

An aerial, top-down view of a very large, dense crowd of people. The individuals are packed closely together, filling the entire frame. They are wearing various colorful clothing, and some are holding up phones or cameras, suggesting a public event or festival. The perspective is from directly above, looking down on the crowd.

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TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 4, April, 2024

THREE THOUSAND SOULS

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 87, Number 4 / April, 2024



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EDITORIAL

THREE THOUSAND SOULS

THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD
AND OUR
IRANIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:
and the same day there were added unto them
about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41).*

TODAY over 3,000 Iranian brothers and sisters are new members of ecclesias in the UK (Yes, that number matches Acts 2:41!). For those of us living in other parts of the Western world, this is quite staggering to consider. Imagine if many of our ecclesias doubled or tripled in size within a couple of years. How different our weekly schedule would look if our biggest challenge was how to effectively lead classes for so many seeking baptism?

Don't Limit God!

The Apostle Paul learned never to limit what God can do. God delivered Paul from his raging mind to a peace in Jesus Christ he had never before experienced. He learned the beauty of grace rather than condemnation of legalism. He witnessed how God delivered him from stoning, shipwreck, persecutions, hunger, cold, and nakedness (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). Truly, there was nothing God could not do. But even then, what He could do was far beyond what Paul thought possible.

Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask and think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Our natural default is to use fleshly reasoning to estimate what is possible. We survey a problem and analyze the alternatives. But God is never limited by what confines the flesh. He is the Almighty. We must not reduce Him to our limitations.

God's Mighty Hand

We have joyfully watched from afar the exponential growth of our community in foreign lands. It is a great source of encouragement and hope in these Last Days. But it is easy to conclude that interest in spiritual things in Western countries is only declining. Some have said that the number of members we have today in North America is about the same as fifty or more years ago. Are we just treading water? Should we conclude that God is working elsewhere and that we are to “*strengthen the things that remain*”? Is it possible God could bring tens, hundreds, or thousands of new believers to our ecclesias?

Over the past decade, UK ecclesias have provided a valuable case study. The UK was experiencing declining numbers in many of its ecclesias. It is estimated the UK Christadelphian community peaked in the 1950s, numbering around 18,000. By 2020, that number had dropped to around 8,000. Some longstanding ecclesial halls closed due to diminished numbers. Many of our UK brothers and sisters recognized that to reverse this trend, they would need a special blessing from God.

We dedicate this issue to our Iranian refugee brothers and sisters, whom the LORD drew to our UK ecclesias. It was not a surprise that the LORD would answer prayers. But it was a surprise how He answered them. Answers to our prayers often work that way.

But this story is not really about numbers. The thirst and passion for truth that these new brothers and sisters have has literally transformed ecclesias. This issue will feature eight stories of brothers and sisters who fled

In North America, there are over a half million Farsi speakers and over fifty million who speak Spanish as their primary language. As many as 21% of all Americans (71 million!) speak a language other than English at home.

their homeland, leaving everything behind to find God. Each story shares a unique pathway to connecting with Christadelphians and valued members of UK ecclesias. Please invest the time to read each story. These eight are just a few of the thousands of similar stories of our brothers and sisters. We'll begin with an updated story from Bro. Steven Cox who recounts the history of the Iranian emigres in the UK and the baptisms in UK ecclesias. We'll hear a lovely exhortation from Bro. Majid Esmaeli (Leicester Westleigh Ecclesia, UK) as he discusses Scriptural wisdom about our speech. Make sure to read Bro. Peter Simpson's article on "When God Opens a Window of Opportunity." He shares some beneficial lessons about preaching that he learned from his ecclesias's experience with Iranian refugees.

No Human Strategy

As we'll see, it was not a human strategy that brought about this new expansion. As in the first century, early disciples did not specifically hear how things would unfold or who would go where. The Lord Jesus Christ orchestrated it all under his leadership. As the Spirit led them, men and women acted in faith to conditions and situations, often under duress and persecution.

This development calls for us to rethink our own neighborhoods In North America. There are over a half

million Farsi speakers and over fifty million who speak Spanish as their primary language. As many as 21% of all Americans (71 million!) speak a language other than English at home. There must be a "*great door and effectual*" opportunity for us to provide the gospel message in the native tongue of those living right at our doorstep. It sends an important message of love and inclusion when we attempt to communicate in their primary language. Additionally, we must ask if there are other underserved groups we should minister to.

Our goal in this issue is to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus Christ is still extremely active, even in communities we perceive as being uninterested and resistant. There is much to learn from the experience of the UK ecclesias. This story provides insights into the need for focused communal prayer, asking for the powerful hand of the LORD to intervene. It is a call to have open minds and hearts to respond to the work of Jesus Christ in our vicinity. Are there opportunities before us right now where we, too, are being asked to respond? Will we have the faith not to limit the Almighty God and to recognize He is still calling men and women in all communities?

Dave Jennings

THE IRANIAN ÉMIGRÉ COMMUNITY IN THE UK

UPDATED AND REPUBLISHED

(originally in the June 2020 *Tidings*)

By Steven Cox

Christianity in Iran from Acts Chapter 2 to the Arab Conquest

THE first Jewish converts to Christianity in Iran were those “Parthians and Medes and Elamites” who returned home to Ctesiphon, Adiabene, and other Jewish centers to break away from synagogues and found churches. There is little evidence of sustained persecution by Zoroastrians. After AD 431, when the Nestorian

churches in the Sasanian Empire split with Rome, refusing to accept Mary as the “Mother of God,” Christianity became an established and tolerated religion in Persia. While Christians mainly used Aramaic, they also produced the first Bible translations into Middle Persian. Of these pre-Islamic Persian translations, only a few pages of Psalms survive, discovered in a Silk Road Monastery in 1905.¹

The Arab conquest of Iran in AD 651 ended more than 400 years of the Sassanian administrative empire, and the previous state religion, Zoroastrianism, was violently suppressed by the Muslim conquerors. Christians fared better under Arab rule but gradually came to be regarded as a minority ethnic group in Iran rather than a religion to which people could freely convert. Nevertheless, this history is still important today since many, if not most, Iranians are aware that Christianity has a longer history in Iran than Islam.

Current Christian Revival in Iran

The revival of Christianity in Iran and the rapid growth of house churches have many causes. But most writers pinpoint growing social discontent during the two presidencies of Ahmadinejad (2005-2012) and the growth of access by Virtual Private Network (VPN) to Western Iranian Christian TV channels and social media apps as significant factors.^{2 3}

Iran's Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi in 2019 spoke of his ministry's research into conversions to Christianity, its questioning of ordinary people to explain their motives, and its efforts to "counter the advocates of Christianity." Iran's leading Islamic seminary sees the domestic fight against Christianity as one of its top priorities,

and former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reportedly once vowed to "stop Christianity in this country." The supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, blames house churches on "Zionists and other enemies." The regime considers Christianity "an existential threat." As one ex-Muslim put it, "We find ourselves facing what is more than a conversion to the Christian faith. It's a mass exodus from Islam."⁴

The growth of house churches in Iran and the frequent raids and jailing of leaders are an important part of the reason why so many Iranians attempt asylum overseas. Given the Iranian house church movement's underground nature, estimates of its size are necessarily vague. Open Doors (a Christian-based organization supporting the needs of persecuted Christians around the world) found 370,000 Muslim background believers in 2013 and 720,000 in 2020. Christianity tends to spread cautiously only among people with long-standing relationships, friends from primary school rather than university, cousins rather than colleagues. Those attracted are often, not surprisingly, those who are already disaffected with Islam and at odds with the system.⁵

Asylum System in Europe

To understand how the Christadelphian Auxiliary Lecturing Society (CALS)



in the United Kingdom (UK) ended up with 9,000 Iranian Bible students, it helps to appreciate the refugee road. First, most follow a long route through Turkey and the Balkans to the European Union (EU), where it is possible to apply for asylum in any country, but many head to the Calais jungle seeking a route to the UK. This choice sometimes occurs with good reasons for not applying for asylum in France and Germany. The reason is sometimes because they know a little English and sometimes due to a large amount of fear and misinformation about EU countries.⁶ Once in the UK, the asylum process starts. First, there is initial accommodation in a large hostel in London, Birmingham, Derby, Wakefield, or Liverpool.⁷ An Iranian migrant tells the story of her waiting for an asylum claim to be processed.⁸ Next, allocation to smaller houses in inner cities, typically one Iranian sharing with three others, such as Africans and Kurds. At this point, the asylum seeker can get a legal-aid lawyer and start preparing for the Home Office interview. Third, the Home Office interview itself. If the interview ends in a Home Office refusal, it leads to a chain of appeals. Hopefully, the last step is acceptance, leading to a five-year refugee visa and work permit.⁹

History of Christadelphian Preaching

The first Iranian Christadelphians were baptized in Pakistan. The first baptisms in Iran, with the assistance of Christadelphians from India, took place in 2009 and 2011. In 2012, the Christadelphians in Iran were arrested, and visitors from India, being named by the Iranian authorities in the court hearings, were warned to cancel plans for future visits. After their release on bail, some of these escaped from Iran to Turkey and Sri Lanka. From there, after a long process with assistance from the United Nations, Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation (WCF), Karolyn Andrews Memorial Fund (KAMF), and the Christadelphian Bible Mission (CBM), they were able to obtain refugee visas for Germany, Canada and the United States.

In Turkey, teaching and evangelizing to Iranians both in Iran and Turkey continued, and the CBM's 22 lesson course was translated into Persian. Subsequently, ecclesias of refugees formed in Denizli and Kayseri in Turkey around 2015 and were further supported by the WCF and CBM. The WCF and CBM had already worked together in Turkey with Turkish contacts, but the emphasis shifted to Iranians. There are currently around 100 Iranian Christadelphians in Turkey.

Liverpool

For the first two years of active Persian language preaching in the UK (2016-2017), work was heavily centered in the Liverpool City Ecclesia. Liverpool is a city with three large hostels, but the ecclesia depended on a handful of core English members commuting from Manchester and London to run translated classes. Liverpool quickly became a majority-Iranian ecclesia by the end of 2017.

Preaching Methods of the CBM and CALS

The materials of the main courses in use are the CBM 22 lesson course (as a series of bilingual PowerPoints) and CBM 40 lesson course (as a large blue book, more suitable for self-study). There is considerable overlap between CBM 22 and CBM 40, and students usually do either one or the other in class. The CBM “Preparing for Baptism” and CBM “New Life” courses follow.

Preaching in the Midlands by the CALS began in April 2018, kick-started by the arrival in the UK of an enthusiastic contact, Mehrdad H., who had been in the camps in Greece with a brother from Liverpool. Three classes a week were immediately set up at the Edgbaston hostel, and over the next months, the teachers followed students when “The Home Office” moved people between accommodation centers. Also, once people have a right to remain, they move to other cities for family or employment reasons. This circumstance meant that a class in one location soon led to classes in other locations. Specifically, hostel classes in Birmingham led to classes at the other

major hostels in Derby, Wakefield, and London. By March 2019, we had covered all the bases. Anywhere the “Home Office” could send an Iranian asylum seeker, classes were set up and running.

This Iranian-Christadelphian network is extremely important and functions because many of our contacts are constantly engaged in *besharat* (evangelizing) to other Iranians they meet. This inevitably presented a significant challenge and the need for change. Ecclesias vary in their ability and willingness to respond to these challenges. Many have made adaptations to meeting times and formats and welcomed the opportunity to support the work. Conversely, it is sad at times to observe ecclesial halls that are within walking distance of Iranians continuing with untranslated Sunday evening lectures with no visitors. At the same time, local Iranians take an hour’s bus ride to an ecclesia providing Farsi translation.

Most ecclesias with Iranians regularly attending could see that, despite the challenges, this was clearly the work of the Lord. Initial concerns about people’s genuineness were overcome. Ecclesias, without direct contact, tended to be more cautious or simply occupied with their own members and activities. In terms of winning over and reassuring UK ecclesias releasing of the Sale Ecclesia’s Iranians video in October 2019 was a watershed.⁸ It opened the doors of ecclesias up and down the UK to Persian-translated classes. Suddenly, ecclesias in the prosperous south offered to find jobs and houses for Iranians with work visas to move south and join them.

What Attracts Iranians to the Christadelphians?

The doctrine of the Trinity is a big factor. Our preaching leans heavily on Jesus being the Son of Man, Son of God, not God. Another big factor is the emphasis on study. Iranians like to study. Even without the enforced leisure of the Home Office system, Iranians enjoy structured study and discussion. A big factor is that the Christadelphians have a UK network that retains people as they undergo the many moves through the many geographical areas in the UK asylum system. An Iranian Christadelphian student knows that if they find their name on the hostel noticeboard for “displacement” to house share at the other end of the UK, they only need to send a “WhatsApp” location-pin and Christadelphians from the local ecclesia will be waiting to plug them into the local Persian-translated Bible classes. Also, since we have to show both sides of the gospel, there is help to register with a medical doctor, dentist, etc. This Iranian-Christadelphian network is extremely important and functions because many of our contacts are constantly engaged in *besharat* (evangelizing) to other Iranians they meet.

The CALS-run Persian classes went into lockdown at the beginning of March 2020, three weeks before the rest of the country, due to fear by Iranians who had already heard of fatalities back home. Many UK ecclesias did not return to running Persian-translated classes until the Autumn of that year. This development created a big online

culture of classes and social events run by Iranian members themselves resulting in a great deal of cohesion in the Iranian Christadelphian community. However, something of a crash and a feeling of loss occurred when meetings reopened. While this was for the better, something was lost.

The number of baptized members is now over 3,000. Unfortunately, it was inevitable that some members stopped coming regularly after having obtained “Leave to Remain.” The turmoil of searching for housing and employment and often moving to another city has caused attendance disruption. So, there are not 3,000 actively attending.

Some people, including some of our committed Iranian members, will look at some individuals and wonder if they were ever genuine. This is one reason why, apart from the need for a viable understanding of the Gospel before baptism, our more senior Iranian members may take it upon themselves to warn new arrivals that if they are just looking for a baptism certificate, they can go elsewhere. But the deliberate fakers are rare; it’s much more often the case that our contacts genuinely are sympathetic to Christianity and see being Christian as part of their new lives in the UK. So, the challenge is partly the universal problem of the Parable of the Sower:

Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered

away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. (Mark 4:5-7).

