

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1513



A Long Way from Home! – page 3
The Gospel We Preach – page 8
Faith in the Face of Adversity – page 11

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

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1513



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Bible Versions

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A Long Way from Home!

Hundreds of thousands of people were stranded all over the world when the dust from Eyjafjallajökull – an erupting volcano in Iceland – spread across large parts of European airspace. It stopped or impeded commercial flights for six days and led to the unprecedented closure of many of Europe's major airports because of fears that the volcanic dust would damage jet engines and thus endanger life.

Many days after the ash cloud had been declared safe, as the wind direction changed and the eruption eased, many were left counting the cost. Families were still stranded: sleeping at airports, staying in costly hotels, trying to get a flight home. Airlines were working out what the disruption had cost them in lost business, extra meals, or accommodation costs. Governments were left to consider their position as they were said to have overreacted to the potential danger and to have restricted flying unnecessarily.

But other travellers will have tales to tell their children and grandchildren for years to come about how they got home, despite a volcano!

Homeward Bound

For there were ways of getting home despite the closure of airports. Ferries were still running; cargo vessels took passengers; some light aircraft were chartered; taxis could be summoned to get you to a port; cars could be hired; a coach was hired by a group of

people who clubbed together; others travelled by train. Some people crossed continents, combining one form of transport with another, just to get to a ferry terminal.

Occasions like this can bring out the very best in people who are anxious to get home and who make great endeavours. And when the aircraft were grounded ferries abounded as this month's cover photograph shows, the photographer having driven across to Dunkirk in Northern France to collect his stranded family, who were visiting from New Zealand, to bring them safely to Britain.

Changing Society

Events like this demonstrate how things have changed compared with just a few years ago. The eruption happened just after the Easter holiday break and there were people stranded all over the world. Tourists were to be found in countries as far apart as Australia, New Zealand, India and Mexico. Hundreds of thousands of

people were either away on holiday or on business, and none of them could get back on their scheduled flights. That's the sort of world we now live in, where readily available travel is taken for granted.

But it is also the case that human society is now more fragile than ever and something like an erupting



Queues at Calais Ferry terminal as people tried to get home

volcano, an earthquake, or a tidal wave can cause huge disruption and loss. None of that would have mattered in earlier times but now that we travel much more and work in businesses which criss-cross the world, we are vulnerable to the circumstances of life as never before. Things may look solid and secure but, as events like the banking crisis or a volcanic eruption demonstrate, society is not that robust and one unscheduled event can throw things seriously off track.

Back Home

Many years ago the Jewish people were dispersed all over the world but not because they had been on holiday. For more than 1000 years they had been a displaced people, ousted from their homeland by the Romans and forced to move on from nation to nation as they were persecuted and refused a place to settle. But God had promised that the time would come for them to return home, at His command:

“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’ For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he” (Jeremiah 31:10,11).

The impediment to their return was significant: much more of an obstacle than just a bit of volcanic ash. Some of the land was occupied by people now described as Palestinians. Many nations had been responsible for the persecution of the Jewish people, so when the matter came to a vote in the United Nations the decision could have gone against partitioning the land to create a Jewish State. But it did not.

Under the hand of God and in 1947 the majority vote was for the establishment of a Jewish state after a lapse of 1878 years. By then there were some Jews already living in the land, having bought estates and farms they had begun to reclaim the land from centuries of abandonment. The declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948 spurred on the process of resettlement and Jews from all over the world began to return and resettle.

The Exodus Again

Long before the nation had come from Egypt as refugees marching to the land that God had promised their ancestors. Now they travelled to Israel as Abraham had once journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees – leaving settled homes to become pioneers in a new nation, making a new start in life. Mainly by sea, for this was in the 1940s and early 50s, a dispersed community moved home to settle in a new land and to build it into a powerful nation.

The existence of Israel as a Middle Eastern nation is a modern phenomenon which is a testimony to the fact that God always keeps His Word. He promised that he would re-establish the nation of Israel on earth and that has now been accomplished, amidst opposition and in controversial circumstances, just as the Bible predicted.

The scene is now set for the final dramatic event in the prophetic calendar. Now that Israel is back in the land, surrounded by enemies, we can expect the return of Jesus from heaven to reign on earth over God’s restored kingdom. He may be a long way from home at present, but not for long!

