

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1458



Changing the Guard – page 3

A Famine and a Harvest – page 15

Three Steps to a Happier Life – page 18

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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1458

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; 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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Changing the Guard

When the Queen is in official residence, the ceremony of Changing the Guard provides a colourful spectacle in the quadrangle of Windsor Castle, in Berkshire.

The castle is one of the Queen's official residences. Nowadays the ceremony has more to do with tourism than anything else – long standing traditions being maintained because they are so colourful and attractive. But Changing the Guard, or “Guard Mounting” as it is more correctly known, was once a very important aspect of royal security and safety.

Symbolic Presence

In Britain, Household troops have guarded the monarch for more than 300 years – since 1660. When one guard had finished its spell of duty another set of soldiers would come to relieve them and the ceremony would serve to remind people that there was a continuing security presence to safeguard the monarch, his or her family, and the royal residence.

Of course, a few soldiers could not possibly have resisted a mass invasion, if enough people were so minded, and there have been several rather embarrassing occasions when royal security has been breached quite easily. But the principle is what matters. The things we value as a society or as individuals are things that we should watch over and carefully guard. We would not want to lose something that really matters to us merely by neglect or

through our indifference.

All Change

We are living in times of unprecedented change, much of it occurring because of changing technology, or through changing attitudes. We can now do so much more with our time; there are so many more opportunities for enjoyment, travel, entertainment or education.

Tomorrow will be different again, as new things become available and new challenges confront us. And it all happens without anybody really noticing how big some of these changes are and what a huge impact they can have upon our lives and the lives of people around us. If you had to change the guard every time there was an important change in today's world, those soldiers would be on the march almost all the time!

Attitudes have changed radically towards things like marriage, the family, work, international affairs and popular culture, as fashions and fancies come and go. One day scientists affirm one thing; another day they have a different view as new evidence comes to light, or new ideas emerge. But not everything changes: some things are unchanging and unchangeable.

Timeless Truth

God who made the world does not change. Man might change his ideas about God but that doesn't affect God and His purpose one little bit. The Bible presents us with a picture of the immensity and sovereignty of Almighty God. He is described as “*from everlasting to everlast-*



ing” (Psalm 90:2) and, whilst making a magnificent declaration of God’s greatness, the prophet Isaiah asks these challenging questions:

“With whom did he take counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of justice? Who taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, he lifts up the isles as a very little thing ... All nations before him are as nothing, ... To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him?” (Isaiah 40:14-18).

Change of View

How would it be if a colony of ants, whilst busy at their foraging and feeding, decided that mankind was rather different from how they had formerly viewed the species? Would it make the slightest difference to us? Would their changed opinions alter our existence, or our understanding of who we are and what we are about? Not at all!

Nor, says Isaiah, can our changed view of Almighty God affect Him, His revealed purpose and His gracious offer to mankind. God wants people who want to be part of His purpose and He will work with them and for them until that is realised.

There is a huge change coming, which will completely alter our world for the better. The old guard – the people who now control and direct the world – will then be changed, and a new guard will be installed. For God is about to take over the rulership of the world and to establish His Kingdom on earth.

The King’s Guard

There was an occasion in Bible times when the temple was guarded and when both contingents of soldiers joined together to proclaim a young boy as the new King. They achieved a notable coup, ousting wicked Queen Athaliah and installing good King Joash in her place (you can read all about it in 2 Kings, chapter 11). They stood guard to protect him and, by standing together, they helped change the spiritual orientation of the kingdom of Judah.

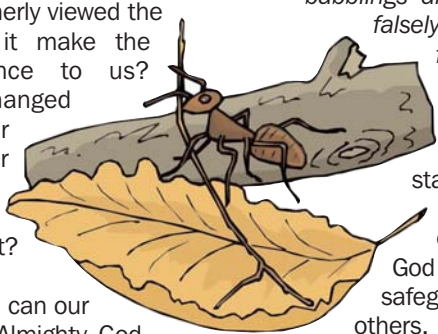
The apostle Paul was being guarded by Roman soldiers when he wrote these parting words of instruction to young Timothy, words which have now been passed down to us to try to follow:

“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith” (1 Timothy 6:20,21).

When we come to understand what the Bible teaches, it becomes the responsibility of every believer to guard what God has revealed. We need to safeguard it for ourselves and for others, by exposing wrong arguments and challenging mistaken beliefs. That way we can be sure that we will keep the faith and that there will be an active and vigorous group of people in existence when Jesus returns from heaven to rule on earth.

When that change comes, we want to be there – like a guard of honour – to welcome the King into His Kingdom.

Editor



Part One

The Failure of Humanism

Ask your neighbour, or a workmate, what they know about Humanism and the chances are they will know very little apart perhaps from the name.

