

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

Manufacturer's Instructions (p. 3)

"Not My King!" (p. 5)

True Conversion (p. 12)

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 humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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Manufacturer's Instructions

IN THE VEHICLE DOOR there was a handy pocket, with a sign above it which indicated 'Not for phones'. Daft sign, I thought. I slipped my phone in the pocket, shut the door and smashed my phone. It turned out the vehicle manufacturers who put the sign there knew better than I did.



When you buy a fridge, or a car, or a phone, or flat-pack furniture, or any other consumer item, you'll receive instructions from the manufacturer which explain how to set it up, how to clean it and maintain it, and what to do if it goes wrong. You can disregard the instructions, and trust that you'll just figure it out. But the sensible thing is to read and keep the instructions, and refer to them when necessary. That's the way to get the best use out of the product.

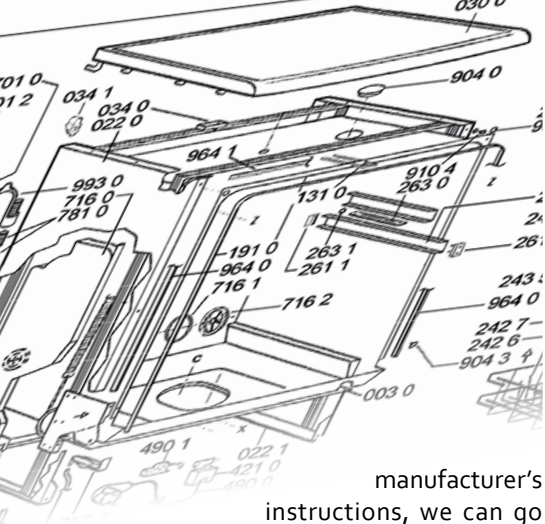
Life can be complicated, and precarious, and (you have to admit) we all find it bewildering and difficult at times. Wouldn't it be handy if our life came with an instruction manual? Good news, there is one! It's called the Bible. It's quite a bit bigger than an average instruction manual—but human life is very much more complicated than a fridge or a phone.

How to Live Your Best Life

Writing to his young friend Timothy, the Apostle Paul said:

From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

The Bible shows us what life is about, why we are here, why we are the way we are and why the world is the way it is; it tells us about God, and His purpose with the world and us. It shows us how to get the best out of our life, how to avoid its pitfalls and how to make the most of its opportunities; how to be content and at peace with ourselves and with others, and above all with God. But it's much more than that: it's able to make us *'wise for salvation'*. It shows us that this life is just the start—if we follow our



manufacturer's instructions, we can go on to live for ever when Christ returns to establish his Kingdom. As Paul said in his previous letter to Timothy, 'godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come' (1 Timothy 4:8).

A Good Read

Some people enjoy reading manuals — most don't. The Bible is not just a manual, it is a brilliant book to read.

Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It's a song of praise to God, which is basically all about the wonder and value of God's word. Here's an extract:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word (Psalm 119:9–16).

The Psalmist says he seeks God's word with his whole heart, he treasures it; he delights in it, more than anything else; he absorbs it and meditates upon it and is always ready to talk about it. Generations of Bible readers have discovered the truth of this for themselves.

The Meaning of Life

Ecclesiastes is the Bible's philosophy book. It asks the big questions—what is existence, and what does life mean? Unlike most philosophy texts, it also gives the answer. This is the book's conclusion:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

That is how to get the best out of life: to get to know God, to fear Him, to do what He says; and to live in the knowledge that this life is preparation for the life to come.

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“Not My King!”

THE UNITED KINGDOM has a king. Most of its population have not known a king on the throne. Queen Elizabeth II reigned for 70 years. She died in September 2022, and was succeeded by her eldest son Charles, who is now King Charles III. The Queen was 96 years old, so funeral and subsequent coronation arrangements had been provisionally discussed. Nonetheless, her death was a shock, because although aged and frail she had still been doing duties and seemed in reasonable health for her age.



Queen Elizabeth II

Charles became king immediately his mother died. While still in grief and shock he started his duties, including meeting his citizens. He was already known to all the population as Prince Charles, and much of his life history is public. In contrast, he knows relatively few of his citizens.

His succession to the throne was met with affection and joy, and cries of ‘God save the king!’ There have, however, been protests from those people who do not support the monarchy. Some protesters waved placards saying ‘Not my king’. Some object

to the kingship being inherited by birth in a ‘royal line’.

