
INCLUDES SPECIAL SECTION ON **PRAYER** (Page 27)

TIDINGS

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A STRANGER IN THE LAND

Spiritually, we each have an appreciation for what it means to live in a land that is not our own.

May we each remember this insight when we look at the needs of so many, who not only struggle with this issue spiritually, but physically also.

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.


TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 6 / June, 2023



IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial — A Stranger in the Land, Dave Jennings	2
SPECIAL SECTION — Displaced, Refugees and Exiles, Marc Bilton	6
— Ecclesias in Turkey, Peter Simpson	11
— From Congo to Chicago, Dan Richard	13
— No Retreat, No Surrender, Ramazani Emena	17
Life Application — Coping with Bereavement (Part 2), Stephen Hill	21
Prayer — Six-Month Prayer Challenge, Robert Prins	27
— Notice of an International Prayer on June 24th	32
Exhortation and Consolation — People Who Knew Jesus, Rick Hill	33
— Debt, Jackie Grieves	35
Music and Praise — Come and See, Jessica Gelineau	37
Exposition — God is Not a Monster, (Part 5), Chris Sales	44
First Principles — The Righteous Shall Live By Faith, (Part 3), Richard Morgan	49
Letters to the Editor	54
Preaching and Teaching — Quito Bible School, Ian and Nishla Neblett	59
— A New Sunday School in Antigua, Jan Berneau	62
— Return to Bolivia and Ecuador, Rob Alderson	64
Thoughts on the Way — What Does God Look Like?, George Booker	67



EDITORIAL

A STRANGER IN THE LAND

By Dave Jennings

GOD has always deeply cared about those most vulnerable. In Bible times, it was often the fatherless and widows, the poor. God's laws made special provisions for those who were most in need of help. He cares about those in need. He expects us to do the same.

The identity of the people of Israel has been that of a refugee people. When the Promise was reiterated to Abraham, he was told that displacement from the land was certain. *"Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them."* (Gen 15:13). During the time of Jacob, during great famine in the land of Canaan, the family moved to Egypt, to be sustained by Joseph. Israel's history comprises multiple relocations, including Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and throughout Europe. God's people know what it means to be in another country as a stranger. Moses' first son was named Gershom, meaning, *"I have been a stranger in a strange land."* (Exod 2:22). Being strangers in a strange land has been the experience of God's people for most of their history.

As Israel moved out of Egypt into the wilderness, God was clear that there was to be only one Law—for both Israel and the stranger that dwelt among them. God expected them to have a high sensitivity to this and not to oppress the stranger, *"for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."* (Exod 23:9). God expects men and women to consider the unique circumstances of a person who is vulnerable, in a foreign land, with foreign people.

Refugees Today

Today, the United Nations estimates that there are over 100 million displaced people in the world—the highest number since tracking began. Refugees flee war, violence, and persecution by crossing one or more international borders to find safety in another country. Some have been forcibly displaced; others flee because there is literally no other option for survival. Some may live in refugee camps for years, even decades, while in other countries, many move from temporary shelter in the camps to very difficult conditions in cities.

Many of these refugees possess only their clothing and whatever they can carry with them from their homes. They leave behind loved ones and their possessions. They move into a land that usually doesn't speak their language and has a very different culture. The refugee experience is not a new phenomenon. During World War II, there were as many as 60 million refugees caused by the war. In fact, the movement of vulnerable families into other countries is part of the history of man.

In the United Kingdom, refugees from Iran have helped to reshape many of the ecclesias. Iranian brothers and sisters, often in dire personal circumstances, have found loving, supportive ecclesias that have embraced them in fellowship. Here in North America, we have seen some limited experiences where refugee families have been resettled into ecclesial areas. In some cases, this has brought brothers and sisters and their families from foreign lands to assimilate into the community and ecclesia.

How Can You Help?

It is perfectly natural for one's heart to be moved to assist families that need resettlement. When we hear of the difficult conditions in some of the refugee camps, we want to open our purse strings to help. Many of us, with substantial discretionary income, feel we might be able to make a transformational difference for a family in need.

We reached out to the Christadelphian Bible Mission UK (CBM UK) to comment on the needs of our refugee brothers and sisters. The following article by Bro. Marc Bilton details the

needs and the issues being faced by our displaced and refugee brothers and sisters. *The Tidings* would like to ask our readers to carefully consider the counsel of the CBM UK on this issue. The CBM UK is primarily chartered as a preaching organization, as is true of the other Bible Mission groups. Their mission is to share the gospel message, not to change economic conditions or standard of living. Most welfare is focused on the maintenance of basic needs and facilitating safety for families at risk. The CBM UK has local brethren in these areas that advise them on the needs of the refugees in the area, and



they have developed processes for taking care of such pressing needs as food, clothing, and shelter. When legal services are required to avoid deportation or other issues, the CBM UK has processes in place to assist.

After many years of personal activity in the Bible Mission of the Americas, I can attest to the importance of allowing those closest, and most familiar with the brothers and sisters to oversee the support being provided. There are ways to help. But often, good intentions can lead to very damaging results. The infusion of money into impoverished areas must always be done very carefully, as you will read in the following article.

There is a great opportunity for North American ecclesias to assist these vulnerable refugee families who are immigrating to North America. In this issue, we are pleased to provide an update by our Bro. Peter Simpson, on Iranian refugees living in Turkey and their difficult conditions. Also, in this issue, you can read the story of the Lombard, Illinois Ecclesia, and their experience with Congolese refugee families. We are also thankful to have a fascinating article by Bro. Ramazani Emena, on his personal refugee experience that led him to the truth and eventually the Lombard Ecclesia. We have previously published similar articles about the experiences of ecclesias in Indiana and Ontario.

What if I Am Contacted By a Refugee in Need?

From time to time, many of us will receive a communication from a

brother or sister claiming to be a refugee or greatly impoverished, asking for our personal intervention. Generally, this is an appeal for money. Our strong caution is not to respond directly. However, don't assume that this communication is completely false, either. The best course of action is to forward the communication to the Country Representative for CBM UK. This person is in a position to investigate the need and best determine how to deal with the request. If you have trouble identifying the appropriate CBM UK representative, feel free to contact the Tidings at editor@tidings.org. We will make every attempt to assist you.

The needs of the vulnerable must always be part of the agenda and prayers of ecclesias and individuals. The following articles are intended to provide a short overview of the challenges being faced by Christadelphian refugee families, as well as the best way you can be of assistance.

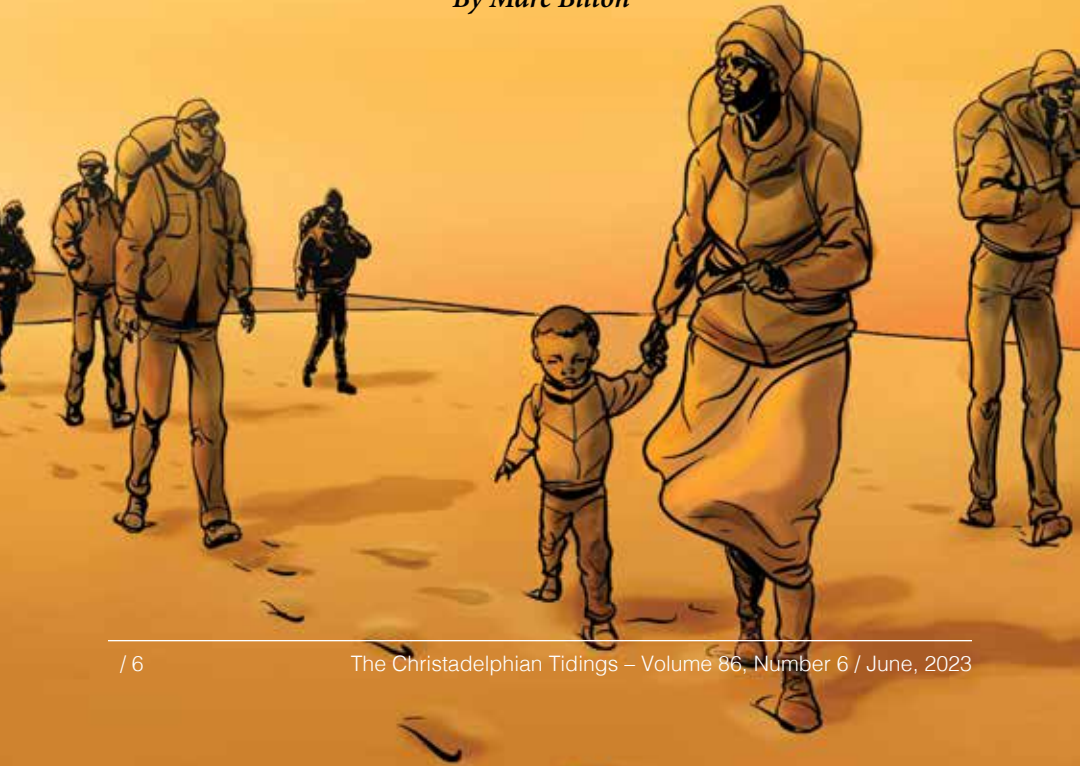
Spiritually, we each have an appreciation for what it means to live in a land that is not our own. Though our lives are generally comfortable, we do know what it feels like to discern what is right or wrong differently than those around us. This is not our homeland; we are ambassadors for Christ. May we each remember this insight when we look at the needs of so many who not only struggle with this issue spiritually, but physically also.

Dave Jennings

SPECIAL REPORT

DISPLACED, REFUGEES AND EXILES

By Marc Bilton



OUR current Western world faces the needs of refugees and the question of how best to help them. This article aims to consider the issues, benefits, and suggested means of helping those in need.

Refugees are not a modern phenomenon. The Scriptures have many examples to consider as we look at how to respond. God in Genesis 12 called Abram to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house. He had to leave a civilized city with universities, houses, shops, and his family and go to a country God would show him. All of this was done with no knowledge of what he would find. Hebrews tells us that *"if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."* (Heb 11:15-16).

David was displaced twice in his life, first by fleeing from Saul and later from Absalom. Both situations differed in his entourage and his sleeping conditions, but both were still distressing for him. Several psalms relate to these periods, the common theme being his trust in God as his refuge, rock, shield, and salvation.

The children of Israel were exiled and made into refugees, first the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians, then Judah by the Babylonians. The Romans again made the returned people into refugees following the fall of Jerusalem. These events were intended to punish their unbelief and idolatry, but the LORD was still their God. They were still

His witnesses, part of His plan and purpose. This displacement may happen again. Zechariah 14 implies that half of Jerusalem shall be exiled and made into refugees.

The final example is the spread of the Truth. Persecution of the Church, particularly by Saul, then later Roman Emperors, caused many to be displaced and seek refuge elsewhere, preaching the Gospel as they went. We have all been beneficiaries of their refugee status as the Word made it to us.

The world's circumstances are now part of God's plan and purpose. Some may be displaced to bring them reliance on God. Some might be sent out to spread the Gospel. Some might become an opportunity for followers of Christ to be the Good Samaritan or as the sheep, not the goats. Some might be fleeing persecution. Some might endure punishment or correction. Some incidents might be things that just happen, like the tower of Siloam, war, pestilence, or famine. Migration might also, and I'm sorry to say this, be caused by human nature: greed, ambition, envy, covetousness, and other things proceeding from our sinful hearts.

Some of these reasons are obvious, some not, but our Father knows a refugee's heart. So, this brings us to our predicament, what do we do? The Good Samaritan cleaned the stranger up, bandaged his wound, and paid the inn for his temporary stay. He didn't give him any money or possessions. The sheep in the other parable the king referred to provided food, drink, and clothes and visited those in need—all done for the least of Christ's brethren.

Christadelphian Bible Mission Role

From a CBM Welfare perspective, we cannot feed the whole community; we cannot provide hotel accommodations for everyone; we cannot cure all of their infirmities. But there is much we can do. First, we can teach our contacts the gospel. That way, “the

sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that shall be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18). This

is why preaching is the main objective of CBM. Second, we love each other as Christ has loved us. Love is a word often used but rarely in a complete sense. We like the idea of giving and treating others like

we would like to be treated, but to love is sometimes saying “no.” A parent who only says “yes” has a spoiled child who is perhaps unhealthy and at risk from preventable accidents. We teach our children how to cross the road, be careful with knives, electricity, and water, what foods to eat, the importance of being active, and how to take on responsibilities for their own good. All these are part of a healthy discipline that we lovingly show to our own children. The CBM has learned some very sobering lessons about giving people money to help them through their difficulties. Often this has hindered their spiritual, moral, emotional, and physical development.

From a CBM Welfare perspective, we cannot feed the whole community, we cannot provide hotel accommodations for everyone, and we cannot cure every one of their infirmities. **But there is much we can do.**

Back to refugees, none of us want anyone, especially a brother or sister or their children, to starve. So help is given in such circumstances to get them through until they can once again provide for themselves. None of us want anyone to die because of persecution of their faith, so a place

of safety is worthy of consideration. It must be said, though, that life and death are not in our hands but the Father’s. How we define safety is the question. Is it a place free from war, like many who fled the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), or Ukraine sought? Certainly, yes, but what kind of safety?

