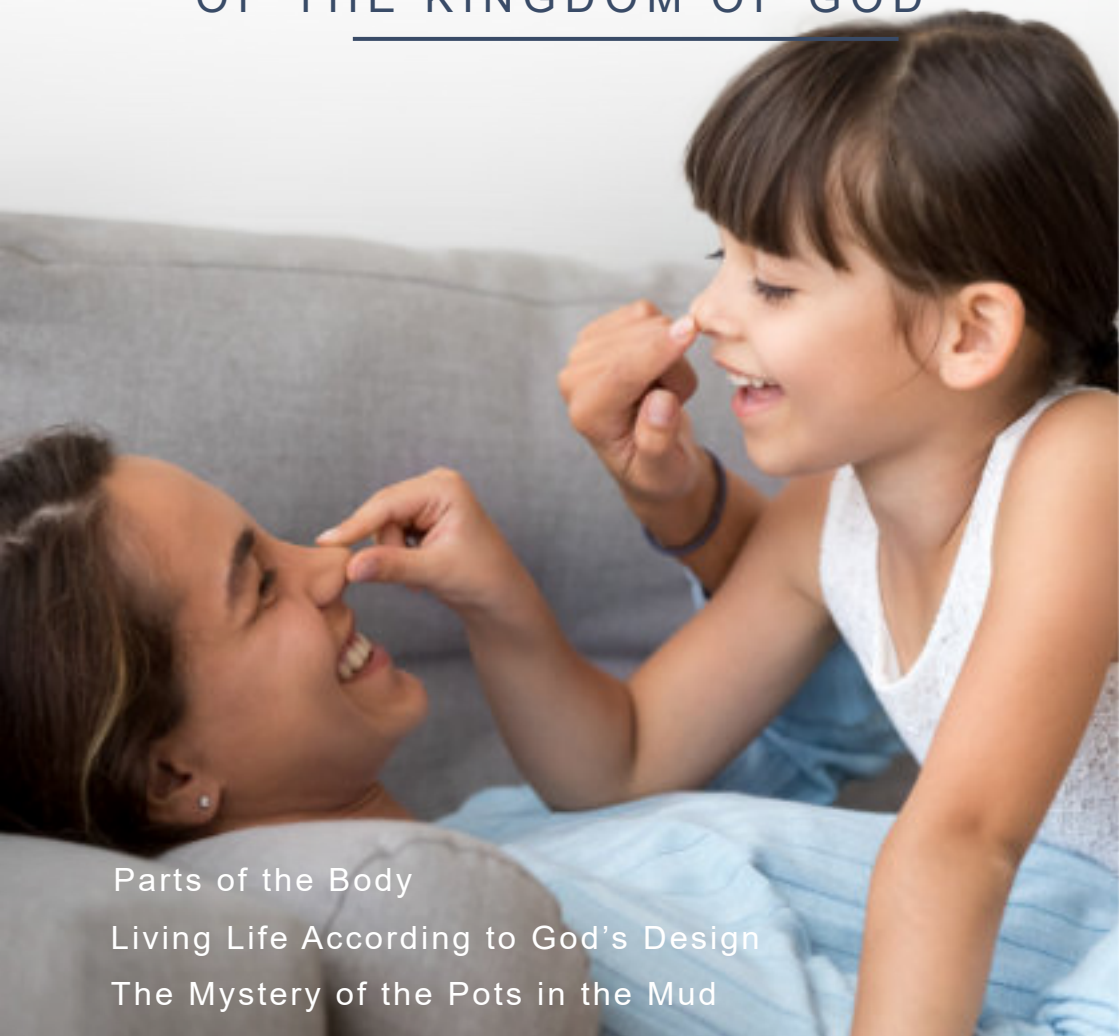


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Issue 1709

GLAD TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD



Parts of the Body

Living Life According to God's Design

The Mystery of the Pots in the Mud

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 people that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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GLAD TIDINGS DISTRIBUTORS

United Kingdom: Becky Collard—orders-uk@gladtidingsmagazine.org
Australia: Ruth Morgan—gladtidingsaustralia@gmail.com
Canada: Vivian Thorp—vivianthorp@bell.net
New Zealand: Jenny Luxmoore—delux@xtra.co.nz
USA: Pat Hemingray—orders-usa@gladtidingsmagazine.org
Other countries: Andrew Johnson—orders-int@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Chris Parkin—editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

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EDITORIAL

PARTS OF THE BODY

A while ago I injured my right shoulder, and for several months I had to use my left arm to do many things it had never done before. Being right-handed, I was surprised how dexterous my left arm became.

What was the left arm's reaction? Did it resent suddenly having to do so much unaccustomed work? Did it perhaps get conceited, and decide that it had previously been undervalued and now I ought to give it the recognition it deserves?

No. It's a part of me, and it just does what it needs to do.