Editor

Part Two

The Flight of the Honey Bee



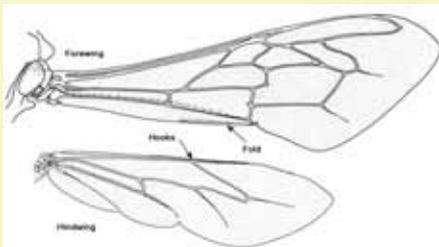
In the first part of this article **Lawrence Cave** showed that honey bees are remarkably well-equipped for flight. They move their wings forward on the downstroke; backward on the upstroke; rotate their wings on both strokes and do all that accurately 200 times a second. Now he looks in more detail at what these remarkable workers can do.

Wing structure

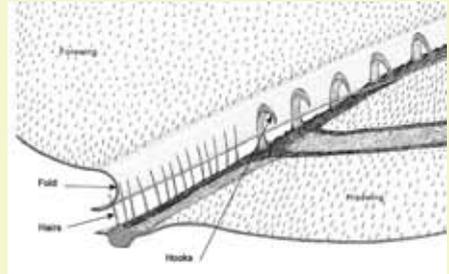
Bee's wings are thin membranes of cuticle stiffened and supported by veins, as the picture shows. Throughout the life of the bee, a chemical is moved through the hollow veins to ensure the wings remain stiff but flexible. The bee has two wings on each side of its body. The picture shows the wings coupled together for flight.



In the resting position the wings are uncoupled over the back of the bee. As the forewing rotates over the hindwing to the flying position a row of hooks on the front edge of the hindwing engage in a fold on the back edge of the forewing. This means that both wings open together and form a single wing surface. The diagram below shows the location of the hooks and fold.



The next diagram shows the intricate detail of the coupling mechanism.



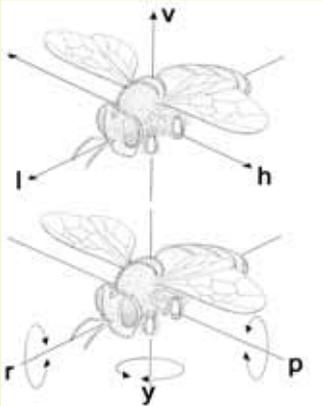
Scientists are uncertain what the hairs do. They think that they may have some kind of sensing function. Once the wings are coupled together securely, the bee uses its muscles to flap its wings in the complex manner that we saw earlier. It has no less than eight different sets of muscles. These muscles:

- ✓ raise and lower the wings,
- ✓ pull the wings forward and backward,
- ✓ move the wings to the correct angle.

The bee must coordinate all of these functions correctly to be able to fly.

Control in Flight

Once the bee is in the air, it must be able to control its movement. The diagram below shows just how complex this is.



- ❖ *The upper picture shows that the bee can move: vertically (v) up and down, longitudinally (l) forwards and backwards and horizontally (h) side to side.*
- ❖ *The lower picture shows how the bee can rotate in the air, these are known as: roll (r) pitch (p) and yaw (y).*
- ❖ *All of these movements are achieved by slight variations in the angle of the wings (which we looked at in the first article).*

When the bee hovers, the wings are producing a vertical force exactly equal to the weight of the bee. Subtle change in the wing angles produces an overall force that is not vertical. This will make the bee move forwards or sideways. When the wing angles are slightly changed on one side only, different forces on each side of the bee are produced. This will cause the bee to turn in the same way that a boat will turn if one oar is producing more force than the other.

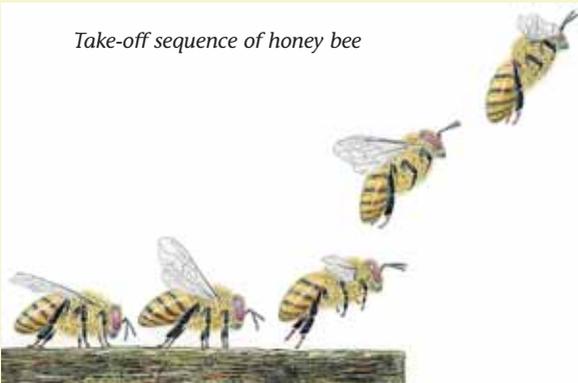
Fixed-wing passenger aircraft are designed to have a high degree of stability in flight, but they are not very manoeuvrable. Bees are more like combat aircraft, which fly on the edge of instability and require complex

control systems to keep the aircraft stable. Engineers spend years designing the complex systems required to control these aircraft. These systems constantly monitor the aircraft and rapidly make the necessary minor adjustments to keep the aircraft in the air. The correction must be quick and accurate to avoid disaster. Bees flying on the edge of instability must also monitor their situation continuously and take immediate corrective action. Bees monitor body position and motion through special sense organs and through their eyes.

