

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

The Importance of Roots (p.3)

Why So Many Different Churches? (p.12)

Frank's Story (p.17)

A monthly magazine written and 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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The Importance of Roots

IF SOMEONE asked you what's the most important thing in life, what would you say?

This was Jesus' reply when he was asked that question:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37–40).



His answer combined two verses from the Bible. The first is Deuteronomy 6:4–5: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."* This commandment was at the centre of the Law which God gave to His people Israel. Today Jews know it as *Shema Yisrael* ('Hear O Israel') and it's at the heart of Jewish prayer services. The

second verse he quoted is also taken from the Law, it's Leviticus 19:18: *"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD."*

Jesus said that the entire teaching of the Law and the Prophets is summarised in these two commandments.

The Law and the Prophets

The 'Law' which God gave to Israel is contained in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It was to be the basis of their religious, national and personal lives. It's comprehensive and thorough and gives guidance for every situation. The 'Prophets' is the writings of the many great men God provided throughout Israel's history to proclaim to the nation His guidance, encouragement and warnings.

Jesus distilled it all into just two commandments. It's not that the rest of the Law and the Prophets are unnecessary—they are the words of God, Jesus himself continually referred to them and his teaching was based on them and every Bible reader knows that they are invaluable. What he said is that if you boil them all down and extract the essence of them, they are all underpinned by these two great principles: love God, and love

your fellow people. This is essentially what all God's laws are about.

When you think about these two great commandments there's a lifetime of lessons to learn: for example, about the supremacy of love; about the fact that (contrary to the popular notion) love requires effort, whether it's love for another person or love for God; and about the fact that there is a priority—God first, people second. This is the big difference between the Christian concept of love, and the one that's popular in today's world.

True Love

Our world puts great emphasis on the virtues of peace, harmony and love—which is absolutely a good thing. From the United Nations which exists to promote peace between countries, all the way down to reconciliation counsellors who seek to restore harmony in personal relationships, we value and try to achieve peace and love. But somehow, as anyone's experience of the world will show them, it very often doesn't work. The reason, I suggest, is that we're trying to fulfil the second commandment without the first. We're trying to make the tree stand up without its roots. We're trying to promote love without the source of love—God.

How do we learn to love one another? The Bible's answer is that we learn to love by learning about the love that God shows to us. He loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us, so that our sins can be taken away:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God... for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:7-11).

A follower of Jesus Christ should be someone who stands out as a truly loving person. Like their master, they should show kindness in everything they do and say. And the key to this state of mind is that it is a response to the love which God has shown to them.

You could say that their life is like a tree with its branches and its roots – vibrant and fruitful with their love for their fellows, and underneath anchored and nourished by their love for God.



Strangers and Citizens

THE MAN looked disorientated. “You’re not from these parts, are you?” asked the kindly shopper. “No,” the man replied hesitantly. “Not from this country.” He sighed. “I don’t have a country. I am seeking asylum here. I had to flee from my country because I believe in Jesus Christ. In my country I would die.”



We all like to feel that we ‘belong’ somewhere – but there are some people who have nowhere they can call home. They feel like aliens, unwanted, often vulnerable. And they are not always treated with compassion, even in affluent societies.

Strangers

‘Strangers’ are a theme in the Bible. They are sometimes described as ‘sojourners’—temporary dwellers with no inherited rights.

In this way they are very similar to modern-day refugees. In the Bible the concept is first used of Abraham (Genesis 17:8). God told him to leave his own country and go to a land where he would be a stranger. When he arrived in Canaan God promised him and his descendants that He would give the land to them. Abraham did not inherit the promised land (Acts 7:5), and nor did his son or grandson. This promise and the fact that it is not yet fully realised are key messages of the Bible. They show that God’s plan for the faithful is on the earth and its fulfilment is still in the future.