The apostle Paul described the community of believers as being like a human body:

'Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

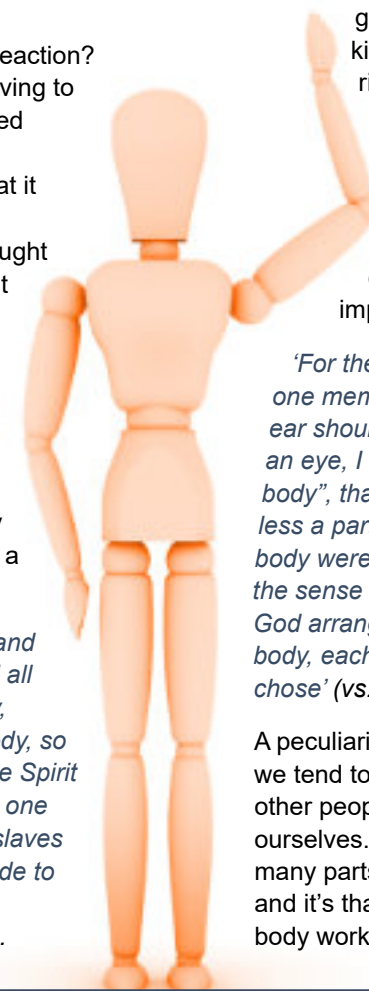
When you are baptised, you become a part of a worldwide body.

Unity in Diversity

The picture of the body teaches that the Christian community consists of a great variety of different kinds of people—there are right arms, left arms, eyes and ears and backbones, and obscure internal organs that no one except doctors have heard of. We all play our part, and we are all important. Paul continues:

'For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?... But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose' (vs. 14–18).

A peculiarity about people is that we tend to prefer the company of other people who are like ourselves. But the body is built of many parts that are very different, and it's that diversity that makes the body work.



Love One Another

Jesus Christ said to his followers, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). Using the picture of a human body is an excellent way to reinforce this principle. For example, under normal circumstances you perhaps don’t pay much attention to your little toe. But if you should stub it, your whole body is in distress: *‘If one member suffers, all suffer together’* (1 Corinthians 12:26).

The idea of one part of the body looking after itself and being unconcerned about other parts is absurd—the body is a single interconnected and interdependent organism. So as Paul said again, *‘Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others’* (Philippians 2:4).

Some members of the body find themselves physically isolated from it, which of course presents difficulties. But they can be connected to their fellow members online or by correspondence and maybe occasional visits—and of course by prayer. This way they can still play their part.

Christ the Head

Arms are arms and legs are legs, but it’s your head that

makes you what you are. Your face conveys your identity; and with your brain you think and feel, and direct the rest of your body.

The head of the body of believers is Jesus Christ:

‘Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love’ (Ephesians 4:15–16).

In this imperfect world, no community is perfect, not even the community of believers. There are personality clashes, and problems which can even be so severe that the body is damaged (see page 22). But faithful believers enjoy the assurance that they are a part of a growing, vibrant, indestructible body—the body of Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us (Galatians 2:20), and is always with us (Matthew 28:20).



LIVING LIFE ACCORDING TO GOD’S DESIGN

We’re living in a time when many feel overwhelmed and pulled apart. Stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout have become daily realities for millions. From the constant pressure to succeed to the endless comparisons on social media, life often feels like it’s unravelling, leaving us exhausted and disconnected.

In the middle of this noise and tension, the Bible offers timeless wisdom, not just for eternity, but for today. The Bible shows us how we can live for ever in God’s coming Kingdom—and it also shows us how to get the most out of our lives now. God invites us into a way of living that is steady, meaningful, and grounded. He doesn’t promise a life without challenges, but He does show us how to live with peace, purpose, and fulfilment—right here and now.

The Purpose of Life

Many people spend their lives chasing after goals they hope will bring happiness—careers, success, recognition—only to feel empty once they get there. Ecclesiastes 12:13 tells us what life is about. *‘The end of the matter; all has been heard.’*



Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.’

When we live by God’s ways, we’re not pulled in every direction. Instead, we gain clarity and direction that come from something greater than the expectations of others or our own striving. God’s wisdom offers a way of life that leads to lasting peace and purpose, regardless of our circumstances.

From the very beginning, God made it clear that we weren’t meant to do life alone. In Genesis 2:18 He said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone.”* And Proverbs 27:17 teaches us, *‘Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.’*

We are created for connection. A full and meaningful life is not built in

isolation, but through strong, healthy relationships—with family, friends, and the people God places in our path. He calls us to love deeply, forgive freely, and walk together in unity.

True purpose cannot be fully created by us. We may seek it in careers, relationships, or self-expression, but none of these alone satisfy the deep longing we all have for meaning. That's because real purpose is God-given. We were made to live for something greater than ourselves—something eternal. Only by surrendering to God's ways do we find lasting direction, fulfilment, and the strength to keep going when life gets difficult.

