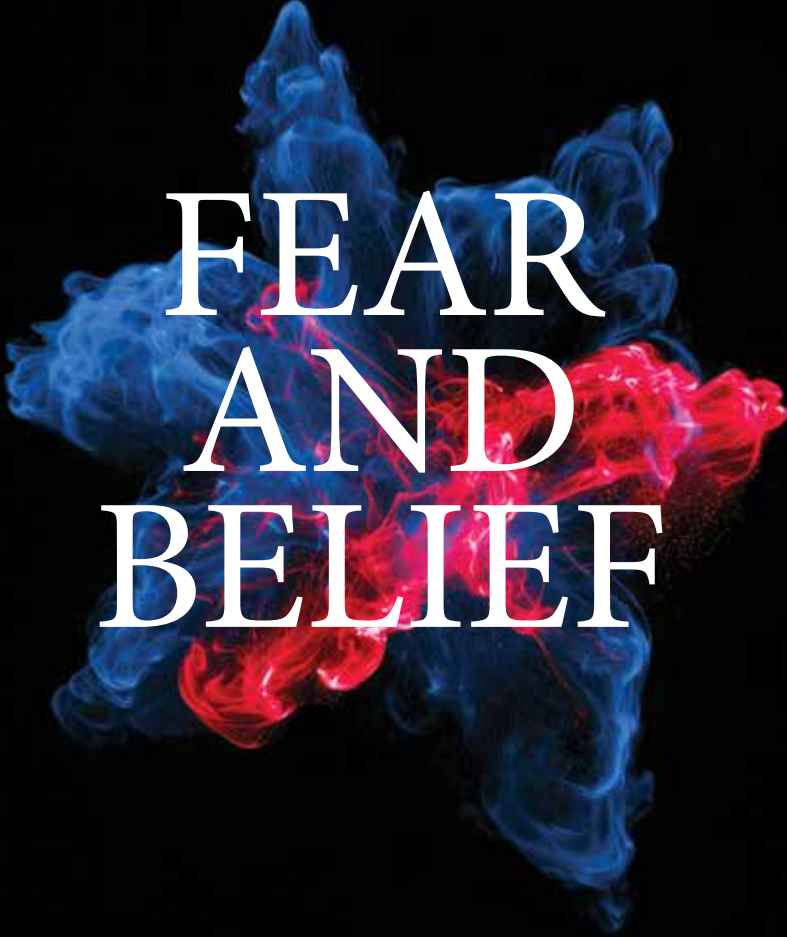


TIDINGS

Volume 89, Number 9, October, 2026

An abstract graphic consisting of swirling, smoke-like or ink-like patterns in vibrant blue and red colors, set against a solid black background. The patterns are fluid and organic, with the blue and red colors intermingling and creating a sense of movement and depth.

FEAR AND BELIEF

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 89, Number 9 / October, 2026



EDITORIAL

Fear and Belief, Jason Hensley2

LIFE APPLICATION

Building Relationships God’s Way (4), David Fraser6
Nassib’s Story, Abigail Shankour14

EXHORTATION AND CONSOLATION

See the Salvation, Jochem Hale18

BACK TO THE ORIGINAL

Let Us Learn (2), Martha Monahan22

STUFF THAT WORKS

Baraka Bible School, Sela Msafiri26

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Creation Around Us, Annabelle Guscott32

BIBLE STUDIES

The Chapters That Changed My Life (7), Ben Brinkerhoff36
Exploring David’s Census (2), Brandon Entwistle40
Judas and Peter, Geoff Henstock48

PREACHING AND TEACHING

Held in His Hands, Anna Tikvah54
A Visit to Peru, Jim and Jean Hunter60
Growing Together through Joy and Sorrow,
Kevin and Rebekah Hunter62
Truth Corps, by Members of the team64

THOUGHTS ON THE WAY

I am John the Baptist (2), George Booker66



FEAR AND BELIEF

WHEN was the last time you felt fear?

I'm not trying to bring up any bad memories here, nor do I mean paralyzing, bone-chilling fear. I simply mean: when did you last feel **any** fear? I ask the question because I think this probably happens more often than we often recognize. For me, the last time I felt fear was probably within the last hour or two. That doesn't mean I embraced the fear and believed it represented reality; rather, that fear is just a regular part of our lives.

But have you thought about the time when it won't be? I'm sure you have. Yet maybe the better question is: how **often** do we think about the time when it won't be a regular part of life? Since the fall, God has been reforming creation—with the goal of returning everything to Eden once more: returning everything back to a time of no fear. Such is the description of the Kingdom of God:

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and

they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:3-4).¹

And **no one** shall make them afraid. The Kingdom is a time of rest—a time not just when we physically rest, but a time in which our troubles and anxieties are gone. Thus, Revelation creates a picture in which all things are made new: sorrow, death, pain—all of those things that we fear—are gone (Revelation 21:4-5).

But that isn't just something for which we hope today. Remember how the Lord constantly taught that “*The kingdom of God is at hand.*” (Mark 1:14-15)?

We know the Kingdom didn't literally come at any point near that time; rather, Christ himself was a representation of the Kingdom. Being with him was like being in the Kingdom. He could heal, he could solve hunger issues, and he could provide that peace (cp. Luke 11:20; 17:20-21).

In a sense, we too can be a representation of this Kingdom. We can't go around and raise the dead; we can't create food for the hungry to eat, but when it comes to fear, perhaps we can show just a glimpse of that Kingdom by recognizing the fear we feel and choosing instead to embrace belief.

