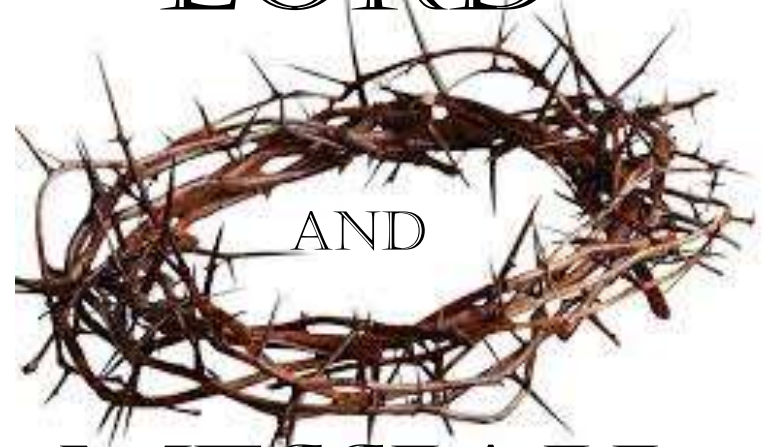


LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW FOR
CERTAIN, THAT GOD HAS MADE THIS JESUS,
WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED, BOTH

LORD



AND

MESSIAH

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LORDSHIP AND
MESSIAHSHIP OF JESUS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY

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INTRODUCTION

I was brought up in a Working Men's Club, a Café and a Pub. In my first job, I worked in Tilbury docks, and I also worked part-time as a barman. My principal interest in life was gambling, at which I often made a small profit. I had no idea of what a Christian was, or even that there were such people.

If you had asked me whether I believed in God, I would probably have hesitated, then admitted the possibility of such a thing, but with no real interest or conviction about the matter either way.

Today it is different. Today I am an unequivocal believer in, and follower of, Jesus Christ. Today I am a Christian. The priority in my life is now to serve Jesus in every way He enables and leads me. There is a big difference between what I was and what I am.

Every day, somewhere in the world there are thousands of people making the journey from not being a Christian to being a Christian. Each spiritual journey will be unique, just as each person's natural life is unique. But there will also be similarities. In the natural, every person is conceived, born, breathes, develops, and so too in the spiritual.

This book is primarily for people who have made the decision to become a Christian or who are helping those who have done so. It is not aimed at persuading people to act, but to provide a measure of understanding to enable them to do so responsibly and effectively. It is aimed at ensuring the right foundations in a relationship with Jesus, especially in understanding not simply as Saviour (which He is) but also as Lord and Messiah.

My principle sourcebook is the Bible.

IN THE BEGINNING – GOD

Christianity, should not be considered so much as a belief in God, but as a relationship with God.

In order to have a relationship with someone you need to understand a bit about that person. What makes them tick, what are their ambitions, what do they like and dislike. In the Bible God has told us some of these things about Himself. Right at the very beginning in the first chapter of the Bible in Genesis, there is a record of God having a conversation within Himself. “*Let us make people so that they are like us.*” After that, God created Adam and gave him instructions about to how he was to live. He then created Eve and gave them a large area of land, a garden or park, where He intended to visit them and walk and talk with them.

At the end of the Bible in the last couple of chapters, we get a glimpse of how God is going to finish the story. We see there a new heaven and a new earth. On the earth, having come down from heaven, is a city and that city is populated by people who are in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The relationship is expressed in two ways. Firstly, the city is spoken of as a bride who has been made ready for her husband, and secondly, it is referred to as the place where God is living.

The whole Bible records the journey between that beginning and that end. What God intends us to see, is that He made us for a purpose, and that purpose involves a relationship with Him, a relationship so close that it can be expressed in such terms as a marriage, or as God living among us.

SO WHAT WENT WRONG?

That something did go wrong is certain. In the third chapter of Genesis, the Bible records that one of the angels that God had created before humankind, came into the place that God had made for Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent. The serpent told lies to Eve, in order to get her to disobey God, by pursuing a way of life that involved self-reliance instead of reliance upon God. Eve accepted the lie and passed it on to Adam and they both broke relationship with God.

The Bible tells us that they died, that is the part of them through which they had their spiritual relationship with God could no longer function. Physical death, which was never God’s intention, also loomed up on the horizon as a fate awaiting them in the future. The positive aspect of the situation, was that God said something which gave them hope. This was a seed of promise that would grow until fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. The promise was that when one of Eve’s later descendants was born, there would be a conflict between him and the serpent (later identified as Satan). In this future conflict, Satan would deliver a deadly blow, but would receive an even deadlier one back.