Transformation

Romans 12:2 urges us to '*be transformed by the renewal of your mind*'. In a world full of confusing messages about who we must be or what we must achieve, God calls us back to what is true. When we focus our hearts on Him, apply ourselves to absorbing His Word in the Bible, and set our minds on what lasts, we find genuine peace, purpose, and lasting treasure.

The apostle Paul learned how to be content—to be grateful in every circumstance:

'I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger,

abundance and need'
(*Philippians 4:11–12*).

Gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to what we have. It reminds us that health, time, relationships, and opportunities are all gifts. Contentment is not settling for less: it's appreciating what is already present.

To live well, we need daily habits that strengthen and sustain us. Prayer isn't just a ritual, it's a relationship. Community isn't optional, it's essential. God gives us rhythms like worship and fellowship not to burden us, but to bring balance and restore us.

Jesus said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you*" (*John 14:27*).

His peace isn't shallow or dependent on perfect circumstances. It runs deep. It comes from trusting the One who holds your whole life together.

God's wisdom isn't just for someday—it's for today. When we align our lives with His truth, we don't just make it through—we grow, we build, and we thrive. A fulfilling life is possible when we follow His way, one faithful step at a time.

JOANNE WALE



MARY JONES AND HER BIBLE



This is the true story of a young Welsh girl who changed completely the printing and distribution of Bibles worldwide.

Mary Jones was born in 1784, and lived in the small village of Llanfihangel-y-Pennant, near to Abergynolwyn, mid Wales. From the age of eight she had listened to the Bible being read in the local church, and she longed for a Bible for herself.

At that time she could not read, but she could memorise the Bible quotes she heard in the church services. Her prayer was, "O God please make a way for me to learn and know more about the Bible."

At last a school was established in Abergynolwyn, two miles away, and there Mary learned to read. Bibles were rare and expensive, but she was determined to save for one.

She became very industrious. She started with two half pennies. She was given some hens, so she had eggs to sell; she did neighbours' washing and ironing, and also gathered sticks for them. She found a purse and was given a shilling as a reward. She did other jobs and received several gifts. But when her father was ill, she gave some of her savings to her mother to help the household.

Journey to Bala

At last, at the age of 15, after working hard for six years, she had enough to purchase her own Bible—she had saved the grand sum of 3 shillings and 6 pence.

She had heard that the Reverend Thomas Charles had some Welsh language Bibles, in Bala which was



25 miles away, and determined to go to see him.

After packing some food and water and saying farewell to her parents, Mary set off barefoot as she did not want to wear her shoes out. Her journey was through rough terrain, but beautiful scenery. She met a few people along her way; some gave her refreshment when they knew where she was walking to. She washed in streams.

When at last she arrived in Bala, Mary stayed with her contact Pastor David Edwards. On the next morning he took her to see the Reverend Thomas Charles in his office.

Noticing Mary's poor clothing and rough hands, he thought she had a petition for work or some kind of help. Pastor David assured him, "Nothing wrong has happened, Mr Charles. This young girl has walked for 25 miles to ask if you have a Bible you can spare for her. She has the money to pay for one."

Heartbreak and Joy

Mary told the Reverend that she could read, and demonstrated her knowledge of the Bible.

But his reply was devastating: "How unutterably sad to see this young girl so brave, so intelligent, so consistent a Christian, coming all this way to see me for a Bible, and I have none to spare for her, not one!"

Mary buried her face in her hands, tears gushing through her fingers, her body shaking so much that she could not stand. The two ministers sat in silence.

Suddenly Mr Charles rose from his chair and laid his hand on Mary's head. He said, "You shall have your Bible. I cannot send you away without one, my child."

He handed her a Bible from his own bookcase. "Here Mary, take it."

Mary held the Bible, her eyes still brimming with tears. "Is it really for me?"

"Yes, it is a reward for all your earnest work and trust, may God bless you in your reading of it."

Next day she strode off for home, clasping her own new Bible, and was greeted by her overjoyed parents.

Mary Jones' story is now known worldwide. By way of tribute to her, many people since have undertaken the 25-mile walk from Llanfihangel-y-Pennant to Bala.

Bible Societies

Two years later, in December 1802, Mr Charles went to London to a meeting of the Religious Tract Society. He told them the story of Mary Jones, and stressed the dire need of the Welsh people for Bibles in their own language. His story made a deep impression. After a silence a Reverend Joseph Hughes said, "Hers is the story of the world. Your hope is of forming a society for printing and distributing Bibles in Wales, but I say why not for the world?"

So it happened that on December 7th 1802 the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed. Since then, other societies have been formed to

further the vision of making the Bible available to everybody in their common language. The people of Wales planted a tree which now has many branches and spreads throughout the world.

Mary Jones' Welsh Bible is kept in the Bible Society's Archives in Cambridge University Library, and is occasionally displayed at the Mary Jones Pilgrim Centre in Llanycil near Bala, where she purchased it.

World Bestseller

Approximately 80 to 100 million copies of the Bible are sold every year, maintaining its status as the world's best selling book. It has been translated into more than 700 languages.