*Yet the whole western world is supposed to have rejected Christianity (and other religions) in its favour. It is true that during the last fifty years belief in the Bible has waned, but people have not automatically embraced Humanism as the alternative. In this series **Malcolm Edwards** explores some of the reasons for this and shows why Humanism is fundamentally flawed.*

No Alternative

The sad truth is that there is no other accepted code of ethics which has been adopted in place of the code once given to mankind by Almighty God. This is sad on two counts: first that God's law code has been abandoned, when it was designed for our good; second that there is now no generally accepted alternative which defines right conduct from wrong action and behaviour.

But why are the principles and teachings of Humanism so little known? Apart from a few academics and philosophers, the public at large are totally ignorant about this movement. Books on the subject are scarce and, for a subject that is supposed to have revolutionised world thinking, there seems to be surprising apathy amongst humanists themselves to widely share their beliefs.

At a well-publicised debate between Bible believers and humanists in a Melbourne University in 1993, only a handful of recognised humanist supporters attended, support-



ers of the Bible outnumbering them by about ten to one!

So, if Humanism has failed to catch the imagination of the masses, why do people still prefer to ignore God and Christianity? The answer must be that, though not actively pursuing humanism, most people are happier with the moral freedom it offers rather than the restrictions of religious ethics. They don't really want to know what Humanism is about: all they want is freedom to do whatever they want to do! In these articles we are going to see whether this movement offers something which is better than Bible truth: something that will save the human race and bring peace and right living to everyone – something that God offers in His Word.

The Origins of Humanism

Humanism is said to have originated in the period of the Renaissance and to have been derived from the teachings of men like Erasmus, a man who believed in God, yet someone whose views were strongly opposed by Martin Luther at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

As a basic conception however, Humanism is much older than that, and goes back to

Greek thinking that was around before the birth of Jesus Christ. The Epicureans, for example, are said to have taught that God had no interest in human life and that there was no survival after death. So humanist ideas have been around a long time; but the movement that now calls itself Humanism is essentially atheistic, and has its roots in Darwinian evolution.

Though still an unproven theory, evolution has caused sufficient doubt about God and Creation among people unwilling to question it deeply, for agnosticism and atheism to thrive. It has been enthusiastically accepted and dogmatically taught by educationalists for half a century, and it is the foundation stone for modern humanism. We shall critically examine evolution in a later article, but in determining the origins of modern humanism, we can confidently say that Charles Darwin's book, "The Origin of Species" has played a significant role. For if existence just happened and if chance is the main component of human origin, there is nothing and none to answer to.

What Exactly Is Humanism?

Humanism is defined as the effort of men:

- * *to think,*
- * *to feel and*
- * *to act for themselves, and*
- * *to abide by the logic of results.*

It is epitomised in the words of the Mediaeval humanist and philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in exalting the dignity of man. The idea is that we can become what we will. The

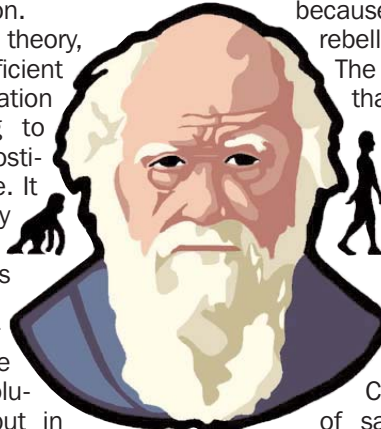
concept considers humankind to be basically good, and capable of improving the quality of human life by reason and scientific progress.

This view of life and human destiny is diametrically opposed to what the Bible says and teaches. In God's revelation to mankind we learn that mankind has fallen from its original privileged position because of disobedience and rebellion against the Creator.

The message of the Bible is that God wants to rescue us from ourselves: to redeem us from moral decay and to make us such that we can spend eternity in His presence. Because of our desperate condition as sinners, God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to show us the way of salvation. So if we are indeed capable of improving our condition without God's help, we have no need of the Lord Jesus either. So Humanism and Christianity are completely opposed to one another.

Be Free!

The two fundamental principles of modern humanism are free inquiry and social agreement. Yet humanist H.J.Blackham in his introduction to "Objections to Humanism" (Constable and Co Ltd-London-1963) admits that free inquiry is radical and dangerous and that social agreement is always open to question and revision. What that really means is that if we will not recognise divine morality, we must always learn by our mistakes, no matter how frequent or costly those mistakes might be. That's what happens when you abandon God's law and decide that



a free-for-all can be substituted, until such time as society decides what is the best course of action for everybody.

Contrary to the teaching of Scripture about humility and self-discipline, humanism tends to glorify human achievement and self importance, aiming solely on how we should learn to live and to die. Whilst its hopes are vaguely focused on a better world sometime in the future, it offers little consolation to people who are alive now, and no hope whatsoever for those millions who have died having never experienced the expected Utopia. Such people have to be regarded as mere links in the evolutionary chain; they existed only to improve and enhance the species and it was a pity for them they had such a tough time of it!