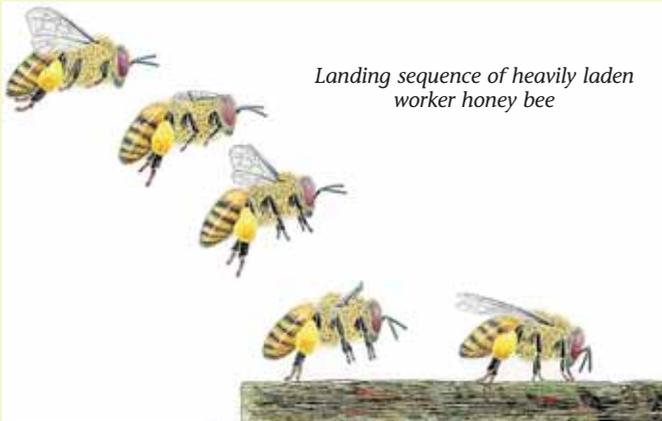
The Challenge

Evolutionists have no idea how the complex flight system of insects such

Take-off sequence of honey bee



Bees must take off, fly in a controlled and directed manner and land at an appropriate place. It is obvious that a great deal of control of their eight sets of flight muscles is essential.



The flight system of the honey bee points to a Creator. Unless all of the systems and features that we have looked at are fully functional, the honey bee cannot fly.

as bees could have evolved. To be credible, they must give an explanation of how all these systems, evolving gradually, gave an advantage to the bee at all stages. The fact is that a set of wings that did not work would be a distinct disadvantage in survival. Furthermore, there are no fossils in the fossil record with partially formed wings. When they appear, the insects are already in possession of fully-formed functional wings. Some of them look remarkably like today's dragonflies, some are like cockroaches and others look more like mayflies. There is no evidence from the fossil record that insect flight systems gradually developed. The facts tell us that they appeared fully functional. They point unerringly to a Creator.

Lawrence Cave

We acknowledge the cooperation of the International Bee Research Association for permission to reproduce pictures from their book "Form and Function in the Honey Bee" by Lesley Goodman.

Look at the website www.theevidence.org.uk for more facts pointing to a Creator.

Summary:

Insect fossils in the fossil record with partially formed wings are yet to be found. No one knows how the honey bee flight system could have developed. To be able to fly bees must:

- ⇒ Move wings forward on the downstroke
- ⇒ Move wings backward on the upstroke
- ⇒ Rotate their wings to the correct angle on both strokes
- ⇒ Do the above accurately 200 times a second
- ⇒ Gain extra uplift using three complex mechanisms
- ⇒ Have stiff but flexible wings
- ⇒ Couple their wings together securely
- ⇒ Coordinate eight sets of muscles to move their wings correctly

Have:

- sense organs to monitor their current position
- control systems to rapidly correct undesirable situations
- rapid communication between sense organs and control systems.

The Gospel We Preach

*Over many months **Dudley Fifield** has been tracing foundation principles from the first book of the Bible to show how they are developed elsewhere in the Bible. In this final article he sums up what Genesis has to teach us about the unfolding purpose of God.*

The God of the Bible is unique. He is the only true and living God and He emphasises throughout His Word that He is One, that there is no plurality within the godhead, and that He only has immortality (Deuteronomy 6:4,5; 1 Timothy 6:16).

In the beginning God created all things by His Word. The natural world with its ever-changing rhythms – day and night, summer and winter – speak to us of the fidelity of God (Genesis 8:22) and in the Bible that is used to impress on us the faithfulness of God’s Word in all its operations. For this reason we trust the Bible implicitly, for it is the inspired Word of God. (2 Tim. 3:16).

God’s Purpose with Mankind

Supreme amongst the creative work of God is mankind, to whom He gave dominion over all the earth (Genesis 1:26). God’s purpose is shown to be with mankind and with the earth, for ultimately God will fill the earth with His glory. This will be accomplished when man, through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, finally achieves the dominion that God intended. In accomplishing this purpose, man will glorify God’s name in a day when His name will be



revered in all the earth (Psalm 8:6,9; Hebrews 2:8).

Man, created in the image and likeness of God, was described as “very good”. He was made “a living soul”, that is “a living, breathing creature”, and in this respect man had no superiority over the animal creation. He had, however, the ability to relate to God, to worship and praise God and to develop divine characteristics.