Abraham’s grandson (Jacob) went from Canaan with his family down into Egypt to escape famine. These ‘Hebrews’ were foreigners in Egypt, and later when they had grown into a nation they were enslaved and ill-treated by the Pharaoh. God delivered them by Moses, but the nation was instructed never to forget their own experience of being strangers. God told them that when they were living in their land they must treat strangers kindly (for example Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:33–34). He was insistent that the Israelites were not to be influenced by strangers’ religious practices: on the contrary, any sojourners in Israel had to respect the God of Israel and His commandments (Leviticus 18:26). But he also insisted that they treat strangers well.

We're All Strangers

A psalmist prayed, *"I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me"* (Psalm 119:19).

According to King David we're all strangers in a way because of our mortal state:

For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope (1 Chronicles 29:15).

But the apostle Paul tells us how we can become citizens:

"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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:12-13).



How to Achieve Citizenship

It is a grave situation that in our natural state we are without hope, alienated from, strangers to, and even enemies of God (Romans 5:10). We naturally belong to a race of people subject to sin and consequently destined for extinction. As far as God is concerned, we are strangers. But He wants us to belong to Him.

He asks us to believe in Jesus and to give him our allegiance. While we have no inherited right to God's grace He offers it to us freely. We must, however, be prepared to regard ourselves as strangers in this world, waiting for citizenship of God's kingdom which Jesus will bring on his return to earth. We can remain patriotic citizens in this present world and strangers to God's promises, or aspire to be citizens of God's Kingdom, making this the focus of our lives. Paul described this transition:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19).

We are asked to follow the example of Abraham and other faithful people who regarded themselves as strangers in this world. They did not value the standards, possessions and priorities of this life but wanted to serve God and to be in His promised Kingdom on a transformed earth, whatever the consequences in this life.

Believers are warned against loving this present godless world (1 John 2:15) or

accepting its standards (Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 2:9–14). They should, however, be thankful for all of the blessings they receive from God now, including any rights they have as citizens of one of this world’s countries. Moreover, they are commanded to respect the laws of their land (Romans 13:1).

It would be good to think that the refugee was granted asylum and is able to live at peace in a new and better country. However, citizenship in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ offers benefits beyond our wildest dreams. This will also be for ever. Surely this is the citizenship that we should long for.

What of Us?

Where do we belong or want to belong? If Jesus came tomorrow would we be reluctant to leave our possessions and homes, or do we regard them as nothing in order to be with Christ?

Can we echo the words of the faithful Apostle Paul:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:8–9).

Anna Hart



“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. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that 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.”

(Hebrews 11:13–16)

Arrows

TOWARDS the end of his life Elisha completed a task originally given to Elijah. When he was at Horeb, the mountain of God, Elijah had been told to do three things:

Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place” (1 Kings 19:15–16).

The only one of those tasks that Elijah actually completed was to anoint Elisha. Now his successor was to arrange for one of the other tasks to be performed, but not in person. He commissioned one of the Sons of the Prophets:

Anointing of Jehu

Get yourself ready, take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead. Now when you arrive at that place, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him rise up from among his associates, and take him to an inner room. Then take the flask of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, ‘Thus says the LORD: “I have anointed you king over Israel.”’ Then open the door and flee, and do not delay (2 Kings 9:1–3).

The young man did exactly as he was told. When he arrived in Ramoth Gilead he found Jehu amongst the captains of the army. He took him into the house and there he anointed him as directed by Elisha, with this instruction to Jehu:

Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I have anointed you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free (2 Kings 9:6–8).

So the descendants of Ahab were to be wiped out—their wickedness had been extreme and could not be allowed to persist. Even Jezebel was not to be exempt: *“The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her” (v. 10).*

This prophecy came true with devastating accuracy. Before he was installed on the throne of Israel Jehu assassinated both Joram and Ahaziah, then ensured the death of Jezebel, her body being eaten by dogs before it could be buried. No wonder the Son of the Prophets was told to flee once he had anointed Jehu.