Many Ukrainians fled to Europe, and

brothers and sisters have physically or financially assisted them. Many from the DRC ended up in refugee camps around Africa. Some have returned home after things in their home region have calmed down. But some are still in camps that their governments and world authorities seek to close, feeling the need is no longer there. People in these camps disagree and request aid and funding from external sources to maintain their lifestyles. Some moved to the Western world by brothers and sisters successfully and are enriching the ecclesias they joined. Some moved into isolation with no or few Christadelphians in the country. Some have struggled to adapt from an African way of life to

a Western culture. Not only are there language barriers, but there are many significant differences to adjust to, such as the types of foods available, the kitchen equipment, the toilet facilities, and the cost of living. Inevitably, many have left the faith once they got to the Western world. It might be that the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choked the Word. It might be that living the Truth in isolation meant that their faith had no root and withered. It might be that they saw our community as a means to an end that they finally achieved.

Refugees From Iran

Some of these experiences from Africa are relevant to emigres from Iran. Many have fled Iran to the West. Some have escaped the religious persecution they faced as followers of Christ. But we also need to be aware some have fled due to political reasons, women's rights, homosexuality, political beliefs, freedom of speech, and perhaps others.

Some have left to seek a better life for themselves and their family, with the West offering improved prospects for jobs, housing, education, and health care. Once more, only God knows the heart, so we do what we can. Again, we have made mistakes. Some have left the faith once they could remain in a place they wanted, whether Greece, France, the UK, Canada, or the USA. On the contrary, many have enriched the ecclesias they have formed, such as in Turkey or the UK.

Once more, the question arises, "What more should we do above preaching the gospel as commanded?" In the UK, there are laws we as a community must not break, such as providing employment or gifting money. Many are housed in hotels with consistent food, drink, and washing facilities. These small dwelling units and welfare are not the case everywhere around the world. We might need to help fund a part of their rent while they



find employment, or we might need to help with an emergency or work through health care issues, as they cannot show evidence of insurance or national support. We might need to help them to avoid deportation back to Iran if they face the death penalty there. It ought to be stressed that this

We would advise only giving money to the relevant charities who have oversight of such circumstances, and have the local knowledge to help where necessary.

penalty isn't always the case. CBM has been asked to help brethren to go to Canada, the USA, or other affluent Western countries. These opportunities, when available, are generally for healthy, employable

people. So many of our members in Turkey have health issues that would preclude them from such schemes. We would rather everyone was in the same situation and supporting each other, but at the same time, we are doing our best to ease life-threatening persecution.

Social Media Contacts With Westerners

We know many displaced, refugees, and exiled brothers and sisters have access to social media and email, providing them access to the broader Christadelphian community. Generally, this is a great blessing, but for some individuals, it is an opportunity to exploit. They contact individual members, ecclesias or organizations, telling of their plight

and seeking financial aid. The warm-hearted loving members believe they are the only people receiving that correspondence and act, often giving money. Sounds lovely, but if you repeat that ten times, plus the amount CBM or other Christadelphian charities give them, that person is suddenly very wealthy compared to their neighbors. This generosity can hinder them spiritually and perhaps physically. For this reason, we advise only giving money to the relevant charities that oversee such circumstances and have the local knowledge to help where necessary. This strategy follows the example in the New Testament for the collection organized by Paul, who sent it through one organization to ensure each member's need was met. (1 Cor 16:1-4).

As is often said to me, we need the wisdom of Solomon to deal with welfare cases. We are told to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. I know I don't have that. I have made mistakes and will continue to, but the CBM is trying desperately to learn from refugees how to help best where we can and not hinder the spiritual development of members around the world. We need to be aware of issues but not shy away from our responsibility and the hope we have. To conclude, only God knows what is in men's hearts, and we are all waiting for the glory that shall be revealed to us at Christ's return when all sorrow and crying shall be wiped away.

*Marc Bilton,
CBM Welfare Secretary*



SPECIAL REPORT

ECCLESIAS IN TURKEY

By Peter Simpson

THREE or four years ago, it was a great surprise for our small ecclesia in the UK to welcome Iranian refugees into our community. It was an even greater surprise sometime later to learn that there were also ecclesias of Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey who had fled there for refuge in fear for their lives because of their new-found Christian beliefs. Today there are 250-300 brothers and sisters in Turkey, with ecclesias in four main centers and others living in isolation in more than a dozen cities scattered around the country.

Our recent visit to the country (March–April 2023) confirmed that as Christian converts in a majority Muslim country, life in Turkey is problematic. Our brothers and sisters are under constant observation by the Turkish police, often intending to deport them back to Iran. They are discriminated against regarding employment, housing, and education. Sometimes they are forced to work illegally or for long hours and receive little pay while facing a worsening economic situation and rampant inflation. Nevertheless, they continue

to preach to those of their neighbors, who are themselves Christian converts, but who have come to know the Truth about the one God of the Bible. New baptisms are a regular feature of our visits.

Not unexpectedly, welfare is a significant concern, with brothers and sisters in the UK having contributed more than £400,000 to the needs of our spiritual family in Turkey since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic. The distribution is coordinated by local members and welfare committees in the Turkish ecclesias, who can ensure that help is provided fairly and consistently to those who need it most. CBM UK currently has sufficient funds to meet the need. Nevertheless, we understand brothers and sisters may want to contribute, and if so, they can make donations to the CBM UK Welfare Fund. For those in North America, it would probably be easiest to forward donations to CBMA for them to be consolidated and passed on.

The act of providing welfare help comes, of course, with its own challenges. Even the Lord Jesus remarked at one point that his hearers were only there for the loaves and fishes. We ourselves have experienced the gratitude and joy from sharing the material benefits the LORD has blessed us with. But we have also witnessed the deep divisions, and erosion of fellowship and trust caused within the Turkish ecclesias and between individual brothers and sisters due to the unintended consequences of generous giving; arguments about money and motivation for church

attendance. These consequences happen particularly when giving is not coordinated and especially when contributions are made directly to individuals. The widespread use of social media means we are regularly informed of requests for help received from people purporting to be brothers and sisters in Turkey. If you would like advice regarding any such claims, please forward correspondence to turkey@cbm.or.uk, and we will provide any help and advice we have available.

There are specific ways brothers and sisters in North America can help. Due to renewed United Nations Refugee Agency sponsorship schemes in recent weeks, we have seen an uptake in brothers and sisters departing from Turkey for the US—for example, to Los Angeles, Boston, Seattle, and San Diego, with others likely to follow. Please help them settle into their new surroundings. Some may only have an extremely basic grasp of English. We understand there may also be sponsorship schemes recently introduced enabling the resettlement of refugees in the United States. We are in regular contact with brothers and sisters under serious threat to their well-being in Turkey who would welcome your help and prayers. We would happily work with a coordinating committee of brothers and sisters in the US to examine these possibilities.

*Peter Simpson,
CBM Link for Turkey*



FROM CONGO TO CHICAGO

By Dan Richard

HAVE you ever prayed and asked for opportunities to serve? Perhaps you were especially motivated after Bible School, after being baptized, or from another special moment when your faith peaked. When we ask God for opportunities to serve, it is a healthy and likely, amazing first step into the unknown. I speak from my own experience, and the opportunities continue to flow in unpredictable and surprising ways.

About ten years ago, the Lombard (Chicago) Ecclesia received our first contact from a baptized sister from Congo. Her name is Kiza, and Bro. Lucas Scheepers of Pretoria, South Africa, baptized her. Her family of eight was accepted into the United Nations US refugee resettlement program and found themselves in Chicago and in great need. Our government provided this family with housing for three months and simple job and culture training. But after that initial support, all refugees are basically on their own and need to quickly adapt by finding

work to avoid homelessness. That is more than a challenge for refugees in a new and challenging environment!

Before receiving a phone call from Kiza, I sought an opportunity to serve. Our family had returned from a trip to Sydney, Australia, and saw how an ESL (English as Second Language) class turned into a successful preaching program. The idea of this program was very appealing since our church seemed suitable and able to organize ESL classes. Well, my prayer about starting an ESL class soon pivoted entirely in a different direction, as Kiza's family was in our backyard and had serious needs.

We immediately arranged to have someone drive each week, pick up the family, and bring them to church. This effort was at least two hours of extra driving for someone each week. But it was a great opportunity to meet our new friends and learn much more about them. The Lombard Ecclesia is very good at welcoming visitors,



Masina, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

and we had many people help just by being friendly. We started a dedicated Sunday School class for the new attendees, as only one family member was Christadelphian, and the others appeared to have a Pentecostal slant. We also started having lunch after service each week since the family could use extra food, and all seemed to enjoy spending time and becoming acquainted.

After a month or two, it became apparent that driving two extra hours each week would not be an ideal long-term solution. Our interaction was limited to just a few hours each week, and this family needed much more support. Fortunately, I work for NOW Foods (a vitamin company), and we were on a hiring binge. We hired four family members to work the midnight shift and found apartments within

walking distance. This development was a significant solution for all. The new location was also very close to a number of our members' homes. So many members became involved with support, food, time, finances, and friendship. Our dying, white, suburban church took on this "opportunity," and we've been growing, thankfully, ever since.

About six months after the first phone call, another family from Congo made contact. They knew Kiza and the first family from South Africa and began an amazing journey that continues today. Thanks to the Great Lakes Bible School, the Emena family of ten relocated from Fort Worth, Texas. This new family took a train from Texas directly to the Bible School in Wisconsin with all their worldly possessions and never returned. The Emena family have been

diligent attendees and supporters of God's work in the Chicago area. We often wonder where we would be today without them!

Our new friends from Congo were very good at bringing friends to church. We began to see more visitors than usual and learned to be extra welcoming. We printed many copies of a first principles book in Swahili and gave that to the many visitors who struggled with English. We still have extra copies in case anyone would like some! Two additional husbands of the first family women arrived later and joined our Congolese members. Another large Congolese family from Iowa relocated to our area after hearing of jobs and church support. Soon after, we heard about two young Iranian brothers arriving in Phoenix. Bro. Tim Galbraith of India advised Milad and Masih to relocate to Chicago because we could also support them. They soon moved to Chicago and were followed by another Iranian family of four living in Kansas City, who had known Milad and Masih when they were refugees in Sri Lanka. Next, two more Iranians arrived, separately, from Turkey, though both sisters' husbands were left behind.

About two years ago, our first brother from Cameroon miraculously arrived in Chicago, unconnected to any others. He was our first asylum seeker, as he flew from Cameroon to Ecuador and then made his way north and eventually into California, where he declared asylum. His name is Bro. Charles Amin, and he had been a principal of a Christadelphian school for the blind

in Cameroon. We followed a similar script by eventually helping him find a job and relocate after he gained legal status. His story alone reflects a true act of God, including how he won his court cases and just recently received his green card. Bro. Charles has been an amazing addition to our church, and he soon attracted others from Cameroon without even trying! Today he shares his two-bedroom apartment with three other men from Cameroon he knows or is related to. He is the only baptized Christadelphian, but all four have been attending meeting regularly and are very involved.

Bro. Charles has been an amazing addition to our church, and he soon attracted others from Cameroon without even trying!

On January 18, 2023 President Biden announced Welcome Corps. The US is starting a new private sponsorship program to imitate what Canada has been doing for a long time. The program details are at welcomecorps.org. The idea is that US citizens, groups, or churches can pay \$2,275 per person and act as a guarantor to bring refugees to the US from other countries. "Sponsor groups welcome refugee newcomers by securing and preparing initial housing, greeting refugee newcomers at the airport, enrolling children in school, and helping adults find employment." And a whole lot more! The opportunities to serve have just opened to huge new

levels. According to World Relief, this program is just starting, with an expected rollout in the summer of 2023.

I know a business friend in Guelph, Ontario, who personally sponsored about 100 Syrian families a few years ago to move to Canada. He is quite wealthy and able to do this financially, but he saw a great need and knew he could help. He didn't do this for religious reasons but simply to help the helpless. He organized churches into support groups to provide housing, language and job training, schooling for kids, and much more. From a distance, this personal effort is stunning. Imagine what opportunities God is presenting to all in the USA in ways you may have never considered for your church.

The Lombard Christadelphians have multiple members who still have spouses and children “stuck” by red tape in other countries waiting for an opening like this. Some spouses have been waiting for five years, so this program is incredibly important. We expect to support our

members financially and with support for jobs, housing, and other needs. Our ongoing relationship with multiple immigrant charities, such as World Relief, should help. What an exciting and promising legal change that can dramatically energize your life and your church!

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in.” (Matt 25:35).¹

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Heb 13:2).

*Dan Richard,
Lombard Ecclesia, IL*



NO RETREAT, NO SURRENDER

By Ramazani Emena

IM Bro. Ramazani Emena, married to Sis. Sangani, and father of eight children. We are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and have lived in Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa. We are currently living among brethren and sisters in the Lombard Ecclesia in western Chicago. I'm a polyglot of five languages—I can speak Swahili, Lingala, French, Kibembe, and English. Today I am also writing on behalf of my fellow brethren and sisters from Mexico, Iran, and Cameroon who also attend the Chicago Ecclesia.

Our message is found in the Bible in two places. The first is: *“Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thess 5:17-18).¹

The second is: *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”* (Matt 7:7-8).

Because no one knows when, how, where, or through whom he shall have prayers answered, that is why one Sunday, I exhorted in the Chicago

ecclesia about: "No Retreat, No Surrender." That means we should have faith (hope) in everything of God and that we can be helpful in your life (including in the Kingdom of God) and for the future of your family, both spiritually and physically.

While living in my home country of the DRC and attending the high school in South Kivu, named Institute Mwenge wa Taifa Baraka, I had a question: "How can I go out of the country?" and "How can I become a famous man?" But the war in DRC started in 1997, and we fled and found ourselves in Tanzania. Then I decided this was the opportunity for me to fulfill my dream. As we say in French: "*quelque fois le malheur est bon.*" In English, this means: "Sometimes misfortune is good!" Brothers and sisters, all I was doing in the Lugufu refugee camp was focused on thinking about getting out and going somewhere overseas.