What Might Happen

But how do we do that?

Consider your own fear: why are you often afraid? For me, I'm afraid because of what I think might actually happen. I'm afraid of how someone might react, that I might get hurt, that my car might break down, or that things won't go the way that I want them to. I'm afraid that I'll say the wrong thing, or that something unexpected might take place. Yet, Scripture is very clear about anxiety. It's vain (Psalm 127:2), and it weighs us down (Proverbs 12:25). Even more, Christ very plainly says that it shouldn't be part of our lives:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:25-31).

These verses really challenge me—because like every other human, I get anxious. Even more, this particular set of verses isn't even initially all that comforting. Do you see why? Jesus tells us not to worry, because God takes care of the birds and the grass. Yet, birds die all of the time. Little children trample grass. Though Jesus makes it clear that we shouldn't worry, it feels as though his reassurance isn't all that reassuring.

That isn't the fault of Scripture, though. I think that just means that we might be misunderstanding the text. Indeed, Jesus isn't telling us that we won't die. Our lives **will** be like the lives of the birds. And, just as God feeds them, God will feed us. So what do we make of times, then, when God **doesn't** feed us? Take a look at the parallel account in Luke—Jesus adds another section about birds: *“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”* (Luke 12:6-7).

This isn't just about God taking care of the birds. Instead, I think it shows Jesus's underlying message. Even these silly little birds **are important** to God. He knows each of them! And, in the same way, He knows every hair on your head!

Just sit with that for a little bit. Do you ever stop to think about the fact that the Creator of everything knows you and thinks that you matter? It's overwhelming.

But even more, in that light, what did Jesus mean when he spoke about God feeding the birds?

He meant that when God **doesn't** feed the birds, it is because He specifically **chose** not to feed the birds. It isn't as if God forgot. But so often we think that way! We think that God might forget to take care of us—or that something might happen to us that God wouldn't want to happen.

Christ's answer to worry is to remember that God cares about you and is organizing and shaping everything in your life. As Paul wrote, *“All things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28). That's not just a nice verse—that's a promise.

Asking

Later, the Apostle Paul adds to that promise when talking about worry. We recognize that God knows everything that is happening, and even more beautifully, He actually wants our input! *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6-7). When we pray for a different way, we are once again implicitly acknowledging that everything happens according to God's plan. Prayer reminds us of who is making the decisions. And thus, if the thing we worried about happens, and while we may be terrified of the reality that confronts us, we can also find peace in knowing that, despite our feelings, God is working all things for good.

Isn't that what Christ himself did? He certainly felt fear in the garden; yet rather than being crippled by that

fear, he prayed. He didn't just pray for comfort; he prayed for a different way. He knew that he mattered to God. He knew that God could change reality. And he also knew that when God said "no" to his request for a change, it didn't mean that God hadn't answered his prayer—it meant that God was working out all things for good.

Introduction to This Issue

In other words, fear and anxiety are real feelings. They often arise from difficult circumstances or experiences. And the next step is to remember who God is. He is the one who holds all things in His hands; He even knows all the sparrows. And the One who sustains everything has a plan for you and is, in fact, working that plan out right now. The plan might be painful. Sometimes (oftentimes?) we might not understand what's happening or why. But we can trust that God is working and that the end result of that work is good. Belief, therefore, in God's work is how we can show the Kingdom of God today—because the peace that comes from this is peace that can really only come from God.

In this issue of the magazine, we'll be thinking about how God works. In the Life Application section, David Fraser will finish his series on relationships, and Abigail Shankour will tell the story of how her dad came to understand the Truth and held on to hope and peace. For the exhortation, Jochem Hale will describe God's salvation even through circumstances that at first didn't look like salvation—again, a reminder that God is bigger and is working.

In Back to the Original, Martha Monahan returns to Psalm 23 and considers how the psalm describes dwelling with God today. For Stuff that Works, Sela Msafiri writes about Baraka Bible School and what it meant for the attendees. For our First Principles article, Annabelle Guscott describes creation and how it can help us come closer to God. For our Bible Studies, Ben Brinkerhoff continues his series on Romans, looking at "*sin in the flesh*," Geoff Henstock compares Judas and Peter, and Brandon Entwistle finishes his look at David's census.

Finally, we continue our look at *Held in His Hands*, Anna Tikvah's latest book, present numerous preaching updates, and end with George Booker's description of John the Baptist's mission.

May all these things come together to build up your belief and, in doing so, help you to find peace in the God who knows all the sparrows—and most of all, loves you.

Jason Hensley

¹ All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *English Standard Version*.

P A R T 4

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS GOD'S WAY

By David Fraser
Pinetown Ecclesia, South Africa



The Family Relationship:
The Divine School of Character

*“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children,
and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way,
when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)¹*

BEFORE there was an ecclesia, there was a family. Before there was a nation of Israel, there were the households of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The family is God’s first and most fundamental human institution—the setting where we first learn about relationships, authority, love, and Him. Across this series, we have traced the golden threads of divine relationship principles: our relationship with God, the foundation of all else; the ecclesial brotherhood, the spiritual family baptism brings us into; and the male-female relationship, the covenant of marriage that reflects Christ and the ecclesia. Now we turn to the family itself, where these principles find their most daily, practical use.

