



Joining
the
important
dots

The title is rendered in a 3D, grey, sans-serif font. The words are stacked vertically: 'Joining' at the top, 'the' in italics below it, 'important' in italics below that, and 'dots' at the bottom. A network diagram is overlaid on the text, consisting of several grey spheres (nodes) connected by thin grey lines (edges). The nodes are positioned at various points, including the top of the 'J', the top of the 'i' in 'Joining', the top of the 'd' in 'dots', and the top of the 'o' in 'dots'. A line also extends downwards from the bottom of the 'o' in 'dots'.

Mike Trainer

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Foreword

I first met Mike in 1990 after being introduced by a friend.

Our first encounter was a good, old-fashioned chat about life, the universe and everything. What I appreciated from this, and other later encounters, was Mike's genuine interest in people, and his willingness to share from his own life experience.

When you get to know Mike, you discover he loves the company of people. He has a great sense of humor and enjoys sharing a story while managing the balance between the fun and the serious better than most people I know.

Mike has a lot to offer people in general and I have often noticed and now value his consistent inner strength. Over the years he has been confronted with awkward situations that couldn't be side-stepped (as have many others), but has always been able to adjust and change and turn it to good – something I have come to truly admire.

When it comes to passion, surfing would have to be in Mike's "Top Five". His knowledge of weather, wind and swell always seem to swing the odds in favour of a good surf.

He loves being a grandfather. Mike shares the kind of significant and perceptive moments with his grandchildren which only come about through regular, close involvement.

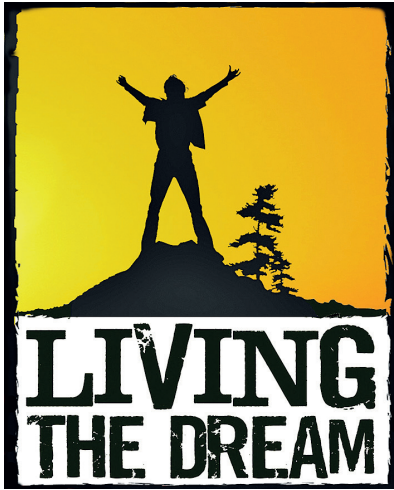
As for friendship, Mike has been a faithful friend over the years and is as easy to be around as your favorite chair.

Craig Rawcliffe,

February 2016

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Well, cliché or not, I gave it a good nudge. Youthful enthusiasm combined with smattering of pure naivety and I was on my way; living the dream seemed a pretty good concept to me. At the tender age of sixteen, brain-cells heading all directions, I decided to give living a concerted whirl and basically I loved every minute. I did what I wanted the way I wanted to; it was all good and I honestly felt like I was winning.

That was until reality came my way like a Mack truck on steroids. I got taken out big-time. That was the beginning of my decision to attempt to join the dots (if there were dots to join) of the life we live.

So if you have an interest, you're invited to come on the journey. In fact even if you don't have an interest you should at least skim some of the information, for no other reason than because it is challenging. I mean we all want to know whether our greatest grandfather was a tadpole and whether he hung out at the shallow end of the gene pool, don't we? Or whether life is bigger than that, bigger than us, whether there is a method behind the madness or a reason for existence. I'm no whizz-kid, but over the long term I have checked out this scenario as honestly and objectively as I could. I think most people would be intrigued by the conclusions.

I will catch up with the Mack truck on steroids later, but first will give you some basic information about myself.

Firstly, I'm no big deal, and don't want to be. Like everybody else, my story has its unique portions, but in general my life (certainly the earlier part) was pretty ho-hum. Ho-hum in the sense that my parents were working class, enjoyed partying a little too

much and as everyone does, found people of a similar ilk to spend their time with. Unfortunately they divorced when I was only six and I ended up living with my mum and my younger brother. I honestly can't remember being sad about my life status. Like most kids I had fun, played a lot, either by myself, with others or in footy teams.

The first mega-moment of my life occurred one day when I was eleven years of age. One weekend when I was staying with my Dad, he organised a fishing day with a friend who owned a boat. I liked fishing so I was about as excited as a kid my age could be. I still remember the lovely day that greeted us as we launched the boat and was as 'keen as a bean' to catch a decent fish.

To cut a longish story shorter, after trying a couple of fishing spots when it was low-tide Dad and his two mates decided to row the dingy to some nearby rocks to get mussels. Ironically for safety reasons, they left me alone on the boat which was anchored in the channel. During the time it took them to accumulate a decent quantity of shellfish, the tide changed, the wind dramatically increased in strength and the boat I was in got into serious difficulty. Every time it was lifted by a wave it got closer to the exposed rocks.

Two of the adults on the rock decided to row the dingy back to help me, but unaware of the tide change and current strength, they miscalculated the angle and missed their one opportunity to connect with the boat I was in.

When they were fifteen metres away, a wave flipped their dingy. The boat owner decided to swim for the boat while the other person clung on to the dingy which very quickly drifted away and out of sight. Swimming against the horrendous current, the boat owner made it to within a couple of meters of the stern of the boat. I put my hand out to grab his hand but just as we were going to connect, he stopped swimming and just sank, I still remember watching him keep sinking till he disappeared, he was never to be seen again.

Dad saw what was happening and swam to the small island about thirty meters from the rock he was on. Luckily there was a

boat sheltering from the storm in the lee of the island. Dad alerted them to the situation and they bravely came to my rescue fully at their own peril. I realise now that I owe my life to them.

They drew up as close as they could and threw me a rope. I grabbed it and moved to the side of the boat nearest to theirs. A wave slammed their boat into ours and then abruptly separated them. Still hanging on to the rope, I was catapulted into turbulent ocean. To this day, I still remember being under their boat, rubbing against the barnacles. I held onto that rope as if my life depended on it, and it did. Finally they pulled me aboard, drenched and confused, but alive. (The Auckland daily newspaper *The New Zealand Herald*, carried a report of the incident on its front page. You'll find it at the back of the book.)

As a result of this event, I developed a phobia of expanses of water, especially the ocean; up to that point, the ocean had been something I had truly enjoyed. Strangely, the drowning I witnessed so closely didn't have the impact you would expect. Maybe I was too young for it to register properly, I don't know.

To help me overcome my fears and return to enjoying the beach and sea, my Mum bought a small yacht for us. Not long after, I felt comfortable with the ocean again, started playing with my uncle's surfboard and became hooked on surfing. All prior bad experiences with the ocean seemed to just dissipate with time and the ocean became a pleasurable focus in my life. Surfing made me feel the way I wanted to feel; it still does.

The surfing life became the dream I wanted to live. At sixteen, I went on a surf trip with some friends, and ended up at a surf beach named Whangamata. It was summer, warm water, good waves, fun girls and fun times, and I wasn't leaving. For three months I stayed by myself in a one man pup-tent; surfing during the day, footloose and fancy-free. For me this was the dream and it was gooooood!

As time progressed, I became more involved in the surfing community. I admired the lifestyle of the top echelon and decided this was what I wanted to aspire to. There were strings attached that I certainly enjoyed such as smoking "wacky backy" (marijuana)

which was quite prolific at the time. I also found myself getting quite involved in the Timothy Leary buzz, tripping on LSD. It all seemed reasonably harmless and maybe even helpful. After three months in the tent, I rented a small one bedroom bach which was the high-life in comparison. Unfortunately my Whangamata days came to an abrupt end when I got busted with around sixty baby marijuana plants and I had to serve six months periodic detention in Auckland, my home city.

By the time I was 18, living the dream surfing had morphed into getting stoned virtually every day. My close surfing buddies had drifted to the wayside; now my closest acquaintances were dealing dope. It was during this time that a good friend who I often surfed with went missing for about a week. Nobody, including his mum, knew where he was. Then one afternoon he phoned and asked to meet me. It was all a bit “secret squirrel”, but I was intrigued so was happy to go with it. When we met, he asked me to get into his car to talk; I noticed there were two large suitcases in the back. Long story short, he'd been to Penang and had twenty five pounds of quality Buddha weed he wanted me to sell for him. From then on I just got engulfed in what had been low-key fun; I was stoned all day, every day. My socialising skills evaporated and the only time I felt comfortable was when I was chemically affected along with others who were in a similar state.

My friend went back again to Penang and this time he also bought back some heroin. He changed a lot in a short period of time, and it was then the infamous Mack truck on steroids lined me up. My mate, my friend, the buddy who I had shared so many good times with, hanged himself. In his own garage he took his life.

Being a bit older than the last time I encountered death close up, this hit me big-time. No more seeing each other ever again, not even once; no more chats, no more laughs, no more surfs. I was rattled; life wasn't what it was cracked up to be. I couldn't just bury my head in the sand and pretend it didn't matter. Basically the dream had become a nightmare.

Where was I at? I had lost my way. The seeds I had planted into my life were not what I thought they were and I had changed

into a person I was no longer comfortable with. The simplicity of life and childlike innocence was long gone. Now I swore like a trooper (sorry to you non-swearing troopers), smoked about thirty cigarettes a day, drank too much alcohol and got stoned daily. I had drifted from my better friends and hardly ever surfed. I had several concerted attempts to give up the things that I now realised were hassling me, but just couldn't sustain the effort necessary. It became a major worry to me and I just didn't know how to sort it out.

Like many others, I came to the conclusion that the best way to change was to get away from the people and lifestyle I was caught up with. I took off to another country to start again and ended up on Australia's idyllic Sunshine Coast, to surf and play. I was prepared to work if necessary but it certainly wasn't a priority.

I enjoyed these days but in time regressed back to the habits I was trying to kick. Hash oil and "magic mushies" were everywhere and my resisting capabilities basically dissolved.

After I had been in Oz for about six months, a good friend from New Zealand sent a letter that really affected me. I had the utmost respect for this person because he was New Zealand's national surfing champion and had been one of my main partying buddies. In the letter he said he had completely given up drugs and the accompanying lifestyle (but not surfing). I was shocked, a bit horrified, but certainly intrigued. In fact, after some soul searching, I decided I should go back home to see if my friend had joined a weird group, and if necessary, help him back to how we used to be.

Yes, I do know how hypocritical that sounds.

I caught up with Graham within a couple of days of arriving home. I admit I couldn't quite tune in to what he was saying, but I was impressed with a couple of things: firstly that he was so normal without the help of drugs and secondly that he spoke a lot of common sense.

Now is not the time for detail, but in a nutshell Graham explained to me that I could have the same experience and

benefits that he had. As I said earlier, I'm no whizz kid, but I'm not an absolute dummy either, so I quickly worked out this was an everything-to-gain, nothing-to-lose scenario.

I did the very simple things required and I was changed. My mind changed; literally from that day on I gave up alcohol, dope in all forms, and swearing. But what still impresses me the most is these things happened without gritted teeth determination on my part.

I rate those changes as huge, but the one change that I think is even more amazing is the breaking down and removing of the overpowering ignorance we all possess when it comes to the paramount issue of every person's life.