Opposition in Israel

This is not new. Around 1000 BC, David succeeded Saul and became the second king of Israel. The account of David’s thrilling and turbulent career is in the Bible books of Samuel. His first years were not easy. Abner the captain of Saul’s army took Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, and made him king as a rival to David. Ish-bosheth reigned for two years but was subsequently murdered (2 Samuel 2:2–17, 4:5–12).

David was one of the most famous and successful Jewish kings. His son Solomon also had a prosperous reign, but Solomon’s son Rehoboam behaved foolishly and created a split in the kingdom: *‘And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David”’* (1 Kings 12:16). Rehoboam retained his rule over two tribes, which became the Southern Kingdom; the other ten tribes appointed their own monarchy and became the Northern Kingdom.

The Northern Kingdom had a checkered history with seven of their 19 kings murdered by their successor. None of the northern kings pleased God. In the Southern Kingdom all the kings were in the royal line of succession from David, and

some were good kings who pleased God. But the line was not without trouble. For example, King Joash only survived because he and his nurse were hidden to escape the massacre of the rest of his brothers by their furious grandmother after her son, the previous king, had been killed (2 Kings 10 and 11).

Jesus: The Promised King

The most extreme example of a rejected king is Jesus. There was a king in Israel until the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon, around 600 BC. From then until now the Jews have not had a king. But their scriptures foretold very clearly and repeatedly that a Messiah—that is an ‘anointed one’ (which is the meaning of ‘Christ’), would come. For example, the prophet Ezekiel said these words about Zedekiah, the last Jewish king:

Thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgement belongs, and I will give it to him (Ezekiel 21:26–27).

Years later, the angel Gabriel told Mary that her son Jesus would be the promised king:

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David (Luke 1:32).



Jesus has never ruled as a king. But he told people that this was his destiny, promised by God Himself. This was raised at his trial when he was questioned by the Roman governor Pilate.

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37).

And Pilate took note of this when he crucified Jesus. In fact, he made it a public statement for all to see.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

Jesus: The Rejected King

Jesus had not been what the people expected him to be. They were all, especially the religious rulers, familiar with the scriptures that promised them a glorious king. And Jesus was a descendant of King David through Mary. But the Jewish leaders wanted a political king, not a man who would die to save them from their sins. They did not understand the scriptures that foretold of the suffering servant. They could not accept that this unpretentious man could be a king. So when Pilate said to them "Behold your King!" they cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:14–15).

There has been no greater rejection in human history. The Son of God, who lived a perfect life and spent his time preaching

and healing the sick, betrayed and rejected by his people.

Jesus had known that this would happen. On several occasions he told his disciples that he would be murdered. He told parables to teach them that he would leave them, but later return as judge and king. For instance one of the parables was about a man who went away to receive a kingdom, and to return, and he described the attitude of the Jews:

But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us' (Luke 19:14).

In another parable he described himself as the king, back on earth judging the nations:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus' priority was the Kingdom, although he knew he had to suffer first. During his ministry, this is what he preached:

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:1).

He told his followers: *'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness' (Matthew 6:33).*

UK citizens know a lot about the life of king Charles III, whereas he knows little about their lives. In contrast, Jesus knows everything about us. By reading the Bible we can learn a lot about him. Charles is a king: Jesus is not yet a king. Charles has waited a long time as prince; Jesus has been in heaven for centuries, awaiting

the time set by God for his reign to begin (Matthew 24:36–39). His reign has been anticipated for thousands of years, and his kingdom will be over the whole world (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15). Nobody will be able to oppose him and he will conquer all those people who reject his reign (Psalm 2:7–12; 1 Corinthians 15:24–28).



King Charles III

Preparing for the King

The followers of Jesus are preparing themselves for his judgement and reign. For many other people it will be a surprise and shock when he does come back. He foretold that he would have chilling words for those who were not ready for him: even people who had professed to follow him and do miracles in his name.

And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matthew 7:23).

We have a choice. We can show our allegiance to Jesus as our future king, or we can be like the Jews of old. Does Jesus know that we seek his kingdom and accept him as our king; or are we, in the way we think and live, really saying of him 'Not my king!'

Anna Hart

2 Timothy

THIS LETTER, probably Paul's last, was written shortly before his martyrdom at the hands of the Emperor Nero in Rome, about 68 AD. Although Paul had been released after his first trial (his 'crime' was preaching the gospel!), he knew that this time his execution was imminent (4:6).



Final Advice

Paul had 'fought the good fight' (4:7) and he urged Timothy to stand fast in the true faith, without fear (1:7; 2:1); not to be 'ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner' (1:8). Like Paul himself, he must be 'a good soldier' for Jesus Christ (2:3).