The family is uniquely placed to shape character. Here, children first meet authority, learn respect and obedience, and develop the relational skills life will demand. Here too, more than anywhere, faith passes from one generation to the next. Little wonder Scripture gives such attention to family relationships.

The True Inheritance: More Than Material Wealth

In the ancient world, inheritance meant far more than the transfer of property. When a father handed down his inheritance, he transmitted the family name, reputation, trade, connections, and above all, the family faith. An inheritance was a legacy: everything gathered across generations that would

shape the identity and future of those who followed.

Scripture carries this fuller sense when it declares, *“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward.”* (Psalm 127:3). The Hebrew for “heritage” is *nachalah*—the word used for Israel’s inheritance of the Promised Land. Children are more than a biological blessing; they are a sacred trust, an inheritance from God to be stewarded and handed on.

This truth transforms how we see our roles. Parents are stewards entrusted with a divine inheritance that reaches back through the ages and forward to generations yet unborn. Children are heirs being prepared to guard and hand down this sacred legacy of faith.

Consider the chain of transmission in 2 Timothy 1:5: *“When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”* From Lois to Eunice to Timothy—three generations linked by a shared faith. **This** is God’s design for the family.

The Threefold Cord in Family Life

The threefold cord that strengthens every relationship applies with full force to family life. Between husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, God’s presence, as the third strand, provides the stability that holds a family together through its stresses.

Without God at the center, family relationships slide into competing self-interest—parents pursuing their ambitions, children their desires, siblings their own advantage. The household becomes a collection of individuals sharing space rather than a family sharing life. Like a two-strand rope, such a family unravels under pressure, each member turning about their own axis until the bonds give way. But when God is woven in as the essential third strand, everything changes. Shared submission to His authority creates common ground between generations whose views naturally differ. His Word settles disputes over values and priorities; His love models the self-sacrifice that lets family members put others first.

The result is the binding stability we have traced throughout this series: the resistance to unraveling provided by the third strand. Reinforced by the divine presence, family bonds hold even when individual members fail. The triangle of God, parent, and child forms a self-reinforcing structure that grows stronger under pressure, not weaker.

The Divine Pattern in Family Relationships

The pattern of mental, moral, and physical development that has guided our study applies just as powerfully here. Each member of the family has a part to play, and each part follows this progression.

Parents begin with **mental** instruction—teaching children God’s ways and the principles of righteous living—which ripens into **moral** conviction in the heart—a settled,

inward commitment to what is right even when mom and dad are not watching. Finally, the **physical** expression appears in character and conduct that reflect godly teaching. The **fruit** is the next generation of believers, raised to love the Lord and walk in His ways.

This is exactly what God commanded Israel: “*You shall teach them diligently to your children.*” (Deuteronomy 6:7). The Hebrew for “*teach diligently*” (*shanan*) means to sharpen or whet, like honing a blade. Parents must work carefully and persistently at instruction, shaping their children’s minds with divine truth until it cuts through to the heart.

Mental → Moral → Physical → Fruit

This is God’s pattern for raising children who love the Lord.

Husbands and Wives: The Foundation of the Home

In any home, the marriage relationship is the bedrock on which the other family relationships are built. When husband and wife are united in purpose and rightly ordered in their roles, the whole household benefits; when that foundation is weak, everything built on it suffers. Our third article explored these roles in depth; here we simply recall them.

The Husband’s Calling

Scripture gives the husband a leadership role—a place of responsibility, not privilege, defined by the charge to love his wife “*as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.*” (Ephesians 5:25). This is self-sacrificing love that puts her needs above his comfort, seeks her growth in God, and makes a home where she can flourish. A husband who loves like this makes his leadership a

joy to follow because it so plainly serves for the good of his wife.

The Wife's Calling

The wife is called to be *"a helper comparable to him"* (Genesis 2:18): a complement and a partner, his equal in worth. The Hebrew word *ezer*, *"helper"*, is used of God Himself: *"The God of my father was my help."* (Exodus 18:4)—a word fit for the Almighty cannot mean an inferior. And *kenegdo*, *"comparable to him,"* occurs only twice in all of Scripture, here and three verses later, where Adam names the animals and finds no counterpart among them (Genesis 2:18, 20). It describes one who stands opposite and corresponds, a matching counterpart. Her submission *"as to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:22) is a willing respect honoring both his role and the God who established it. Proverbs 31 paints her portrait: industrious, wise, compassionate, and faithful, building her home so that *"the heart of her husband safely trusts her."* (Proverbs 31:11). This is a woman who flourishes in her role. When both fulfill their callings, the children see daily what a godly relationship looks like.

Heirs Together

Peter adds a word that protects the whole arrangement. Husbands are to dwell with their wives *"with understanding, giving honor to the wife... and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."* (1 Peter 3:7). *"Heirs together:"* the Greek *synkleronomoi* sets husband and wife side by side in a shared inheritance. Whatever their roles in the home, they are equals before the throne.

Parents and Children: The Sacred Trust

Children, we have seen, are a heritage from the LORD (Psalm 127:3). They are gifts entrusted to parents by God Himself, and with the gift comes a weighty responsibility: to raise these precious lives in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Parents' Responsibility

Scripture sets out the parents' sacred duties with clarity:

To love them. Titus 2:4 instructs older women to *"admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children."* This is more than affection; it is committed care that perseveres through difficulty and delights in the child's flourishing.