Mary Jones' example shows the value of this book, which is nothing less than the Word of God:

'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 3:16–17).

TOM INGHAM

A RIVER OF PURE WATER

At the commencement of his ministry, Jesus Christ announced that his purpose was to *'proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed'* (Luke 4:18). Before he ascended to heaven, he commissioned his disciples to continue his work and take the gospel of salvation to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yet even a cursory understanding of history shows that in the two thousand or so years since then the Christian church has not always had such a benign effect upon humankind. The Christian faith has been corrupted by the addition of pagan ideas. The simple teaching of its Lord has degenerated into superstition and empty ritual. It has been abused to endorse the ungodly reigns of kings and emperors, to justify slavery, and to bless warring armies. It has been used as an obstacle to scientific discovery. Church leaders have persecuted to the death those who disagreed with their teachings, and have made war on those of other religions. The faith of Christ has been twisted into a state ideology and an instrument of social control.

All this has not gone unnoticed by unbelievers. Atheist writers have seized upon the past record of the churches as evidence that religion is a malign force, and that humankind would be a lot happier if religion in all its forms were obliterated.

Is that a fair conclusion to draw? The course of church history has sometimes been compared to a stream that emerges from its source as a fountain of water so pure that a sick person can drink from it and be made well. But as the stream winds its way through the countryside, tributaries flow into it that enlarge it but also pollute it. Rubbish and detritus are thrown into it, and eventually it is so dirty and polluted that if a person in good health drank from it they would be made sick.

The Christian faith is like that. We must go back to its source, to the teaching and the living example of the Lord Jesus as revealed in the Bible, if we want to rediscover the gospel that he taught in its purity, its simplicity and its beauty. Then we will find the pure water that can truly refresh us and give us life: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink"* (John 7:37).

PAUL WASSON

LISTEN TO THE WARNINGS

"You can't go down there—it's dangerous," warned the official.

Jim protested, "I go there every week."

"You should have had a letter from us warning that the whole site was going to be closed because of a fire hazard."

"Oh!" Jim snarled, "I don't read your junk mail."

Warnings to the Jews

Years ago, not long before the Babylonian army took the kingdom of Judah into captivity, the faithful prophet Jeremiah warned the Jews about what would happen to them and to their land. His words were directly from Almighty God because of the nation's wickedness. But their king Jehoiakim did not like the messages. Some of them were written in a scroll and read in the temple in Jerusalem. When the king

heard the first part of the scroll for himself, he ignored the pleadings of his princes and cut up and burnt the scroll (Jeremiah 36:21–24).

Of course, destroying the written words could not invalidate the message of God and the captivity took place. Moreover, the king died and his body was unburied, just as Jeremiah had warned (Jeremiah 22:18–19, 36:30). Had he taken note, God would not have been so angry with him.

Bibles Burned

Other people have burnt God's words. Hebrew Bibles were destroyed in the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th Century. In the 16th Century William Tyndale defied the authorities and set about translating the Bible into English. Many copies of his work were burnt, and eventually he himself was burnt at the stake. Ever since and even today there are those who despise and fear the Bible, and try to destroy it.

We might be horrified at such contempt for this special book. However, we need to ask ourselves how much we treasure the Word of God. Do we pick and choose the parts we read, and so deliberately ignore parts of God's revelation to us? If so, we might



just as well burn the other parts ourselves!

Bible Warnings

Do we value the *actual words* of the original Bible, as Jesus and the apostles did? The Bible, originally written in Hebrew and Greek, has now been translated into many languages. In languages like English there are also several different translations. However, the philosophy of translators does vary, and the quality of translations varies. Try to pick a translation that's true to the original text. (A popular translation is the English Standard Version, which is used in the *Glad Tidings* magazine.) Do we pay attention to the details of the messages?

Jim burnt a letter but was restrained by an official who was looking after him. Without this he could have been in real trouble. Far more seriously, God's message to us really is a matter of life and death. God warns of a day when Jesus will come back and judge the world (Acts 17:30–31). This will happen whether or not we have read about it, believed it or prepared for it. Do we really want to end up like king Jehoiakim?

Some people have taken God's message very seriously. In The Acts of the Apostles we read of converts to Christianity at Ephesus. They were enthusiastic for the hope of eternal life which was offered in the preaching of the apostle Paul. They burned the books associated with their 'magic'—which were worth a



fortune, thereby possibly destroying their livelihoods and even putting their own safety at risk (Acts 19:18–20, 23–40). Some have died for their faith. And the death of Jesus, *for us*, was an act of total obedience to the word of God.

Way of Escape

By ignoring the Bible we put our eternal wellbeing in jeopardy. When Jesus Christ returns there will be a judgement (2 Timothy 4:1). The extinction of those not found faithful is likened to an ever-burning fire from which there is no escape (Mark 9:43–48).