Few could anticipate and then rise to the expectation that we might have of them to dedicate most of Sunday and one evening a week to their church. The pressure of working as a migrant, two or three poorly paying jobs, evenings, and weekends, doesn't fit well with the comfortable middle-class lives most UK-born members enjoy. It isn't the expected Christadelphian way to only attend three or four times a year, but

alienate our Iranian members. For example, protest.

An important date for every Iranian is September 16, 2022. This date marked the death of Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish girl who was arrested by a clothing patrol for not wearing her head covering properly while visiting her brother in the capital. She was subsequently beaten into a coma while in custody. The protests following this death naturally galvanized the population of Iran, especially women and Kurds. In the UK, the Persian-Christadelphian

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for those struggling to make a new life, doing only that, while not at all good, doesn't mean faith in their new religion has totally died. Therefore, ecclesias can adjust to the reality of the life of our refugee members to some degree, and there are some things we can do. We can offer online supplemental bread and wine on weekdays. We can make it easier for those working unsocial hours in fast food businesses to attend meetings. We can enable people to help find housing better.

A more difficult question would be what we can do where we feel there is some Biblical support for Christadelphian positions that can unexpectedly

ecclesial WhatsApp groups were full of upset, consternation and sympathy for Mahsa and for the protests in Iran. In some of those groups, Western Christadelphians made the mistake of trying to shut down the discussion. In some ecclesias, the question sessions after Bible class turned to this subject. In some ecclesias, there was upset that ecclesial prayer did not address the situation. In the past, when occasional political upset had strayed into the groups, a gentle reminder and recirculating the several relevant Persian-translated PDFs on politics and protest was enough to calm things, but this was different. It was wiser, and

probably right, for English members to bite their tongues or simply agree. Whether this was a real trigger or pretext, this caused the resignation of some Iranian members who had served as pillars of their local ecclesias. In 2024, the subject still remains sensitive. Going forward, challenges will only increase. And yet we must thank God for these challenges as we as a community have received an unexpected and underserved immense blessing. The new refugee Christadelphians in many of our cities and their families are making the difference between the Christadelphian message remaining open in those cities or not. It is what keeps a lightstand flickering and not extinguishing.

The CALS (the domestic preaching and teaching Christadelphian support charity) has, since the start of formal CALS, provided support targeted at refugee preaching. In 2018, CALS tried to provide ecclesias with resources, not just for first principles preaching and teaching but also for exhortation, encouragement, development, and retention. Persian materials are mainly produced in collaboration with the

CBM. Recent CBM materials, such as the “Growing into Christ” course, also help UK ecclesias. CALS continues to work on resources to help with the retention and development of the Iranian speakers and leaders that our community will need. Additionally, CALS works with welfare charities such as the Christadelphian Aid for Refugees (CARA). View information on CARA and how you could contribute at www.cara.fund.

Finally, we have to remember our small place in what happens in men's and women's hearts. This idea is God's work, and as much as it is true, “*How can they hear without a preacher?*” (Romans 10:14), it is God who gives the increase, and those who plant and water are nothing (1 Corinthians 3:6). Most of all in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:19, it is God reconciling men and women back to himself through the obedient example of his Son. It is Christ's example that must work on all of us in everything.

Steven Cox
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1 Thomas K.J., *A Restless Search: A History of Persian Translations of the Bible*, American Bible Society, 2015.

2 Bradley M., *Too Many to Jail: The Story of Iran's New Christians*, Elam Ministries, 2014.

3 Khosravi S., *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

4 Pipes, Daniel, *Newsweek*, June 24, 2021

5 Ibid.

6 ITV News 3 Jan 2019, “Iranian migrants ‘willing to risk everything’ to reach UK,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChQP0kAlrds>

7 ITV News 13 Nov 2019.

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmbZkNn9DGo>

9 Manchester Guardian, “How does asylum in the UK work?”, 7 March 2017, but still up to date <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GeSDuMVUX>

WHEN GOD OPENS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

By Peter Simpson

Preparing the Way

A common comment at our ecclesia used to be, "No one ever responds to our preaching!" Well, that wasn't quite true. For years, we had been organizing Sunday Bible talks and Bible seminars, sometimes with dozens of attendees for many months. Nevertheless, baptisms had been few, and audiences seemed to dwindle away eventually. But those who were baptized did so because of the relationships that developed. This outcome provided our ecclesia time to get to know our audience as individuals seeking God.

When we look back, however, those activities were preparing the way for something greater. Producing positive Bible presentations prepares preachers. Nevertheless, when our Heavenly Father opens a window of opportunity,

will we be prepared to respond to the challenge?

Accepting the Gospel with Childlike Innocence

Someone suggested we hold the Bible Exhibition in our hall. This was a bizarre idea, it seemed. The room is small and could only accommodate around a quarter of the exhibits. From the outside, the building is not attractive and is located in an area with a high immigrant Muslim population. So, it was hardly likely that locals would be dropping in. One sister suggested advertising the effort by emailing local schools, which she was willing to do personally. We thought it would probably be a waste of effort, but why not? The school across the road from the hall responded by asking if they could come and have a look around. Surely, they wouldn't be

interested in a display of old Bibles and illustrated panels about Israel in the purpose of God and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus? One teacher who was sent over to “spy the land” exclaimed, “This is just what we want!” The school was almost exclusively Bangladeshi/Pakistani, with some Eastern European and West Indian students. Her role was to organize religious studies, and she was looking for someone to help with the Christianity segment. As the week passed, two hundred youngsters with the most enquiring minds and their teachers listened to our explanations, watched short enactments of baptism and memorial services, and enjoyed Bible activities. Then they asked, “Can you come to our school and teach the Christian celebration of Christmas?” “Could you teach the meaning of Easter?” they inquired. “Are you going to use the exhibition next year?” This engagement went on for three years. We were hoping eventually that a whole generation of school kids from

the local community would be in the hall and learn something about Christadelphian beliefs and our hope. Sadly, that didn’t happen. The teacher left, and we weren’t invited again. There were other visitors to the exhibition, but the eager response of these children was the highlight of those times.

There was a powerful message here that we needed to learn. Don’t limit the Lord! He can bring about highly unexpected results from the most unlikely situations. We were yet to discover just how unexpected that could be.

The Harvest Truly is Plentiful

It started in 2018 when Iranian refugees began to arrive at the hall, asking if they could come in. They were literally “knocking on the ecclesial door.” This interest had happened already elsewhere in the region. Those were happy days, a unique experience, a thirst for truth from our visitors, prompting regular teaching sessions with open Bibles and regular Sunday pizza and salad lunches. The trickle turned to a steady stream with new visitors every week, and then eventually, there were a few baptisms and then multiple baptisms. Our small, relatively elderly ecclesia was, to some extent, overwhelmed and outnumbered. And the truly unexpected had indeed occurred. These people were from Iran, that hostile anti-western nation. They were drawn especially to us by our belief in the unity of the Father and the love of His Son. They accepted the truth of the gospel like children, without preconceptions.



The Rochdale, UK ecclesial hall

One example might help to illustrate our experience. We received a WhatsApp message that two Iranian men had been moved by the UK government to a house in Haslingden, a small Lancashire village with poor transport links, miles away from our hall. They had previously attended the Liverpool City Ecclesia briefly and were keen to keep in contact with Christadelphians. Unfortunately, those who would normally be able to offer transport were away that day, so we thought nothing more about it. Imagine the surprise when two strangers, neither of whom spoke English, traveled 1 ½ hours by bus to find us (and 1 ½ hours home afterward) to meet for our Sunday service. The doorkeeper for the day was in complete shock, wondering whether he should allow two foreign, swarthy, casually dressed adult males into the room. They and others after them continued to make those journeys for a considerable period to attend. These folks turned up at our hall with no overt preaching activity from ourselves whatsoever. The nature of our worship services and study classes changed, though not always welcomed in a conservative meeting. The services

were interpreted by those few who had fluent English and Farsi (some of whom had learned the language by watching American soap opera TV programs). It was a challenging time.

Sadly, COVID severely impacted these arrangements, and by the time some sort of normality returned, most of our new ecclesia members had their asylum claims accepted. Some had moved on or found employment (often on Sundays) or made arrangements to be joined by their families, all of which were distracted from the truth. We completely lost contact with some. Others wanted to move out of the area, notably to London. Never had the Parable of the Sower and other New Testament writings been so relevant to us.

Today, there are more Iranian brothers and sisters in the room at the hall (and online) than English members. There are still challenges to be faced. Hopefully, we will meet them and be strengthened to serve in better ways because of this.

There's another focus of activity these days: the sudden universal adoption of video conferencing and instant messaging. This new effort has



The Rochdale Ecclesia Sunday morning Bible study class

resulted in online services and studies, primarily to maintain contact with our dispersed membership. Midweek Bible classes for gospel preaching and Bible study with Farsi interpretation now regularly attract forty to fifty attendees and more, most of whom, would you believe, live in Turkey! No one would ever have dreamed of that three or four years ago.

New Wine in Old Bottles

Such radical change in such a short timeframe is bound to leave its mark. Some of that wine may spill. The strong are not always strong, and the weak are not always weak. We recognize abilities in others that we and they never realized they had.

Those visitors, many of whom are now our brothers and sisters, have come to our hall for various reasons. Some came for a friendly welcome in a strange country or the attraction of something new to do. Maybe it was the assurance of a warm meal or help with their asylum claims. But some came because they recognized and believed in lifesaving truth and are now traveling with us on a greater journey to a true promised land.

Throughout all of this, the LORD's hand is apparent. Had the events been timed differently, the ecclesia would not have had the resources to rise to the challenge.

So, What Have We Learned?

Our Heavenly Father opens windows of opportunity in the most unexpected ways, and we can anticipate that favor to increase as the great day draws near.

Are we taken aback when others want to share our faith? It always seems to catch me by surprise! As a community, we must encourage ourselves to be positive and open. There are people who want to hear!

Unprecedented change in our community requires early, careful, and prayerful decision-making of the sort we have never been used to. This scenario requires us to deal kindly with those who find change difficult to cope with. Some of our traditional ecclesial frameworks and ways of doing things are not amenable to radical change. We must keep a firm foundation. Ecclesias that are not so heavily involved can step in and provide respite for burned-out preachers.

Our small ecclesia faced, and still faces, an existential situation. Has the LORD answered our prayers, or is some greater unseen purpose working out through our lives and service? Time will certainly tell! God's word will accomplish what He pleases. It does not return to Him void.

During this time, we have shared the experiences of our Lord. We've recalled how his time of preparation progressed to popularity, followed by disappointment and even persecution. How few were at the foot of the cross or in the upper room on the day of Pentecost? Yet what a foundation was laid for the mighty work that followed! May we also rise to the opportunity. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

*Peter Simpson,
Rochdale Ecclesia, UK*

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES OF CHRISTADELPHIAN IRANIAN REFUGEES



**Bro. Reza Emadi,
Solihull Ecclesia, UK**

My religious experience was only from Islam, where there are lots of lies and ignorance, along with violence and retribution. I only carried the name of being a Muslim. If you are born into a Muslim family, you are Muslim, just like being born into a Jewish family, you will always be Jewish unless you convert to another religion. Iranians will say they're Muslim even if they don't believe or practice the religion for fear of being reported to the authorities. Girls aged nine and boys aged fifteen can be married off and have no say in the matter. Because the prophet Muhammad did this, a number of those following Islam think it okay to marry off their children. It is a very wicked and corrupt religion.

I decided to follow Christianity when I was in Iran and got to know about it through one of my childhood friends when I was age 31. He knew I no longer believed in Muhammad, and started talking about Jesus to me, and read a passage from the Bible from his phone. He went to a house church and invited me to go along with him. I went once or twice a week over three years, but it was a very dangerous thing to do.

I had to leave my country due to changing my religion, which in Iran is punishable by long-term imprisonment, torture, and finally execution. I had a phone call while at work from my brother-in-law to say don't come home, as the police are looking for you. I knew then my life was in danger. I drove to his summer house, which was a two-hour drive away, and stayed there for two weeks.

He stayed there with me and bought food and looked after me. It was a very frightening experience, and I was worried they would find me at any time.

From there, I spent a couple of months traveling through different countries, and it was very exhausting. This was arranged by my relative, who paid traffic smugglers to transport me to England. I was in the back of vans blindfolded and in container lorries on ships and told not to talk. I was treated badly by the traffic smugglers. I ended up in France at the camp at Calais and was there for two weeks before crossing the English Channel in a dingy with forty-three other people to reach the port of Dover on May 22, 2022. We were in the boat from 5 am until 11:30 am, when we were picked up by a police boat. It took a further two hours to reach Dover. All in the boat were taken to a deportation center. I was there for two days before I was finally taken to a hotel in the Midlands. I was moved by authorities from there after sixteen months and am currently sharing a house in Smethwick, West Midlands. It is much better being able to shop and cook for myself, and I no longer have to share a bedroom.

I reached England with trust and prayer. It was His wish that I be here today, but I miss all my family and friends greatly. I have been here nearly two years now and am still waiting to have approval to remain in the country. This causes me a lot of worry and stress. I knew no English when I arrived, which made life very hard. Shopping, talking to doctors at the hospital, and traveling on public transport were all very difficult. Google

Translate helped a great deal. I can now hold a conversation if people don't speak too fast, but there is still a lot I don't understand. I feel I am improving a little every day.

I met one of the Iranians at a hotel in Coventry and he talked to me about Christadelphians. It was very close to my beliefs, and because I also believed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God only, I went along with him to one of the church services. I continued to attend regularly after that and also attended the Bible learning center in Coventry, where a group of us went through the 22 lesson and 40 lesson courses. I also attended a couple of online Zoom Bible classes during the week. This is how I learned more about the Bible and Christadelphian beliefs. I was baptized on February 25, 2023.