To instruct them in God's Word. *"You shall teach them diligently to your children."* (Deuteronomy 6:7); *"The father shall make known Your truth to the children."* (Isaiah 38:19). This is not handed off to the ecclesia or the Sunday School; it is the primary work of parents in the daily rhythms of home.

To train them for godly living. *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). Training is instruction and practice together—not words only, but consistent example.

To correct them when needed. *"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly."* (Proverbs 13:24).

Discipline in love, never anger; measured, never excessive—an expression of care: “*For whom the LORD loves He chastens.*” (Hebrews 12:6). Parents who never correct their children fail them grievously.

To avoid provoking them to wrath. “*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*” (Ephesians 6:4). Harsh, unreasonable, or inconsistent parenting breeds resentment; godly parenting joins firmness with tenderness and an authority a child can approach.

To provide for them. “*But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*” (1 Timothy 5:8). Provision is more than material; it includes emotional support, time, attention, and presence.

The Children’s Responsibility

Children, too, carry responsibilities within the family:

To honor their parents. “*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land.*” (Exodus 20:12). This is the fifth commandment, and “*the first commandment with promise*” (Ephesians 6:2). The Hebrew for “honor” (*kabad*) carries the sense of weight—treating parents as significant, worthy of respect.

To obey their parents. “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*” (Ephesians 6:1). In childhood and youth, obedience is the chief expression of honor, bounded “*in the Lord*”: should parents command something plainly contrary to God’s Word, they forfeit the claim to obedience in that matter alone—a rare exception, not a convenient loophole.



To attend to parental teaching.

"My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck." (Proverbs 1:8-9). Children who receive their parents' instruction with humility gain wisdom that adorns their whole lives.

To care for aging parents. *"But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God."* (1 Timothy 5:4). The child once nurtured in infancy has a duty to nurture in return when parents grow old: a cycle of care completed, the sacred duty of godly children.

The Blessing of Generations

Scripture prizes the multi-generational family: *"Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father."* (Proverbs 17:6). Grandparents hold a special place in God's design: repositories of wisdom, living links to the past, witnesses to God's faithfulness across the decades. Their experience is priceless.

The elderly deserve particular honor: *"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God."* (Leviticus 19:32). This reverence for age has all but vanished from modern culture, yet remains God's requirement. Wisdom gathered over years of walking with God cannot be replaced by youthful energy, though the two are richly complementary.

When the generations connect—grandparents sharing faith with grandchildren, the middle-aged honoring aging parents while guiding growing children—something beautiful appears. The faith that sustained one generation passes to the next, growing richer with each handing-on: *"One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts."* (Psalm 145:4).

Family: A School for Understanding God

Family relationships serve a great purpose beyond their immediate benefits: they teach us about God. The vocabulary of family—Father, children, brothers and sisters, inheritance—runs all through Scripture's description of our relationship with the divine.

When we feel a father's loving discipline, we grasp why God chastens His children: *"For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."* (Hebrews 12:6). When we rest in a mother's comfort, we see how God consoles us: *"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you."* (Isaiah 66:13). And watching parents sacrifice for their children, we glimpse the Father's gift of His Son.

This is why healthy family relationships matter so much. They shape our capacity to know and relate to God. A child who experiences consistent, loving authority learns to trust divine authority; a child who knows a parent's forgiveness more readily grasps God's. The family becomes a school of faith, preparing hearts for the gospel's greater truths.



Building Strong Families

How, in practice, do we build the kind of family Scripture envisions? A few disciplines prove essential:

Establish daily Bible reading.

Nothing shapes a family's spiritual culture more than consistent time together in Scripture. Around the breakfast table or before bed, make God's Word a daily presence in your home. Aim for quality over quantity—a few verses truly understood beat three chapters rushed through to “do the readings.”

Pray together regularly. Families that pray together own their shared dependence on God and welcome His presence into their days. Children who hear their parents

pray learn to pray themselves; they watch mom and dad bow to the greater authority of God.

Prioritize ecclesial involvement.

Attend meetings faithfully as a family. Let children see that gathering with God's people takes priority over competing activities in an age that fills Sundays with everything else. Habits formed in childhood often become norms they later hold dear.

Create space for conversation.

Turn off the screens. Eat meals together. Talk about faith naturally, as Deuteronomy 6 envisions—when you sit, when you walk, when you lie down, when you rise up. Let spiritual conversation be woven into the fabric of ordinary life.

Model what you teach. Children learn more from watching than from being told. Let them see you reading Scripture, praying, serving others, handling conflict graciously, repenting when you fail. Your example speaks louder than your words—they will become what you are.

Maintain the threefold cord. Keep God at the center of your family. When He is the common reference point, disagreements find resolution; when His authority is honored, submission becomes worship rather than a burden; and in a home filled with His love, human love flourishes.

The Family's Eternal Significance

We close this series where we began—with God. Every relationship we have examined finds its source and model in Him. The divine relationship establishes our identity as His children. The ecclesial brotherhood extends that family across time and space. The male-female relationship pictures Christ and his bride. And the human family is the setting in which all these truths are first learned and daily practiced.

We have set out high, lofty ideals we may never fully reach. But, like Paul, God's love compels us past our failings toward higher, nobler things—without God's high standards we risk having none at all:

But I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me... forgetting

those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14).