A common expression says that we should not 'burn our bridges': that is, we should not destroy our way of escape. Let us value God's Word, which offers us true escape (2 Peter 2:20).

'See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven' (Hebrews 12:25).

ANNA HART

RUTH—part 1

IN THE DAYS WHEN THE JUDGES RULED

The story of Ruth the Moabitess is exquisite. It's a tale of how God works to save people, and it is stripped of all unnecessary detail. With just 85 verses, you can read the whole book in 15 minutes—it's a very good use of your time, perhaps before you follow this article.

The narrative centres around two widows: Naomi is older and a Jew, Ruth is younger and a gentile. Both find themselves destitute, utterly vulnerable, and unable to save themselves. Yet, they are redeemed and brought into the family of God, given a home and cared for. 'Redemption', or being redeemed, is a key word—it means to be restored or 'bought back' and in its greatest sense is how God brings men and women back from sin and the sentence of death.

This story is also about ordinary people in a godless time of immorality and violence, who showed faith in God and love for one another. The central character, Ruth, exhibits great integrity, faith, and tenderness. She is called a virtuous or worthy woman (Ruth 3:11), and it's worth reading Proverbs 31:10–31 to see how the Bible describes someone like this. Friendship and love are powerful themes in the relationships between Ruth and Naomi (her mother-in-law), and Ruth and Boaz (eventually her husband). They are practical examples of genuine affection, care, and serious commitment.

The book of Ruth is placed in the Bible after Judges, and before the books of Samuel which narrate the story of the first kings of Israel. Historically, the book of Ruth is significant as it bridges the period of the Judges to King David. In many older manuscripts, it appears as an appendix to Judges. The narrative provides background for the great King David, and so it is part of the story of Jesus' family.





The Law of Moses also plays a role in the story, emphasizing that it is important to keep all of God's commands, not just the ones we may particularly like. This includes provisions such as the right for the poor to collect the gleanings after harvest (Leviticus 19:9–10), and the law of 'levirate' marriage, in which a man marries his brother's widow to have children and continue his name (Deuteronomy 25:5–10). The Law was not a dry theoretical concept, it was real and brought to life through the faith and love of people who observed it.

The power of God is another central theme, as He is shown to be in control at every stage. He takes Naomi and Ruth from a position of hopelessness and brings them into His family, to share the promises He made. The story of Ruth is a picture of how anyone can be brought into the family of God. There are strong echoes of the whole plan of God, the work of the Lord Jesus, and the redemption of His bride, the community of believers.

A Drama in a Deadly Time

The book of Ruth is organized into a four-act drama, well divided by its chapters. Pivotal moments include Ruth's declaration of faith (chapter

1:16–17), when she meets Boaz in his field (2:8), Boaz's declaration of commitment to Ruth (3:10–11), and the finale at the town gate (4:9–10).

The story is set in the time of the Judges, a time when the nation constantly failed to obey and honour God as king. The pattern of Israel's behaviour at this time is described in Judges 2:11–19: they were repeatedly faithless and disobedient to God; He would punish them through invading neighbouring tribes; they cried out to God, Who would save them. However, they quickly reverted to their old ways, as summarised in the last verse of Judges: *'Everyone did what was right in his own eyes'* (Judges 21:25).

The story of Ruth serves as a transition, showing how God would establish a righteous king in Israel, who would help people come to Him. In the first instance this would be David (Ruth's great-grandson), and it will ultimately be fulfilled by Jesus, descendant of Ruth and David, and Son of God.

Famine and Disaster

The story starts in Ruth 1:1–5 with Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their sons, who lived in Bethlehem in Israel. It seems that they were

wealthy, as we later learn of possessions (probably a house and land) that they had left behind. There was a terrible famine, and ironically no food in Bethlehem (which means *'House of Bread'* in Hebrew). They decided to travel to Moab, about 30 miles away to the east, which was seemingly unaffected by the famine. Maybe this tells us that the famine was one of God's punishments on faithless Israel, or perhaps it was due to the complex geography and weather patterns of the area.

Moab was a tribe who were almost permanently at odds with Israel. During the Exodus, they opposed Israel (Numbers 22) and entrapped them in immoral behaviour (Numbers 25). We can see God's view in Deuteronomy 23:3–6—Moabites were excluded from the congregation of Israel to the tenth generation. That's a strong condemnation!

The family's decision to go to Moab had disastrous effects, leading firstly to the death of Elimelech. After marrying Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, his sons, Mahlon and Chilion died too. Ten years after coming to Moab, Naomi was left without husband or sons, but with two daughters-in-law. We do not know much about Elimelech, but it does

look as though he deserted his people in a time of trouble. He disappears from the record at this point. Difficulties are a fact of life, small or big, personal or public. It is worth considering how we respond. The Bible shows us that the best approach is not to flee from a difficult situation, but to get closer to God, to seek His help and guidance. It isn't always easy, but that is what Ruth would do, and she was well blessed by God.