Adam and Eve had children and grandchildren, and their family began to grow and spread out, but because they were separated from God’s presence, things went wrong. The problem was self-reliance instead of reliance upon God, and it was passed on from them through the generations. The Bible later defines this self-reliance as sin. We sometimes tend to think of sin as the things in our lives that we do wrong. It does include wrongdoing, but it is

Note: Passages in the Bible, like the promise God made which points to the future, are understood as a prophecy or a foretelling of what is to come. This was the first of over 300 that were made about Jesus Christ before he was born.

much deeper than that. It is rooted in the sort of attitude that we see in a child when they refuse something good, in order to assert their own independence. Sometimes we call it ‘cutting off your nose to spite your face’. It always results in alienation and it often leaves a trail of damage in its wake. It is self-reliance.

This self-reliance was passed on in two ways:

Firstly, as part of the genetic nature of humanity. Just as parents will pass on some of their characteristics to their children, the first parents, Adam and Eve, gave all their descendants, right down to today, this deeply ingrained attitude of concentrating on ourselves as the focus of everything we do. The extent to which this is outworked in any individual may vary, and it does not prohibit the occasional acts of heroism and sacrifice that warm our hearts and brighten our lives, and which give some apparent glimpses of hope for the future. But such things are exceptions. It is because they are exceptions that we give them such attention and commendation when they do happen. We would not do that if they were the norm.

We have become so accustomed to this trait of self-centredness in ourselves, that we even try to solve problems by encouraging even greater levels of self-dependence. It is also promoted as the way to achieve personal growth. The internet and bookshops give large amounts of space to what we call ‘Self-help’ guidance. It often does seem to help, but it does so by making us even more independent, when God always intended that we should live in dependence on Him. It is not that some of the information given may not appear to improve our situations, there is often some identifiable progress, but the progress is based on continuing in isolation from God, rather than in relationship with Him.

The second way that Adam and Eve’s original failure is passed on to us, is not one that we may immediately think of, although it is something very familiar to us. In any form of society, we recognise that people are impacted by the action of their leaders. If a President or Prime Minister declares war, then, like it or not, we are all at war. If the Government changes the laws on tax and benefits, then in one way or another that will affect each one of us. Actions by appointed leaders affect the people.

The huge emphasis on choice, which permeates our society today, is really only a myth. The choices we have are only from a range of options, which someone else has pre-determined for us. Whether the ruling comes down to us from the Government in the form of law, or whether the corporates have made decisions on the basis of finance or fashion, the net result is the same, we find ourselves being squeezed towards acting in certain ways. Different cultures may have different manifestations of the problem, but the net result is the same. All people are unavoidably influenced by those who exercise governmental, legal, financial or cultural authority over them.

What we may not realise, is that in the beginning God built this principle into His creation. His original intention was that He should lead the affairs of the world and that He would do this through Adam, who was the delegated head of the human race. But when Adam rebelled, because he was our delegated head, he implicated us in that rebellion as well. The whole world, from Adam to the present day is at war with God.

THE SEEDS OF HOPE

We must not think that God was taken by surprise by the failure of the people He created. One of the things which God had done, was to make us with freedom of choice. This was not like the freedom of choice that is emphasised today, where we are presented with a range of choices and we have to select from one of them. When God decided to make people like Himself, in His image, as the Bible terms it, that likeness was to include the possibility of unlimited potential. God is not limited in choice, but He always chooses what is best. He designed us to do the same, and intended that we learn to discern what was always best by learning from Himself and by imitating Him.

When Adam and Eve decided to learn by self acquired knowledge, instead of by receiving God's knowledge, it had consequences which still affect all of us. But we cannot blame it all on our fore-parents, for each one of us makes the same choice ourselves. Our failure gets worse. Firstly, we are implicated in the rebellion of Adam, because he was our representative governing head and our genetic ancestor. Then we continue and confirm that rebellion by choosing to do our own thing.

From our point of view, the bad news is that God was, and is, unable to overlook this rebellion. Because all life originates in God, turning against God and trying to live independently of Him, means that we are cutting ourselves off from the very source of life itself. Death is not non-existence so much as non-functioning. When a car battery dies it does not cease to exist, but it ceases to function. It is unable to carry out the purpose for which it was intended. If it were recharged or joined to another battery which had life in it, it would be able to be a conduit of that life, and to begin functioning again.

In order to live spiritually, we need to receive spiritual life from God. The problem though, is that if God had continued to allow us to draw life from Him after the rebellion, that life would have fed the rebellion and made it even worse. So God declared that humankind would have to suffer the consequences of the rebellion and continue in a form of living death. We live insofar as we exist, but we are dead insofar as we do not function in the way that God intended, and for which we were created. It is as if we are all like dead batteries – we may look OK on the outside, but when it comes to the crunch and we are called upon to produce spiritual life, there is nothing there, we are dead.

God had a plan in hand that would not only remedy the situation, but that would raise humanity to an even better place than it might have been if things had not gone wrong.