The family that keeps God at its center, follows His pattern of mental, moral, and physical development, and acknowledges His authority as the ground on which unity is built will bear fruit that lasts. Not perfect, but growing, pressing on together toward the day when the family of God is complete, gathered around His throne, every relationship perfected in His presence.

Until that day, may we build all our relationships walking together in agreement, united by submission to His authority. Let us follow the pattern He has set: **mental** understanding deepening into **moral** commitment, expressed in **physical** action, bearing **fruit** to His glory.

And may the threefold cord—ourselves, our loved ones, and our God—never be broken.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25).

David Fraser,
Pinetown Ecclesia, South Africa

¹ All Bible references are from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

NASSIB'S STORY

*By Abigail Shankour
Verdugo Hills Ecclesia, CA*



You may recall that we printed a brief memorial for Brother Nassib Shankour shortly after he fell asleep in August 2024. Knowing him and his family, I felt that we could benefit from hearing his whole story. Nassib's daughter, Sister Abigail Shankour, agreed to write it up and we are happy to share it with you.

Jason Hensley

MY dad, Bro. Nassib Shankour, fell asleep in Christ on June 25, 2024. He was a loving father and a pillar who helped shape my faith. His walk of faith not only guided me but also helped many others find the truth. My dad was born in Damascus, the very city where the Apostle Paul was converted.

My dad's native language was Arabic, and he devoted himself to helping other Arabic speakers seek the truth. I have vivid memories of him waking up early each morning before dropping me off at the Christadelphian Heritage School, reading the Bible, and hosting Zoom classes with students from Europe and the Middle East.

He was deeply passionate about preaching. He often told my mom and me that even a few words could be enough to plant a seed of faith in someone's heart.

In his first exhortation (given just a few years ago), he quoted Matthew 28:19-20: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded*

you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

We have been called to share our hope.

I hope that by sharing my dad's faith journey, it will inspire and encourage others in their walk toward the Kingdom. Many people search long and hard for the truth, and those of us who have grown up in the truth should never take it for granted. I also pray that anyone who has not yet been baptized may be encouraged by the story of someone who longed for the truth and found it.

My Dad's Faith Journey

My dad was a deeply religious person at heart. While living in Damascus, he once aspired to become a priest and even studied at a monastery.

However, during his time there, he realized that what was being taught did not align with the Bible. This deeply troubled him, and he left, eventually moving to America.

In America, he continued searching for the truth. He visited many different churches, going from one to another each Sunday, but none of them offered what he was seeking. Disappointed, he decided to study the Bible on his own.



He read it from Genesis to Revelation repeatedly, striving to understand it. Through this, he became firmly convinced of one thing: that there is one God, and Jesus is His Son.

This continued until he met someone.

He had a neighbor, a young woman he liked (my mom). He would often see her returning home from meetings or Bible classes. One day, he gathered the courage to ask her out. She kindly declined, explaining that she was dating with the intention of marriage and wanted to marry within her faith and raise her children in it.

This intrigued my dad, and he asked about her beliefs. She told him she was raised in the Christadelphian faith. Though she didn't elaborate further at the time, his curiosity was sparked.

Eventually, she agreed to go out with him on one condition: their first date would be at a Sunday meeting. Intrigued, he accepted. Although my mom was part of the LA Hispanic Ecclesia, she took him to the Reseda Ecclesia for that first date.

During the service, when the bread and wine were passed, my dad was confused as to why it was not offered to him. Later, my mom explained that baptism requires a conscious decision and an understanding of God's Word.

This led him to ask the most important question: "What do you believe?"

My mom answered, "We believe in one God, and that Jesus Christ is His Son."

Those words settled it for him.

He asked how he could become part of this truth, and my mom directed him to the Verdugo Hills Ecclesia. There, he studied for baptism under Bro. Bob Lloyd, Bro. Peter Wilson, Bro. Dennis Paggi, and Bro. David Collister. In time, he was baptized, and later he and my mom were married.

A year later, I was born and raised in the Christadelphian faith. I feel incredibly blessed to have grown up in the Truth.

Then, with the encouragement of my mom and Bro. Steve Cox, my dad, felt the call to make a difference in the lives of others. He began hosting Zoom classes for Arabic speakers who were

interested in learning the truth. He continued this work faithfully until he fell asleep in Christ.

He loved his students deeply. I remember nights when we stayed awake until 3 am to watch several of them be baptized.

One of my dad's favorite hymns, No. 338 from the green hymn book, was played at his memorial. It reflects John 13:34-35: *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

My dad truly strove to live by these words.

I had the honor of being baptized by my dad in 2022. That same year, he felt confident enough in his English to give his first exhortation, where he shared his personal testimony.

In April 2024, my beloved dad was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He fell asleep in Christ just two months later.

One memory that stays with me from that difficult time was before he had a high-risk procedure that required heavy anesthesia. The doctor warned that he might not survive. My mom and I were crying, but he looked at us and said, "Why are you crying? If I open my eyes and see you, I will be happy. Or if I open my eyes and see my Lord Jesus Christ, I will be so happy."

In his first exhortation, he also quoted:

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope

the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8 KJV).

I thought this would be a beautiful way to end his story.

May our Lord come quickly.

Abigail Shankour,
Verdugo Hills Ecclesia, CA



Bro. Nassib

EXHORTATION AND CONSOLATION

SEE THE SALVATION

*By Jochem Hale
Cambridge Ecclesia, ON*



ONE could argue that Matthew 27 is one of the saddest parts of the Bible. So much happens in that chapter that, on its own, would be very sad. In this chapter, it just keeps coming, and most of it happens to Jesus, a man whom we love.