Brighter Things to Come

So far, so miserable. However, in all this human weakness, we shall see that God is in control. He will bring Ruth into the family of Israel as a mother in the line of the Lord Jesus. Her name means 'tender' or 'friend', and she will be an example of love for others, faith, and responding to God's goodness.

She represents anyone who wants to be free from the human condition of sin (disobedience to God) and its consequence, death. Ruth's story is our story, a narrative of redemption, faith, and love that resonates through the ages.

ANDREW HALE
(to be continued)

THE MYSTERY OF THE POTS IN THE MUD



In a narrow channel, beneath Jerusalem's Old City of David, two intact clay jars lay on their sides, wedged in mud. It was 2011, and Israeli archaeologists were exploring what was then a newly discovered tunnel close to the Temple Mount. The last thing they anticipated were signs of past human activity so deep below the old city streets.

The jars had all the appearance of being left there purposely and, amazingly, food fragments were still discernible inside. Yet why would anyone choose this dark, charmless venue to take their supper?

A clue comes in the history of Jerusalem itself. The Roman historian Josephus Flavius recorded the last days of Israel as a nation in the First Century AD, when Roman armies razed the Jerusalem temple to the ground (as foretold by Jesus Christ in Luke 21:20–24). Josephus himself witnessed the years leading

up to the destruction of the temple and described in some detail how the Jews endured the final weeks, when Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman siege ramps, engines and battering rams.

On 24th July 70 AD, the armies of Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian, broke into the inner precincts of Jerusalem, breached the Antonia Fortress and destroyed the magnificent temple. Thousands of Jerusalem's citizens had already died at Roman hands but a small group survived by going into hiding. They hoped that, if they were able to outlast the Roman presence, they could come out again after the enemy had left.

Unfortunately, the Romans were aware that some Jews were still present somewhere, and continued to seek them out. So the desperate fugitives escaped to the subterranean passages and sewers that ran



beneath the city, hoping these might lead out to the desert. From there they might be able to reach Masada, the mountain-top fortress by the Dead Sea where some escapees had already found some sanctuary.

Despite the urgency, Jerusalem's remaining defenders and citizens collected what sparse belongings they had, along with the last of their food that they carried in clay jars. Sadly, Josephus records that the Romans found them before they were able to escape through the tunnels.

*"And when [the Romans] found where they were, they broke up the ground and slew all they met with. There were also found slain there above two thousand persons, partly by their own hands, and partly by one another, but chiefly destroyed by the famine." **

What these 21st Century, Israeli archaeologists had come across was

* Josephus: *Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, chapter 9.

the very spot where desperate families, two millennia ago, had lost their lives.

Shortly after Titus' destruction, the Emperor Hadrian expelled the Jewish population from their land entirely by brutally crushing a final revolt in 132–135 AD. He then used a 'scorched earth' policy that massacred hundreds of thousands, sold survivors into slavery, and banned the Jews' religious practices. He issued an imperial decree banning all circumcised persons from entering or even looking upon the territory under pain of death. To add the final insult and erase all Jewish ties to the land, Hadrian renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina, and changed the province's name to Syria Palaestina. So the Jews were expelled from the home that had been theirs for nearly 1500 years (Joshua 1, 10:40), and remained in exile for almost another two millennia. Subsequently Jews have been renowned for finding homes across the globe.



around, and bring them to their own land' (Ezekiel 37:21).

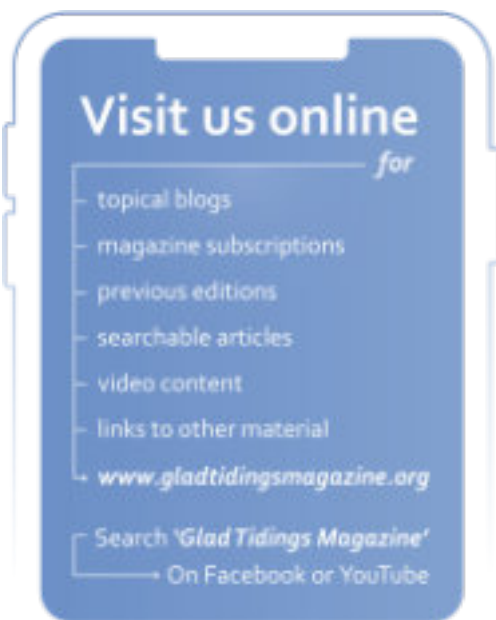
That poignant moment in an unexciting drainage channel confirmed two amazing facts. One—that the dispossessed First Century Jewish people did not entirely perish as the Romans had intended, their clay pots symbolising the hope that they would survive. And two—those who found the vessels were themselves living proof that God had indeed kept His word and returned His people to their land.