The humanist trusts in knowledge as the force which will determine human behaviour. The obscure expectation is that it will somehow, some day, result in such international agreement as to create eventual world peace and happiness. The question to ask is: "Does it seem that things are getting better in our world as we become more knowledgeable about ourselves and our environment?" Or does it seem that things are getting worse? Is it a case that the more we know the less likely we are to do the right thing? These are big questions and we need to look carefully at man-made ideas that set out to challenge and change what God says about human life and destiny.

Malcolm Edwards

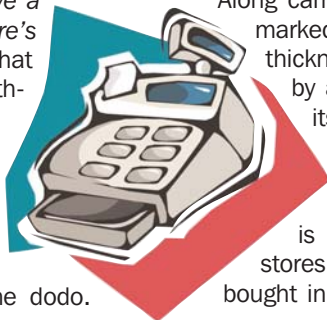
Tagging Along

It wasn't all that long ago when to be a shopkeeper, or to work on a cash till, required a certain ability in mathematics. You had at least to be proficient in mental arithmetic:

'Right Mrs Smith, one tin of baked beans 1/3d, one loaf of bread 6d, a dozen eggs 1/6d, and a tin of pineapples 1/4d; that will be 4/7d – you only have a £1 note? No problem here's your change 15/5d'. All that would have been done without pencil or paper.

Technology

Then along came the calculator and decimalisation, and mental arithmetic suffered the same fate as the dodo.



Everything is now done for you – you punch the price of the various items into the calculator on the till and the machine works out the total cost of the shopping, and the amount of change to be given. All that is now necessary is to give the change to the customer, provided of course the correct price was punched in!

The next stage of progress was to try and eliminate any need at all for thought. Along came the bar code – items were marked with a series of different thickness lines which could be read by a laser scanner. The item and its price can now be read and recorded on computer and all necessary calculations performed. However, this system is far more subtle than that. It stores an itinerary of what is being bought in all branches of the retailer. It

records which items are selling well, and which aren't. These are tagged and the warehouse is automatically notified so that new stocks can be ordered, or other items discontinued, all according to demand. It represents another level of control.

What Next?

So, where is all this leading to, you may be asking. There have been huge advances made in technology in our lifetime. Computers can store and manipulate huge amounts of information incredibly rapidly, so rapidly that huge quantities of items can be tagged and monitored in real time. In fact the field of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is advancing in leaps and bounds every day.

An article appeared in the "New Scientist" magazine last year (28th August 2004, pg. 22) which has sent alarm bells ringing with anyone concerned with personal liberties, because the bar coding of items has been taken a stage further. A new system has been developed called 'Radio Frequency Identification' (RFID) which consists of a small chip and an antenna. When a radio signal is sent from a reading device to the chip it activates and sends back a digital code stored in its memory. This code is unique to that particular chip, so individual items can be tracked. The US department of defence has adopted the system as from Oct 2004 and Wal-Mart had plans to install it during 2005.

You're still not too worried? Well here are a few more applications already in use.

- ✓ It is being used to automatically collect motorway tolls in Europe,
- ✓ for tracking luggage in airports (good idea), and

- ✓ a Spanish nightclub chain is using tags implanted under the skin as a membership pass.

This last application is rightly causing concern in many circles. Anyone could be tagged or unknowingly be given a tagged item which would enable them to be tracked wherever they go.

Compulsory Tagging

It is this last application that reminded me of a section of verses in the Book of Revelation.

"Also it (a beast) causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Revelation 13:16,17).

The Book of Revelation is fascinating to study. It is full of symbolism and imagery and there are many different interpretations of its meaning. However the general picture here in chapter 13 is of an all-powerful political (or religious) system that has authority to force all the earth to worship a powerful leader. Those who don't worship this leader are destroyed. All the inhabitants of the earth are ordered to be tagged – a mark is placed on their right hand or forehead. This mark is their permit to buy and sell. Without it life would be unbearable – even the purchase of food would be denied.

Could this possibly happen? Could such a regime ever gain this much power so that it could demand and obtain such compliance? January 2005 remembered the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Those inmates knew exactly what it was to be ruled by a ruthless regime. They were even marked on their arms with an identity number. Thankfully this regime was overrun. Many thought

The mark of Cain (Genesis 4:15)

that communism was such a regime in the USSR, where you had to be a member of the party, or else...!

That regime has now collapsed. It may be that there are other countries which still operate such a system – where total unthinking obedience to the government is an essential requirement. So, yes! It is perfectly possible for a corrupt world dictatorship to arise which makes such demands on its citizens and exercises such total control, especially now that technology makes it possible.

Bible readers will remember that there was an occasion long ago when a man was marked in such a way that he would be recognised wherever he went, so that his movements could be monitored! (Genesis 4:15).