Eve was created as Adam’s help mate, thus establishing the divine ordinance of marriage (one man and one woman for life – Matthew 19:4-6). In Eden they were given one command: they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for, if they did, they would die. The serpent, by his thinking, slandered God, calling Him a liar. Sadly, Adam and Eve took the thinking of the serpent into their hearts and minds, for they ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree and thus sinned. As a consequence, death entered the world (Romans 5:12).

Salvation from Sin and Death

Death is the complete cessation of life. In the grave man has no conscious existence. Consequently the only hope that man has of a life after death is by resurrection from the dead. This is



why the New Testament refers to the death of believers as 'a sleep'. Adam's sin had appalling consequences for the whole human race. We are all born mortal, destined to die: more than that, we have an inbred tendency to sin. But for the grace and mercy of God we would be destined to remain for ever in the grave.

From the very beginning, God indicated the way in which He would save mankind from sin. He promised a deliverer who would share our nature and yet would conquer sin. This deliverer was described as "*the seed of the woman*", a description which pointed forward to the Lord Jesus Christ who was born of a virgin (Galatians 4:4). He had no human father for he was the only begotten Son of God. It was predicted that he would trample sin underfoot but that he would be wounded in the process.

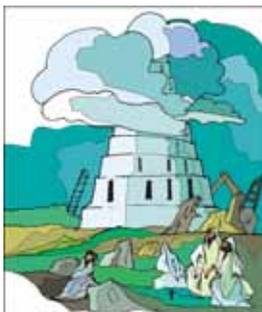
Yet because of his sinless life, Jesus would be delivered from death and would thus conquer sin in all its expressions. This was exactly what Jesus later accomplished by his sacrificial death on the cross. So it was that the shedding of blood to provide a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve again pointed forward to the way that Jesus would die for our sins.

Confession and Repentance

The great lesson of the forgiveness of sins emphasised in Eden is that we must acknowledge and confess our sins. This was something that Adam and Eve neglected to do when given the opportunity – they were too busy passing on the blame to others. When we come to the cross of Christ we are to recognise that he died as one of us, and that he died for us. Jesus repre-

sented us, for it is our human nature that is crucified there (Hebrews 2:14). We recognise that his death is what we deserve, because of the sort of people we are and because of the things we do. That recognition requires the act of baptism, the total immersion of the body in water (Romans 6:1-14). In symbol we are then crucified with Jesus. By recognition of this truth, God says that He will impute righteousness to us (forgive our sins, and count us righteous) because we believe and accept the truths proclaimed by the Lord Jesus on the cross.

God has thus offered us a way of salvation but, as the episode with Cain and Abel showed (in Genesis ch.4), people have developed a tendency to worship God in their own way. After his jealous murder of Abel, the banished Cain began to build a city. This began a process of building a kingdom apart from God in which people could delight and glorify themselves. Nimrod built Babel and rebellious men said "*let us build a city and a tower*" (Genesis 11:4). It is this civilisation



developed by mankind that the Scripture calls "*the kingdom of men*" (Daniel 4:17). It stands in contrast to the Kingdom of God, which will shortly be established on the earth. God's Kingdom, in contradistinction to man's city, is called "*the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*" (Hebrews 11:10).

Kingdom of God

God's Kingdom will be established on earth at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, when all human government will be overthrown. In that day the

responsible dead will be raised and those found worthy will be given eternal life. They will reign as kings and priests on the earth with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of widespread human rebellion, God called out one man – Abraham – and made great promises to him. He was told that from him would spring a nation who would inherit the land of Canaan. This nation is the people we know as Israel and through them God perpetuated His truth in the earth. To them He committed His Holy Oracles and into that nation the Lord Jesus was born.

Because of their persistent unbelief, God overthrew the kingdom of Israel and scattered its inhabitants throughout the earth. But, ever faithful to His Word, God promised that He would regather them when the time was near for His Son to return to earth from heaven. We have seen the beginning of this process in the establishment of the State of Israel.

The promises that God made to Abraham were not only concerned with the nation of Israel but also with the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham was told that through his descendant (or “seed”) all nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). The New Testament assures us that by these words *“the gospel was preached to Abraham”* (Galatians 3:8) and that the supreme fulfilment of these words is in the Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Through baptism we can also be counted as Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise (3:27-29).

All these promises will find their ultimate fulfilment in what the Bible calls

‘the Millennium’. This is like a pyramidal structure with the Lord Jesus at the top; the glorified and immortal saints – the faithful believers – forming the next strata, as they reign with him. The next strata is the mortal nation of Israel, exalted by God in fulfilment of His promise to Abraham and finally, at the base, the mortal nations of the earth, all recognising the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus and acknowledging the supremacy of God.

