

BEYOND TODAY

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A biblical verdict on creation

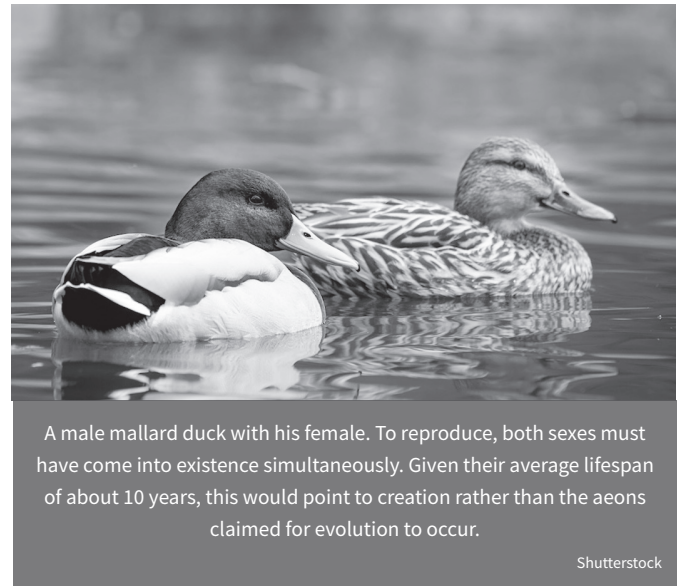
Was there a magnificent mind at work when the universe began, or did it spring into existence of its own accord?

Believers in a Creator God challenge atheists to give answers to the most fundamental of all questions: How could life have sprung from inanimate matter, and where did matter come from if God is taken out of the equation? In the field of science, something doesn't come out of nothing. On the origin of matter, no convincing answer is given.

The bedrock of the theory of evolution is that extremely long periods of time were required during which life gradually evolved. However, in both fauna and flora, male and female genders had to appear simultaneously, or at least during the time span of one generation rather than aeons of time. Evolutionists have never provided a satisfying explanation as to how pairs of creatures evolved at the same time. The pollination process in nature and the fertilising of eggs in poultry present an insoluble conundrum to evolutionists and atheists.

Life comes from life

All around us we see the law of biogenesis at work – life begets life. What initially triggered this, if not a life-giving Creator God? “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” was the firm conviction of the psalmist (Psalm 100:3). Earlier King David reflected: “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 14:1) – a firm denial that evolution could be responsible for the begetting of life. In the biological reproduction process, new life is fully dependent on already existing life. That is the scientific process we can observe all around us, the result of the Creator's edict, “Be fruitful and multiply”, as recorded in the Genesis creation account.

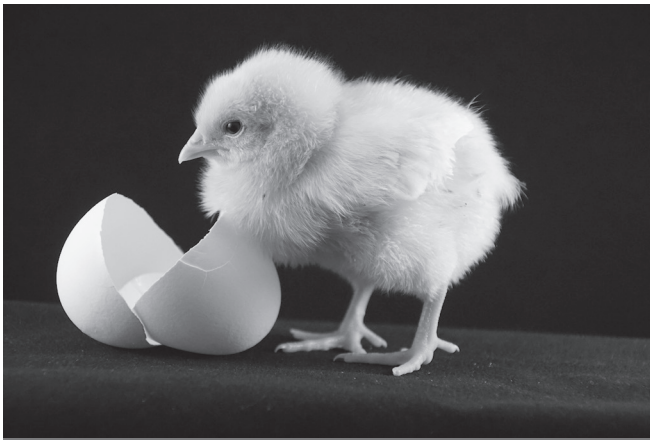


A male mallard duck with his female. To reproduce, both sexes must have come into existence simultaneously. Given their average lifespan of about 10 years, this would point to creation rather than the aeons claimed for evolution to occur.

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Compelling evidence for a divine Creator

Precise astronomical positioning was required for our solar system, which ensures Earth functions as a life-sustaining planet. Astronomers and laymen alike marvel at the seemingly endless vastness of space and reflect on how all this could have come about without the hand of an omnipotent Architect. The biblical patriarch Job was in no doubt about the origin of the universe when stating that it is God who “stretches out the north over empty space [and] hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7). The scientifically proven fact that the earth is suspended in space is fully recognised today, but the biblical patriarch Job evidently knew it thousands of years ago.



Scientists are at a loss to explain how birds and animals first reproduced by laying eggs. If there were not already an egg-laying adult female, where could the egg have come from?

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Back in 1957 when Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin travelled in his Sputnik flight to the edge of space, he was reported to have said, "I didn't see God." True enough, given that the Almighty "alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see . . ." (1 Timothy 6:16).