The Death of Elisha

Elisha does not appear again in the history of Israel for some time, not until he was on his deathbed. Joash (also known as Jehoash), one of the kings of Israel, went to visit the sick prophet. Joash reigned from 798–782 BC, about 15 years after the death of Jehu. He was distraught at the prophet's impending death and cried "O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen!" (2 Kings 13:14). Elisha himself had used this phrase when Elijah was taken away.

The prophet asked Joash to engage in an enacted parable. "And Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and some arrows'" (v. 15). He instructed him to draw the bow, then he put his hands over the king's hands, and

asked for the eastward window to be opened. Then he told the king to shoot the arrow through the window. There was significance to all of this.

And he said, "*The arrow of the LORD's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them*" (v. 17).

Syria had been Israel's enemy for many years, and a complete victory would be a very welcome relief.

Then Elisha told the king to strike his arrows on the floor. Joash did so three times.

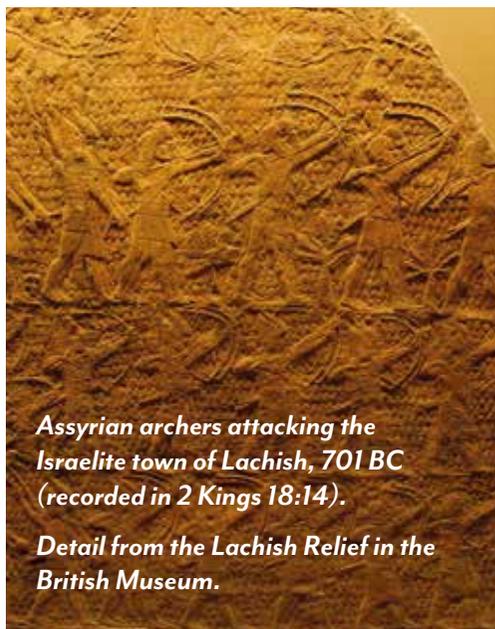
And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times" (v. 19).

To have struck more would have meant that Syria would be so completely routed that they would never again trouble Israel. As it was, Syria would continue to cause problems. Perhaps the king should have been more careful to check what the prophet meant before he followed the instructions.

Elisha died. It looked as though this was the end of an age of miracles, for the lifetimes of Elijah and Elisha were a time of great miracle working. In fact, it was not quite the end. Elisha was buried.

Elisha's Last Miracle

And the raiding bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year. So it was, as



Assyrian archers attacking the Israelite town of Lachish, 701 BC (recorded in 2 Kings 18:14).

Detail from the Lachish Relief in the British Museum.