It was helpful to me that other Iranians attended the church already, as it was good to have brothers, sisters, and friends to talk to about the Bible in the Farsi language. In total, there were thirty Iranian members when I first went along. There are currently sixty Iranian brothers, sisters, and friends. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

All Iranian members have been made very welcome by the Iranian team at my ecclesia. I have had a lot of support and encouragement and enjoyed not only Bible study in my own language but also many social activities. Although we have consistently attended for a few years now, the majority of the ecclesia seem to find it difficult to understand and appreciate the needs of Iranians and struggle with integration. I try to always be friendly and helpful to encourage communication and

acceptance. I haven't found it difficult being a Christadelphian. The most difficult thing was the journey to get to that stage. Since being baptized, I have felt more at peace.

God is our heavenly Father and the Creator of all things, and everything is done according to His will. In the Psalms, David tells us God will always be present to lead and hold us. Since the beginning of my spiritual journey and following Him, I know he listens to my prayers and is close to me and watches over me. I'm still very young in the faith, but my faith is increasing the more I pray and read the Bible, and from reading I learn how to live a life in Christ. We read that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Even when I am in a dark, scary and lonely place, I know He is still there with me.

(And a comment from Sis. Gaye Clasper, of the Solihull, UK Ecclesia, who assisted Bro. Reza with the writing of this article.)

If you are fortunate enough to come into contact with any asylum seeker, either in or out of the ecclesia, please show them compassion. By acting with compassion for the most vulnerable of God's children, we are doing this for God. There are many Bible passages that tell us how to treat the alien or foreigner. Treating these people as "less worthy" is not an option. We are called to share in God's grace. In Biblical times, some were disadvantaged and treated unjustly. We wouldn't do that, would we? We are told in Matthew 25:40, *"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* It has been an honor and



Members of the Solihull Ecclesia

privilege to share the gospel message and the hope of Israel with our Iranian brothers, sisters, and friends. Those in the ecclesia who have gotten involved with teaching and supporting our Iranian friends have learned so much from them. I feel richer for coming into contact with them, and thank God for that. They have left **everything** behind **and** risked their lives to get here—family, friends, houses, and jobs. We are now their family. For those who have been baptized, we can now call them our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they are part of the worldwide Christadelphian family of God. How special is that?

Sis. Maryam,

London Finsbury Park Ecclesia, UK

I have forgotten the past for a long time. I don't know why, maybe it was intentional or unintentional. But I remember a few things well. When I was a child, I think it was during middle school most of the teachers liked me. One day, our teacher called me and said, "We want to form a group to perform a play with your classmates." I

remember that we had to perform two plays, and I unintentionally prepared a play by Shakespeare called Romeo and Juliet, and a play from the Bible with my friends. I told my friend that I wanted to do a play on Jesus Christ. My friend, Maria, said that her mother knew stories very well. We went to meet her mother, and she told us that Jesus said if someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn your face to the left, and don't fight it. When we were performing it, I suddenly cried. At that time, I didn't have enough knowledge to say why, but I was crying silently there. Later, with some of my friends, I watched the movie "The Cross."

At that time, I knew Jesus was crucified innocently and how unjust people decided to crucify Jesus instead of Barabbas. When I was participating in prayer and Bible teaching classes, at the end of the session, the person who was teaching us always said, "Lord, you have called me, and I suffered many hardships while I was on the way." But from the bottom of my heart, there was hope that it would end, and I knew

that he called me. At that time, maybe I didn't know why I cried after being slapped during the performance of the play, but now I know that it was hard to believe so much love and affection for a teenager. Now I can understand how lovingly he looked at the people who oppressed him, and I prayed for them. I know that the reason these people gather in the churches, break bread, and drink wine is only because of the love of Jesus Christ. We try to implement God's message, and I know that this is difficult, but I will try my best to be the one who wants me.

Maybe it's hard to believe, or you think that I'm pretending, but a smuggler put me on the top of a truck in a port (meaning the top under the windshield on top of the truck). The driver entered the port late and did not get the ticket. It was the last ship that was supposed to come from the port to England. The driver had to sleep in the truck at the beach until the morning. I had been warned in advance that I should not make any moves. I was without warm clothes to keep me warm on a cold night of ten degrees below zero. I had to sleep on one side and not move at all. My body was frozen. When the truck went inside the ship, I thought they were scanning the truck. I was praying to God that they would not find me. My neck slipped from the top of the truck, and went on the road. I prayed, Jesus, either kill me or save me. At the same time as I was praying, I saw my son coming to me with a blanket in his hand. I told him that this blanket was thin and to please give me the thickest blanket, which is wool. I went to sleep with the warmth of the blanket. When

I woke up, the driver hit the roof of the truck and said to come to the front to warm up. I was completely frozen. He took me down and put me in the front seat and turned on the car's heater at full blast. After an hour, I warmed up a little. He dropped me off near the place I was supposed to go. I saw one of Jesus' miracles that day. I know how great this miracle was for me.

After months of difficulty, I managed to enter England. After a few hours, when we were at the main location of the Home Office, and after many questions and answers, I was freezing on the way. A female agent came to my aid and pulled an aluminum foil around my body so that I could warm up a little. They asked me if I was hungry, but I didn't say anything. They gave me a sandwich, and after about eight hours, they sent me to a hostel in South London, an area called Croydon. When we entered, the man in charge told me that we had shared rooms. I was not used to this, so I asked him to give me a separate room. As I was asking, I was talking to our Lord Jesus Christ in my heart. Please help me do this because I was so tired that I needed to sleep for a week without waking up. He then told me to come behind him, and he gave me a small single room with a bathroom and toilet, which is what I had requested. I took a shower there and slept for two consecutive days!

He later knocked on the door. I was also feeling hungry. I joined him and met many people. An old English woman, who sometimes comes there at night, came up to me and greeted me. She asked me if I was religious. I said yes. She then offered to pick me

up and take me to her church. There, I heard them calling the name of God with a loud voice. She was a very loving woman, but I was not at peace there at her church. When I returned, I decided to find another church. The next week, I went to another church with someone from the hostel. He was skinny, and he was tortured like us. The next day a person named Steven (Cox) came to our hostel. My friends said that he gave them the address of the church and we decided to go there.

I thought we were entering a special place with special architecture and decoration. But instead, we entered a residential house that they used instead of a church. They embraced us very sincerely and introduced us with love to sit and share our pain. When the prayer in English was finished, we asked them to bring us an interpreter, which they brought the next week. During that week, I thought that maybe they were like the others, but I had read in the Bible that Jesus and his companions were in a home where they were received.

The next week, they provided us with a Persian Bible. I asked him if he could explain to us their beliefs. Wow, he started by defining the first words and beliefs of Christadelphians, which completely attracted me. He explained that God is one, and Jesus is the Son of God, and we can be one of his helpers. He sent his only begotten Son

for the forgiveness of our sins, and his shedding of blood cleansed our sins. This was very similar to my own beliefs.

I was very happy that I had found a place without pretense and noise that only wanted to follow the word of God.

"I was very happy
that I had found
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of God."

This is how I became a Christadelphian. By God's grace, I have been able to introduce hundreds of people to the Christadelphians and help to bring them into our churches. Also, during the time of the coronavirus, I went to help our sisters, brothers, and friends in

hotels and hostels for two years. Now I also help and serve in the church as far as I can. Paul said in Corinthians that we can be a messenger, but if we don't have love, we are nothing. I also try to love and continue to study the word of God, and I know that He called me by name and removed all the problems from my path so that I can continue to live in our faith. He is also by my side and helps me.

**Sis. Salma B.,
Nottingham Ecclesia, UK**

Hello, my name is Salma. I am 36 years old. I came to England as a refugee at the age of 33. If you know the reason, you will find it funny that in a country in the 21st century, a person cannot freely choose his religion and perform his actions and must flee the country.

Fleeing is a word that we are familiar with in many places in the Bible. People had to flee for religion, which

is a completely personal belief. I am sharing my experience with you so that you know what Jesus Christ was like in my life.

All along the way, as I was coming, it was as if Jesus Christ was with me, and the protection that Jesus Christ gave me was indescribable. He filled my loneliness, gave me the light of hope, and saved me from difficult situations. Even during the hardships of being a refugee, when I was judged many times by people who saw me and understood that I was a refugee, they immediately said that I had fled my country. It didn't look good to me, and I was learning to rely only on God's judgment.

Those who judged me don't know what Iran looks like! They don't know the history of Iran. Sometimes they don't know where it is! I had to explain that we are in prosperity, but I came here because of my belief. I became a refugee, and I endured this situation to prove my loyalty to Jesus Christ and God. My sufferings are very small compared to the suffering that Christ suffered on the cross for us.

For the first time, when I managed to go to church in England, all my hair stood on end. I wanted to write all these stories of my life one day so that people would learn that being a follower of Christ is not easy. When I went to the Christadelphian church, God placed angels on my path, which I couldn't believe. God and Jesus Christ made this difficult path a little easier for me by placing these people whom I call angels, and my faith became stronger. I learned a lot about Christianity. If I were in Iran, I would never have had such knowledge.

In my opinion, the Bible is summarized by two words: love and affection. I learned from my Christadelphian family to be an example with my behavior so that I can give the good news to other people through my behavior, actions, and words. Also, I learned not to judge people, even in my mind. This was one of the most important lessons I learned because everyone has their own story in every situation, and no one can walk in someone else's shoes. Jesus Christ taught us to love each other and love others as ourselves.

**Bro. Ramtin Mousanejhad,
Taunton Ecclesia, UK**

Hello, my name is Ramtin. I became a refugee in England with my wife. I decided to share a summary of my life and personal experience with you. My wife and I were accountants in Iran, and I also did some business work. We were able to provide a normal life for ourselves, and we were living with family and friends. In Iran, we decided to seek a true belief in God. It so happened that we started church activities and got to know the Bible to some extent. After some time passed, along with the beginning of popular protests, we joined the night gatherings. Because of this, we had to leave our lives and families very quickly, as well as our country.

I was left with the responsibility of my wife and a path full of danger, along with aimless migration. After arriving in England in the hotel where we were living, we decided to join a church and met the Christadelphians completely by chance and without any planning. Let me correct myself by saying that the Christadelphians are not a group.



Bro. Ramtin and his wife Maral

They are a family, a loving family with exemplary actions. A family based on the Bible. A family whose efforts are to behave according to the instructions of the Bible. All their daily thoughts are full of love and benevolence. Their hopes and dreams are tied to the Bible.

Now my wife and I are a member of the big family of Christadelphians, and we are believers with the teachings and studies we had from the Bible. We believe that our life is with Jesus Christ and God, and considering the difficult conditions of asylum and life, we try to put ourselves on the right path by reading the Bible daily to remove the fears and disappointments of life. We believe that we got the greatest love and blessing that we could have. Romans 28:8 tells us that we know that for those who love God and are called according to His will, all things work together for good.

**Bro. Soroush Parsi,
Solihull Ecclesia, UK**

After nearly twenty-two years of service in Persian and English-speaking churches, I fully understand the concerns of asylum seekers. Iranian asylum-seekers may have left Iran for many reasons and have sought refuge in Europe and the United Kingdom, but it can be said that only 15 percent of them go to church because of their heartfelt desire for Christ. There are a number of reasons for political, economic, educational, or other reasons they have left Iran, but due to considerations and political relations between the Iranian government, Britain, and other European countries, the political case of Iranians in 99.5 percent of cases is not accepted by the British Home Office agents. These dear ones come to the church and try to use their Christian membership to build their case.

We should know that seeking asylum is a social disease imposed on its people by the ruling regimes of any country. It should be examined with the same view. During the reign of the monarchy in Iran, there were rarely Iranian refugees in Britain and Europe. Did all ten lepers who came to Jesus Christ for healing come to him again to be thankful after they had been healed? Absolutely not. But did our Lord Jesus complain about their lack of return? What about the 3,000 people who were baptized on Pentecost's day? Did they all become permanent members of the Church of Christ? If someone comes to church in the hope of healing from

cancer or illness or being healed from addiction, do we expect him to stay in the church forever? The rain of God's mercy pours upon the unbeliever and the believer. The real church of Christ is doing the same. Iranians come from a highly religious country and have a lack of trust in religious teachings. Our duty is only to preach the salvation message of the gospel, and to judge faith of other people is God's responsibility.

**Bro. Salem Mahmoud Khalend,
Middlesbrough Ecclesia, UK**

My name is Salem Mahmoud Khalend. I am from Makhmur, a part of Iraq. I had to leave my country and go to the UK, but unfortunately, I did not have the right to stay in that country and waited for several years. I received rejections for six years. Since then, I was a person with no religion who was in a bad situation, always living in stress and anxiety. I had just been deprived of my house and salary, and there was no one to help me and hold my hand. Jesus came to save me.

I turned to a charity called Open Door (which was a Christian charity) for help. They handed me over to one of their Kurdish members, named Christine. Christine was aware that I, too, was Kurdish. She spoke to me, and we got to know each other. There were several forms and documents that had to be filled out, and I had to sign them. I sat in the waiting room and was very impatient. My friend was sitting there in the waiting room, and when he heard the story of my life, he was very sad. He suggested that he take me somewhere with him and introduce me to a family.

The caring family was the Christadelphian family, which I will consider myself a member of as long as I live. They have always helped me and sympathized with me. I met them for the first time, and I spent most of the week with them. On Sundays, we celebrate the memory of our Lord Jesus Christ. On Mondays and Fridays, we meet online with our Kurdish brothers and sisters to talk and learn about the Bible.

After a year of continuing to read the Bible, as our Lord asked us in Matthew, He said: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Do all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* I requested baptism on August 14, 2022, and started a new life under the name of Jesus Christ. Since



Bro. Salem Khalend

then, my life has completely changed, and I have been saved from all these anxieties.

Christadelphia is not a religion but a faith and a way of salvation. It is a large family that lives in many countries, and I hope everyone of any nation who has not yet been acquainted with the Bible will be acquainted. Lives change by reading the Scriptures. As a person, my life has changed and improved. I wish everyone the chance to make their lives better like mine.