How long did those changes last? Well it has now been over thirty years and there has been no regression.

My conclusion is that it is a privilege and a pleasure to have received this massive change of perspective.

Joining the Dots



As we live out our days on planet Earth, most of us will at some point question our purpose. The question may not be about whether there is a purpose to our lives. After all,

people find genuine purpose in raising a family, in working at a satisfying occupation or in achieving other significant goals.

The question is more likely to be whether there is an overriding purpose, a purpose of a paramount importance, a purpose which will profoundly influence what we value most.

Wouldn't it be great if after evaluating a few options, we could know for certain whether such a purpose exists? But it is simply not that easy.

Even to initiate a search for purpose is overwhelming. Where should we begin? Life itself can be distracting and demanding enough without trying to analyze every philosophical or religious option available.

Sometimes it is easier to turn one's back on these hard questions and return to what is simple and comfortable.

Many people will empathize with the cry echoing through the lyrics of John Lennon's single, "Give Me Some Truth":

"I'm sick and tired of hearing things/
From uptight, short-sighted, narrow-minded
hypocrites...I've had enough of reading things/
By neurotic, psychotic, pig-headed politicians..."

No short-haired, yellow-bellied, son of tricky
dicky/ Is gonna mother hubbard soft soap me/
With just a pocketful of hope”

The refrain after each verse is: “All I want is the truth, just give me some truth!”

Is it really too much to ask for simple truth?

Frankly sometimes it’s easier to drift through life simply avoiding facing this question at all. We can choose to pursue temporary feel-goods instead. We gravitate to what “tickles our fancy”; after all, it’s a free world isn’t it? But in doing so, we can unwittingly open ourselves to be influenced by those who are biased, deceived or blatantly wrong.

Therefore it is common sense to investigate all avenues, to learn something of the different paths we can follow through life. We may discover something special along the way.

In considering whether there is a bigger picture, a greater purpose to life, how about starting with some of the bigger questions?

Did the universe really begin with a “Big Bang”? Is there a constructive case for intelligent design? Is the Theory of Evolution fact, or is it merely the evolution of a theory? Is there a creator God or is the universe a random event? If there is a God, does it matter to him how we live our lives? Is one religious faith superior to the rest?

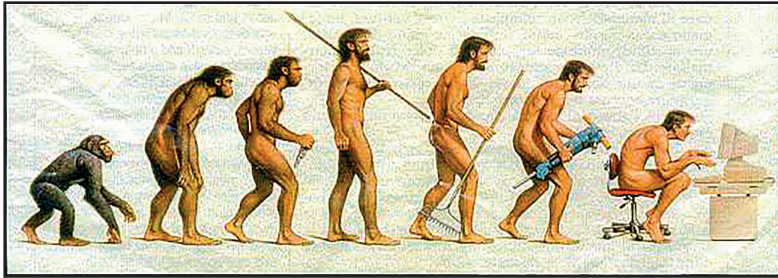
These questions are just the tip of an ever-expanding iceberg.

The purpose of this book is to pass on some interesting conclusions I have come to, conclusions which certainly eluded me in my younger days. I have endeavoured to be consistent with the observations and evaluations I have accumulated. I’m hoping to create an awareness of what the important issues are, to make it easier for people to make informed decisions about the purpose of their lives. At the very least, I hope to broaden horizons.

For the record, I am not highly educated; I have no qualifications after my name. I'm just an average person who has taken the opportunity to assess and analyse various options.

I value honesty. Therefore I am determined, that if I push any particular barrow, it will be one of unbiased evaluation of the fundamental issues we should face.

Evolution: The Theory of Evolution or the Evolution of a Theory?



During the course of my life, I, like many, have been vulnerable to “expert opinion”. This was acceptable to me until more experts refuted the irrefutable proof provided by the original experts.

This has never been more obvious than in the Creation versus Evolution debate.

Before I get technical—which, for the record, I intend to avoid at all costs—I should mention that in my latter school years I became interested in astronomy after completing an assignment on our solar system. While other planets were interesting, it was Earth that impressed me. I marvelled at Earth’s enormous size and the way it just seemed to hang in space. I found it incredible that its atmosphere and distance from the sun are unique among planets because they are perfect for sustaining life. I was amazed by the complexities of Earth’s orbit and the influence of the moon on our tides. There are many breath-taking features of Earth. These features are even more astounding if you believe they are merely the result of a random big bang.

Later I discovered that when considering the solar system, there are a number of questions the theory of evolution cannot answer. For instance, how do the planets just hang in space? If this is due merely to the gravitational pull of the sun, why is Mercury not getting drawn closer? How does the furthest planet, despite its

great distance from the sun, maintain the course of its orbit? How does the orbit of Halley's Comet continue on its exact course when its orbit is oblong rather than circular? How does it not get sucked into the sun when it travels so close? How does it not burn out? The questions are many and absolute answers are conspicuous by their absence.

By the time I entered adulthood, I was a keen surfer who subconsciously began to acknowledge the beauty of the waves, the ocean, the sunsets and other natural marvels. I couldn't ignore what was before my very eyes. Whether it evolved or not started to become relevant. I guess in hindsight, I preferred the thought of nature evolving, if for no other reason than the fact that most religious people I knew were nerdy. In addition they seemed to be a bit behind the eight ball when it came to maximising enjoyment of life.

But as I considered the evolutionary theory further, many more questions emerged.

Evolutionists say that the Big Bang caused anti-matter to become matter. This is the only way they can explain how evolution even began, yet scientists are still unable to prove how this could be possible.

Even if matter did originate this way, how did one living cell just appear, survive, mutate and evolve from an invisible amoeba into a fish? How did it then transform into a bird or an animal or a man?

Then there is the perplexing problem of the missing links. If evolution occurred, there should be evidence in the fossil record of semi-mutated species, that is, species which were in the process of evolving. These should far outnumber the fully evolved creatures that we see around us today. However the fossils discovered thus far are only species which do not appear to have evolved from one form to another. According to the fossil record, therefore, species never have changed from one type to another.

In *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin himself questioned the nonexistence of innumerable transitional forms in the fossil

record. Darwin also acknowledged that if his theory was correct, there should be multitudes of semi-developed species all over our planet. If all these transitional forms did exist, there would have to be great confusion in the natural world. Instead we can only marvel at the order and well-defined species that we actually witness in nature.

The humble ant is a good example. Scientists acknowledge that the earliest of ant fossils show that present-day ants have not changed from their fossilized ancestors. There is no fossil evidence that ants have evolved from any form and there are certainly no pre-ant mutations.

A senior palaeontologist who worked for the British museum is quoted in the book, *Did Man Just Happen?* by W.A. Criswell. He says: "There is not one iota of proof in this great museum for the transmutation of species." That was approximately one hundred years ago and to this day the theory of evolution depends more on hope than substantiated fact.

Despite this startling lack of evidence, evolution is still taught as fact in virtually all educational institutions. This is amazing considering it is less than a hundred years since the Scopes trial took place. In this trial, a school teacher was taken to court for teaching evolution in the public school system.

Plant life is another realm of significant interest. According to the fossil record, at one point there was no vegetation on Earth. Then suddenly, apparently with no intermediate stage, an abundance of trees and plants appear in the next fossil layers. There is no evidence that plants evolved at all.

In the book, *Evolution of Plants*, Dr D. H. Scott comments that the sudden appearance of well-developed, flowering plants is still perhaps the greatest difficulty in the record. "They seem to burst forth in full panoply and (notably) without ancestors." W. B. Scott explains in *An Introduction to Geology*: "It was with extreme suddenness the invasion swept the Earth. There can be no question as to the facts of the completeness of the revolution of flora". Darwin himself referred to the sudden, unexplainable appearance

of flowering plants in conjunction with pollinating insects, wasps and bees as an “abominable mystery” (Scott, *Evolution of Plants*).

There are other important challenges to the Theory of Evolution. For instance, for life to occur, it would require several processes of evolution to occur at very specific times. Certain gases would have had to evolve at exactly the same time as other essential gases in order to produce the air that living creatures breathe. Is it possible to believe that it was by sheer chance this occurred at the same time as the formation of perfect lungs? What about animals which require air for the brain to operate at all? Do we say all of these and much more were merely random events? At the very least it is reasonable to conclude that it is extremely unlikely.

The credibility of evolution is in question in other areas too.

For instance, there is a need to re-examine the validity of traditional bone dating processes.

In 1912, the Piltdown skull was excavated from a gravel pit in England. Because of the jawbone shape, it was originally estimated to be 500,000 years old. At the time, it was hailed as significant proof of the existence of prehistoric man. However about forty years later, the skull was proven to be only fifty years old, exposing the prior promotion as a hoax.

The Keilor skull (Seal of God), found in Victoria, Australia, was originally thought to be 150,000 years old. Today, with the assistance of modern dating methods, it is thought to be only 8000-9000 years old.

Others have made claims regarding the existence of prehistoric man based on the discovery of a bone or tooth. Yet these same teeth or bones have later been found to belong to an animal. Those involved also need to come clean about how much Plaster of Paris has been used when creating the forms of animal or prehistoric man that we see in museums. In several of these cases, not only was the proof-bone enhanced with plaster, but wild conclusions were drawn about how such prehistoric people must have lived, what they ate and how they behaved.

We should be quick to question such “science”.

In the book, *Modern Biology and the Theory of Evolution*, Eric Wassman wrote that the whole hypothetical pedigree of man is not supported by a single fossil genus of a single fossil species.

My experience is that people often don't feel compelled to tell the truth. Falsehoods are often used if deemed beneficial. We become vulnerable when the integrity of experts is in question.

Recently, I went to hear a professor from one of the most prestigious universities in Australia. I found his conclusions extremely interesting. He claimed that many scientists now admit that the universe could not have evolved by chance; the odds are considered too great for such perfection to have occurred randomly.

It was not my original intention, but the closer I have scrutinized the credibility of evolution, the more I have found it wanting. This being the case, I made even closer evaluation, and discovered that this has only brought other evolution-type claims into question.

Scientific views about evolution have changed significantly as new discoveries contend with what was presented as proven fact in the past. Advances in technology (geology-physics-biology-astronomy, etc.,) have enabled us to have certainty rather than optimistic hope and this has changed the playing field somewhat.

One claim which astounds me is the time frame we have been taught to accept since embracing the Big Bang theory. Up to reasonably recently, we were encouraged to accept as fact that the Big Bang occurred 12 to 15 billion years ago. Most of us accept scientific claims without question simply because the science is a bit beyond us, so like the average person, I went with the flow.

However nowadays, we have a problem and it is a good one. It has been proven that the size of our ever-expanding universe is so immense, that twelve to fifteen billion years would be inadequate time for the Big Bang to have occurred. To correct the maths, scientists have adjusted the figures to a mere sixty-five billion years more – a total of eighty billion-ish years.