Dangers for the followers of Christ would not be confined to the First Century. Great perils would come: false teachers arose within the Christian community in those

days, but the 'last days' before the return of Christ will also be perilous (3:1–7). We need these warnings more than ever today.

Paul knew that, although we are mortal, God has offered a 'promise of the life' (1:1) to all true believers and a 'crown of righteousness' (4:8) when Christ returns, if they have remained faithful.

Norman Owen

By kind permission of 'The Christadelphian'



The 'stephanos', or victor's crown, given to successful competitors in the Roman Games:

'An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules' (2:5).



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ 2 Timothy 2:8—see 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Luke 1:32.
- ◆ 2 Timothy 2:19—see Numbers 16:5–7, 26.
- ◆ 2 Timothy 3:1–7—see Romans 1:28–31; 2 Peter 3:3–4.

6 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defence no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. **9**

True Conversion

'TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3). To 'turn' is to be converted, and Jesus believed it to be crucially important.

There is a view that conversion to Christianity is a matter simply of declaring that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—upon which you are saved. This does not fit with what we read in the Bible.

When we look into the Bible we see that conversion to Christianity has to do with listening to the Word of God, being convinced of its truth, repenting of our sins (that is, turning away from them), and being baptised for the forgiveness of our sins: *'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:38)*. Then we can look forward to receiving eternal life at Christ's return: *'Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done' (Revelation 22:12)*.

The importance of allowing God's Word to change us is emphasised throughout the Bible. For example: *'The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes' (Psalm 19:7-8)*.

Let's consider two examples of people who were converted to Christianity.

The Conversion of Cornelius



Cornelius was a Roman centurion. His story is in Acts 10. He was a devout, kind-hearted and prayerful man. God approved of his character, but he needed to do more in order to be saved. An angel appeared to him and instructed him to send for the Apostle Peter. He gathered his household together and sent urgent messengers.

When Peter arrived Cornelius said, *'I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord'* (v. 33). Peter preached to them the *'good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)'* (v. 36). He told them how God raised Jesus from the dead; how he himself had seen him, and eaten and drunk with him after he was risen; that he had commanded them to preach to people

that God had appointed Jesus judge of the living and the dead; and that in his name forgiveness of sins would be granted to all who believed in him, as the prophets had foretold.

At this point the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household. They spoke with tongues, which was a sign that God had accepted them. Peter asked, *'Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'* (v. 47). No objection was possible, so he commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord.

Cornelius was a good man, but his goodness would not save him. Peter preached the Gospel to him, and he was baptised.

The Conversion of Saul



Saul's story is in Acts 9. He was an earnest and zealous man, and devoted to God's service. He was so zealous that he persecuted people whom he saw as a threat to the Jewish faith. His conversion happened as he was on the way to

Damascus to seek out and punish the Christians there. He was more honoured than Cornelius, because he was visited not by an angel but by Jesus Christ himself, confronting him in a blinding light from heaven. He later wrote to the Galatians:

'For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ' (Galatians 1:11–12).

Jesus Christ spoke to him, and he was struck blind. The Lord sent another disciple to heal him (Acts 9:10–12). He was immediately baptised (v. 18). Then being inspired and empowered to work miracles in the name of Jesus, he set about preaching in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of sins: *'Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you'* (Acts 13:38).

This is the process of conversion, and we see it repeated throughout the book of Acts. For example *'Many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized'* (Acts 18:8). It involves hearing the Gospel message, being convinced of its truth, turning our lives around, being baptised for the forgiveness of our sins, and living a new life in obedience to the Lord Jesus who said, *'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'* (Luke 9:23).

Bible Fingerpost

Arrival

IT WAS THE END of an era, and yet it was an exciting beginning. The Israelites would never forget Moses' long parting speech, and the moving ceremony in which he handed over command to Joshua the son of Nun. *'Be strong and courageous,'* he had said, *'for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it'* (Deuteronomy 31:7).

Crossing the Jordan

Only the River Jordan now lay between the people and their goal. The Jordan was a considerable obstacle. The river derives its water largely from the rain that falls on Mount Hermon, over one hundred miles away to the north. In winter a thick snow cap builds up on Hermon's peaks. The summer sun melts this snow into swirling torrents that swell the Jordan into a mighty flood. For most of the year the river can be forded or crossed with a simple bridge. But at barley harvest in March, the very time when the Israelites needed to cross, it was far too wide for their children, cattle and baggage to go over.