I decided to travel down to South Africa (Pretoria) with my whole family.

Many Congolese from our region had settled there, despite being unwelcome by the local people. Despite many serious challenges, I patiently prayed, and through this manner, I was able to learn about the Truth. Later I was baptized by Bro. Lucas Scheepers in 2012 in South Africa. My wife, Sangani, was baptized in 2013, just before we left Pretoria. Some people who have visited South Africa may know Bro. Lucas, Sis. Leona and Bro. Padiri, just to name a few. These are some of the people we had fellowship with while living in Pretoria.

After waiting for years, our request to gain refugee rights was heard. However, our application was rejected the first time. But I did not give up. In my heart, I was telling myself, "No Retreat, No Surrender." I restarted the appeal to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), and fortunately, God answered my family's prayers. He helped us overcome so many hurdles while living among daily



The Emena's home in Pretoria, South Africa in 2013

dangers in South Africa. Bro. Lucas couldn't believe that we could go to the US since we had no money, no passports, and no relatives in the US! Even when we were about to leave with United Nations (UN) refugee status, we had a big problem at the airport with my eldest son, Livre. His name was incorrect in his documents and did not match his airplane tickets. One ticket agent would not allow Livre to fly with the family due to this, but after some quick prayer and a miracle, another man overrode the ticketing error and allowed us to leave.

By the grace of God, we flew to New York City and then to Fort Worth, Texas, in the US in 2013. We were initially "placed" in a large apartment of four bedrooms for our family of ten, though without air conditioning. We just didn't know how to turn the

air conditioner on! Catholic Charities helped us with English training, job training, and cultural rules in the US. People at our apartment complex often complained about our family because our children were jumping up and down and making noise. We were threatened that the police would be called and had some racial prejudice.

Some of our older children began making friends we disapproved of, and we tried to find Christadelphians in our area. We were frustrated that our children would not have a Sunday School to attend since we had only recently been baptized and been active in the Pretoria ecclesia. We were told it was a four-hour drive to a Christadelphian meeting, so we were unable to attend any meeting. We began to have a small church service at home with our family, but the



Ramazani Emema (top, red shirt) and others in Pretoria, So. Africa, 2013

apartment complex told us we were not allowed to have any church service in those apartments!

Eventually, Bro. Brad Bennett called and helped us take a train to Great Lakes Bible School with all our possessions. That ride was over twenty-four hours with our children, who were three to fifteen years old. When we finally arrived at the Bible School in Wisconsin, we were so happy to meet quite a few brothers and sisters we had previously met in Pretoria in the past few years. These people had visited our church, and some had helped to repair parts of our home. Brethren from the Chicago area made us feel welcome by driving us to a new phase in life after Bible School, with total relocation for a home and a new job. We also met another Congolese family led by Sis. Bridgett, who we knew from Pretoria. They were attending the Lombard Ecclesia as well.

I am happy with my decision to follow the Truth, and in my heart, I will never forget the tough decisions I had to make. Despite the outcome, I always knew God had a plan, so I kept looking forward. There was no turning back. In my mind, I had been living the phrase "No Retreat, No Surrender."

We are all born in different circumstances and with different motives. I had set my sights on finding a better place to live with my family, and I trusted in the LORD to help guide me toward this goal. With many setbacks, I thought I would break and give up. But I kept my faith in God.

My brothers and sisters are all searching and trying to attain something. It can be simple or complex, and it is difficult to do things without God. That being said, a person needs to put effort and focus on their goals and plans because, as the Bible says, "*faith without deeds is useless.*" (Jas 2:20). We can use fellow brothers and sisters for support and advice because in this manner we are helping each other. In my own life, I would not have arrived at the Truth without getting and taking advice from my brothers and sisters. Nobody is knowledgeable in everything except God, so we can only help and learn from each other. I am happy that nothing can separate me and my family from the love of Jesus.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35-39).

Ramazani Emena,
Lombard Ecclesia, IL

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version.

PART 2

COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT

By Stephen Hill

The Grief Process and Learning From Grief

IN 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published her book “*On Death and Dying*,” where she discussed her theory of the five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It is not always appreciated that she identified these stages in the experiences of people dying from a terminal disease. She made it clear that these steps do not necessarily come in the order noted above, nor are all steps experienced by all patients, though she stated a person will always experience at least two. In fact, people will often experience several stages in a “roller coaster” effect—switching between two or more stages, returning to one or more several times before working through it.

The Grief Process

The grief process for bereavement may not, therefore, be the same as Kübler-Ross described. The grief process is a very individual experience and often lonely. So much depends on your own personality and your relationship with the one who has died. Therefore, you **cannot** compare one person’s grief with that of another.

The grief process is an inescapable journey we must endure. It is an **unchartered** trip—a zigzag or a circle, not straight-forward. Therefore, the first year of grieving is a series of **firsts**—the first birthday and annual family gatherings without them, the anniversary of the death, etc. Grief counselors, therefore, may caution

against making significant decisions in this first year.

There is no **timetable** for grieving, therefore, take one day at a time (Matt 6:34). It can take one to three years to become stable again, that is, if grief is resolved or uncomplicated. It took me 18 months after our daughter died. Grief resolution is when the bereaved can, in time, move on. This result requires an acceptance that life will never be the same again. It does not mean you “get over it”—because you are forever changed.

Time alone does not heal you. You **choose** to heal. It takes effort. It is possible to feel you cannot move on, that the pain of your loss is simply too great. These thoughts may lead to living in a state of grief for many years, perhaps even for the rest of one's life. This situation is a kind of living death, and in the case of ending one's life to stop the pain, a real death. But in either case, we cannot honor the dead by “dying” with them. Furthermore, our family and loved ones will experience both their own grief and the loss of the withdrawn one.

“Moving on” involves letting your emotions out and letting them run their course. Don't fight them, and don't feel embarrassed by showing them in front of others. Not letting them out hinders the healing process. It leads to bitterness if unresolved.

The sharp pain eases in time, but emotions easily rise, whether prompted by a memory or for no reason at all. The memory of the loss of a loved one is always sad. Some things that can help the grieving process are:

- Seek solace in our community.
- Read and learn about death-related grief responses.
- Attend a support group.
- Seek therapy with a trained counselor or psychologist.
- Write down your thoughts and feelings.
- Eat well, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- Grieving mends the spirit and heals the heart. We overcome it when we stop focusing exclusively on our own hurt.

Tears

Our Western culture can often inhibit us from showing our true feelings or even discussing them. Scripture mentions numerous occasions when the faithful in grief cried:

- Gen 23:2—Abraham for Sarah.
- Gen 37:35—Jacob for lost Joseph.
- Gen 50:1—Joseph for Jacob.
- Deut 34:8—Israel for Moses.
- 2 Sam 1:12—David and his men for Saul and Jonathan.
- 2 Sam 3:32—David for Abner.
- 2 Sam 12:21—David for Bathsheba's son.
- 2 Sam 13:36—David and his men for Amnon.
- 2 Sam 18:33—David for Absalom.
- Matt 2: 18—women for children.
- Acts 9:39—women for Dorcas.

Growing through Grief

My wife and I attended a presentation for our ecclesia by a professional grief counselor. He said that in time the one grieving will experience joy and

*Grief is not inconsistent with faith.
However, knowledge of the resurrection at the return
of Christ may not help us immediately. We know the
verses well, but they don't seem to ease the pain.*

sadness at the same time. I challenged this statement, and he asked how long it had been since our daughter's death. I said it was ten months. He replied that it was too soon but that it would come. And he was right—it did! And this is precisely what the Apostle Paul declared:

- *“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”* (2 Cor 6:10).¹
- *“I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.”* (2 Cor 7:4).
- *“In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy... abounded.”* (2 Cor 8:2).

He also explained how this is possible. Joy is our inner state, knowing that we are God's children and that it is our, *“Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* (Luke 12:32). Sadness, on the other hand, is our response to external events—whether of death or some other form of loss.

It may seem that the Apostle Paul said that we should not grieve when a loved one dies: *“I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”* (1 Thess 4:13).

Does this mean that sorrowing is wrong? Given the numerous examples of the faithful sorrowing (e.g., John

11:31, 33, 35; Phil 2:27), clearly, it is not. So, what did Paul mean?

- His words are to comfort us (1 Thess 4:18).
- Extreme grieving suggests to others that we do not have a hope.
- We know that the dead are asleep and will wake up (1 Thess 4:14-15). The word cemetery means a sleeping place.

Grief is, therefore, not inconsistent with faith.

However, knowledge of the resurrection at the return of Christ may not help us immediately. We know the verses well, but they don't seem to ease the pain. Martha felt this way when Jesus affirmed the resurrection on the Last Day (John 11:23-24). Looking forward to the resurrection does not mean we are happy that our loved one has died. Even though Martha and Mary believed in the resurrection, both expressed their deep sense of loss for their brother Lazarus and their disappointment that Jesus had not come sooner to heal him (John 11:21, 32).

Learning from Grief

Without minimizing the impact of bereavement, there are important lessons to learn from the experiences of grief. Indeed, this is true of all experiences—we should be “trained” by

them (Heb 12:11). I have learned a lot through my experiences of death and grief. I just wished there was another way to learn them! I have grouped my thoughts under six headings:

1. Expectations/Anticipations

Job, in the extremity of his tragedy, could say, *“the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away”* (Job 1:21), and *“shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?”* (Job 2:10). Indeed, the Apostle Paul says that *“the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also... groan within ourselves.”* (Rom 8:22-23).

We must not, therefore, expect to be an exception. Rather we should expect unexpected, unsettling, irritating, and confusing experiences. God doesn't owe us anything. There is no promise in the Bible of a life free from pain and disappointment.

2. God Cares

In times of crisis, anxiety, confusion, or disappointment, we must remember God is totally in control and that He is never disinterested in our situation.

There are many references in the Psalms to the need to remember God's wonderful works in the past (e.g., Psalm 78:4, 7, 11, 12, 32, 43; 107:15, 21, 22, 24, 31). Perhaps this seems a bit academic, but consider His wonderful works in your life. Baptism demonstrates the miracle of forgiveness, the blessing of God's love shown to us through our families and brothers and sisters in Christ, and the gift of God's only begotten Son as our Savior. You may be able to add many more to this list.

The Apostle Peter encourages us to cast

“all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Pet 5:7). Even as we travel through the valley of the shadow of death, we are assured that God is with us. (Psa 23:4).

3. Trial of Faith

We know how important faith is to our Father in heaven: *“without faith it is impossible to please Him.”* (Heb 11:6). Furthermore, *“faith without works is dead.”* (Jas 2:17, 26). It is evident then that God will never do anything to undermine our faith, to destroy the need for faith. Giving us a pain-free life would leave us no opportunity to show our faith.

Our faith will be tested (Jas 1:3), and that by fire. (1 Pet 1:7) Our faith will not be unchallenged for long. Our God, therefore, permits difficulties to occur. There are many opportunities for faith to grow in our lives, so we should use these experiences to grow in faith. In difficult times faith is our life raft—we have nothing else.

There are many examples in Scripture when God permits His children to experience struggles:

- Joseph was promised great things but was sold as a slave and imprisoned.
- David was anointed as King but hunted in the wilderness.
- The disciples were left to row for hours in a storm when Jesus could have rescued them much earlier.

All our trials have a purpose. This reality does not mean we must interpret them as punishment for our sins. Job's trials came upon him, but they were without a cause (Job 2:3). Even when we are *“chastened”* by our Lord, which

is painful, we are being “trained” by such experiences (Heb 12:10-11).

We will cope much better with our trials when we remember those times in our past when we have proved that our faith is valid: *“And I said, ‘This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.’ I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely will I remember Your wonders of old.”* (Psa 77:10-11).

Unfortunately, *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”* (1 Cor 10:13) is often quoted to assure us that our trials will never be too great to bear. But this verse must be understood in its context, like all Scripture. The chapter is all about the temptation to worship idols or demons (vv. 7, 14, 19-21, 28). It is not about the trials of our faith.

The rest of verses 13-14 also show this: *“But with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”* In contrast, there is no escape from the trials of our faith, from trouble.

Indeed, life can be too much to bear, as Moses found (Num 11:14-15; Deut 1:9, 12). Being unable to cope is not, therefore, a sign of weakness or lack of faith. Telling someone who is not coping well that they should be makes them feel even worse.

4. God's Sovereignty

One of the most challenging facts of life is the awareness that some of

God's children have a more difficult life than others, and conversely, some seem to have it easier than others. This inequality is even more stark when we consider our brothers and sisters in developing countries.

In Romans 9, the Apostle Paul addresses this issue by drawing our attention to God's selection of Isaac and Jacob (vv. 7, 10). Consequently, he asks, *“Is there unrighteousness with God?”* (v. 14). Or we might ask, “Is God unfair?” Paul's response to this question is: *“O man, who are you to reply against God?”* (v. 20) and follows this by referring to God as the potter.

When we consider God's awesome power and unfathomable wisdom, we are indeed just clay in His hands. Job's questions were answered similarly when Elihu and Almighty God pointed to His power in creation (chapters 32-41). There is no theology of a helpless God.

We must accept Him as the unchanging God who never makes mistakes. As confusing as life may seem at times, we may, years later, begin to understand how God was working in our lives. And if not, we will understand when transformed into immortality.