The apostle Paul wrote, "for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made . . ." (Romans 1:20). The Creator and supreme Architect of the universe is neither confined to space nor visible to the human eye. King Solomon was divinely inspired to write, "heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You" (1 Kings 8:27). How true! Man could travel to the ends of the universe, if such were possible, and never see God either with the naked eye or the astronomical instruments at his disposal.

The atheist dare not ask what something or other brought the universe into existence, if God is taken out of the equation.

The God described in the Hebrew Scriptures, the writings that the early Christians held to be divinely inspired (2 Timothy 3:15-16), is the One Who created the universe and is an eternally existing Being. King David of ancient Israel pointed out: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2).

For mere mortals it's difficult to fully comprehend God's omnipotence. Although God has revealed in His Word all that is essential for us to know, for the present He has kept back some, perhaps much, information from His creation. Our finite minds cannot compete with the infinite mind of the Almighty, the God "who inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15).

The statement in Genesis 1:1 that the universe had a beginning is in general agreement with the belief of astronomers that there was no universe prior to the so-called "Big Bang." The question the atheist dare not ask is what something or other brought the universe into existence, if God as the divine Architect is taken out of the equation. Indeed, as already quoted, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

To study this topic further and to discover its relevance to your future, please request or download our booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

You may also like to request *Why Were You Born?*

Gerhard Marx

Let the Bible answer...

What does the Bible say about who Christ is?

Christ is the member of the God family who created all things: John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1-2, 10-12.

He was the One who interacted with the patriarchs and ancient Israel: John 8:57-58; 1 Corinthians 10:4.

Of His own will He relinquished His glory to become human and die for us: Matthew 1:23; John 17:5, 24; Philipians 2:5-11.

In addition to paying the death penalty for repentant sinners, He also came to reveal the Father: John 1:18; Matthew 11:27; John 14:6-11; 17:6, 25.

Christ was God made flesh: 1 Timothy 3:16.

One of His names was Immanuel, meaning "God with us": Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23.

To deny that Christ was God in the flesh reflects the spirit of the antichrist: 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 1:7.

Two significant trees

In the garden of Eden not all fruit trees were beneficial. In fact, one was deadly.

How many trees were there in the Garden of Eden? As a qualified forester working amongst trees for many years, I've often thought there must have been hundreds, if not thousands. Besides those which gave shelter, there were also fruit-bearing trees which were to provide food. Two of the latter were in the centre of the garden and God brought them to Adam's attention.

Genesis 2:9 tells us: "And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

God put Adam into the garden with instructions to "tend and keep it" (verse 15). There was one additional directive: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (verse 17).

A choice to be made

Notice the way this is put: Verse 9 says that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is good for food, but verse 17 states that if eaten it will cause death. So, the relationship with this tree is not one of "Is the fruit of it good for food?" but one of obedience. Adam had the choice to make.

The other tree mentioned is the tree of life which is also good for food. The name implies that eating from this tree and not the other would mean living forever was a possibility. God was giving mankind the choice of trust in and obedience to Him, which would result in eternal life,

or practising ways of living which would ultimately lead to eternal death.

Here is where Satan stepped in to confuse the matter and instigate his plan to destroy all human beings.

Genesis 3:1 states: "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

By this wording Satan caused Eve to doubt God's truthfulness and integrity. He was trying to manipulate her thinking.

God gave humans the choice of trust in and obedience to Him which would result in eternal life, or practising ways of living which would ultimately lead to eternal death.

The first recorded lie

Satan continued: "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (verses 4-5). Satan accused God of lying, and of failing to share His wisdom and knowledge with His human

Why Adam and Eve didn't die immediately

Genesis 2:16-17 states: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" This seems to suggest that Adam and Eve would die the very day they ate the forbidden fruit. Clearly they did not.

The *Nelson Study Bible (NKJV)* makes this statement on the words *you shall surely die*: "These emphatic words are made of two forms of the verb meaning 'to die'. The point is not that the guilty person would drop dead right then, but that it would certainly happen – there is no escape (Hebrews 9:27)."

Literally translated the words that make up this phrase are "dying you shall die," as appears in the margin reference of the NKJV, with similar renderings in other "word for word" versions such as *Young's Literal Translation*.

From that moment on, death became inevitable.

creation. He was promoting the fact that if they disobeyed God's instruction, they would become like Him and able to choose between right and wrong. In other words they could decide for themselves the way they wanted to live and not be dictated to by another being.

