The Christadelphian
INCORPORATING TESTIMONY MAGAZINE

The text of the New Testament



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A magazine dedicated wholly to the Hope of Israel

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:15, ESV)

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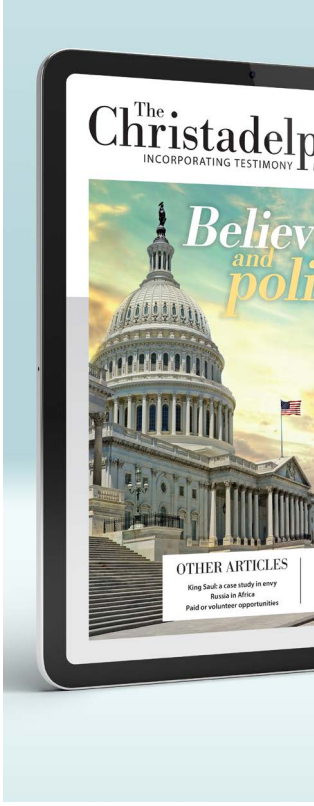





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A new preaching opportunity



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SUNDAY MORNING

MULTICOLOURED EMBROIDERY

J. HAMILTON WILSON (KENILWORTH, UK)

Exodus chapters 35–38 record the construction and decoration of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. To some, these chapters present a fascinating study of how it all must have looked, and they find great enjoyment in exploring the spiritual significance of the intricate details of the various items described. Indeed, valuable lessons can be learned from such studies. For those of us with a more limited imagination, or perhaps with an inability to visualise all the architectural detail, these descriptions can appear a little tedious or uninspiring. Yet the wonder of it all is that each item is not only practical but in most cases very beautiful, and we can at least understand that they reflect God's own beauty and glory.

We may be so accustomed to reading these details that we take them for granted or even find them inconsequential. If that is you, then imagine yourself as one of those who saw all the intricate patterns and details for the first time. How awe-inspiring they would be! You would surely wonder at the beauty of the carpentry, the glory of the metalwork and its engraving, the intricacy of the embroidery work. You would ask Bezaleel questions: "What's this for? Why is that made this way? What's the meaning of this pattern?"

I remember once visiting Worcester Cathedral and speaking, as I thought, to a brother who was with us, deprecating the fact that all the gold and the precious items had been wrested from the poor to beautify this building. The person next to me – in fact a complete stranger whom I had mistaken for my friend and brother – said, "Ah yes, but they gave it for the glory of God!" Whatever we think of that reply, that was certainly true of the children of Israel who willingly brought offerings for the construction of the Tabernacle, a place where God would 'dwell' with men. Of their free will they brought so much that the coffers had to be closed and the flow of gifts halted.

So important was this work, and so important was it that it should be done to perfection, that God put special measures in place. He appointed Bezaleel and Aholiab to carry it out. Bezaleel was the main artificer, in charge of all the work in metal, wood and stone, and seemingly in overall control of the project, while Aholiab was in charge of the textiles and fabric.

SPIRITUAL MEANINGS

Some people have a natural aptitude for working with their hands, and it appears that both men had such skills. Yet Bezeleel in particular had skills beyond simple handicraft: "See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri … and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship … And He hath put in his heart that he may teach …" (Exodus 35:30-34). [1] Not only were Bezaleel and Aholiab skilled to carry out the work; it seems that they had a spiritual understanding of what it was all about. No doubt, as people beheld what was being done

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and wondered about it, the two men would be answering such questions as we have imagined.

Is there not a parallel in our being ready to witness to the Truth as people see its outworking in our lives? Without going into the meaning of all the intricate details and patterns of the Tabernacle, surely we can see that they must equate to God working out the details – the 'embroidery' – of our lives, and we can therefore ponder how we might 'beautify' our lives for Him. The purpose that He has with us needs to be worked out in the details of our relationship with Him.

PATTERNS OF HEAVENLY THINGS

The Tabernacle, and later the Temple, were only of passing use, being but patterns of heavenly things. God's true dwelling place is with His saints. God has always declared that He desires to "dwell among" His people (see Exodus 25:8). The things of the old Tabernacle were only shadows of that principle – as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, "a figure for the time then present" (Hebrews 9:9). Our Lord Jesus Christ, "an high priest of good things to come", obtained redemption for us –

> *"by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ... It was ... necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with* [animal sacrifices]*; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (verses 11,23,24).*

Psalm 96 includes the injunction, "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (verse 9). God intended that the physical beauty evident in the Tabernacle should be reflected in holiness in the lives of His worshippers. The same 'embroidery' that beautified the sanctuary of old should beautify the 'living temple' in which He is now pleased to dwell – His ecclesia. Just as responsibility for constructing the Tabernacle did not lie with only one or two men, so now we all have to be involved, as every member of the nation of Israel contributed material goods for the building work, some bringing silver and gold and precious stones, others weaving the glorious fabrics with which the curtains would be made, to be embroidered with the emblems of the cherubim.

All those who contributed to the work of the Tabernacle must have a level of spiritual wisdom and understanding too: "And Moses called ... every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it" (Exodus 36:2). The comparison for us is that we have many talents, physical and spiritual, which we are expected to contribute to the work of building and beautifying the ecclesia. We are exhorted to "work out [our] salvation" (Philippians 2:12) – not that we can ever earn it, but we have been given the means to elaborate the details of our spiritual lives within the household of God.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE WORK

How do we know that this comparison is justified? There is a word that appears three times in the New Testament, and which I love: the Greek word *poikilos*. It appears first in Ephesians 3:10 in a compound form, *polupoikilos*: "... to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the *manifold* wisdom of God ..." *Poikilos* literally means 'many-coloured', and here Paul says that it is God's intention that through the preaching of the ecclesia the many 'colourful' facets of the gospel should be made known to the rulers and the authorities of the world. God's wisdom is indeed 'many-coloured', and it can touch many aspects of people's lives – a truth that we all know for ourselves.

The other two occurrences are both in Peter's letters. In his first letter, Peter offers comfort to brothers and sisters under persecution: "... though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through *manifold* temptations: that the trial of your faith ... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1:6,7). Their trials were indeed

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'many-coloured'; the temptations of the world that they had left behind would try to draw them back in – the hostility of the Jews who opposed this new doctrine, the threats of the Roman authorities, and many more.

Perhaps we today do not have quite so many trials to assail us; yet those which do are still 'many-coloured' to us, and any one of them could easily pull us astray if we give in to it. Their very variety and brightness appeal to us – they are so alluring and tempting! But, like Israel of old, we can counter them if we are trying to embroider "the beauty of holiness" into our lives.

The third occurrence of our word is in 1 Peter 4:10: we are to be "good stewards of the *manifold* grace of God." What is the context here? Peter is reminding his readers of the 'graceless' lives they lived before they knew the gospel. Now, by contrast:

- we should no longer live in the lusts of the flesh (verse 2) – that is why Christ died!
- we must therefore give up our 'Gentile' way of life: uncontrolled indulgence, excess of wine, revellings, idolatry (verse 3)
- we are not to run with unbelievers to the same excess (verse 4)
- we must be ready to give an account to our Judge (verse 5)
- the end is at hand; therefore we are to be sober and watchful in prayer (verse 7)
- our love for each other is to be 'constantly stretched' (verse 8)
- we have all received gifts; we are to use them for one another, "as good stewards of the *manifold* grace of God" (verse 10) – He has given us so many gifts that we would be failing in our duty as stewards not to use them
- and not just material gifts of hospitality and so forth, but we are to minister to each other spiritually (verse 11) – how are we making sure that we are equipped to do this?

So there are countless 'many-coloured' attributes that we are to acquire if we are to be able to 'beautify' God's ecclesia – His dwelling place. The natural response to this requirement is for us to become agitated as we realise our deficiencies and try madly to acquire the missing characteristics all at once – which is so big a task that we fall under the weight of it and so achieve nothing.

A LITTLE BIT AT A TIME

The secret, as one brother explained to me many years ago, is to try 'a little bit at a time', and so gradually take on each new attribute, one by one. Peter himself suggests that we go about things in this practical way: "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love]" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

We are surely not far from the idea of building and beautifying the Tabernacle. Bezaleel and Aholiab cannot have gone pell-mell into the work, but realised that so important a work could not be done quickly. Imagine all the careful carving and engraving, the weaving and the spinning, carefully and painstakingly embroidering the beautiful designs and patterns of the linen and the fine-twined threads to manufacture those symbols of redemption and salvation. How much this would teach God's people about His work for them! And we must see it too, in the outworking of His purpose in our lives.

Think of all the detail, and the trouble that God took to show the value of His salvation in the wealth and the patterns of the Tabernacle! And if we work with God, as He works with us, then in time we will 'embroider' our lives and characters such that they truly 'beautify' his ecclesia, His dwelling place now and into eternity. Peter encourages us to apply ourselves to this great work by reminding us that we have been given "exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [we] might be partakers of the divine nature" – because we will have 'woven' aspects of that nature into our lives even now – and so will, by God's grace in the Lord Jesus, "[escape] the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). ■

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UNSUNG HEROES: THE HEBREW MIDWIVES

STEVE DEMARCO
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As we read through the Holy Bible each year, we come across many characters who seem to have led important lives, and their names are therefore remembered. Others appear briefly in genealogies, and we hardly pay them any attention as we struggle to pronounce their unfamiliar names. And some characters are not even named. Have you ever wondered how many people are named in the Scriptures? How many could *you* name off the top of your head? According to those who have counted them, about 2,000 people are named in the Bible. It is sometimes difficult to determine if we are reading about the same person with a different name in a different verse, so there is some ambiguity in the count.

But isn't every person in the Bible important in one way or another? Yes, for sure. So I think it is a good idea to pick a few unfamiliar names now and then and study their lives to see how their story has a message for us.

AN UNNAMED KING

This story begins with one of these unnamed characters. A new king arose in Egypt, who did not know Joseph. Joseph's name and his importance in saving Egypt from famine had been forgotten. The king lacked gratitude, and he did not know or fear Joseph's God. He hatched a plot to rally his Egyptians to persecute the Hebrew immigrants in his land – the descendants of Israel who had migrated to Egypt as a small group of seventy people, but who, over just a few generations, had grown perhaps into millions. At first, he said that they were too numerous and so had become a threat to Egypt. He set taskmasters over them to make them work hard, turning them into them slaves and oppressing them.

You will have noticed that I used the word "he". Why? Because the king's name is not recorded in the Bible; it has been forgotten.

THE PLOT THICKENS

But despite this forced labour, the Hebrews became even more numerous. Exodus 1 opens up to us a perspective on what was happening and who was responsible:

> *"And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in morter, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour" (verses 13,14).* [1]

By this point, it was not only the Pharaoh who was persecuting the Hebrews; it was the Egyptians too. It would have taken quite some organisation by the slave masters to force the Hebrews to work under such harsh conditions. And it would have taken many Egyptians to oversee all this labour. Think about King Solomon: he assigned 3,600 overseers over 150,000 workers to build the Temple (2 Chronicles 2:18).

It is clear that the Egyptian government and all the Egyptian people were involved in the persecution of the Hebrews. Consequently, they

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were all guilty in God's eyes when He heard the cries of His people. They had become collectively guilty for harming His chosen people. It was no surprise, therefore, that God's plagues affected every Egyptian and led ultimately to the death of the firstborn in every household.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

As the problem was becoming more serious by the year, Pharaoh took matters into his own hands: he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the Hebrew baby boys. He must have thought that this would get rid of all the men, leaving the Egyptians to do what they wanted with the women. They would be in control at last, he thought. This reminds me of King Herod, who killed all the boys born about the same time as Jesus, hoping to get rid of a rival king of the Jews. I wonder whether Pharaoh's wise men warned him, like the wise men who inadvertently alerted Herod to the baby Jesus.

But it was the women, the midwives, who stopped Pharaoh. They stood up against his evil plan and saved the Hebrew babies. It is their story that is important. We do not remember this Pharaoh's name, but we remember their names: they are Shiphrah and Puah (Exodus 1:15). Their names are important, and their story has a lesson for us.

HEBREW MIDWIVES?

There are clues in the text that these midwives may have been Egyptian women, not Hebrews – they were "Hebrew midwives" in the sense of

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being midwives *to* the Hebrews. The main reason for this suggestion is this: it would have been strange for Pharaoh to expect Hebrew women to kill Hebrew babies. Furthermore, he does not punish them when he finds out that they have let the boys live; he merely asks why they did not kill them. If they had been Hebrews, then surely he would have executed them like any other slaves.

These midwives disobeyed a direct order by the Pharaoh. This was not an action to be taken lightly, as the consequences could have been severe. I am reminded of King Saul's soldiers who refused his order to kill the priests who had aided David. Or remember Daniel and his friends, who defied King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Such brave people are few and far between, examples that we may follow as conscientious objectors. But why did the midwives disobey? We are told: it was because they feared God. Their actions show that they believed in a higher authority than any king, and that is God. We want to love God, but fearing God is important too. Jesus said:

> *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).*

Fearing only God is liberating. It can free you from the fear of what men can do to you. You can do the right thing in the face of their fearsome threats – that is a valuable lesson from the story of the Hebrew midwives. Fear of God may also help us to stop a particular sin that is difficult to overcome. Instead of fearing future judgment, we can face the issue here and now, knowing that repentance and a change of heart can lead to God's forgiveness.

LYING TO PHARAOH

The midwives must have known that Pharaoh would find out that they were disobeying him by allowing the Hebrew baby boys to live. Imagine how they must have schemed together to come up with the same story to tell him under interrogation. They each report the same thing: the Hebrew women are different from Egyptian women, vigorous, giving birth before the midwives arrive. And he believed them – at least enough not to punish them.

One of God's commandments is not to lie – not to give false testimony. But they lied. They lied to protect the babies and themselves. We might have thought that God would hold this against them, but He did not. These midwives protected God's chosen people, blessing them, so He blessed them: "God dealt well with the midwives" (Exodus 1:20), and established households for them (verse 21). Evidently God approved of what they did. It was part of His plan of salvation for His people. There are other accounts in the Bible of people lying yet not being condemned. Rahab lying to the king of Jericho to protect the two Hebrew spies is one example; you may be able to think of others.

WORSE STILL

Pharaoh then commanded his people to throw the Hebrew baby boys into the Nile, and we assume that they did so. All the Egyptians became guilty of murder, deserving of the curse

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promised for those who curse the descendants of Abraham. By disobeying the Pharaoh, the two midwives showed that it was right to disobey a wrongful order. It was better to obey God rather than man. They were an example to the rest of their nation, but their example was ignored. The consequence for the nation was that, when God's plagues came, they fell upon every Egyptian. All *their* firstborn sons died, God's just and fitting punishment for their compliant sin.

We can learn a lesson from this too. Going along with the sinful actions of a group that we belong to makes us guilty, complicit in the group's actions. But we have an obligation to object to the wrong actions of the majority – even if this should occur in our ecclesias.

FOLLOWING A GOOD EXAMPLE

Later, there was an Egyptian who followed the example of the midwives and did not kill a Hebrew baby boy. That was Pharaoh's daughter, who took Moses out of the basket in the River Nile. She knew that he was a Hebrew, and she surely knew her father's commandment, but she did not obey him. She followed her heart and pitied the abandoned baby, adopting him and raising him as her own child, giving him all the benefits of an Egyptian prince. Some have suggested that she is later named as Bithiah (1 Chronicles 4:18), and that she married a Hebrew and became the mother of his children.

We cannot be sure, but she was evidently a strong character, one of three Egyptian women (I suggest) who played a part in God's plan for saving the Hebrews from bondage. Their actions allowed one of the Hebrews to live and, in time, to become the Hebrews' saviour. I doubt that any of them foresaw what would come of their good works; they just did what they each knew to be right. We too cannot always foresee the outcome of our works, whether it will be good or bad. Like these women, we just need to do the work that we are given – to do what is right and proper.

None of us can boast about our works, thinking that what we have done has a dramatic impact upon the world. As with these midwives, the impact of our works may not be seen for many years – if there is any impact at all. Faith in good works – that good works are worth doing, regardless of any impact or the immediate result – should be our hope. Our example might be the only good works that someone else ever sees, like Pharaoh's daughter, who followed the example of the midwives and saved an abandoned Hebrew baby. And we should not expect our good works to be noticed or appreciated by the world. The world appreciates notoriety, wealth and materialism. But our good works will be noticed by our heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus and the angels. We can therefore trust that they will be stored as 'treasure in heaven'.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These two midwives, seemingly of little importance if we read quickly through their chapter, have their names recorded in the Holy Bible as a tribute to their work in helping God's plan come about. These humble women feared God and obeyed His commandment not to commit murder. By doing so, they helped the Hebrews to survive in that harsh Egyptian slave yard.

Their example also emboldened Pharaoh's daughter to disobey the Pharaoh by saving and protecting a Hebrew baby boy whom she found in the Nile, allowing God's appointed saviour Moses to live freely as a noble in Egypt. This allowed Moses to receive leadership training that would serve him and God well.

The midwives lied to their employer, Pharaoh, and this lie was approved by God. This indicates that it may sometimes be acceptable to God to lie to protect life – as Jesus taught that it was better to 'break' the Sabbath and save life rather than to kill (Mark 3:1-5). There is a higher importance in doing good than in doing nothing. These midwives show us that it is important to do good works at all times. In God's plan, we may never know what purpose we are serving by doing so, or what the ultimate result will be. It is in God's hands. ■

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EXPOSITION

THE EYE OF FAITH

REG CARR (BARTON-UNDER-NEEDWOOD, UK)

The 'eye of faith' – surely that's a phrase from Scripture. It must be! It sounds so much like an expression straight out of the King James Version, or an example of Tyndale's amazing ability to coin such memorable terms. But no! Try as you may, you will not find 'the eye of faith' in Young's *Concordance*, or in Strong's, or in any part of the Word of God.

And yet! And yet, the phrase is demonstrably biblical: it's a metaphorical expression that perfectly encapsulates a familiar scriptural concept. When writing to the Corinthians, for example, the Apostle Paul told them (and us) that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). It's our faith, in other words, that gives us the spiritual insight to look past the visible things around us in the here-and-now, and to conduct our lives in the forward-looking confidence, like Noah (Hebrews 11:7), of "things not seen as yet". That's the function and power of the 'eye of faith'.

"OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION"

And this is precisely the context of 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, in which the apostle is explaining that the basic reason for his own willingness to suffer multiple hardships, in spreading the gospel of salvation through Jesus across the Roman world, is his compelling foresight of the future glories of the Kingdom of God. Present things are merely transitory, argues Paul; but the things of the coming Kingdom, which can only be seen by the eye of faith, are for ever. As Paul writes:

> *"we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).* [1]

Of course, by no reasonable standard could Paul's sufferings – his "affliction", which he describes in painful detail in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 – be classed as "light" (2 Corinthians 4:17; Greek: *elaphros*, meaning 'not heavy')! Paul was able to 'make light of it' only because his faith enabled him to 'see' the future "weight of glory" that would be his, and that would outweigh, as it were, all the insubstantial things sitting in the other, much lighter, pan of his spiritual balancing scales. If only we could think like that! If only we could always say with the psalmist, with supreme faith and confidence in the future, as Paul undoubtedly could, that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5)!

"THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN"

The Greek word for "evidence" in Hebrews 11:1 is the word *elegchos*. It occurs only this once in Scripture, and it means 'conviction' (and is so translated in many versions). The words "not seen" (KJV) are uniquely used in Scripture with reference to objects or persons which are not seen with human, physical eyesight (for example: 1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Colossians 2:18; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 1:8; 1 John 4:20; and here in Hebrews 11:1). But it is the 'conviction' of our faith which enables us

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to act as if we had actually seen what we are 'convinced' of in our minds and hearts. So the eye of faith is an entirely appropriate metaphor to use to express the ability to 'see' things which, for the time being at least, are not visible to our naked human eyesight. For example: we firmly believe in the unseen presence of the Lord Jesus when we break bread and drink wine in memory of him ("For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" – Matthew 18:20). We show our faith in the Lord Jesus, too, and our love for him, when we rejoice in our belief in him *now*, as Peter writes:

> *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Peter 1:8, ESV).*

And, as Peter goes on to explain, it's by the exercise of the eye of faith that we are able to receive "the end of [our] faith, even the salvation of [our] souls" (verse 9). Through our confident faith in the present and future work of the Lord Jesus, in bringing salvation to us, all this can be as real to us today as if we saw and possessed it all right now.

SEEING THE INVISIBLE

Hebrews 11:27 leaves us in no doubt that Moses' faith was strong enough to enable him to 'see' the invisible God Himself. It was by the eye of faith (Moses' spiritual, faith-based insight) that he could look past "the pleasures of sin" (verse 25) and "the treasures in Egypt" (verse 26) – which he could certainly have enjoyed for the rest of his natural life as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Yet he willingly sacrificed such worldly enjoyment, wealth and power, and exchanged them all for a life of Messiah-like suffering with God's chosen, but downtrodden, people. So he gave up his worldly life – for what? For forty years' servitude as a humble shepherd in Midian, followed by forty more years in a wilderness journey fraught with daily problems, which came to a sad end in the plains of Moab, so near to, yet so far from, his hoped-for goal. So why ever did Moses make such a sacrificial choice? Hebrews 11:26 puts it simply and clearly: he chose the harder way "because he was *looking ahead* to his reward" (NIV). And he was able to look ahead like that, in faith, because, despite the very real threat of Pharaoh's power, as verse 27 explains, Moses "persevered as though he could see the One who is invisible" (NET). Moses had an unconquerable faith in the (presently) invisible God: the eye of faith provided him with the "evidence" (or conviction) of "things not seen" (11:1). Now, that is the essence of real faith; and Moses had it in abundance.

"A CLOUD OF WITNESSES"

And Moses was by no means alone in exercising the eye of faith, as Hebrews 11 emphatically illustrates. For no fewer than sixteen 'worthies of old' are singled out for mention, each one displaying that same forward-looking kind of faith that alone is pleasing to God (verse 6). Highly significant, too, is the frequency with which the exercise of spiritual insight (the eye of faith) is seen at work in the lives of this "cloud of witnesses", with a strong verbal emphasis in the text on 'seeing' and 'looking', and on things 'visible' and 'invisible' (verses 1,3,7,10,13,14,23,27). The experiences of all these "witnesses", and the certainty of their ultimate reward, is helpfully summed up for us in verse 13:

> *"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but* having seen them *and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (ESV).*

With all these men and women of faith 'witnessing' to us, woe indeed to us if we fail to replicate their exercise of the all-important eye of faith – faith in God, in His promises, in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the future blessings soon to be revealed to a largely undeserving world. The ability to 'see unseen things', and not to be distracted or beguiled from our faith by the 'real' things that we see around us in daily life, is latent in every one of us; and we are personally responsible for exercising it as a basic part of our faith. For, as we very well know by now, "without faith it is impossible to please [God]; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that

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He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (verse 6). And in 'diligently seeking' God, we cannot fail to put our eye of faith to work.

FAITH-BASED 'SEEING'

Faith itself, of course, comes from "hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17) – it is initiated in us, and fed, by our reading and ingestion of God's Word. This is what Paul, in Galatians 3:5, calls "the hearing of faith". But out of this "hearing" (Greek: *akoē*, meaning 'something heard'), and the faith that is developed as a result of it, must come 'something seen': a vision, or insight, of a spiritual kind. And that 'something seen' opens up to the eye of faith a vision of the future upon which depend all our hopes. This was surely why King David's last words, spoken in his old age, looked with confidence to a safe and eternal future with God:

> *"For does not my house stand so with God? For He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For will He not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?" (2 Samuel 23:5, ESV).*

David saw this vision, even as he lay dying, and it appeared to him as "the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (verse 4). Such spiritual insight, if we can make it ours until our dying breath, will guarantee our ability to see beyond the tangible, and toxic, world of human existence, as David did, to the day of resurrection and to the presently 'unseen' divine reality of eternity.

But unless and until he could see the risen Lord with his own eyes, 'doubting Thomas' would not believe in the resurrection, and in the divine reality of an immortal Lord Jesus (John 20:25). By contrast with Thomas, however, we find ourselves blessed, in these last days, to be among those who believe in a risen and glorified Lord, even though we have not laid eyes upon him – not literally, at least. And we are able to take great strength from the Lord's specific blessing upon us for believing – with the eye of faith – in what is currently unseen (verse 29). Like Moses before us, we are able to see "the invisible", and to turn our view away from the visible, insubstantial and fleeting things of the world, and to look steadfastly at those things which can be seen by the eye of faith alone.

> **"THOUGH YOU HAVE NOT SEEN HIM, YOU LOVE HIM. THOUGH YOU DO NOT**
>
> 
>
> **NOW SEE HIM, YOU BELIEVE IN HIM AND REJOICE WITH JOY THAT IS INEXPRESSIBLE AND FILLED WITH GLORY."**
>
> **(1 Peter 1:8, ESV)**

So, when the Lord descends to earth once more in person, may we be found looking earnestly, with the eye of faith, for that "blessed hope" – the Lord's "glorious appearing" – of which Paul wrote to Titus (Titus 2:13); looking too, as Jude would have us do, "for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude verse 21); and looking for the Apostle Peter's "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). And, as we look with the eye of faith to our Lord Jesus Christ – "the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2) – may we seek continually, each day that remains to us, to make 'the unseen things' more real and more meaningful in our lives, until he comes again. ■

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THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

2 – VARIATIONS AND WITNESSES

JOHN THORPE (SALE, UK)

There are tens of thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament – many more than the manuscripts of other ancient writings, as we saw last time. None of these is the original text, however; they are copies, and copies of copies. The copying was done by hand, which means that there are occasional variations in the text. Some variant readings are the result of accident, where a scribe misread an original or accidentally made a mistake in writing. Others are deliberate. This means that all the available manuscripts of the New Testament are slightly different from one another. Where the manuscripts disagree on the text, it is necessary to decide which of the variants is correct.

THE WITNESSES

The witnesses to the text of the New Testament are divided into several different groups, each of which is identified in a standardised way. The groups are these:

- ***Papyri:*** a papyrus is a manuscript written on papyrus. The writing is all in capital letters without gaps between the words. Because papyrus is a relatively fragile substance, most papyri are only fragments, although a few contain whole books or even more. A New Testament papyrus is identified with a letter P, followed by a superscript number – for example, the Rylands Fragment, which we considered last month, is known as P^{52}.
- ***Uncials:*** an uncial manuscript is written on parchment. Again, uncial script uses only capital letters and there are no gaps between the words. This can make reading uncials a slow process, but, because parchment is very durable, these manuscripts can survive for a long time. Parchment is also expensive, so manuscripts copied on it became available only from the fourth century when the state was prepared to put resources into Christianity. Early on, uncial manuscripts were identified by a single letter: A is the identifier for *Codex Alexandrinus*, B is the identifier for *Codex Vaticanus*, and so on. However, discoveries of additional manuscripts soon exceeded the number of letters available (even when the Greek alphabet had been used too), so uncial manuscripts are also given a number, which is preceded by a zero. Thus uncial A was numbered 02, uncial B was numbered 03, and so on. (01 is *Codex Sinaiticus*, which was given the Hebrew letter א.)
- ***Minuscules:*** in the ninth century a new form of writing, which used lower-case letters and had spaces between the words, was devised. This meant that writing could be smaller and still legible. The name 'minuscule' is given to such copies of the New Testament, which form the largest group of New Testament manuscripts. Minuscules are identified by a number, sometimes with a superscript identifying the part of the New Testament covered.
- ***Lectionaries:*** a lectionary is a Bible written not in the conventional order, but in an order following a reading plan. One could make a

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Christadelphian lectionary by writing out the content of the Bible in the order of the daily readings from the *Bible Companion*. Because of the effort involved in making a lectionary, it was much easier to copy an existing lectionary than to work out a new one from a standard Bible and a reading planner. As a result, lectionaries tend to be independent witnesses to the text.

- ***Versions:*** a version is a translation of the Bible into another language – hence names like the King James Version or the English Standard Version. Many translations were made very early on in the Christian era; Latin versions were certainly available by the middle of the second century, and there are also versions in Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Old Slavonic, Armenian, Gothic and so on. A scholar can use the manuscripts of these versions to work out the Greek text from which the version was translated, and this can be another valuable witness.
- ***Patristic citations:*** ancient writers often quoted from the New Testament, and by looking at their quotations one can partially reconstruct the text of the New Testament that they used. There are problems with this method, because the writers may have used more than one manuscript of the New Testament, or may be quoting from a memory which, in reality, was a little hazy.

CLASSIFICATION OF WITNESSES AND TEXT TYPES

Textual witnesses can be examined and classified according to the kind of text that they contain. This is an intensive study, but was first undertaken when far fewer manuscripts were known than is now the case. Scholars decided that there were three main groups of witnesses:

1. witnesses similar to *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*; these were called 'Alexandrian' witnesses, because they contained readings which were also found in the writings of authors who lived in Alexandria in Egypt
2. witnesses with readings found in Latin translations; these were called 'Western' witnesses, because the people who wrote similar quotations lived in the Western Roman Empire
3. the very great majority of Greek manuscripts, which represented the text used by the Greek Orthodox Church; this group was described as 'Byzantine', because many of the manuscripts were copied in or near that city, and because writers from that area cited these variants.

Each of these groups was labelled a 'text type', and there were debates over which text type was more original.

More recently, statistical analysis of manuscripts by computer has shown that the textual witnesses do form three distinct clusters, but they are spread out in a continuum – a sequence in which manuscript changes are gradual. The Alexandrian and Western text types are simply at the extremes of this continuum. The Byzantine text does contain the largest cluster of witnesses; this happens because Byzantium was very wealthy, and its inhabitants spoke Greek and were members of the Orthodox Church. As a result, many manuscript copies were made from a small number of exemplars in this city. The Byzantine text is thus a real cluster of manuscripts; it is sometimes described as the 'Majority Text'. The most important Alexandrian manuscripts are *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*; these underly the *Emphatic Diaglott*.

INVESTIGATING VARIANT READINGS

The fact that the manuscripts were copied by hand (without the extreme quality-control measures found in Hebrew manuscripts) means that there are many places where different manuscripts contain different versions of the text. As we saw last month, the differences are usually minor, but it is often necessary to think carefully about the text when we are trying to understand a passage.

The method used to decide which is the best reading is based on the question, "Which

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reading best explains the existence of the others?" Factors that need to be taken into consideration include these:

- When does the variant first appear? A variant which does not appear until the thirteenth century is much less likely to be original than one which goes back to the earliest witnesses.
- How widespread is the variant? A variant which appears in witnesses from all over the world is more likely to be from the original than one which appears only in manuscripts from one city. Similarly, a variant that appears in only one manuscript (called a 'singular reading') is unlikely to be the original text.
- How reliable are the witnesses that contain the variant being considered? If a witness contains many errors, then that witness should be considered unreliable.

Having examined the witnesses, one can then go on to look at how the variants may have arisen from one another. Recent studies of scribal habits allow one to come to some conclusions immediately. For example, one common problem occurs where a phrase is repeated. The scribe copies a manuscript as far as the first occurrence of the phrase, but when he looks back at the exemplar his eye skips to the second occurrence, thus missing out the text between. This error is called a *homeoteleuton*, from the Greek which means 'same ending'. There are several similar common mistakes in New Testament manuscripts. Noticing these allows many variant readings to be eliminated.

Finally, one must decide which reading best explains the other readings. One can look at how the text could be misread, and, by matching this with the earliest date at which the variant appeared and the distribution of the variant in the different witnesses, one can usually reach a fairly secure conclusion as to what the original reading was.

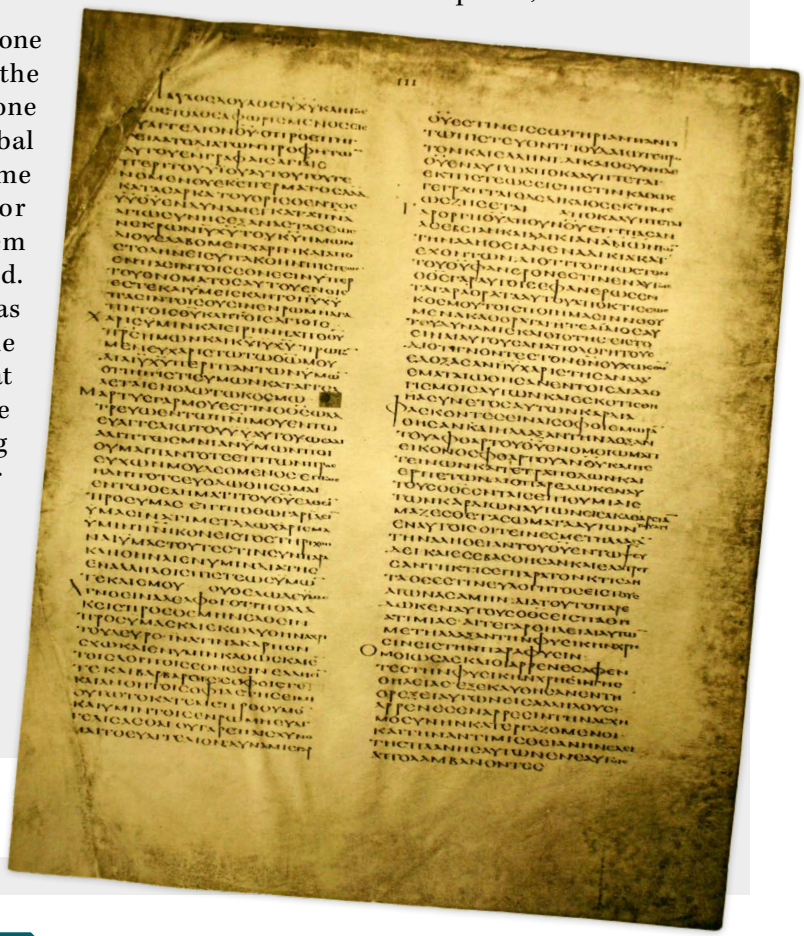
OTHER 'RULES'

Two rules that are often employed, but which go against experimental evidence, are:

1 the shorter reading is to be preferred; and

2 the most difficult reading is to be preferred.

Experimental evidence shows that scribes were far more likely to omit material than to make up material and insert it. There are exceptions, in that scribes



Romans 1 in the* Codex Alexandrinus, *dating from the fifth century.

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sometimes accidentally incorporated marginal comments into the text; but this is rare, and one can usually see what might be a margin problem.

The rule of always preferring the more difficult reading is extremely subjective, and is often used as an excuse to bring in an otherwise unlikely reading which fits the theology of the scholar making the decision. In fact, experimental evidence shows that scribes have no particular tendency to simplify the text.

It may be helpful to look at two examples from the text of the New Testament in the light of what we have seen so far.

EXAMPLE 1: 1 JOHN 2:23

The text of this passage reads, "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also." In the King James (Authorised) Version, the second clause of this verse is in italics. It was not present in the Greek text from which that version was translated, but was taken from the Latin *Vulgate*. The overwhelming majority of New Testament manuscripts do not contain this second clause, but have a shorter text with only the first clause of the verse. The longer text is supported by six uncial manuscripts, six minuscules and the text of the Latin, Coptic and Syriac versions.

How does one decide on the original text? Here, the deciding factor is that both the longer version and the shorter version of the Greek text end with the same two words, "the Father". This is therefore a fairly obvious case of *homeoteleuton*; at some point on in the copying process, a scribe probably allowed his eye to shift from one instance of the phrase to the other, and the text between was missed out. This seems to have happened fairly late on in the history of the text, because older manuscripts and versions have the longer version.

EXAMPLE 2: JOHN 7:53–8:11

This example refers to a complete episode in the Gospel of John. The account of the woman taken in adultery is missing from many early uncial manuscripts and two substantial papyri, as well as from some ancient versions and the set of lectionaries. However, it is present in the overwhelming majority of minuscules, some other uncials, and early translations in Latin (as well as the later *Vulgate*). A look at the distribution of witnesses shows that the witnesses from which this passage is missing tend to be Alexandrian, while there are two separate areas in which it is included, a Western cluster and a Byzantine cluster.

To add to the difficulty of the analysis, some of the witnesses which omit the text have marks which might suggest that something *was* omitted, and some of the witnesses which contain the text have marks which suggest that the text *should be* omitted.

Thinking about how this textual variation might be accounted for, we can say that the text is too long to have been added accidentally. Also, if the account is inauthentic, then it must have been inserted at least twice (for it to appear in the two clusters); one might also expect some comment by a Church Father. On the other hand, it is easy to think of a reason why the account may have been omitted. An early monk, attempting to preach to a raucous congregation, might consider it a good idea to omit something as 'scurrilous' as the record of the Lord Jesus forgiving an adulterous woman. The account does not appear in lectionaries, which suggests that the people who devised the reading plans in the fourth or fifth century did not consider it to be suitable reading. Given this attitude, a scribe might choose (or be ordered) to omit the passage. It therefore seems that the passage is most likely authentic; but many scholars argue against it, and it remains a matter of debate to the present day.

Next time, we will consider the allegation that the text of the New Testament has been deliberately corrupted. ■

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QUESTION OF THE MONTH

IS THE EXODUS HISTORICAL?