This is not the only problem; the thought now is that no big bang could be big enough to still be having an effect eighty billion years later which sounds like a fair call. If that is not enough, we witness order rather than the random chaos you might expect from an explosion a long time ago. Point being, a person has every right to not categorically accept evolution as fact.

If we are to accept that the earth's beginnings were approximately 80 billion years ago, major problems arise. There should be a lot more salt in the sea and the moon should be further away from earth. Maybe more telling are the existence of unfossilized dinosaur bones, some with remnants of blood cells in them. It is possible that such cells could exist several thousand years, but nothing like the 65 billion years we are being asked to accept (J. Safarti, *Refuting Evolution*). There have been several "evolution-proving" claims that have since been disproved.

It may appear as if I'm only out to slam the Theory of Evolution. However this is not the case at all. I only want to show that there is balanced, informed opinion which contends with some of the claims of the Theory of Evolution.

At this point, I think it is worth mentioning the Biblical notion that the earth was created in six days, each twenty-four hours in duration. What is not commonly known is that the Hebrew word for "day" in the original text was a word which also means "an unlimited length of time". This fact has changed my perception of the Biblical account.

The only logical alternate explanation to evolution is irksome to many. It is, of course, that the universe has been designed by an intelligent being and therefore planet Earth and all her living forms were brought about by a divine force. This conclusion, uncomfortable as it may be to accept, challenges us to assume that there must be a God.

So if we are joining the dots, on to the next dot we go.

If there is an intelligence of some description behind the founding of nature, if there is indeed a creator, the next question is obvious. Is such a being connected with a specific faith? If a creator

exists, can we casually or deliberately ignore him and just do our own thing, or is there a bit more to it.

Different Options and Different Faiths



Without wanting to get too philosophical, when we accept that all living things evolved in the aftermath of the Big Bang, there are social consequences. There can be no overriding morality. Therefore individuals should be able to do what they want, when they

want, at least to the point where their evolved fellow-men may decide to place restrictions. Of course, then the obvious question is: “Why do they have the right to restrict my continuing personal evolution?”

For sanity’s sake let’s not go there.

Does it matter what path we choose for our life? Is it a case of “all roads lead to Rome”? Is it true that nothing really matters because at the end of this life we all morph into something superior and enter a higher plain of existence?

Or is there actually a God?

If we assume that there is a God, the question becomes: Is there a faith that connects us to God, and if so, which one is it? How can we identify it?

Every religion claims to be the superior choice. As far as devotion is concerned, all have followers who exhibit great commitment. As for passion, sometimes this is just downright scary. All faiths have their zealots; it is just that some are a little more weird than others, depending on which side of the fence you stand.

In many respects, the requirements of different faiths are quite similar: to be a good (or at least better) person and to avoid self-absorption. When you can, provide assistance to your fellow man. The intentions are usually good. However the reality is that many justify embracing destructive ideals which negate their commendable intentions.

For instance if you are perceived as being an opponent of a particular faith or even if you just don't fit into their "box", you may be treated with disrespect or contempt.

We've all witnessed this; such behaviour leaves a sour taste. It is why so many people snub organised (or unorganised) religion. Who can blame them?

However if we conclude that evolution and the Big Bang are no longer reasonable theories, we are forced to face the fact that there may be a God, regardless of the behaviour of his "followers".

In the light of this, it is reasonable to evaluate whether you should continue doing your own thing, or whether you will take a closer look at religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity.

In most cases, the group you will first examine normally will depend on your upbringing and where you were born.

The Marvel of Bible Prophecy



Every religious group sees their interpretation of how life should be lived as superior, each one claims to do good, and all believe sincerely that if you join their group you will be better off.

Inherent in man is a weakness to believe that we, personally, are always in the right. This causes us to gravitate toward people of a similar opinion. Unwittingly, we lose our ability to honestly assess opposing viewpoints.

To evaluate various religious groups and their ideals objectively, it is necessary to first examine their written standard or instruction. Some see their books as inspirational, others go so far as to say their book, or books, are actually inspired by God. Such claims demand validation; zealous endorsement from religious followers is not enough.

Religious books are generally similar, offering and encouraging increased contentment. Normally this is achieved by less focus on satisfying self, and an increased concern for the well-being of others. Of course this is commendable. The philosophies and requirements vary, but the promised end result is similar: a superior state of being and a final destiny of ultimate joy. This can be pretty tempting considering human beings are wired to seek

contentment in a world that is very limited in being able to provide it.

But, amidst the plethora of books on religion, there is one book that stands alone. It still offers advice for practical living like other religious books. What makes it unique is the way it foretells the future. The book in question is the Bible.

As I have said, it was not a book I was familiar with; it hadn't been part of my upbringing. I had come to view Bible readers as weaker individuals who needed a crutch to lean on. They were certainly not enlightened, certainly not people I had any desire to emulate. For me, it became necessary to separate the people from the book because I realised it was the only way my evaluation could be without bias.

When I was first presented with the claims about the uniqueness of the Bible, I wasn't impressed. After all, it sounds preposterous, doesn't it? With the motivation to prove my friend wrong (and to discourage him from this ridiculous folly), I examined those claims of prophetic accuracy further.

Biblical Prophecy Fulfilled in History



Although we don't really know why, many of us feel that the Bible is different from other books, that there is something a bit unsettling about it. People might say otherwise, but I always have a bit of a chuckle when I see books

on a certain topic and the author claims it is "the Bible" of golf or fishing or whatever. The phrase definitely implies authority, so it is reasonable to see that there is more to the Bible than the stories that many in the West are aware of.

What most people don't know is that the Bible is prophetic; two-thirds of it is actually devoted to describing specific future events with startling accuracy. By startling, I mean super-startling – amazing-beyond-belief startling! It is worth noting that no other book has even come near to fulfilling its specific predictions with such precision. In fact it is remarkable to me that the accuracy of Biblical prophecy is so seldom mentioned, because it is this one realm that gives this book such credibility.

There are two important points made about prophecy in the Bible. Firstly, if a person who claimed to be led by God predicted a future event which did not come to pass, it was a crime punishable by death (Deuteronomy 18:19-20). Secondly, the Bible implies that only God is capable of predicting an event accurately before it happens (Isaiah 41:26). Therefore accurate prophecy is a sign of divine involvement and becomes the hallmark of the Bible's

authenticity. Conversely, if a religious book of any faith lacks specific prophecy and its fulfilment, one can assume it is little more than an accumulation of philosophical opinion.

Biblical prophecy is tremendously varied in that sometimes it referred to an individual, sometimes to a particular nation or ethnic group, and sometimes to the whole world. Some prophecies were in relation to events that would come to pass soon after the prophecy was given; others described events which would take place hundreds or even thousands of years later.

This in itself is amazing, but what is even more staggering is the accuracy of detail with which some prophecies were fulfilled.

For example, the Bible spoke prophetically of Tyre, an ancient city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, situated north-west of the Sea of Galilee. Due to its prime location, it initially prospered as a port dealing in merchant trade. Tyre went on to become a centre of commerce and eventually grew into a great city. As is so often the case when prosperity is involved, the people of Tyre became known for their pride, arrogance and self-obsession. It got to the ridiculous point where the prince of Tyre saw himself as God in some way. Whatever it was, the delusion and over-confidence he manifested was consistent with that of a very arrogant man. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God spoke of his strong disapproval of the Tyrians. In the very heyday of their existence, he prophesied the demise of their booming city in graphic detail (J. McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*).

In simple terms, the prophecies about the city included:

1. Tyre would be attacked by several nations. One of these nations would be Babylon, led by a king called Nebuchadnezzar
2. The city would eventually become nothing but bare rock
3. The riches of Tyre would be looted for her enemies while the walls and houses of Tyre would be destroyed. Stones, timber and debris from the city would be thrown into the water
4. Ancient Tyre would never again be re-built. The site of the city would become a place to spread fishing nets

To put this in modern day perspective, it is as if somebody spoke of the complete demise of New York or London, or some other major player in world trade. It would seem absolutely crazy! At the time, this prophecy sounded so ridiculous it was ignored by the inhabitants of Tyre.

This prophecy was given in 588 BC. Only three years later, Ezekiel's words began to be fulfilled. The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar II, besieged the city for 13 years when its leaders refused to acknowledge Babylon's dominion and right of influence. At the end of this time, Nebuchadnezzar broke down the fortified city gates, only to find that during the siege, the majority of Tyre's inhabitants had relocated to an island approximately one kilometre off the coast. The city was destroyed in 573 BC.

Obviously, the prophecy would have fallen short of Ezekiel's vivid description if it had merely ended there, but it didn't. The people of Tyre prospered on the island for over two hundred years. However approximately two hundred and fifty years later, Alexander the Great asked the Phoenician cities (including Tyre) to open their gates to his army so that he might prevent access or assistance to the Persian fleet. The Tyrians refused, incurring the wrath of Alexander. He decided to make an example of Tyre and besieged it. Although he had no naval fleet, Alexander and his military advisers devised an ambitious scheme to defeat Tyre.

They decided to build a mole (road) from the mainland to the island. Materials were bought from afar to complete this mammoth task. During this operation the rubble of the ancient city of Tyre was thrown into the sea, the result being that the city was laid bare, exactly as Ezekiel had predicted. Although this event occurred well over two thousand years ago, the remains of the city can still be viewed in the water leading to the island.

This pristine coastal site has never again been built on. Today it is, just as Ezekiel prophesied, a place where fishermen spread their nets.

The odds against such events being fulfilled are staggering, yet the evidence is there for all to witness.

Another good example of Biblical prediction coming to pass is the prophecy against the magnificent city of Babylon. In her prime, the demise of Babylon would have been unimaginable.

Babylon was the most fortified of all ancient cities. With the means of warfare available at that time, the city was considered impenetrable. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* claims that the area of the city of Babylon was 196 square miles, with 14 mile sides. It had a circumference of 56 miles and was surrounded by a moat that was 30 feet wide. It possessed an inner and outer defensive wall; the outer wall was the height of a 30 storey building and was 87 feet wide. At the top, the wall was wide enough to fit eleven cars. The city had 100 brass gates and 250 watchtowers which were 100 feet higher than its outer walls.

Like prophecies against Tyre, prophecies against Babylon were given when she was at the height of her glory, this time by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. At the time of the prophecies, there was no evidence of weakness in Babylon.

One hundred and seventy years before it occurred, the prophet Isaiah predicted that Babylon would fall. What is even more remarkable is that he named the leader of the conquering army 120 years before this man was born. The leader's name would be Cyrus.

Other predictions include the following:

1. Babylon would be destroyed and become as the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. (The remains of these cities have been found by archaeologists)
2. Babylon would never be inhabited again
3. Its ruins would be infested by desert creatures
4. No corner or foundation stones would be removed or reused
5. Babylon would become a swampland

Once again, against all odds and with accuracy beyond description, these seemingly impossible events came to pass. Not only was Babylon defeated as the Biblical prophets predicted, but every specific and unique detail of the prophecies has been

fulfilled. The site of the city has never again been inhabited and the remaining ruins have become engulfed by swamp. Although its foundation and corner stones are precious and much sought after for building purposes, nobody has removed them in the 2500 years since.