JOAN LEWIS

But in May 1948 the modern state of Israel was re-established. Under the 1950 'Law of Return' anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent, together with their spouse, has been able to obtain citizenship of the modern state of Israel. Since its establishment, 3.3 million Jews have arrived. Currently between 20,000 and 30,000 immigrate there annually, just as God had promised:

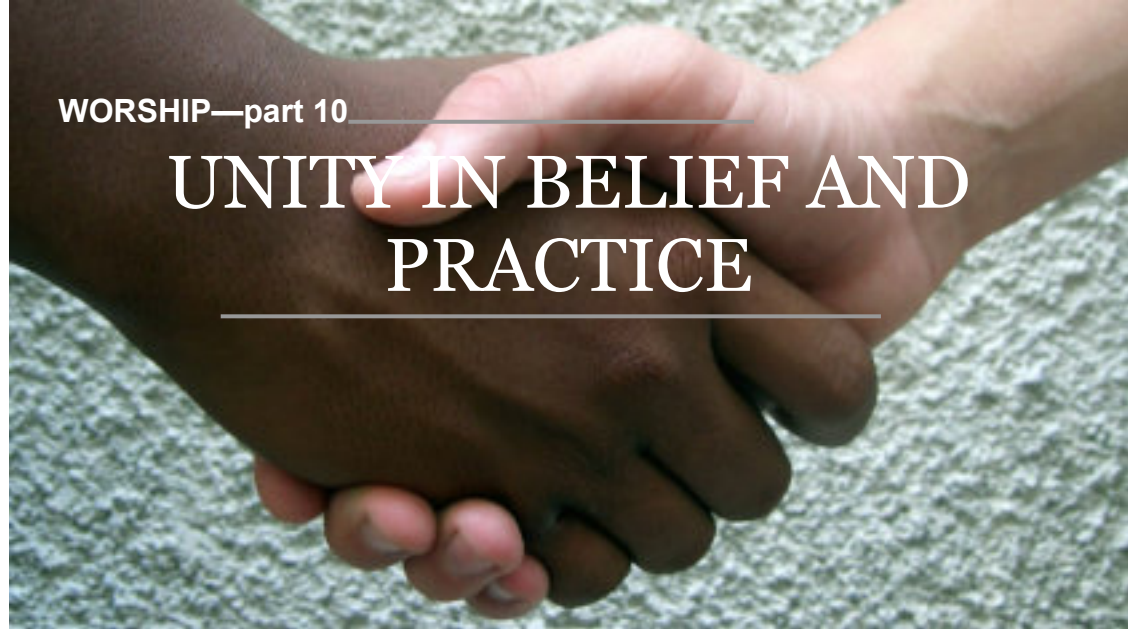
'I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land' (Ezekiel 36:24).

'Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all



WORSHIP—part 10

UNITY IN BELIEF AND PRACTICE



'Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned.'

(Titus 2:7–8)

It is important that believers share the same faith, and that what they believe is the truth as taught in the Bible. This makes for harmony in worshipping and praising God, building up the community, and preaching the gospel of salvation.

This demands a firm belief and faithful practice of the principles. In the Bible's New Testament the words 'faith' and 'belief' are interchangeable, as they both derive from the same Greek word *'pistis'*.

In Romans 6, when writing about the relevance and meaning of baptism, Paul thanks God that the believers *'have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed'* (v. 17).

The Roman brothers and sisters in Christ had embraced in faith the true gospel taught by the apostles, and had maintained that obedience to the doctrine despite difficulties and persecution. It ensured that the Roman congregation was able to continue its worship and witness, and the members stayed together.

Difficulties

Within a few years after the Lord Jesus had ascended to heaven, errors of belief crept in which destroyed the unity. These 'other' teachings disturbed the faith of some, and members were instructed, *'Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world'* (1 John 4:1). In other words, they were to test the new ideas by the sound and fundamental teachings which had been established by Jesus and the early apostles. The apostle Paul had to be extremely strict with the

members in Galatia, when he told them they should reject any gospel which had not been preached or taught by the apostles. The alternative version which had taken hold, seemed like the one which the apostles had taught, but it was not the same, and Paul said its supporters were perverting the true gospel (Galatians 1:6–7). So it was serious; the harmony and unity within the brotherhood had been undermined, and believers were troubled.

Sadly, some members did not hold to the unity of the faith, and *‘wandered away into vain discussion’* (1 Timothy 1:6), to the point of doubt and disbelief of the true teaching. The apostle Paul was deeply concerned about this undermining of truth, and instructed Timothy in Ephesus to take action. He wrote, *‘If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain’* (1 Timothy 6:3–5). These are strong and forceful words, but the unity of the believers was extremely important, as was their relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, not forgetting the grace of salvation. They were better off without the troublemakers who disturbed the faith and hope of some.