ANDREW JENKINS (COVENTRY, UK)

Why do some scholars claim that there is no archaeological evidence for Israel's sojourn in Egypt, and that the exodus never happened? How should we respond?

Israel's exodus from Egypt is a seminal moment in the history of the nation as the Bible presents it. It also provides an essential foundation for much of the theology of both the Old Testament and the New. The Exodus narrative of God's redemption of His people, their deliverance from bondage at Passover, and their journey towards the Promised Land, form a framework which the Spirit uses pervasively to describe the work of salvation accomplished in Jesus. The exodus is referenced, directly or indirectly, in just about every book of Scripture.

Despite this, the current consensus amongst some critical scholars is that the biblical exodus is a myth and never really took place. It is widely accepted by such scholars that Israel as a nation emerged gradually in Canaan from among the indigenous Canaanites, and that their distinct cultural and religious identity and practices evolved slowly over time. This view clashes sharply with our belief in the Scriptural account as a divinely inspired and true record of history. By contrast, many historians point to the lack of archaeological evidence of the exodus as reason enough to omit any reference to it from histories of Israel. Should we be concerned by this 'lack of evidence'?

During the course of preparing a lecture on this subject recently, I had cause to read Dr Kenneth Kitchen's very helpful book *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, first published in 2003. Dr Kitchen is Emeritus Professor of Egyptology at the University of Liverpool, and a leading expert on Egyptian chronology. This book is regarded as a seminal work in Old Testament apologetics. In this article I will include some highlights from Dr Kitchen's chapter on the exodus, but I thoroughly recommend the whole book to anyone interested in this topic.

THE 'ORIGIN MYTH'

Many modern scholars consider the exodus story an 'origin myth', a sort of nationally owned story, fabricated to give an ideological grounding to Israel's unique cultural identity. But this understanding of the exodus

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story poses a fundamental problem: is it really credible that a nation looking for an ideological basis for their identity would write such a humiliating story?

Origin myths typically emphasise certain heroic characteristics of the ancestors from whom the nation is said to descend. But in the exodus story the Israelites are slaves. They are n a situation which they are powerless to resolve for themselves, and entirely reliant on divine intervention to deliver them. As the exodus progresses, Israel are depicted not as of noble lineage, people with whom it would be honourable to identify, but as weak-willed and petulant, often seeking to give up on the divine promise and return to bondage. It is difficult to understand why somebody concocting a story from scratch would choose such an uninspiring foundation on which to build their national identity.

ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE?

For some, one problem that we encounter when we approach this subject is that there is essentially no physical evidence to support the exodus record. This, coupled with presuppositions about human development grounded in evolutionary theory, leads many scholars to the conclusion described above. We are rightly sceptical of what is in essence an argument from silence, yet we still want a compelling explanation for this absence of evidence. As it turns out, it is no less than what we would expect, given the following facts.

The detail recorded in Exodus is very helpful. We are told that the Hebrews were building "in morter, and in brick" (1:14), [1] and that the bricks were made with straw – and therefore, by inference, out of mud. These materials are inherently not very durable. The vast majority of famous monuments and buildings of ancient Egypt which survive to the modern day are made of stone. The physical evidence available to us today must surely be only a tiny percentage of the total construction undertaken during the 2,500 or so years of ancient Egyptian society. We cannot reasonably expect a mudbrick structure to last through the millennia to be available to archaeologists today.

It is also recorded that the enslaved Hebrews "built ... Pithom and Raamses", "treasure cities" located in the Nile Delta region (1:11). The Nile famously flooded its banks, ensuring the fertility of the land, upon which the economy of Pharaonic Egypt was built. Mudbrick structures are even less durable on a flood plain than elsewhere. Indeed, known examples of mudbricks surviving from antiquity are all from climates favourable to their preservation. Most of the well-preserved archaeological material from Pharaonic Egypt is from considerably further south, in what is called Upper Egypt, where the climate is considerably drier than in the Delta.

AN UNSURPRISING RECORD

Throughout ancient Egyptian history, rival families were competing with and succeeding one another. When a new dynasty arose, it would seek to replace existing structures with new ones, disassembling entire buildings to repurpose the materials for their own temples, palaces and monuments. As these building materials often bore inscriptions recounting the exploits and glories of previous rulers, there is a well-documented difficulty with interpreting the archaeological record. Whole cities have been attributed to the construction schemes of one ruler, only for later research to find that they were in fact built by a successor who 'cannibalised' building materials inscribed with the names of kings from decades earlier.

Even if we had a complete, easily accessible and conveniently organised archaeological

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record, we would not expect the Pharaoh of Exodus to record an event as ignominious as the escape of a significant portion of his enslaved workforce, or the humbling of his gods and the destruction of his army by a foreign deity. Readers may be familiar with the Taylor Prism, which records the successes of King Sennacherib of Assyria in his conquest of Judah but omits any reference to his failure to take Jerusalem and the destruction of his army by the angel of the Lord, recorded in 2 Kings 19. In a world where kings were omnipotent representatives of the gods, history was written to flatter them, with any wrinkles in the narrative being ironed out of the record.

There are, therefore, considerable difficulties in any attempt to establish reliably from the archaeological record what was happening in Egypt during the period of the biblical exodus. This renders unsurprising the absence of written records from the period explicitly detailing the Hebrew slave presence and their divinely orchestrated escape.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Despite what we have said, there are still things that archaeology can tell us. There is significant physical and documentary evidence that large migrations of people were commonplace in the Middle East in the second millennium BC. There is therefore no difficulty, from a logistical standpoint, in believing that the exodus could have taken place. Egyptian sources describe an abundance of Semitic peoples within Egyptian society at that time, and make specific reference to the conscription of foreign labourers for building work. This means that the biblical record is consistent with what we know about the policy of the Pharaohs from extra-biblical sources.

Similarly, Israel and her neighbours, about whom we read in the Scriptures, are referenced in Egyptian primary sources from the period, confirming that the people of Israel existed and were known to the Egyptians. Dr Kitchen gives numerous examples of details in the Old Testament which are consistent with what we know from other sources about real, local conditions. There is information about the flora, the fauna and the local geopolitical situation which aligns with extra-biblical evidence, for example. It is not credible to suggest that someone fabricating the record at a later date would have had access to this information.



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Whilst none of this evidence is conclusive, it does reinforce our confidence that the Bible is a reliable historical document, and that we can therefore reasonably accept the events that it records as historical. There is no real conflict between our belief in the inspiration of Scripture and what we know from history.

WHY IT MATTERS

Does it matter whether the exodus really happened? Can we not just take the spiritual lessons from the story, whether or not it is true? Well, the sheer number of references to it throughout the rest of Scripture presents a problem if it did not really happen. The exodus story is so pervasive, and so key to the grand narrative of Scripture, that denying it raises more questions than it solves. Why would the inspired Scriptures choose to reference a fictitious event so extensively? The very pervasiveness of the exodus account becomes yet more evidence for its historical truth.

If God is not recording a concrete 'deliverance event' in Exodus, then it robs the promise of the deliverance available to believers in Christ of much of its power. The biblical model is that short-term fulfilments of prophecy allow us to have confidence in future fulfilments. Many passages which describe our salvation from sin and death in Christ begin with reference to God as the Saviour who took a people unto Himself out of Egypt. Without a literal exodus, God has no credentials as a deliverer that allow us cause to trust in Him, and His promises are bereft of their certainty. Similarly, God's revelation of Himself at Sinai, a pattern for so much New Testament teaching about Jesus, would never have taken place – according to the critics.

The final reason for believing is that God's Word must be fulfilled. Genesis 15:13,14 records, as part of God's promise to Abraham, that Israel would be enslaved but delivered through divine intervention. Any doubt that this has reference to Israel's sojourn in Egypt is dispelled explicitly by Stephen in Acts 7:6,7,17-36. If the exodus never took place, then God's prophecy to Abraham about the fate of his descendants was not true. Thanks be to God that His words are faithful and true, and His faithfulness is to all generations. ■



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EXPOSITION

SIN AND FORGIVENESS



1 – THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN

GREG PALMER (ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA)

We would scarcely be human if we had no interest in the concept of 'the unforgivable sin'. We sometimes seem to have a fascination – perhaps even a morbid fixation – on the topic. Brothers and sisters have lived in fear of accidentally offending the divine Spirit to the extent of being irremediably excluded from salvation. Other churches (if not so much now, certainly historically) have kept their congregations in subjection with the fear of eternal, irreversible damnation in hell. It seems to me that a dread of being unforgiven, coupled with a fear of unworthiness, might represent a Christadelphian version of hellfire torments.

Many things have been suggested as the unforgivable sin. Some cover a broad range of transgressions and others are quite narrow. Some are specific and others are more general. Below is a list of things which have been thought to be either *the* unforgivable sin or part of a group of unforgivable sins:

1. blasphemy against the Holy Spirit
2. crucifying Jesus afresh
3. wilful apostasy
4. continual, repeated and wilful sin
5. offending against 'little ones'
6. accepting sinners into fellowship
7. any sin for which one does not seek forgiveness.

Some of the items on this list are self-explanatory; others are open to a degree of interpretation. But, on first reading, there might be some justification for this entire spectrum of sins being considered unforgivable.

A SERIOUS BUSINESS

There can be no doubt that all these things are serious. Those guilty of the first, we are told explicitly, never have forgiveness (Mark 3:29); of the second and third it is impossible to repent (Hebrews 6:4-6); for the fourth there is no more sacrifice (Hebrews 10:26); in the case of the fifth, it were better that a millstone were hung around the sinner's neck and he be cast into the sea (Matthew 18:6); with the sixth, we share in the sinner's evil deed (2 John verses 10,11); and the last seems logical if repentance is required for forgiveness. This is an exceedingly bleak picture, and it is understandable that generations of believers have exercised their minds over this question.

We might just observe, first of all, that the term 'unforgivable sin' does not occur in Scripture. Make no mistake, there are scriptures that deal

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with circumstances in which people will not be forgiven; but the term itself is a poor invention. It suggests that some sins are worse than others. The truth is that all sin is bad, but some people are worse than others. I trust that by the end of this study you may agree with me.

FOUR TEXTS

There are four principal texts that we will examine as we consider our answer to the question of unforgivable sin. We will draw conclusions from these and other passages as we study them, and at length combine them into what I trust will be a biblically sound and reassuring concept. Along the way, we might individually consider the contenders for the title of 'unforgivable sin' and see how each one fares in the light of sustained scrutiny.

The four passages (in the order we will consider them) are these:

- 1 John 5:16,17
- Hebrews 10:26-29
- Hebrews 6:4-6
- Matthew 12:31,32 (see also Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:9,10) – to be considered later in this series.

There is in each of these passages something enigmatic – terminology that is not clearly defined. The third, all-embracingly and depressingly, speaks of wilful sin; and when I think of my own sins, I find many that I knew were wrong even as I did them. Little wonder, then, that this question has been much debated and discussed.

1 JOHN 5:16,17

> *"There is a sin unto death: I do not say that* [a man] *shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."*[1]

Clearly, there is sin that is unforgivable: John says of it, "There is a sin unto death". But are we justified in this reading? The Greek does not support the singular term; it merely says, "There

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is sin unto death" and "there is sin not unto death".

It may be helpful if we define what John means by these terms. Certainly death is the punishment for all sin, and we scarcely need to be reminded of the 'proof texts' Ezekiel 18:20 and Romans 6:23. John must be saying something more than that death is the punishment for sin. There are those who 'sin not unto death'. Were we to suggest that the wages of these sins is *not* death – that they are trivial and do not merit death – then John would refute any such notion when he summarily informs us that "all unrighteousness is sin".

John surely has in mind the resurrection to life, when all those who believe will be granted immortality because their sin has been removed. The Greek word translated "unto" has the idea of 'tending towards an ultimate result'. Without God's intervention, all sin is sin unto death; but because of His forgiveness, we have the prospect of sin that will not end in oblivion. Earlier in his epistle, John says that "we have passed from death unto life" (3:14). We are amongst the blessed to whom the Lord will not impute sin. "Sin unto death" must therefore be speaking of the opposite: that death, not life, will be the outcome for those whose sins are not forgiven. "Sin unto death" means that for such a person resurrection to life is impossible.

So far John has merely stated the facts: for some, sin will be forgiven, allowing them life; and for others, it will not be forgiven, meaning death. Perhaps John does not categorise sin because he is writing not so much about the sin but about the sinner. But what is the essential difference between forgivable and unforgivable sin? This is the question that we wish to answer. Fortunately, we have more texts to consider.

HEBREWS 10:26-29

> *"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"*

Here we have the conclusion hinted at in 1 John presented again: it is not about the sin but the sinner. The word "wilfully" means 'voluntarily, deliberately, willingly'. This is not about weakness, succumbing to temptation in the heat of the moment. There is no suggestion here of hasty, ill-advised action repented of later. Rather, it suggests calculated rebellion. Notice too that this rebellion is aggravated by its occurring "after that we have received the knowledge of the truth" – which has enlightened us as to the way God wants us to walk.

The writer to the Hebrews does not say "knowledge of doctrine". Truth is more than teaching. It is an understanding of who God wants us to be and why; of what God has called us to be. The circumstance described here is a voluntary, purposeful rejection of God's will for us and a replacement of it by our own will. A person guilty of such a sin has moved (by his own choice) from being a servant of Christ to being an 'adversary', as verse 27 expresses it. This suggests deliberate defection from the camp of Christ to serve sin – a premeditated return to the place whence we came. The verb used is "despised". This is not accidental transgression or regrettable lapse, but calculated rebellion.

REBELLION, NOT WEAKNESS

There are three attitudes towards Christ exhibited by this behaviour:

- 'treading underfoot the Son of God'
- 'counting unholy the blood of the covenant'
- 'doing despite to the Spirit of grace'.

Whilst there is no specific mention of what the sin is, the entire focus is on the attitudes of the sinner. These are all purposeful, not accidental. Our

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salvation has been procured by the co-operation of God and Christ, and came at the cost of our Lord's life. The attitudes referred to here suggest not only that that means little, but that it is vile and disgusting. They are all verbs, 'doing words', purposeful actions intended to insult God's grace. If the KJV makes them sound rather benign, the ESV translates them as "trampled", "profaned" and "outraged". A thought to ponder as we develop our theme: unforgiveable sin is calculated, deliberate rebellion, not human weakness.

HEBREWS 6:4-6

> *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy* [Spirit]*, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."*

We notice in verse 1 that the writer intends to speak about progress towards perfection; yet, sadly, the theme of these verses is regression. The case is stated that a man who has experienced all the benefits listed ought to be making progress towards perfection. There is no expectation of the need to lay again a doctrinal foundation, or the concepts of repentance and faith. These have been established and ought not to require vigorous revision. University mathematics classes do not recite the times tables; they have progressed beyond that. The Hebrew writer expected better things of his audience than the need for intensive revision of first principles.

Those to whom this warning is addressed are in some way in a class of their own. Not only were they enlightened; they had enjoyed first-hand the gifts of the Holy Spirit, defined as "the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come". These words of warning are in a sense specific, therefore, to those who were recipients of the Spirit gifts in the first century. Much having been given them, much was expected of them by way of progress toward perfection. This gives us no licence to treat God with contempt, for we have been blessed with the completed good Word of God.

FALLEN – AND DESTROYED

What is this 'falling away' of which the writer speaks? Unhappily, the Greek word in question occurs only here. However, there is a family of words in Scripture that have a common origin. The portion shared by them all is the idea of 'falling down'. It seems to me that what is being spoken of is failure or ruin. It is the idea that was used by Jesus of the house built on sand (Matthew 7:27), and we read of the same idea in Hebrews 11:30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down" – and, we might add, they stayed down. This is complete destruction and ruin. The meaning in Hebrews 6:6 is qualified by the word "renew", which means that the sinner cannot be restored. The reason why he cannot be restored is like the house on the sand and the walls of Jericho: the fall has destroyed him – like Humpty Dumpty of nursery-rhyme fame, who could not be restored, despite the best efforts of all the king's men. The fall has destroyed the sinner so completely that restoration is impossible.

Intrinsic to such a fall, the writer tells us, is the catastrophic rejection of Jesus. Such a fallen believer puts the Lord to such ridicule and rejection that we might well say he would have given his voice against Christ had he been present at the crucifixion. Such a person effectively sides with the crowd yelling "Crucify him, crucify him" (Luke 23:21), or "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Such a person takes his place alongside the wicked citizens in the parable, who hated the Lord and rejected his rule, and he will find that the Lord when he returns will say, "those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:12-27).

We can now proceed to expand on our emerging definition, to suggest that hatred and rejection of the Lord Jesus constitute a sin that will not be forgiven. ■

(Part 1 of 5)

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THE UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE

A NEW PREACHING OPPORTUNITY

There appears to be a trend for some mainstream Christians to reassess the doctrine of the Trinity and to discover the true Bible teaching that Jesus Christ is not part of a 'triune God'. As such seekers wonder if they are the only people to have discovered that Jesus was fully human – Son of God, yet Son of man – they begin to search for others who agree.

These seekers for truth generally use the generic term 'Biblical Unitarians' to describe their position. It has been carefully chosen to distinguish them from 'Unitarian Universalists', a group who inherited their name from the Unitarian Church of old, which eventually believed that Jesus was *only* a man and rejected his divine Sonship. Biblical Unitarians are quite different.

THE UCA

The Unitarian Christian Alliance (UCA) is an organisation formed in 2019 to raise the profile of distinctive 'Biblical Unitarian' beliefs and to support individuals who have found the truths mentioned above. The UCA is not a church, and it has no ambition to become one or to break down fellowship boundaries between existing churches. Its one reason for existing is to stand against the pervasive false doctrine that Jesus Christ is God, the second person of the Trinity.

The UCA has engaged with Christadelphians in the United States and the United Kingdom because its goals include helping its members to find suitable church communities to join. Of the few available options, they regard the Christadelphian community as an excellent choice. Since a number of UCA members have now made contact with Christadelphian ecclesias, it is appropriate to try to understand the movement, considering the risks and the preaching opportunities that it presents. An approach from members of an organisation that rejects belief in the Trinity appears to offer an interesting opportunity to preach the full gospel message to an interested and growing audience.

ACTIVITIES

The UCA promotes non-Trinitarian teaching online and via conferences, and facilitates communication amongst over 1,500 members in fifty-six countries. It produces books, posts and academic papers. Many more people listen to its podcasts, watch its videos and visit its website. A recent survey found that seventy-nine percent of UCA members are either 'in isolation' or, despite being non-Trinitarians themselves, still in churches which are Trinitarian.

There is therefore now a potential opportunity to preach to those who are looking for a community where a proper understanding of the nature of God and Jesus is essential, and who may be interested in exploring other biblical doctrines too. Any contacts made this way would attend Christadelphian meetings, and, if they wish to take their interest further, go through our normal robust processes of teaching. interviewing and (most probably) baptism, to satisfy ecclesias of the adequacy of their knowledge on a full range of topics – not just the nature of Christ.

