know that the translations of an abridged version of Dr Ford's book, *Jesus Only*, into the Ukrainian and Romanian languages have been completed and proofread.

At the time of writing [August 2012] we are in the process of seeking publishers for these Reader's Digest-sized books in the countries of their language. We are requesting glossy paperback covers, and it is our intention to mass produce these gospel messengers to fill the lives of their readers—in countries where religion dominates, but where the gospel is virtually unknown—with the assurance of

salvation and the joy of redemption. We hope that the Lord may use these small books to initiate a revival. This is our prayer.

Hopefully, by the time this magazine comes into your hands, we will be well on the way to accomplishing this goal. Your prayers and continued support are appreciated.

P.S. The Spanish translation of *Jesus Only* is progressing well, and moves are under way to translate *Jesus Only* into Samoan—the first Pacific language version.

The Story of the Talents

OUR PARABLE for this month is the story of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Jesus said:

The kingdom of heaven is like a man [Jesus] going on a journey [returning to the Father] who called his servants [disciples] and entrusted his property [the gospel] to them,... each according to his ability.... After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

Just as Jesus gave the loaves and fishes to his disciples to pass on to the hungry, so he has given us the gospel to share with others. The gift of the gospel is the best and most important talent Jesus has given us. And, like the loaves and fishes, if this gospel has come from the hands of Jesus there will be sufficient for everyone.

What would you think if the disciples, after having received the loaves and fishes from Jesus' hand, sat down and ate the lot themselves? Yet isn't that what many of us are doing? We feast upon the gospel ourselves, but rarely go out of our way to share it with others. May this parable of the talents encourage you to

share with others the good news which you have received from Jesus. It may be something as simple as passing a *GNU* magazine to a friend and saying, 'I found this particular article very helpful. I was thinking that you might enjoy it too'. You may even decide to order several *GNU* magazines each month to share with others. That is what I do. It may even be your talent to provide funds for the publication of Dr Ford's book, *Jesus Only*, into the languages of other countries where people are hungry for the water of life.

The parable of the talents reveals that all of us have talents or spiritual gifts. To put it another way, while some have four litres of talent, others have three, two or just one litre. God does not expect a one-litre person to produce four litres of ministry, but he does expect him to produce one litre. Likewise, he expects the four litre person to produce four litres.

In this parable Jesus berates the man who returned to him the talent that was given to him earlier. What was the point of giving that man a talent if he only handed it back later? The Lord may have

saved himself the trouble by not giving it in the first place. Because that servant had no positive input into the kingdom he was cast out of it.

On the other hand, those who extend Christ's kingdom by the employment of their talents, will be greeted with the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Each of us has different talents: some have the ability to make the gospel clear and convincing, others have the gift of financing the publication and distribution of that gospel, and still others personally share that gospel with friends, relatives, and workmates. We will all be rewarded according to our works when Jesus returns. It will then become clear just how much we have done to extend Christ's kingdom on Earth.

The Lord has laid a task on your heart that will bring you great joy when carried out. Give it your best shot.

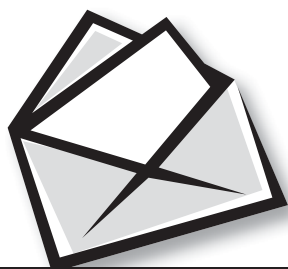
Join the ranks of those who use their talent or talents to extend Christ's kingdom on Earth.



THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION IN BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

For those wishing to read Desmond Ford's second Ph.D., *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*, from Manchester University, supervisor: Professor F. F. Bruce, 1970, it is available for download on www.scribd.com/doc/106151814.

Not for the fainthearted, this work seeks to determine the origin and significance of the mysterious τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως (abomination of desolation) allusion in Mark 13:14 and seeks to discover its relationship to similar canonical references. Its study involves the nature and place of apocalyptic and its links with eschatology. The Olivet discourse, recorded in the Synoptic gospels, and the books of Daniel, Revelation and Second Thessalonians are primary sources. We thank the kind person who put this on the Internet, since every so often we receive a request for it.



Letters from Readers

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.



THE FIRMAMENT ABOVE

Dear Ritchie,

In Job 37:18 it says, 'Can you join him [God] in spreading out the skies, hard as a mirror cast in bronze?' I have read about the firmament that covers the Earth like a dome, but I can't believe that the Bible would teach such a thing. If you have a solution to this problem I would love to know what it is.