5. Preparation

We are now in training, both for the rest of our mortal lives and for the Kingdom. This life is simply a preparation for a much greater role as kings and priests to restore a ruined earth and a shattered population after Armageddon and the great earthquake. Difficulties are to be worked through,

not to be avoided. So much of Scripture shows us the lives of faithful people who, if not immediately, later understood how the hand of God was guiding them. They understood God had a purpose for them, often to save others.

There is great value in studying the subject of Providence. We need to have a worldview that has God in every part.

6. Future

Hardships in this life leave their mark on us. We are forever changed. We are different people. We will never be the same person as we were. These scars never disappear. Our loss is always there, and private cries of grief continue.

However, bereavement brings the resurrection into sharper focus. It becomes more significant in our minds. As important as the coming Kingdom is, the desire for the resurrection becomes dominant, that day when we shall see our loved ones again. We are more *“eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”* (Rom 8:23). In that day, God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Rev 7:17). Furthermore, then *“there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.*

There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev 21:4).

God has not promised
skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways
all our lives through;
God has not promised
sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
peace without pain.
But God has promised
strength for the day,
Rest for the labour,
light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
undying love.

(Annie Johnson Flint)

Stephen Hill,
Hyde Park Ecclesia, SA

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

EDITORS NOTE: We thank Bro. Stephen for sharing this emotional message with us but doing so with the sound consultation from Scripture. If you would like to read more about Bereavement, may we suggest you download a terrific booklet from the Christadelphian Support Network in the UK? This helpful booklet provides multiple accounts of brothers and sisters going through bereavement and valuable resources. You can download this free booklet at <https://tinyurl.com/yf8997sd>

SIX-MONTH PRAYER CHALLENGE

By Robert Prins

SOMEONE asked me how I would describe my ecclesia. I had to think for a moment before I came up with the right word. “Invigorating,” I said.

It wasn’t always like that. In fact, about nine years ago, our ecclesia was anything but invigorating. Problem after problem tumbled around us. Health, mental health, and relationships were some of the urgent problems we faced. But that left us little time and energy to deal with other important issues like morale, direction, and spiritual growth. Our ecclesial population was growing older. Our Sunday School and youth group were shrinking. After a normal Sunday morning meeting, the ecclesial hall would clear out relatively quickly. We had been to the meeting. We had done our duty. Life, enthusiasm, and vibrancy were missing. Praise was mediocre, and love was sluggish.

As an ecclesia, we had tried all sorts of things to improve the situation, but nothing seemed to work. We held special social events, planned potentially exciting Bible classes, and tried to grow through preaching, but nothing seemed to pick up the mood for any sustainable length of time. Most of us had run out of energy.

Furthermore, with five ecclesias in Auckland, if visitors turned up in the city, they would usually choose to visit one of the other ecclesias instead of ours. If people from around the country relocated to Auckland, our ecclesia at Pakuranga was not usually considered an option when deciding where to go. We felt isolated and alone. The only way to enjoy the fellowship of others was to get out and visit them.

My wife, Sis. Sharon and I discussed the state of our ecclesia a lot. What

could we do? How do we pick up energy when we are feeling tired out ourselves? Should we jump the sinking ship or stay to the bitter end?

Then one day, Sharon read a story of someone who had been challenged to pray for a specific country every day for six months to see what God could do with fervent and faithful prayer. The story was amazing. God used the man to become the answer to his own prayers. The country he once knew nothing about was drastically changed for good through his enthusiasm, work, and advice.

“We should do that for our ecclesia,” Sharon said to me. So that was the beginning of our first Six-Month Prayer Challenge.

It started out small, as Sharon, I, and our four children began praying. Then we thought we should invite the ecclesia to pray as well—after all, the more prayers, the better. So we set out the Six-Month Prayer Challenge to our ecclesia. After announcing and explaining what we would do, around twenty of about sixty in our

ecclesia said they would commit to praying for our ecclesia every day. Our prayer was for direction, a change in spirit, spiritual growth, and growth in number. These prayers would often be offered at our meetings, Bible classes, and devotional evenings, as well as in our private homes.

There was no bolt of lightning or tongues of fire to answer our prayer. That would have been nice, but we had to be patient. But less than three months after we started praying, I noticed the first answer to our prayers. It was an attitude change. It was only slight, but it was definitely there. People stayed longer after the meeting, and there seemed to be more of a desire to be there and to meet with each other.

We kept praying. That attitude change was the only answer to prayer we saw in the six months we prayed. Admittedly, it seemed a bit disappointing, but we resolved to wait for the LORD to see how He would answer our prayer. Little did we know, but while we were praying, God was at work preparing people to be answers to our prayers.

The Pakuranga CHRISTADELPHIANS SIX MONTH PRAYER CHALLENGE

13 November 2022 to May 28 2023

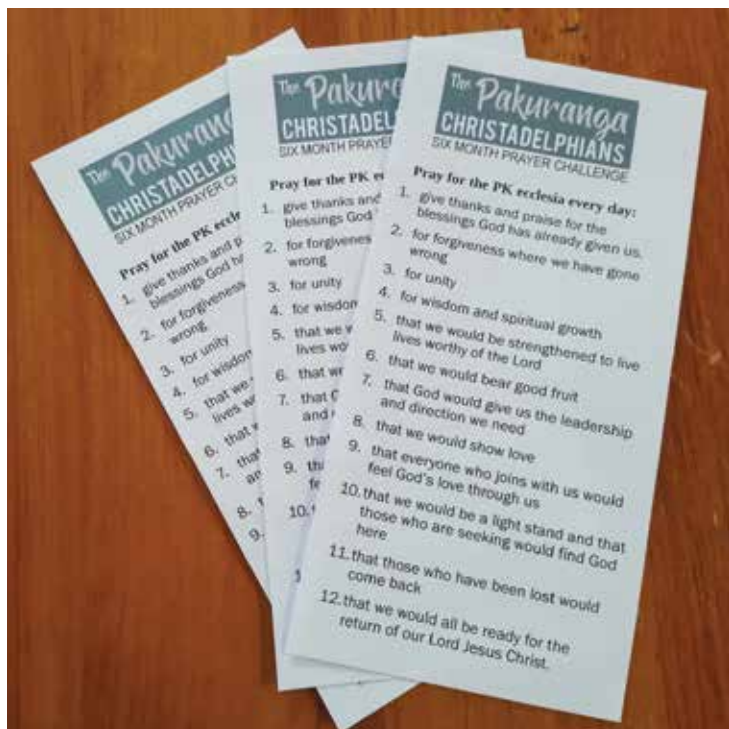
10 March 2023

Congratulations Pakuranga!

We are Four months into our Six Month Prayer Challenge.

Today, that means we have been praying for 119 of 182 days. There are only 63 days left!

Our aim is to have as many people pray for our ecclesia every day in a row for six months. We have done this before and God blessed us with miracle after miracle, resulting in the vibrant ecclesia we have meeting at Pakuranga now. Let's keep praying!



We prayed every day for six months. Many of us carried on praying after that. Then a year after we had started to pray, the miracles began. We had heard rumors that a family was moving to Auckland, but we knew they wouldn't come to Pakuranga. We could all think of so many better places for them to go. Then they turned up one Sunday morning—a lovely surprise—and announced they had come to stay! We were blown away!

Over the following two or three months, we received an influx of five or more families and a good number of young people whose hearts God had prepared to come and join our ecclesia

at Pakuranga. What an incredible boost we all had from them! New enthusiasm, a hall full of children, a growing youth group. And the people kept coming. During a recent exhortation, I asked for a show of hands from everyone who was not at Pakuranga for our first prayer challenge. Well over half of the ecclesia raised their hands. God is good!

Since that first prayer challenge, the Pakuranga ecclesia has developed in amazing ways with a dynamic mix of people from different backgrounds, yet working together as the various parts of the body of Christ. From vibrant worship to an ecclesially sponsored

mission trip for our senior Sunday School class, from spontaneous themed exhortations spanning weeks or months to great fellowship, teaching, music, activities, prayers, and a fantastic online presence, we have been very blessed.

None of this was by our own strength or effort. It was the gift of God to a faithful group of believers who prayed together. All the credit goes to God, who chose to listen to our prayers and answer them in a way that exceeded our wildest dreams. God did the same thing for Ezra as he and a large group of Jews were about to leave their captivity and travel back to the Promised Land.

There, by the Ahava Canal, I [Ezra] proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.... On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. (Ezra 8:21–23, 31 NIV).

God answered their prayers. He is a God who doesn't change. He still answers prayer today.

Then COVID-19 came. With COVID

came the blessings of meeting together online, a daily readings group that is still going strong after three years, online Bible Schools, an ecclesial Feast of Tabernacles, and new programs that have reached out to thousands of people around the world. But with COVID-19, there was also a loss. Names without faces online gradually disappeared—and now we miss them at our face-to-face meetings. There has been waning enthusiasm, some Bible classes were canceled for various reasons, and people are generally feeling tired again.

We still have an awesome ecclesia, but now we need a boost to keep us from falling. What better way to do it than to turn to God in prayer once again?

And so we have begun our second Six-Month Prayer Challenge. This time we have twelve aspects that we are focusing our prayer on. There are many more potential prayer topics for an ecclesia to pray about, but these are the ones we have chosen. Many of them come from Colossians 1:9-11. We have been praying:

1. Thanks and praise for the blessings God has already given us.
2. For forgiveness where we have gone wrong.
3. For unity.
4. For wisdom and spiritual growth.
5. That we would be strengthened to live lives worthy of the LORD.
6. That we would bear good fruit.
7. That God would give us the leadership and direction we need.
8. That we would show love.
9. That everyone who joins us would feel God's love through us.

10. That we would be a light stand and that those who are seeking would find God's love through us.
11. That those who are lost will come back.
12. That we would all be ready for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All these points have been made into a bookmark for our ecclesial members to place in their Bibles or on fridges to remind them to pray and what to pray for. We have also had a monthly Prayer Challenge newsletter to keep us encouraged and updated. And each week, posters around the hall continue to motivate us to pray and tell us how far through the prayer challenge we have come.

At the time of writing, we are over four months into another Six-Month Prayer Challenge. And yes, we have already seen the results! Whole families have been joining in our prayer challenge, with children as young as three praying for blessings on their ecclesia and Sunday School. Small groups within Pakuranga have gathered to pray for people they love who have been gone for some time. Visitors to our meetings have taken this idea back to their own ecclesias throughout New Zealand and around the world. We have had a string of really good exhortations; people we haven't seen in years have been contacted and encouraged and have even come along. And there is a spirit of unity in our prayers that has boosted our enthusiasm and motivation.

We don't know how God might answer our prayers this time. Maybe He will answer them in some miraculous way like He did last time. Perhaps there will be some pain first in pruning before the new growth springs forth. Maybe He has some plans that we haven't even dreamed about yet. But whatever the answer, we know God hears the fervent prayers of righteous people and that when two or three are gathered together, agreeing about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by our Father in heaven.

We don't have the answers about what is best for our ecclesia. God knows. That's why we ask. That's why we are involved in the Six-Month Prayer Challenge. We are praying and trusting God for the answers. Our aim is to trust Him because He knows best.

How would you describe your ecclesia? Invigorating? Is there room for improvement? Prayer doesn't have to be done alone. Praying together can be so much more effective. Why not join us in a Six-Month Prayer Challenge for your ecclesia? Who knows what might happen? What if our prayers went viral, and our whole community started praying? What could God do then? Even our imaginations might be too limited to comprehend the power of God responding when his people pray. Pray, brethren, pray!

*Robert Prins,
Pakuranga Ecclesia, NZ*

A GLOBAL PRAISE AND PRAYER EVENT

*Join us in a live prayer and devotion
on Zoom for the worldwide
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Give Thanks • Ask for Help • Praise God

Saturday, June 24, 2023

10:00 am PDT / 1:00 pm EDT

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Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Eph 3:20-21 ESV

PEOPLE WHO KNOW JESUS

By Rick Hill

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Heb 12:1).¹

I found Bro. George Booker's articles on "People Jesus Knew" to be very refreshing and encouraging. I thought I might try to write about people of faith who know Jesus today. People that have had a great influence on me and others and have influenced our character. You have no doubt met people who, in your mind, exemplify Jesus in the way they live. Their love for God and Jesus echoes in their lives and gives you the motivation to try to do the same.

After talking about the faith of great men like Abraham and Moses and great women such as Rahab, the writer to the Hebrews says:

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions. (Heb 11:32-33).

People we know have not had such harrowing events but have had severe trials and, because of their faith, have endured and persevered through them.

My first example is a most amazing sister whose great faith encouraged me. She was a humble woman, meek, kind, and gentle. She was generous and hospitable, never turning anyone away. She reminds me of what the Apostle Paul said about discipleship:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.
(Rom 12:9-13).

She had four children but lost a few more through miscarriages along the way. She lost her husband early and brought her family up with little but much love. She read her Bible daily, and, despite her trials, her faith continued to shine through. She was also very wise, and her advice given in love was always appreciated.

One of her greatest loves in later years was her grandchildren. I can see the gleam in her eyes even now as she held her first grandson on her knees on the front porch of the family home. She loved more than words can express. Her trials continued as she developed cancer and still went on working to provide for her family. She never gave up. Perseverance was her forte as well.

She would sit in the living room on the rocker with her Bible on her lap, reading about the Kingdom and Jesus. She believed in the power of prayer. In her final days, living with terrible pain, she asked the arranging board to come and pray for her. They came, and her love and faith moved all. She loved singing hymns. She had a beautiful soprano voice. When her mother and aunt would come and sing with her, it was like having angels in your living room. They **were** angels, saints—faithful in Christ Jesus.