**Bro. Keyvan Karami,
Oldbury Ecclesia, UK**

My name is Keyvan. I had to leave my country (Iran) to save my life. My knowledge about Christ and the Bible was very little, and it was limited to

watching some movies, attending some home church classes, and reading the Bible (without understanding it properly). In my country, it was not possible to research and access resources freely. But since I have been in England, it has become possible for me. At first, I went to a Protestant church for a few meetings. But then I met the Christadelphians through a friend of mine who lived in our hotel. I still continued going to the Protestant church. But, after attending several meetings at the Christadelphian church and getting to know their beliefs, I realized that these two churches have very big differences in their understanding of the Bible.

The most prominent of which was that the Protestants were Trinitarians, but



Bro. Keyvan enjoys playing football

the Christadelphians said that Christ was the son of God. We have only one God, who is the Father of Christ. Of course, in my heart I believed this too, but I had to be sure. Believing in my heart was not enough for me, and I had to be certain. I could no longer go to both churches, and I had to choose one. This is where my challenge started. I didn't want to make a wrong choice at the age of 40, so I had to do something myself and do research. When I started researching, I reached the conclusion that the Trinity belief was wrong. I blamed myself for living thirty years with such a wrong belief. I don't intend to insult and speak badly about any religion, but I can only say that I realized some truths about my religion that had nothing to do with my heart's beliefs, with my soul and spirit. During those 15 years, I wonder why neither my parents nor I fully researched this doctrine. Why did they worship only fanatically and blindly? How could such a religion and book be sacred to them?

For these reasons, I had to research again so that the day never comes when my children ask me: Why are you a Christadelphian? I don't want to be ashamed and have an unconvincing answer. This is when my study started, and I spent many days and months in the hotel where I live, reading the Bible and taking notes. I was not allowed to work in those days due to the conditions of asylum, so I had a lot of time to study the Bible. I studied about six hours a day and attended classes at Christadelphian church for two hours. I always had a lot of questions, and our teachers patiently answered

all my questions. The rest of the day, I was doing sports, studying English, and socializing with my new friends at the hotel. I collected my notes from the classes, the notes I made by reading the Bible, and analyzed them with my own soul and mind. Finally, I created a diary of what I believe to be the truth.

**Bro. Aboozar Etekahas,
Cannock Ecclesia, UK**

I was in Iran when I met Christianity, and I did not know much about Christianity. After hearing Luke 15 about the lost son, a brother invited me to Christianity. I became interested in the Bible and wanted to learn more. I could better understand the Bible, and I continued reading. The more I read the Bible, I wanted to continue and understand more.

My friend who supported me in understanding the Bible asked me to come to their meeting for the first time. There were people there that I was seeing for the first time, but talking to them gave me a sense of calmness that you don't usually feel when you see people for the first time. I wanted to continue to know more about Jesus Christ and where this book came from. The brothers explained this to me in the meetings we had together, and I was eager to know more.

At the meeting, I was told that it is dangerous that you are a Muslim and want to become a Christian because you live in Iran. This is considered a crime. It didn't matter to me anymore because I had chosen my way to be part of the brothers and sisters in Christ. They are kind and trustworthy because they believe in what they believe, and they dedicate their lives to our Lord



Bro. Aboozar Etekahas

Jesus Christ without receiving help from anywhere. Their only intention is to convey the good news, which is the Holy Gospel, and establish the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ for those who don't know anything about the Bible and our Lord Jesus Christ. Also, Jesus Christ was sacrificed for our sins by his will so that we can be forgiven. I continued the meetings until one day, the place where we held the meeting was exposed. We were in the middle of a meeting when some policemen in plainclothes entered the house. We quickly ran away out the back door of the house.

I arrived in England in a very strange way, which could only be a miracle. I settled in the Cannock Holiday Hotel, and an Iranian brother who was in my hotel invited me to the Cannock Christadelphian Church. I did not have any information about

Christadelphians. I accepted the teachings of the Christadelphians for living a better and healthier life according to the Bible, which is the living word of God. It can only be a miracle that among all these branches of Christianity, I was led to Christadelphians because the more I continued, the more relaxed I got. Most importantly, I met people who helped me fully understand the Bible, and provided me with useful information about the Bible and our Lord Jesus Christ. They showed us the love that Jesus Christ spoke about in the Bible. They want to do everything they can for us to understand the Bible and to spread this good news to everyone so that all people can be saved by reading the Bible and acting on it. They, too, can reach the Kingdom of God. It is the wish of every Christian to build a world full of peace and purity for each other and we must join hands to share the Holy Bible, which is the living word of God to everyone. I was baptized on July 13, 2022, and I am very happy about it.

**In Memory of
Bro. Kamran Yasanpour,
Chester Ecclesia, UK**

In mid-2020, we were introduced to interested asylum seekers who had been placed in an area more than 15 miles away, where that ecclesia closed many years ago. Eventually, even under COVID restrictions, we were able to bring a good number to the Chester Ecclesial Hall for baptism. The first to be interviewed was Kamran Yasanpour, a Kurdish Iranian in his mid-30s. I was privileged to baptize him, but it never occurred to me that less than four years

later, I would be conducting his funeral after he was found dead in his flat.

Kamran had endeared himself to the ecclesia and made a significant contribution with his language skills as an interpreter for other interviews and baptisms. He then became the regular translator of exhortations, particularly helpful for so many who were reliant on reading a script while joining on Zoom from across the large area where the authorities placed our members and friends.

Kamran did not have it easy, with his underlying health issues and enduring appalling problems with poor accommodations. He was also attacked in the street. He moved to London and set up a business, determined to lay a good foundation for getting his young daughter over from Iran. It was not to be. But his fellow Kurds from across North West England came to hear of his hope, as well as his life, as his family, natural and spiritual, bade him farewell.

Kamran was the epitome of the phraseology I am happy to include in letters of support to the authorities. His read: “He has always been prompt, noticeably friendly and cheerful



Late Bro. Kamran Yasanpour

(sometimes in the face of adversity), as well as most polite and helpful.” Now he rests, awaiting an even better commendation from the Righteous Judge, not just this from one of his fellow travelers to Zion.

*Stephen Adams,
Chester Ecclesia, UK*



HOW PERSONAL WITNESSING TOUCHED TWO FAMILIES IN CALIFORNIA

By Patty Chelius and Tovi Spencer

ONE SISTER'S STORY

I need to preface this story with a little background. I went to a variety of churches as a child with different friends from school. My family did not attend. As a little girl, I somehow became convinced the Bible was the Word of God. I have no idea how that conviction came about. But it was an unshakeable belief I had. In later years, I referred to it as an uneducated, blind faith.

Fifty-two years ago, I walked into an insurance agent's office for a job interview. Little did I know how life-changing that moment would be for me or that I would work there for the better part of forty-eight years.

As a young twenty-two-year-old, I went to work for Bro. Bob Lloyd and

his partner, Bro. Ken Sommerville. At first, they were hesitant to hire me as they were not certain I had the type of experience they were looking for. I am very thankful they took a chance on me.

Bob Lloyd always had a Bible open on a cabinet behind his desk. When I would go into his office to discuss the work we were doing, he had a knack for bringing a Biblical concept to apply to what we were talking about. He would then turn around, pick up his Bible, and show me exactly where in Scripture the concept was presented. I remember being amazed by this. I would then go home and tell my husband what he had said. My husband had never opened the Bible in his life, although he did attend Catholic schools as a child.

He didn't have an interest in God's Word but had respect for Bob Lloyd, which caused him to listen to what Bob told me. At the same time, Ken Sommerville was also mentioning to me that God had a plan for salvation, and I might want to be part of that plan. These conversations were easy to be part of because I didn't feel like I was being lectured to. I felt like very caring people loved God so much that they had a loving desire to share that with anyone who would listen.

A few years after I started working for Bob and Ken, I became pregnant with my first child. I told my husband I wanted to start returning to church because I wanted my children to have that experience. He was fine with it but didn't seem interested in going with me. I was fine with that. I went to work the next day and told Bob I would start going to a church near where I lived. He said he thought that was a great idea. He then asked me if I would like to start reading the Bible with him and Sis. Peggy, one evening a week. I told him I would think about it. I went home and told my husband, who said he would also like to attend. I was so happy to hear him say that. I went to work the next day, and we set it up to meet the following week.

The very next day, my husband came home from work and said his company had offered him an amazing promotion at their location in Montreal. We discussed it and decided it was the right thing to do. I went to work the next day and gave my notice, and those classes we would have had with Bob and Peggy did not happen. Within one month, we had relocated to Canada.

We lived in Canada for three years. While in Canada, Bob and Ken would write letters to me. I remember a letter Ken wrote to me. He again reminded me that God has a plan and a timetable.

When we moved back to California three years later, my husband and I watched a TV miniseries called *Jesus of Nazareth*. That miniseries touched my husband, and he asked me to call Bob and tell him that he wanted to start studying the Bible with him. I did. We studied with Bob one night a week, and we studied with Ken another evening. I remember my husband telling Bob the first evening that he would not go to his church but just wanted to know what the Bible was about. Bob replied that was fine. Within about three weeks, my husband and I told Bob he needed to baptize us. Bob told us he would be very happy to baptize us, but there was a little more information we needed to understand. We studied every free minute we had. We were so hungry with a desire to understand God's plan for salvation. Eight weeks after we started studying with Bob and Ken, we were baptized.

During those early years of my relationship with Bob and Ken, I never felt pressure. Only a sincere love for me. I honestly believe that had I rejected what God had to offer, Bob and Ken would have loved me anyway. I don't think they would have ever given up on me. I think I would have remained in their prayers.

*Patty Chelius,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

ANOTHER FAMILY'S STORY

As a child, my family and I always attended Sunday School and church services. We lived in New York, Florida, Hawaii, North Carolina, and Mexico City. We moved around a lot because my dad was in the US Air Force, and we followed him wherever he was stationed. When I was younger, we went to church, and I enjoyed the youth group and being in the choir. I remembered in Sunday School the stories in the Bible, such as Noah's Ark, how God created man, the birth of Jesus, and the spreading of the Gospel.

We were brought up as Protestants, and I have always believed in God. But I may have been distant from God at times. After high school, I felt I was searching for something. I did not know what that was, but I knew something was missing in my life and heart, and there was an emptiness in my spirit. I would go to different churches searching for what was missing. There were times when I did not go to church due to different distractions in my life, and I felt apart from God. Something was missing, but I did not know exactly what it was.

When I met Raul, my now husband, we were away from God and not going to Church. I believed in God, and so did he. At some point, we began going to different churches, searching for what was missing in our lives. It was interesting because he also had been looking for that something. One day, Raul went to the supermarket, which was not close to our home, and there he ran into a former coworker whom he had not seen in years. They had previously talked about life, the universe, faith, philosophy, and God. She had recently attended a Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar. She had the seminar flyer for the upcoming seminar in her purse, which she handed over to Raul. She said it was excellent, informative, and helped explain the Bible. She learned about the Gospel and how to read her Bible. She told Raul that he should give it a try. She was basically just looking to study the Bible, and unfortunately, she never became a member of the ecclesia. We do not know why she did not continue with the seminars or come into the truth.



My husband decided to check out the seminar at the Reseda Christadelphian Ecclesia. At first, he was both very interested and skeptical about the seminar. But he saw how they were studying the Bible and how they explained it. I joined him the following week and felt the same way. They were reading and showing us the echoes throughout the Bible and the connections between the Old and New Testaments.

We continued and finished the beginning seminar. We felt good about learning about reading the bible better, and then we enrolled in the intermediate and finally the advanced seminar. It was like putting pieces of a puzzle together. It was becoming clearer to us. We decided to continue studying in one of the members' homes since we were the only ones at the end of the advanced seminar. We attended the Sunday memorial services as guests a couple of times. They told us that if we decided to get baptized and become members of the ecclesia, we would be signing up for a new life in Christ. The seminar was very informative and answered many, if not most, of our questions, and we are continually learning. The most important thing was that we discovered what was missing—the connection with our Heavenly Father.

The members have always been very friendly and welcoming and have shown their love and faith in God. They seemed very committed to the gospel message, reading and understanding the Bible.

At some point, marriage was discussed as addressed in the Bible. After much praying, marriage felt right to me. I had been struggling with the idea of marriage due to my parents having been divorced. Another big subject was baptism: full immersion, repentance, forgiveness of sins, and commitment to the truth. My husband and I felt very ready to be baptized. We were baptized and given the right hand of fellowship and became members of the Reseda Christadelphian Ecclesia.

The ecclesia welcomed us. Now, we feel part of the family through fellowship, going out to lunch with our brethren, the monthly sister class for me, spending time with members at ecclesial events, or sharing a meal. After the seminars, we began reading Christadelphian books, such as *The Ecclesia Guide*, and *The New Life*. We read with a couple of the members and continued by reading *Christendom Astray*, and now we are reading *A Life of Jesus*. I finally feel like I have a permanent home at the ecclesia. We are truly blessed to be saved and brought to the Truth. We are dedicated to serving God, following his commandments, reading and understanding the Bible, and trying to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Tovi Spencer,
Reseda Ecclesia, CA*

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR *Words*

By Majid Esmaeli

IN Mark 6:14-29, we read the story of the end of the life of John the Baptist. Let me comment about Herod in these verses. Herod personally had great respect for John the Baptist. At that time, no one dared to criticize the king or tell him he had sinned. But John boldly exhorted Herod that he should not have married his brother's wife. We see that Herod did nothing to retaliate. Although he did not follow John's

counsel, in his heart, he respected him and considered him a holy man. Then, at Herod's birthday party, when Salome finished dancing, he swore he would give her anything she wanted, even half of his kingdom. He never thought she would consult with her mother, for he knew her mother hated John the Baptist. The girl asked for something that broke his heart, and because of the oath he had taken before the people at

that celebration, he issued the order to kill John.

I want to talk to you about speech. We see that Herod's mouth opened in a way it should not have. There are many verses in the word of God about the power of language and grammar, and in general, there are many verses about our speech. Whether we accept it or not, there is power in our speech. Proverbs 18:21 says, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."* With the tongue, you can create life, or with the tongue, you can create death or destruction. God knows how much we have hurt and upset others with our language and vice versa. How many times have we been hurt in life because of the words of others?

In Matthew 12:37, we are told our words determine our destiny. Because of our words, we will either prosper or be condemned. Our words can affect our justice or our justification. Basically, when you believe, you confess with your own tongue, which means God wants this faith to start with your tongue. In Romans 10:9-10 (ESV), the Apostle Paul emphasizes this:

Because if you confess Jesus with your tongue and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved, because it is in the heart that a person believes, and it is with the tongue that he believes.