We noted earlier that God had promised Eve that one of her descendants would confront Satan and would get the better of him. That did not happen quickly. The long build up to that event is set out in the Bible through the unfolding of three things. These are developed through the first part of the Bible, which we call the Old Testament.

Firstly, there is a development of the theme of that first promise. There are further promises, and types and examples are given. These show what this descendant of Eve would be like, and how He would deal with the situation that had gone wrong. Secondly, it shows how God selected a particular group of people and how He led them, in order to demonstrate and work out His purpose. Thirdly, it gives us a record of how God gave His people the opportunity to see whether they could work things out for themselves, and how they failed on every occasion to do that.

GOD'S PROMISED MESSIAH

God's original intention had been that Adam, as the representative head, Lord or King of the human race, would have ruled it under His delegated authority. If Adam had not rebelled, he would have learnt from God, imitated God, and implicitly followed His will, knowing that God always chose that which was best and right.

Because God foreknew that Adam would fail in this task, He had always planned that there would be a second Adam, who would succeed. This second Adam would take over as Lord and King and would fulfil the responsibility of exercising God's delegated authority. He would then lead others to come into that fulfilment and exercise authority under Him..

When men began to spread over the earth and to establish tribes and kingdoms, one of the governmental practices that came into use, was a ceremony in which authority was delegated from one person to another. So for instance, if a king led his soldiers to war against another country and they won, rather than staying in that country in order to rule it himself, the king would appoint one of his trusted followers to rule in his stead. This appointment was made by taking a flask of oil and pouring it upon the head of the chosen person. They, and everyone else, would know that from then on, when that person spoke or acted, they did so with the full authority of the king. The person then became known as 'The Anointed One'.

This practice reflected the method that God had chosen to fulfil His purpose. The promised descendant of Eve, the second Adam, would be God's Anointed One. God would appoint a man to regain control of the earth, bring humanity back to the pathway of fulfilling the will of God, and in that way discover the potential

which existed for them. In the Hebrew language, the language in which the Old Testament was written, the Anointed One is 'The Messiah'. As the promises about this person were developed and written down in the Bible, they became known as the Messianic expectation. It was an expectation that God would break into the times, affairs and history of humankind, and establish His Kingdom through His own appointed representative. This representative would have the power and authority to act on His behalf, and would succeed where Adam had failed.

Anyone who is familiar with the Bible will know some of the passages that relate to the Messianic expectation. One, which most churches read at Christmas time, and which has also been set to music by the composer Handel, is from Isaiah chapter 9 and goes as follows:

For unto us a child is born,
unto us a Son is given,
and the government will be upon His shoulders.
And He will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of His government and of peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The committed will of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

This passage mentions the fact that the Messiah will come as a king and will be involved in government. The emphasis at the end, is that it is God Himself who will ensure that this happens.

Another passage that refers to the Messiah and emphasises His kingship, is from chapter 9 of the book of Zechariah.

Rejoice with all your heart, people of Zion!
Shout in triumph, people of Jerusalem!
Look! Your King is coming to you:
He is righteous and victorious.
He is humble and rides on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of an ass.

Zechariah wrote this at a time when the people he was addressing did not have a king and so it pointed to a future fulfilment, a fulfilment that has since been identified with the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life, at what we now call, the first Easter.

There are over three hundred occasions in the Old Testament where there are passages which are understood to point forward to the coming of God's representative, His Messiah. Many of these indicated that He would herald in God's Kingdom and that it would be an era of the Spirit of God on the earth. Over the Church's history, there have been many books written dealing with these passages, but for our purposes here, we simply want to highlight the fact that they are there, and that they formed an important part of the way in which God would work out His plan. His Messiah would be Lord of the earth, a second Adam who would deal with our rebellion and establish God's rule.

THE FORMING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

God did not appoint His Messiah immediately, and in the meantime, until He should come, God raised up temporary leaders whom He gave to a particular group of people that He had chosen.

It is both interesting and important to see the type of people that God chose to be leaders. They were a mixed bunch, and in many respects, they lacked the sort of leadership qualifications that we have come to think of as necessary. In their natural abilities, few of them were great warriors, few great orators, few had any apparent organisational skill and they were not necessarily popular with the crowds either. However, they did all have one thing in common. They all had some ability to perceive that there was only one true God and that this God knew what He was doing. So when He said something, they agreed with Him, and if it involved action on their part, they obeyed. Not always immediately, and not always perfectly, but they all had that something, which enabled them to both hear and to do what God said. This common characteristic which they shared, is described in the Bible by the word faith. It was never merely believing about something, but agreeing with Someone – God.

One of the first, who was also the most important leader that God chose, was a man named Abram (later changed to Abraham). As far as we can tell, he was a man who lived in the most civilised part of the world at that time – nearly four thousand years ago, and he would have lived in a real degree of comfort with plenty to eat and drink and servants to wait on him. But when God told him to emigrate to a new land, where he would have to live in a tent, he went. It seems that the thing he prized more than anything was the opportunity to have a relationship with God. This appears to

have been so real, that in the book of James chapter 2, Abraham is referred to as the friend of God.