A Better Alternative

The Bible gives us a far better hope, however. It too speaks of a world ruler who will exercise absolute power, but in a way which is for the benefit of everyone who wants to live at peace and in harmony with God and man. The return of Jesus to the earth will result in the establishment of a perfect, benevolent Kingdom – the Kingdom of God – where evil and corruption will be abolished for good. This is how the struggle between good and evil world systems is described in the Book of Revelation, again in powerful symbolic language:

“The beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the



beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur’ (Revelation 19:20);

“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (20:4).

Making the Choice

Imagine how it would be if we were faced with a decision either to be tagged by an all-powerful world regime or to stand out against it, because we chose the way of Jesus and were determined to wait for him to overthrow that world system when he establishes God’s kingdom on earth. It would take a lot of courage to make that decision but we can, in fact, opt now to choose the latter course of action without any fear of dire consequences.

It’s a matter of choice and determination, to want to be marked out as a follower of Jesus, in the knowledge that he will know wherever we are, and whatever we are doing at all times – and that without electronic tagging! The person who chooses to follow Jesus can be assured that he will never leave us alone, but will always be there for us, to strengthen and help us, through good and bad times alike.

Mike Kirton

Bible Quotations from the R.S.V.

Growth of the Gospel -12

The Conversion of the First Gentiles

In this series **John Hellowell** has been looking at the work of the risen Christ through his apostles as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. He has shown how the gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, then Judea, then in Samaria – just as the Lord had commanded (Acts 1:8). As the circle of believers expanded it came to include a former persecutor (Saul of Tarsus) and an Ethiopian who had accepted the Jewish religion. But, as yet, no Gentile as such had embraced the new faith – not until now!

The Call of Cornelius

In Acts chapter 10, the growth of the Gospel message takes a very significant step. Living in the magnificent port of Caesarea, built by Herod the Great and named in honour of Caesar Augustus, was a Roman centurion named Cornelius. It is almost certain that he had now retired from active service for it would be difficult otherwise to reconcile what we learn about him. He lived in his own house, not in military quarters, and had a retinue of servants. He was evidently not required to worship the Emperor, which was a requirement for all serving soldiers; indeed, the army carried pagan standards when it marched.

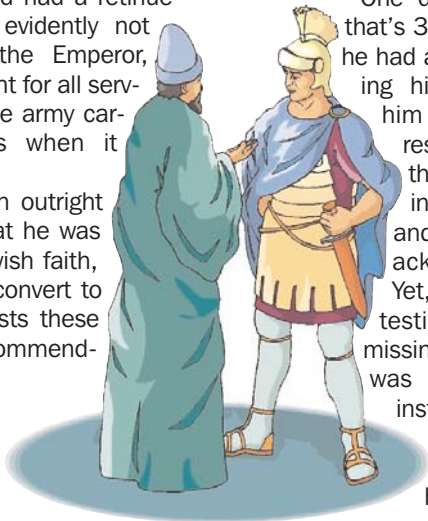
Cornelius was not an outright pagan. We are told that he was sympathetic to the Jewish faith, but he was not a full convert to Judaism. The record lists these four important and commendable characteristics:

- ✿ He was devout ,
- ✿ He was a God-fearer, along with his household,

- ✿ He gave alms generously to the people (that is, of Israel), and
- ✿ He prayed to God continually

This is endorsed by the description we are given in verse 22 of chapter 10, when we are told about:

“Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews...” (Acts 10:22)



One day, at the ninth hour – that’s 3 pm, as we reckon time – he had a vision of an angel entering his room and addressing him by name. Cornelius responded by asking what the angel wanted and was informed that his prayers and his good deeds were acknowledged in heaven. Yet, in spite of this wonderful testimony, something was missing. He was not told what it was by the angel but was instructed to send to Joppa for the apostle Peter, who would tell him what he needed to do. So, two

household servants, accompanied by a devout soldier, were briefed and despatched to the house of Simon the Tanner in Joppa.

Peter's Vision

As the delegation neared Joppa, Peter went up to the housetop at the sixth hour (noon) to pray. Perhaps this was a quiet location, or maybe it got him a little distance away from the smell of the tannery! The choice of lodgings is unusual for the apostle, for the occupation of tanning was abhorrent to strict Jews and regulations were imposed by the Rabbis with respect to the life of tanners and the location of tanneries. It's a pointer to the fact that the apostle was changing his position somewhat and was adopting a rather more lenient attitude, compared with the strict Jewish stance he sometimes seemed to take.

His prayers ended, Peter began to feel very hungry and while his meal was being prepared he fell into a trance and had a vision. He saw something like a great sheet being let down from heaven to the earth and inside it were all sorts of animals, birds and reptiles – it was a veritable menagerie! Now Peter was invited to butcher some of these and then eat them, but he refused. These were animals which no strict Jew would contemplate eating and Peter said so! He stressed that he had never broken the dietary aspects of the Law of Moses, which identified 'clean' and 'unclean' animals: you could eat the first but not the second!