Hope you can help
A.B.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear A.,

Not everything in the Bible is a direct teaching from the Lord, for a lot of the Bible is a history of the God's people, warts and all. The people's belief about the nature of the heavens is no more God's truth than their belief about *sheol* or *hades* under the earth.

In New Testament times people believed that evil spirits caused all sickness. There were spirits of blindness, spirits of deafness, spirits of epilepsy, etc. In their thinking, the only way to be free of the disease was to cast out the spirit that caused it. What ancient people believed about the heavens is no more God's Word for us than their beliefs in *hades* and spirits. Jesus alone is 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'.



SOLAR ECLIPSE?

Dear Pastor Ritchie

Some people are saying that the three hours of darkness that came over all the land during Jesus' final hours on the Cross was a solar eclipse (Matthew 27:45), therefore this event should not be taken as a sign from God that mirrored the darkness in Jesus' heart.

I have heard, however, that, astronomically, the three hours of darkness could not have been an eclipse. Do you have any information that will either confirm or deny the eclipse theory?

K.N.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear K.,

A solar eclipse can only take place when the moon is precisely between the Earth and the sun. When in this position the moon blots out the full body of the sun leaving only the corona visible. Jesus, however, died during the Passover, which was always celebrated at the time of full moon. Solar eclipses cannot occur at full moon, at which time the moon is on the opposite side of the Earth from the sun. The only conclusion we can draw from this is that the darkness 'over all the land' was caused by something other than a solar eclipse.



LANGUAGE

Dear Editor,

How was the Jew, Samson, able to communicate with the Philistines? And how was the Jewish shepherd boy, David, able to converse with the Philistine giant, Goliath? They would have had different languages.

L.P.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear L.,

When people immigrate to a country that speaks a foreign language, by the second generation they usually adopt the language of the mother country. The language of Canaan was Canaanite. The Philistines adopted that language as their own, and so did the Hebrews. There is very little difference between the alphabets of the Canaanites and the Hebrews.



INTERPRETING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Dear Pastor Ritchie,

A dear Christian friend of mine insists that Ezekiel 38-39 foretells the time when Russia and a coalition of northern countries

(Gog and Magog) will overrun Israel, but the Lord will destroy them on the mountains of Israel. I am sceptical about this interpretation, but am not able to present a contrary opinion because of my lack of knowledge in this area. Can you please help me?

M.P.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear M.,

There is no such country as Magog, or a person called Gog. And there never was, because these are code words used by Ezekiel for Babylon and its prince. To understand this cipher better, see 'How to Interpret Scripture' in the November 2011 GNU magazine.

Further, the New Testament often takes the words of the Old Testament and gives them a universal application, as John does in his application of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:7-9. Compare also Zechariah 12:10 with Revelation 1:7.

Another factor to consider—when looking at how some Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in our day—is that of progressive revelation. The New Testament provides information additional to that given by the Old Testament. A simple example is that of the Son of Man appearing on the clouds of heaven with a sickle in his hand (Rev. 14:14). Daniel 7:13 makes no mention of a sickle.

The New Testament not only builds on the foundation of the Old Testament, but often adds a structure of its own. So the safest way to interpret Old Testament prophecy is to see how it is applied in the New Testament.



JESUS' SHROUD

Dear Editor,

I have never yet read a good reason for why Jesus left his shroud and linen wrappings behind in the tomb? Do you know why?

P.P.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear P.,

I have to confess that it is something I have not considered deeply until now. But the more I think about it the more I can see wonderful lessons in that picture.

First, if the disciples had stolen Jesus' body as the priests claimed, it is doubtful that they would have taken valuable minutes to unwrap Jesus' funeral bindings to get rid of the weight of embalming spices before leaving the tomb. Every second saved would have been crucial because if they were caught by the soldiers they would have been executed for breaking the Roman seal. Furthermore, why would the disciples do something so offensive to their culture as undressing Jesus and running through the streets carrying his naked body? It makes no sense.

But more importantly, it appears to me that the lesson Jesus was teaching here is that everything pertaining to this life—especially the bindings of death—will be left behind in the resurrection to a life that will have no end. There is no place in the new world for the trappings of death. 'The old order of things will pass away and everything will be made new.'



NEEDS PRAYER

Dear Sir,

I was wondering if you would pray that I would get an increased flow of blood in my legs, and that I wouldn't get sores on them.

I will pray for you and your magazines.

Would you please print a page on Daniel chapter 9?