Eve fell for this: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (verse 6). The wretched results of this unwise decision are recorded in verses 7-24 (see also Genesis 4:8 and 6:5-6).

Prevailing attitudes

Mankind's wayward course has continued from creation to this very day. Judges 17:6 records: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." In Judges 21:25 the words are repeated almost verbatim. Our current world operates on the same basis, with each person choosing his or her own ways, thus resulting in similar disasters. Wars seem to occur everywhere, and individuals change God's laws to suit whichever idea they wish to pursue. Thus, the path chosen by Adam and Eve still thrives.

Satan's way is one of pride, rebellion and selfishness, sometimes referred to as "the way of get," whilst obedience to God would promote peace and deep love and outgoing concern for others.

Without God's intervention in our lives, we too would retain the same nature Adam and Eve chose. We must ensure that with God's help we are following the way of love. Proverbs 21:2 warns "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts."

At the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, only one of these two trees survives, and it is not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Revelation 22:1-2 records that the tree of life would be growing on the banks of a river of water of life that flows out from the throne of God and the Lamb. Verse 14 notes that those who adhere to His commandments – that is those who follow God's way of love and peace – will have a right to the tree of life.

The apostle Peter affirmed of the righteous: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). In God's Kingdom, nothing evil will be permitted.

David Payne

The abomination of desolation explained

Foretold in the Old Testament book of Daniel and by Christ Himself in Matthew's gospel, what is this and when can we expect it?

When asked, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Jesus mentioned several events to His disciples. Some are already in motion – wars and rumours of wars, pestilences, famines and earthquakes (Matthew 24:6-7); others are yet to occur. One of the most distinct of the latter that Jesus described is called the abomination of desolation. He stated: "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16).

An etymological definition

"Abomination" comes from the Old Testament He-

brew 'to be filthy,' 'to loathe,' 'to abhor'" ("Abomination of Desolation," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). It is most often used to describe idolatrous worship practices, especially those most offensive to a sense of decency and morality. In New Testament Greek, "abomination" means "a foul thing, a detestable thing" (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*).

From the Old Testament, "to make desolate" means "to destroy, lay waste, devastate; to be astonished . . . something so horrible that it can leave a person speechless" (*The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, p. 2376). The Greek word in the New Testament means much the same.

Thus, combining the words and meanings, we see that Daniel and Jesus were describing a foul and abhorrent

thing that will horribly desecrate and devastate an area within the city of Jerusalem.

An earlier fulfilment

This terrible event has happened before and was foretold by Daniel. He described it within a detailed prophecy about the Greek kings who ruled over portions of the Greco-Macedonian empire (Daniel 11).

After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was divided into four territories ruled by the late king's most prominent generals. Seleucus I Nicator, who lived approximately 358 to 281 BC, emerged as one of the strongest rulers. He governed a large swathe of Alexander's old empire that included the city of Babylon, Mesopotamia, and central Asia (land generally to the north of Jerusalem).

Daniel 11:31 reads: "And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation". Daniel's prophecy of the "abomination of desolation" describes events that occurred in Jerusalem around 168/167 BC during the rule of the eighth Seleucid king, Antiochus IV. He is better known in history as Antiochus Epiphanes (Greek for "manifestation of god").

Hostile to Jewish worship, Antiochus attempted to Hellenise (enforce the adoption of Greek culture and religion) on the Jews in Judea. He outlawed all forms of Jewish worship and placed a Hellenised high priest, who was sympathetic to his rule, over the temple. He eventually outlawed practices like circumcision, the biblical dietary laws and Sabbath observance.

In 168 BC, a group of Jews revolted against the high priest that Antiochus had appointed and took control of Jerusalem. Antiochus returned to Jerusalem and violently put down the rebellion, killing thousands of Jews and selling others into slavery.

A year later, Antiochus erected a statue of the Greek god Zeus in the Jerusalem temple. He also ordered that swine, biblically unclean animals, be offered on the temple altar, thus desecrating the holy place and thereby fulfilling Daniel's prophecy. This led to the seven-year Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BC). These events are recorded in the non-canonical but historical book of Maccabees. Led by Judas Maccabeus, the rebels vanquished the evil Greek emperor Antiochus and rededicated the Temple.

The original abomination of desolation was an idol, with accompanying pagan sacrifices, intended to desecrate God's temple.

What happens first

One more event precedes a future Antiochus figure

setting up the abomination of desolation. Again, Daniel gives us a clue: "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days" (Daniel 12:11).

The abomination of desolation will be set up once *the daily sacrifices* are halted. Since the Jews are not currently offering any daily sacrifices in Jerusalem, this means that they will be re-established at some point in the future. For sacrifices to be offered, at the very least an altar would be required.