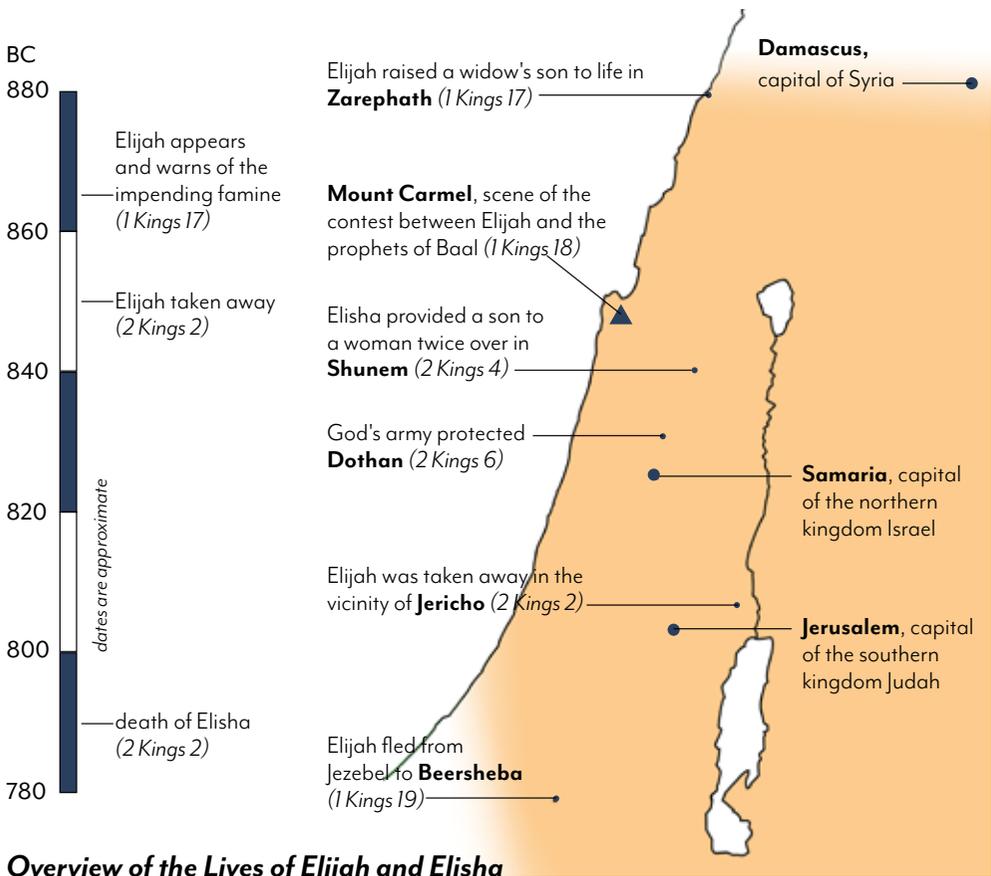
they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band of raiders; and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet (2 Kings 13: 20–21).

This was the third occasion when someone who had died was raised from the dead during the times of these two prophets.

The era and work of Elijah and Elisha ended as it had begun, with a miracle.

It began with the announcement of an impending famine, and ended with a resurrection. There are so many lessons from their lives and times, about keeping faith with God, about obeying His word and trusting Him. Their lives may seem very long ago and distant from ours, but the lessons are right up to date, completely fit for the 21st Century. The important thing is to take note of them.

Mark Sheppard



The Unity of God

THERE IS one God, and He is supreme. This is stressed throughout the Bible.

Moses said: *“To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him”* (Deuteronomy 4:35).

King David said: *“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours”* (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Jesus Christ said: *“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one’”* (Mark 12:29).

You could also look at Isaiah 42:8, 45:5; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:5, and many other passages.

God Is Love

Something else that is stressed throughout the Bible is the love of God. God’s love for those who seek Him is far, far above our ability to love—but He wants us to return His love as much as we are able. This was the fundamental instruction to the nation of Israel at the beginning of their history:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

And to the Christians the Apostle John explained that love for God leads to love for our fellows:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God... In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:7–11).

Communion

The love of God finds expression in the high point of faith, the simple ceremony which Christians call the ‘breaking of bread’, or ‘communion’ because it is an act of union with God and His son Jesus Christ. The Bible also calls it the ‘love feast’ (Jude :12).

And we are given a promise that for those who faithfully seek it now, there will be perfect union with God in His Kingdom:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:1–2).

Denis Jackson

Why So Many Different Churches?



IN THE ACTS of the Apostles we read of the beginning of the early church when 3,000 people were baptised on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). The next verse says *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* This is a simple and clear statement that the apostles’ doctrine (‘doctrine’ means ‘teaching’) was the foundation of the faith of these new believers, and they had a ‘fellowship’ that drew them together as a body of people with a common purpose.

Thus the church started (the Greek word which our Bibles translate as ‘church’ is *ecclesia*, and it does not mean a building, it simply means an assembly). And what a ‘fellowship’ they experienced! What a spirit of dedication possessed them. We read how *‘all who believed were together, and had all things in common’* (v. 44).

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to

house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (vs. 46-47).

The apostle Peter tells us that when we are in this fellowship we are *“a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light”* (1 Peter 2:9).