Even if there were only the prophecies of these two cities for us to analyse and assess, we should at least feel awed. But there are similar prophecies, equally as unlikely to come to pass, about many other lands or cities such as Sidon, Samaria, Gaza-Ashkelon, Moab-Ammon, Nineveh, Jerusalem, Palestine and others. Without exception, every one of these locations has become exactly what was prophesied for them. Today they stand before us as a beacon, confirming the Bible's authenticity.

The prophetic accuracy of the Bible is without parallel. There must come a point where we cannot deny the supernatural dimension of the Bible and its prophecies.

However the prophecies about Tyre, Babylon and the other cities pale into insignificance when compared with the number of prophecies about one outstanding individual. It is ironic to me that in my youth I put such minimal value on this man: the person of Jesus Christ.

I haven't counted, but I understand that there are over 200 predictions in the Old Testament of the Bible which refer to Christ. They have all been fulfilled to the letter. Without doubt, the person Jesus Christ is the paramount focus of the Bible.

In terms of time period, the most recent Old Testament prediction made about Christ's first coming was given over 400 years before his birth; other prophecies about him literally date back hundreds of years, some even millennia.

Biblical prophets predicted the time of Christ's arrival, his birth and birthplace, his upbringing, his ministry as well as the exact time span of this ministry. Besides this, we are told how he would speak, what sort of person he was, how he would be betrayed, that the betrayal would involve 30 pieces of silver, how

and why he would die. The prophecies also declared that he would conquer death and that he would make the Holy Spirit available to mankind.

In order to grasp the enormity of this, imagine if you were asked to precisely predict an event in the life of a specific person at a specific time in the future. Your prophecy would need to synchronize with approximately 200 other prophecies from several people who didn't know each other and who lived during different time periods. Finally, none of the predictions could be made within four centuries of the event.

Some diligent individual calculated that the odds for only eight of these prophecies to have come to pass are the same as if you covered the State of Texas two feet deep in dollar coins and then by some miracle, found one coin that was not a dollar coin. Bear in mind, this is the probability for only eight of the prophecies to have come to pass; the odds for two hundred plus is totally mind-boggling.

Of all the great people that have walked our planet, there are none who could claim to have accurate prophecies given and fulfilled for even one per cent of their lives or deaths. This is fact in regard to all leaders of other religions.

The following is only a partial list of the prophecies about Christ in the Bible. The prophet Daniel informs us of the time of Christ's arrival on Earth, that he would officially be called Messiah and Christ, that his ministry would begin from his baptism (by John the Baptist in the river Jordan) and that it would continue until his death three and a half years later (Daniel 9:25-27).

Other Old Testament books of the Bible prophecy these specific details about Jesus Christ:

- ◇ He would be of the lineage of King David
- ◇ He would be born of a virgin
- ◇ He would be born in Bethlehem (the city is actually named)
- ◇ He would spend time in Egypt
- ◇ He would live in Nazareth, Galilee (both actually named)

- ◇ His coming would be announced by an Elijah-type herald, i.e. John the Baptist
- ◇ His coming would occasion the massacre of Bethlehem's children
- ◇ He would proclaim God-given liberty and hope to a lost and blinded world
- ◇ His mission would also include non-Israelite peoples (the Gentiles)
- ◇ His ministry would be one to make people whole (spiritually and physically)
- ◇ He would teach using parables
- ◇ He would be rejected and not believed by the leaders of his time
- ◇ He would make a triumphant entry into Jerusalem
- ◇ He would be called a shepherd
- ◇ He would be beaten by men
- ◇ That not only would he be betrayed by a friend, but that this person would be paid exactly thirty pieces of silver
- ◇ He would die alongside criminals
- ◇ He would be offered vinegar and gall during this event
- ◇ He would be buried by a rich man
- ◇ Men would toss dice for his garments
- ◇ His actual dying words were foretold
- ◇ His side would be pierced
- ◇ Not a bone of his body would be broken
- ◇ He would not be defeated by death, in fact would be raised absolutely triumphant from that state after three days.

During his own crucifixion, Jesus acknowledged that this horrific event was a fulfilment of scriptures from the Old Testament and that it would impact the world, as it has and as it does.

I can honestly say that in my twenty plus years of investigating Biblical authenticity, my initial wonder has only increased, firstly because of the incomprehensible odds against the exact fulfilment of these prophecies. Secondly, there is simply nothing in other religious or philosophical circles that can even slightly compare with such miraculous fact.

Prophecy about the Future and the Last Days

Whatever our views on evolution, different religions or basic theories of life, when we recognize the precise fulfilment of Bible prophecy, it should give us confidence in the authenticity of the Bible.

In the light of such tangible, objective proof, it is reasonable to assume mankind has been exposed to a mind that transcends that of any human being, a mind that clearly sees the future. Because we see the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, we are free to consider what this same mind has communicated regarding the future. Obviously prophecy which refers to future events may impact not only our lives, but also those of our loved ones and humanity in general.

Before we embark on this investigation, it is worth addressing the issue of those who have claimed to know the date the world will end. Clearly their presumption has proved to be nothing but a manifestation of egotistical folly. Unfortunately such predictions only serve to cause people to believe that everything in the Bible is suspect, and become a kind of inoculation against anything Biblical. It is critical to recognize that these individuals (twits) are not uncovering Biblical error; they are merely revealing their own foolishness.

When Jesus' disciples asked him when the world would end, he spoke of signs which would indicate the end was imminent. But he also said that no man would know the exact day or the hour of the second coming of Christ. Therefore it is ridiculous for any person to suggest they have calculated the exact time of the world's end. It is even more so if they claim Biblical authority.

When we look at a Bible prophecy, it needs to be considered in the context of the whole of Bible, and must be in complete harmony with other scriptures addressing the specific issue or event. If there is apparent contradiction between scriptures, the issue must be questioned and examined further. Yet frequently, we are bombarded with far-fetched, selective interpretations (often from the book of Revelation) that ignore clear, balanced scriptural

comment. Again, this only serves to devalue the Bible's worth in the eyes of casual or genuine seekers and observers; in a nutshell it is a disgrace.

I think it's fair to say that most people in western culture are aware of the concept or time period called the "last days" or the "end of the world". Personally, I can say that I always had a vague awareness of this even though I had no religious upbringing. When this topic was first mentioned to me, I remember being instantly intrigued, and quickly decided it would be beneficial to determine whether it was just another fantasy or an actual reality. The terminology, "the last days", is from the Bible. In this chapter it will refer to the period of time prior to the most cataclysmic event to occur on planet earth: the phenomenal second coming of Jesus Christ. Although the concept might seem far-fetched to the average person, it is worthy of consideration. If it proves true, its impact on every one of us will be colossal; if nothing else, it is extremely interesting.

Before proceeding with "joining dots" on this part of the journey, I would like to explain something. Although it may seem a little complicated at first, it is quite simple and worth grasping.

Most of us are aware of the Biblical account in Genesis that the world was created in six days and that God rested on the seventh. The word "day" is better interpreted as "period of time". In the New Testament it states, "a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day" (2 Peter 3:8).

The Bible also tells us that there will be a thousand year period of peace called the millennium, directly after the return, or second coming of Christ (Revelation 20:2-7).

If there is to be a thousand years of peace (or rest), it is reasonable to assume there will be a six thousand year term of labour (God labouring with mankind and mankind labouring through life) preceding it, just as six days of labour precede the seventh day of rest in the Genesis account. This is why in Acts 2, the event that was taking place was referred to as the "Last Days", or the last two thousand years before the return of Jesus. This is

further supported by the prophet Hosea who predicts there will be approximately two thousand years of dealings with man (after Christ's death and resurrection) before the day (one thousand years) of being "raised up to live in his sight" (Hosea 6:2-3). This "day" refers to the millennium.

Some of the last or "latter days" references apply to this period of two thousand years while others refer specifically to the time just before the return of Jesus.

The second coming of Jesus is the principal prophetic event in the Bible; the return of Christ, and the days prior (the last days), are the most prophesied of all Biblical events. Again I have never counted the exact amount, but have read that there are over 300 prophecies about this period.

In my earlier days, I had little trouble mocking something that to my mind was too extreme to ever possibly be true. My perspective has changed significantly since I have taken time out and honestly assessed the facts without bias. Now I am convinced that just as every other event the Bible prophesied came to complete fulfillment (Tyre, Babylon, the first coming of Christ, etc.), these prophecies about Christ's return will just as surely come to pass.

The Bible implies that the return of Christ will be approximately 2000 years after the death of Jesus. While Jesus himself stated that no man will know the exact day or hour of this event, we are given signs for things to look out for, some of which are mentioned in this chapter.

I have divided the predictions into four categories to make things a little easier to understand. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but hopefully it will help those who are intrigued by such things to check these claims for themselves.

The four categories that I have found most relevant are as follows:

1. The prevalent thought patterns of people in this time
2. The compromise and deception of religious groups (especially "churchianity")

3. The position of nations and international tensions
4. The struggling condition of our beautiful planet

1. Thinking Prevalent in the Last Days

As I have mentioned, there are specific Biblical references to the type of thinking that will be prevalent in the last days. Ironically, people who vehemently oppose the whole concept of Christ's return actually prove the truth of these prophecies as they embrace the perspectives and lifestyles that are prophesied about.

The prophecies are of a general nature and therefore do not apply one hundred percent to every individual. However as the Anglo-Saxon people have fulfilled what was written about Israel's future, it is quite reasonable to assume that these prophecies apply generally to western civilisation.

Whether people choose to believe the Adam and Eve story or not (and let's face it, it does sound pretty far-fetched), it is interesting that just as Adam and Eve hid from God, so people in general avoid God today. We choose to ignore his warning ("You shall surely die") as we get consumed by the knowledge of good and evil. What I mean is that basically our life becomes one of continual assessment of what the world offers, a series of choices between good or bad options. Many times, people see the same thing in completely opposite terms (good or bad), depending on their viewpoint; some even get very passionate about their views. We get so consumed by these that we forget to check thoroughly if there is a way that does not conclude with: "You shall surely die". The sad thing is that people die oblivious to the far greater life, the life that provides genuine contentment.

Point being, since Adam and Eve chose knowledge of good and evil over life, mankind has had approximately 6000 years to create and embrace its ideologies. Things are coming to a head, and we aren't as smart as we like to think we are. As the saying goes, those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it; by my reckoning we are expert at ignoring history as well as turning a blind eye to negative

consequences when it suits us. We are killing our planet, world politics is wanting big-time, our money system and associated debt is a major worry. There are many people who exist in very difficult situations like wars, famines and personal sickness. In addition, even in normal life, there are relentless pressures and stresses.