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RISKS

Members of the UCA organisation sign up to the affirmation that "The one God is the Father alone, and Jesus is his human Messiah, who is now exalted as Lord and Saviour." [1] This statement does not contradict the Christadelphian understanding of Jesus, but it does not state explicitly his divine begettal, and it is not as biblically worded as Clause 2 of our *Statement of Faith*: "Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, begotten of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, without the intervention of man ..." The UCA statement can therefore accommodate beliefs that we would reject, so care must be taken to ensure that we really are 'on the same page' even on this topic. Nevertheless, subject to that vital qualification, those who have engaged with UCA members so far have often been impressed with their level of biblical understanding. There has usually been an agreement on the nature of Jesus and a good basis for further discussion.

Secondly, as a one-issue organisation, the UCA does not seek to define other doctrines. This is very different from Christadelphians, who share a whole set of interconnecting doctrines, not just this one. Agreeing on our understanding of Jesus and God does not always mean agreeing on other doctrines. Engagement thus far has shown that there *is* often considerable doctrinal overlap; but, as we have always done, this needs to be discussed on an individual basis. All our 'first principle' topics need to be explored: inspiration, the promises, sin and the 'devil', God's purpose with Israel, the Holy Spirit, the return of Christ, baptism, practical Christianity and matters of conscience ... and so on. Contact between UCA members and Christadelphians is a starting point for sharing our understanding of the *full* gospel message taught in the Bible.

Another potential risk could be that the UCA at some point alters its charter. It is very clear that the UCA is not a church; it does not arrange worship at its conferences, so there is currently low risk of an 'open table'. However, its position on any matter could change so as to make opportunities of engagement more challenging.

Should Christadelphians *become members* of the UCA? So far, this question has been left to the conscience of individuals. Some may consider this a step too far (a view that would be widely shared if joining involved or implied fellowship). Others will feel that it is an excellent preaching opportunity amongst those with a common interest, noting that no sharing of fellowship is involved, and that many of us are members of organisations with far less noble aims purely on the basis of a shared interest such as a hobby. So far as we are aware, no Christadelphians have been asked by the UCA to compromise on their beliefs or on the exclusive fellowship that we share via our acceptance of our carefully worded *Statement of Faith*. Indeed, many UCA members have shown themselves to be just as sensitive to fellowship boundaries as we are. If individuals do decide to get involved, then it may be a good idea to keep one's ecclesia informed and potentially to seek support.

WINDSOR CONFERENCE, JULY 2024

The UCA holds regular conferences in the United States. Christadelphians have attended and spoken at these conferences, with interesting contacts resulting. The UCA held its first UK conference at Windsor in July. This included sessions on aspects of the Bible's teaching about the nature of God and the relationship between Him and the Lord Jesus. Eighteen Christadelphians were among the eighty-six delegates, and a number were involved in leading sessions. The main presentations were generally academic in nature, more technical than a typical Christadelphian 'study day'. It did not include acts of worship – it was a conference.

Amongst the delegates there were real seekers after truth. One woman shared her church's reaction to questions that she and her husband were asking about the nature of God: "We read the Bible too much, we were told. In a surprisingly short time, our senior pastor asked us to leave."

1 See too the longer UCA affirmation at www.unitarianchristianalliance.org/the-uca-affirmation/

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Parents have been left without a supportive church to help them raise their children. The commitment of many UCA members to their beliefs was admirable. Some promote Bible teaching about the one God at Speaker's Corner in London – not for the fainthearted!

Christadelphian attendees were impressed to find UCA members exploring Bible passages in a biblical way, agreeing with our beliefs on such matters as the atonement and life after death by resurrection – which entails the rejection of an immortal soul. The lively discussion sessions provided a good opportunity to discuss Scripture teaching. Four delegates attended Christadelphian meetings on their way home, and three continue to visit Dunstable ecclesia.

POINTS TO PONDER

Christadelphians have always opposed the teaching of the Unitarian Universalists – that Jesus was just 'a good man'. Many Biblical Unitarians, however, are much closer to or aligned with our understanding of Bible teaching about God and Jesus.

So, are 'Biblical Unitarians' Christadelphians by another name? No. Biblical Unitarians focus on a single issue, and, as we have said, among them there is a spectrum of beliefs on other topics (the devil and the Spirit, for instance). However, having overcome the false idea of the Trinity – a huge barrier to truth – and with a proper understanding that resurrection and the Kingdom of God are the real Christian hope, some may be open to learning more from us. The UCA has a growing membership, good working relationships with Christadelphians, and a growing body of material which presents a case to answer for Trinitarian scholars. As Christadelphians, we should be able to provide definitive answers to Trinitarian 'wrested scriptures', being aware that the set of passages used by Trinitarians has changed over the years.

The UCA's effective use of social media to spread their message shows the benefit of giving thought and effort to preaching online in a coherent and consistent way. We might ponder the extent and effectiveness of our own preaching of the whole gospel in the this light. Whilst this is by no means a 'numbers game', the UCA are using Facebook, YouTube and podcasts to reach larger audiences than we do, and their preaching is generally much more visible. We could help make the Christadelphian name better known by participating in non-Trinitarian social media sites – for example, by posting comments in online discussions.

Many Christadelphian ecclesias have reduced their preaching activities, having not reinstated public Bible talks following the restrictions of the COVID pandemic. The current increase in seekers for truth may suggest that this is a mistake. Many at the Windsor conference had not heard of Christadelphians, which is a pity; but many who thought that they were alone were delighted to learn about us.

THINKING AHEAD

UCA conferences are expected to continue, with annual events planned for the USA and the UK, and a first conference in New Zealand in November. Those present at the July event found that taking part offered a genuine and valuable opportunity for meaningful conversations with people who do not believe in the Trinity.

In summary, engaging with the UCA does not involve worshipping with those who do not share all our beliefs, nor does it represent a drift towards ecumenism. Rather, the UCA initiative has opened a potential new 'door' of preaching, helping us to reach people who have turned away from a belief in the Trinity to a better understanding of the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ and his relationship to God. May God bless all our efforts to bring more people to a knowledge of the true gospel.

We thank Brother David Fenton (Maidstone), Brother Jeremy Pearce (Dunstable), Sister Christine Parker (Morecambe) and others for their help with this article. – EDITORS ■

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FEATURE

2025 MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE ARE CHANGING. THIS ARTICLE TELLS YOU HOW AND WHY.

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How much does it cost?

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What about *Faith Alive*?

We will announce our plans for *Faith Alive* in the spring.

ECCLESIAL PARCELS

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EXPOSITION

THE GREATNESS OF HIS POWER (2)

MICHAEL STOREY (COVENTRY, UK)

In the first part of our study, we considered the Apostle Paul's inspired words in Ephesians 1:15-23. Here he declares that he has prayed that God will give them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him", so that "the eyes of [their] understanding" will be opened to know three things. The first two of these things we considered last month; now we turn to the third:

"... and what is the exceeding greatness of [God's] power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ..."(9)

1 Bible quotations are from the KJV.

POWER

GOD'S POWER IN C

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year. They will not include a digital version of the magazine unless we are supplied with everyone's email address.

What about digital ecclesial subscriptions?

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REVIEW

A CHRISTADELPHIAN CLASSIC

PETER HALE (HASLINGTON, UK)

Many years ago, a dear friend asserted that *Christendom Astray* was the only book necessary (apart from your Bible, of course) for a preaching visit, because it contains every doctrine that you are likely to come across, along with many helpful supporting Bible references. Indeed, *Christendom Astray* covers all the biblical doctrines we need to know before baptism – and therefore, we believe, for salvation. But do we really need this book of 440 pages, written in 1884, based on lectures given in 1862, by Brother Robert Roberts, who died in 1898? The answer is, "Much every way!"

Brother Roberts faced a daunting task: to show the truth of the doctrines we believe in a single book – no PowerPoint, no visual aids, just a book. Yet this book remains effective and powerful. Its positive presentation of Bible truth is still of immense value. His plan was to give us "confidence in the Bible as a divine record" (page 2). And so he does. His standard was the highest, for as he says: "Nothing but an untrammelled individual knowledge of the Bible" will suffice if we are looking for salvation – a high ideal. Is there a better way? Surely not.

The author points out primarily that the Bible declares God's love for man. When *Christendom Astray* was first published, the Bible was highly respected and familiar to many. Early on in his book, however, Brother Roberts offered his generation (and still offers ours) some challenges:

- "That Christendom is astray from the system of doctrine and practice established by the labours of the apostles in the first century, is recognised by men of very different ways of thinking" (page 1)
- "... it is for every man by himself, and for himself, to seek to understand [the Bible], and to extend the benefit he may have received" (page 3)
- "The command is direct from the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself: 'Let him that heareth say, Come'" (page 3).

Brother Roberts asserts divine authorship for the whole Bible. He points out that "You cannot reject Moses while accepting Christ ... Moses and Christ stand or fall together" (page 4). The Bible has an "absolute unity of spirit and identity of principle" (page 6). It is "a literary miracle" (page 6). "The effect of the Bible is to make the man who studies it, better, happier and wiser" (page 8). On the other hand: "By his rejection of the Bible, the unbeliever sacrifices an immense present advantage. He deprives himself of the consolations that come with the Bible's declarations of God's love for man" (page 8).

His book takes us systematically through the Bible, via mortality, immortality, and judgment to come, to the second coming of Christ. Its final section turns to the application of one's study of the Scriptures, concluding with the personal appeal "To the interested reader" (page 436).

WORKED EXAMPLES

Quite recently, a dearly loved brother commented, "*Christendom Astray* is a real page-turner, because you are always wondering, 'How will he deal with this doctrine?'" An illustration of this may be helpful.

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Dealing with the popular belief in heaven and hell, the author cites the Lord's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), spoken to the Pharisees:

> *"It is either a literal narrative or a parable ... The rich man* lifts up his eyes, *being in torment, and* sees *Abraham* afar off, *and Lazarus in his bosom; and cries, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip* the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue*'. Does popular theology allow of the wicked in hell seeing the righteous in heaven? or admit of the possibility of conversation passing between the occupants of the two places? ... Is it a literal narrative? Even orthodox believers talk of it as a parable, which it doubtless is" (pages 45,46).*

The Lord speaks to the Pharisees' beliefs. The parable is based on their theory of the death state. "This did not involve [Jesus'] sanction of the theory, any more than his allusion to Beelzebub carried with it a sanction of the reality of that god of the heathen" (page 47). When Jesus spoke plainly of the true state of the dead, he spoke of his friend Lazarus: "Lazarus is dead" (John 11:14) – and yet, by contrast, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (verse 25). As Brother Roberts puts it: "It is in these plain words of Christ that we are to seek for Christ's real ideal on the subject of the dead, and not in a parabolic discourse, addressed to his enemies for the purpose of confusion and condemnation and not of instruction" (page 48).

There is a similar approach on the doctrine of judgment to come:

> *"The common idea of 'judgment to come', is that at a certain time ... God will bring every human being to individual account – that heaven will be emptied, and hell emptied, of their countless myriads of souls, which will be reunited to their former bodies (resurrected to receive them) and added to earth's living population and brought to judgment" (page 96).*

It does not seem to strike orthodoxy as strange that there should be a day of judgment on which everyone's fate is sealed, despite their immortal souls having gone to heaven or hell at death. Judgment has its basis in responsibility (which explains where children stand in relation to judgment, as Brother Roberts asserts).

THE TEST OF TIME

This is a book that has stood the test of time. Some may feel that some of the beliefs that it refers to have fallen out of fashion, but the book always gives useful background information, and can be profitable, whether for preaching or for personal study. Reading it gives us an insight into what some of the visitors to our ecclesias may believe, and their reasons for that. *Christendom Astray* could help us to talk to our friends with more confidence, and in a more informed way, and perhaps, with God's blessing, win them over to the Truth as it is in Jesus. It can also bolster our own confidence in the Bible.

So we come to the final appeal, "To the interested reader" (pages 436–439). After all his in-depth research, Brother Roberts changes his style completely. He points out that there is a body of people who believe the teaching contained in this book. They are called 'Christadelphians', and they meet in 'ecclesias' – he explains why we prefer not to use the word 'church', 'ecclesia' meaning "the assembly of the called out" – to break bread on the first day of each week to remember Jesus, as he commanded. They have no ministers. Unpaid members deal with the conduct of any necessary business and they have "a mutual care of each other in things spiritual and temporal" – a final challenge for us, perhaps. To paraphrase Brother Roberts' conclusion: "If you want to contact this group, then get in touch with the people who gave you this book."

Whether you are young or not so young, and whether you see it as a useful preaching tool or as a boost for your day-to-day faith, this book remains a 'must read'. ■

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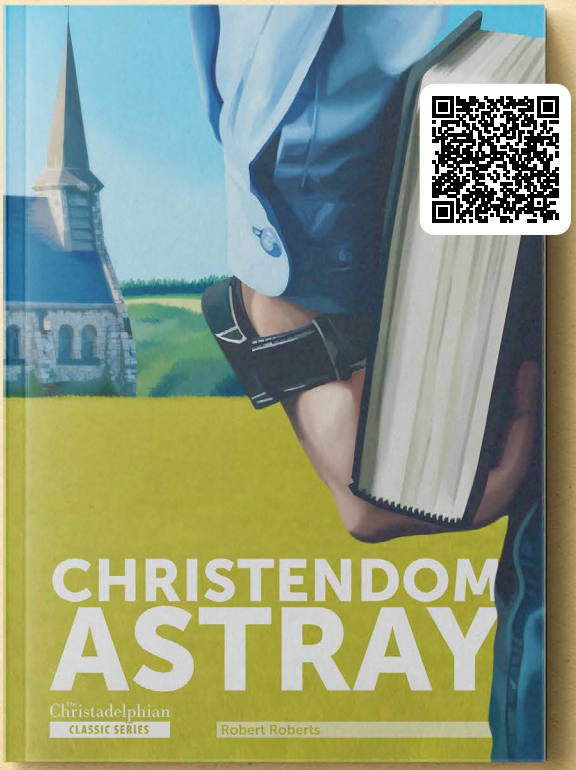
REVIEW

AFFIRMING OUR FAITH IN THE BIBLE

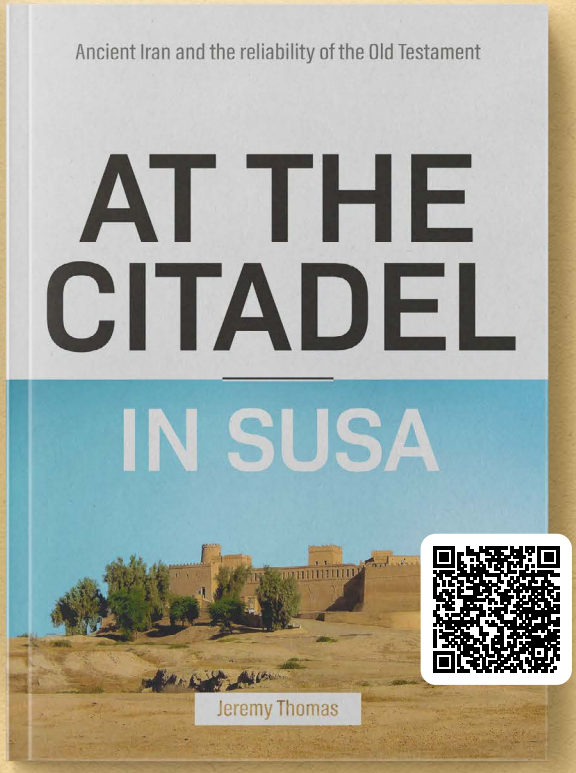
DAVID FRASER (DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA)

It is wonderful when a Bible topic fires up a young mind and drives a lifelong passion for its understanding. Such a spark kindled in Brother Jeremy Thomas the desire to understand the ancient history of the Medo-Persian Empire, and its connection to our faith in the vivid events of the Book of Esther that unfold in the biblical palace at Shushan (from which the book's title is derived). The empire, spanning an historical period of just over 100 years and featuring in ten or so books of the Bible, is expertly described in his 182-page book, which is logically presented, information-rich, and well illustrated throughout, with detailed tables that make perfect Bible inserts.



UNPICKING THE NAMES

As the author explains, almost nothing remains of written primary-source material on the empire. His insights are primarily from later Greek texts and historians, and are blended with archaeological evidence, where he deftly deals with critics who don't share our appreciation of



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the inspiration of Scripture. As a non-historian, I had battled with many of the chronologies, naming conventions and titles of the empire's kings without proper satisfaction until the author expertly unpicked them, presenting us with an honestly reasoned and richly referenced view of this intriguing age, by clearly naming and placing key Medo-Persian kings who feature in Scripture, and also those who don't.

In identifying the king named Ahasuerus in the Bible, Brother Jeremy takes us on a fascinating journey through ancient manuscripts, biblical clues and archaeological digs to convincingly present his candidate: a king who invaded Greece and embarked on spectacular building projects, and whose epithet was 'the Great' – his exciting identity awaits the reader!

VIVID PICTURE OF A BIBLICAL CITY

And what of the Citadel at Susa? Among the other key cities of Medo-Persia – Pasargadae (the first capital), Persepolis (the ceremonial capital), Ecbatana (the summer retreat), and Babylon (the conquered administrative capital) – Susa stands as one of the world's oldest cities, capital of several empires and a strategic trading city. It was in this metropolis and its famous court that the thrilling story of Esther, Haman and Mordecai played out. The author paints a graphic picture of the extensive court complex of the king, and locates the very room in which the tense moments of Esther 5:1,2 unfolded when the king extended his golden sceptre to Esther's outstretched hand.

For the first time in my mind's eye, Brother Jeremy's vivid picture of the Citadel and the events which took place in each area of the court has made it much easier to read the Book of Esther. Tantalising details include a statue that Mordecai probably gazed on, textual details that are still clear in the archaeological ruins (such as the city square through which Haman led Mordecai on horseback), the probable identity of the nearby 'river' of Ulai, famed for its connection to Daniel, and even the possible location of the prophet's tomb – these are a few of the Bible-anchored gems that he unearths.

The author presents engaging details of the later King Darius's life, including a trilingual Persian equivalent of the Rosetta Stone that colours the events of the Jews' return from exile in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra. The book concludes by critically and carefully examining the historicity of the story of Esther, expertly dealing with apparent contradictions and difficulties. Overall, a stand-out feature of this work is the faith-affirming corroboration of the Bible with archaeological evidence.