Goodness and Severity

We have seen in the Genesis record both the goodness and the severity of God (remember the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah). We must learn not to take God for granted. Believing His word is of supreme importance. The apostle Paul once said: *“even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Galatians 1:8). We must all strive to preserve the integrity of the one true gospel.

It’s not an easy task. The Lord Jesus said: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matthew 7:13,14).

The choice is a vital one – between life and death. The choice is ours and faced with all that God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, what can we do but choose life?

Dudley Fifield

Series concluded

Faith in the Face of Adversity

The New Testament was written soon after Jesus lived and was completed by the end of the 1st Century. The books of the New Testament tell us about the life and teaching of Jesus and how that teaching spread.

The 66 books of the Old and the New Testament taken together are *'the Word of God'*. Jesus made it clear that to understand the significance of his teaching and of his life and death we need to understand *'the Scriptures'* (Luke 24:25-27). When he said this, *'the Scriptures'* were the Old Testament. It is important, then, that we realise that the New Testament is built on the foundation of the Old.

Man of Faith

The New Testament draws our attention to many people in Old Testament times who showed outstanding faith in the face of adversity. Take Joseph, the son of Jacob. He was favoured by his father because he was a God-fearing son. His brothers were jealous of him and attacked and almost killed him. Instead they sold him to some merchants who took him to Egypt. There he became a slave, serving an Egyptian officer. He proved to be loyal and conscientious. But one day the officer's

wife falsely accused him of assaulting her. The result? He was put in prison. Despite the fact that everything seemed to be going wrong again, Joseph never lost his faith. He trusted that God was developing his character through trial, that God had some greater purpose.

This became clear when later he assisted the ruling Pharaoh to store grain during years of plenty to use during years of famine. Joseph's own family back in Canaan were forced to come to Egypt to buy food. There, in a dramatic series of encounters, Joseph revealed to his brothers that he was the one they had despised and sold into slavery so many years before. Did he seek revenge? No! He saw that God had been at work:

"Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." (Genesis 45:5).

Joseph wanted his brothers to face up to their wrong-doing; but he wanted to move on and bring them into a positive relationship with God. He shows us clearly that trust in God helps us to cope with what life throws at us. Joseph believed firmly in the promises God had made to his great grandfather, Abraham, his grandfather Isaac, and his father Jacob. Those promises were an assurance that



people who are God's people have a future. However much they fail, however much they struggle, belief in that future will get them through. On his deathbed, he urged his sons and grandsons to hold fast to those promises.

Notice that Joseph was tried and tested by the circumstances of life in Canaan and then in Egypt. He was betrayed by his own brothers; sold into slavery; misused by his master's wife; wrongly imprisoned; and then forgotten about until the nation needed him. There is no record of any demonic or satanic involvement in his life. He was subjected instead to the usual hazards and challenges of life and he survived these with remarkable good humour, understanding and maturity. God used the circumstances of his challenging life to develop and prepare him for everything that lay ahead. Because he had learned to control his own feelings he turned out to be the perfect man to control and regulate Egypt through the difficult years of abundance and famine that lay ahead.

Adversity Personified

Many years later, when David was king over the ancient nation of Israel, he too faced much adversity in his life. He was a man who loved God and prayed for help in every situation. This is how it is for men of faith. Their understanding of the word of God is reinforced by prayer. Prayer does not work in a vacuum; it involves listening to God, which we do when we read the Bible, His Word. Afterwards, when we express our needs to Him, we do so



with an awareness that He knows best, that adversity and trial have a purpose, drawing us closer to Him and deepening our experience of life. A well-known psalm of David expresses it well:

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” (Psalm 23:4-6).

The psalm is written in poetic language. We know there is no actual “valley of the shadow of death”. The rod and the staff are figures of speech, reminders of the tools of a shepherd. The association between the shepherd and God helps us to understand that God is like a shepherd who cares for His sheep.

Pictured Opposition

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language and picture language is often used to make things more vivid and memorable. The Hebrew word ‘satan’ means adversary – one who opposes or resists, or an accuser. It only occurs some 30 or so times in the Old Testament’s 37 books but it refers to a whole range of different things that oppose God’s purpose. On one occasion ‘satan’ is the word used to describe an angel sent by God to resist a prophet wanting to speak against God’s people:

“Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an **adversary** (a *satan*) against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him" (Numbers 22:21,22).