Soon this ‘special people’ were a target of envy and then of persecution (Acts 8:1; 9:1, 13). This only drew them closer together.

True Fellowship Starts with God

The apostle Paul wrote of these people that they had been *“called into the fellowship of His son, Jesus Christ our Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:9).

What a beautiful picture of fellowship is revealed to us: a body of people coming together because they are of one mind. John takes up the theme in his first letter:

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

John is saying that fellowship starts with each member of the church having a true relationship with the Father and His son. As a result of that relationship they then have fellowship with one another. Unless they have established that true relationship with their Saviour and his Father they cannot have true fellowship with one another.

Communion

The central point of fellowship is when believers meet together to remember the Lord Jesus as he commanded (Luke 22:19), by the simple act of breaking bread and drinking wine as symbols of his body and blood which were given for them. Paul describes it like this: *“We, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17).*



The believers become joined together, symbolically part of their Lord's body: *“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (v. 16).*

This is why this simple act is sometimes known as ‘communion’, or ‘common union’

—it means being united with Jesus Christ and with each other because of what we have in common. With whom should believers share ‘communion’—only with those who share their beliefs, or with others as well?

Light and Darkness

Paul says: *“What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).* To this John adds: *“If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1: 6–7).*

Believers can walk in darkness in two ways. Firstly they can walk in darkness by practising the works of darkness, returning to the attitudes and behaviour of people who do not know God. They can also walk in darkness by following a ‘different gospel’. Paul again:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6–7).

It stands to reason that in order to share communion, believers need to be united in their understanding of the ‘apostles’ teaching’ (as we saw in Acts 2:42). This is how it was in that first church in Jerusalem, and it is clear that all the churches of which

we read in the New Testament were based on the teaching of the apostles.

Different Gospels

There have been many ‘different gospels’ over the centuries. False teachers began by claiming that Christians must obey the Law of Moses. The apostle Paul firmly refuted this:

The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Galatians 3:24–25).

Others tried to teach that if Jesus had been the Son of God he could not have come in the flesh as an ordinary human being, but the apostle John insisted:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist (2 John 7).

There are many references to various other false teachings that arose in the early church (for example 1 Corinthians 15:12, 1 Timothy 1:19–20, 2 Timothy 2:18, Titus 3:10, 2 John 1:10, Revelation 2:14). And history shows that as the centuries passed, churches divided and multiplied until today we have a multitude of church denominations, each holding to different understandings of the ‘apostles’ teaching’. If there is one God and He has caused one Bible to be written, why are there so many different and competing churches?

Why So Many Churches?

Dedicated Bible students know the answer to that question. The Bible itself foretells the breakdown of the church. The apostle Paul said, *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29–30).*

Paul wrote as though it was inevitable: *“For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19).*

The apostle John was contending with wrong believers. As he stood firm for the truth, he said of those who left his community, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19).*

While we might wish it were otherwise, a study of the Bible makes it clear that God did not intend that there would be one universal church which encompasses everyone who calls themselves a Christian. There is one Bible—and with the aid of God’s holy book, everyone who is a seeker is able to search out that which is true. Those who do are true believers; sadly, we fear that the rest are not.



people, His spirit watches over them. As the Psalm says,

You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways... Where can I go from Your spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (Psalm 139:2–3, 7).

God through His spirit knows whether Christians have unity of heart and mind in serving Him—or whether actually they are walking in darkness.

Upholding the True Gospel

Christadelphians believe that we have turned away from the darkness of human inventions, and returned to the clear light of the simple original ‘apostles’ teaching’. We are holding up that light to be seen by anyone who is looking for it.

Paul wrote, *“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11)*. Human nature is ever ready to compromise. In some situations God is willing to allow for that—but He certainly does not allow it when it comes to fellowship. The challenge to all who seek to truly do the will of God, is to walk together with Him:

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:3–6).

Can Two Walk Together?