Yours truly,
S.G.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear S.,

We will pray that the Lord will do what is best for you, which is what you would want us to do. I ask all, who read this letter, to also beseech the Lord on behalf of Mr. G.

Dr. Ford has written the best material I have read on Daniel 9, so I will search out a succinct article of his on that chapter for you.

If you would like something more comprehensive, get his book, *In the Heart of Daniel: An Exposition of Daniel 9:24-27*, from the GNU Office. Ring Carolyn at the office, on phone +61 (0)7 5524 5040.

God fill you with his grace and peace.

2012 Seminars Remaining!

BALLINA SEMINAR

3 November 2012, from 10:00am to 4:00pm

Venue:

Ballina Island Motor Inn,
Pacific Highway, Ballina NSW 2478

Speakers:

Pastor Ron Allen:

Stern of Face and Unrelenting of Heart—Lessons from Stephen versus the Sanhedrin.

Dr Milton Hook:

The Genre of Genesis 1 to 11 and Some Word Pictures of Salvation.

PEACHESTER SEMINARS

Fellowship meetings are held at Mango Hill Farm

159 Commissioners Flat Road, Peachester QLD 4519, on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month from 2:30pm to 4:30pm, led by **Dr Desmond Ford.**

TWEED MEETINGS

Fellowship meetings are also held at 9:30am (NSW time) at the GNU office at 2/54-60 Industry Drive, Tweed Heads South, NSW 2486 on selected Saturdays, led by **Pastor Ron Allen.**

Dates for the remainder of 2012 are as follows:

6 and 20 October

17 November

1 and 15 December

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Publisher's review



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God's Odds: How to Win the Wager

Desmond Ford

Our daily choices are governed by our personal philosophy.

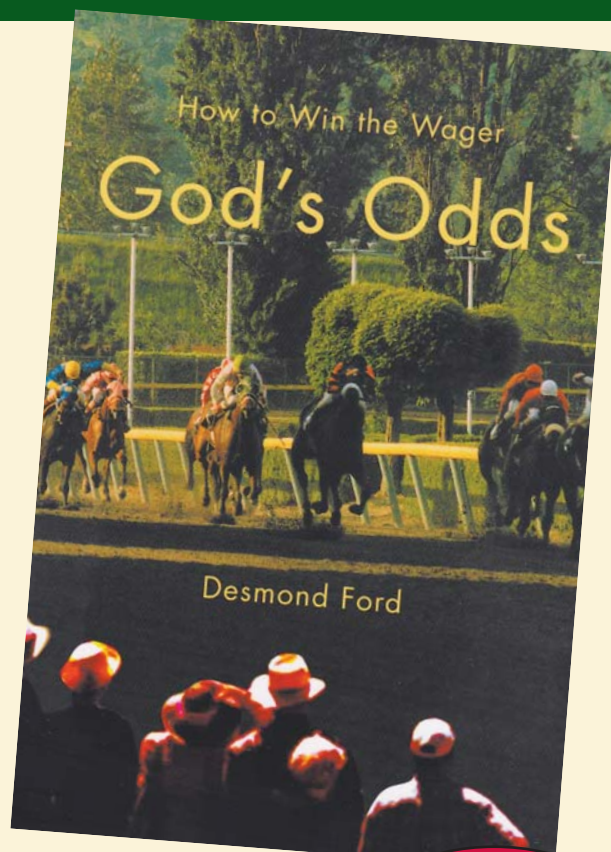
For all action some hypothesis about the origin and nature of the universe and humanity must be adopted, whether consciously or unconsciously. We act according to prior decisions as to what has value and whether there is meaning to life. The question regarding what is good and what should be is answered by our personal decision regarding the beginning of all things. Are we just dirt plus time plus chance, or are we the children of a loving heavenly Father? This book sets forth the odds that the God spoken of in the Christian Bible are overwhelming, and that therefore the Christian faith is the best basis for every life.

Born in Townsville, in Queensland, Australia, Desmond Ford is a semi-retired pastor, evangelist, teacher, and author of over thirty books. He was the Director of Good News Unlimited, a parachurch ministry in California for almost twenty-five years.

Desmond Ford has two earned doctorates from Michigan State University (USA) and Manchester University (UK). He hosted the Worth More Than a Million TV show and daily and weekly radio broadcasts in the USA, Australia, and Canada.

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The heart of the gospel is
forgiveness. Jesus' last
words to his disciples were:
'Repentance and forgiveness
of sins will be preached in
my name to all nations ...'

— (Luke 24:46).