RECOMMENDATION

The book is a comfortable read owing to the author's fluid writing style, something which often can't be said of historical or archaeological exegetical texts. Despite the relatively high level that the book is pitched at, it can be approached without requiring specialist-domain knowledge of the reader – not an easy achievement, considering a technically 'dense' topic such as this. Readers of varying skill and maturity levels should all derive value from this work. A great read in a day, yet eminently suitable as a reference book with a detailed scriptural index, extended resources and bibliography – it works equally well for both.

At the Citadel in Susa uniquely harmonises the biblical and the secular in a way we've never previously enjoyed in the brotherhood, and in my view should be a standard on any well-rounded Christadelphian bookshelf. ■

Christendom Astray *by Robert Roberts. The Christadelphian (2021 edition). Paperback; 450 pages. ISBN 978 0 85189 009 8. £12.00 plus postage; e-book: £7.50.* At the Citadel in Susa: Ancient Iran and the reliability of the Old Testament *by Jeremy Thomas. The Christadelphian (2024). Paperback; 192 pages. ISBN 978 0 85189 497 3. £10.00 plus postage; e-book: £7.00. Both titles available from the Christadelphian Office.*

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BIBLE NUGGETS

30 – THRESHINGFLOORS AND WINEPRESSES

GAB BAUER (BIRMINGHAM, UK)

We have spent the last few Nuggets following a train of thought to do with corn and wine. We repeatedly saw the link to God's blessings, and the obligation on us to respond by sharing His gifts with others.

The aspect of corn and wine under consideration this time puzzled me at first. In a chapter which deals with God's judgment on Babylon, we read:

> *"The daughter of Babylon is like a* threshingfloor*, it is time to* thresh *her: yet a little while, and the time of her* harvest *shall come" (Jeremiah 51:33).* [1]

A few pages on, but chronologically earlier, we read of God's judgment on Judah in these terms:

> *"the Lord hath* trodden *the virgin, the daughter of Judah,* as in a winepress*" (Lamentations 1:15).*

A number of other Bible passages use the same imagery (see Isaiah 63:1-6; Micah 4:12,13; Habakkuk 3:12; Revelation 14:14-20).

Perhaps the most intriguing passages are in Joel. His prophecy is full of corn- and wine-related ideas. Joel 3 brings us to judgments on the nations and the final conflict before the establishment of the Kingdom, and we find the same pictures being used. Even the preparations for war have echoes of corn and wine:

> *"beat your plowshares* [for the cornfields] *into swords, and your pruninghooks* [used on vines] *into spears" (verse 10).*

The judgment itself reads thus:

> *"Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.* Put ye in the sickle*, for* the harvest *is ripe: come, get you down; for* the press *is full,* the fats [wine vats] *overflow; for their wickedness is great" (verses 12,13).*

Why is it that imagery which we found associated with blessing is now seen in the context of judgment?

On reflection, it makes perfect sense. Every judgment is a reckoning, and God is asking what His people (and the other nations) have done with the blessings that He bestowed on them. Their responsibility – and ours – could be described in terms of 'bringing forth fruit'. Occasionally, God will bring circumstances into our lives (judgments) which will put pressure on us – crush us, as it were – to see if there is any substance to us, or if we are empty shells, husks which the wind will carry away, and which will be burned with unquenchable fire.

In a sense, the idea of judgment is there even in the bread and wine. Writing to the Corinthians about the Lord's supper, Paul says:

> *"let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation* [judgment] *to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:28,29).*

When we examine ourselves, we are asking ourselves what we have done with the blessing of the hope of life in the Lord Jesus Christ. ■

1 Bible quotations are from the KJV.

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CHRISTADELPHIANS AND POLITICS (2)

MARK ALLFREE AND SIMON GENDERS (NOTTINGHAM, UK)

Last month, we discussed some of the biblical principles that underlie the stance taken by the Christadelphian community since its foundation: that we do not take part in politics. In recent years, this stance has sometimes been questioned. This month and next, we consider some of the questions which challenge our well-established position.

Question 1. If it is true that we shouldn't vote because we are citizens of the Kingdom of God (Philippians 3:20), why is it acceptable to use our natural citizenship to obtain and use a passport? Does the example of the Apostle Paul, who used his Roman citizenship, provide us with a valid reason for us to take part in politics?

The word 'citizen', in both English and Greek, relates to a city – that is, the city (or, by extension, the state) in which we were born and to which we are in some sense connected. Certain privileges are granted to citizens, which may include being allowed to vote in elections or to use a passport. In fact, voting is sometimes seen as a citizen's duty, and in some countries – Australia, for instance – it is mandatory. There are benefits when citizens travel abroad too. If problems occur, they are able to use the services of their embassy or consulate.

Most of us have an earthly citizenship by birth. Nevertheless, in a spiritual sense, we are citizens of heaven – 'born in Zion' (Psalm 87:5,6). This question therefore boils down to priorities. Which matters most to us: our earthly or our heavenly citizenship? Where does our true allegiance lie? To which city do we truly belong? The answer is found in Hebrews 11, where we read of faithful men and women confessing by their actions that they were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (verse 13), [1] and that the 'city' of which they really wanted to be part was a 'heavenly' one: "if they had called to mind that

1 Bible quotations are from the NKJV.



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country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (verses 15,16). As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called upon to prioritise that better, heavenly country – the city that God has prepared for us too.

Is there a moral contradiction, then, if we say that our spiritual citizenship is in heaven, but at the same time feel happy to make use of a passport and its related benefits – and yet refuse to vote? Is this position consistent?

It is worth considering the way in which the Apostle Paul made use of his own earthly citizenship. When he appealed to Caesar, he was using the benefits of being born a Roman citizen, true; but not merely for his own ends. The Lord had told him that he would bear witness of him at Rome (Acts 23:11), and by Paul's appealing to Caesar that divine purpose was eventually accomplished. In this way, Paul's earthly citizenship was made use of specifically so that he could accomplish this God-given work. In general, however, he regarded even his exceptional human heritage as amongst the things that he counted as "rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (see Philippians 3:4-8). His status and education made it possible for him to greatly influence the politics of his day, and before his baptism he had probably been a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Once he became a disciple of Christ, however, he put all these things behind him. He did not seek to influence the political world of his day.

Whilst Paul had a special commission from the Lord, we can learn from his example. Many of us will not have hesitated about using our earthly citizenship to obtain a passport for foreign travel. Countless brothers and sisters have done just that to facilitate work for the Truth – for example, for CBM preaching or supporting an overseas Bible school. Others will routinely use the opportunity of a foreign holiday to share fellowship with Christadelphians overseas, offering them spiritual support in their isolated circumstances. In such ways, it is possible to use the benefits of earthly citizenship as a means of serving God. As with all the blessings that God gives us, the challenge is that we can find ways of using them in His service, or we can use them simply to satisfy ourselves.



The scriptural principles that teach us not to vote or to take part in politics, however, involve more than the question of our true citizenship. Other reasons include the fact that it is God's prerogative to direct the affairs of the nations of this world, in line with His will; and that

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few human rulers are true followers of Christ, so inevitably the ways in which they practise their politics cannot be endorsed by disciples in Christ. Paul teaches that we should "be subject to the governing authorities" – that is, neither resisting nor actively participating – because they are effectively 'God's ministers' (see Romans 13:1-7). In all our ways, our conduct should be consistent with our declared desire to be citizens of God's heavenly Kingdom, and we should therefore avoid giving any endorsement (including by voting for it) to a governing system that Jesus will overthrow at his return.

Question 2. Shouldn't we be a force for good in the world? Shouldn't Christians be trying to make a positive difference? In what better way can this be done than by voting for an appropriate political party?

Certainly, the Apostle Paul says that we must "do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). And when we do so, it should be in the true spirit of Christ, and not in a way that draws attention to our good deeds. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:3,4). However, it is not necessary for us to get involved in politics to "do good to all". The biblical principles outlined last month indicate that to do so is inappropriate for disciples of Christ.

Jesus also said: "you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good" (Mark 14:7). Hard though it is, we therefore have to accept that, this side of the Kingdom, problems such as poverty and social injustice are not going to go away. The world's problems will not be resolved unto the Lord returns to "bring justice to the poor of the people … and … break in pieces the oppressor" (Psalm 72:4). We are not called on to solve the ills of this world.

What we can – and must – do is to preach the gospel. We are "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20), and it is our responsibility as his representatives to speak the truth of the gospel boldly. Ambassadors represent the interests of their own country to another country. They live as foreigners in a foreign land – and this is what we are, just like Abraham, who "dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country … for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9,10).

For Christ's ambassadors, the primary objective must be to tell people about the coming Kingdom of God. We must "preach the word [being] ready in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). It is our privilege to spread the good news that, if we respond to the gospel call, then the Scriptures hold out for us the hope of eternal life in a world free of war and conflict, when "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

Whilst we may have the desire to do good in this world, 'the mind of Christ' that we are asked to cultivate is alien to the thinking of this world and its politics. When the Labour Party came to power in the United Kingdom in 1997, Alastair Campbell, an atheist and Labour's chief strategist, famously said, "We don't do God." What could be more contrary to what we believe as disciples of Jesus, waiting for his return to establish the Kingdom? As we endeavour to live by the principles of Christ's teaching, being "not … conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2), we have no common ground with those who adopt this point of view.

Question 3. Was it right for Daniel and Joseph to accept government positions? And what about Lot, who 'sat in the gate' in Sodom (Genesis 19:1)?

Following the incident of King Belshazzar's feast, when Daniel was able to interpret 'the writing on the wall', Belshazzar promoted him

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in the kingdom of Babylon: "they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom" (Daniel 5:29). Similarly, when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, he was promoted to high office in Egypt. Pharaoh said to him, "You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you" (Genesis 41:40). In effect, Joseph was appointed prime minister of Egypt.

> **"NOW THEN, WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, AS THOUGH GOD WERE PLEADING THROUGH US: WE IMPLORE YOU ON CHRIST'S BEHALF, BE RECONCILED TO GOD."**
> 2 Corinthians 5:20

On other occasions, however, Daniel made a stand for conscience' sake. He risked King Nebuchadnezzar's wrath when he "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies" (Daniel 1:8). It is interesting to ponder why he did this. Perhaps the king's food had been dedicated to Babylonian gods; or perhaps it did not comply with the requirements of the Law of Moses regarding what was clean and unclean. Clearly, therefore, Daniel was a very faithful, principled man, and he would not have hesitated in refusing the position of rulership had he considered it necessary to do so for conscience' sake. The same can be said for Joseph, who is also recorded in Hebrews 11 as a man of great faith.

There is no doubt that God was at work in the lives of both men, each of whom was put into a position of influence by God, who "rules in the kingdom of men" (Daniel 4:17). Both Egypt and Babylon were used by Him in the accomplishment of His purpose for His people Israel.

Jacob and his family went down into Egypt to escape the consequences of the great famine in Canaan, and there the Israelites became a great multitude. God had sent Joseph into Egypt to prepare the way for his brothers and "to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). His elevation to high office in Egypt was therefore an expression of God's loving provision for His people.

Similarly, despite the fact that Judah had been carried away to Babylon because of their iniquities, God said: "though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you" (Jeremiah 30:11). By elevating Daniel to a position of influence, God was again caring for His people, helping to preserve them as a distinct people during the time of their captivity, and paving the way for their eventual return from exile. It may well have been as a result of Daniel's influence that King Cyrus of Persia was prompted to make his decree (Ezra 1:1-4), allowing the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild the temple.

The case of Lot in Sodom is altogether different. Following his disagreement with Abram, "Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom" (Genesis 13:12). Some time later, Lot became increasingly involved in Sodom's affairs, such that he 'sat in the gate' of the city (19:1) – the city gate was where civil and administrative affairs were conducted. It was a most unwise thing for Lot, a "righteous man" (2 Peter 2:8), to involve himself in such matters in such an ungodly place. His decision to become so involved in the affairs of that wicked city nearly cost him his life. When God destroyed Sodom, only Lot and his two daughters escaped – even his wife was consumed when God's righteous judgments fell upon that place. Lot's example, then, is a powerful argument against getting involved in the politics of this world. ■

(Part 2 of 3)

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WORKSHOP

A PSALM ABOUT THE LORD JESUS: PSALM 2

JEREMY THOMAS

1 *Why are the nations in an uproar*
and the peoples devising a vain thing?
2 *The kings of the earth take their stand and*
the rulers take counsel together against the
LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
3 *"Let us tear their fetters apart and cast*
away their cords from us!"
4 *He who sits in the heavens laughs, the*
Lord scoffs at them.
5 *Then He will speak to them in His anger*
and terrify them in His fury, saying,
6 *"But as for Me, I have installed My King*
upon Zion, My holy mountain."
7 *"I will surely tell of the decree of the*
LORD: He said to me, 'You are My Son,
today I have begotten you.
8 *'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the*
nations as your inheritance, and the very
ends of the earth as your possession.
9 *'You shall break them with a rod*
of iron, you shall shatter them like
earthenware.'"
10 *Now therefore, O kings, show*
discernment; take warning, O judges of
the earth.
11 *Worship the LORD with reverence and*
rejoice with trembling.
12 *Do homage to the Son, that he not*
become angry, and you perish in the
way, for his wrath may soon be kindled.
How blessed are all who take refuge in
Him! (NASB 1995)

Question 1: Read Psalm 2. Don't rush. Most of the verses are made up of pairs of phrases – a way of repeating, expanding or contrasting ideas. As you read, notice these pairs, and try to get a feel for how they 'move' – this is poetry.

Question 2: Is there a historical background to this psalm in the life and experiences of King David? If you think there is, find as many links as you can with the words and ideas in Psalm 2.

Question 3: How do we know that this psalm is about the Lord Jesus? Find firm evidence for this (for example, quotations from Psalm 2 elsewhere in the Bible).

Question 4: In the light of your answer to Question 3, now work out who's speaking in each verse. Are any of your answers unexpected?

Question 5: In the light of your answer to Question 4, now divide the psalm into sections, according to who's speaking and what's happening – and when. Do you notice anything about the overall structure of the psalm?

Question 6: How do you think the Lord Jesus understood Psalm 2 during his earthly ministry? How may it have prepared him for his work? How may it have helped him in times of temptation?

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JESUS' GENEALOGIES

Dear Brother Mark,

Thank you for your interesting articles on the two genealogies of Christ (August, page 414; September, page 480). It is true, as you say, that we cannot be absolutely certain of the explanations for their differences. However, they do provide the opportunity for some scripturally based speculation.

There seems to be a major difficulty with the suggestion that Matthew's genealogy was the literal one, as it includes King Jeconiah. In Jeremiah's prophecy, Jeconiah was disqualified from being a progenitor of Jesus: "Thus says the LORD: 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah'" (Jeremiah 22:30, ESV). A future role of Jesus is to sit on David's throne (Luke 1:32). Thus it seems that the levirate marriage argument can more likely be applied to Matthew's record, rather than to Luke's as you suggest.

The Matthew genealogy is very stylised and in fact contains forty-one names, not forty-two, so it is necessary to count someone twice to get the 3 × 14 stated in the text (Matthew 1:17). This emphasises King David, and Jesus' credentials as his legal seed – that seems to be Matthew's main aim.

Readers may be interested in an article published a few years ago in *Testimony* magazine. [1] This article drew on an earlier article *The Christadelphian* [2] and attempted to reconcile the two genealogies. The article suggests the possibility that Matthat (Luke 3:24) and Matthan (Matthew 1:15) are the same person. This man had two sons, Jacob and Heli. Jacob had no sons and so adopted his brother's son, Joseph, who married his daughter, Mary. Hence Joseph is the son of Jacob in Matthew's record and the son of Heli in Luke's record. This would mean that Mary married her first cousin, Joseph – like the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 36:11). Though not certain, this approach would reconcile the two genealogies and reinforce Jesus' pedigree as both the natural seed and the legal seed of David, and the rightful heir to Judah's throne through both his mother and his adoptive father. It has the additional virtue of linking Mary and Joseph in a way reminiscent of earlier faithful Israelites.

Sincerely your brother,
Chris Davenport (Rugby, UK)

Dear Brother Mark,

Thank you for your interesting articles concerning the two genealogies of Jesus. It is frequently said that Jesus' genealogy in Luke's Gospel states that Adam was the son of God. May I suggest an alternative reading of the text?

We are used to the Scriptures using the word 'son' in a wider sense than common English does. Jesus is called 'son of David', and we recognise that this means that he descended from King David, who lived many generations earlier. 'Son' in this sense means 'descendant'. I suggest that this is how we should read the whole of Luke's genealogy, which then makes much more sense. Taking Luke 3:23,24 as an example, the sense would be: "Jesus [was] the son [descendant] of Heli; Jesus was the son of Matthat; Jesus was the son of Levi; Jesus was the son of Melchi …" Thus in verse 38 – "the son of Adam, the son of God" – it is Jesus who is the Son of God in this context, not Adam.

This way of reading Luke's genealogy also makes more sense of verse 23: "Now Jesus himself began his ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli" (NKJV). Luke is not telling us that Joseph was the

1 "The genealogies of Christ", *Testimony*, vol. 88, no. 1,036, Mar. 2018, p. 95.

2 "From an interleaved New Testament", *The Christadelphian*, vol. 54, no. 636, Jun. 1917, p. 262.

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son of Heli. The NKJV, like the KJV, has the words "as was supposed" in parentheses. In keeping with what has been suggested, we can put the whole of the clause "being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph" in parentheses. People did suppose that Jesus was the son of Joseph, and indeed Joseph was his adoptive legal father.

With love in Jesus,
John Benson (Hitchin, UK)

Dear Brother Mark,

I have very much appreciated the articles on the genealogy of our Lord. The lists in Matthew and Luke have intrigued scholars since ancient times, and various explanations have been offered as to how they relate to Mary and Joseph. There are several questions in relation to these records for which it is impossible to give definitive answers, but the suggestions made in the recent articles, and in the letter in the September magazine (page 490), offer much food for thought.

In the September article, it is suggested that Mary may not have had any brothers. Whilst it is impossible to be dogmatic on whether that is the case, this suggestion would be consistent with the fact that, when Mary came home after her visit to Elizabeth, the text says she "returned to her own house" (Luke 1:56). An unmarried teenage woman would be unlikely to have her own house unless she were both an orphan and had no brothers. Mary and Martha in Bethany, for instance, lived in the house of their brother, so it is reasonable to assume that the mother of our Lord would have lived in the home of her parents or a brother until she married Joseph.

Your brother in Christ,
Geoff Henstock (Adelaide, Australia)

THE COMING OF CHRIST

Dear Brother Mark,

I have become increasingly concerned over the last few years at a shift in the brotherhood's interpretation of prophecies concerning events after the glorious return of Jesus to the earth. A 'secret' coming of Christ is suggested, with judgment taking place in secret at Mount Sinai and followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb. It is said that during this period, possibly of ten years, the world is completely oblivious to Christ's return. It has even been suggested that during this time Elijah will go to Israel to warn them of a northern invasion of an alliance of nations led by Russia; but this will prove fruitless, and only a remnant will survive the invasion. Christ and the saints will then march from Sinai to the Mount of Olives, which will then split in two, resulting in the destruction of the invaders at the battle of Armageddon. The saints, it is suggested, will not experience the 'time of trouble' that will afflict the inhabitants of the earth at this time.