Perhaps Joshua was wondering how he was going to solve this problem. Perhaps he was feeling depressed and lonely without Moses to turn to for advice. At any rate, God came along with a message of counsel and good cheer that runs down through the centuries. *'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you,'* he promised (Joshua 1:5). The apostle, writing centuries later to the First Century Christians, spotlighted those words to Joshua, and applied them to us. He coupled with them another comforting verse from the Psalms: *'Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"'* (Hebrews 13:5–6). Looking back on the record of Joshua's life, we know that God never did forsake him, or let him down. Nor did he fail the Psalmist, David. So we may have the confidence that God is there to guard and protect us, if we humbly listen to Him.

There was another part to the advice He gave Joshua. *'This Book of the Law shall*



not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success' (Joshua 1:8). God promised to be with Joshua, and give him His support. But it was still essential for him to study God's word by day and night. God's help was not a magic influence, dissolving all obstacles, or an inner voice telling him just what to do in every situation. He still needed to base his decisions on the commandments written down in the Law of Moses. So it is for us. 'All Scripture,' says Paul, 'is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The Law of Moses contains no instructions for crossing rivers, but this was not to be a test of Joshua's organisational skill. God was going to make this historic event an object lesson that would last for all time. First, He set a date for the crossing. It would take place in three days. The people should have their possessions packed ready in good time. When the hour arrived, the ark from the Tabernacle should go on ahead: *'There shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length... in*

order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before' (Joshua 3:4).

The great morning came. The people assembled in marching order on the plain before the river. Slowly the ark set off, carried by priests, straight towards the brown, swollen waters. The people watched in silence. They held their breath as the feet of the bearers covered the last few yards and entered the water. Then a gasp arose. The moment the Levites wet their sandals in the brink of the river, *'the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down towards the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off' (verse 16).*

Walking Through the River

Before their very eyes, the water level sank like a bath when the plug is pulled out, and soon they were able to stumble across the stony bed to the safety of the other side. The ark with its brave bearers stood there in the midst of the river bed while the people passed in front of it, hour after hour. As soon as the last family was across, Joshua ordered the priests to follow him on to the western bank. No sooner had they scrambled up the side, than the water





began to flow again. Within hours it was swirling away as if nothing had happened.

It was a stupendous miracle, as great as the crossing of the Red Sea 40 years before. Sometimes critics have tried to explain it away as a natural phenomenon. The area is prone to earthquakes, the whole valley of the Jordan being a huge geological fault. Researchers have claimed an earthquake of magnitude 6 to 7 occurs on average every 200 years along the line of the fault. In ten out of 30 quakes for which there are historical records, the latest as recent as 1927, the Jordan stopped flowing for one to two days.

However, suggestions as to the mechanics of the miracle in no way reduce its power. If God chose to dam the river at the city of Adam, 15 miles north, by a tactical earthquake, this would not be at all out of character. He frequently employed natural events such as hailstones, floods and earthquakes to turn the balance of a battle (for example Joshua 10:11). An earthquake opened the prison doors for the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:26). A sea of mud defeated the chariots of Sisera in the time of the judges (Judges 5:21). The miracle lay not in the agency, but in the timing. Imagine Joshua promising the people they would be across the river in three days, and keeping

his fingers crossed that an earthquake which happens about once every 200 years would turn up just at the right time. Or even his assuming the water would stay held back just long enough for a whole nation of people to get across.

Clearly God was behind it all, earning the respect of the Canaanites, who heard of the incident and trembled in their shoes. For Israel, delivered from Egypt, were now fair and square in the Promised Land. As they danced and feasted, they knew that their God is a God who keeps His promises, and there is none like Him in all the earth.

A Parable of Salvation

What are we to make of this thrilling climax to the wilderness journey? Is there a lesson here, under the surface, that can give us hope? Certainly there is. Put together the three days, the 2000 cubits, the names of the places and the rôle of the ark, and you have the ingredients of a most impressive allegory. Let us begin with the River Jordan itself. It rolls down from a place called Adam and flows into the Dead Sea. It becomes the symbol for human life, which started with a man called Adam and ends inevitably in death. The ark, that holy chest containing the commandments of God and where God's glory dwelt, is a



symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. After an interval of three days, it was able to hold back the swirling waters so that a faithful, dedicated band could cross over. That fits too. Exactly three days after his crucifixion, Jesus conquered death for his followers by stepping out of the tomb. The 2000 cubits (it was 'about' two thousand) if you allow a year for a cubit, is the time he has been away in heaven.