Jesus spoke of the days preceding his return and stated that the love of many would wax cold or slowly chill. There would be nothing too obvious initially but slowly signs of this would appear. In the original Greek text, the word for “love” is “agape”; this is the strongest version of love, unending and selfless. Every day there is less provision made for this type of love in our world; many religious institutions and people in general prefer the more emotive, temporary, feel-good version of love, usually to their detriment because they misjudge the consequences. “Churchianity” has hijacked true Christianity and entertainment has bullied the standard of Bible truth. The gap between what the Bible requires and what people accept is perplexing.

2. “Churchianity” and Compromise



The disciples asked Jesus, “... what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). He responded with considerable detail.

Firstly he warned that many groups, denominations or individuals would claim to represent God, but in truth they do not. He certainly got that one right! Jesus also said

that anyone who followed such compromise would be deceived. This is not just referring to people claiming to be Christ. Today we are surrounded by so many religions and spiritual options which seem to confirm the accuracy of this prediction. The Bible offers

clear standards to help us identify true Christianity. Mark 16:15 and Acts 2:38 are good starters.

In the Bible, there is a list given in 1Timothy 3 that enables us to realise how far our thinking has drifted from our Creator's advice. It states, "In the last days, perilous (strength-reducing) times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful (mainly to God who gave them life) and unholy." You can read the full list for yourself; it also includes "without natural affection, lacking in self-control, fierce, high-minded, and lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

This refers to the average individual. But there is an accurate reference to modern day compromised Christianity. In the same chapter it describes people who "will be ever learning and still will not come to the knowledge of the truth". It may come as a shock to some people, but modern-day churches often devalue God's standard when they sidestep the responsibility of upholding Biblical standards in order to focus on being acceptable to as many as possible. They unwittingly become a mere social group. It should not be a numbers game, it should be a "courageously uphold the truth" game.

2 Timothy 4 tells us "in the latter times, some will depart from the faith, speaking lies in hypocrisy and having a hardened conscience that resists truth". Unfortunately the time referred to in this passage has arrived; there is a preference for Christian fable rather than Christian truth. People are searching for what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear. This scenario is being played out before us and we cannot ignore it.

Jude (the book before Revelation) informs us that in the last days, people will walk after their own desires, and will mock truth. 2 Peter 3 informs us that prior to the return of Christ, people will scoff at the thought of the second coming being truth and will prefer to give their minds over to lust. They will ask: "Where is the promise of his coming?" completely unaware that they are fulfilling prophecy even as they say it. We are even told that they are not just ignorant of the times, but are wilfully ignorant. Of course this

is a state of mind that is extremely difficult to change. I know this is true because it describes me exactly as I was. I couldn't change my thinking to save myself (excuse the pun). But a tangible miracle (I'll talk about that later) changed my thinking for me, and for this, I am very thankful.

For me, it is the great irony of our time that the masses who refuse to acknowledge truth are actually living proof of it. These are apt, accurate descriptions of what we find today in religious and non-religious circles. No doubt this is the sort of thing which caused a frustrated John Lennon to ask for the simple truth instead of pointless tradition.

3. The Position of Nations and International Tension



Jesus warned that those who commit to upholding the truth will be victimized in various ways, including coming under pressure to compromise their faith. Unfortunately many will succumb to this pressure, and some will choose to give up on the great friendship with God which the Gospel offers.

He went on to say, “as in the days of Noah, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be, for as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking and given in marriage...and knew not until the

flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.” This is how it will occur. Whether a person agrees or disagrees will not prevent it happening; it is recorded in the Bible and as with all Biblical prophecy, it will come to pass.

In specific reference to the last days, Jesus stated that we would hear of wars and rumours of wars. In addition he said there would be famines, pestilences and earthquakes. Certainly there have always been these sorts of events and disasters; apparently they are happening with increasing frequency. But it is not so much that these disasters are happening, or even the possibility they are more common now than at any other time in history; it is the fact that we *hear* (through media etc) of them, every single day. When Jesus said “you shall hear” of these things, his words seem to acknowledge the advanced state of modern technology. Nowadays we know about global events almost before they happen because our news media has proliferated and nearly everybody has instant access to all significant news. Never has media communication been so advanced, and to make comment of it approximately 2000 years before its time is, to my mind, amazing.

When speaking about the days preceding his return, the accuracy of what Jesus said in Luke 21 is stunning. Famines, tension over oil supply, financial crises with nations going bankrupt, ISIS aggression, unemployment, narcotic epidemics, AIDS, nuclear weapons, nuclear waste ... the list goes on. Jesus literally called the situation perplexing, and I think we would all agree that “perplexing” is a very good adjective to describe the situation the world is in. For those who are honest enough to admit that this is how it is, the burden is huge if God is erased from the solution.

Isaiah 51 tells us that Jerusalem will be a cup of trembling. History certainly demonstrates Jerusalem’s frequent instability. Many people see the city as special and three major world religions see it as holy in some way. It is remarkable that the fate of the city is still a major concern for so many—but the prophecy is recorded so it should not be a surprise. In Luke 21, Jesus declares that Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies and that when we witness this, the destruction of the city is imminent.

It is the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 and 39 which I think is of special interest. It was not fulfilled in the time period it was spoken, and has not been since. It is noted that “in the latter days you shall understand it perfectly”, or at least in our case, a little better.

Over many centuries and several major civilisations, the peoples of the Middle East have jostled for anything from existence to pre-eminence. Nobody from the past could have accurately guessed at their present positioning and intention unless they were inspired by a Being with a perspective outside of time. Yet today we have the accumulation of hostile Arab nations agitated by Israel’s existence. This text seems to be telling us that Jerusalem will be attacked by their combined (Arab) enemy and at the same time Magog (Russia) will attack America, who will be unprepared.

In this latter days period, it is predicted that the western world (America and the British Commonwealth), will come to live carelessly without recognizing the risk to their security. Having considered carefully some of the myriad opinions and interpretations regarding these chapters, my evaluation is as follows.

In the West, we belong to a self-obsessed society that easily becomes consumed with the demands of everyday life. As we become more casual about security, our military guard will be reduced, and we will become vulnerable to enemies. As a result, there will be war.

In approximately 520 BC, the prophet Zechariah describes this war in terms that sound much like the catastrophic effects of nuclear devastation. (Zec 14) Jerusalem and the West will be attacked simultaneously. This war could be what Jesus refers to in Matthew 24 where he states that without divine intervention, no one would survive. The description of the event is horrendous and is in accord with what Jesus stated: that it would be a time of trouble for mankind that has no parallel in history. In fact he talks about men’s hearts failing in fear during this period. This is the war that signals Jesus’ return, the essential return of Christ which prevents mankind from obliterating itself and our planet. Jesus did say he would return to the earth, not only because we would have

the ability to destroy ourselves, but even more frightening, some twits would actually be prepared to do so.

This period culminates in the magnificent return of Christ.

This realm of prophecy doesn't appeal to everybody. But it is interesting and beneficial to at least grasp the basics, especially as some of the predictions date as far back as around 700 BC. All these scriptures are very specific in detail. Considering Jesus' words were spoken almost 2000 years ago, it is staggering that the nations mentioned are currently positioned exactly as prophesied.

4. The Demise of Our Planet



Children playing in their backyard in Borneo

As we are aware, planet Earth is under pressure and unfortunately the pressure comes from those who derive most pleasure from it: the people of the world. Our finite planet cannot meet the infinite demands that we place on it and now we are at the point where cracks (or crevasses) are starting to appear. Whether it is greed, desperation or opportunity, it seems it is too easy to overlook the detrimental, long-term effects to our planet because of ever-increasing, present day demands.

The situation is getting worse, not better. The so-called advance of society during the previous 50 years has left our planet straining to cope. Without quoting specifics, we are witnessing marked increase in the pollution of air, sea and rivers. Global warming appears to constitute a major concern because of the increase of heat in countries where it is already very hot and the subsequent effects of rising sea-levels from melting ice-caps. As if that isn't enough, we are rapidly depleting oil reserves, along with many other mineral deposits necessary to support modern day living. Food production is no longer able to adequately meet the demands of mankind ("man unkind" is probably more accurate), huge forests which once assisted in purifying our air are shrinking at an alarming rate, fish stocks worldwide are diminishing and the list goes on.

It is "guesstimated" by experts in this field that there are around 200 species on our earth becoming extinct daily. Yes, daily.

We hear virtually zilch about these dilemmas from our esteemed leaders. We have issues like the Fukushima nuclear reactor situation and virtually nobody is aware of the catastrophic



Larson, The Far Side

Dedicated to our esteemed leaders

damage taking place. For several years radioactive waste has been spewing into our beloved Pacific Ocean (so much so it is now polluting the west coast of America), yet our zealous media reports nothing of consequence about this. What we do hear appears to be “carefully edited”; there is deliberate exclusion of facts that we should know. For instance, we do not hear that authorities do not have any idea how to solve the Fukushima problem; it is now being referred to as out of control and we are basically oblivious to the unhindered destruction taking place. We hear more about Caitlyn and Kim K’s backside (I’m sure you know who I mean) than this super-serious, ongoing catastrophe.

The saddest thing about our dying world is our pathetic attempts to prevent the destruction happening before our very eyes. We are hooked on the way we live (especially in the West) and if anything means reducing our pleasure, we actually aren’t that interested. Going to work on a horse and living without mod-cons... you’ve got to be joking!

Bob Dylan wrote a song about similar situations and posed the question to us all: “When You Gonna Wake Up?” Unfortunately the answer is that it just isn’t going to happen. I know I sound like the all-time pessimist, but not so; I think I am being nothing more than a basic realist. Globally, the problem is that we are just too preoccupied and self-obsessed to devote the time, effort and sacrifice necessary to turn things around, and that is assuming we possess the resolve and wherewithal to do so.

We like to think raising public awareness will assist the cause, but in reality it’s like a pea being placed before a steamroller. The Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan is just one of many instances which prove this point.

I won’t bombard you with copious detail, but some information may assist you to understand and evaluate for yourself what actually is becoming apparent at Fukushima. It seems more and more people are calling the situation very serious. A former nuclear industry executive, Albert Gundersen, has rated it twenty times worse than Chernobyl, but because no solution is available that quite possibly is a major understatement. At Chernobyl it was one

nuclear reactor that experienced a 30% melt-down that was contained within 10 days, Fukushima was a four reactors event, all four being much larger (4 times) than the reactor at Chernobyl. At Fukushima 4 reactors suffered 100% meltdown and quite possibly the horrific scenario of melt-through, which is in another league as far as serious is concerned, because it is something that has never happened before, so the whole situation is without precedent. Recent testing for radiation levels under the Fukushima nuclear plant has confirmed fears of a melt-through with a spike of over 100,000%.