The Jewish rulers are planning to put Jesus to death. Judas is overcome by his decision to betray Jesus. Pilate is manipulated and backed into a corner to allow Jesus to be killed. Jesus is beaten and scourged. He is mocked, abused, and killed, witnessed by people, many of whom were women, who loved him.

And to add insult to all that injury, he is mocked by being dressed up like a pretend king. In John 19, we see Jesus fully dressed in his crown and robe, and we know from Matthew that he was also given a reed as a staff. “*Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.*” And then the record says, “*Behold, the Man!*” (John 19:5). We’re literally told to look at Jesus.

All of that is true and happened, but is that what God wants us to see? Does God want us to see the sadness, the pain, and the humility by having Jesus mocked with his crown, his robe, and his reed? Maybe. Or was God showing us something else? Something that He was accomplishing at this time; something He has been doing all along?

If we consider the items given to Jesus and how they were used in the Old Testament, we can see they share a common theme—one that mirrors exactly what God did when His Son died on the cross. God brought salvation. He did that in the days of old, He did that in the day Christ died, and

He will do it again. In fact, many are destined to obtain salvation.

But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10).¹

So what were these items? In Matthew 27:27-29, we can see them all.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

First, the robe. A colorful robe. What does that remind you of? In Genesis 37, we read of a man who was given a colorful robe. Joseph’s father gave him this robe because he loved his son. His brothers did not love him. He was sold for money by his own brothers. What did God accomplish through all this, though?

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant

in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. (Genesis 45:5-7).

And again, *“As for you, you meant evil against me, [but] God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”* (Genesis 50:20). God brought salvation to many people through this event.

The next item they gave to Jesus was a crown. But it was a crown of thorny branches, twisted and woven together to form a tight circle. On that very same mountain, another father took his son and was willing to slay him. Abraham was asked to go up the mountain and kill the promised son, who carried the wood on his back as he was led to the place where he was to be killed.

Isaac was not to be sacrificed, of course. But an animal, provided by God, was offered up so that the son might live. This animal, a ram, was caught in the thicket (Genesis 22:13). The root word for thicket means to entwine, fold together, or wrap.

In so many ways, this points forward to what our Father did through His Son. And the crown of thorns, twisted together, that was placed on Jesus's head reminds us not only that Isaac's life was saved, but that many, many more were saved by God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

And finally, the reed given to Jesus. Who is the man who comes to mind when we think of reeds? Moses's life almost starts among the reeds. After hiding her son for three months, Jochebed places the baby boy in a basket, covers it with tar and pitch, and sets it among the reeds (Exodus 2:2-3). The life of this baby boy, Moses, changes dramatically from this point and continues to change as he grows older. Eventually, he was the one to lead the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and toward the promised land. But they didn't head straight for the land of Canaan, the land God had promised. God led them by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea (Exodus



Life isn't easy. Life is very hard at times. And sometimes we cry out to God and say, Why? Why God, why? Why this pain? Why this heartache? Why this suffering? God isn't adding insult to injury in our lives; He is actively working to bring salvation.

13:18). The interesting thing about the word "Red" is that it is the exact word used for reeds in Exodus 2:3, 5, where Moses was placed and found among the reeds. It is only translated "red" when it is in combination with the word "sea." So, really, instead of the Red Sea, it should be called the Sea of Reeds.

Whatever this body of water should be called, when standing at the banks of this sea, the Israelites were terrified. They were stuck between the water and a fast-approaching Egyptian army. They cried out to God, and they turned on Moses, asking him why he brought them out here in the wilderness to die. At least they were alive in Egypt. Moses's response shows us exactly what God accomplished through this man, taken from the reeds, standing by the Sea of Reeds. *"But Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.'"* (Exodus 14:13).

God brought salvation. So was it an insult added to injury when Jesus was dressed up with these items, like a pretend king? Or was it God showing that, once again, He was doing what He

intended from the very beginning? To bring salvation, so that many people might be saved.

What is our perspective? Life isn't easy. Life is very hard at times. And sometimes we cry out to God and say, Why? Why God, why? Why this pain? Why this heartache? Why this suffering? And sometimes we can be consumed by it and fail to see that God is working in our lives to bring salvation to us and those around us through our trials. God isn't adding insult to injury in our lives; He is actively working to bring salvation. *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28).

Thanks be to God that we have time to stand still, to remember the sacrifice, to see the salvation. To eat bread, and drink wine, and know that in Christ a great many people are saved.