God took Abraham through many tests which always concentrated on one thing, not how good he was, but would he believe God and would he do the things that God showed him. When Abraham passed the tests (not always first time round), it is said that God reckoned him to be righteous or in right standing with Himself. Through the relationship with Abraham, God showed what He desires and requires. It is quite simply, faith – agreeing with God and acting in accordance with that agreement.

Although Abraham was not the second Adam, through whom God was going to finally deal with things, he had many things happen in his life that pointed forward to that person. One significant event was that God made a solemn agreement with Abraham in which He set out and promised three things:

He was going to give Abraham a land

He was going to make Abraham the father of a great nation

He was going to bless the whole world through Abraham

Although not clear at the time, it was later understood that the way in which God would bless the whole world through him, was by the Messiah being born from his family line. The promise to Eve was narrowed down to be through one of Abraham's descendants.

Abraham and his wife Sarah were both very old and they had no children at the time God made the promise. On a human level, there was no possibility of Sarah becoming pregnant. God selected a couple for His purposes who were apparently unable to fulfil what He wanted. It established the principle that God was not looking for people of high ability, but people who would agree with and co-operate with Him. That is, people who have faith and trust in God.

God did enable Abraham and Sarah to have a child who they named Isaac, and he had a son named Jacob, later changed to Israel, from whom his descendants, the Hebrew nation, took their name. Jacob had twelve sons and all became fathers of the nation of Israel. One son, named Judah, was appointed to start a Royal line to rule the nation, one of whom would be the Messiah.

The next major leader, four hundred years later, was Moses. When Moses was born, Israel was in a very sorry state. Not only had the whole race become slaves to the Pharaoh in Egypt, but in order to control their strength, Pharaoh had ordered the killing of all new born male babies. Moses' mother hid him and he escaped death. He ended up being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Later he murdered a man and spent a long time on the run, before he was called back by God. Moses stuttered, but in spite of this, God made him His spokesman to confront Pharaoh, and to demand the release of the nation from slavery. It was at this time, that the nation of Israel began to be regularly referred to in the Bible as God's people.

Under Moses' delegated leadership, God accomplished miraculous feats which are remembered and celebrated until the present day. Through a series of plagues upon the Egyptians, culminating in the death of the eldest son in each family, Pharaoh was persuaded to release the Israelites. They escaped through the waters of the Red Sea which God divided, and were led to a place called Mount Sinai, where God made an Agreement with them.

Note: There are three terms that are used interchangeably for one thing in the Bible, for they all refer to the same thing. They are Covenant, Testament and Agreement. We refer to the two parts of the Bible as the Old Testament and the New Testament because they each are set in the context of the Agreements which God has made with His people. One was until the time of Jesus, and one from the time of Jesus. The Old one is the one that was made through Moses.

In contrast to the concise Agreement, centred on the future, which God had made with Abraham, the Agreement through Moses was very detailed and included specific instructions as to how they should live in the present. This Agreement included the Ten Commandments, and these, together with a large proportion of the rest of it, dealt with how God required His people to behave.

After Moses, God appointed his assistant Joshua, who led the nation to occupy the land that God had promised to Abraham. After him came a series of men and women called Judges. In practice, they were mainly military leaders who carried on the fight to defeat the nation's enemies and to fully settle the people in the land. In the New Testament book of Hebrews chapter 11, many of these early leaders are set down as examples of those whom we should emulate. What is interesting, is that the list includes a number whose morals would raise an eyebrow or two should they come along to a church today. It is clear that they are not there for us to copy their behaviour, but to follow their example of faith. Every one of them is in the list because of their ability to take God at His word – they were people of faith.

The high point of Israel's history came about a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, with two kings, a father and his son. The first was King David and God said of him that he was a man after His own heart. The other was King Solomon who was renowned for his wisdom. In line with what he had done with Abraham and Moses, God also made a Covenant Agreement with David.

King David played an important part in the development of the Messianic expectation. Firstly, in the Agreement God made, He promised him that the Messiah would be one of his descendants, narrowing down the field again. Secondly, as well as being king, David was prophet and he wrote many prophetic songs. We know

these songs as some of the Psalms. A number of them refer specifically to aspects of the Messiah's life and, importantly, to his death as well. If you were to set out Psalm 22 alongside the Gospel accounts of the death of Jesus, it could almost be mistaken for a fifth account of the event, and yet it was written a thousand years beforehand.

In spite of a prosperous reign, after Solomon, things went badly wrong for Israel. The nation split in two and they followed rival kings. Both of the royal lines vacillated between those who sought to follow God and those who wanted their own way. Some of the latter are were bad, and both of the kingdoms moved into a period of decline. The Northern kingdom retained the name of Israel, and the Southern kingdom became known by the name of Judah, which was the largest tribe that had settled in that area.