Our faith and confession are not enough. If our confession is in our hearts, we must also confess with our tongue. God is aware of the power of our tongue, and the Apostle Paul says this confession is for our salvation.

The first thing that can help us control our speech is that we should change the content of our words. We cannot be a spring from which both fresh and salt water come out at the same time. We cannot have a mouth that blesses and curses. It is not appropriate for this to happen. A salty spring cannot produce fresh water.

You see, sometimes you say something, and immediately when you think about it, it can make you feel ashamed. So, you need to think a little before you speak. Don't hurt anyone. We should be careful and use our tongue to love others, to give grace to others, to bless others, and to preach the word of God. When the tongue is used for these purposes, then the wicked cannot defile our language. In the end, since we know that there is power in our speech, it is better to use it in the divine path, entrusting the power of our speech to the hands of God. When we use our speech like this, we glorify God, and we feel good. Today, my prayer is that all of us can use our speech in the way that God wants.

Majid Esmaeli,
Leicester Westleigh Ecclesia, UK



Bro. Majid exhorting

ALL GLORY TO GOD

By Jessica Gelineau

Every poet and musician and artist, but for Grace, is drawn away from love of the thing he tells, to love of the telling. (*The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis).

WE recently celebrated a version of the Sabbath as a family. It was an interesting exercise, and it would be a tangent to go into the details of what that looked like for us. In the context of this story, it would be helpful to know that our observance included putting away our phones and computers for a full day. After these were ceremoniously stored out of reach on Friday evening, we sat down on the couch, about to kick off our time of rest

by eating mushroom and olive pizza and watching a nature movie together. Levi, my husband, had covered the two-year-old's lap with a towel against tomato sauce stains and looked at me. "I feel like there should be a blessing or something we say to start our Sabbath." "I have a prayer!" chimed in five-year-old Pippa, without missing a beat, "Help us think more about things God created and not about the things God didn't create." And we said, "Amen!"

The Things God Didn't Create and The Things He Did

In my daughter's concrete, elementary-school-age brain, it's easy to sort "things God created" and "things God didn't create" into two buckets. Oak trees, snow leopards, our family. The TV remote, Daddy's cell phone, and her new Lego set (which actually featured heavily in our unplugged Saturday activities). Her spontaneous prayer implies that the first category is inherently good, and the second is inherently not so good. But there is more nuance there, isn't there? When can what is God-created and God-given actually distract us from God Himself?

Idols¹ mentioned in the Bible (bear with me) were often "things God didn't create," things created by humans. Think of the Golden Calf, the image of the mythological Dagon which kept falling on its face (that's a funny story when you're a kid!), the "god" in Isaiah 44 that is made out of some of the wood before the rest is used to build a nice bonfire.² These kinds of literal idols are still important items in many modern religions today; they are not a thing of the past. However, they do not hold much temptation as objects of worship for me (and perhaps for others), who grew up in a largely Western, Christian, or secular context.

Idols can also come in the form of "things God created." The worship of the Creator-made sun, moon, and stars took place in several cultures God's people interacted with or found themselves living within during Biblical times. Job, while listing potential, plausible iniquities that he

did not commit, says, *"If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand... I would have been false to God above."* (Job 31:26-28).³ As one commentator explains, "The heavenly bodies which were worshiped were so remote that the worshippers could not access them. They expressed their veneration by kissing the hand. Job means to say he had never performed an act of homage to the heavenly bodies."⁴

Job didn't worship the sun, and neither do I. However, I personally can understand the desire to worship and exalt aspects of God's Creation more so than I can fathom bowing down to an image of wood or stone. You could say that those things the Creator made are more inherently beautiful and, therefore, have a more powerful draw, a greater gravity. The steady rhythm of ocean waves. The radiance of the sun shining on your face after a multi-day rainstorm. The moon when it is full and seems low to the ground.

As even my young child knows, it is **good** to spend time thinking about the things God created. And it is **good** to embrace our calling to create, being made in His image. The antidote to accidental idolatry is not that we avoid these good gifts because they are just too good, but that we ground ourselves and anchor ourselves in the remembrance of the fountain they flow from, ideally daily.

Similarly, when we engage in the creative process, our focus must not drift away from the source of that creativity. The immersive feeling of being able to paint

a beautiful vista, tell a compelling story, or bring a piece of music into being can be nearly intoxicating. This feeling is a wonderful gift, but it can also be a fatal temptation if it leads to the exaltation of the creation or the created process over the Creator Himself.

The way author and songwriter Andrew Peterson writes about the potential missteps believers can take when participating in the creative process resonates with me.

Art shouldn't be about self-expression or self-indulgence. Art shouldn't be about self. The paradox is that art is necessarily created by a Self, and will necessarily draw some measure of attention or consideration to the artist. But the aim ought to be for the thing to draw attention, ultimately, to something other than the Self.⁵

For believers, this "something other" is clear. We want our music and our art to testify to God's existence, love, and design for eternal good.

Perhaps those of us who consider ourselves artists and are prone to worship, or at least over-love, our own work (I am absolutely guilty!) can devise some practical, anchoring habit to remind ourselves where our creativity comes from. I recently learned that the initials for the phrase "*Soli Deo Gloria*," All Glory to God, are written at the bottom of each of Bach's manuscripts. I imagine praying a short, even memorized prayer habitually before sitting down to sketch, compose, write, or cast could go a long way

towards staving off misplaced affection for our creative work or processes.

Our Work in Light of a Creator and a Redeemer

I would never want to imply that my little artistic or creative endeavors are objectively better than those of my neighbors who haven't yet come to know Christ. My artistic processes are scattered. I cling, gather, and glean how I can. I rarely devote time to practicing any particular piece of music to make it shine the way the composer intended (whether I or another is the composer). And when I do hit on a particularly satisfactory idea or sing a harmonic note that sounds actually beautiful, and I sit in that feeling for any length of time, I (wretched woman that I am!) feel the pull of my hand towards the stars. I start to fall in love with the telling of the story. And I need to return to square one, remove my shoes, and stand in the grass again.

What I do mean is that, in the context of the work Christ has already begun in our lives, our art, or simply our work, is being redeemed in a way that means that it has substance—it has weight to it. It is real. It **means** something because Christ means something. For those of us who find ourselves in Christ, we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). And I feel very much this means our artistic endeavors and everything else we do, for that matter, belongs to the new Creation.

I return now to briefly reconsider Pippa's spontaneous prayer and offer a variation of it that I can pray as a slightly older child of God who has, mathematically speaking, about

seven times more experience with the deceitfulness of the human heart.

“Help us think more often about the things God created, and remember with certainty that everything we or other humans create is subject to, and ultimately derived from, the King of Creation.”

King of Creation is not an explicit title given to God in the Bible, though the earth and everything in it are clearly subject to Him.⁶ If the phrase rings a bell for you, it might be because you’ve sung the following well-known hymn:⁷

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
the King of Creation!

O my soul, praise Him, for He is your
health and salvation!

The idea of God being our health and salvation calls to mind Psalm 103. In reading verses 3-5, we recall: *“He forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases He redeems your life from the pit, He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. He satisfies your desires with good things.”*

The idea of God, the King of Creation, crowning us with anything is staggering.

Let us keep finding Him, again and again, and be satisfied by Him rather than the work of our hands.

Jessica Gelineau,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA



¹ A quick Google search defines an idol as “an image or representation of a god used as an object of worship” (Oxford Languages)—this works fine for the word as I am using it here. We may have different associations with or reactions to the term “idol.” Idolatry isn’t a term I personally often use. Still, I think it makes sense to discuss this here because it offers a framework for understanding what happens when we are drawn away to love the created rather than the Creator.

² Ex. 32:4, 1 Samuel 5:3-4, Isaiah 44:16-17.

³ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless specifically noted.

⁴ Psalm 47, Psalm 148.

⁵ Hymn 118 in the Christadelphian green Hymn Book. Composer: Joachim Neander.

⁶ Barnes, Albert (1798-1870). *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*. Public Domain.

⁷ Peterson, Andrew (2019). *Adorning the Dark*. B&H Books. pp. 44-45.

Music and Praise section editor, Jessica Gelineau, would love to engage with you and dive into conversations around the intersection of inspiration, creativity, music, and praise. Please reach out if you have a thought to share or to further a conversation you’ve seen started in this installment of “On Creating.”

You can send emails to jessica.r.gelineau@gmail.com.

NOAH: SAVING YOUR FAMILY IN A DARK WORLD

PART ONE: WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT THIS STORY IN THESE LAST DAYS?

By Dennis Bevans

NOAH is such an interesting character study because we all think we already know the story. However, as we mature as Bible students, we need to expect to find more in the account than the surface level we learned as children in Sunday School. If you have not taken a deep dive into this story, you are in for a treat.

Some relevant questions that may be lingering in your mind. What is this world coming to? What is the ecclesial world coming to? What can I do about it to protect and preserve my family while we wait for the return of our Lord?

The world we live in has forever changed. The ecclesial family has been forever altered. Remote gathering tools

like Zoom are better than anything we have ever had for those in isolation, traveling, or sick. It has expanded the reach of ecclesias that have used the technology to broadcast classes, lectures and even Memorial Service. It was the only way we could legally come together as a community for a while. However, as much value as it creates for content, it cannot replace the contact necessary for a healthy ecclesial experience. Ecclesial life is what you put into it, not what you get out of it. Certainly, there are those among us who are physically unable to leave their homes and truly can only help others remotely. However, for those who can (and before the pandemic did) attend in person, remote participation cannot be seen as an acceptable replacement if merely for convenience's sake. Some may never return because they find it easy to eliminate the commute. Their ecclesial experience has been forever diluted!

We see a world in chaos, which has also created issues in the ecclesia. Did you ever think we would have a discussion (some of it quite heated) about whether wearing a mask was a lack of faith or a responsible act of service? Did you ever expect to hear talks and read articles in our community about the social injustices this world has created and continues to create? Did you ever expect that we would see the LGBTQ and whatever movement become mainstream in the world and

even impact our conversations in the ecclesia? Did you ever think social media would light up with heated political debate among brothers and sisters?

Did you know that all of these conditions have happened before, and we can see evidence of these major worldview issues and their impact on the ecclesial family back in Genesis? What could a story about a man and his family approximately 4,500 years ago do to help me today? Doesn't everyone already know about Noah and the Ark? Isn't this a Sunday School topic?

Jesus tells us why we should truly care about and understand the story of Noah.

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24:37-39).

If we can better understand the days of Noah, we can be better prepared for the return of our Lord. Not only can we use the details as clues and signs of the times (which we can and do), but we can also learn from what Noah and his family did to inherit life in a world on a collision course with the judgment of the Father.

Ecclesial life
is what you
put into it, not
what you get
out of it.

Noah's name plays a very prominent role in the early chapters of Genesis, but the Scriptural record is fairly quiet on him overall. In the New Testament, he is mentioned in the Luke parallel of the Matthew 24 verses above and in the genealogy of Luke 3. Outside of that, he is mentioned twice by Peter (both referring to the eight people saved in the Ark, which we will look at later in this series).

The only other is in Hebrews, and it is worth looking at.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. (Hebrews 11:7).

Wouldn't we all like to insert our name in this verse? In fact, the last two verses of the chapter offer us an invitation to be part of this glorious outcome: *"that they without us should not be made perfect."*

The Old Testament is not much different. We have Noah introduced in Genesis 5:28-29, noting his name as "rest." Genesis 6 gives us two specific instructions: let light in and make only one door! These details point us directly to Christ as a shadow that will resonate throughout this account. There is only one path that leads to salvation. We must prepare, follow **his** way, and work together in love so that we might dwell with the Father and Son forever as his eternal family. You may be considering the words of Ephesians right now. Let's divert for a moment:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Did you know there are two different words in Greek for "one?" Most of them are the first, which is fine. But two of them are the word *"the only one,"* both of which tie us directly back to the story of the Ark being built: **only one** hope and **only one** baptism.

Genesis 7 tells us clearly that the theme of this story is the completion of a covenant using the number seven (rest again) to the point of exhaustion. For now, we will simply mention the seven rainbow colors as a case in point. Genesis 8 is essentially a foreshadowing of Jesus and his redeeming work. God provided the specific timing of this event, putting it in line with the Passover week and, therefore, the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord.; we will consider this connection in detail later in the series. Genesis 9 closes the "story" with some "not so flattering details" and then concludes the account with *"and he died."*

From there, he appears in a couple of genealogies (Genesis 10, 1 Chronicles 1) and then mentioned in a reminder of the curse and the promise in Isaiah 54:9. The other two references are in Ezekiel 14:14, 20, which we shall consider in detail shortly.

That is it! Why, then, does it feel like such a profound story in Scripture? People who know very little about

the Bible can usually recite something about Noah or at least identify him in reference to an ark or the Flood.

The reason is that we all look through the lens of perspective. I imagine you could find Noah-themed toys in just about every ecclesial hall on any given Sunday. And that there are toys and decorations somewhere in your personal collection if you have children or grandchildren (personally guilty as charged). Odds are that some of the lessons the children hear at nearly every study weekend or Bible School will use part of the Noah story, conditioning them to think they know the story, too! As they mature, they, like all of us, can then be challenged to study it for the wisdom of God and not discount it as a child's story of old.

Let's use an object lesson to make the point more clearly. How many of each animal entered the ark? Most are thinking **two**, but you would be Biblically inaccurate and miss a major theme in the record. A detailed answer is coming, but the point for right now is that the children's story is only part of the story, and there is much more for us to learn.

Ezekiel and Jesus channel our focus for us in this introduction. Since we read Jesus' words earlier, let's now look at Ezekiel:

Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 14:14).

To make it more succinct and closer to home, he repeats it for emphasis and adds the familial detail in verse 20:

Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.