Jochem Hale,
Cambridge Ecclesia, ON

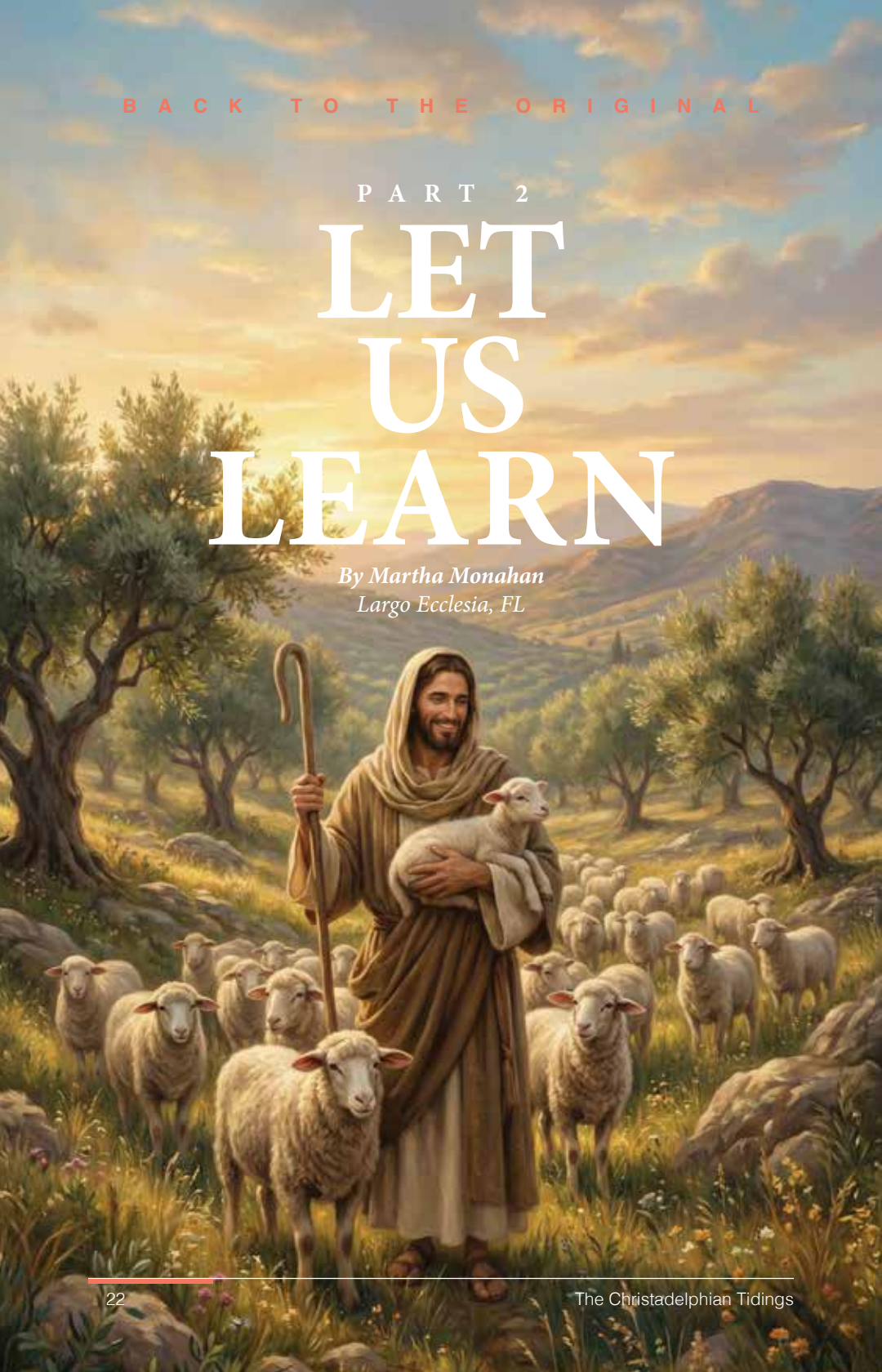
¹ All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New American Standard Bible* 1995.

BACK TO THE ORIGINAL

PART 2

LET US LEARN

*By Martha Monahan
Largo Ecclesia, FL*



*“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever,” or
“and my dwelling will be in the house of the LORD for a length of days”
(Psalm 23:6).¹*

WE are starting again with words we know well. The English wording is so familiar that translators face a problem. If they change the translation too much from what people know and have accepted, then readers will just choose to purchase a version they already recognize. Yet we desire to truly know the Scriptures, and we recognize they weren't originally recorded for us in English. We are not just looking for familiarity; we are seeking to know God so that He might reveal Himself to us more completely through His Word. By tracing the original words behind “*forever*,” we will discover a beautiful reality: David was not just looking toward a distant eternity, but rejoicing that he could dwell in God's presence right now—amazed that the eternal God invites us into His permanent household even for the temporary length of our days.

The words we will look closely at right now are the Hebrew ones typically translated in our English Bibles as “*forever*.” In Hebrew, there are several words or sets of words that are translated into English as “*forever*.” In Genesis 3:22, God is speaking of the possibility that the man may eat of the tree of life and live forever (*’olam*). When talking with Abram in Genesis 13:15, God says that he would give Abram all that land that he could see to him and to his seed forever (*’ad-olam*). There is a word that can be translated as “until” added before *olam* in this passage, so the Hebrew is transliterated *’ad -olam*. Interestingly,

in the Song of Moses, another form appears, sometimes translated as “*forever and ever*” (*le’olam va’ed*). Here, the preposition *’ad/ed* (until/to) follows *le’olam*, joined by the conjunction *v’* (and). Literally rendered, it might look like “to forever and until.”