That time was the era of the prophets. Men raised up by God to speak warnings to both Israel and Judah. Whilst there were some periods of reform and obedience to God, both parts of the Nation kept returning to idolatry and following their own ways rather than God's.

The prophets emphasised the need to return to the basis of faith that Abraham had in God, and to the Covenant Agreement that God made through Moses. They focussed in particular on the need to worship God alone, and not to be tempted by the idol worship, which permeated the land before they settled there. That was still proving to be a draw to many. The prophets also spoke of the need to treat each other in a way that befitted the people of God. They especially emphasised how they should treat the poor with compassion and in a way that retained their dignity. There was an aura of despair over virtually everything. The exception was the continuing promises of the coming age of the Messiah.

Through the main prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, there emerged a new emphasis on the Messianic expectation.

As it became increasingly apparent that God's people were not responding as they should have done, whilst maintaining the call to return to the ways of the Old Covenant, God began to speak of a New One. There would be two significant features to the New Agreement which God would make. When He finally arrived, the Messiah Himself would be the one who inaugurated the Agreement and He would be fully in charge of it. What was new was that it would not be applied externally by a set of rules, but internally by God's Spirit working within hearts and minds. The impartation of the Spirit would be the key feature of the new era.

But the new was not yet. Around 200 years after Solomon died, Israel was overrun by Assyria, and the people taken into captivity. They never went back to the land God had given them. The ten tribes that made up the Northern State, lost their identity as a nation. Over the ensuing years they were scattered throughout the world. Though they did not have a national identity associated with a geographical land, many retained their sense of being the people of God. Nearly two and three quarter millennia later a steady stream of their descendants are now returning to Palestine, in fulfilment of God's eternal promise.

Around a hundred and forty years after the Northern tribes were taken away, those in the South were also overcome and they were deported to Babylon. But for them, there was specific hope. God indicated prophetically that they would return after seventy years. During the time in Babylon, the Royal line stopped functioning. Then, when the time of their captivity was completed, because they lacked a king to lead them, God raised up the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah to bring them home.

The devastated land was reclaimed, and the capitol city of Jerusalem was restored. Most importantly, within Jerusalem the temple was rebuilt. It did not have the glory that was there in the former temple which Solomon had built, but it was a place where the worship of God could function once again.

Even in this situation, God spoke words of hope and promise and told the people that the glory of the latter house (temple) would be greater than the former. That was impossible in human terms and those who saw in this promise the anticipation of the Messiah, began to realise that it may have been referring to something above and beyond the merely physical and visible.

Soon after this period, the record of the Old Testament closed. There were four hundred years of apparent silence from God, and the Jewish nation as it had then become, experienced occupation by foreign armies, first the Greeks and then the Romans.

In records outside of the Bible, it is possible to read of stories of great heroism by individuals, families and resistance groups during this period, but the situation was largely one of oppression and depression. And yet, the very hopelessness of the time kindled a rising expectancy that God would yet again intervene, that He would keep His promises and that the Messiah, God's Anointed one would come to restore all things.

THE HOPELESS TASK

We mentioned earlier that there was a third major theme in the books of the Old Testament. The two we have covered, were the development of the promises that God made, especially in relation to the future Messiah, and the separation of a people, the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac, from which the Messiah would be born. The third is the record that any plan other than God's original plan were and always would be doomed to failure.

God created us in such a way, that we could only reach our potential as individuals and as a society, if we lived in relationship with Him. Since Adam and Eve chose the way of self-reliance, all humanity has followed their footsteps and chosen the same pathway. Today, in the West this has reached a climax where, not only do we embrace this pathway, but our whole culture is based on promoting it as the only possible way forward.

God knew that this would be the case. When He chose Israel as a separated people through which to prepare for and manifest the Messiah, He also gave them opportunity to try to live according to various alternative pathways, in order to show that such alternatives would not and could not work.

The first of these was initiated in the Agreement that God made through Moses at Mount Sinai after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt, God gave them a law, which enshrined guidance on how to live in respect of God, their neighbours and society. It incorporated legal guidance, health laws, teaching on the nature of separation and holiness and how to deal with their enemies when they entered into the land God had promised. What is more, it had full details of a priestly and sacrificial system that would

enable people to receive forgiveness from God, and to offer to Him an acceptable form of worship. If they kept it, the law would enable them to live healthy, happy, prosperous and fruitful lives. It was a good and perfect law and God offered the people great blessing if they would stick to it, and strict punishment if they would not. However, the people consistently failed to abide by it. At times, they did better than others, but they always and inevitably failed.

The first and most important lesson both they and we need to learn, is that having the perfect knowledge of how to live, coupled with appropriate incentives and punishments, does not in itself enable anyone to do so.