All three saved others by their efforts, preaching, and living a life of faith. Ezekiel uses them as an example to Israel to save their households, basically telling them (and by extension us) that the state of the national ecclesia was so bad that if these three pillars in the truth were there now, they would walk out alone! Jesus tells us to let our "*light shine before men*" to describe our preaching efforts, which is something we do not hear but rather see. Who we are is a far more profound preaching tool to our children, each other, our neighbors, and coworkers than anything we can possibly say! This thought is a highly important backdrop for us as we heed the warning to save our household as we see that day approaching.

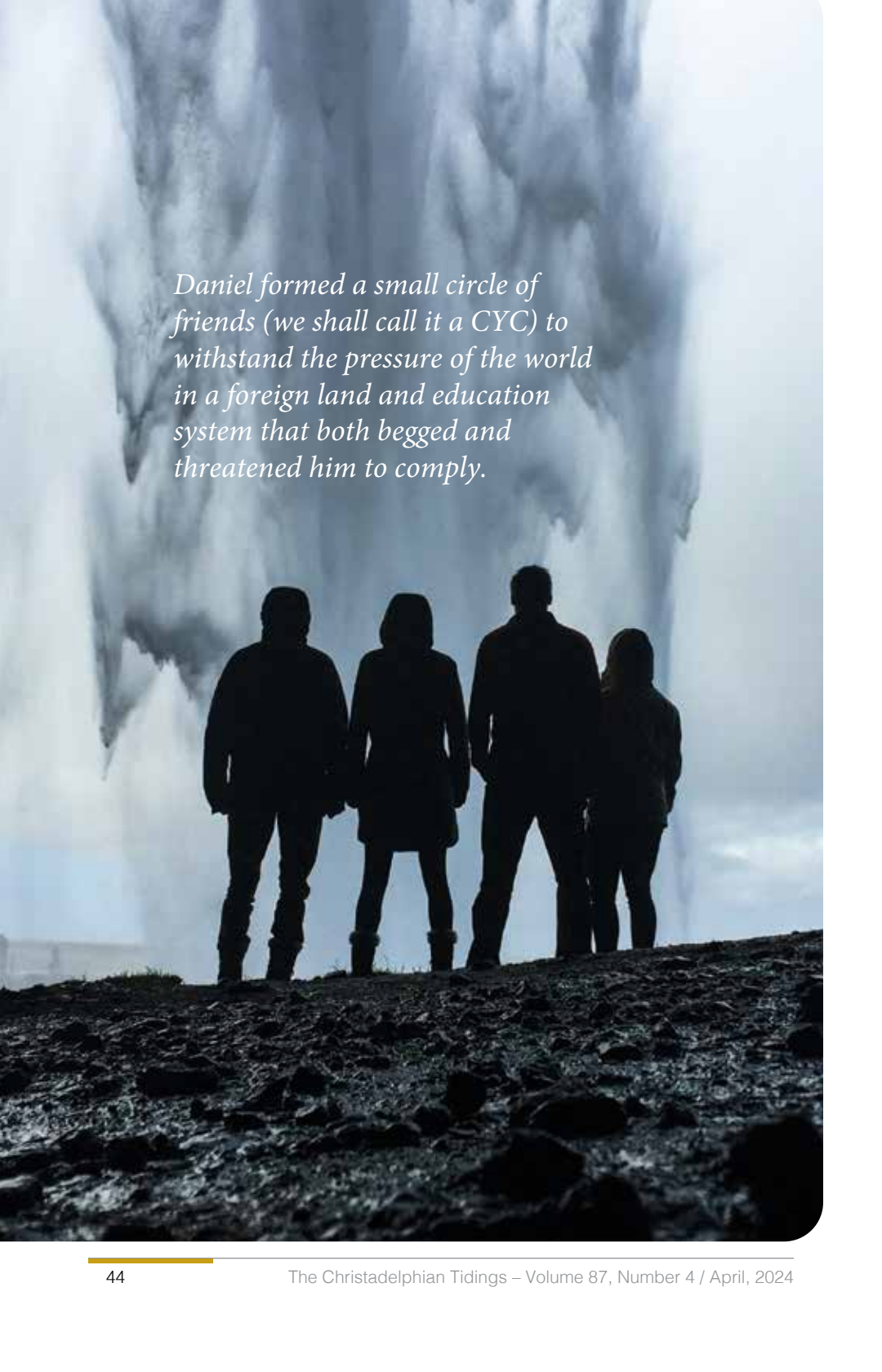
Ecclesial life can be hard. Ecclesias are nothing more than a collection of individuals and families into a greater family, trying to become God's family. Our personal families are the training ground for ecclesial service. It is not about **any** of us or even **all** of us! This concept is emphasized in the family setting. The plan of the Father is all about **His** glory, and He has invited us to be a part of that. I earnestly believe the Father created the family (both personal and ecclesial) for us to learn how to love each other when some behave unlovable. When a child makes a mistake, we see past the present failure and encourage them



to achieve beyond the temporary setback toward success. Unless, of course, it is someone else's child that fails. Here, we can easily write them off as a delinquent who was probably set up for failure by bad parenting! It is all about perspective. Our God sees us for who we are. Though sinners, He can see past our present failings toward His glory if we are letting Him refine us in our walk to His Kingdom. Learning to love when the unlovable acts around us are evident allows us to see others how God sees us. Remember, we are judged the way we judge others, so it is imperative that we get our lenses aligned with His. Do we see the failings of our brothers and sisters around us as evidence that God is working in their lives too, and love them anyway? Our natural tendency is to discredit and selfishly see God only at work in our own lives. Tragic consequences await if we do not learn the valuable lesson He has provided in such an intimate setting.

Let's use these three individuals of Ezekiel 14 to illustrate the point. All three were in difficult ecclesial circumstances, not unlike the challenges of our day. We are not alone! Our God has left them as examples to strengthen us for **His** purpose. Noah was found alone with his wife, perhaps his parents, and certainly his grandfather, while the entire ecclesia and almost all of his family chose to be like the world and ridicule him. Talk about standing up for the truth! When the ecclesia is so small that one man and his wife are all who are worth saving, that is scary.

Job is such a great example as he lost his entire family, and the one surviving family member (his wife) advised he should "*curse God and die*," giving him virtually no support in his time of need. Here is a man with no recorded sin called out in Scripture. Still, there are writings in our community calling him out as self-righteous, believing that he could earn salvation with works and



Daniel formed a small circle of friends (we shall call it a CYC) to withstand the pressure of the world in a foreign land and education system that both begged and threatened him to comply.

that he needed correction. Let's make it just a little more uncomfortable.

The sons of God (the ecclesia) have come together again, and Satan (the adversary) is among them a few thousand years later, calling out Job again. Unbelievable! It is our human nature to find flaws in others. But let us not be so arrogant as to find flaws where God does not. Let us allow for the flaws of others so that our God can look past our flaws to His glory. Do we say, "My opinion is important to me because it is mine"? We must all be careful not to elevate our opinions above their station because when we do this, we do not give our God's Word the preeminence it deserves. Job suffers not for his own sin but as a lesson about the jealousy of an adversary in the ecclesial midst.

The third was Daniel, who was torn away from his family and physically altered so he could not have his own children. He formed a small circle of friends (we shall call it a CYC) to withstand the pressure of the world in a foreign land and education system that both begged and threatened him to comply. This environment was not unlike the education models of our day, where our children are being groomed from their elementary years to accept what the world thinks is "right."

In fact, he was a contemporary of Ezekiel, which is astounding! Picture that scene: Noah and Job—good choices, Ezekiel. Daniel? He was a kid that used to be in our meeting, but he got deported. Can you imagine having

someone currently alive writing a letter to the whole community calling **you** out as an example of what it looks like to walk to the Kingdom? Can you imagine describing another brother or sister that way? Add to this the thought that Ezekiel was writing under inspiration, so it was more than his opinion; it was God's!

Jesus connects the dots for us in the gospels by adding the content of Noah's story to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Luke 17 account. In verse 25, Jesus specifically uses Noah and Lot's families to describe his own suffering among his family! Look at verse 27:

They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

What is the missing ingredient? YHWH! It is easy for all of us to fill our time with events like this, but if God is not the center of our life, then we are a family without a core.

God is working in the lives of others. We just do not have a front-row seat. Let us be encouraged to leave our collective comfort zone, actively look for ways to develop our love for the brotherhood, and earnestly contend for the faith that leads us to dwell together with the Father and His Son for eternity.

Dennis Bevans,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, CA

PART 8

WORDS I HOPE I NEVER HEAR AGAIN

By David Levin

*Christadelphian Cliches, Misquotes,
Pat Phrases, Wrested Scriptures, and
Legalistic Formulas*



**Do the Readings;
Excellent Candidate for Baptism;
Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

THIS final installment of this series includes three phrases with no particular connection among them.

Do the Readings

If you've kept up with this series, you know where I'm headed with this one.

What's wrong with it: (1) It turns a spiritual exercise into a legalistic check-off-the-behavior task. (2) It sanctifies one specific way of reading the Bible.

What's at stake? Your attitude about Bible reading.

How can it be fixed? There are any number of ways to say this better. One favorite from a dear older brother, now long gone: listen to God.

Discussion: Whether it's "do the readings," "doing the readings," or "did the readings," these stock phrases arise in many contexts, perhaps most often encountered in exhortations, formal or not, reminding you to "do the readings." Disregarding **how** it's said, this is sound advice. Your spiritual life depends heavily on Bible reading. Daily input, like regular food and water, yields the best results. Without the influence of the Scriptures, your mind will revert, as Robert Roberts so pungently stated, "to its original swinishness."

However, the phrase "do the readings" sullies its message because "do" denotes "to complete or accomplish a task." The purpose of Bible reading is not to check off a task or to get it done, like cleaning the kitchen after dinner—Did you do

the dishes? The purpose is to absorb divine thoughts and elevate your mind. Bible reading is not an act to be done but a time to listen to God. Read slowly and thoughtfully. Analyze the patterns of the text and note context—what's there and what's not there. Apply the text to your life's challenges.

The phrase "do the readings" introduces two unnecessary and detrimental substitutions when contrasted, for instance, with "read the Bible." First, the verb "do" (instead of "read") stresses the act of completing the task or getting it **done**. As in, "Checked off for another day. On schedule. We're into April, and I've done the readings every day."

Second, the direct object, "readings," also emphasizes a task rather than a spiritual encounter. When you reduce the Bible to "readings," instruction becomes a rote daily chore. Say this sentence to yourself, and note how you feel: "I am going to do the readings." Now say, "I am going to read the Bible." You can probably even **feel** a difference. They are different activities.

What Does "The Readings" Imply?

What is, or are, "the readings?" We all know that "the readings" is short for "the two Old Testament and one New Testament sequential chapter selections as listed in Robert Roberts' Bible reading plan." It can mean nothing but. Even if you had read the Bible that day, you might not have done **the readings**.

I personally follow the plan (mostly) and almost always use one of the Scriptures for that day as the basis of my exhortations. I like the idea that many, if not most, of the audience will be on the same page as me when

I speak. I also like the idea that on any day of the week, tens of thousands of my brothers and sisters in the faith are contemplating the same texts that I am, and each of us, in their own way, is learning what God has to say to each of us individually.

As useful as it is, there's nothing sacred about using the Roberts plan. Others are available that have different arrangements with different advantages and disadvantages. We would all at least **say** that. However, the ubiquity of “doing the readings,” with its implication of **these** chapters, argues otherwise. The positive value of Bible reading is subsumed to a specific practice.

As with any ritual, tool, ceremony, or religious practice, it is the end purpose, not the means to that end, that needs to be emphasized if we are to remain

a spiritual community. Doing “the readings” can become ritualized, as can the Breaking of Bread or attendance at meeting. It's not something you “do;” it's something you engage in.

The legalist tendency inherent in human nature is in force here, as is the power of language. Please replace “doing the readings” with “reading the Bible,” “listening to God,” “engaging in Spiritual instruction,” or anything that emphasizes the benefit of the process rather than the completion of a task. Words **do** matter, especially when you are addressing a group.

Excellent Candidate for the Truth

This phrase describes a certain type of person who has expressed interest in our faith. The adjective might be great, ideal, or something similar. Any of these indicate that the interested person is not just someone responding to God's



call but someone who would make a welcome new member, someone who would fit right in.

What's wrong with it: It represents a stereotypical view of someone who is probably far from the “ideal candidate” of the New Testament. It is more likely to denote someone who already fits in well with you.

What's at stake? Preaching focus, ecclesial diversity, cultural awareness, and basic Biblical directives about our interaction with other humans.

How can it be fixed? By fixing your own perspective of what the gospel is and for whom it is directed.

Discussion: This entry was suggested to me by a Black brother, Randy Tyra, who called it a “despicable phrase.” It is not a phrase I have heard often, but evidently, it is used often enough to warrant mention in this series.

Nonetheless, I ask you if you have ever said something like this regarding a person with whom you have had apparently fruitful Bible discussions. You became excited about their interest and eagerness to learn more. What were your criteria for labeling that person an “excellent candidate?” Was it their humility to learn and submit to God's way? Only that? Or was the person sufficiently “like you” that having them in the ecclesia would be comfortable for you?

For most of the *Tidings* readership, “excellent candidate” often means upper-middle to upper-class white folk, well-dressed and well-spoken. They likely already belong to another

Christian denomination and adhere to a similar moral code. In other words, they'll make a fine, upstanding Christadelphian as soon as you knock the wrong doctrines out of their head.

Jesus cautioned us (Matthew 5:46-47) that there is no merit in consorting only with those “like you.” A homogenous ecclesia does not challenge your understanding, patience, love, and other interpersonal aspects of discipleship.

James 2:1-7 also warns about favoritism in an appeal that specifically applies here. In our culture, the man in fine clothing would likely be labeled “an excellent candidate,” not the man in shabby clothing. The “excellent candidate” epithet seldom fits the repeated examples of the Bible's respondents to God's grace. The phrase is more about class bias and an academic view of the gospel message. Get the doctrines right, keep everything else about yourself, and you'll be a fine brother or sister.

The phrase “excellent candidate” does not translate to “demographic clone.” Anyone with sincere interest and willingness to follow Christ is an “excellent candidate.”

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

This phrase is sometimes used when dealing with a marital matter or when referring to a situation of this sort.