She passed away, dying in great pain but having joy before her and leaving behind a wonderful example of faith and love to those she touched with her heart and soul. She never wrote a book. She never went to university. She never achieved greatness in this world. But she did obtain a crown and will be there when our Lord returns to welcome her into his arms of love. She was a woman of faith.

Faith is not about doing great works. It is about living a life of trust in God and Jesus and doing your best with the talents that God has given you. It is about standing up for what you believe when necessary and treating others better than yourself. What does God want of us?

He has told you, mortal one, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8).

*Rick Hill,
Picton Ecclesia, ON*

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.



DEBT

By Jackie Grieves

A Meditation on Leviticus 25

MY mom strongly advised against taking on debt. She was a young woman during the Great Depression. During that time, her father's business, a grocery store, failed. I understand it was because he allowed struggling customers to owe him for their food purchases. Fast forward ninety years—and today, many people are in debt up to their eyeballs.

In Leviticus 25, we read about legislation in God's "love your neighbors" series: laws intended to shield people in debt from being mistreated. In Israel, the responsibility to help rested with family, other individuals (that's you and me),

and God, because there were no social services to pick up the tab.

Did the Law distinguish between different causes of debt? Was debt that came via uncontrollable disasters, such as death or crop failure, treated differently from debt due to over-consumption, irresponsible risk-taking, gambling, drinking, or financial incompetence? No, God did not allow "if" or "but" discrimination against the debtor. The Law didn't require that excuses be offered and left no space for not providing help because they were "stupid, lazy people!"

God talks a lot about liberty in this chapter. Liberty from owing something to Him is fundamental to God's character, and that's clear in the legislation here. In Israel, liberty from permanent poverty and indebtedness was set in concrete.

It appears in Leviticus 25:35 that giving free financial assistance with no strings attached was preferable over repayable loans. However, if loans were given, they had to be either interest-free or have extremely low rates. Furthermore, all of Israel's debt had a mandatory "write it off" date.

Listen to this from Deuteronomy 15:1-3:

*At the end of every seventh year, cancel all debts. This is the procedure: Everyone who has lent money to a neighbour writes it off. You must not press your neighbour or his brother for payment: All-Debts-Are-Cancelled—GOD says so. You may collect payment from foreigners, but whatever you have lent to your fellow Israelite, you must write off.*¹

Hmmm, how would that work today? How difficult would writing off the debt be for the creditor? What about your bank or your credit card company? Or friend or relative?

When the value of help needed was assessed, God's principles applied. Moses said this on the subject:

When you happen on someone who is in trouble or needs help among your people with whom you live in this land that God is giving you, don't look the other way pretending you don't see him. Don't keep a tight

grip on your purse. No. Look at him, open your purse, lend whatever, and as much as, he needs. Don't count the cost. Don't listen to that selfish voice saying, "It's almost the seventh year, the year of All-Debts-Are-Cancelled," and turn aside and leave your needy neighbour in the lurch, refusing to help him. He'll call GOD's attention to you and your blatant sin. Give freely and spontaneously. Don't have a stingy heart. The way you handle matters like this triggers God's blessing in everything you do. There are always going to be poor and needy people among you. So I command you: Always be generous, open purse and hands, give to your neighbours in trouble. (Deut 15:7-11).

Do God's principles apply to other non-monetary forms of indebtedness? How about the personal debt of other kinds—such as saying sorry? Forgiving? Dishing out revenge of some kind because of a grudge we are carrying? Well, yes!

Paul said, "Love... doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel." (1 Cor 13:5-6). And in Romans 13:8, "Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along."

If God provides us liberty from owing Him, can we do less towards our fellow man? Meditate on these thoughts.

Jackie Grieves,
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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from The Message Bible.

COME AND SEE

AN INTERVIEW WITH CALEB OSBORN

By Jessica Gelineau



THE following interview was recorded on April 11th, 2023, by Bro. Levi Myers (Cambridge, ON) and Bro. Levi Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA), with Bro. Caleb Osborn (Thousand Oaks, CA).¹ The interview discusses spiritual songwriting and the recently released album, *Redeemer*, which centers around the question, “What do you make of Jesus, and how do you allow him to shape your life?”

Bro. Caleb, his wife, Sis. Bethany Osborn and about ten other brothers and sisters worked together under the name “Shouts of Grace” to create this exciting album about the character and Lordship of Jesus Christ. The full conversation is featured in the Summer episode of the Good Christadelphian Music podcast, available on whatever platform you use for podcast listening!



A scene from the studio showing the progress of each track recorded.

Levi M: We're super excited to have you here to share about the album that you've released recently.

Caleb: The album is called *Redeemer*. It's about the person of Jesus Christ, our relationship with him, and what it means to be a disciple. There are nine songs; each of them tackles that theme from a different perspective. Most of these songs were written at one point or another for the California and British Columbia Youth Conferences. So, while most of them were used sometime in the last few years for a relatively small group of people, they were never released in a quality recording. This release is a nice opportunity to take that work and produce a more polished version to share widely. The oldest songs on the

album started being written in 2016, but we didn't begin recording them for this album until the summer of 2019.

Levi M: I've listened. It's beautiful! There are a lot of different voices on there. Talk a little bit more about that. Who got involved in this? Was it your CYC?

Caleb: We had a total of 9 or 10 people singing different songs. Mostly it was people whom I knew and was close to.

Levi G: How did you come up with the band name Shouts of Grace?

Caleb O: That's a great question, and it's one I knew would be asked a lot when I came up with it. It

comes from Zechariah 4:7. That whole section talks about how you're not supposed to "*despise the day of small things*," in the context of the rebuilding of the temple. The people had stopped building the temple. Then Zechariah and Haggai came on in and said, consider your ways; you've got to start working. I know this temple is not as great as you want it to be, but don't despise it just because it's small. God can still work with it. Go ahead. Don't be afraid of enemies. You'll be able to tell this mountain of obstacles in front of you to get away, to move out of the way, and God will take care of it. And then you'll bring forth the top stone of the temple with shouts, crying, "*Grace, grace unto it!*" So it is a bit of a convoluted verse, but basically, what

it's saying is, you're going to finish the work of building this temple. It's not going to be that great, but it's going to be finished. And your victory shout is going to be "Grace," because that's how it's accomplished.

Caleb O: Being very conscious of how amateur all of us working on this are, the idea is that we can sort of throw our attempts at this project and then God's grace can complete the work and make it useful in some small way. So that's the idea. Plus it has the idea of shouting, which I like in terms of singing!

Levi M: You all definitely put some thought into that. I'm curious to know a little bit more about your process for songwriting and composing, Caleb. I always notice that your songs, which I love, are profound and meaningful, filled with Scriptural messages. I'm curious about how you approach writing a song and how you can be creative and stay so true to God's word.

Caleb O: That's the big challenge, right? It's fun. I guess, in some ways, I put fairly strict limitations on my process, which I think helps with the creative process. One limitation is that I try not to develop anything new in



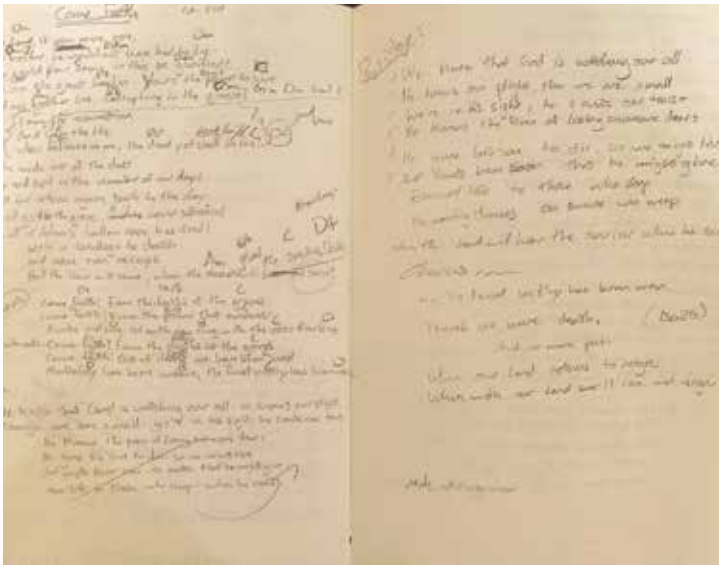
SHOUTS OF GRACE

the lyrics I write. What I mean by that is I don't try to come up with my own analogies or examples. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but I prefer to stick to what the Bible says and the ideas and imagery that the Bible has. The other limitation is I try not to

Being very conscious of how amateur all of us working on this are, the idea is that we can sort of throw our attempts at this project and then God's grace can complete the work and make it useful in some small way.

do long quotes from the Bible in my songs. This by no means is saying that you shouldn't do long quotes in songs—so much of the Scripture I've memorized is from songs that put the Bible to music. But for the songs that I like the most, and when I'm working on writing, I try to

pack them full of Scriptural allusions. A tip I learned from my uncle, Bro. Dan Osborn, is to write down the reference to the idea's source at the end of every line. An example is "Judas Song." One of the verses says, "So Judas *by transgression fell*," three words from



A look inside Caleb's notebook at the lyrical process for Come Forth

I know why
I think that.
In terms of
depth, I think
it's important
to make sure
that what
you're saying
is Biblically

Acts 1. It goes on, “He sold himself to sin. Christ’s warnings fell unheeded, and he refused to let them in.” I got that from John 13, where Jesus repeatedly tells Judas, What are you doing? I know what you're doing. This is not good.

That song comes from a study on Judas I did with Bro. Tim Bruce for the BC Youth Conference workbook. We had our heads in it for a really long time. I’m apprehensive, I guess, that everything I say in there, I know why I said it. I know what I am trying to convey about Judas, and it’s what I understand the Bible to say about Judas’s decline, the reasons for it, and the aspects of it. So while it is an interpretation, I know where it comes from, and

based. In most of the hymns in our hymn book, if you look at them with a close eye, you can point out, “Oh, that line comes from that verse,” and together, the words tell a story that’s almost different than the sum of its parts. If I’m just repeating quotes from the Bible, it doesn’t take as much thought in terms of the lyric writing.

Levi M: It’s almost like doing a mini-Bible study. I’ve definitely heard that approach before. It can be hard to put a complex idea into a song in a way that makes sense and rhymes and just feels good to sing and doesn’t just sound like you’re trying too hard to fit a quote in there or an idea, right?

Everyone who encounters
the Bible or encounters
the message of Jesus at
all does at some point get
drawn to the cross. And
you have to ask the ques-
tion, “Do I go in deeper,
or do I walk away?”

Caleb O: One of the things that impresses me about really well-written lyrics is when you manage to express a lot with a few words. I think of the song *We Listen to Live* by Steph Jamieson.² It doesn't use big words, but it has the right meter, and it has the right rhyming scheme. It has that line in the second verse, "We recognize our lives return to dust/we're like vapors or shadows, but still you work with us." That's my favorite line of the song. It takes from James the idea of, "*What is life but a vapor,*" and it links that with the idea that we are dust, and yet, the gratitude that God still works with us, even though we have these transient, insignificant lives. That simple but profound line is like the pot of gold you're always trying to chase.

Levi M: So with the album release, you had written that the songs revolve around the timeless question, "What do you personally make of Christ, and how have you allowed his impact to shape your life?" That's a really cool, overarching theme for your album. I'm curious what your answer to that is.

Caleb O: That's a hard question to answer. I would say that description of the album is more of a confession than an answer. It's hard to have a relationship with Jesus, I think. I've



Sis. Kristen Styles performing

been studying the gospels for a long time, which is where all these songs came from, mostly because I'm on that quest to try to feel, to know Jesus better, and to have his impact mean something in my life. The songs are a stumbling expression of trying to get closer. That question comes from a good exhortation in *May You Know It To Be True*, a book by Bro. Dennis Gillett. In the ending, he talks about what you make of Christ, whether you see him as somebody who just sort of passes by or if he's someone who becomes, I think the phrase he uses, "incarnate in your consciousness." That captured me. And so that's really what the first song, *Come and See*, is about. It starts off with those questions. Is he the one we're waiting for? He does all these different, strange things. This new figure, Jesus, comes onto the

scene. Who is he? What's he all about? And then the answer in that song is, well, he's giving you an invitation. It's to come and see what he's about, come and see what he offers, but also to count the cost. And so the album explores what Jesus says in John 12, "*If I'm lifted up, I'll draw all men unto me.*" Everyone who encounters the Bible or the message of Jesus at all does, at some point, get drawn to the cross. And you have to ask the question, "Do I go in deeper, or do I walk away?" You may see people you care about experiencing this, and some people may leave because the crown isn't worth the cost, as it were, to them. And it's not just mourning that, but also recognizing that tendency within yourself. And certainly, it's almost harder to make that choice in day-to-day things. Do I pick up my cross in this little thing, this momentary decision?

And then the final song, *Redeemer*, the title track, says, some say this, some say that about Jesus, but I believe he is the Christ. This idea is, of course, what Peter says after everybody walks away after the feeding of the 5,000. And those lyrics were inspired by my later teen years when I struggled with my faith. I had a lot of doubts, a lot of fears that we were wrong about everything we believed.