Is there any basis upon which the sacrifices might be reinstated? Sacrifices played an important role in ancient Israel; one such sacrifice being that of a red heifer, the ashes of which were mixed with water and used for purification of the priests (Numbers 19:1-22).

An article posted in September 2023 in the Irish Mirror was entitled "First red heifer in 2,000 years signals 'end of days' as Bible prophecy fulfilled." The writers Anita McSorely and Elaine McCahill reported that the Temple Institute of Jerusalem declared a "perfectly red heifer was born in Israel" and that the calf and mother would under-

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go extensive examination to determine she is blemish free. The Temple Institute and other organisations have been established with the goal of building the Third Temple on Mount Moriah, also known as the Temple Mount.

There's debate as to whether an entire Third Temple would need to be constructed in Jerusalem, or just an altar. Either construction would not please the Islamic community. However, considering the ongoing war and deteriorating relationship between Israel and its neighbours, Israelites may be willing to abandon international relations if they believe that rebuilding the temple is a prerequisite for the coming of the Jewish Messiah. Traditionally they do not accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah (John 1:11; 1 Corinthians 2:8).

As we watch world events unfold, we can see the puzzle pieces of prophecy moving closer to their final configuration. Current events in the Middle East should serve as a catalyst to motivate us and provide us with a sense of urgency to redeem the time and to seek God while He may be found.

Mark Mirigian

A gift, a reward or both?

No amount of good works can entitle us to salvation. Yet Christ encourages His followers to labour for a reward. How does this differ from a gift?

The apostle Paul states that the wages of sin – what we earn from breaking God’s law – is death, but God’s gift to the repentant sinner is eternal life (Romans 6:23). By turning from our former ways, by living God-centred lives in obedience to His commandments, overcoming sin, developing His character, and by growing in grace and knowledge, we are merely laying the foundation of becoming like Jesus Christ. No amount of obedience, law-keeping or good works can buy us salvation. Nevertheless, these actions are still required.

At Jesus Christ’s return His disciples will receive the gift of eternal life. Their feeble mortal bodies will be changed in the twinkling of an eye into dazzling supreme spirit bodies. How and when disciples receive eternal life is explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

A reward is earned

In addition to this amazing gift of forgiveness and eternal life, Jesus also promised rewards. We see this in many Bible verses, for example, in Paul’s letter to the Church in Corinth. “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Scripture clearly tells us those who remain faithful receive not only the gift of eternal life at Christ’s second coming, but also the possibility of a reward, dependent upon one’s “works.” Jesus explained to the apostle John: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone *according to his work*” (Revelation 22:12).

The gospels also hint at the rewards available. In the parable of the talents, the lord told those whose in-

vestment had increased: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23). Similarly, Jesus Christ will grant rewards in proportion to current service here on earth (Luke 19:11-27).

This is confirmed in the book of Revelation which states that faithful servants will become kings and priests ruling together with Jesus Christ on earth for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6). He even promised the apostles rulership over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; see also Acts 9:36; Ephesians 2:10 and Titus 2:7,14).

Christ’s warning

Those following Christ’s instructions are learning now how to rule or teach in the future. Jesus alluded to this in what is known as the Olivet Prophecy. He asked: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods” (Matthew 24:45-47). Here Christ praised the servant who provided proper spiritual sustenance for His household – expounding and modelling the teachings from God’s word.

No amount of obedience, law-keeping or good works can buy us salvation. Nevertheless, these actions are still required.

In contrast He warned: “But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:48-51).

This latter servant did not follow instructions, did not show love for his Lord’s household, and sought only his

(Continued on page 7)



Q How can I know that I have received the Holy Spirit and if it is working within me?

FAQ

A When an individual reaches a point where he or she becomes interested in committing to God, entering into the covenant of baptism is required. Buried in the waters of baptism (Romans 6:4), the believer's past sins – acknowledged and repented of – are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15-22). Coming up out of the water a new life in Christ begins (2 Corinthians 5:17) made possible by the Spirit of God dwelling within the individual through prayer and the laying on of the elder's hands (Acts 8:14-17; 2 Timothy 1:6).

That concludes the *act* of baptism, but the *spiritual* growth process that follows is lifelong. It is not a one-time commitment; it is a lifetime of pruning, overcoming sin and becoming increasingly Christ-like. The covenant made at baptism simply represents the first step. That process is an indication of a life that is being led by the Holy Spirit.