What's wrong with it? “Marriage, divorce, and remarriage” is undoubtedly among the best (worst?) examples of an ill-formed phrase that has become entrenched through

thoughtless repetition. It also removes humanity from a marital situation and turns it into a legal exercise.

What's at stake? Two things. One has to do with how various phrases, sayings, and teachings become standardized among us. The other concerns how you treat marital relationships—as a lawyer or a compassionate human.

How to fix it? Why does it need a code name? Each situation is its own sorrow.

Discussion: The most obvious problem with “marriage, divorce, and remarriage” is that the first term has nothing to do with what this phrase supposedly tracks, and the second term adds no meaning. The phrase describes this scenario: At some time, two people got married; that's the “marriage” part, and it's not a problem. Later, they got divorced; that is a problem, but it's a done deal at this point. Now, one (or both) of them wants to, plans to or has already married someone other than their original spouse.

The word “remarriage,” though not a Biblical term, describes all of this fully without assistance from “marriage” and “divorce.” Implicit in “remarriage” is a previous divorce; the word is not applied to widows and widowers who marry again. In standard English usage, “remarriage” does apply to those whose first spouse has died, but that is not the case in ecclesial use.

If “marriage” is not part of the problem, and “divorce” is already implied by “remarriage,” then what's the point of the three-word stock phrase? One word, “remarriage,” says all that needs

to be said; the rest is wordy, unwieldy clutter.

However, being wordy and unwieldy is not the main issue here. The greater problem is that it is a stock phrase that gets repeated without critical thought as to what the words imply. As language works, the stock phrase takes on its own meaning and becomes a rubric under which all “remarriage” situations fall, even though everyone is as unique as the people involved.

While “marriage, divorce, and remarriage” is awful enough, it becomes downright hideous when shortened to “MDR” (and I have heard this). Reduced to initials, it's a dry, clinical diagnosis, a three-letter abbreviation like CHF (Congestive Heart Failure), HTN (hypertension), or some dread disease. A situation designated as an “MDR” becomes a “case to be settled.”

This appraisal of “marriage, divorce, and remarriage” provides another occasion for the reminder: words **do** matter. You are talking about **people**, and not just any people, but brothers and sisters who have suffered a failed marriage but have not given up their hope of a married life. Whatever their circumstances and whatever ecclesial policies and decisions might be rendered, give them a fair, decent, and human hearing. And that starts with how you label the situation to be dealt with.

*David Levin,
Denver Ecclesia, CO*

THE SERPENT OF GENESIS

By Richard Morgan

MANY Christians believe the serpent of Genesis 3 to be either a tool of the fallen angel Satan of orthodoxy or Satan himself. Let's examine those claims using Scriptural commentary on the events in Eden.

The Nahas

First, we don't have much to go on regarding the serpent himself. We do know he was *"more crafty than any other beast of the field"* (Genesis 3:1),¹ suggesting he was one of the animals

created by God in chapter 1. Mathews writes concerning this verse, "Also the serpent is identified as an animal that God 'had made' among the beasts of the field, referring to 2:19. This dismisses any notion of a competing dualism since the animal owes its existence to God."²

That the serpent speaks is held as proof that there was something supernatural going on. Even if the serpent was an animal, the fact he talks to Eve must mean he is being controlled in some

way by Satan. However, that is an inference not supported by the text.

In fact, none of the other occurrences of the Hebrew word for serpent, *nahas*, lend any commentary on Genesis 3, much less inferring that Satan was the power behind him. However, we do come across several passages where Yahweh (rather than Satan) controls *nahas*. For instance, in Numbers 21:6 we're told, "*The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people.*" Amos 9:3 records, "*I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.*" We saw last article that Yahweh is sovereign, creating good **and** evil. In both passages, we see evidence for the fact that he kills as well as makes alive.

It is the serpent's speech, however, which is his outstanding characteristic. Eve admitted, "*The serpent deceived me*" (Genesis 3:13), and we find how deceiving his words were by examining the word "*crafty*" from verse 1. The word itself, *arum*, is neither negative nor positive. We find most occurrences in Proverbs where it is used in a positive sense to describe prudence (Proverbs 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12). Perhaps the context in Proverbs 14 is useful here, where in verse 8 we're told, "*The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way*" but in the context, we read "*There is a way that*

seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." (v. 12). Perhaps there is a hint to the experience of Eve who heard the prudent speech of the serpent. It seemed right to her to eat the fruit, but that "*way*" resulted in death.

Twice in the Psalms, we're reminded of serpent-like deceitful speech. David speaks of the wicked, "*They have venom like the venom of a serpent*" (Psalm 58:4) and "*They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's*" (Psalm 140:3). So, what can we learn from the rest of Scripture regarding the deceitful speech of the Genesis serpent?

New Testament Echoes

The best way to interpret Old Testament Scripture is to use apostolic testimony. What did Jesus and the apostles say about the events in Eden? We can turn to several passages that

allude to the serpent that are worth considering.

First, think about the curse placed on the serpent. God told him, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15). This curse, called the *protoevangelium* by Bible scholars, is prophetic of the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over sin and death. When he was crucified, the serpent bit him in the heel, but he rose from the dead and dealt the serpent a death blow to the head.

None of the other occurrences of the Hebrew word for serpent, *nahas*, lend any commentary on Genesis 3, much less inferring that Satan was the power behind him.

Remember that passage in Numbers when the *nahas* bit the children of Israel. Moses was told to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole so that anyone who looked at it would be cured of the serpents' bites. John tells us, "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up*" (John 3:14), so there's something about this incident that points forward to Christ's victory on the cross. The question is, what does the serpent represent?

When we look at the cross, we see Jesus nailed to it. We do **not** see a serpent, so there must be some way in which the serpent is incorporated into the body of Christ. Either Jesus was possessed by the serpent on the cross (an idea not taught in Scripture), or we need to find something about Jesus himself that connects to the idea of the serpent.

There's a clue in James's explanation regarding temptation and sin. He tells us, "*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*" (James 1:14). Notice no mention of the serpent here despite his presence in the very first temptation in Eden. Instead of being lured and enticed by the serpent, we are lured and enticed by our own desire. If the mainstream view of the serpent was correct, that he was a tool of Satan or Satan himself, and that this is where temptation comes from, why doesn't James mention him?

Paul, using the same word for "*desire*," exhorts us, "*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.*" (Romans 6:12). Later in Romans, he writes, "*But put on the Lord*

Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Romans 13:14). These, and other passages, confirm that we have desires built into our fleshly bodies. The Bible also says that Jesus came in the flesh and, therefore, has the same inbuilt desires. The difference with Jesus is that he overcame the luring and enticing power of the flesh by always depending on God.

Could it be, therefore, that James's summary of the way temptation works is a commentary on Genesis 3, and the luring and enticing deceitful words of the serpent are a symbol for how our natural desires and passions speak to us and entice us into sin? Furthermore, could it be that the serpent on the pole, pointing forward as it does to the cross, represents the fact that when Jesus was crucified, he put to death the desires of the body?

We've already looked a little at Paul's words in Romans, a book all about the problems of sin and evil. And yet, until the very last chapter (which we'll look at in a moment), Paul fails to mention Satan, the devil, or the serpent. That is, even though in chapter 1 he lists the sins of humankind, in chapter 2, he lists the sins of the Jews, and in chapter 3, he sums it up by saying, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Still, there is no mention of any involvement by a malevolent fallen angel.

However, Paul does allude to the events in Eden. Consider these words in chapter 7: "*But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.*"

(v. 8). The word “covetousness” is the same word used for “desire” by James. And isn’t this what the serpent did in Genesis 3, seizing an opportunity through the commandment when he said to Eve, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1) quoting the commandment in the process?

Even more so, in Romans 7:11, Paul writes, “For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” This sentence seems to be a summary of the events in Eden. Once again, we have something seizing an opportunity through the commandment, then deception, and death—just as it happened in Genesis 3. But, instead of the serpent, it is sin that seizes its opportunity.

If Paul and James believed in the malevolent fallen angel of mainstream Christianity, they would have written things much differently. Perhaps James would have written, “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by Satan in the guise of a serpent.” Paul would have said, “For the serpent, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”

False Teachers

Paul does, however, mention Satan in the very last chapter of Romans. In fact, he seems to tie Satan and the Genesis serpent together with the words “*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*” (Romans 16:20). Commentators agree “there is an obvious allusion to Gen. 3:15”³, but perhaps this proves too much for the mainstream belief in a supernatural devil.

The context is talking about false teachers:

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive (vv 17-18).

Notice further echoes with the serpent. The word “appetites” is literally “bellies,” reminding us of the serpent’s curse to slither along on his belly. He used “smooth talk” and did “deceive” the “naïve” Eve. These connections further cement the link in verse 20 to the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15.

Does that mean the false teachers Paul warns about are under the control of Satan? That is a conclusion many mainstream believers in a supernatural devil are forced to make. However, the links with Genesis 3 tell us the false teachers **are** the serpent, and Satan is also the serpent. We’ll come back to that point in a future article.

For now, consider the point that Paul is connecting false teachers with the serpent, whose main characteristic is his deceitful speech. Notice Paul says that in so doing, they “*serve their own appetites,*” thus connecting their motivation for false teaching with the desires of the bodies. Here, we have an outworking of the problem Paul identified earlier in Romans, as outlined above.

There’s one other interesting connection with the serpent in Romans. Remember, from Psalm 140:3, we looked at how

it is one of the occasions where we encounter the word *nahas*. In Romans 3:13, Paul quotes the verse with the words, “*The venom of asps is under their lips.*” This statement is about “*both Jews and Gentiles*” (v. 9), who are “*under sin.*” This moment would have been another opportunity for Paul to say, “under the influence of Satan,” but he doesn’t do that. He says they are “*under sin,*” which is a power found in our bodies according to what Paul teaches in the context, not a power that comes from the promptings of a supernatural devil. Who might the false teachers be? We know that in the first century, Judaizers followed Paul around, preaching to people that they needed to keep the Law of Moses and be circumcised. Interestingly, the precursor to the Judaizers were the Pharisees and Sadducees. Both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7) and Jesus (Matthew 12:34; 23:33) call them “*You brood of vipers!*”—another allusion to Genesis 3:15 and the seed of the serpent.

Paul is concerned with false teachers in other epistles. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 11, he uses the example of the serpent—“*But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*” (v. 3). What is the counterpart of the serpent here? The next verse says, “*For if someone comes and proclaims another*

Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted.” In other words, the serpent represents the false teachers themselves.

Conclusion

There is little, if any, Old Testament commentary on the serpent’s identity in Genesis 3. We know he was one of the animals God made, and his main characteristic is his deceitful speech.

In the New Testament, we do have echoes back to the Genesis serpent. First, we see how the serpent comes to represent the principle of sin and the desires of the flesh. Second, the serpent represents false teachers urged on by those same desires.

There is one other mention of the serpent we need to look at, in Revelation 12:9, where the dragon in the vision is called “*that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan,*” but we will save looking at the context for a future article.

Richard Morgan,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Bible, unless specifically noted.

² K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 232.

³ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 280.

GUYANA SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH GROUP INITIATIVE

By Mark Carr and Rafeek Soolaman

THE Truth in Guyana, South America, has a long, rich history, reaching back as far as the earliest days of the birth of our community in the late 1800s. There has been a continual ecclesial presence in Guyana since that time. Today, there are five active ecclesias. Three are in the capital of Georgetown, and two are approximately two hours outside of Georgetown, in the region of Berbice. One of those ecclesias in Berbice is the Kilcoy Ecclesia, and some very exciting growth has been seen lately in this tiny lampstand.

Kilcoy's personal history mirrors the ebbs and flows of the growth of the Truth in Guyana itself. In the 70s and 80s, Kilcoy was a thriving ecclesia, with many brethren and sisters actively proclaiming the gospel to the community around them. However, over time, economic pressures to find work and a rise in violence and crime, coupled with large-scale immigration of entire families to North America, reduced the membership of Kilcoy to only a handful of members. While witnessing and special lectures continued, the hands to do the work were reduced, and the responses to our proclamation work were less and less.

In 2023, an exciting new initiative was undertaken to create a community Sunday School and Youth Group based in the Kilcoy ecclesial hall. While adults might not often actively respond to the gospel's message, our experiences holding annual Vacation Bible Schools for children in the community have been highly

successful and well attended. At Kilcoy, their current Sunday School was supported by only two to three young people who are children of members of that ecclesia, with very sporadic CYC Youth Group activities. A combined effort between the brothers and sisters of Kilcoy and the support of a small but very dedicated group of brothers and sisters in North America was undertaken, and the results are stunning. To give perspective on the size of the Kilcoy ecclesia, there are effectively three active brethren (two of whom are speaking brethren) and five to six sisters (three of whom are Sunday School teachers) running these activities each week. The Sunday School has grown to as many as thirty-two children on a Sunday morning, and the CYC Youth Activities have had as many as fourteen young adults and teenagers on a Saturday afternoon. All but two of those Sunday School children are community children coming from non-Christadelphian homes. Each Sunday, the numbers are around twenty-three faithful attendees of all ages, forming three very full classes of children using every resource Kilcoy



must teach these young people. While any dip in numbers from our peak is completely fine and not unexpected, we have a very good idea of why some children do not or cannot come.

Our Youth Circle activities again have two Christadelphian children, but the rest of the group that attends are also from outside our community. Bro. John and Sis. Dinah Pillion of the Seattle ecclesia have taken in hand to have weekly CYC Zoom classes, with Bible studies geared for young people to teach them the Gospel of Christ. They have formed an incredible bond with these young adults, and in 2023, we could come to Kilcoy in person and take them on some fun excursions. We've been told the attendance is very consistent, and the mature questions coming from these young people about the Bible are very encouraging.