Of course, the law fulfilled other functions apart from teaching this core lesson. To many of the faithful, it gave insight and understanding into the character of God. It also gave the Israelite nation a separate identity from all the other nations. This was one of the main factors, which preserved those who went through the age of the dispersion, following the defeat by the Assyrians. Especially, through its priestly and sacrificial system, it prepared the people to understand a good deal about the nature and function of the expected Messiah.

God also gave the Israelites a variety of forms of government. They had dynamic leaders chosen by God, they had kings who were God ordained and others who were usurpers who gathered the people to themselves. Over the years, they had a priestly system, military leaders and prophets but all to no avail.

Most of all He gave them a land in which He guaranteed security of tenure provide they kept to the basic guidelines of worshipping Him and not the false gods of the surrounding nations.

However, in spite of every advantage, Israel failed. That does not mean we should look down on them, for the lesson is that we would have all failed had we been in their place. Indeed, in whatever situation we find ourselves, we do fail. Reliance on ourselves and reliance on others cannot ever achieve a way of life that approaches anywhere near to the life that God intends for us, and which we would have, if we had not chosen to go our own ways.

It is understandable, that any Christian living in the West in the Twenty First Century, might still ask, 'so what? What has all this got to do with us?' The thing that many of us do not very easily grasp, is the universal nature of what God has done and is doing. God's purposes are worldwide. They affect and include the whole of the human race. They are also eternal; they affect and include all people from all times, from the very beginning with Adam and Eve, to the very last person who will be born before Jesus returns to the earth.

This is serious stuff.

We are not considering a bit of religion, as an add on to all the other things that occupy us and clutter our lives, but a fundamental re-assessment of our world view which can, and must change everything.

What went wrong in the very beginning was that Adam and Eve chose to be self-reliant rather than to relate to and depend on God. The Bible calls this sin, but we need to understand that this is such a lot more than simply doing individual things that are wrong. It is a totally wrong attitude to everything. It is an attitude which *insists* that the way forward is through *continued* self-reliance, rather than looking to God to sort things out for us.

SO WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Simply put, the solution is not what, but who. Jesus is the solution, for Jesus is the Messiah, God's new head and Lord of humanity.

The problems, which started with Adam, but which are confirmed by and in each one of us, may be summed up simply as follows:

1. We have inherited an inbuilt and unavoidable tendency towards self-reliance and self-sought knowledge, which inevitably results in us doing wrong things. This is sin. The consequences of it are firstly spiritual death and then physical death.
2. Adam, as the first appointed Lord and leader of humanity, and our representative or mediator with God, rebelled against God and we have continued in that state of rebellion ever since. The consequences of this are also spiritual and physical death.
3. Because God is Holy and righteous, He is unable to allow sin and rebellion to go unpunished. This means that as well as us already being spiritually dead and inevitably going to be physically dead, we will also face a future judgement where the penalty will be eternal death.
4. Things went wrong because of self-reliance and so there is no possibility of solving them by improving techniques and trying harder. God has shown the hopelessness of the situation. He chose a particular people, the Nation of Israel, and demonstrated through them that, even when He gave clear written guidance of His will (the law, given by Covenant Agreement through Moses), they would not and could not obey it. He also demonstrated that any form of human government would fail, even when it was the best, chosen by Himself.

Despite the fact that, throughout the Old Testament, God continually demonstrated the hopelessness of the situation from a human point of view, we have not been left without hope. There is an astonishing level of hope permeating this first part of the bible. But, and this is very important, it is always and without exception, based on the promises that God will intervene to put the matter right Himself. It would take another book,(and there are plenty already written), to list the promises made about God's intended intervention, but they may be summarised as follows:

God would appoint a new representative head, a second Adam, who would show how a person should and could live in total dependence upon God. He would be God's Messiah. The Anointed one, who, because He always does the will of God, would have full authority from God in every step He undertakes.

As part of His messianic function He would take up the role as legitimate and legal Lord and King over God's people.

Because He would not be operating on His own behalf in His own self-interest, God would give Him His own Spirit, and also the authority and ability to pass His Spirit on to others. This enabling presence of the Spirit would be so crucial, that in the midst of all the other promises of God, this was singled out and designated THE promise. It is the core element of the New Covenant Agreement.

When the promise was fulfilled, the Spirit's key role would be to internalise God's will and purposes. This would be by giving understanding and the power to live according to it.

The Messiah would also effect reconciliation with God. Just as the first head, Adam, led humanity into rebellion, causing separation

from God; the second head, the Messiah would lead His people into a restoration of fellowship with God. This would involve dealing with the punishment for sin and obtaining a pardon for the guilty. The Messiah would also be the one who would deal with the enemies of God's people and establish peace.