I recommend that we give careful consideration to Brother Tecwyn Morgan's booklet *Christ is Coming*, written some years ago but still available online. [3] In the section "Tribulation" we read this:

> *"Will the believers waiting for their Lord have to suffer this trouble, or will they be spared? The likelihood is that present-day believers will live through this time of trouble, indeed that they have already begun to do so. Jesus promised that for the elect's sake that time would be shortened (Mark 13:20). But those who finally stand approved before the Judge are those 'which came out of the* great tribulation*, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:14)."*

The following two paragraphs do suggest that God will provide some protection for the faithful, quoting Isaiah 24:18-23 and 26:20,21.

The danger of the belief in a secret, almost Rapture-like gathering of the saints is that when the world's trouble reaches a peak, those remaining may think that they have not been

3 thechristadelphianjournal.com/read-booklets-online/christ-is-coming/

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taken to judgment and conclude that they have been rejected by Christ.

Sincerely your brother in Christ,
Douglas Brown (Strathaven, UK)

ETERNAL FIRE

Dear Editors,

Thank you for October's interesting question of the month on "eternal fire" (page 532). In Matthew 18:8,9, "eternal fire" is paralleled with "hell [Gehenna] fire". My understanding of this passage is that Jesus is speaking in the first instance of the fiery destruction of AD 70, after the pattern of the 'unquenchable fire' of Jeremiah's day – see, for instance, Jeremiah 7:20; 19:6,13, where Jerusalem is prophesied to become like Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom and suffer God's wrath, which will "burn, and … not be quenched". In this scenario, "eternal fire" means fire that cannot be put out until it has done its God-ordained job of destruction.

With love in our Lord Jesus,
Mary Benson (Norwich, UK)

THE TRUE VINE

Dear Brother Mark,

I have followed Brother Geoff Henstock's article (August, page 420; September, page 474) with interest, in particular the Old Testament teaching of the Messiah being the stem of the vine. I thank him for his work.

It is interesting that in John 15 our Lord's statement "I am the true vine" (verse 1) develops this theme, widening the concept to his being the whole vine, not just the stem. This is similar to the concept of the ecclesia being Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). At the Judgment, Jesus will say: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40, ESV). He said to the Apostle Paul: "why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4, ESV).

In John 15, Jesus speaks of his 'abiding' – both in us as individuals and in his ecclesia: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (verses 4,5, ESV). The fruit comes from our relationship with the Lord living and abiding in us. The Word of God in the Scriptures provides guidance, encouragement and refreshment; our relationship with Christ, the 'abiding' in him, motivates us to bring forth the fruit.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,
Andrew Collinge (Halesowen, UK)

MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Dear Brother Mark,

At this time of year, ecclesias and individuals will be considering taking out, or renewing, subscriptions to *The Christadelphian* and other magazines in the community. For several years, Stratford-upon-Avon ecclesia has purchased annual subscriptions on behalf of all members who would like to receive a copy of the magazine, which in our case is most households. If members so wish, they can reimburse the ecclesia through the general fund collection.

Such an arrangement ensures that no one misses out for financial reasons, and avoids the embarrassment of having to ask for financial support. Perhaps other ecclesias would consider adopting this or similar arrangements.

Sincerely your brother,
Andrew Bramhill (on behalf of Stratford-upon-Avon ecclesia)

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COMMUNITY

A SPIRITUAL RETREAT IN AUGUST

THE 2024 CHRISTADELPHIAN CONFERENCE

DARREN GUY, ARNE ROBERTS AND STEPHEN WHITEHOUSE

If you're looking for a spiritually enriching week centred on God's Word and enjoying good company in beautiful surroundings, then the Christadelphian Conference may be just what you need. This year, we (the three brothers authoring this article) had the privilege of attending and speaking, and we'd love to share what made it so special.

First of all, the venue was fantastic. We stayed at Moor Hall Conference Centre in Cookham, a stunning nineteenth-century manor house set in nine acres of lovely grounds. With just under seventy brothers and sisters attending, the atmosphere was cosy and intimate, making it easy to connect with everyone. The beautiful setting and the close-knit fellowship made us feel that we were all part of something special.



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From the moment we arrived, it was clear that this Conference had been thoughtfully designed for those at various stages of life, including singles, couples without young children, 'empty nesters' and older couples. The week provided a warm and inclusive environment where everyone felt welcome. We were immediately struck by the genuine sense of community – no cliques, no feelings of being left out, just a shared love of exploring Scripture.

Each day started with a devotion at 7:40 am. Yes, this was early, but it set the perfect tone for the day. This quiet reflection, allowing us to focus on God's Word, was followed by a hearty breakfast that got us ready for what lay ahead.

The morning sessions were the heart of the Conference. Our time together was spent studying God's Word, and the talks flowed naturally into our conversations throughout the day. Whether over coffee or during a walk, we found ourselves constantly discussing and reflecting on what we'd heard, keeping the studies a continuous part of our interactions.

After the morning talks, we broke into groups to discuss the daily readings. This is where the conference really came alive. Everyone had the chance to ask questions and explore the Scriptures together. The atmosphere was one of shared learning, where every voice mattered, making the discussions both enriching and personal.

Lunch was more than just a meal; it was a great opportunity to connect and build friendships. And let's talk about the food: it was amazing!

In the afternoons we had some free time, which many of us used to explore the charming village of Cookham. It's a quintessentially English village, with quaint shops and beautiful streets, perfect for a relaxing stroll. We often bumped into other brothers and sisters, which was a lovely way to continue building connections.

Later in the afternoon, there was a time set aside for asking the speakers questions – something that could have been rather nerve-wracking for us! But it turned out to be helpful, constructive and in fact very encouraging. After that, another talk was followed by dinner and then an evening programme that offered something different from the main study sessions.

Evenings were all about unwinding and enjoying each other's company. There was even a snooker table for those feeling a bit competitive. Let's just say that we discovered some hidden talents among us – some of the brothers and sisters were surprisingly good! It made for some fun (and occasionally rather intense) matches that added a bit of friendly rivalry to the week.

We want to extend a heartfelt 'thank you' to the Conference committee, whose hard work made everything run smoothly. Their dedication ensured that the Conference was a success and a memorable experience for all.

If you've ever thought that Bible Schools might not be for you – perhaps because you don't have a family to bring or a large group of friends – then this Conference could be exactly what you're looking for. The smaller size (there are only eighty spaces) and the welcoming atmosphere make it the perfect place to meet new people and grow spiritually. ■

If the Lord remains away, another week is planned for 2025, God willing. It's one not to miss! Speakers and subjects: Bro. Jon Hale (Crewe) – "Let us go forth unto him"; Bro. Martyn Lawrence (Doncaster) – "From the iron furnace (studies in the Exodus)"; Bro. Luke Whitehouse (Shirley) – "The reign of King Josiah". To book your place, use the form at the Conference website: **www.christadelphianconference.co.uk**.

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NEWS FROM THE ECCLESIAS

All arrangements "if the Lord will". Items for publication required by the 10th of the month.

BURUNDI

Benoit Mukendi | We are delighted to report the baptism of the following into the saving name of Jesus Christ, praying that we will be able to help one another as we await the Kingdom. **Mika** ecclesia: ***Doricimpa Valerie***, ***Ntahomenyereye Augustin***, ***Wachawaseme Victor***, ***Ntihinduka Jean de Dieu***, ***Nirera Angelique***, ***Ndihokubwayo Belyse*** and ***Nyanzira Denise***. **Rumonge** ecclesia: ***Christian Minani***, ***Ndayishimiye Theogene***, ***Nduwimana Christine***, ***Nyibuntu Huruma Happy***, ***Keza Kimana Ornella***, ***Mbazimana Clementine***, ***Irankunda Angel***, ***Deborah Balongelwa***, ***Shimirimana Anitha***, ***Niyotungiye Charline***, ***Kamariza Chantal***, ***Uwimana Florienne***, ***Jahari Masudi***, ***Ndayisenga Beoline***, ***Niyonsaba Aline***, ***Ingabire Aniella***, ***Niyonizigiye Consolatta***, ***Nishemezwa Rematta***, ***Bukeyeneza Francine***, ***Nihoza Fidelitte*** and ***Niyonkuru Revocat***.

CAMEROON

Paul Newton (CBM Linkman) | We are pleased to report the baptisms of ***Akamin Hilda Asongafac*** and ***Fuanya Pelkins Nkengbeza*** at Kompina ecclesia on 6 Oct. May they be blessed in their new lives in Christ.

CANADA

Hamilton (Book Road), ON | Ian Macfarlane | We rejoice with the angels in heaven at the baptism of two of our young people: ***Harrison Macfarlane***, son of Bro. Scott & Sis. Haley, on 30 Nov. 2023; and ***Lucas Alexander***, son of Bro. Brian & Sis. Rachel, on 31 Dec. 2023. We also joy in the marriage of Bro. Josh Pipe to Sis. Melanie Hodge on 2 Feb. We pray that God will bless this young couple as they begin their walk as heirs together of the grace of life. With sadness, we report the falling asleep of Sis. Mary Prette on 21 Aug. She was a non-resident member of our ecclesia, formerly a member of the Winnipeg ecclesia for many years. We pray that our Father will comfort her husband, Bro. Wayne, in the sure hope of the resurrection. We have commended Bro. Bill Olinyc and Sis. Jen Munro to the loving care of Brantford ecclesia. We are saddened that since then Bro. Bill has fallen asleep. We are further saddened to report that we have withdrawn fellowship from Bro. Jesse & Sis. Karen Pipe and Bro. Isaac Leadbetter. We pray that they will reconsider their walk and return to the bonds of fellowship before our Lord returns. The Christadelphian Heritage College continues to be run from our hall, and we are excited to start a new school year with some upgrades to the bulding, which will be welcomed by teachers and students alike. We pray that God will bless us in raising a godly seed to His honour and glory in these last days. Preaching efforts continue, including the Essential Bible Studies podcast, which will soon enter its seventh season. We are holding a Hope Day / Study Day on 25 and 29 Dec., at our ecclesial hall and online (**bookroadchristadelphians.ca**). Speaker: Bro. Jon Gore (Detroit, Milford Road, MI, USA); theme: "Practicing the royal law". Three classes on 25 Dec.; Sunday School and exhortation on 29 Dec.

CHINA

Hong Kong | Jon Scrivener | We extend a warm welcome of fellowship on Sundays to anyone travelling here for business or as a stopover to other destinations. As we are currently meeting in the homes of brothers and sisters; please contact the over-signed for location details (**jonscrivener17@yahoo.co.uk**).

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

East | Steve Weston and Benoit Mukendi | During a visit to the area by Bro. Benoit Mukendi (Toronto West), accompanied by brethren from Kinshasa, twenty-two baptisms took place at the following ecclesias: Bukavu, Goma, Kavumu, Kinshasa, Lukananda, Muyange and Panzi. May our Lord bless our new members in a country that remains unstable and sometimes unsafe: ***Katuta Kyama Albert***, ***Adamu Muninda Stephane***, ***Kaputa Kyenge Joseph***, ***Kalombe Kombe Jean***, ***Mukula Muleleko Amedee***, ***Lwenge Lubambo Benoit***, ***Kayeye Musenga Marcel***, ***Kalonda Kalunga Adili***, ***Mapengo Wa Mapengo Frederick***, ***Kisimba Thadee Clephas***, ***Kyodwa Musenga Moise***, ***Ngoy Mavava Blaise***, ***Kazika Wa Kazika Jacques***, ***Kalunga Muzimbe Lazare***, ***Mwavita Endesi Marie***, ***Mowa Kalombe Isabelle***, ***Lubambo Mutubi Antoinette***, ***Kabiswe Musenga Adidja***, ***Mitwele Muninda Pervseverande***, ***Mwamba Mukanga Aimerance***, ***Sumaili Mbungwe Marie***, ***Mpelembe Lubambo Annie***, ***Kanaila Muleleko Mimy***, ***Kalwa Lubambo Claudine***, ***Ndazi Senki Jolie Jeanne***, ***Mwenya Mulundu Elizabeth***, ***Mumba Lubambo Daddy***, ***Kisimba Kasumpa Miky***, ***Sonda Malilala***

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Edouine, *Kabembo Ponde Beatrice*, *Kapiya Bembe Joesphine*, *Katempa Lubambo Bernadette*, *Mbwisha Mubi Dorcas*, *Ngobola Zongwe Bernadette*, *Lukube Mukula Jeanne*, *Maki Musenga*, *Kyanda Musenga*, *Kalunga Kabala*, *Annociate Mpumpa* and *Zongwe Angele*. **Kasenga** ecclesia: *Mathieu Ramzani*, *Safari Tambwe* and *Nehema Matondo*; **Uvira** ecclesia: *Vumiliya Wamboko* and *Ndambuko Malega Martha*; **Kilembwe** ecclesia: *Byamungu Kasketi Champion* and *Ombeza Basimba Dangote*; **Fizi** ecclesia: *Abilola Didier*, *Evariste Alinote* and *Mwacha Empty*; **Kalundja** ecclesia: *Yangya Situmai Kazadi* and *Kashindi M'munga*; **Baraka** ecclesia: *Anna Shabani*, *Helene Alex*, *Apendeki Francoise* and *Mapendo Esperence*. We pray that we will be able to help one another as we are await our heavenly Father's Kingdom.

GERMANY

Esslingen | Volker Imhof | With happiness we report that our Sis. Ella Main was married to Bro. Nick Elton (Southern Vales, Adelaide, Australia) on 14 Sep. in Adelaide. We pray that our heavenly Father bless them on their walk of life and keep them safe on their way to His glorious Kingdom. In love, we commend Sis. Ella to Southern Vales, praying that she will be happy in her new ecclesial home.

MALAWI

John Mathias | There were baptisms in Malawi during September at the following ecclesias: Chiwoko, Chowe, Dzaleka Camp, Gona, Khancha, Likaka, Magomero, Makina, Manyamba, Namphota, Njumwa and Sakhome. Sadly, we report the falling asleep of Sis. Chisomo Lanjes of Nanchila ecclesia.

SOUTH AFRICA

Pinetown | Chagne Bilton | In August, we bade farewell to Sis. Debbie Payne (Barber), who has returned to Whanganui, New Zealand, after forty years in South Africa. She will be greatly missed, and we pray that she will be blessed as she settles in 'back home'. We report the following deaths: Bro. Alastair Clark (in isolation, Margate) on 2 Jul.; Sis. Norma Fraser (Coventry, UK, formerly of Pinetown ecclesia), on 7 Jul.; Sis. Fay Kaiser (17 Apr.); and Sis. Aminata Bushabu (10 Feb.). Our thoughts and prayers are with their families as we await Christ's return and the glorious resurrection to life. We enjoyed our quarterly Fraternal on 3 Aug., when Bro. Barry Law and Bro. Ian Sampson addressed the subjects "The coming Messiah" and "One God, one Christ". We were joined by several members from Durban and Pietermaritzburg ecclesias. The following have been baptised: *Bidi Bushabu* on 20 Aug. 2023; *Gillean Gersbank* (Fraser) on 2 Jun; and one of our students, *Ntombi Mkhize*, on 15 Sep. We pray for our heavenly Father's blessing as they walk with us towards the Kingdom. We have welcomed Sis. Lynn Ingle, Sis Anna Thabela and Sis. Heather Hartmann by transfer from Durban ecclesia, and Bro. Lionel Herselman from Westville ecclesia.

UNITED KINGDOM

Ashby-de-la-Zouch | Dan Weatherall | We are delighted to welcome Bro. Paul & Sis. Pam Oram from Leamington Spa ecclesia and Bro. Stephen & Sis. Emma Ensell from Walsall ecclesia. We look forward to sharing their company and faith. We report with sadness the falling asleep of Sis. Sylvia Singleton, who was baptised at Birmingham West in 1952 and had been a member here for twenty-four years. We share in the sorrow of her daughters, Sis. Sarah and Ruth, but we are comforted in the hope of resurrection. Our Youth Weekend (14+) is from 7-9 Feb. 2025. Speaker: Bro. Luke Whitehouse (Shirley); theme: "Daniel: faith in exile". Bookings open on 3 Nov. at **ashbyyouthweekend.co.uk**. Our memorial meeting time has changed to 11.30 am; our public Bible Hour remains at 10 am. The over-signed is now ecclesial secretary; please send all correspondence to **info@ashbychurch.co.uk**.

Bedford | Phil Crossley | In love, we commend Bro. Sina Radkoli to the care and fellowship of the brothers and sisters of Stratford-upon-Avon ecclesia. He will be missed, but we our pleased that he now meets with a new ecclesial family.

Birmingham (Acocks Green) | Paul Wasson | We rejoiced to witness the baptism, on 13 Sep., of *Luke Foley*. We pray that our heavenly Father will bless our new brother as he journeys with us towards the Kingdom.

Birmingham (Handsworth) | John Emanuel | We rejoiced at the baptism of *Neil Grimmitt* into the saving name of our Lord on 29 Jun., and look forward to sharing our walk towards the Kingdom with him. We are grateful to Rowley Regis ecclesia for the use of their hall.

Birmingham (Kings Norton) | Andrew Johnson | With sadness, yet in the certain hope of the resurrection, we record the falling asleep, on 28 Sep., of our dear Sis. Linda Syddall, aged 77. We will miss here, and we extend our love and sympathy to her husband Bro. John, their daughter Sis. Rachael Rogers (Studley), and to other members of the family. We pray that Sis. Linda will receive that crown of righteousness at our Lord's

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appearing. We are holding a Student Meal (for students in the Midlands) on 9 Nov., from 11.30 am, at our hall. Contact Bro. Tim & Sis. Miriam Collard with any dietary requirements (**timothycollard@gmail.com**). We are also holding a Study and Fellowship Day (for ages 18-25) on 15 Mar. 2025. Speakers: Bro. Kitson Reid (Birmingham, Acocks Green) and Bro. Joni Mannell (Walsall). To book, visit **forms.gle/QQTto1nM2BytjuNW7**.

Birmingham (West) | Tony Watkins | We rejoice with our Sis. Jemima Ashton and Bro. Sam Turton (Knowle and Dorridge), who were married at our hall on 2 Sep. We pray that they will be blessed in their life together. We are very pleased to welcome back into fellowship Sis. Michele Jones following a fully satisfactory interview. On 4 Oct., we were delighted to witness the baptism of ***Ruby Gayle***, daughter of our Bro. Mike & Sis. Claire. We pray that her life of faith and fellowship will be richly blessed.