Human 'Satan's'

Elsewhere the same word is used of various human adversaries. Here are a few more examples:

*"O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! Let them be confounded and consumed who are **adversaries** of my life; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt" (Psalm 71:12,13);*

*"The princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the princes of the Philistines said to him, 'Make this fellow return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become our **adversary**. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of these men?'" (1 Samuel 29:4);*

*"David said, 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be **adversaries** to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I am king over Israel?'" (2 Samuel 19:22);*

*"Now the LORD raised up an **adversary** against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was a descendant of the king in Edom" (1 Kings 11:14).*

Tested by Life

It is important to realise that nowhere in the Bible is there the idea that a

fallen angel called Satan is working against people to turn them against God. This will be a surprise to many people who believe this popular view. But when we read the Old Testament we see that adversaries (or 'satans', as the Hebrew word is) come in all shapes and sizes. They can be soldiers, comrades in arms, enemies – even angels, who are doing God's will, like the one who stopped Balaam in his tracks. But the adversary is never a fallen angel, because angels cannot fall: they are the wholly-good servants of God in heaven.

And remember that there are only some 30 occurrences of that Hebrew word in the Old Testament. If there really was a 'fallen angel' as some people believe, would it not be referred to much more often? We can only ask that you look at the evidence with an open mind.

The important point is this, as we have seen when looking at the lives of faithful people like Joseph or King David. When we recognise that the word 'satan' is the Old Testament Hebrew word meaning 'adversary', we come to realise that in life's struggles we are not being tested by some supernatural monster trying to wreck our lives, drag us to destruction and turn us away from God.

Adversity comes to us from people, sometimes even from God Himself, to test and develop our characters. God wants changed people who are willing to put their trust and confidence in Him, come what may in life. If we do that, we can be sure that He will richly reward us, if not in this life then in the life to come.

Michael Owen

The Christian and the Refugee Problem

There are acute refugee problems in many of the world's trouble spots, whether the trouble is military, political or economic.

When the situation becomes intolerable people move, sometimes abandoning everything, sometimes trying to take some of their possessions with them. The situations are different – whether from Zimbabwe to Zambia, from Afghanistan to the UK, or from Mexico to the US or Canada. The motivation might vary, but the underlying cause is the same. People living in one country want to be somewhere else – somewhere they judge will offer them a better lifestyle; or somewhere where they can at least be safe.

Why Go?

The factors which cause these attempts to escape are many and varied. It may be sheer poverty which drives folk to brave barbed-wire barriers and the guns of border guards. They might just want to gain a basic living for themselves and their families. They may have fallen foul of an oppressive regime and may fear for their lives, or the lives of family members. They might simply desire economic betterment in a more prosperous state or they may be fed up of living for a long time in a refugee camp when there are no signs that anyone will ever do anything to resettle them in their former land or in any alternative dwelling place.

Faced with that problem, as some readers of “*Glad Tidings*” will indeed



be, we can understand the frustration engendered and the desire to be elsewhere. But if we were responsible for solving the problem – as politicians or international statesmen – we can equally see how difficult it is to solve this huge problem, and its root causes.

How do you stop wars? How can you prevent atrocities and inhumanity? How do you ensure that welfare aid is available and is properly distributed? I feel it is unlikely that either politicians or governments, or United Nations, or the world at large can solve the problem, it is so huge. Jesus rather enigmatically once said “*The poor you have with you always*” (John 12:8), and that has proved to be absolutely true. There is never enough to go round, so that there are no poor people left.

Christadelphians and others have proclaimed their belief, based on the Bible, that there will be no solution to this problem, and many others, until Jesus Christ returns to set up God's Kingdom on the earth, when under his beneficent rule of righteousness, inequity, evil and greed will be banished and equality and righteousness

will hold sway. The picture held out in the prophets is depicted in passages such as Isaiah chapter 2, verses 1-14 and Psalm 72, verses 1-6.

Early Refugees

So, having quoted these Bible passages, we could well close this article, as we can't give a better solution to the refugee problem than that, and we might as well just sit back and wait for the return of Jesus! But, for a few moments, let's look at examples in the Bible where people were refugees. The outstanding example is Abraham, who was called out by God to leave an idol-worshipping city in ancient Iraq – Ur of the Chaldees – to go to a distant land which he didn't even know. There he was to wander to and fro for the rest of his life, living as a shepherd with his children and his grandchildren, putting his faith in God that things would turn out all right for him. His experience is summarised like this:

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Like most refugees there were times when Abraham had to cross national boundaries just to get food and a livelihood for himself and his family.