The heavenly voice replied: "What God

has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).

This vision was presented three times and it must have had Peter wondering whatever it meant and what he was supposed to do about it. While he was still thinking about its significance, something happened which made the meaning clear. The Holy Spirit informed him that three men were asking for him and that he was to meet them and to go with them, for this was God's purpose.

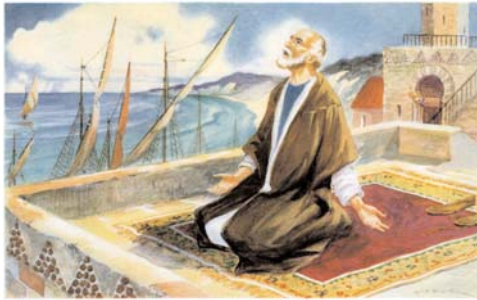
They were the three men who had come from Cornelius, in response to his vision. The delegation explained their errand and all was then made clear to Peter. As it was now too late to start out for Caesarea, the men spent

the night with Peter and, no doubt, discussed the whole episode and its significance.

At the House of Cornelius

Next morning Peter set out, accompanied by six disciples (11:12) making a party of ten. The following day they arrived at the home of Cornelius, who was waiting for them and, realising the great import of what had happened, had also invited his relatives and close friends to attend.

On entering the house, Peter was embarrassed at the reverence he was afforded as Cornelius fell at his feet. Peter immediately helped him up and stressed that he was a man just like him and, while this would be acceptable for an angel, such behaviour was totally inappropriate in his case. He went on to say that, under normal circumstances, it would not have been acceptable for Jews to keep company with Gentiles but that God had shown



him that this distinction no longer applied. From now on he would not call any man “common” or “unclean”.

It has been remarked that this was rather incongruous given that this Galilean former fisherman was currently staying in a tannery and, no doubt, had the residual smell of curing leather about him! In his defence it is notable that he went to Caesarea without hesitation and without fully understanding the background to his call. Now Cornelius was able to provide the background and rehearsed what had happened four days previously.

Peter’s Perception of God’s Purpose

Having been acquainted with the details, Peter now perceived the significance of his vision and God’s purpose in calling Gentiles to repentance. He realised that, from now on, “in every nation whoever fears God is accepted by him”. Peter then reiterated the essential details of the mission of the Lord Jesus with which Cornelius and his associates would already be familiar – “since *this thing was not done in a corner*” (Acts 26:26).

The essential details were that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and that with this divine power he was able to perform many miracles, especially those of healing. However, Jesus was crucified; raised the third day and appeared to his disciples. They were commissioned to preach and proclaim that God had ordained him to be the judge of the living and the dead. Peter’s final declaration is one that

gives hope to everyone of us as well:

“To him all the prophets witness that, through his name, whoever believes in him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

This was the key point. The Jews had considered themselves to be the sole recipients of God’s forgiveness but, in fact, throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament there are indications that Gentiles would also be blessed by God.

While Peter was still speaking something quite extraordinary happened – the Holy Spirit fell upon the whole audience. This was comparable with the day of Pentecost when the apostles were able to speak in tongues and prophesy (v.46).

The effect on the Jewish members was very telling. They all concluded that God had clearly indicated that He was prepared to accept Gentiles on the same basis as the Jews. The gift of the Holy Spirit – God’s power in action – was positive proof that these Gentiles were acceptable to Him, as Peter had been taught earlier – what God had cleansed they must not reject.

Christian Baptism

Now there was only one more thing to be done and Peter asked the Jews present whether any of them could now oppose the baptism of those present. Nobody would: how could they! Yet notice the importance of this development. Cornelius and his household had believed the gospel and God had shown, in the clearest possible way that they were acceptable to him: but their baptism was still essential.

This is the obvious lesson of this whole



episode. Even someone like Cornelius, who showed all the commendable attributes of devotion for and reverence towards God, unstinting generosity in his charitable giving and his rich prayerful life, still had to submit to the acknowledgement of the grace of God and repentantly undergo the symbolic renewal of his spiritual life by dying to his old life and being raised to newness of life through the waters of baptism.

So the whole company was baptised and joined the family of God. It was only natural that those newly-converted Gentiles should invite Peter and his companions to stay with them for a few days. They would enjoy the rich fellowship which is the great privilege of all true believers and

they would also have the opportunity to obtain answers to any outstanding questions regarding Christian belief and conduct.

From now on everybody who had come to believe and be baptised – with no racial distinction whatsoever – would be eligible for admission to the family of God. This was a very significant development, yet it was not something that had happened by accident. The acceptance of non-Jews into God’s family had been foreshadowed in God’s purpose from the very beginning, as we shall see in the next article in this series.

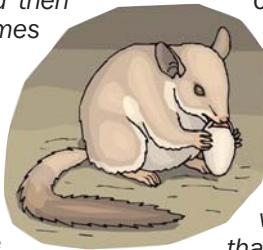
John Hellawell

“Not My Will, but Yours”

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:13,14).