It has now been almost five years since the reactor explosions and the situation appears to be getting worse, not better. TEPCO, the power company that owns Fukushima has deliberately downplayed facts and deceived the public, but has come clean over the last month and admitted the situation is *out of control*. A molten radio-active core loose in the earth is about as scary as pollution can get, and now we are being told a solution for the situation is still unknown, or at least 40-60 years away at best. Other people who appear to have no agenda and more honesty say any solution within 200 years would be amazing.

The old adage, “the solution for pollution is dilution”, does not hold true for nuclear waste. Many of the hideous nuclear chemicals, with time, increase in strength, some with a toxicity that is hard to even imagine and have life-spans that exceed a million years. It's crazy.

Commentators on the Fukushima meltdown are very concerned that the natural aquifer that flows under the nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean might be transporting substantial amounts of dangerous radioactive, nuclear chemicals into the sea.

There already seem to be significant numbers of people suffering severe side-effects from exposure to the radiation, but those numbers will be insignificant when compared with what is to come because the incubation time for radiation poisoning has not yet expired.

Just recently, TEPCO, admitted reactor four was decimated at the time of the explosions (5 years ago). To many that will mean nothing but it is of extreme concern because the nuclear fuel at Fukushima was what is called MOX fuel, and it is radical, 1000's of times more sinister than the graphite fuel which was released at the Chernobyl event. The amount that was blasted into the air was substantial.

It was Albert Einstein who said "the unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our mode of thinking and we thus drift to unparalleled catastrophe". It is easy to concur.

In 2016, five years after the disaster, events of immense concern are taking place in the North Pacific. Krill, sardines, herring, squid and fish alike have virtually disappeared, whales and seals have been found dead on beaches with no food in their bellies, seal pups (over 3000 this season) have been rescued on the Californian coast completely emaciated, and still nuclear waste flows into the Pacific. Some observers are claiming that up to 90% of the low-tide, ocean nursery on the British Columbian coast is wiped out. More and more people say radioactivity can be the only possible culprit, time will tell.

I'm no expert but I have spent many hours evaluating opinions of the effects of Fukushima. Some knowledgeable people see it as potentially being an extinction of mankind event (I know that sounds extreme) because of the bio-accumulation, others are more optimistic. If you're interested, google, "Fukushima disaster" and you can check for yourself

Lastly there is a bucketful of serious issues that seem to affect pretty well everybody on the globe. Besides the everyday pressures of just doing life, we have crime going through the roof in virtually all forms. In the West drug and/or alcohol abuse is wreaking havoc, there is financial pressure on many, financial scams, an increase in the breakdown of marriages and the family unit, AIDS is still a major issue along with all the new viruses randomly appearing. Nations continue to struggle for global dominance and control. Ideologies that crush whoever or whatever does not conform don't

seem to be getting any fewer, and whatever, the list just seems to be getting larger.

Basically, we need a new start and it needs to be a new start where greed and self-obsession is reigned in. We need help beyond the wisdom of man, and the great news is it is just around the corner. We (mankind) were graciously given 6000 years to prove we don't need Divine assistance, and all we've done is prove we do.

Thankfully the amazing life force that is responsible for the creation of everything hasn't left us to our downward spiral and it appears divine intervention is close. I don't know your thoughts on this but I certainly know mine, I say, "Bring it on and the sooner the better!!"

What Happens Next? A New Beginning

So this is the end of the world, but not as we know it, as Spock used to say. For 6000 years (six days), man has laboured with mammoth effort and often good intent but has failed to recognize God's authority. Look where it has brought us: every individual still lives about three score and ten years before death takes them forever. On a global scale, there isn't much to show other than an abuse of our beautiful planet with humanity drawing itself to the brink of self-destruction.

The prophecies regarding the years after the second coming of Jesus are remarkable. Yes there will be an end to the futility of everyday life as we have experienced it. But it will be replaced by a new beginning, God's version of abundant life. God, our creator, the One who cares far more for us than we could ever care for ourselves, is going to reign on Earth.

This may seem laughable to some but it will happen. We need to honestly evaluate where we will stand when it does. This evaluation could prove more valuable than anything else in our three score and ten years.

Scripture allows us a glimpse of what will happen from this point, and the glimpse is incredible.

Firstly there will be genuine peace on earth for one thousand years (the seventh day, the day of rest). This will be a time in which mankind will actually desire the perfect wisdom of God; He will teach us His ways and, even better, we will walk in His paths. Scripture says that spears will be beaten into pruning-hooks and swords into plough-shares. We are told that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and the ways of war will not be learned any more. During this time, God will graciously bring to light things that have been hidden in darkness, such as the thoughts and the intentions in the hearts of men (Jeremiah 17:9). Then, and only then, every man will acknowledge and be thankful to God. Even nature will mellow; the prophet Isaiah informs us that the wolf will lie with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, the calf,

young lion etc will be together and a little child will lead them. A baby will play on the hole of the asp and so it goes on! We are told that the Earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord just as the ocean fully and deeply covers the bed of the sea.

This period in the future will be amazing and God calls every person, everywhere, to be part of it.

I am very confident these things will come to pass. Therefore I think it is appropriate that I write from this position of certainty because the outworking of Biblical prophecy is inevitable. There may be slight differences in exactly how things unfold, but the principles will not alter.

For myself, I found that there comes a time when remaining neutral on these issues amounts to self-deception.

I have been a sceptic, with bells on. During those years I would have thought it ridiculous to throw away fun to become bound to any form of restrictive religion. I never thought for a second there could be a caring God who provided irrefutable proofs of His existence. I never knew about the incredible experience called the baptism of the Holy Spirit or the weight of evidence in fulfilled Biblical prophecy.

Even today, many years since my initial confrontation, it is sheer understatement to say that I still consider the truth of prophetic fulfilment in history astounding.

I must stress this is not intended to be an endorsement of religious groups, but rather an endorsement of the existence of a higher being. This Being has proven, not just his existence, but also his strong desire to influence common man into life that continues beyond the grave, all of which is revealed in his inspired book, The Holy Bible.

Deliberately Blinkered?



After being exposed to this information about Christ and Biblical prophecy, remaining neutral can no longer be an option. Where do we stand? We have the right to be sceptical, but there comes a time when we must acknowledge the irrefutable proof of divine intervention in the affairs of humanity.

Yet most of us do not.

The prevalent view of religion is that it is for people who need a crutch or purpose for their life. But in this book I have tried to take a different line of reasoning, one of identifying and establishing fact, not a need for religion. I find it bizarre that the average person is determined to ignore such compelling information. Why is this?

If the book containing these prophecies also offers advice for our lives, it would be natural to assume that people would be extremely grateful and respond positively to its message. Obviously this is just not the case.

When I first shared my experience of Christianity, there was no genuine enquiry from my friends about what was going on in my life. From the start, they preferred to try to talk me out of what had happened to me; their natural inclination was to oppose it. Ironically, this was exactly the way I had originally been with my friend.

There is an array of reasons why people respond like this, and in many ways it is a natural response.

There is the perception that we will have to give up what we really enjoy if we believe the Bible's claims. A battle is waged in

our minds; the more we focus on what we think we might lose, the more oblivious we become to the immense benefits we receive when we embrace truth.

Although we are reluctant to admit it, we are often unwilling to leave the comfort of being one of the majority. Then there is the mixture of lack of free time combined with the general western apathy that can, and often does, morph into spiritual laziness.

The Bible claims that Jesus Christ overcame death, the only person ever to do so. Given the Bible's authenticity in prophecy, we owe it to ourselves to at least check out this claim. Turning a blind eye to anything that impacts our lives so dramatically is senseless; this is an "everything to gain, nothing to lose" scenario.

After all, it's not as if death is irrelevant to us as human beings; death is as remorseless as remorseless gets. When death claims someone, it renders every effort of theirs futile. It leaves us with the agony of permanent loss, knowing we will not see or touch or talk with this person again. Surely the slightest hope that we could be freed from such a heinous enemy is the most beautiful thing in life, and must be worthy of investigation.

Why then, do we still turn away from the Bible and its claims?

The same book that provides the marvel of prophetic fulfilment also answers this question. The Bible declares that the normal human condition is one that naturally prefers the ways and ideologies of our world. This results in an unhelpful bias towards very important issues causing us to run with the multitude who don't seem to mind the futility of everyday life.

Personally I found this way of thinking intimidated me to the point that I was actually embarrassed to be seen checking whether the Bible could possibly be authentic, more concerned that people I knew would think I was a goof or a twit.

But that is the beauty of prophecy; the Bible calls it "shining light". It was just what I needed to dispel the darkness of getting the most I could get out my years, a darkness which I had become so accustomed to, I never even queried it.

Damage Done by Religion



Many find it of interest that it was towards the religious groups of his time that Jesus showed the least tolerance, particularly if they played the part of committed zealots. He exposed them as

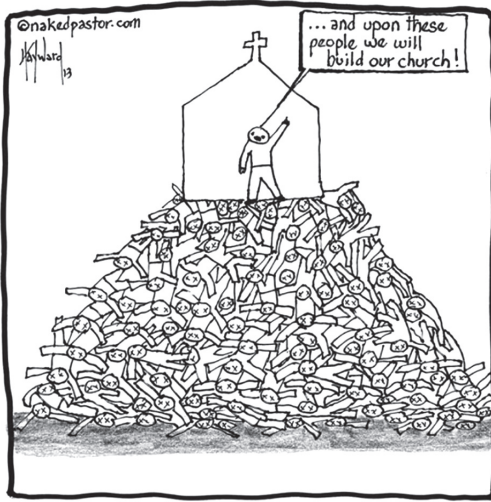
lovers of tradition rather than truth, lovers of self rather than God or others. As is so often the case today, they played their part well, but they were fakes. It was also the religious groups who wanted to kill Jesus, finally succeeding in orchestrating his death. Truth despises religion, and religion despises truth. Truth utilises what Jesus died to make available to everyone and treasures it; religion deliberately evades it and subtly promotes self-righteousness.

Many in our western culture have witnessed too much churchie funny-business to ever want to surrender their lives to it.

Historically, established religion has been guilty of some of the worst atrocities that have taken place in the history of mankind.

Although the Bible can be proven to be inspired by the fulfilment of prophecy, it in no way justifies the history of religious leaders who arrogantly held a Bible in one hand and destroyed lives with the other. Tragically, far too many atrocities have been realised at the hands of religious institutions who claim divine authority.

The true accounts of events during the Inquisition (approximately 1200AD-1700AD) by the church system based in the city of seven hills makes frightening reading. At this time, the supremely powerful church sought to eradicate those whom they decided to label heretics and infidels. Although no exact figure exists, it is estimated that 50 million people were murdered



during this period. The Inquisition is only one of many times where church influence brought about the complete destruction of those who they perceived as being in opposition.

It is not the purpose of this book to bag churches, but at the same time it would be absolutely irresponsible of me

not to make mention of some basic observations.