I remember listening to a debate between Richard Dawkins, the famously militant atheist, and a Christian. Richard Dawkins said that even if you could convince me that the Creation happened, I couldn't believe in this Jesus character. He's so petty and small and insignificant, and it happened so long ago, on a dusty hill outside an outpost of the Roman Empire. It's so **petty**, is the word he



kept using. It's petty and small and insignificant as a methodology for saving the world. That still echoes in my head. I guess it was like, that's one perspective on Jesus, right? That his life is this random, insignificant event that happened long ago. The choice is to believe that's not true. And I don't believe that's true. I believe that Jesus did rise from the dead, and I believe that in the picture of Christ on the cross and the empty tomb, the pairing of those two things it's the answer to everything. And so you have to choose to believe that idea if it resonates with you. For me, that's the problem or the conflict the album circles around. And I think the closing song emphasizes the answer I may not always feel, but it's the answer I believe or choose to believe.

Levi M: We all have faithless moments. If we haven't yet, everyone will at some point in their life, where faith can be so hard to cling to. But God has given us this amazing example in His Son, who faced many things that were so incredibly big. Insurmountable obstacles. And Jesus somehow managed to endure, despite everything, and accept he had to go through what he went through. His struggle is such an amazing reminder to look to Jesus when we feel those moments—to look to him and cling to him and reach out to his example in Scripture.

*Jessica Gelineau,
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¹ Bro. Caleb Osborn can be contacted at shoutsofgrace.music@gmail.com.

² *We Listen to Live* is song #87 in the Christadelphian Orange Worship Book. Copyright © Steph Jamieson 2012. Written for Study Week 2012. The song can be listened to at: <https://shop.theseventhday.com.au/node/155>

You can listen to the album *Redeemer* on the Shouts of Grace website: **shoutsofgracemusic.wixsite.com/projects**

It can also be streamed on the **Renew App**, a Christadelphian Music Streaming app available through the Apple and Google stores. Look for this image, download the app on your device, and search for the *Redeemer* album to listen.



P A R T 5

GOD IS NOT A MONSTER

GOD AND GENOCIDE

By Chris Sales

IN our last article, we asked whether the God of the Bible is “a jealous God.” The Biblical answer is: “Yes, He is!” Exodus 34:14 states, “*For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*” We saw, however, that God’s jealousy implies vulnerability and the capacity to experience pain—not the pettiness of a power-hungry deity obsessed with dominating people! In fact, God gets jealous precisely because He cares and

loves His people deeply! God’s jealousy isn’t capricious or petty. God becomes jealous of our best interests, and His commandments are given for our good.

This final article will examine whether the God of the Bible condones genocide and ethnic cleansing.

The New Atheists will often quote chapters like Deuteronomy 20 to show that the God of the Old Testament is a racially prejudiced ethnic cleanser:

As for the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is going to give you as an inheritance, you must not allow a single living thing to survive. Instead, you must utterly annihilate them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—just as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they cannot teach you all the abhorrent ways they worship their gods, causing you to sin against the Lord your God. (Deut 20:16-18).¹

While this sounds cut and dried, it will be important to get some context and background to understand what is happening here.

First, it is worth noting that the Canaanites in Joshua's time suffered the consequences of their own actions, not a cruel invasion by a foreign people. God says, *"Therefore the land has become unclean and I have brought the punishment for its iniquity upon it so that the land has vomited out its inhabitants."* (Lev 18:25). Was this fair of God to act in this way? Well, the Canaanites **should** have known better since their ancestor was Canaan, the grandson of Noah. Therefore, he would have been aware of the consequences of disobeying God since he grew up in the only family that survived the Flood.

The Canaanites should have known better since their ancestor was Canaan, the grandson of Noah. Therefore, he would have been aware of the consequences of disobeying God since he grew up in the only family that survived the Flood.

Melchizedek was the king of Salem and priest of God. (Gen 14:18). He lived amid the Canaanites. He and Abraham fellowshiped together and he blessed Abraham, who even gave him a tenth of all the spoils. Therefore

the people of the land knew of the Most High God. They were not ignorant of God's laws and expectations. They had no excuse for their immorality and idolatry.

Abraham and Lot preached extensively all across the region, and God did many miracles through them. The Canaanites were witnesses of God's judgment poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah, so they knew exactly what happened to

people who disobeyed him. They had no excuse. Therefore, Joshua and the people of Israel were God's instrument to bring punishment upon disobedient nations.

This is a **timeless** principle!

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes—his eternal power and

divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. So, people are without excuse. (Rom 1:18-20).

It is also important to consider that God **waited** many years between giving the command in Leviticus 18 and acting on it. Why did God wait? Because He is merciful and longsuffering. When God promised to give Abraham's offspring the land, God told Abraham that it would not be until *"the fourth generation [that] they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."* (Gen 15:16). God would not act against these people until their wickedness reached a level He could no longer tolerate. Interestingly, God eventually brought about the same judgment upon His own people Israel when they later behaved like the

horrific Crusades in the Middle Ages, nor any other atrocities that have been done "in the Name of God."

In addition, the nation of Israel was not allowed to have a standing army, and they were not to be reliant on horses and chariots. Only prophets under divine revelation made the call for war (not kings, priests, or tribal leaders). The victories Israel's non-professional, rag-tag army won against overwhelming odds clearly signaled that God was fighting for them. Often priests were praising and worshipping God before, during and after a battle. When acting in faith, Israel won their battles without any loss of life. God was obviously the one who brought the victory.

This fact does not justify the many holy wars declared throughout history. As one writer said, "Yahweh-initiated

God's call to battle (for example, in the time of Joshua) was unique to the nation of Israel. Such a command isn't an enduring, universally binding standard for all times and all cultures. It wasn't even a permanent fixture in Israel's story after the time of David.

Canaanites they had dispossessed. (see Num 33:51-56).

Significantly, God's call to battle (for example, in the time of Joshua) was unique to the nation of Israel. Such a command isn't an enduring, universally binding standard for all times and all cultures. It wasn't even a permanent fixture in Israel's story after the time of David. It certainly should never have been used to justify the brutally

battles were never intended for non-prophet organizations!"²

Most of the wars Israel fought as a nation under Joshua and David were in self-defense. God explicitly instructed them not to provoke any nations that chose to co-exist with them peacefully. For example, in Deuteronomy 2:9, God tells the children of Israel, "*Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battles.*" This instruction was

repeated for other nations too. But the chapter goes on to show that when attacked, Israel defended itself and was victorious over their enemies.

So, was it xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, or genocide in Joshua's time? No! These are just terms the New Atheists use to evoke a strong emotional response from their readers.

God always intended to include "*all nations*" in his plan of redemption (Gen 12:1-3). But, in time, God does judge and will judge all those who practice evil and wickedness—Jew or Gentile!

The account of Israel inheriting the land was not about race or ethnicity but about good versus evil. Many non-Jews were incorporated into the family

of Israel—Rahab, Uriah the Hittite, and Araunah the Jebusite, to name just a few. Israel was instructed to care for foreigners (Lev 19:34; Deut 10:18-19) and give them full rights in the land. (Lev 24:22; Num 35:15.) Acceptance and inclusion, or rejection and annihilation, depended on whether or not there was a belief in God. It had nothing to do with race, color, or ethnicity.

God is concerned about sin and wickedness, not ethnicity. In fact, in the Old Testament, it is obvious God opposed Israel's sin just as much as (if not more than) the sins of the Gentiles. God even used foreign nations to judge Israel! Assyria, Babylon, and Rome



were all used to punish Israel and scatter them throughout the globe at various times as judgment upon Israel for continually rejecting God.

While we may be troubled when reading certain Old Testament passages, we can put them into proper perspective by looking at their context and the historical period. The ultimate resolution is found in God's Word and in His Son Jesus Christ—who lived among us, was put to death, and rose again on our behalf. The God whom the New Atheists consider a “monster” is a holy God who we need to revere, but also a loving, self-sacrificing God who invites us to be reconciled to Him. Remember what Dawkins said. “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser.”³

Well, I don't believe in the God that Richard Dawkins doesn't believe in! This is the God I believe in:

The LORD, the one who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and faithfulness, guarding mercy for thousands by forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin—so making innocent! While still visiting the iniquity of fathers and children, to the third and fourth, of those that hate Him. (a paraphrase of Exodus 34:5-7).

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¹ All Scriptural citations are from the New King James Version.

² Copan, Paul, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, page 161.

³ Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, UK, 2006, p. 31 in the hardcover edition and p. 51 in the paperback edition.

The LORD, the one who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and faithfulness, guarding mercy for thousands by forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin



PART 4

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

By Richard Morgan

IN Galatians 3:11, Paul quotes our key phrase from Habakkuk when he writes, “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for *‘The righteous shall live by faith.’*” It seems Paul had Habakkuk in mind throughout his epistle. For instance, in chapter 6, he curiously remarks, “See

with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.” (v. 11). Why should the Galatians be impressed that Paul is writing in large letters unless he is alluding to what Habakkuk said in the context of the righteous living by faith when God told him “*Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he*

may run who reads it.” (Hab 2:2). Just as the prophet wrote the vision with large letters, Paul does the same for the Galatians—he wants them to run in faith.

Back in Galatians 3, Paul leads into his quotation of Habakkuk by using another quotation: “*For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’*” (v. 10). These words are from Deuteronomy 27:26, a chapter in which the Israelites are instructed to “*set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the words of this law*” and “*write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly.*” (v. 2-3, 8). That word “*plainly*” is the same one used in Habakkuk when he was told to make the vision “*plain on tablets.*”

have kept its spirit perfectly, but it still cursed him, and God, by allowing his Son to be hung on a tree, thus breaking the law, wanted to make this plain for us to see. Even a sinless man was cursed by the Law.

Paul mentions Christ’s death earlier in chapter 3, where he writes, “*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.*” (v. 1). His use of the phrase “*publicly portrayed*” is intriguing in this context. While it is true that Jesus’ death was a public portrayal of the principles outlined above, there’s more to the phrase than meets the eye. It is translated from one Greek word, *prographo*, which means “*written*” (e.g., see Rom 15:4; Eph 3:3). Surely, here we have another allusion to Habakkuk writing the vision plainly. When we see

When we see Christ crucified, we see the plain and evident statement of where a law-based religion leads, the cursing of a sinless man.

What should be plain—or “*evident*,” as Paul writes in Galatians 3:11—is that righteousness does not come from law, which is one of Paul’s main points in the epistle. As Deuteronomy outlines, the people were under a curse if they did not abide by the law, and as Paul says in verse 13, even Christ was cursed by that law—“*Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.*” Even though Jesus never sinned, he was not justified by keeping the Law of Moses. He might

Christ crucified, we see the plain and evident statement of where a law-based religion leads, the cursing of a sinless man. In other words, the law does not work: “*the righteous shall live by faith.*”

As can be seen from passages like Galatians 6:11-15, the controversy centered on the question of circumcision. Paul talks of those who “*desire to have you circumcised*” (v. 13), but Paul reminds his readers that it makes no difference if you’re

circumcised or not (v. 15) because that has nothing to do with faith. In fact, in chapter 5, Paul writes, “If you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you” (v. 2) and “you are severed from Christ” (v. 4), having “fallen away from grace.”

Establishing one’s

righteousness
before God

c a n n o t

happen by
the rite of

circumcision or
any ritualism; only “faith
working through love.” (v. 6).

Throughout Galatians, Paul’s language is strong and adamant. Ritualism totally obscures Christ, and we do well to heed the lesson even though we Christadelphians aren’t bothered by the circumcision controversy. But returning to a law-based religion can be just as appealing as we naturally try to go about establishing our own righteousness by how often we attend meeting, do the daily readings, or how much Bible study we do. None of those things is a substitute for faith, and if they become our religion, we, too, will fall from grace.

For us to appreciate how easy it is to forget that the righteous shall live by faith, not law, consider the example Paul uses in Chapter 2. There he talks about Peter (who he refers to as Cephas):

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before

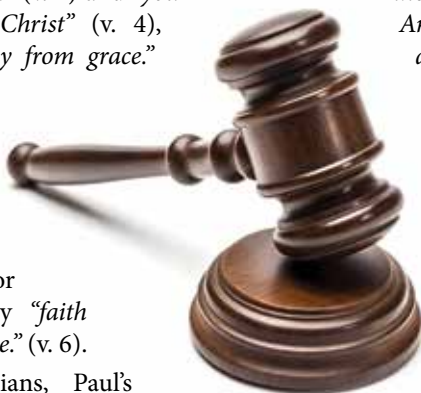
certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel,

I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal 2:11-15).

He’s talking here about **Peter**, the beloved disciple of Christ, the same man who boldly stood up and preached the gospel on the Day of Pentecost. If Peter could slip into this mode of thinking, so can we.

Later in the chapter, Paul addresses an objection to the doctrine that the righteous shall live by faith, not law—“But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin?” (v. 17) or in the NET version, “Is Christ then one who encourages sin?” Paul answers his question with an emphatic “Certainly not!” Justification by faith accomplishes the will of God—it produces the kind





of character God is looking for. But it can seem counterintuitive to those who might say we need a law to tell us right from wrong. We need to get the balance right, however. The idea of antinomianism (against the law) has arisen in Christianity throughout history: the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey. However, God **does** want us to obey. The question is, **how** do we obey? Through being given a set of rules and rituals to follow, or by developing faith and trust in God? The gospel tells us the latter is the case.

In Romans, Paul wrote that the “*very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me*” (Rom 7:10), telling us that far from encouraging righteousness, trying to live by law is counterproductive. To illustrate the principle, consider one of the places in the Old Testament where we’re told about the law promising life. Here is the passage from Deuteronomy 30:16. I’ve left part of the words out:

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today... by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live

and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

It appears you can keep God’s commandments and live so that we might say “*the righteous shall live by law.*” But here is the passage again, with the part in square brackets filled in:

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

The difference is **how** we obey God. This passage says we obey God by loving him, not by rote-following rules.