It was Robert Burns, the Scottish poet who once, seeing the way a farmer’s plough had disturbed the carefully constructed nest of a field mouse, penned the words that John Steinbeck later made even more famous:

*“The best-laid plans of mice and men
Gang aft a’gley, [often go wrong]
And leave us naught but grief and pain*



For promised joy.”

Those words strike a chord with all of us, despite the fact that a plough is the least likely thing to unsettle us, for there are so many things in life that can disturb or overturn our plans, however carefully they are made.

Are we taking seriously the words of the Apostle James? For, having written about the uncertainty of life, he adds the advice:

You ought to say, “If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that” (4:15).

In the first century, James had evidently noticed that those around him were discussing their planned activities as if they were bound to take place, as if wishing could make it so.

Boast Not

Such misplaced confidence was described as boasting, and Proverbs tells us, *“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth”* (27:1).

One of the harsh lessons of the 21st century is that we cannot count on everything turning out as we might have wished. Settled lives, loving families, happy holidays – all these can be tragically smashed apart by unimaginable forces; friends, relatives and possessions can be snatched away in a moment. It is exactly as James described it when he asked:

“What is your life?”, and then answered, *“It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away”* (4:14).

God not Self

While there is yet time, we must set out to do God’s will, to obey His commandments, instead of serving Self. It is not sufficient to plan things to suit ourselves, and then tack on the expression *“God willing”* at the end of a sentence, as a kind of mini insurance policy. We should be asking ourselves if God really wants us to do what we are proposing. Does it serve him, or progress our spiritual development?

Those are crucial questions in life. Pleasing God should be uppermost in our minds, and we must bear in mind that it is the Return of the Lord Jesus that most closely defines his purpose for all of us.

How are we to know what God really wants us to do? Left to our own devices, we could assume that certain things are

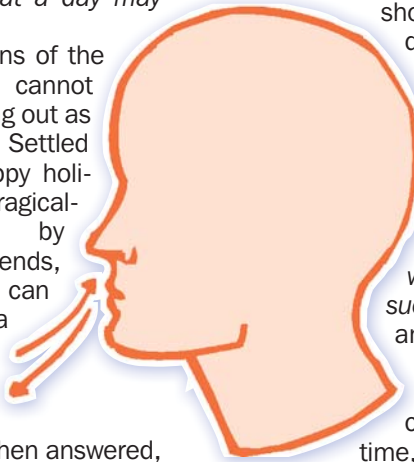
in accordance with God’s will, whilst in fact they are quite the opposite of what He has in store for us. We just can’t take anything for granted, as life is such a precarious matter. So we should always make our decisions and planned actions a matter of prayer.

Let us then, with true humility, say: *“If our Master delays his Coming, and if it pleases God, we shall do such and such”*. In our watching and waiting, let us remember that God’s judgements may come in a moment of time, sweeping all before them with an overflowing flood.

Nothing that we purpose to do in the flesh – to please and satisfy Self – will profit us on that day. But if we have put our whole life into God’s hands and trust in Him to oversee and guide us, we can rest assured that He will care for us.

That was just how Jesus lived. He placed his entire trust and confidence in his Father and submitted himself in perfect obedience, *“even unto death”*. The words he prayed as he faced the ordeal of the Cross, should be our prayer too, hard though it can be to submit ourselves without holding anything back. Here is a prayer for this and every day:

“Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).



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Part One – A Love Story

A Famine and a Harvest

About 3,300 years ago a family of four – the parents and their two sons – ran away. Their ancestors had only arrived in their “Promised Land” a hundred or so years earlier, but now there was a famine, and all their hopes and dreams had faded.

“We can’t stay here any longer,” Elimlech told his family; “The only thing is for us to go to Moab”, a nearby country. So off they went. Their faith in God had gone, and their new wonderful life style was a thing of the past. Little did they know that less than fifteen years later, a close relative of Elimlech, a man named Boaz, would be reaping his bumper harvests in the very same fields three of them were now leaving for good.

Hard Times

It was a sorry time in Israel’s history. Joshua had divided the land among the twelve tribes and, very soon, Joshua’s God had been forgotten. When a Saviour came – the Bible calls them “Judges” – the people turned back to God; but after his death everyone did what was right in their own eyes, again. Enemies came and went, and so did Israel’s faith.

So now Elimelech had had enough, and turned his back on the “Promised Land”. He went off to seek his survival – if not his fortune – in the land of Moab, whose people were descended from Lot, Abraham’s nephew. None of the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob applied to Lot and his descendants. So, in moving to Moab, Elimelech was taking Naomi his wife, and their two sons away from God, God’s land, and God’s people.