Blackburn | David Garside | We commend Bro. Peter & Sis. Jean Brierley to Manchester (Sale) ecclesia. We thank them for their contributions to our ecclesial family over many years, and trust that they will grow with their new brothers and sisters. We mourn with Sis. Judith Instone and her family on the falling asleep of her father, Bro. Philip Adams. The father of the undersigned, Bro. Leslie Garside (Southport), fell asleep in September, soon after the falling asleep of his wife Sis. Ruth in June. We were privileged to work with such lovely brothers in Christ, who now are at rest awaiting the return of their Lord. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Blackpool | Adrian Webster | In love, we commend Bro. Rahim Meysam Nouriani to Stratford-upon-Avon ecclesia. May God bless him as he continues his journey to the Kingdom.

Bristol (Downend) | Steve Jenkins | We rejoice at the baptism of ***Melika Javanmardi*** on 6 Oct. We pray for our heavenly Father's continued blessing on our new sister, as we encourage one another towards the Kingdom. We welcome Bro. Radman Hamidreza by transfer from Tewkesbury ecclesia and look forward to his fellowship.

Cambridge | Simon Collard | Our Autumn Family Day is on 9 Nov., from 10.30 am, at our Hall in Vinery Rd., Cambridge and on Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Caleb Bilton (Pershore); theme: "The journey to God". Refreshments at 10.30; first talk at 11.00 am; children's activities to be arranged. Lunch will be served for those who join us for the day; please let us know if you intend to come. Meeting ID: 941 597 955.

Cannock | Wayne Marshall | In love, we commend Bro. Jacob Firth to the care of the brothers and sisters of Nottingham (Forest Road) ecclesia. We thank him for his service at Cannock since his baptism; we will miss him. We pray that they will be mutually blessed on their walk Zionwards. Our Study Afternoon is on 16 Nov., at 4 pm, at our Price Street hall and on Zoom. Online Farsi translation; refreshments served afterwards. Meeting ID: 816 2040 3126; no password.

Cardiff | Jeremy Morgan | We welcome Sis. Charlotte Hale, who has been commended to us in love by Crewe ecclesia. We look forward to her company on our journey towards the Kingdom.

Chester | Submitted by Martin Walker | We are delighted to report the baptism of ***Leila Najar*** on 29 Sep. We welcome Sis. Carmen Baines by transfer from Ashton-under-Lyne ecclesia, and Bro. Mehrdad Karami by transfer from Manchester (Old Trafford) ecclesia. We look forward to sharing fellowship with our brother and sisters as we walk together towards the coming Kingdom of God.

Colchester | John Swift | We commend Bro. Ali Roubin to the love and care of Castleford ecclesia and pray for his continued walk towards the Kingdom.

Coventry (Grosvenor Road) | David Blacklock | The second in a series of studies on the Book of Revelation, following the continuous-historic interpretation, is on 23 Nov., at 2.30 pm, at our hall and on Zoom. Speaker: our Bro. Mark Evans; theme: "Revelation 2" (two talks; refreshments afterwards). Meeting ID: 830 9030 3325; password: 074092. Our future studies are on 8 Feb. 2025 and 15 Mar. 2025.

Coventry (West) | Paul Davies | We are pleased to report the baptism of ***Morat (Moori) Nazari*** on 15 Aug. We pray for our heavenly Father's blessing on our new brother. We welcome by transfer from Leicester (Westleigh) Sis. Zahra Damangir and look forward to sharing fellowship. We are pleased to report that our Bro. Simeon Cope and Sis. Hattie Carr (East Pennines) were married on 10 Aug., and pray that their united walk towards the Kingdom will reflect the relationship between Christ and his bride. Our Fraternal Gathering is on 2 Nov., at 4.30 pm, at our hall. Speaker: Bro. Peter Owen (Mumbles); theme: "Hezekiah – he trusted in the LORD God of Israel" (two talks; tea served between at 5.30 pm). Our 16+ Youth Day is on 14 Dec. Speaker: Bro. Ben Dwyer (Walsall); theme: "Have ye not read?". Booking required via **tinyurl.com/CovWest16Plus2024**.

Crewe | Jon Hale | In love, we commend Sis. Charlotte Hale to the love and care of Cardiff ecclesia. We shall miss her contributions but wish her God's blessings as she settles in to her new ecclesia.

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Doncaster | Ken Hardy | We were delighted to baptise two of our friends into the saving name of Jesus: ***Masoud Bahadory*** and ***Soma Nikkhah*** were immersed on 8 Sep. during our breaking of bread service. We look forward to fellowship with them as we journey towards God's glorious Kingdom.

Dudley (Queens Cross) | Michael Harrison | Our Autumn Study Evening is on 9 Nov., at 4.30 pm, at our hall and on Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Luke Bennett (Nuneaton, Whitestone); theme: "The days of the Lord" (two talks). Light refreshments served afterwards. Meeting ID: 827 7412 0127; password: DQCstudy.

Dunstable | Jeremy Goodwin | We were very glad to witness two more baptisms into our Lord Jesus Christ on 25 Sep. We welcome Mahziar Mortazavi and Shokri, and pray that God will bless them on their journey towards His Kingdom with us.

East Surrey | Brenda Skinner | We commend Bro. Fardin Khosravi to his new spiritual home at Watford.

Glasgow (Kelvin) | Stephen Dawson-Bowman | We rejoice with the angels in heaven to witness, on 18 Sep. the baptism of ***Ali Mohammadi***. May our heavenly Father continue to bless our new brother as we edify one another on our joint walk towards His glorious Kingdom.

Gorseinon | Dan Pearce | We were delighted to witness the joining in marriage of Bro. Oudom Srin of Sihanoukville ecclesia (Cambodia) to our Sis. Bethanie Palmer. We pray that God will bless their union. We welcome Bro. Johnny & Sis. Rebekah Stevenson, who have joined us from Middlesbrough ecclesia, and hope they will be happy in their new ecclesial home.

Guildford | Submitted by Nancy Ramsden Duffield | Following his return from overseas, Bro. Nigel Harrison transferred to Petersfield ecclesia, to whom we commend him in love.

Halesowen | Andrew Thompson | We are delighted to report the baptism of ***Sally-Anne Cassim*** on 8 Sep. We thank our Bro. Malcolm Shilvock for his words of encouragement and advice. We pray for God's guiding hand to be with Sis. Sally-Anne on her walk towards God's Kingdom, hoping that she will be happy in her ecclesia.

Halifax (Balmoral Place) | Roger Eglen | We rejoice in the baptism of ***Pejman Rostami*** on 6 Oct., and pray that God will bless him in his walk towards the Kingdom. Our Bible Class Study Fraternal is on 30 Nov., at 4 pm, at our hall and on Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Andrew Whittaker (Heywood); theme: "The ark ascending": (1) "Touch me not"; (2) "Handle me and see". Refreshments afterwards. Meeting ID: 928 0338 2620; password 803691.

Heckmondwike | Darren Peach | With sadness, and yet in the sure knowledge of the resurrection, we report the falling asleep of Sis. Julia Fentiman, aged 81, on 14 Sep. She was baptised in 1958 and had spent her entire ecclesial life at Heckmondwike. She was active in the Sunday School, the Youth Circle and the Bible Learning Centre, and her tours of Israel witnessed to her love for the Land and God's chosen people. Sis. Julia's faithful pilgrimage is now over, and she sleeps awaiting the day of her Master's return, when she will be in Jerusalem again, standing before her Master. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family.

Heywood | Stephen Stoneley | Our Bible Class Gathering is on 7 Dec., at 4 pm, in our hall and on Zoom. Theme: "Moses the servant of God": (1) "In Egypt" – Bro. Todd Turner (Coventry, West); (2) "In Midian" – Bro. David Cullen (Morecambe); (3) "In the wilderness" – Bro. Jotham Anderton (Burton-on-Trent). Buffet tea after. Meeting ID: 867 6900 3951; password: 140548.

Lapworth | Les Shears | We are delighted to report the marriage of our Bro. Harry Genders and Sis. Phoebe Jefferies (Pershore), and pray for God's blessing to be with them in their new life together. We commend Sis. Lara Millar to the loving care of Nottingham (South) ecclesia. Lapworth Village Hall is not available for use on 24 Nov. and 1 Dec.; would anyone planing to visit on those dates please make contact to confirm the location of the meeting.

Leamington Spa | Robin Britton | With sadness, yet in the hope of resurrection, we report the falling asleep of Sis. Jean Daniels at Olivet on 12 Sep. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and all those who mourn. In love, we transfer our Bro. Paul & Sis. Pam Oram to Ashby-de-la-Zouch, thanking them for their service to our ecclesia in various capacities over the past twelve years.

Leicester (Westleigh) | Neil Bolton | We are delighted to report that ***Shahram Mahmoudi*** and ***Shayan Khanehbeigi*** were baptised on 6 Oct. We welcome our two new brothers and pray for their continued discipleship and spiritual wellbeing. Sis. Zahra Damangir transferred to Coventry (West) ecclesia. We are grateful that she has found a warm welcome, and are pleased to commend her in love to their care.

Llanelli | Paul Aston | In co-operation with Ammanford ecclesia, we are pleased to welcome back into fellowship Bro. Luke Tippins. We look forward to his company and help on the road towards God's Kingdom.

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London (Ealing) | Paul Sheppard | On 29 Sep., we were delighted to witness the baptisms of ***Fatemeh Azizi***, ***Hamied Dalirie***, ***Mohsen Masoumi***, ***Nian Mohammadi***, ***Sara Rahmati***, ***Toktam Gholami*** and ***Vida Parsatabar***.

London (Finsbury Park) | Andrew Fitch | Bro. Jonny & Sis. Helen Roberts have transferred to Maidenhead ecclesia following their return from the USA. We wish them and their children God's blessing in their new ecclesial home.

Lye | Mark Johnson | Our Summer Camp is from 26 Jul. to 2 Aug. 2025. See the entry under "Our work and fellowship" on page 613.

Maidenhead | Anthony Whitehorn | We are delighted to report the baptism of ***Noah Nouri***. It was a delight to witness his immersion, and we pray for a blessing on his new walk with Christ. We are also delighted to welcome Bro. Jonny & Sis. Helen Roberts by transfer from London (Finsbury Park) ecclesia. We pray for a blessing on their family as we "carry each other's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Manchester (Old Trafford) | Charles Crawford | We were delighted to witness the baptisms of ***Chloe Newton***, ***Isabelle Halstead*** and ***Mohammed Adzadi***. We welcome Sis. Alison Newton by transfer from Leeds (Oakwood). We look forward to sharing fellowship with them all. We are holding a Youth Weekend from 15-17 Nov. Theme: "Cancelled". Bookings can be made via **www.thebethel.org**.

Middlesbrough | Timothy Day | With a little sadness and a sense of loss, but with all our love, we have transferred Bro. Johnny & Sis. Rebekah Stevenson to Gorseinon ecclesia. We thank them for all the fellowship and support that they have given to Middlesbrough ecclesia and the Teesside ecclesias over the years. We shall miss them greatly, but we pray for God to bless them and their growing family in their new ecclesial home.

Mountsorrel | Glenn Smith | With sadness, we report the falling asleep on 28 Sep. of Sis. Norma Elizabeth Forbes (*née* Hughes), aged 75. Baptised at Birmingham (Acocks Green) in August 1967, she was a faithful and quiet sister. She now rests in the sure hope of resurrection to life at our Lord's return. We extend our loving sympathy to Bro. Peter and the family.

Mumbles | Michael Movassaghi | With sadness we report that Bro. Ben Eagle has resigned from fellowship. We are deeply grieved by his decision, but it is our earnest prayer that, by God's grace, he will reconsider his position and return to the fellowship of his brethren and sisters.

Newbury | Chris Edwards | We are very pleased to report recent baptisms, the result of personal preaching: ***Saba Gheybi*** (wife of Bro. Ahad), ***Aida Biglary*** and ***Alireza Sarbazi*** (brother of Sis. Parisa). We are glad to expand our ecclesial family, and pray that we can support one another.

Newcastle (Staffs.) | Martin Evans | With sadness we report the falling asleep of Bro. Stan Wale, who now awaits the coming of Christ and the wonderful day of resurrection. Our thoughts and prayers are with Sis. Liz and the family.

Oldbury | Linda Garcia | With much regret, we record that Bro. Majid Sedaghat, Bro. Aref Mohammadi and Bro. Hossein Ebrahimi are no longer in fellowship. We pray they will have a change of heart before our Master's return.

Oldham | James Hartley | We sorrow, yet not without hope, at the falling asleep of our dear Sis. Julie Shaw. She was baptised at 16 and remained faithful for her pilgrimage of seventy years, a member of this ecclesia throughout her life. Her love for the truth of the Almighty were clear to all those she spoke to. Since the death of her husband Bro. Harvey, she has been regularly attending Mountain Ash ecclesia. We trust that her sleep will be short, before she is raised to stand before her Lord. We extend sympathy to Sis. Debbie Ainsworth, Bro. Bob Schofield, Sis. Sandra Mills, Bro. Andy, Sis. Gemma and Sam Ainsworth and Claire.

Pershore | Nicholas White | We are saddened by the falling asleep, on 19 Sep., of Bro. Mike Page, aged 60. Since joining Pershore in 2000, he has touched our lives with his infectious enthusiasm, energy, dedication to our Lord, and his longing for the Kingdom, as he did for the forty-four years since his baptism. Many benefitted from his dynamic speaking style and his insight into the Scriptures. He led numerous Camps and youth activities, and wrote books to help our young people prepare for the Kingdom. He championed the Shunem Home in India tirelessly, and supported our Iranian contacts. He served as an arranging brother, assistant secretary and Sunday school teacher. We are thankful for his faithful example, and take comfort in knowing he will rise again. Our thoughts, prayers and love are with Sis. Steph and all Bro. Mike's family. We rejoiced in the marriage of Bro. Sim Kitchen to Sis. Lily Jones on 7 Sep. Adding to the joy of the day, former member Sis. Phoebe Jefferies (Cardiff) was married to Bro. Harry Genders (Lapworth). We share in the happiness of both couples and their families, and pray that our Father will bless them richly as they walk Zionwards.

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Peterborough | Martin Wheeler | We welcome Bro. Morteza Pirasteh and Sis. Zarrin Heidari. who have been commended in love by the brothers and sisters of Norwich ecclesia, and we pray for God's blessing as we walk together towards the Kingdom.

Petersfield | Richard Cooper | We welcome Bro. Nigel Harrison from Guildford ecclesia. We look forward to his fellowship and support as we walk together towards the Kingdom.

Rugby | David Godfrey | We rejoice at the joining in marriage of Bro. Ben Morgan and Sis. Esther Barrett, we pray for our heavenly Father's blessing on their united walk towards the Kingdom.

Sheffield | Bob Baynham | We are pleased to report the following baptisms: ***Leila Chehreghani*** and ***Hossein Kehtari*** on 8 Sep.; ***Mohammadreza Beihaghi*** on 15 Sep.; and ***Ghodrat Azizi*** on 6 Oct. We thank the Lord for His continued mercies, and pray that He will bless our new brothers and sister in their new lives in Christ.

Solihull | Martin Bright | We are holding a 25+ Day on 30 Nov., at 10 am. Speaker: Bro. Adam Sheppard (Spalding); theme: "So encourage one another and build each other up". Booking required via **solihull-25-plus.co.uk**.

Southport | Marshall Vickers | With sadness, yet in hope, we report the falling asleep of Bro. Leslie Garside, aged 95. He & Sis. Ruth moved to Garswood from Leeds (West) last year. Sadly, Sis. Ruth fell asleep in June. May our Lord strengthen their children, Bro. David Garside (Blackburn), Sis. Linda Singleton (Heywood), Malcolm and all the family in their loss. We pray for the time of resurrection when, by God's grace and mercy, we shall all be reunited. May it be soon.

Stevenage | John Benson | With great sorrow, we report that Sis. Rita Wood fell asleep on 27 Sep., aged 94. She and her husband Bro. David joined Stevenage a few months after the ecclesia was founded in 1959. She was a faithful, generous sister, who opened her home for many ecclesial events. We pray for the day when we will be united in the Kingdom. Our thoughts and sympathies are with her son Bro. Ashley (Sydney, Shaftesbury Road, Australia), her daughter Stephanie, and other members of the family.

Stockport | Ivor Williams | We thank London (Barnet) ecclesia for their help with the baptism of ***Ebrahim A.*** on 6 Oct. We interviewed him for baptism in April, but he moved to London before he was baptised. He he has been strong in faith and now attends Barnet ecclesia. We at Stockport watched a video clip of his baptism at the end of our memorial service. We thank our heavenly Father for guiding us all in this situation, and we ask for His continued help as we grow in fellowship.

Studley | Alan Day | Because of road closures, on 10 Nov. our memorial meeting will be held at 10 am and our Bible talk at 12.45 pm.

Swansea | John Evans | With sadness, we report that fellowship has been withdrawn from Bro. Farhad Alizadeh and Bro. Hasan Karim. We do this in the sincere hope that this will bring both brethren to a change of heart.

Taunton | Paul Rushforth | We warmly welcome Sis. Penny Tarrant, who has transferred from the Yeovil ecclesia. We are delighted that she joins us in loving fellowship as we walk together towards the Kingdom.

Teignmouth | Paul Lucas | Bro. Keith Byron has moved to Fairhaven, and we transfer him to the love and care of Bournemouth (Central) ecclesia. We are grateful for the contribution he has made at Teignmouth for twenty-five years, and we wish him well in his new surroundings. He have twenty-five wooden chairs with light-blue upholstered seats, available for collection. Contact the over-signed (01626 866 022; **paullucas.bittons@btinternet.com**).

Walsall | Philomon Burney | We transfer Bro. Stephen & Sis. Emma Ensell to Ashby-de-la-Zouch ecclesia, and Bro. Ata Ebrahimi to Wolverhampton ecclesia.

Wyke | Geoff Ingle | We are sad to hear of the falling asleep of Bro. Philip Adams. He & Sis. Dorothy joined us in 2011 shortly after moving to West Royd House in Mirfield, and we enjoyed fellowship with them for nine years until they moved to Garswood in Southport. We have fond memories of Bro. Philip, and recall him and Sis. Dorothy saying how much they felt 'at home' with us all. We send our love to Sis. Dorothy and the rest of the family.