The above passage from Deuteronomy 30 is helpful for how Paul uses it in Romans. In the verse just before the one cited, we read,

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say,

“Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. (v. 11-14).

In Romans 10:5, Paul writes, *“For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them,”* probably referencing passages like Leviticus 18:4. But, as we have seen, ultimately trying to live by law is counterproductive when it comes to righteousness. So, Paul continues in Romans 10 by citing Deuteronomy 30:

But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)“ or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim). (v. 6-8).

In other words, the passage from Deuteronomy is all about living by faith, or as Paul writes in Galatians, *“faith working through love.”* (Gal 5:6).

Faith deals with sin in ways law never could. In Galatians 6, Paul writes,

The law of Christ is distinct from the Law of Moses in that it’s all about character and how we treat one another.

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (v. 1-2).

The law of Christ is distinct from the Law of Moses in that it’s all about character and how we treat one another. Under law if someone is *“caught in any transgression”* there is only punishment, not a restoration.

Finally, consider Paul’s four-fold summary of the power of living by faith at the end of Galatians 2. Notice his repeated use of the word live—*“For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.”* (v. 19), *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”* (v. 20) and *“the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

This is what living by faith looks like, and it’s all about motivation. The reason that Paul can live is not by law—he tried that, and it only brought about the horrible maltreatment of others while he was the Pharisaical Saul of Tarsus. But now he lives because of the motivation that comes from the Son of God loving him and giving himself for him.

*Richard Morgan,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

¹ All Scriptural citations are from the English Standard Version.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor's Note: The articles by Bro. George Booker on “A Temple Filled With Unsearchable Riches” have generated much discussion among our readers. We are pleased to have brothers and sisters share their ideas about this prophecy, and we include these views for your consideration. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the *Tidings* Committee.

"A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS"

The future is all about Hope: Christ's return, the Resurrection, Judgment and reward of everlasting life, abolishment of tyranny and oppression, cessation of hunger, illness, and sorrow, the restoration of God's people (Israel) to exaltation, a world at peace under Divine law, truth, and justice, righteousness and love, peace and prosperity. All descriptors of the Kingdom of God on earth.

And yes, there will be a restored Temple and Levitical priesthood in Jerusalem.

This is a unique teaching only we hold, found nowhere else amongst the denominations of Christendom. The only community that shares our view is the Orthodox Jews.

The future Temple, however, is referred to by outside authors, yet not to be built by Jesus but instead by a future antichrist who will make a covenant with the Jews, bringing back sacrifices and rebuilding their temple (e.g., Hal Lindsey, *Left Behind* series). Their teachings are so astray that they will eventually mistake Jesus and accuse **him** of being the antichrist!

Just like the religious leaders of Jesus's day once said his powers were from Beelzebub, history will repeat, my friends, so beware.

May we recognize and familiarize ourselves with the diamonds which were mined out of the sacred writ, in living contrast to what's out there.

So what are the reasons why some don't accept a future Temple?

1) God changed His mind.

I've heard it said that God “dangled” the vision of Ezekiel's temple before the nation of Israel as it were some kind of carrot they could not hope to reach. This is so sad a commentary against our Creator. It is unprecedented that God ever made a promise on which He reneged.

When God makes a promise, He keeps it, regardless of our lack of faith. Whether it was the promises to Abraham, a land flowing with milk and honey, or the return of Christ and the Kingdom restored—these will all be fulfilled in His good time, not according to our timetable.

When has God ever offered such a glorious vision of hope and then taken it back? It's been taught that the vision was meant for back then and only then. Ezekiel's vision could not have been fulfilled in his day. That time still awaits its necessary King!

There are clues throughout Ezekiel that are overwhelming hints of its intended future fulfillment.

Two Scriptures should be sufficient to reveal this:

In Ezekiel 41:18–20 there is described a continuous series of carvings of the cherubim. These are stated to be the two faces of the man and of the lion. These faces represent the ministry of Christ in his unique roles of both priest and king, as they also symbolize the prophets, Ezekiel and Isaiah. But where are the other faces of the ox and eagle? There will be no need for these in the future when Christ returns as he has fulfilled his destiny in both becoming a servant as well as having inherited God's immortal nature and eternal life. Christ will not come again to serve but to be glorified and served; he will not return to be given the power of the Holy Spirit – it's already his! What will beautifully remain is the man who mediates between God and men. What was Ezekiel's job? Was he not a priest? And what was the theme of Isaiah? Was it not the kingdom and its king? And after whose order was the Christ to come? Psalm 110 tells us, Melchizedek, both king and priest, the lion and the man: King of kings and Lord of lords. This Temple was not meant to exist until Christ was in earth again in his glory. Everywhere the eye can see will be seen the double portrait of him who is to come!

The other case in point is Chapter 45: 21–25. Here we find that the Passover will be reinstituted.

This would not come as a surprise to devout Jews. What would be shocking to them is that there is one big singular change of note. Read it for yourselves;

what is missing?! There is no year-old, unblemished male lamb. I think you know why. It's because he will be there in person. Note the interesting reference to a man of high position mentioned in this excerpt. Only God will be allowed to make a great change like this, and that cannot come until His son is back on the earth, once again, in his majesty!

2) It's all symbolic.

This is an argument that ignores context, chronology, and logic, and sadly was one encountered in my early days of preaching to JW's who said the same thing. They also teach that Christ was pre-existent and will never ever set foot on this earth again. Please, let's not quote them on doctrine. We will briefly look at the literal significance of the verses relating to the last days:

- Ezekiel 37—the resurrectional vision of the nation of Israel re-born and fulfilled. (Literal)
- Ezekiel 38—war waged upon the nation of Israel, yet to come. (Literal)
- Ezekiel 39—God's intervention to rescue Israel, yet to come. (Literal)
- Ezekiel 40–46—Description of the Temple, yet to come. (Literal)
- Ezekiel 47—Paradise restored, yet to come. (Literal)
- Ezekiel 48—Apportioning the land between the tribes of Israel, yet to come. (Literal)

This simple overview is really rather logical as we must accept the latter chapters as literal as we do chapters 37–39. Has Israel literally become a nation again, and will she face another war? Yes.

And please, don't ever tell anyone that chapter 47 is only symbolic and that we will never see a paradise on this earth again!

A quick parallel to mistakenly believing a literal prophetic chapter is only literal when we like it to be so. Some have thought like this towards the final few verses in Zechariah 14. Most everyone believes that the chapter is thoroughly literal as it starts with war and Christ's return, ending with the establishment of the kingdom and return to sacrifices. Those who disagree will teach almost the same until the end when they suddenly don't like what they read and make a last-minute change to teach in a symbolic ending.

We can't pick and choose interpretations based on our personal preferences. If Mt. Olivet is to be split during an earthquake, it is poor Bible research to say that the last couple of verses are disagreeable, and so revert to symbolism. The context will solve over 90% of our questions, my friends.

3) The details are so hard to understand so we can't come to any conclusion.

This response is to give up on your studies. Please do not. Let us not lose heart, nor the forest for the trees. See the big picture first, and the details will eventually fill in! I'm not an architect either, but it doesn't mean I can't appreciate an awesome structure!

4) The Old Testament is so hard to understand, and much of it is fulfilled, right?

Not so, my friends, The Old Testament is full of reasonably understood prophecies yet to be fulfilled that

take a little bit of effort and taking into context. It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the honor of kings to search them out. Just like the effort of study it takes to understand a parable, the Lord wants us to pursue these matters for ourselves and make up our own minds. So please prayerfully pore over these verses, and you will discover their hidden message. I am not one of these Bible school speakers nor a great scholar, and believe me, if I can figure this teaching out, so can all of you!

Here are my four "go-to" chapters that will be a surefire source to put the clues together for the future:

1. Isaiah 56 connects the House of Prayer with future Gentile offerings and sacrifices to Jesus' exclamation in Mark 11:17.
2. Isaiah 60 joyously proclaims of the clean animals being brought in the future by nations of the other sons of Abraham to be given as offerings. Here we'll also read of the timber to be brought to beautify the future Temple.
3. Jeremiah 33:14–26 makes it clear that the two elements of royalty and revived ritual will go hand in hand. It is a dual prophecy of a king-priest who shall return, a package deal, so to speak, of a joyous double blessing. Only our ability to stop the world from spinning on its axis and counting the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea can prevent it! God means what He says.
4. Zechariah 14 has so much exciting prophecies yet to be fulfilled, ending in the celebration of the 'Feast of Booths' when future Gentiles will also be invited!

5) Christ died for our sins so why do we need to return to animal sacrifice?

A very good question upon which the pioneers have remarked considerably, and I would recommend reading *“Christendom Astray”* by Bro. Robert Roberts to see the overall picture. I will admit that I do not relish this aspect of the Kingdom age and would not have made a good Levitical priest under the old covenant. I cannot stand the sight of blood and could never perform surgery or become a paramedic. However, the Kingdom is not about what I prefer nor human aversion to killing beautiful unblemished clean animals. I wish it didn’t have to be so. It goes against the heart of every sensitive believer that the innocent must die for the guilty. Yet this is what God has ordained from the lamb slain from the foundation of the world to Calvary. That’s the sad, undeniable news of our fallen nature. Thanks be to God that He has sent His only begotten Son to save us, sinners. The incredible news now for us is that **we** have been bought for a price, and the blood of bulls and goats will never need to be shed on **our** behalf. Mission accomplished for us.

But the Kingdom to come, fortunately, will not be just for us Christadelphians. There will be billions of Gentiles upon the face of this future earth over whom Christ and the saints will rule for a thousand years. What about them and the mortal Jews? The Temple and its sacrifices will be needed for the

future mortals while we as believers in this dispensation, have been forever atoned for. So do not lose heart; Christ died once for all of us sinners. The Temple and its ritual offerings will not be for us. But what about the future population?

Have they not a place in God’s plan and, more importantly, a need for atonement as well? It is God’s prerogative that a modified version of the Mosaic Law shall be established, different but similar. We can neither promote nor deny the future generations what our human nature assumes will occur. God will take care of them the way He pleases, revealed yet hidden throughout the Hebrew Old Testament of our Bibles.

It will be our job to teach and heal and protect and oversee an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the joy of the whole earth. This joyous journey to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles will be the highlight of the year amongst the survivors who’ve come up against this holy city in battle. (Zech 14:16-21) Then will come a time to celebrate outdoors: Bible study, Sunday School classes, campfires, singalongs, fraternal picnics, where all will praise the Creator of the universe in the Name of His only begotten Son! What magnanimity Yahweh will render in Christ as he awaits his guests!

*Peter Wisniowski,
Toronto Church Street Ecclesia, ON*

HEZEKIAH'S PATH TO UNITY

Hardness of the heart is fixed by being humble.

God responded to Solomon's prayer of dedication in 2 Chronicles 7:12-16. In his prayer, Solomon listed all the ways Israel's hard hearts would break their relationship with God. In God's response, He said, If my people humble themselves, then I will restore them. God and Solomon realized Israel would only humble themselves when they finally got to their wit's end. They could do nothing. All pride and hardness of heart had been removed, so they could humble themselves and turn to God. So it is with us. When we have tried everything, and there is nothing left to try, or we are so desperate that we will submit to anything, that's when God can work. When the hardness of the heart is softened, we will turn to God in prayer, and God can do his best work. Relationships break down because of our hardness of heart. But when, and only when, the hardness is forced to become humble (or voluntarily becomes humble), then when we pray, God can hear us and work with us and restore the relationship.

*Robert Prins,
Pakuranga Ecclesia, NZ*

ECCLESIAL NEWS

I really enjoy reading *The Tidings Magazine* (hard copy), but I miss the section on ecclesial news. Can this new section be returned to the hard copy? Another brother I spoke with also had the same feelings.

*Dianne Drywood,
Greenaway Ecclesia, ON*

Dear Sis. Dianne,

I agree with you that the ecclesial news was a feature that I have personally enjoyed for many years. It was the first thing I used to turn to when I read the magazine. However, after multiple attempts, we had to conclude that this was not as valued by the community as we thought.

Over the past few years, the number of ecclesias submitting ecclesial intelligence to fraternal magazines has dropped dramatically. We made several attempts to reverse the trend, but unfortunately, we didn't see much of a change. As we looked further into this, we learned that most ecclesias that do share news share it "real-time" through either social media or email.

Sadly we concluded that the ecclesial news section in the magazine wasn't accomplishing its purpose for North American ecclesias. We notified our readers a year ago that we wouldn't be posting ecclesial news in the magazine any longer. However, we post ecclesial news received on our website, www.Tidings.org/ecclesia-news. You can read all the ecclesial news that we have received over the past year.

Editor



QUITO BIBLE SCHOOL

By Ian and Nishla Neblett

Convivencia in Quito, Ecuador March 2023

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it
is for brethren to dwell together
in unity!
(Psa 133:1).*

ALTHOUGH the brothers and sisters who attended from nine different countries do not live together, our temporary dwelling for the Bible School felt like a prelude to the kingdom. In attendance were brethren from Argentina, Canada, Columbia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States, Panama, Mexico, and the host

nation of Ecuador. The Hosteria El Cana, in the city of Guayllabamba, was the location for the Convivencia 2023 Quito, Ecuador. All the classes for the approximately sixty attendees were given in Spanish. An Interesting fact about the Quito Airport is that it lies 2,813 meters (about 9,300 feet) above sea level, while the Bible School's location is 2,142 (just over 7,000 feet) above sea level. Therefore, the first thrilling experience was the speedy, winding, descending drive around the mountainous terrain. However, this paled compared to the rest of the week's edification and fellowship activities.