“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land” (Genesis 12:10).

And whilst there Abraham had difficulties that he needed to resolve, which he did with God's help and protection.

Joseph the Refugee

Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, yet with help he overcame those setbacks and became overlord over Egypt under Pharaoh, and was in a position to invite his family, as refugees, to come into Egypt and thus survive the famine which swept over the Mediterranean world at that time. Man of faith that he was, he was able to say, on revealing his identity to his brothers:

“God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me

here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:5-8).

Strangers and Pilgrims

God's foreknowledge had provided a Saviour, and a solution to the refugee problem. But God encouraged his people to see them-



selves as pilgrims or refugees – people who were passing through this life experience by way of preparation for a much better life which is to come. As the Letter to Hebrew believers says:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

The Greek word “strangers” here is “*xenoi*” (from which we get “xenophobia” = fear of strangers). It means “outsiders, refugees or foreigners. And “*pilgrims*” = “*parepidemos*” = “sojourners in a temporary home”, people who had no permanent dwellings. In verse 9 Abraham is described as a “*sojourner*”, the word meaning “a resident alien”; that was a status just above that of a slave! That was Abraham!

There are lots more examples we could look at, like the embryonic nation of Israel in slavery in Egypt – they were slaves and refugees! And when they eventually entered the Promised Land they still didn’t have security of tenure, and indeed were eventually expelled by God for their unfaithfulness. They were carried captive to Babylon where again they had the status of refugees, and God told them to get used to it (Jeremiah 29:4-7). But God also promised through Jeremiah that one day their refugee status would end (see Jeremiah 23:5-8).

All Refugees

We could go on finding examples of refugees in the Bible. But the truth is

we are ALL refugees! This is what Paul says of us before we find Christ:

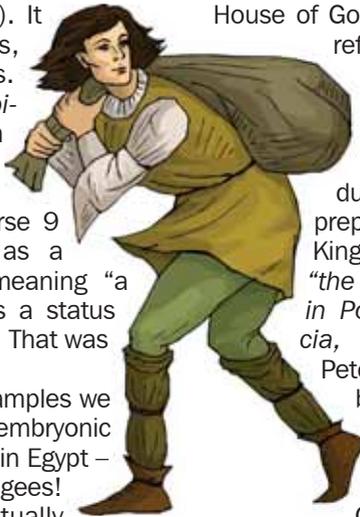
“At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Without Christ we are “*aliens*”, “*strangers*” or “*foreigners*”: separate from God and His gracious purpose. But by belief and baptism into Christ we can become part of the one, united House of God. What a turnaround for refugees!

The letters of Peter are full of this picture of the Christian in this world being on a pilgrimage, during which he or she is preparing and seeking for the Kingdom of God. He writes to “*the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*” (1 Peter 1:1) and describes his believing readers as “*sojourners and pilgrims*” (1 Peter 2:11).

That’s just what the Christian is in this world: a refugee, an exile, because he or she does not belong to this world, to this order of things. Believers seek a better world in the Kingdom of God, to be established at the Coming of Jesus Christ.

The call of God has always been to “*Come out from among them and be separate*”, for only in that way can we be truly God’s sons and daughters, and be rid finally of our refugee status. Refugees suffer, there’s no doubt about that. The Christian too must be prepared for self-denial and its consequences.



The Coming Kingdom

Refugees will naturally seek a place of refuge: somewhere where they can be safe, can prosper and where they can bring up their families in security. The writer to the Hebrews said of the early believers that they: *“waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hebrews 11:10). No wonder the New Testament ends with a picture of God’s kingdom coming from heaven to earth in the form of a city, which has foundations (Revelation 21:1-21).

The apostle John was given a glimpse of the new regime that will exist when King Jesus rules: it’s a beautiful picture of the Kingdom of God, and pictures like this should make all of us refugees long for the Coming of the King:

“I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ Then he who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And he said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’ And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son’” (Revelation 21:3-7).

Hamilton Wilson



Spiritual Food

God has prepared our spiritual food
That we should strengthened be;
In this there is no famine,
So no excuse have we
If we fail to thoroughly digest
This spiritual food each day.

As with our natural food we find
Our inclinations vary,
Some are more fickle as to choice
And some of diets wary;
For growth our food needs to be right
To give us a healthy appetite.

As we prepare our meals each day
Be they fish or fruit or bread,
Our thoughts turn to the lessons
taught
When Jesus his disciples led
Along the shores of Galilee
Or on grassy slopes miracles did see.