Even Harder Times

The family had not been in Moab that long when Elimelech died. Was this God’s punishment? Over the next ten years the two lads married local girls, but before any grandchildren came Naomi’s way, tragedy struck. Both the young men died too. Naomi must have been heart-broken, but strange things can sometimes come out of hard times. Naomi’s faith resurfaced, and she made a

big decision – she was going to return to the land of Israel.

Her decision might have been coloured by the fact that she had heard that the famine had ended back home. But it was still a big decision, to leave her new family, acquired in Moab, and go home to all the likely expressions of “I told you so”.

Her daughters-in-law both commenced the journey with her, saying they would return with her, but before long Orpah



turned back, to her own land and her own folk. The Divine record says that she went back to *“her people and her gods”* (Ruth 1:15). Good Jews did not marry out of their faith, and Orpah might have realised that she would face a lifetime of widowhood if she accompanied Naomi.

Vital Choice

Ruth, however, did not turn back. It becomes clear that she had learnt sufficient about the LORD God of Israel to help her decide that He was God in heaven above and earth beneath. He had chosen Abraham and the Jews as the vehicle by which He would bless the whole world. Naomi was the only living Jew she knew, and she intended to stick by her.

Ruth’s impassioned statement of faith stands high among the world’s literature:

“Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16,17).

With that declaration Ruth joined the people of God. By her expression of faith in Almighty God and His promises, she became part of *“Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Galatians 3:29). The rest of the story makes that evident.

Our Role Model

The chances are you weren’t born in Moab, and you don’t know anybody called

Naomi, certainly not as your mother-in-law! But we can still make a choice like the one Ruth made and become an inheritor according to God’s promises to us. In Old Testament times you joined the people of God by joining the nation of Israel – that was God’s doorway in for all people, Jew and non-Jew alike. Take Rahab as another example. She sheltered the spies in Jericho and made it clear that she believed in their God, and wanted to be saved when the city fell – and so she was, by faith (Hebrews 11:31). She was destined to become Ruth’s mother-in-law, as things worked out – remarkably!

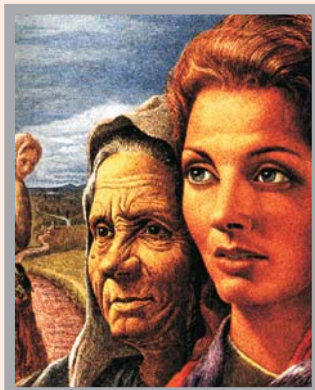
If we want to follow Ruth’s example, and put our trust in the God of the Bible, we don’t now have to become Israelis – we can become Jews *“inwardly”* (Romans 2:29). The New Testament way for us to become part of Abraham and of Christ is by baptism

in water, after understanding and believing the promises of God. That’s what Paul says in Galatians chapter 3 – that by faith and baptism we can become the children of God and *“heirs according to the promise”*.

Barley Harvest

Naomi and Ruth headed *“home”*. It’s fascinating to note that their return journey was at just the same time of year as Joshua had led the nation of Israel into their *“Promised Land”*. The River Jordan is in flood throughout the harvest season, so Naomi and Ruth probably went around the south of the Dead Sea, and up north to Bethlehem, a long journey on foot of about 100 miles. They arrived safely, and the local people remembered Naomi.

At the time, the Jews had a God-given



law that enabled the poor to gather the gleanings and reap from the corners of the fields (see Leviticus 19:9,10). As barley harvest was just starting, Ruth asked Naomi's permission to go and glean, so as to provide them with necessary food. This is a fascinating insight into the depth of knowledge Ruth had about the Jewish laws.



She must have asked many questions, and absorbed all that her late husband Mahlon had told her, as well as cross-questioning Naomi on the long walk to Bethlehem. Now it was her turn to pay something back.

Little knowing that her steps were directed by God, Ruth spent a pleasant day working in the field of a local farmer, after first asking the foreman's permission. Boaz, the farmer, immediately took an interest in her, when he learnt who she was. News had spread about the Moabite girl who had accompanied old Naomi back home. So he made a point of going over to her and welcoming her to his fields. He even told his men not to give her any problems. She was to carry on working on his farm, and he blessed her in the name of the Lord God of Israel "under whose

wings you have come for refuge" (Ruth 2:12).

Bread and Wine

At mealtime a wonderful thing happened. Boaz invited Ruth to come over and sit with his harvesters. He gave her some food and drink, and made her feel very welcome. But the food wasn't just an ordinary picnic. It was bread and wine.

Neither Boaz nor Ruth would have realised the significance of that meal. It was over a thousand years later that the Lord Jesus Christ gave his disciples bread and wine at a supper they shared together. Bread was to help them remember his torn body, and the wine was a symbol of His lifeblood. True Christians make an effort to share this memorial once a week. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup", said Paul, "you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26)

So what a transformation for Ruth! She had put her trust in the God of Israel; she had found support and sustenance in Bethlehem; now she had been given a token of her newfound status – she had shared bread and wine with someone who cared for her, because he loved her. Truly she was now becoming accepted as a daughter of Abraham, by faith, and thus an "heir according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

David Simpson

My Strength

God is with me in my troubles,
Surrounding me with constant care,
I know He always hears me
When I cry to Him in prayer.