When Jesus was born, He was born as an Israelite, a member of God's chosen people and He was heralded as being their long promised Lord and Messiah and Israel's rightful King. The opening chapters of the New Testament in Matthew's gospel emphasise this aspect of Jesus' life. The first chapter begins with the hereditary proof of Jesus' Royal blood from the line of Judah, which then receives supernatural attestation by the appearing of a star, which was recognised, even by non-Jews, as sign of a special Royal birth.

In his gospel, John says at the end of chapter 20 that his purpose in writing it is in order that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Messiah. This emphasis permeates almost every chapter of John.

The testimony throughout the New Testament is that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed one, who would be the Lord of God's people, initiate the era of God's Spirit, establish the New Covenant, and who will eventually come back to earth to establish the full and final eternal reign of God. In this position Jesus is able to bring in the needed solution to everything that had previously gone wrong under Adam.

Note: The Greek word for 'The Anointed one' is Christ, just as the Hebrew word is Messiah. The two words are sometimes used interchangeably but they always refer to Jesus. Those of us whose language has been influenced by Greek (such as English), usually use the word Christ, whilst Jewish believers would always use Messiah, but the two are identical in meaning.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

The word Christian literally means ‘a little christ’ – ‘a little messiah’. It originated as a nickname of those who were early followers of Jesus. As with most nicknames, it emphasised something identifiable about the people to whom it was applied, that marked them out as different from others. The thing that set Jesus Christ apart from other religious teachers was the fact that He carried God’s authority. It was said of Him that He spoke with authority, not as the scribes and Pharisees. He knew what He was talking about, exercised God’s power, and lived a life that was not dependant on the circumstances around Him. Those who became His disciples began to display the same traits, and picked up the nickname of little anointed ones.

There is considerable confusion surrounding the term ‘Christian’ today. It has largely lost the meaning which it had in the beginning, but which is still one of the most accurate ways of understanding it. It may be helpful to go through a few things that are not accurate definitions of being a ‘Christian’.

A Christian is not someone in a Western culture who believes in God. A Christian does believe in God, but so do lots of others.

A Christian is not someone who holds to a particular set of values that are seen as civilised and somehow good. A Christian should have a high moral life but so do lots of other people as well.

A Christian is not someone who simply goes to church. Many Christians will regularly attend a church and be an active part of it, but so do lots of people who are not Christians.

A person is not a Christian because they believe that Jesus existed, read their Bibles, pray and are religious. Again, Christians will do these, but they are not defined as a Christian by them.

In the time of Jesus. Nearly everyone believed in God, or at least a god of some sort. Most people would have prayed, met with others for religious festivals and many of them, particularly the Pharisees, would have held to very high moral standards. When Jesus came on the scene, He announced that all of these things were inadequate in themselves to deal with the problem everyone faced, alienation from God.

The ones who came closest to getting it right were those people who recognised, albeit imperfectly, that the most important thing was to have faith in God. This was not simply believing in God in the sense of acknowledging Him, but believing in Him in the all the common affairs of this life and trusting Him for all the affairs of the life to come. They trusted Him and what He had promised, and lived their lives on that basis.

There was no fixed pattern as to where such people came from or what they looked like, but they could be broadly categorised as being of two types. The first were those who were part of God’s people, who believed what God had promised about the Messiah throughout the Old Testament, and who were waiting expectantly for Him to come. The second group were people of other nationalities who had a genuine trust in God.

The step that they both needed to take was to finally recognise and acknowledge that Jesus was the expected Messiah of God, and that though promised through, and to, the Jews, His kingdom rule would be over the Gentiles as well.

Note: God’s people, Israel, were by this time usually called Jews, which came from the name of the tribe of Judah, the largest tribe to live in the land after the devastation of the wars and deportations, and eventual return between four and five hundred years previously. People of other nations were called Gentiles.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, those from either group, who did believe and recognise his Messiahship, were baptised, in water and Holy Spirit, into a Covenant union with Him. This Covenant was not like the Old external one that had been given through Moses, but was a New internal one given through Jesus Himself. They were not simply people who believed facts about Jesus, but those who received His Spirit and shared the overflow of His anointing. This is why His followers became known by the nickname Christians – the little anointed ones.

HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THAT GOD HAS MADE JESUS BOTH LORD AND CHRIST?

If we summarise some of the things we have looked at:

Christ (a Greek word) is the translation of Messiah (a Hebrew word). The two have the same meaning, and can be and are interchangeable in differing translations. The simple meaning in English is ‘the anointed one’. Now in Hebrew thinking and in the understanding of the surrounding nations, the anointing that would be understood by the concept of messiahship, was not primarily one of power in the sense of strength or ability, though it may include that, but of authority and status.

If a king conquered a country, and appointed someone to rule over it in his name and authority, that person would be anointed with oil and would then have full authority to act on behalf of and in place of the king. This is the concept that undergirded the practice of anointing Hebrew kings, priests and prophets. God delegated His authority to them to function in his name. As necessary, they were also given ability and were equipped for particular tasks, but that was not the primary purpose.