Upon arrival, warm, fraternal greetings from the organizers awaited all the attendees. Even the hotel staff greeted visitors at the airport. Bro. Kevin and Sis. Rebekah Hunter, and the brothers and sisters from the Ecuador Ecclesia, did a commendable job arranging room assignments, meals, evening events, and the calendar of classes for both adults and children.

The adult studies were led by Bro. Kevin Hunter, from the United States, and Bro. Diego Vargas, from Costa Rica. Bro. Kevin guided us through important themes in the Book of Daniel while making key connections to the Book of Revelation. Bro. Diego

provided an in-depth analysis of the topic of preserving the family of faith by utilizing various key passages.

The children's classes were facilitated by an effective collaboration of brothers and sisters who initially coordinated their efforts using a WhatsApp chat group. The young scholars were introduced to various topics in the Book of Daniel and the parables of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Hands-on activities accompanied the lessons via the creation of lap books and other various crafts. Additionally, the youngsters were provided with a physical education program which gave them an opportunity to stretch





Evening Activities for the Adults

their legs while cementing the bonds of friendship.

Both adults and children helped the facilitators by reading passages, asking questions, and offering additional perspectives. This collective effort reminded me of the passage found in Ephesians 4:16, where Paul speaks of how Christ is our head:

The whole body [from various nations] were fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part and made an increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

On behalf of all the organizers and attendees, I would like to thank the Bible Mission for their loving contribution. This Bible School was blessed with beautiful weather, fun activities, delicious food, vital studies, and precious fellowship. We are looking forward to next year's installment if our Lord should remain away.

*Ian and Nishla Neblett,
Colon Ecclesia, Panama*



It wouldn't be Bible School without lots of food!

A NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL IN ANTIGUA

By Jan Berneau



The Turtons and Tudors visit Antigua from the UK

IN August 2022, two fieldworkers arrived in Antigua from Nairobi and planned to remain there until this coming August. The fieldworkers are Bro. Amos Natembea and Bro. Albert Mwashu from Kenya. Bro. Clive Solomon has for decades supported

the work in Antigua and with the help of the CBMC, was able to arrange for these brothers to commit to a year-long service in Antigua. Their focus was to generate contacts and teach the truth of the gospel. However, a pleasant surprise has turned out to



The new Sunday School in Antigua

be that the focus of their work is with the enthusiastic Sunday School. The Antigua Ecclesia has three sisters and eleven Sunday School participants, ranging in age between 2–24, with several regular visitors. Bolstered with recently supplied Bibles, hymn books, and first principles courses from the Christadelphian Save the Children Fund, spreading the gospel mainly goes on through the Sunday School program.

A recent visit from the Tudor and Turton families from the UK in February 2023 confirmed the vibrant

environment in this little ecclesia of sisters, children, and some friends. They provided a couple of exhortations, a Sunday School class, and a Bible class to support the work of the Kenyan brothers. God willing, in August, the Kenyan brethren will return home to their families and ecclesia. Our hope is there will be volunteers to continue the work in Antigua in the future.

*Jan Berneau,
CBMC Publicity*

BACK TO BOLIVIA AND CHILE

By Rob Alderson



The brothers and sisters in Villarica, Chile

In a rerun of the visit made to Bolivia and Chile in November 2022, it was the turn of the brethren in Chile on this occasion in 2023 to celebrate a baptism, while the brethren in La Paz, Bolivia, continue in the one faith waiting for our Lord's return.

The theme of the two visits—apart from the baptism, was our heritage of faith and where it began. It is very easy to pass our days without a direct sense of connection to the events of the Bible. The challenge can be greater for isolated ecclesias and brethren in places like Bolivia and Chile. We reminded ourselves that our heritage of faith began when Abraham believed in God and left his house. We are here today because Abraham believed in God. We become heirs to the promise when we are baptized and participate in an unbroken line of events and faith. In both small and great ways, the continuity of the story of this world is with us every day, and we are reminded that we are very much a part of that unfolding story in which Abraham, David, Jesus, and the Apostles take part.

When we acknowledge the month of August, we are reminded of the great Caesar Augustus, who decreed a census and helped establish a world peace that allowed the Gospel to flourish. When we acknowledge 2023, we give



The baptism of Antonella Rossell in Chile

witness to the years since the Lord's birth. When we strum a guitar, it strikes a chord right back to the days of Daniel, Kitara of Babylon, and the New Testament times. We see the influence of Cyrus the Great and Xenophon's epic "The Education of Cyrus" in political thinking right down to the modern world. We share bread and wine, as has been done continuously for 2000 years, and we have been invited to witness the testimony of the Jewish people who remain central to the continuity. Many of the inflated issues of today are put into their true perspective when our sense of heritage in God's plan is alive and well.

So, when eight brethren met in a rented room in La Paz in the center of South America in 2023, the link was real. Some have a natural heritage through the Indigenous people, and thus via the great migrations from Asia to America are a part of the story that began after

Noah. Others have a heritage back to Spain, a place that the Apostle Paul wished to visit, and which today bears witness to the influence of the Roman world of the New Testament in place names like Zaragoza (Caesar Augustus). But their new heritage is with Abraham, through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, this group, with the support of Bro. Shimon Spina, who participates from afar, lives the heritage of faith in our Lord.

Further south in Chile, the center of activity on the visit to that country was a small farmhouse outside Villarrica, near Temuco. On this occasion, six brothers and sisters, as distant physically and temporally from Abraham as you could possibly imagine, slotted right into the continuity of heritage and brought another sister on board.

Sis. Antonella Rossel González was baptized in a small, cold pool on the land of Sis. Gloria and her husband, Fernando. Antonella had studied for some years and steadily moved toward this moment. She lives in Santiago, a heaving and burdened metropolis. Hence, the peace and natural beauty of the southern lake district of Chile and the prominent snow-capped mountains provided a fitting metaphor for the new

man in Christ in contrast to the old man left behind.

After a special weekend with our new sister, the brothers who traveled with her returned to Santiago. The city where she lives is named after a fisherman. Not any fisherman. This was John's brother, a Son of Thunder, who Herod killed for following his Lord. James, the son of Zebedee, gives his name to this modern massive city.

Let's never forget our heritage of faith. It is as real as the seven days of each week. Abraham would have loved to stand where we do today and see what was triggered when he believed in God.

*Rob Alderson,
CBMC Link for Chile*



Sis. Antonella receives the Right Hand of Fellowship in Chile

Thoughts on the Way

What Does God Look Like?

WHILE the Sunday School teacher was reading a Bible story to her class, she noticed that one little girl was working industriously with a pencil and paper. When the reading was finished, the teacher walked over to her and asked, “Sally, what are you doing?” Without looking up, Sally continued with her work, and answered: “I’m drawing a picture of God.” The teacher said, “But, dear, no one knows what God really looks like.” Her diligent artist replied, “They **will** know as soon as I finish this picture!”

Have you ever wondered why the God of the Bible has chosen not to reveal Himself, physically and tangibly, to His followers? I have at least one answer, and it calls for us to consider the Ten Commandments, which begin with this:

I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above and on the earth beneath or in the waters below; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. (Exod 20:2-5).¹

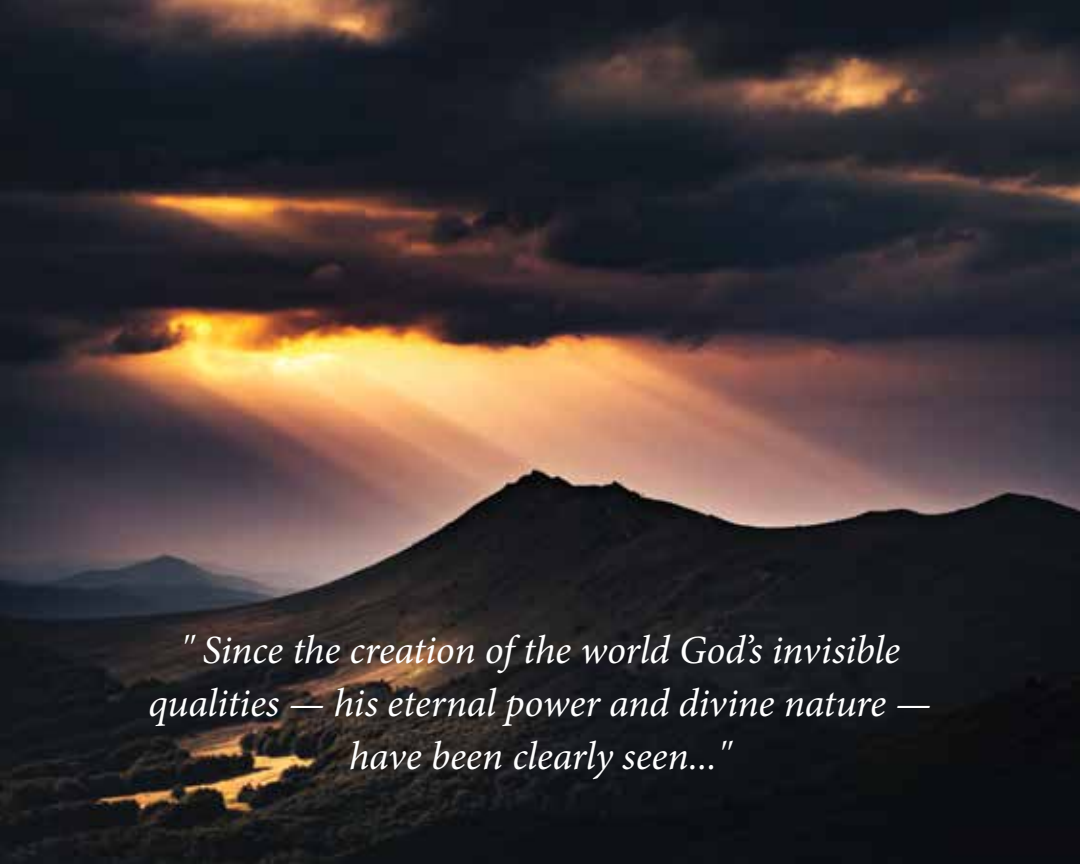
I think our God knows that any human attempt to show others what the One God looks like would result in the creation of an “idol,” a painted picture, a stained-glass window, a statue, or an image of some other form. In practically no time, people would be worshipping the idol itself, not the true God!

The Apostle Paul addressed this question when he spoke to the Athenian philosophers in the Areopagus:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:24-25).

And in his letter to the Roman believers, Paul wrote:

Since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people [the godless and wicked] are without excuse... Although they



" Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen..."

claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles... They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. (Rom 1:20-22,25).

The Bible reveals a history of incidents in which humans attempted to show to others what God looked like:

1. Exodus 32 and 33: When Moses spent too much time on the mountain with the Lord, the people waiting below gathered around Aaron and demanded that he make "gods" (or a "God") who would go before them. Aaron gave in to their demands and made a golden calf an idol. The outcome of this misadventure led to a plague that carried away many people.
2. The lesson of Nehushtan (2 Kgs 18:4). When the children of Israel complained about the food quality in the wilderness, God sent poisonous serpents among them, and many people died. Then God told Moses to make a brazen serpent to be lifted up on a standard so that those who were bitten might see it and live. For some time, that image proved helpful to them (Num 21). Nevertheless, after much time passed, the snake's image was considered dangerous because it had become an object of veneration.

The Israelites were burning incense to the image, not the LORD God. When King Hezekiah saw this was so, he destroyed the image.

Of the brass serpent, Robert Roberts wrote:

“There was no virtue in the brass of the serpent or in the shape into which the brass had been wrought. At a later stage of Israel’s history, when Israel worshiped the brazen serpent, under a mistaken idea of its power, Hezekiah, with the divine approbation [approval], broke it in pieces, calling it ‘a piece of brass’” (*The Visible Hand of God*, p. 254).

3. When the Israelites went out to fight the Philistines, they took with them the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, in the mistaken notion that the ark by itself would save them from the hands of their enemies (1 Sam 4). Tragically, when they were defeated, they learned the ark itself was not the Lord God!
4. In 1 Samuel 8, the elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah and demanded the old man would appoint a king to lead them, “*such as all the other nations have.*” (v. 5). In doing this, they rejected the God they did not see for the king they could see. The LORD chose a king for them, and Saul was selected. King Saul had an impressive stature and demeanor, but he proved to be a terrible disappointment. In the years to come, Israel would learn that dependence upon the unseen God was far better than following a weak,

vacillating human leader who had nothing to offer them but trouble.

We all recognize that “*No one has ever seen God,*” that is, in the fullness of His glory (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12). There is, of course, one special exception: “*No one has seen the Father **except the one who is from God***” (John 6:46), that is, Jesus Christ. In the upper room, Philip, apparently speaking for the other disciples, said to Jesus: “*Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.*” (John 14:8) To this Jesus replied:

Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father?” Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work. (John 14:9-10).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is “[God’s] Son, whom He appointed heir of all things... The Son is the radiance of God’s glory, and the exact representation (the express image: KJV) of His being” (Heb 1:2, 3).

We should never have to ask, “What does God look like?” But if that question ever comes up, even from a little girl or boy, we can answer simply: “Jesus is the perfect image of his Father. Let’s look at Jesus, hear what he says, and see what he does. When we do that, then—I guarantee, we will see God.”

George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX

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