Centuries earlier God had said to Israel through the prophet Amos, *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3)*. The prophet’s question to God’s people was, were they really walking together with Him? They were not, and so He would forsake them (verses 14–15). God’s principle still applies: unless two are in agreement, they cannot walk together. Walking together with God means having fellowship, because having fellowship, as we have seen, begins by having a true relationship with God, knowing and following the real truth of His word.

The apostles’ teaching, as it is presented in the Bible, creates the basis for believers’ fellowship with God and each other. Can God accept those who deny the need for agreement together? Should He not maintain His own principles?

Ephesians chapter 4 commences with an appeal to *“walk worthy of the calling with which you were called... endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (verses 1–3)*. God is always present with His

David Caudery

Esther

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE spread over much of the civilised world and consisted of 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1). Following the destruction of the kingdom of Judah a hundred years earlier many Jews were still scattered throughout the Empire (Esther 4:3; 8:9, 17). The Persian king Ahasuerus in the book of Esther is generally thought to be Xerxes (485–464 BC). An attempt to annihilate the Jews was thwarted by God, Who has an ongoing purpose with this nation.

The Conquest of the Enemy

There are three main sections:

1. King Ahasuerus rejected Queen Vashti and chose a new queen, whom he named Esther. She was Jewish and had been brought up by Mordecai, her cousin. Haman was a wicked Amalekite, of a tribe long opposed to Israel and to God (see Exodus 17:8–16; Numbers 24:20). He was jealous of Mordecai and planned to destroy him and all Jews on a date decided by casting 'lots' (Purim) (Esther 3:7, 13).
2. Mordecai persuaded Esther to plead with the king for her people. After fasting she began by inviting the king and Haman to a banquet. At a second banquet she told the king of Haman's plot to massacre the Jews. The king

commanded that Haman should be hanged on the 23 metre high 'tree' which Haman had prepared for the hanging of Mordecai (Esther 5:14, 7:10).

3. The king then issued a decree permitting all Jews to defend themselves on the appointed day. This deliverance is commemorated by the Jews every year at the feast of Purim (Esther 9:27–28).

Norman Owen

By kind permission of 'The Christadelphian'



A Purim Ratchet is used to drown out the sound of Haman's name when the Book of Esther is read aloud during the Feast of Purim.

Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ Esther 2:12, 17—see Revelation 19:7, 8; Psalm 45:10–17.
- ◆ Esther 5:14; 7:10—see Acts 5:30, 10:39; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24.
- ◆ Esther 10:3—see Genesis 41:40, 43; Matthew 27:29, 28:18.

Frank's Story



FRANK was a highly qualified accountant. He was on his way to start a new job, in Eastern Europe far from home.

He sat in the corner of the train carriage well out of the way. He was aware that people were looking at him, and sometimes looks developed into uncomfortable stares. It was unusual to see a black African travelling on a train in that country.

Frank settled into the warmth of his corner seat and nodded sleepily as the train clattered along with its steady rhythmic beat.

Suddenly two burly men appeared out of nowhere, grabbed him by his coat and in what seemed like one swift movement pulled him out of his seat, feet not touching the ground, and propelled him to the carriage door. The next thing he was aware of was that he was being hurled

out of the moving train, tumbling into the darkness. Like a sack of potatoes he bounced and rolled down the embankment and crumpled at the foot of a fence post, groaning in agony.

He must have passed out and remained unconscious for a long time. Eventually he began to come round. He was in terrible pain.

What had happened to him? Where was he? And what had happened to his legs? They seemed to be there but he couldn't feel anything! In his befuddled state he couldn't work things out. He must have blacked out again.