When he comes back, the first thing Jesus will do is to raise his followers from the dead. *'For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command,' wrote the Apostle Paul, 'with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first' (1 Thessalonians 4:16).* Passing before him in judgement, as the people passed in front of the ark, he will give the faithful ones the tremendous honour of immortality in the Kingdom of God. *'He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury' (Romans 2:6–8).* Once we are across, standing in the land God swore to give to Abraham and his descendants, we

shall have an inheritance, writes Peter, that will outshine the brightest rewards that this world can ever offer. It will be *'an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading... the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls' (1 Peter 1:4, 9).*

Jesus (or Joshua, for that is his name in Hebrew,) is due to return. We stand on the borders of the Kingdom of God. Now is your chance to follow him through the wilderness way, so that you can go with him into his everlasting rest (Hebrews 4:1). Get out your Bible, and find out those vital commandments of God. Be of good courage, and put your hand in His. But hurry. The time is nearly up.

David M Pearce
(concluded)

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CJ *Should Christians do Christmas?*

Ed CHRISTMAS IS the orthodox church's festival that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. It's generally observed on 25th December.

Jesus never instructed his followers to observe his birthday, and there is no hint in the Bible that they ever did. Besides, we don't know when it was. Based on indications in the Gospels, the consensus among scholars is that Christ was born around the time of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles in the late summer. We can be certain that it was not 25th December: history shows that the festival of Christmas actually originates in the church's attempt to Christianise the pagan winter solstice festival. (There is an irony here: in the modern western world people sometimes bemoan how Christmas is becoming so hideously commercialised—that it seems to be simply an opportunity for self-indulgence, with very little thought for Christ. The fact is, the festival is simply reverting to its ancient origins!)

Understandably, some followers of Christ will not have anything to do with Christmas. Others however use it as an opportunity to think about the wonder of Christ's birth, teach the story to their children, and preach about it to a world which, for this brief

time of year, may be more willing to listen. Which approach is right?

In Romans chapter 14 the Apostle Paul is discussing matters of conscience in relation to everyday life:

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgement on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him... One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honour of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honour of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honour of the Lord and gives thanks to God (vs. 2–6).

So in matters such as these where there is no definite Bible instruction, the guiding principles are to arrive at your decision with a good conscience, and to respect other people's consciences. The indicator of whether or not your conscience is good is that you can give thanks to God and honour Him in what you do.

Across

Down

2 David did this from Saul (1 Samuel 21:10)

4 This future king was hidden with his nurse (2 Kings 11:2)

7 A description of Solomon (1 Kings 5:7)

8 Solomon was appointed to be this over Israel and Judah (1 Kings 1:35)

9 This king was the father of 14 across (1 Kings 16:28)

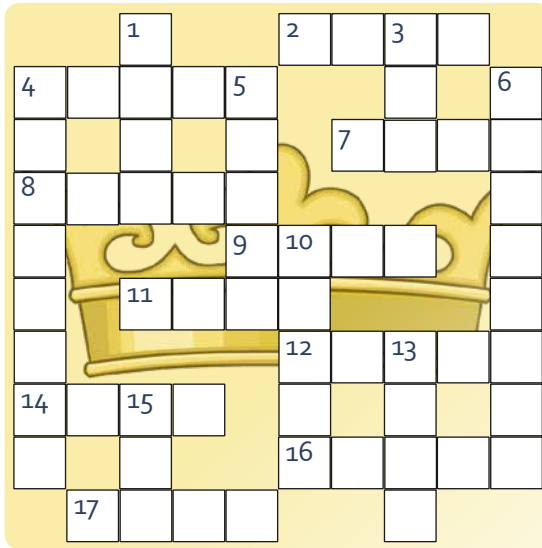
11 Gehazi told the king that Elisha had raised a dead one to life (2 Kings 8:5)

12 Paul described himself as a citizen of this empire (Acts 22:27)

14 This wicked king had Jezebel as his wife (1 Kings 21:25)

16 David was told a parable about a rich man who had many of these (2 Samuel 12:2)

17 David sat here to greet his army (2 Samuel 19:8)



1 The first human king of Israel (1 Samuel 11:15)

3 A priest in the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1)

4 The king of Israel after Solomon (1 Kings 12:20)

5 The king at the time of the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:1)

6 King Saul told these that they should kill David (1 Samuel 19:1)

10 One of the gifts brought to King Solomon (1 Kings 10:25)

13 The mother of the future king of the world (Matthew 1:16)

15 A good king of Judah (1 Kings 15:11)

(These clues use the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

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