CBMC, while supporting the efforts through funding for Sunday School books and supplies, has consulted with the brothers and sisters there to explore further how we can assist. Many of the children who attend come from extremely poor and challenging circumstances. Many are very young

and live from one to three miles from the ecclesial hall. The parents are not against the children attending, but they will often not try to ensure they get transportation to the Hall on a Sunday morning. Some young children who would love to come must walk to get to us independently. Compounding this problem is the reality that no members of Kilcoy, until this December, had a personal vehicle to transport the children. All these factors have played into a small decline in attendance. After some thoughtful planning, an appeal to CBMC was made to allocate some funds to purchase a second-hand minibus to be used by the ecclesia to ensure any children who wish to attend can attend. Bro. Rafeek Soolaman and I, co-Links for Guyana, traveled to Berbice together in January with funds in hand to research governmental tax and legal barriers to purchasing a bus. We were also hoping to secure a quality second-hand bus for the members of the Berbice ecclesias. Finally, we could purchase a quality vehicle at a very reasonable cost to CBMC! Not only will the bus be used for Sunday School and CYC activities on weekends, but it will also strengthen the ties between



the second Berbice ecclesia in New Amsterdam, fostering joint ecclesial Memorial Services, Sunday School and many other activities.

We have not seen this level of activity and excitement in Kilcoy in a great many years, and it is an absolute delight to experience. Sometimes, it has been difficult to remain positive through the lack of response to our preaching efforts by the adult community. It has been the young, teachable minds of children that have breathed life into all our work. The brothers and sisters are building the Kilcoy ecclesia of tomorrow, teaching our children the right ways of God from the outset. If God wills and continues to bless our efforts, perhaps they will grow up to join us as brothers and sisters in our walk to God's Kingdom. We ask you to keep these brothers and sisters



in your prayers and, where possible, continue to support the important work of the growth of the gospel in these mission field areas through CBM America and CBM Canada.

*Mark Carr and
Rafeek Soolaman,
CBMC Co-Links for Guyana*

Editor's note: The Tidings would like to thank Sis. Jan Berneau (Verdugo Hills Ecclesia, CA) for her important work in supplying updates from the CBMA and CBMC.

Jan has led publicity for over two decades, keeping us all informed of activities in Latin America and the Caribbean and how we might support the work. Additionally, Sis. Jan leads the work for the Western Ecclesial Address Book, which is updated annually.

Many thanks to Sis. Jan, for her loving and diligent work!

COSTA RICA

By David Collister

COSTA Rica is a beautiful country with a warm, tropical year-round climate. The beaches, highly sought out by tourists, can be quite hot and humid, but the central valley, where many major cities are located, is about 4,000 feet (1,160 meters) above sea level. Because of this, the temperatures there are quite temperate.

I usually tell people who ask about the climate that it is like springtime year-round, with a rainy season going from about May through November, during which it rains almost every day for an hour or so. And the dry season, from December through April, which the Ticos (Costa Ricans) call their summer, warms up gradually as May approaches. However, it cools down as soon as the rain starts again in April or May. It's worth mentioning that

Costa Rica never really gets too hot. However, it can feel warm at times because of the high humidity and the intense tropical sunshine. The central valley is where the capital city of San José is located, as well as the province of Heredia, where the ecclesia is located.

Throughout any year, the Link Brother may have plans for trips to Costa Rica and always makes plans to attend the year-end Bible School and visit two ecclesias there. If you're interested in a visit, please contact me at contact@cbma.net.

*David Collister,
CBMA Link for Costa Rica*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Regarding: In Whose Name?

A simple comment on the "baptismal formula" discussion.

I was also concerned about the wording in Matthew 28:19. When I was baptizing someone coming from a Trinitarian background, it was especially troubling.

I have used the following for years: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit power of God."

*Ken Sommerville,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

Thoughts on the Way

Grace, Mercy and Peace

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
(1st Timothy 1:2; 2nd Timothy 1:2).¹

IT'S easy easy to think of these words as nothing more than a pleasant introduction to the real substance of Paul's letters. Why is this? Maybe it's because we have become so familiar with the words grace, mercy, and peace that their power and beauty are lost. Perhaps these words have been mixed into some conglomeration of "Bible words," unrelated, or so we think, to our daily lives.

If we let this happen, however, we are rushing past some of the most wonderful concepts of the gospel. Grace, mercy, and peace are too important to be dismissed so quickly. These three fundamental words describe significant aspects of salvation. Each word, when considered, is seen to be different from its companion words. And each word deserves serious thought, ongoing reflection, and, finally, our eternal thankfulness.

Paul's greeting in most of his letters is restricted to the first and last of these three words, that is: "*grace and peace*" (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Titus 1:4). But Paul does use the longer phrase, which adds "*mercy*," in the introductions to his two letters to Timothy.

These two words (grace and peace) are quite significant in themselves. "*Grace*" is a regular blessing and greeting in Greek, while "*peace*" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew greeting "*shalom*." So "*grace*" and "*peace*," when used together in a greeting, could suggest that Paul was sending messages to congregations of believers that contained **both** Greek (Gentile) and Hebrew members.

Grace (Greek "*charis*") means a gift, specifically goodness and kindness. God's grace includes all His gifts to humankind, that is, all He has made generally available to **all people**.

In the words of a familiar hymn (131):

Sun, moon, and stars Thy love
attest

In every golden ray;

Love draws the curtain of the
night,

And love brings back the day.

Thy bounty every season crowns

With all the bliss it yields;

With joyful cluster loads the vine;

With strengthening grain, the
fields.

God's grace gives us the world in which we all live and everything in it: the sun and the moon, the day and the night

following one another, the progress of the seasons, and the fruits of the earth for food, clothing, and shelter. But His mercy also brings the special gifts reserved for God's dear children. The same Hymn 131 considers these special gifts too:

Thy goodness, Lord, our souls
confess,
Thy mercy we adore—
A spring whose blessings never
fail,
A sea without a shore.
But chiefly Thy compassion, Lord,
Is in the gospel seen:
There, like a sun, thy mercy shines
Without a cloud between.

Mercy, or compassion, is the most significant part of God's grace because it has to do with eternity and, thus, with those who have the hope of eternal life. In other words, our heavenly Father shows the fullest possible measure of His grace toward us, His children, when He offers us mercy.

By God's grace, all creatures, ourselves included, have life and breath. By His grace, we all have the necessities of life. Even these gifts are not ours by any right, but only through His kindness. But while the daily blessings of God's grace can only take us so far, the greatest gift of grace is mercy and forgiveness of sins. It can provide us with the last and greatest of God's blessings: **eternal life** in His Kingdom.

As I said, the Apostle Paul added "mercy" to his greeting in his last letters. Why did he do this? Possibly because the years of his service to others, as he

grew older and increased in experience and wisdom, had deepened his appreciation of the need for "mercy" for himself and others.

Is this true, I wonder, for all of us? Do we desire mercy for others? I hope we do.

Maybe, as a result of his own profound, personal gratitude to the LORD God, Paul felt that need for mercy more strongly with each passing year. After all, as a young man, Paul had arrested, imprisoned, and sent to death many believers in Christ, and yet the Lord Jesus Christ had redeemed him, a sinner!

And Paul's own gratitude for the LORD's eternal blessing welled up within him even more as he drew closer to the end of his mortal life, where a Roman sword awaited him:

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Let's look now at each of the three distinct components of Paul's greeting in a little more detail.

We will see that, even though they are distinct, they are simultaneously related to one another. Also, the order Paul uses may explain their relationship to one another. That is,

- the first (grace) leads to the second (mercy), and

- these two, together, produce the third (peace, as we shall see) in the lives of believers (e.g., Grace + Mercy = Peace).

Grace

"*Charis*" primarily means a gift or favor and may refer to any and all of God's blessings and gifts to men. In a few passages, "*grace*" refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but that is quite a specialized meaning. The context of each passage will usually give us hints as to which "gift," among many, is intended.

Grace is the favorable attention and care the LORD God shows toward all humankind. But at the heart of "*grace*," in a special place, like the Most Holy in the Tabernacle and Temple, God's grace becomes more than the kindness of a benevolent Creator toward His creation. There, in His Most Holy Place, where Jesus, our mediator, rests in the bosom of his Father, grace is revealed, finally, in the Father's love for His dear children. Truly, to know this amazing grace is to be taken into God's special family and come within the scope of His marvelous love.

Simply holding certain beliefs, attending meetings, and being technically "in the Truth" is not enough to guarantee God's grace. We must also be moved to do something! We must, in the words of Paul, "*stir up*" (or "re-ignite") "*into flame God's gift*" (2 Timothy 1:6), putting aside the

"*spirit of fear*" (v. 7) and showing in our lives the One whom we believe and follow. Only then will the "*grace given us in Christ Jesus*" be fully "*revealed*" in ourselves (vv. 9, 10), in an overflowing abundance of life-giving mercy.

Mercy

This mercy goes beyond mere grace. Mercy has to do with the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. These blessings will be ours if we recognize our absolute need for that mercy and our utter helplessness without it.

Mercy is the overlooking of our shortcomings and failures if we, like Paul, really try to put aside the "*old self*" ("*the old man*" KJV) and embrace "*the new self*" ("*the new man*" KJV) in our lives (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Our heavenly Father is the essence of all holiness, purity, and perfection. On the other hand, and miles and miles separated from Him, we are weak, seriously

imperfect, dying creatures.

Nevertheless, we may seek the exalted fellowship of our Father. How can we, being what we are, presume to approach Him? The answer is simple. We can be confident enough to approach God **only because a man, our Lord Jesus Christ, did what no one else could do.** He opened a door previously locked to the rest of us, a door that might otherwise have remained locked forever:

We do not have a high priest who

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is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

As we presume to approach the LORD God’s throne of grace, we must also remember that it is only in being merciful toward others that we may expect to receive the mercy of God. More than once, our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us of this fact:

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7).

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14, 15).

If we stop to think about this conditional promise, it is the most extraordinary thing:

- Knowing that we must repudiate our sins and shortcomings, we start out by striving to do just that. This effort, even when undertaken with good intentions, may lead us to compare ourselves with others, if only to evaluate our own progress.

- But if we allow ourselves to spend too much time on such comparisons, then, before we realize it, we are well on the way to **judging** others.
- And any emphasis we put on the sins of others may make us less willing to forgive them!
- In such a way, our unwillingness to forgive others can jeopardize our own forgiveness, which we so desperately need!
- Finally, the attention we might give to others who are “sinners,” or perhaps “false teachers,” in our eyes, can lead to the worst of situations, more divisiveness within the brotherhood. Even though our Savior, on his last day before he died, prayed to his Father that those who believed in Him might be “one as we are one. I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.” (John 17:22- 23).

Here is an interesting dilemma for the believer:

- We must criticize ourselves honestly while refraining from criticizing others.
- We must judge ourselves while refusing to pass judgment upon others.
- And we must be uncompromising with ourselves while making many allowances for others.

Even when we try to do the right thing, we may find ourselves in need of God's mercy all the more because, in our zeal to do right, we wind up judging others harshly and then failing to forgive them.

As the old saying goes, we want mercy for ourselves but judgment for others! This situation, it seems to me, is a distinct problem for those who seek to be righteous, and it can cause us to stumble far too often!

Peace

As we have said, God's grace reaches its climax in the mercy shown toward His beloved children, and His mercy is fully shown in the forgiveness of sins, resurrection, and eternal life. The knowledge of these two blessings, grace in general for all and mercy in particular for us who believe, leads us, as believers, to the most profound peace imaginable.

This **peace** is an impregnable mental shield against fear and doubt. The peace of the New Testament is peace of mind: a feeling of unity and harmony. This peace is not based on the absence of conflict or problems in our lives. Instead, it is **peace with God**, regardless of outward situation. It is not a **worldly** peace but a **divine** peace:

*Since we have been justified through faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
(Romans 5:1).

To have **peace** with God makes all other circumstances of life unimportant. This peace, like the Hebrew word "*shalom*," suggests unity or oneness through a

single-minded loving worship of the one God:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37, 39).

Just before his suffering on the cross, Jesus explained the difference between a worldly peace and a spiritual peace:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.
(John 14:27).

And the Apostle Paul adds this advice:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends [passes] all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6, 7).

It is true the peace which the Lord Jesus bestowed upon his disciples was a peace bought at an enormous price, that is, "*the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*" (1 Peter 1:19). However, his blood, which Jesus brought into the presence of Almighty God, was the means of destroying "*the dividing wall of hostility,*" thus creating for those in Christ a unity between God and man, and also a unity between Jews ("*who were near*") and Gentiles ("*who were far away*"). (Ephesians 2:14-16).



In this world, any peace is temporary. Like the water from the well of Samaria, a man may drink of it and yet thirst again. But a spiritual peace, a peace with God, truly quenches the thirsty soul of the believer (John 4:13-15), with the water of life which never fails. It is "a spring whose blessings never fail, a sea without a shore."

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you (Isa 26:3).

No matter the outward circumstances of an individual, if they have what the prophet calls a "perfect peace," then their inner peace will override whatever turmoil surrounds them.

At this point, I'd like to tell you a short story.

There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, with peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell, and lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This scene did not

look peaceful at all. But when the king looked carefully, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush, a mother bird had built her nest. There, amid the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird in her nest— perfect peace.

Which picture won the prize? The king chose the second picture because, he explained, "Peace is not found in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. True peace is found in all those things when one can still be calm in their own heart. **That is the real meaning of peace.**"

We have considered God's grace by which we may have life each day and God's mercy by which we may have eternal life. Now, we can face the future and anything it may bring. We cannot know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future!

The Apostle Paul, chained and in prison because of the gospel he preached, told the Philippians he was free from all anxiety and worry.

He also told them they could be at peace in the same way if only they remembered, believed, and prayed. He assured them that in doing so,

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7).

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1 All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version, unless specifically noted.

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is published monthly, except bimonthly in July-August, by The **Christadelphian Tidings**,

567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941.

FIRST CLASS POSTAGE PAID at Simi Valley, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Christadelphian Tidings, 567 Astorian Dr., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Committee: Alan Markwith (Chairman), John Bilello, Peter Bilello, Linda Beckerson, Nancy Brinkerhoff, Shawn Moynihan, Steve Davis, Jeff Gelineau and William Link.

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moms initiative

The **Moms Survey** was completed February 15, 2024.

Some of the interesting findings were:

86%

of moms felt their
children were
growing spiritually

59%

said they personally
were growing
spiritually

41%

of moms don't
have an older
sister mentor

79%

said they believe their
marriage is successful and
thriving

40%

of moms are full-
time homemakers

The May issue will provide a full report on this important survey, and
identify useful resources that are being planned for moms.

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