Storms of life may rage unceasing,
But safe within His hands I'll stay.
He'll give me strength, true peace,
and courage,
No matter what may come my way.

Colleen Simons

Three Steps to a Happier Life

In this short series, **Sarah and Andy Joiner** have explained that **Belief and Baptism** are vital steps to take if we want to improve the quality of our life – both now and in the life to come. Now they explain the third step we should take if we want to be truly happy.

The third “B”

At the outset we said there were three “Bs” that we should concentrate on, and we have already looked at two of them – **Belief** and **Baptism**. Becoming happy demands one more thing – proper Behaviour. How we behave is really important. You see, belief and baptism will not:

- ✘ Remove temptation;
- ✘ Keep us from sin;
- ✘ Unconditionally assure eternal salvation;
- ✘ Solve all of life’s problems;
- ✘ Make a wrong thing right;
- ✘ Save an impenitent sinner – someone who is not sorry.

There is a bit more to it than that. We have to **Behave** and trust in God’s grace. There are many verses which show that our behaviour matters to God. Look at this passage from Ephesians chapter 5:

*“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. **For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God**” (Ephesians 5:3-5).*

Life Change

This is a very clear and powerful passage. The way we think and act has to change, otherwise we will not be allowed to enter God’s kingdom. We cannot laugh at coarse jokes, or indulge in drunkenness from an excess of alcohol. We need to clean our minds and lives from sexual immorality. And what about greed? Materialism is a much more subtle sin.

Watch out – if we’re always wanting higher wages, a new bathroom suite, the latest TV. Be careful! These things might destroy us if they become the focus of our lives rather than our wanting to please God.

Don’t get disheartened. None of us are perfect. The point is that we should be trying to behave properly, and we should be ready to confess our failures to God when things go wrong:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8,9).

Even when we are baptised believers, we need to ask for forgiveness every day for the things we do wrong and the things that we don’t do, that we should do. If we believe and are baptised and are trying to behave, we can rejoice and be confident

in God's forgiveness. But remember, we show that we are sorry for something by trying not to do it again. God will help us if we urgently seek him.

Real Happiness

Do the three "B"s really lead to happiness? God asks us to Believe what he has told us in the Bible. He commands us to be Baptised as a matter of urgency. He commands us to obey him – though he promises to forgive us when we fail, if we keep on trying to do the right thing. Jesus promises the faithful believer that when he returns he will give them the gift of everlasting life. This is how the Psalmist expressed his conviction, in his prayer to God:

"For you will not ... allow your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fulness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:10,11).

God will not leave us in the grave; He will bring us into His presence in His kingdom. In God's presence there is no suffering, death or sorrow – only complete joy and true happiness forever. The Bible is not lying. When Jesus returns to set up the Kingdom of God on earth, we will be full of joy. Then there will be true happiness forever.

If we **Believe**, get **Baptised** and **Behave properly** our life will stop going around in circles. We will be on the straight and purposeful path to the kingdom of God. This hope gives our life meaning now, and in God's Kingdom there will be true happiness for ever.

Do it Today!

We have to trust that what God has told us is true – this is the path to happiness. As the saying goes: "to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat!" We have to trust God, and step out, holding on to him. If you have the faith and courage to do this, God will not let you down. Listen to what King David had to say about trusting in God and trying to walk in His ways:

"This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles ... Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him!" (Psalm 34:6,8).

Taste and see that God is good – act now. "Tomorrow never comes", as they say. It's really important to start reading the Bible for yourself, to find out what it really says. Get asking questions. Ask someone for one-to-one help in understanding the Bible. Do it today. Jesus could be back at any second – we might not be able to do it tomorrow. And that's equally true about Baptism – do it today; and about Behaviour – it's important to change the way we act right now.

And once we've got around to it, we need to follow Jesus for the rest of our lives. Even though we might stumble, we must keep our hand in God's hand, and walk with Him all through our lives.

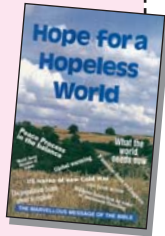
The Three B's then – **Believe** – get-around-to-it; **be Baptised** – get-around-to-it; **Behave** – get-around-to-it. And once you've got around-to-it. Stick to it! That's the only way to everlasting happiness.

Sarah & Andy Joiner

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What a Leader!

The trouble with human rulers is that after a time they vanish from the scene, and have to be replaced; and who can tell whether the replacement will be better, or worse, than their predecessors? But Jesus is alive for evermore and will need no successors! Further, he will be equipped with all the power needed to see that his righteous policy is not thwarted or threatened by evil men.



Fred Pearce

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