In modern day society the lesson has still not been learnt, and many churches shun Bible truth when it suits them; the preference for pointless tradition is still strong. There are many who have trusted church leadership, only to have that trust abused.

When I read the Bible, I find a level-headed God who asks for level-headed followers to present a level-headed truth. Unfortunately this seems to elude many institutions that claim to represent Him. Why do these differences and extremes exist within the church? The answer is quite simple. People have a tendency to pick the bits of the Bible that suit them, and as a result embrace anything from pointless tradition to ridiculous emotional hype. Neither reflects the simple, common-sense life that Jesus demonstrated.

For example, in Biblical times, the apostle Peter was asked what a person needed to do to become right with God. Peter answered, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Although Peter's answer is just as true today, 2000 years have taken their toll and as a result modern-

day Christianity is found wanting, preferring to introduce things like “the sinners prayer”. It is fulfilment of end-time scripture, but it also is very sad.

In the Bible, God expresses concern that his offer of abundant life is not devalued in the minds of enquiring people. Recently I was listening to a radio station where people were given the opportunity to phone in and share which individual in history they would most like to spend a day with. As you can imagine, there were several names put forth such as Shakespeare, Captain Cook, Alexander the Great, etc. When a caller happened to use the words “Jesus Christ” as an expletive, the radio host quipped it was strange that no one who had called would choose to spend a day with Jesus.

Sadly, religious institutions have done major damage to the common man’s perception of the Bible and God. We have become victims to a spiritual inoculation that is having a profound effect on our generation. Although I never thought so at the time, I now consider my religion-free upbringing to be an advantage. I believe it has enabled me to evaluate issues without being manipulated by preconceived ideas or agendas that I felt obligated to uphold.

Outside of Christianity, other religious groups have historically encouraged their followers to give up their lives for their cause, which is “obviously” God’s cause. Today we have groups that claim it an honour to destroy as many “infidels” as possible with the promised reward of umpteen virgins in heaven.

Is it any wonder that thinking people conclude that it is best to shun anything with a religious connection?

Just remember it is unwise to throw out the bath water until we are certain it doesn’t contain a baby!

It is vitally important for any person who decides to take a closer look at what God has made available to distinguish between religious dogma and Bible truth. Religious dogma is dangerous while Bible truth is liberating.

The King Lear Parallel



Regret

OK, I admit this is a deviation from a straight line, but it is relevant so bear with me. Although we are going to veer slightly left field, I believe it is a dot worth joining. As Joe Cocker sang, “Lend me your ear/ and I’ll sing you a song/ and I’ll try not to sing out of

key”. At the very least, what follows is worth some consideration.

Although I possessed minimal interest toward anything to do with Shakespeare for the first half of my life, since then I have often found myself drawn to his works. While I am far from being a Shakespearean scholar, I find the more I am exposed to his writing, the more I appreciate his truly unique skills with the written word.

Apparently William Shakespeare invented almost 2,500 words, many of which we frequently use in our day to day lives. He also invented scores of what are now common sayings, though most of us are completely oblivious to their Shakespearean source. It is surprising that these accomplishments are relatively unknown. It could simply be because the invention of new words, sayings and poetry all pale in comparison to the excellence of the plays Shakespeare wrote.

He wrote three types of play: historic, comic and tragic. All were thought-provoking; some are nothing short of brilliant as they explore the motives and intents (often negative) of different characters. All too often we can identify with Shakespeare’s characters more closely than we like to admit.

One such play is *King Lear*. It joins *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* as one of Shakespeare’s classic tragedies. *King Lear* presents life lessons which we do well to consider.

The play is the story of an aging king who decides to split his kingdom between his three daughters. Two daughters declare their

love for their father with excessive flattery, while his third daughter, Cordelia, simply but sincerely states that she loves him. The King is not impressed by Cordelia's simple words and disinherits her.

Over time, it becomes clear that the two daughters who flattered him have little regard for the well-being of the King. They demean their father and seek to remove the minimal dignity he has left. Through their cruelty, King Lear is transformed from a powerful king to a troubled, ineffective man. He is tormented by unrelenting grief and remorse especially for his merciless banishment of Cordelia. He searches for Cordelia but in true tragic form, as soon as he finds her, they are taken into captivity together. Cordelia is murdered; exhaustion and grief overwhelm the King so that he also dies—of a broken heart.

Of course the moral of the story is that we must be careful with decisions that affect the direction of our lives. It is a simple theme which has application to many areas; we all have to make major decisions at some point. It is simple wisdom not to be tempted by temporary gain if it means the loss of something more precious. We also learn from King Lear that it is critical to stand strong when being bullied by people who do not necessarily have our true interests at heart.

Like King Lear, we have many opportunities and options before us as we live life. Personal gratification shouts her demands loudly. But she doesn't have a reputation for evaluating the consequences of giving into them; neither does she tell us what we will miss out on if we choose to ignore wise advice.

Over the years as I have observed people making decisions of varying significance, I have concluded there are three questions that we must answer with certainty: Is there intelligent design behind our cosmos? If so, does this supernatural force have a genuine concern for our well-being? And finally, does this Being require anything of us which will result in enhancing our lives?

It is just too easy to banish these questions from our thoughts. After all, we've got things to do, places to go and limited time to do

it in. Just as King Lear foolishly sent his daughter away, we can also unwisely discard those things that are most precious.

Whether we admit it or not, we all desire contentment. Life offers us many options with claims to satisfy, but often these have strings attached. Sometimes it demands the banishment of things that really do matter.

The life lesson here is not to be a King Lear. Don't live your life regretting a terrible miscalculation.

On the subject of tragic, I'm a bit tragic myself; a "Woodstock tragic". If you must know, I think Joe Cocker singing "A Little Help From my Friends" is still unbeaten, although Bowie singing "Heroes" live in Ireland is close. But as you have read, I was exposed to many alternatives in my younger days. I chose a certain group to be part of, we enjoyed good times, surfed daily, got stoned often, enjoyed partying and basically breezed through life with minimal responsibility and maximum enjoyment.

But it didn't and couldn't last; we went our different ways.

It is many years later and we live with the effects and results of our choices. Some straightened out, settled down and had a family. Others tried to extend the dream until eventually it took its toll: some spun out, some overdosed and some took their lives. Some are still just drifting with no purpose.

People have different views about how things have turned out. I agree with those who are bothered by the wasted potential of anybody's precious life.

Most people judge the success of their lives by comparing themselves with others who are less successful, at least from their point of view. If this type of satisfaction is all that there is to life, well so be it.

But I think if you read on, you will find there is a compelling, yet balanced realm which beckons to us, and it is all good.

The Character of God



After examining Bible prophecy and at the very least finding it challenging, we need to ask the question, “What is the God of the Bible really like? How can we know the character or personality of God?”

To answer this, we need to consider the way the Bible talks about God’s character. There is

no better place to start than with the Biblical accounts of the life of Christ. During the three and a half years of his public ministry until his death, Jesus displayed the character of God, and what a display it was.

Jesus Christ was wise, he was kind and he was miraculous. He walked on water, stilled storms, healed all manner of sickness and even raised the dead. The only times he rebuked anybody was when he rebuked religious leaders (no doubt dressed in their ridiculous, but intimidating regalia), who dared to use God’s Law to burden people. God’s desire has always been to liberate lives and set people free, even if only from simple misunderstanding. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus said, “Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I *will* give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your souls.”

As a man, he lived through the same things we do: he hungered, thirsted, suffered the rejection of friends and was deliberately misrepresented by enemies. Four hundred years earlier, the

prophet Isaiah declared that he who was to become the Saviour of the world would be a man of sorrows who was well acquainted with grief; and so he was. The Bible informs us that God allowed him to suffer heartbreak and disappointment so that he could empathise with us on every level. He desires to be an ally who never fails those who trust in him, a perfect, been-there-done-that friend, a friend who loves us beyond our wildest dreams and can help beyond our wildest expectations.

Jesus endeavoured to live a life that demonstrated what God is like and he couldn't have done it better. God is exactly as we hoped he would be. He is caring, he is perfect and he is magnificent, beyond words.

In addition, Jesus was God's only Son and no father could give a more precious gift to and for the world. Why would God give his Son? The Bible makes it very clear that God had a plan to destroy one of our most powerful enemies: death. For all our efforts and achievements in life, death ignores all and mercilessly brings us to nought. All humanity is now forced to accept that inevitable end to life; it is harsh, it is cruel and it is repugnant to God. God grieved while his son suffered and died a horrendous death. This is because the death of Jesus was what it cost to restore God's connection with man, and to give us life beyond the grave. God has achieved his goal and now beckons all to become benefactors of what he has made available through the death of his son.

So, to state the obvious: God is not a goose or a twit or a nerd. He is all you would expect of a divine being; he exceeds all expectation of what is good, and has an intense interest in mankind both individually and collectively. God truly and honestly loves mankind. He harbours enormous concerns for our well-being both now and in our future.

God doesn't beat about the bush, he is honest and direct.

He is perfect and his judgements are final. Being outside the bounds of time, God sees the future while we get caught up with the present. In ignorance and foolishness we do not see the end results of our choices.

In my teens when I enjoyed the marijuana and LSD thing, it was fun with a capital “F”. My friends and I were footloose and fancy free, and to all intents and purposes we were winning. But we didn’t see the future. As I mentioned earlier, within ten years, two of my best friends became mentally unstable. Prior to their drug involvement they had been normal, happy people. Another friend took his life, some overdosed, several slowly became socially inept and quite directionless, withdrawing from society and existing on welfare benefits. As with many enticing things that life offers us, the end didn’t resemble the beginning.

A little help from an eternal God who knows the future is good value and should be gratefully embraced rather than casually ignored.

As I mentioned earlier, the person of Jesus Christ has gone from being an absolute nobody to me, to becoming my “pearl of greatest price”. Personally I felt ripped off big time when the beauty of the person Jesus Christ was revealed to me. I came to realize that I had lived a lonely life, completely oblivious to the fact that I had a priceless friend who willingly gave his wonderful life so that he could enhance mine. He is a friend who will never ever leave or forsake me, and this is not just for me, but anyone who dares to accept the challenge. Clichéd or not, the most wonderful fact of life is that God so loved every person that he gave his precious Son to die, so that he could renew the mind of all his followers by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In closing this chapter, it is important to understand that if we sincerely want to “get to know God” we need to realise that God is Spirit. To truly know him, we need to experience what the Bible calls the receiving or baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is available to any genuine seeker of truth; it is a tangible experience that is available to all. Jesus often spoke about this special event during his life, but it was not available until 50 days after his death. It was this experience that invigorated and transformed the disciples 2000 years ago and it is still doing the same today.

God offers every person, everywhere, the miracle of receiving the Holy Spirit in the just the same way as the disciples did. Only

then can we experience His eternal plan for our lives. For every living person, whether we believe it or not, this is definitely is the “pearl of greatest price”.