The question posed is an extremely important one, because baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit are not enough to become a part of the family of God. That's not the litmus test. The apostle Paul writes in the book of Romans that those who are "led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" (Romans 8:12-15). Being led by God's Spirit is important, because a person can receive God's Spirit and through negligence or inaction quench its fire (1 Thessalonians 5:19). God does not desire individuals in His Kingdom who are not actively living His way of life now.

The apostle Paul also wrote to Timothy and admonished him to fan the flames of that Spirit in his life (2 Timothy 1:5-7).

We are called to change. Yielding ourselves to God's Spirit in our lives today and allowing it to transform our

mind, speech and actions, is a necessity. In Galatians 5, a contrast is made between the lusts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (ie, the traits apparent in the life of someone who is led by God's Spirit). In verses 22-23, we see that if an individual is increasing in godly love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, they are putting to death the carnal lusts of the flesh and allowing God's Spirit to lead and transform them.

As time goes on, there will be less of the carnal responses and more of the responses God desires: love, patience, self-control and the like.

So to answer the question posed:

1. Have you received God's Spirit by the laying on of hands, following repentance and baptism by immersion?
2. Are you overcoming your sins?
3. Are your thoughts, speech and actions becoming more Christ-like?

If you answered yes to all three of those questions, then you can reasonably conclude that you are being led by God's Spirit in your life. Keep nurturing that Spirit and growing spiritually, and listen for its promptings in your life.

If you answered no, it is an indication that either you haven't yet received God's Spirit, or that you are not properly yielding yourself to it in your life. If the former, our booklet *What You Need to Know About Baptism* will be helpful. If the latter, the good news is, it's not too late. Just as a smouldering fire can be returned to life by fanning the flames and putting on fuel, so too can God's Spirit. Increased prayer and study, service to God, turning to Him and drawing near (James 4:8) can help us to nurture that fire within. Once rekindled, it is important to continue along that path.

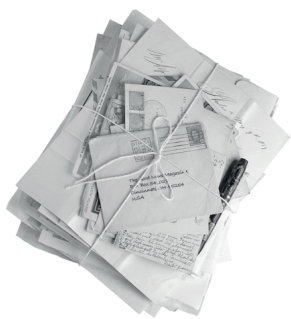
(Continued from page 6)

personal gratification. Not only did he earn no reward, but it would appear that by his actions he had also rejected his precious gift of salvation.

Eternal life is a gift for those who obey God and endure to the end. In addition, individuals will be rewarded with various roles based on how well they have served in this life.

Our booklets *What You Need to Know About Baptism* and *What Does the Bible Teach About Grace?* provide study materials that explain further the gift of salvation and how works are also required. Let us all practise the obedience and good works that our loving Saviour encourages us to do, so we all receive a reward.

Terry Oldfield



Letters From Our Readers

Literature sheds light on current world events

I have been re-reading your leaflets *The Horsemen of Revelation* and the *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Christ's Return*. Things do seem to be hotting up with trouble around the world. Perhaps this really is like the 1930s with all the players getting in place.

On the one hand I really look forward to Christ's return but the awful events leading up to this are really concerning and definitely not something I would wish on anyone. We shall have to keep calm and carry on and leave it all to God.

Thank you so much for all your explanations. They have helped so much in understanding [biblical] passages that have not been easy to understand in the past.

Reader in Torpoint, Devon

Thank you for the *Beyond Today* magazine and for the amazing booklets. I am very pleased with the literature. It explains everything that's

going on in the world today.

Reader in Peterborough

Thank you so much for sending me the *Beyond Today* magazine. It is so helpful to me in understanding all the bad things that are happening in the world.

Reader in Ossett

Origin of the Trinity belief

Why is the Godhead referred to as the Trinity, when the word Trinity does not appear in Scripture?

Reader in Northern Ireland

Editor's comment: We have sent you our booklet Is God a Trinity? It explains the origins of this teaching.

Previous teaching untrue

I am really enjoying the *Bible Study Course* and I am looking forward to being able to learn more about God and what He has to offer us once we get to know Him better.

Thank you. It has been a real eye opener given what I thought I knew about God. I realise what I have been

taught before is not true.

Could you please send me the booklet *Tools for Spiritual Growth*?

Reader in York

Putting God first

Your [magazine] is so inspiring and uplifting. I look forward to it as it is so informative. I thank God every day for what He has done for me. Thank you does not seem enough of a word.

Reader in Mold

Your journal has really helped me to grow spiritually. Thank you.

Reader in Birmingham

I love reading *Beyond Today*. It encourages me to put God first in my thoughts and I try to do that every day.

Reader in Kent

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Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

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