The recipes within God’s Word
Are wholesome, pure and good
Like the manna in the wilderness
They are our Heavenly Food,
So we must continue using them
Till life’s journey we have trod.

Mary Eyre

A Wedding is Announced

The harvest was over. Boaz and his workers had begun the process of winnowing the barley at his threshing floor.

It would be hard physical work, throwing the corn into the air after the threshing process to separate the husk. The wind would take the husk away, leaving only the grain which was wanted, so it was usually done in an open place, perhaps a hilltop. It would have been hard work indeed for Gideon who had to do it in a wine-press, to hide it from the marauding Midianites. At the end of the day Boaz would eat his meal and sleep at the threshing floor.

Night-time Adventure

Boaz was Naomi's next of kin – her redeemer, as provided by the law God had given to Moses – so now Naomi gave Ruth a helping hand. She told her to arrive at the threshing floor after the meal, when Boaz had settled down for the night, and Ruth did just that. Her timing was perfect. Boaz had lain down at the end of the heap of grain for a contented night's sleep and noticed nothing until something startled him at midnight and he turned in his sleep.

It was then that he became aware of someone else with him. "Who are you?" he asked, and he was perhaps even more surprised at the answer from the Moabitess. "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer" (Ruth 3:9). Ruth had used a phrase he once used to her when he said: "The LORD repay you for what you have done, and

a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" Now, as it turned out, Boaz was to be the instrument of God's care for Ruth.

Boaz was very conscious of an age gap between him and Ruth, but his affections had been aroused and he wished to look after this young woman and make her his wife. He would willingly take on the role of the redeemer, the "goel", but there was a problem. There was an even nearer relative, one who was thus better qualified than he, and his right to redeem had preference should he wish to use it.

"Remain tonight," he said to Ruth, "and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning."

It must have been a rather tense night. Boaz would wish to see an end of the matter, but nothing could be done until the other relative was given his opportunity and his response properly witnessed.

Morning Talks

Before the sun was really up, when all appeared as shadows, Ruth slipped away from the threshing floor, with six measures of barley wrapped in her garment. Whatever happened, Boaz reckoned that she couldn't be allowed to return empty-handed to her mother-in-law, who had clearly worked to bring these two together. So things had worked out better for Naomi than she might have expected when she said "I

went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty” (Ruth 1:21). Her anxiety had been short lived, as God’s law made provision for the needy, but the hard times they experienced had been the means of bringing Ruth and Boaz together. Sometimes our lives have similar difficult times as a prelude to the Lord God bringing some blessing.

Whilst Ruth had returned home to Naomi, Boaz went down to the gate of the city, where all the business was transacted. He knew that sooner or later the other kinsman would go through the gate and could be challenged about the right of redemption. When he came to the gate, Boaz invited him to sit down and offered him, in the sight and hearing of ten witnesses, the right to redeem the land which Naomi wished to sell. At first the other suggested that he would take up the offer, but when Boaz indicated that Ruth would be included in the bargain, he quickly backed away, not wishing to impair his own inheritance.

The small ceremony at the gate was concluded with the closer relative taking off his sandal as a sign that he would forego his right to redeem. It allowed Boaz to do what he wished to do.

“You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day” (Ruth 4:9,10).

Clearly this was the outcome which Boaz had sought, but he was too honourable a man to achieve it by anything other than the correct way.

Happy Family

Very quickly after they were married Ruth conceived and gave birth to a son, who was named Obed. Nothing is said in the divine record about the name of Mahlon, although it was customary for the new baby to be seen as continuing the dead father’s family line. Instead the genealogy of King David at the end of the book gives the line through Salmon, Boaz and so on to Jesse and David.

Perhaps the way in which the women of the neighbourhood spoke of the new baby is the clue. They said “A son has been born to Naomi.” So Naomi, who had despaired of another son to provide a husband for either Ruth or Orpah found herself with a grandson. The genealogy is repeated twice more, once in Matthew’s gospel, and also by Luke, both bringing the line right up to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Clearly this is one of the important messages of the book for us, that it is another link in the line of the one who was not only son of man, but also Son of God. And the book shows clearly that if we want to be part of the family of believers, which has existed in all ages, we need the sort of faith and commitment shown by Ruth and Naomi.

They did their part faithfully, and God richly blessed them, as he will do for all His people.

Mark Sheppard

Quotations from the English Standard Version of the Bible

Concluded

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