Appendix:

The Importance of The Book of Acts

Nowadays there are many varying versions of Christianity. This is a concern because the Bible is clear that there is only one true version of Christianity. The version we are encouraged to aspire to is the one recorded in the fifth book of the New Testament, the Book of Acts. Our Christian experience today should parallel what is written there. All professing Christians should look to the events the apostles experienced and the principles they upheld because true Christianity hasn't changed from the time of the Book of Acts. The challenge is whether today's Christian can embrace such a standard and not compromise despite the pressure applied by modern day "churchianity".

Before embarking on a simple breakdown of the Book of Acts, I would like to make it clear that this is not being written to put down any person or group; I derive no pleasure from belittling anybody or their opinions. On the contrary, my main intention is to assist people who desire to have their life enhanced by their creator.

It is necessary to stress (at least in my opinion) that this issue is the most important that we will be confronted with in our lives. To get this one right is critical and that is a massive understatement.

The writing of this appendix is to assist people to better understand the Book of Acts. Here I will attempt to separate the fundamentals from the incidentals so that the simple truth of Acts can be grasped easily. The most compelling reason for this is that if you adhere to and courageously uphold this standard, God promises that you will receive a new life. I know it sounds a bit corny, but it really isn't: from this time on, he will be your friend. He will never leave or forsake you and your life will not be ultimately obliterated by death.

The Book of Acts, written by Luke, is basically a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. In this gospel, Luke records many of the events he personally witnessed during Christ's three and a half year ministry. This spans the time from when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist through to his horrendous death and indescribable resurrection. In Acts, Luke records how the apostles and true followers of Jesus had their lives transformed after the resurrection by a specific miracle. He also describes how the apostles instructed enquirers who wanted to experience the same life-transforming miracle, and details how the apostles embarked on their God-given mission to communicate this message to as many people as possible.

Chapter One speaks of the first 50 days after the death of Christ. Over 40 days during this period, Jesus communicated with the apostles and others, proving not only that he was alive, but also instructing and teaching them. He explained that very soon God himself was going to send power so dynamic that the apostles would experience completely transformed lives. He also said that while John the Baptist had baptised with water, Jesus would now baptise with the Holy Spirit. It was to be this event which would bring the power necessary to renew a life along with physical, mental and spiritual healing.

Acts 2 records the fulfilment of Jesus' words. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was the culmination of Christ coming to earth, dying on man's behalf and his resurrection. While the apostles were praying, they received the greatest gift available to man, a gift directly from God himself, the gift of the Holy Spirit. When this gift was received there was—and still is—a tangible outward manifestation called "speaking in tongues". This is simply a pure language used for praying directly to God.

People who witnessed this event actually asked the apostles what they needed to do to be saved. The apostle Peter, himself completely changed, answered that they would need to repent and be water baptised. He also declared that any person called by God would receive the Holy Spirit. There are two other occasions (Acts 10 and 19) where the Book of Acts describes people receiving

the Holy Spirit. In all cases, the receiving of the Holy Spirit was identified by the manifestation of speaking in tongues; it is no different today.

From this time on, the apostles experienced power they didn't have while they walked with Jesus. The Book of Acts records that they could pray for the sick and see them get healed just as they had while Jesus lived. But it also records that the apostles could now pray for others to receive the Holy Spirit—which they had not been able to do before Jesus had died. It happened just as described in Acts 2:33; the event could be seen and heard, eliminating any confusion or compromise.

At this point, it is worth noting a comment made by Jesus in John 14:12. While walking with his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane only hours before being betrayed by Judas, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, he that believes on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works shall he do, because I go to the Father."

The greater work Jesus spoke of is praying for an ordinary person to be baptised in the Holy Spirit; this event is greater than the healings Jesus gave people, greater than walking on water, greater than raising Lazarus and greater than everything else Jesus did. It was something Jesus could not have done at that time as he had to die on behalf of all mankind before the Holy Spirit could be available to everybody.

In Acts 10 and 11 there is the account of a man who was described as devout, constantly praying, giving generously to others and whose prayers were literally a memorial before God. He was instructed to listen to Peter who would tell him how he and the members of his household could be saved. (This is interesting because today most churches would say such a person was saved already.) To make a long story shorter, Peter told them what Jesus required and as he spoke, these people received the Spirit. Once again, everyone knew this because it was identified by the evidence of speaking in tongues. Over the years I have found it essential that an individual understands Acts 10 and 11 if he or she wants to receive salvation in the way God intended.

There are many events recorded in Acts revealing the newness of life which a person obtains after receiving the Holy Spirit and they are all interesting. But it is the importance of being baptised by the Holy Spirit that was paramount then—and it still is today.

If it is of any consolation, within months of having this tangible experience, I was pressured by church-going people to minimize its importance. Sadly, being none the wiser, I trusted them and did just that. Thankfully, in future days I gave the whole issue the time it deserves and requires.

After evaluating what the Bible has to say many, many times over a long period, I came to realize that the moment when the Holy Spirit is manifested in someone's life is the greatest, most momentous, most precious thing that could ever happen to them!

In closing, I would like to address a common dilemma that we do well to understand. It is the issue of when or if a person can actually be worthy of the privilege of receiving God's love, attention and gifts. The truth is that nobody in and of themselves is ever worthy of God's gifts, whether they have lived a life that has been good, bad or both.

But if we embrace and act on the simple requirements of Acts 2:38, we make ourselves worthy. This change is not based on what we have done but rather on what God makes available through Jesus' horrendous death and amazing resurrection. The ball is in our court. It is fully our call and our response which determines worthiness; it is not whether we have been "good".

We also do well to grasp that if maybe we have been unwise in thoughts and actions since knowing God, the ever-living God is still a justifier and definitely not a condemner. Make the decision to return to God's standard and he cannot deny you, for the best reason ever—simply because he cannot deny himself.

If there is anything to be wary of, it is delay. As the saying goes, strike while the iron is hot. From there it is ALL GOOD!!!

Tragedy in Heavy Seas

DINGHY SWAMPED OFF ISLAND Man Drowns Two Saved



Michael Trainer, aged 11.



One man was drowned and two others narrowly escaped death after a seven-foot dinghy was swamped by heavy seas in the Sergeant Channel, between Motuihe and Cruso Islands about 2.15 p.m. yesterday.

The dead man, whose body had not been recovered when a search was called off at nightfall, was

Mr Ian MacDonald, aged 23, single, son of Mr and Mrs J. MacDonald, of 5 Bradbury Rd, Howick.

The survivors, one of whom had been in the water for about half an hour, were picked up by the 26-foot launch Roslyn.

They were Mr Barry Trainer, aged 22, of 20 Vincent St, Howick, his son Michael, aged 11, and Mr Les O'Hearn, of 12 Biedislow St, Howick.

All were too upset to talk about the mishap last night. "It's just a tragedy," said Mr Trainer.

Hunting Mussels

They were out for a day's cruising in Mr MacDonald's 18-foot launch, and had anchored in the channel to go and forage for mussels on Cruso Island.

Mr MacDonald was rowing Mr O'Hearn back to the launch when heavy seas swamped the dinghy. Michael was already on the launch and Mr Trainer, who was still on Cruso Island, stood helplessly as his friends floundered in the water.

He had seen the Roslyn anchored in the lee of the island and rushed off to get help.

The skipper of the Roslyn, Mr R. H. Bartlett, of 16 Fitzgerald Rd, Mt Wellington, who was on a fishing trip with two friends, Mr T. Sheffield, of 4 Loy Rd, Patersons, and Mr H. Rogers, of 2 Gungah Rd, Mt Wellington, had sought shelter from the worsening weather.

"I saw a man running along the shore, yelling and trying to attract our attention," said Mr Bartlett. "He said to come quickly, that there was a boat in distress and two men drowning."

Hauled into Water

"The first thing we sighted was the launch which had dragged its anchor and was being swept toward the rocks.

Michael was on board waving frantically.

"We threw him a rope, but he couldn't make it fast and was hauled out of the launch into the water. It was a good thing he had the sense to hang on to the rope."

Directed Search

Mr Bartlett said once Michael was on board he directed the search.

"The wind was blowing hard and the sea was pretty rough. We transferred Mr Sheffield to the drifting launch and he managed to start it up and sail away from the rocks."

Mr Sheffield enlisted aid from the launch Helena, while Mr Bartlett sent out a May-day call.

Within minutes the police launch Deodar, New Zealand Volunteer Coast Guard auxiliaries and Tourist Air Travel amphibian aircraft were sent to the scene.

Meanwhile, Mr Bartlett continued searching for Mr MacDonald and Mr O'Hearn.

Did Not Panic

"Michael directed us," said Mr Bartlett. "He didn't cry or panic at all. He was a real champion. Mr O'Hearn probably owes his life to the boy."

"I saw a hand waving and we picked up Mr O'Hearn who was still clinging to the dinghy. He had just about said it when we pulled him on board."

Mr Bartlett said Mr MacDonald had left the dinghy to try and reach the launch. He was not seen again.

Patrol boats from the Tamaki Yacht Club and the Howick Sea Rescue Brigade joined private boats in a search for Mr MacDonald's body.

The search was called off at dark but will be resumed at first light today.

Patrol Car Becomes Victim 23

An unmarked traffic patrol car lying in wait for speedsters in Apirana Ave, Glen Innes, yesterday became the third parked car in five years to be rammed by passing traffic in the street.

Alarmed by the number of smashers in 150 yards of the uphill avenue, 20 residents petitioned the city traffic department to make an investigation.

For two weeks the department has kept a watch on the road, running from Glen Innes up a steep rise to St Heliers Bay Rd.

"We have complained at speeding," said a resident, Mr S. Masters. "The traffic department has now discovered how dangerous it is to park in Apirana Ave."

QUEEN M

Tour Ma In Auc

Staff Reporter

The Queen Mother se

New Zealand tour at Auc

Official sources indicated

last night that five days

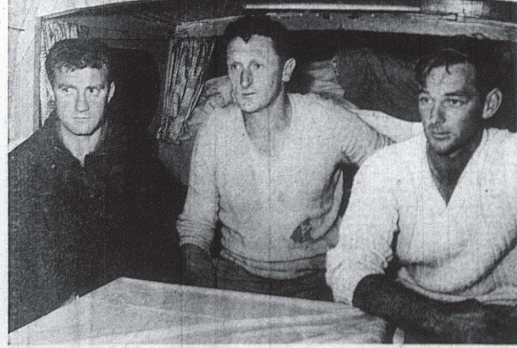
would probably be allotted for

the Britannia's crossing of the

Tasman from Melbourne.



Mr Trainer



The rescuers (from left) Mr Sheffield, Mr Rogers and Mr Bartlett, on board the launch Roslyn last night.

My brush with death was written up on the front page of the New Zealand Herald on October 25, 1965. That's me at the top aged 11.

*If you want to talk to Mike about anything in
this book you'll get him at
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