Encouragement

The same problem had surfaced in many new Christian congregations, and there are many similar words of encouragement to hold fast. In Paul's second letter to Timothy he writes, *‘Follow the pattern of the sound*



words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you’ (2 Timothy 1:13–14). Whether or not Paul considered the alternative false teaching as a personal rejection of himself and what he stood for is irrelevant, the important feature is that the erroneous teaching undermined the faith of some and hazarded their eternal salvation. Furthermore, it

slandered God, as well as setting aside the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, for God had carefully and precisely provided the true Gospel to be preached, believed, and faithfully lived. God had called out from the Jewish and Gentile worlds, a people for His Name (Acts 15:14).

That others should obstruct and impede God's word and work was arrogant and inexcusable.

Blessings

We have referred to the trouble caused by the ‘wrong’ teachers, which was clearly deplorable and destructive of faith, to see the reasons why Paul found it necessary to write about holding fast to the faithful word. His positive

exhortations would refresh the believers and help them to maintain their unity in faith and practice. There is a comfort and consolation in the true Gospel. This desired unity and harmony was in operation in most congregations, and was a wonderful example of working together and being concerned and caring for each other. It is recorded of the Jerusalem members that *‘all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people’* (Acts 2:44–47). After all, they were all together *‘heirs... of the grace of life’* (1 Peter 3:7).

VIC AUCOTT
(to be continued)



YOUR QUESTIONS

Why can't all Christians just bury their differences and get along? Isn't that what Christ wants?

AP

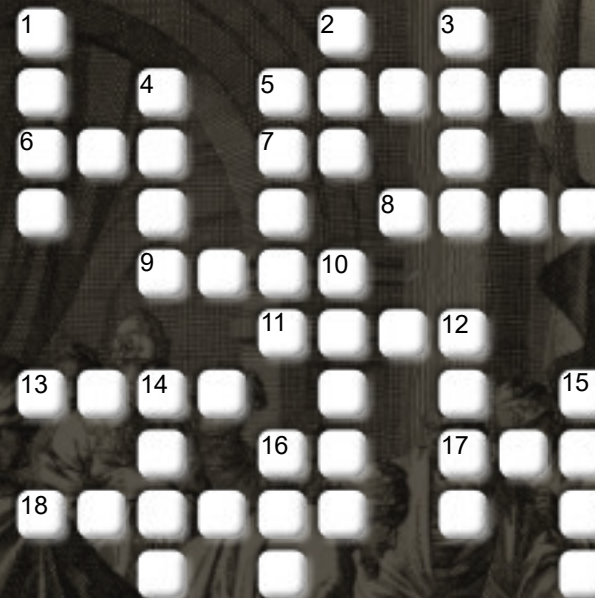
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The apostle Paul said, *'Is Christ divided?'* (1 Corinthians 1:13). The answer should be no! The community of believers should be characterised by harmony: *'Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity'* (Psalm 133:1).

However, we are sinful people (Romans 3:23), and so problems arise. They did in the First Century, within a few years of the church's birth, so we shouldn't be surprised if they happen now. In the New Testament letters we have a sadly long list of cases where faithful believers were told not to share fellowship with other believers who taught or practised wrong things. For example those who were persistently immoral (1 Corinthians 5:11, Ephesians 5:7-8); those who were idle and busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:10-15); anyone who *'teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness'* (1 Timothy 6:3-5); those who betrayed their faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20); those who did not abide in the teaching of Christ (2 John :9-11). The apostle John in his letters warns about those who *'went out from us, but they were not of us'*, who taught wrong things about God and Christ and whom he calls *'antichrist'* (1 John 2:18-23, 4:1-3 and 2 John :7).

John wrote, *'That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ'* (1 John 1:3). A Christian believer's fellowship starts with God and Christ. It follows that fellowship with other believers must be on the basis of a shared faith.

CROSSWORD



17 Baruch used this to write on the scroll (Jeremiah 36:18)

18 The king did this to the first scroll (Jeremiah 36:28)

Down

1 Jeremiah told the people not to go after these (Jeremiah 35:15)

2 The affirmative (Jeremiah 46:21)

3 God wanted everyone to do this from their evil way (Jeremiah 36:3)

4 When the people heard Jeremiah's words, they turned to each other in this (Jeremiah 36:16)

Across

5 He read from the scroll to king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:21)

6 God said that everyone would do this for his own iniquity (Jeremiah 31:30)

7 "Tell ___ please, how did you write all these words?" (Jeremiah 36:17)

8 To be aware of (Jeremiah 36:19)

9 Baruch did this to the words of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:10)

11 Jeremiah and Baruch were told to do this (Jeremiah 36:19)

13 Men sought that of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38:16)

16 He dictated all these words to ___ (Jeremiah 36:18)

5 Jehoiakim was king of this country (Jeremiah 36:1)

10 Jehoiachin did this daily at the king's table (Jeremiah 52:33)

12 Wicked (Jeremiah 36:3)

14 The king threw the pieces of the scroll into this (Jeremiah 36:23)

15 Can the Ethiopian change this, or the leopard change his spots? (Jeremiah 13:23)

16 Baruch was told to read to all those of Judah who came out of their cities (Jeremiah 36:6)

COLIN JANNAWAY



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