In Hospital

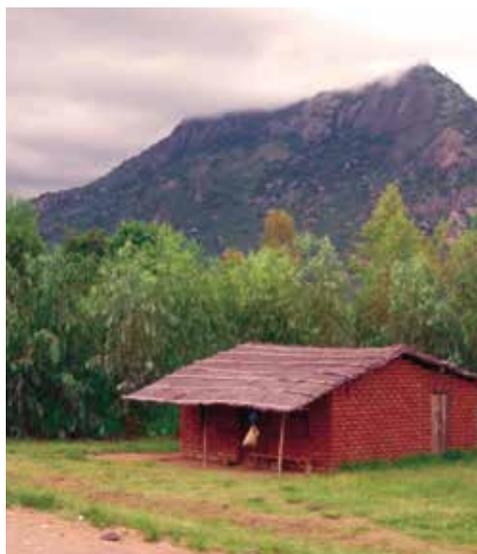
The next thing he knew there was a nurse explaining to him that he was in hospital. She explained that he must have lain unnoticed for some days. The person who found him had brought him to the hospital where it was discovered that both legs were badly broken and that already they were infected, so there was nothing for it but to amputate both just above the knee.

The nurse could give him something for the pain—but no one could give him his legs back. His life had changed for ever. Whatever could he do? How would he get home? Who would look after him? What about his job?

Actually the practicalities worked out well. The host country's government ensured his travel home and a continuing pension for the rest of his natural life. Back in Africa a small bungalow was provided within a secure compound, and there he lived with his ageing but active mother.

Back Home

But what did the future hold? He would always be dependent, always more anxious. He had to find other things to do. He had an English Bible, but struggled to understand it. He discovered a correspondence course and was given



a tutor based in the UK (the course and tutor came from the Christadelphian Bible Mission, an organisation which preaches the Gospel), and in time he asked if there were Christadelphians in his country. He asked if someone could visit and also he

said he wished to be baptised into Jesus Christ. That's where I came into Frank's story, as a visiting 'missionary'.

My companion and I were asked to visit. We actually made up a small troupe as we thought it would be good for Frank to meet a few local Christadelphians. We were admitted to the compound by Frank's mother, who eyed us up and down most suspiciously—a formidable lady, I thought.

We found Frank sitting in his wheelchair reading a well-thumbed Bible. We talked, and it was apparent that his faith was founded upon an excellent insight into Bible teaching and he was sincere in his desire to be baptised. He wanted to drive forward the events which would result in his baptism.

There was of course a practical difficulty—baptism involves the full immersion of a person in water: how were we to baptise a man who was wheelchair-bound? We had on previous occasions made use of a hotel swimming pool, which was fine for someone who was able bodied.

Discussing with Frank we thought it would be possible with the help of one or two strong brothers in attendance. We agreed to meet the following day at the hotel—Frank would get there by taxi.

Nowhere to be Seen

Frank was to be one of a number to be baptised that day. We planned the service at the hotel, which included the first 'communion' (sharing bread and wine in

remembrance of Jesus Christ) for the newly baptised members.

The following day we all met at the hotel, but there was no Frank. Whatever had become of him? We proceeded with the service for the others who had come. Frank did not arrive—was it that the taxi had not collected him, was it that he could not face the effort required to get to the hotel, was it that he had changed his mind about being baptised?

We arrived once more at his compound. His mother admitted us—I sensed with more reluctance than previously. We found Frank just as we had before, only this time he was clearly agitated and frustrated.

Very quickly the story was told: his mother, being afraid for his safety, had refused to let him out of the compound, bolting the gates and hiding the key. She was not going to let these new friends drag him into a hotel swimming pool!

But he desperately wanted to be baptised. He suggested that we use his own bath, which he could climb in and out of himself. We had not anticipated that! We and the little group of local members were delighted to be able to assist Frank in his baptism, and a little afterwards we also shared the bread and wine in fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can still feel the tears of joy shed that day.

The Pearl of Great Price

Frank is a faithful brother and his accountancy qualifications have been helpful to the local brothers and sisters in running the financial affairs of the church.

Frank could have been bitter about the catastrophe which had befallen him. He could have blamed God for allowing such a thing to happen. In the event it became his opportunity to find and grasp the pearl of greatest price, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

David Nightingale



“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

(Matthew 13:45–46)

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