Throughout the Old Testament, the understanding was developed of a day when God’s kingdom on earth would be realised. To bring this about, God would appoint a Messiah – an anointed one – to be in charge and to exercise rule in his stead. There was some confusion as to the nature of this coming kingdom (some saw it as a military one taking back the land from the Romans), but after the ascension of Jesus, it is explicit that the kingdom of God is not determined by earthly boundaries but by the extent of the exercise of God’s rule.

God has made the crucified, risen, ascended and glorified Jesus both Lord and Christ. It is He, (as He told His disciples before He left them) who has received all authority in heaven and on earth, and it is under this authority, delegated to both them and us, that the good news is to be proclaimed and followers taught and made.

The very first element of that teaching should surely be to explain **who** it is that men and women are called to follow. Without that, any form of discipleship will inevitably be woefully inadequate.

The first step of discipleship must be recognition and acceptance that Jesus is the Lord and Christ to whom we submit and obey. In practice this is often relegated to a second indeterminate stage, which may even be treated as an optional extra.

The church of today appears to be spearheading its mission with the message of the love of God. Whilst this is a true element of the gospel, the preaching of the apostles and evangelists made the person of Jesus, and His exultation to be Lord and Christ, the forefront and focus of their message of hope and judgement.

One of the things that is helpful in looking at this situation, is to ask whether there is anything missing in the contemporary understanding of the Gospel as it is presented in popular evangelical terms. In the fairly wide circles that I move in, there does seem to be this emphasis on telling people that God loves them (true), and that they need their sins forgiven and Jesus has died to make this possible (also true), but what appears to be neglected is an explanation of who this Jesus actually is.

The inspired Gospel writers however, always emphasised this truth about Jesus. It is the basis for understanding what he has done and how we might need to respond to that.

Matthew meticulously sets out the Royal line of Jesus. We do not know whether Matthew had access to a copy of a document listing all the fathers of Israel, or whether he researched the information for himself. However, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he sets out the claim that Jesus is in the direct line of the throne of the nation of Israel and, very particularly, that he is the Christ who had been promised since God first spoke to Abraham. The genealogy is the proof of the pedigree.

Mark simply plunges into his Gospel with the statement that ‘This is the good news about Jesus the Christ’.

Luke, somewhat meticulously gathers details and sets them in careful order culminating in the encounter with Simeon in the temple in Jerusalem. Simeon had been told by God, that before he died, he would see the Lord’s Messiah. When Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to him, his life was complete. He responds in obvious joy with the song ‘Lord let now your servant depart in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation’. He acknowledged that salvation would come through the Messiah.

John’s good news begins with the staggering statement that the one who he is writing about, is both God and creator. But John also clearly states that the root intention of his writings (Ch. 20 v 21) was to show that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

In the first sermon after Pentecost, the climax is reached with Peter’s declaration that Jesus been raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and exalted to the right hand of God. As the recipient

of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, and as the one who now pours out the Spirit on His followers, Jesus has received the ultimate mark of heavenly authority. 'God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ'.

We have seen that the same key point is emphasised in each of the four Gospel accounts as well as Acts. It is set forth in different ways, but all affirm and emphasise the same truth - Jesus is the Christ, God's promised Messiah.

We do proclaim Jesus Christ, but it rarely appears that 'Christ' has any more significance than a sort of a surname, in the way that we might use Smith or Jones. Consequently, we minimise the special significance in it. What is more serious, is that we neglect to bring people into a discipleship that is based on the absolute Lordship of Jesus that His Messiahship requires. Consequently, many of the people in our churches never come to terms with forsaking the world and genuinely following Jesus.

Jesus is God's appointed and anointed ruler in the Kingdom of God. By the same anointing he is also God's High Priest. The proclamation of forgiveness, is the result not only of the Cross, (which it is), but also of the fact that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, and is now functioning as Priest in order to affect our forgiveness, and as King in order to oversee our deliverance from the kingdom of darkness.

When someone acknowledges the absolute divine authority of Jesus over all things, the appropriate response is to capitulate to that authority and acknowledge Him as Lord of all. This means aligning our wills with His and make the outworking of His rule the priority in our lives. We can then rest, confident that He is in charge, that He will provide for us, love us, and of course forgive

us as well. When we are proclaiming the good news, it is essential that we do not simply present the last two aspects – love and forgiveness - without including the other elements – Jesus' authority as Lord and Messiah. God, through the Gospel writers, has gone to such lengths to draw these to our notice and there is no truly good news without them.

*Whatever and whoever else He is,
we must not neglect the fact, that
God declares Jesus to be both
Lord and Christ,
who, with
the Father and the Holy Spirit,
is God,
blessed and worshipped for ever.
Amen*