Yeovil | Submitted by John Greenwood | Sis. Penny Tarrant has asked to transfer to Taunton ecclesia. We commend her to their love and care, with our thanks for her support and help during her time at Yeovil.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Los Angeles Hispanic, CA | Correction: please note that we share Los Angeles Santa Fe Springs ecclesia's hall. See page 556 of the November magazine. Our apologies for the oversight. – EDITORS

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ZAMBIA

Matero | Zacchaeus Muntete (CBM Secretary Zambia) | We have rejoiced with the angels in heaven at the baptism of ***Getrude Nakamba*** on 14 Sep. at Nakonde. She put on the Lord's saving name after a good confession of faith in the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. The undersigned is particularly overjoyed because he has been her tutor. We pray that our new sister will walk steadily along the road towards the Kingdom. ■

OUR WORK AND FELLOWSHIP

CHRISTADELPHIAN BENEVOLENT FUND

Respite and holiday grants | Mark Halstead

Grants are available to help UK brothers and sisters with the cost of respite care or a holiday. Help is also available for carers. Applications, using the forms distributed via post, email, the CBF website (**www.christadelphianbf.com**) or the CBF Secretary, should be made to your recording brother / secretary, who will forward them with an informal assessment to the CBF Secretary; no other documentation is required. We do, however, ask for sensible enquiries to be made to ascertain what applicants can contribute towards the costs of their care or holiday; we also welcome ecclesias contributing towards costs where they are able. Grants are distributed via ecclesia welfare arrangements. For holidays, the normal maximum grant is £200 per person for travel and £500 per person per week for accommodation, up to a maximum of two weeks. For respite care, the normal maximum grant is two weeks at the care provider's prevailing rate. If more copies of the forms are needed, see our website, photocopy, or contact the over-signed (07970 625 123; **mark.trustee@outlook.com**) 23 Barnfield, Urmston, Manchester M41 9EW. If a larger grant is needed or you wish to discuss a request informally, please contact me. Trustees are very grateful for the support of the ecclesias and individuals who make welfare work possible. Please continue to support us.

CHRISTADELPHIAN CARE HOMES

Quarterly update, online | Jeremy Brown

We plan to continue our online quarterly updates next year. The scheduled dates for 2025 are: 22 Mar.; 21 Jun.; 20 Sep.; and 13 Dec. All these meetings will commence at 10 am, on Zoom.

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUPPORT NETWORK

Safeguarding Training and Awareness Day, online: 16 Nov. | Gordon Dawes

The next CSN Safeguarding Training and Awareness Day is on 16 Nov., at 10 am, on Zoom. This will cover important new and updated information for ecclesial, organisational and designated safeguarding leads. Attending will help you to ensure our UK community's compliance and our reputation in an area of increasing critical attention. Morning session (10 am to 12 noon): adult and child safeguarding principles, risk factors, behavioural issues, managing disclosure and scriptural principles for compliance; suitable for all. Afternoon session (1 to 3 pm): ecclesial and organisation DSLs specifically. Booking required via **www.chsn.org.uk/events**. Zoom joining information sent in the week prior to 16 Nov.

CHRISTADELPHIAN YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Swimming Gala, Redditch: 30 Nov. | Bobby Harrison

Our annual Swimming Gala is on 30 Nov., at 5 pm, at Abbey Stadium Sports Centre (Birmingham Road, Redditch B97 6EJ). Bring your CYC / Sunday School; even if you have only one or two swimmers, they won't be alone; small teams have just as much fun. Alternatively, enter a joint team with another group, or contact us and we will find a team with a space. There is plenty of room for spectators. Due to falling numbers, and after more than fifty years, this will be the last CYA swimming gala, so come along and make it a memorable finale. For further information and booking form, visit **www.christadelphianyouthactivities.org.uk** or contact

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the over-signed (07929 888 395; **r.k.harrison@hotmail.com**).

CONFERENCES AND OTHER GATHERINGS

CEAYG Youth Day on Science and Creation, Spalding: 30 Nov. | Mike Ogden

The Christadelphian East Anglian Youth Group are holding a Youth Day (for ages 11+) on Science and Creation on 30 Nov., from 10 am to 6 pm. Three Christadelphian scientists will use powerful evidence to show that the Bible record can be trusted to reveal the creative power of our heavenly Father. Booking is essential as spaces are limited. For further information, or to book, contact the over-signed (07403 352 338; **mike.ogden@yahoo.com**).

Family Study Weekend, Coalbrookdale: 14-16 Mar. 2025 | Matthew Reed

The next Coalbrookdale Family Study Weekend is from 14-16 Mar. 2025. Speaker: Bro. Andy Hale (Ormskirk); theme: "Ruth the Moabitess". A small, welcoming, family weekend in the Midlands. For further information, or to book, contact Bro. Matthew & Sis. Jayne Reed (**reedy_m@hotmail.com**).

150th Family Bible Weekend, Swanwick: 2-4 May 2025 | Jacinth White

The 150th Swanwick Family Bible Weekend is from 2-4 May 2025, at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick. Theme: "Next year in Jerusalem"; speakers: Bro. John Hale (Crewe), Bro. Martyn Lawrence (Doncaster), Bro. Mark Vincent (Lapworth), and Bro. Mark Whittaker (Leamington Spa). Parallel classes for children and young people. To book, email **swanwickbookings@gmail.com**.

Lye Camp: 26 Jul to 2 Aug. 2025 | Bobby Harrison / Peter Harvey

Next year's Lye Camp (for ages 11+) is from 26 Jul. to 2 Aug. 2025. Theme: "Judges"; cost: £125. Book via **forms.gle/9dmi1e4CXcm7xExX8**; or contact the over-signed (**lye.youth.camp@gmail.com**).

Brecon Bible School: 18-23 Aug. 2025 | Jonathan Skyes

Next year's Brecon Bible School is from 18-23 Aug. 2025, at Christ College, Brecon. Speakers: Bro. Roger Long (Coventry, Grosvenor Road) – "Paul and the Thessalonian ecclesia"; Bro. Arne Roberts (Ashby-de-la-Zouch) – "Proverbs – wisdom for the ages"; Bro. Mike Jenner (Rugby) – "Lessons from the patriarchal family". Fully inclusive accommodation at Christ College; camping and caravanning available offsite. Bookings now being taken; please see details on the Bible School website (**www.breconbibleschool.org.uk**) or the bookings administrator: Sis. Claire Barker, 11 Dyrham Court, Swindon SN25 2FY (07786 311 045).

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Recording Brothers – *Ashby-de-la-Zouch:* now Bro. Dan Weatherall; please send all correspondence to **info@ashbychurch.co.uk**.

"COMFORT ONE ANOTHER"

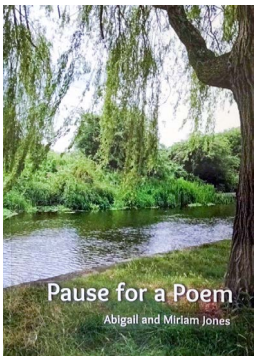
Sis. Hazel Smith and family thank everyone for their cards, prayers and words of comfort on the falling asleep of Sis. June Smith (Birmingham, Acocks Green).

ECCLESIAL CHANGES

Ashby-de-la-Zouch: Sunday meeting time change (see page 607). *Lapworth:* Sunday meetings venue change (see page 609). *Studley:* Sunday meetings time change (see page 611).

NOTICE BOARD

New book – *Pause for a Poem*. A collection of forty-two Bible-based poems covering a variety of topics. Perfect for pausing and meditating on God's Word, providing encouragement for daily life. Cost: £8 plus postage. For more information, previews or to purchase, please visit **bible-quotes-creations.square.site** or contact Sis. Abi Jones: **akezjones@hotmail.com**.



Bro. Alan Overton. Information is sought about Bro. Robert Alan Overton (Rugby), and his work with the Kindertransport during the Second World War. Please contact his granddaughter, Jane Mackenzie (née Robinson) (07973 702 772; **separatetables@gmail.com**).

135 separate copies of *The Christadelphian* magazine (1870-1925), free of charge; UK postage: £8.00. Will ship anywhere for the appropriate cost. Full details from Bro. Ernest Wisner (**hope.first@talktalk.net**).

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FORTHCOMING GATHERINGS

Details of events with online connections, including joining instructions (if provided), are published in *The Christadelphian incorporating Testimony* but are not listed on our website for security reasons. Event organisers should be contacted for access details and further information. Please note:

- Events listed for the first time are coloured orange.
- Information for this month's events can be found here, along with future events that require bookings. Full details of all future events notified can be found in the interactive "What's on" section of our website (**www.thechristadelphian.com/whats-on**).

NOVEMBER

1-3:

Pittsburgh (PA, USA) Fall CYC Gathering. Speaker: Bro. Caleb Osborn (Thousand Oaks, CA); theme: "Choosing joy". Contact Bro. Stephen Robinson (**pghecclesia@gmail.com**).

2:

Coventry (West) Fraternal Gathering | 4.30 pm | ecclesial hall. Speaker: Bro. Peter Owen (Mumbles); theme: "Hezekiah – he trusted in the LORD God of Israel" (two talks; tea served between at 5.30 pm).

Lye Fraternal Gathering | 4 pm | ecclesial hall / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Mark Allfree (Nottingham, Forest Road); theme: "Worship in the Kingdom" (two talks). Meeting ID: 889 5201 0822 (no password).

9:

Birmingham (Kings Norton) Student Meal | from 11.30 am | ecclesial hall. Contact Bro. Tim & Sis. Miriam Collard with any dietary requirements (**timothycollard@gmail.com**).

Cambridge Family Day | 10.30 am | ecclesial hall / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Caleb Bilton (Pershore); theme: "The journey to God". Meeting ID: 941 597 955.

Dudley (Queens Cross) Autumn Study Evening | 4.30 pm | ecclesial hall / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Luke Bennett (Nuneaton, Whitestone); theme: "The days of the Lord" (two talks). Meeting ID: 827 7412 0127; password: DQCstudy.

Earlswood Fraternal Gathering | 3 pm | Earlswood Village Hall. Speaker: Bro. Liam Walton (Kinver); theme: "Ezra": (1) "Rebuilding the spiritual foundation"; (2) "Leadership and the restoration of faith".

Rugby Family Day | Houlton Primary School. Speaker: Bro. Mark Vincent (Lapworth); theme: "In the beginning – big truths from Genesis 1 and 2". See **www.rugbyecclesia.uk**.

15-17:

Manchester (Old Trafford) Youth Weekend | ecclesial hall. Theme: "Cancelled". See **www.thebethel.org**.

16:

Cannock Study Afternoon | 4 pm | ecclesial hall / Zoom. Two talks; online Farsi translation. Meeting ID: 816 2040 3126; no password.

CSN Safeguarding Training and Awareness Day | 10 am | Zoom. This will cover important new and updated information for ecclesial, organisational and designated safeguarding leads. Attending will help you to ensure our UK community's compliance and our reputation in an area of increasing critical attention. Booking required via **www.chsn.org.uk/events**.

Daventry and Northampton Study Evening | 4 pm | Watford village hall / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Kevin Hole (Burton-on-Trent). Meeting ID: 829 2844 7186; password: first word of hymn 391 (as written).

Kinver Study Fraternal | 4 pm | Ashwood Park Primary School / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Stephen Jefferies (Pershore); theme: "Nehemiah": (1) "Building the wall"; (2) "Before the water gate". Meeting ID: 973 180 2489; password: ashwood.

Ormskirk Autumn Fraternal Gathering | 4 pm | Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Nathan Smith (Wardley); theme: "Titus for today": (1) "The sound of a healthy ecclesia", at 4 pm; (2) "Maintaining good works", at 5.15 pm. Meeting ID: 944 8791 1416; password: Moor1899.

22-24:

Washington, DC Family Bible Study Weekend | Camp Hashawha. Speaker: Bro. Jon Godfrey (Washington, DC); theme: "Lessons at the end of the Old Testament". See **hopeofthekingdom.com**.

23:

Coventry (Grosvenor Road) Revelation Study Afternoon | 2.30 pm | ecclesial hall / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Mark Evans (Coventry, Grosvenor Road); theme: "Revelation 2" (two talks). Meeting ID: 830 9030 3325; password: 074092.

Lye Youth Day | Blakedown Parish Rooms | Ages: school year 7+ | Cost: £15. Speaker: Bro. Andrew Parkin

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(Lapworth); theme: "Practical lessons for tomorrow's ecclesia". See **forms.gle/RX9qfvCqCRaYv4Cr7**.

Olivet Winter Fayre | 2.30-4.30 pm | Olivet Care Home. There will be festive refreshments on offer and the opportunity to pick up some bargain gifts from our table-top stalls.

30:

Birmingham (Longbridge) Autumn Fraternal Gathering | 4 pm | ecclesial hall / Google Meet. Speaker: Bro. Reuben Evans (Birmingham, Bournville); theme: "Let the earth bring forth": (1) "Grass, herbs and trees"; (2) "Vines and olives". Join **meet.google.com/esa-ijbg-dfa**.

CEAYG Youth Day on Science and Creation | 10 am to 6 pm | Ages: 11+. Three Christadelphian scientists will use powerful evidence to show that the Bible record can be trusted to reveal the creative power of our heavenly Father. Booking required; contact Bro. Mike Ogden (**mike.ogden@yahoo.com**).

CYA Swimming Gala | Abbey Stadium Sports Centre. Bring your CYC / Sunday School; even if you have only one or two swimmers, they won't be alone; small teams have just as much fun. Alternatively, enter a joint team with another group, or contact us and we will find a team with a space. There is plenty of room for spectators. See **www.christadelphianyouthactivities.org.uk** or contact the over-signed (07929 888 395; **r.k.harrison@hotmail.com**).

Halifax (Balmoral Place) Bible Class Study Fraternal | 4 pm | ecclesial hall / Zoom. Speaker: Bro. Andrew Whittaker (Heywood); theme: "The ark ascending": (1) "Touch me not"; (2) "Handle me and see". Meeting ID: 928 0338 2620; password 803691.

Solihull 25+ Day | 10 am | ecclesial hall. Speaker: Bro. Adam Sheppard (Spalding); theme: "So encourage one another and build each other up". See **solihull-25-plus.co.uk**.

DECEMBER

7:

Midlands Praise Day | 2-6.30 pm | Warwick Hall. Contact Bro. Richard Alleyne (**midlandspraise@gmail.com**).

14:

Coventry (West) 16+ Youth Day | ecclesial hall | Ages: 16+. See **tinyurl.com/CovWest16Plus2024**.

25, 29:

Hamilton (Book Road, ON, Canada) Hope Day / Study Day | ecclesial hall / online. See **bookroadchristadelphians.ca**.

25-2 Jan. 2025:

New Zealand Summer Family Bible School | Blue Skies Centre. See **www.cfbs.org.nz**.

27-30:

Eastern Winter Study | Letton Hall. See **www.easternwinterstudy.org.uk**.

27-1 Jan. 2025:

German / English Winter Family Bible School. See **www.christadelphian-es.de**.

FEBRUARY 2025

7-9:

Ashby-de-la-Zouch Youth Weekend | ecclesial hall | Ages: 14+. See **ashbyyouthweekend.co.uk**.

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8:

Rugby 21+ Day | ecclesial hall. See **www.rugbyecclesia.uk**.

22:

Rugby Prophecy Day | Benn Hall. See **www.rugbyecclesia.uk**.

MARCH 2025

14-16:

Coalbrookdale Family Study Weekend | Coalbrookdale YHA. Contact Bro. Matthew & Sis. Jayne Reed (**reedy_m@hotmail.com**).

15:

Birmingham (Kings Norton) Study and Fellowship Day | ecclesial hall | Ages: 18-25. See **forms.gle/QQTto1nM2BytjuNW7**.

MAY 2025

2-4:

150th Swanwick Family Bible Weekend | Hayes Conference Centre. Contact **swanwickbookings@gmail.com**.

25-30:

Swanwick Family Bible School | Hayes Conference Centre. See **www.familybibleschool.co.uk**).

JULY 2025

26-2 August:

Lye Camp | Ages: 11+ | Cost: £125. See **forms.gle/9dmi1e4CXcm7xExX8**.

AUGUST 2025

4-9:

Harper Adams Bible School | Harper Adams University. See **www.christadelphian-bibleschool.org**.

18-23:

Brecon Bible School | Christ College. See **www.breconbibleschool.org.uk**.

Christadelphian Conference | Moor Hall Conference Centre. See **www.christadelphianconference.co.uk**.

SEASONS volume 4

Seasons is an annual publication produced for sisters of all ages, with contributions from sisters from around the world. This is the fourth book that has been produced in magazine style, and it features articles, uplifting interviews, thoughtful verses, moving poems, recipes and more.

The book is written by sisters who help the reader to find God in every corner and at every stage of life. It is written conversationally, and it feels as if each sister is talking directly to you – like a family member sharing her life experiences, providing helpful guidance and words of wisdom. *Seasons* demonstrates how each 'season' of life can bring you closer to God.

Seasons volume 4 is now available from the Christadelphian Office – while limited stocks last. Price: £20.00 plus postage.



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EPILOGUE

"ABIDETH FOR EVER"

GEOFF HENSTOCK (ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA)

In a world where so much is ephemeral and transient, we find comfort in those things which are stable and abiding. We are used to the changing nature of fashion, but unsettling change is evident in more substantial aspects of life. Longstanding companies change their names and even go out of business, governments come and go, and nations falter and disappear. Even our lives are fleeting, "shorter than a span", as we sing in Hymn 391.

In some minds, anxiety about climate change has raised the spectre of the future of our planet being at risk. That climate change is wreaking havoc in many parts of the world is undeniable, yet we can take comfort from the assurance of the Preacher: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). [1] It must be so, because it is God's purpose that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD" (Habakkuk 2:14).

The earth is one of just five things which the Bible says 'abide for ever', and all of them are connected with the glory of the Lord. Peter spoke of the believers in Christ as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). Our Lord Jesus Christ was 'the Word made flesh', and the Jews were of the belief that the Law of Moses taught that "Christ abideth for ever" (John 12:34) – and they were right. John also wrote that "the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever" (8:35). It is unsurprising, then, that the Letter to the Hebrews describes our Lord as "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (13:8).

When we align ourselves with our Lord Jesus Christ and identify with his sacrifice through baptism, we 'anchor' ourselves to that which is eternal and immovable (6:19). The world about us may be in a state of constant flux, but the faithful remain steadfast. "They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever" (Psalm 125:1).

Having embraced the Word of God and its promises, we face the future not with apprehension but with hopeful confidence, knowing that "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17). Our mortal bodies are frail and corruptible now, but the day is coming when "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53). Then we shall 'abide for ever'.

"O Thou who changest not, we wait for Thee" (Hymn 176). ■

1 Bible quotations are from the KJV.

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NEW BOOK

In this new book, Geoff Henstock examines every instance of the phrase "Kingdom of heaven" to shed light on this vital theme in Matthew's Gospel. Price: £12.00 plus postage; e-book £7.00.

For more details about these items and all our publications please go to **www.thechristadelphian.com** or request a price list.

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