In Psalm 23, we do not have any of these options. Instead, we have Hebrew words that could be translated literally as “for a length of days” (*le’orech yamim*). The same or similar phrase appears in Deuteronomy 30:20, Job 12:12, and Psalm 91:16, and isn't typically translated as “forever” in any of these. In Psalm 21:4, another Psalm of David concerning the King, we have a combination of both expressions: “*length of days for ever and ever*” (ESV; *orech yamim ’olam va’ed*). This would imply that they can add meaning to each other and are not just interchangeable idioms of the same thing. While I cannot definitively explain why translators chose to render the “length of days” expression as “forever” in Psalm 23:6, it does seem to misrepresent the text. We look at this not to disparage the translators—I have spent most of my life reading the Bible in English and am truly thankful for the work that was done so I could read it. We look at it to understand that the hope of the inspired Psalmist in this verse is to dwell in the house of the LORD for the **length of his days**, not “forever.” We can see this idea in another Psalm of David, “*That I may dwell in the House of the LORD all the days of my life*.” (Psalm 27:4). I remember the

specific moment in an exhortation when I realized that I could dwell in the house of the LORD **now**, that this was not **just** a hope for the Kingdom age, but for me, personally, now. I am still in awe of this gift God offers.

Recognizing that David's horizon in Psalm 23 was a lifetime (length of days) rather than endless eternity allows us to look with fresh eyes at another familiar poem of David's: Psalm 15. Like Psalm 23, this poem explores what it means to live in God's presence, but it introduces a fascinating linguistic puzzle. David asks, "*Yahweh, who will sojourn (yagur) in Your tent? Who will settle (yishkon) in the mountain of your Holiness? The one walking uprightly and working righteousness and speaking truth; in his heart... the one doing these will not be shaken forever.*" (vv. 1-2, 5). This is deeply puzzling, because sojourning, settling, and tents all have a temporary nomadic nature, though the temporary can become long-term. For example, Abraham went to sojourn (*lagur*; same root as *yagur*) in Egypt in Genesis 12:10, and Elimelech went to sojourn (*lagur*) in the fields of Moab (Ruth 1:1-2). Both of these men were fleeing a famine, not becoming new residents there. The margins of some versions even note that the root in Psalm 15:1 means "to sojourn."

As for settling, the words we find in other passages share the exact same Hebrew root (*sh-k-n*) as David's word for "settle" (*yishkon*) in Psalm 15. For example, in Genesis 3:24, two cherubim were settled (*vayashken*) East of the Garden of Eden, and again in Genesis 14:13, Abraham is settling (*shochen*) in someone else's area, Mamre, the Amorite's land. We may also recognize

this shared root from Exodus 24:16, when God settled on Mount Sinai, and the Eden-like promise in Exodus 25:8 that "*the sanctuary*" is where God might settle with men. Holding these temporary ideas in our minds, the ending that "*the one doing these will not be shaken forever*" seems a little incongruous. We are left with a beautiful paradox: how could someone in a temporary residence never be shaken? This is a sharp contrast to Psalm 23, which describes dwelling (*veshavti*) in a "house" (*beveit*), not a tent, and uses a word for "dwell" that doesn't suggest sojourning or anything temporary. To put it all together: in Psalm 23, David speaks of one who dwells in a house(hold) for the **length of days** (a lifetime), whereas in Psalm 15 he speaks of one who **sojourns and settles** in a tent forever.

Why is the Hebrew written this way? Why use temporary words for a permanent hope? To begin to understand the depths of this, we must let Scripture interpret Scripture by following the exact Hebrew words. David asks, "*Who will settle (yishkon) in the mountain of Your holiness?*" Centuries later, a crucial clue appears in Joel 3:17 using this exact same vocabulary. God declares: "*And you shall know that I, Yahweh your Elohim, am settling (shochen) in Zion, the mountain of My holiness.*"

So when David asks God who will settle in the mountain of His Holiness, God Himself provides the answer: "*I, Yahweh your Elohim am settling in the Mountain of My Holiness.*" This incredible idea—that God chooses to settle (*sh-k-n*) in Zion, whether described in the past, present, or

future—is echoed throughout Scripture (Psalm 68:16; 74:2; Isa 8:18; Zech 8:3). Then all the incongruous pieces of the Psalm fall into place. Why a temporary settling forever? Because God does not need a place to live (*yeshev*), the heavens and the heavens of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He desires to settle among His people (1 Kings 8:27; cp. 1 Kings 6:11-13).

Because it is God Himself who settles on this mountain, the environment must reflect His character. Returning to the text of Psalm 15, David draws a sharp contrast: those who do evil to their friend, give their silver with usury, or exploit the innocent do not belong on this mountain of God's holiness. They will ultimately be moved. When we realize this, a profound New Testament fulfillment snaps into focus. This is exactly what we see Jesus enforcing when He cleanses the temple (cp. Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-21; Psalm 69). By driving out the money-changers and those exploiting the innocent, Jesus is actively fulfilling the boundaries of Psalm 15, proving that the wicked cannot abide in His Father's house. Our understanding of the answer to David's question deepens when we hear an echo in Psalm 2:6. God does not only settle on the mountain; He establishes His Son there to rule it, declaring, "*As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.*"

When we realize the import of these passages—that Yahweh our God will settle in Zion, the mountain of His

Holiness, because He desires to tent with His people—we humble our hearts. With David, we ask, "*Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?*" (Psalm 24:3), because we long to be there, with Him who will not be moved. We recount to ourselves the promises that "*foreigners who join themselves to the LORD... even those I will bring to My Holy Mountain.*" (Isaiah 56:6-7; cp. Isa 27:13; 66:20). And we quiet ourselves with Hezekiah, even as Assyria may sit outside our gates. We choose to sing "*the Songs of the Ascending Ones*" (Songs of Ascent) because we know it is through much tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom of God (Psalm 120-134).

When we stand on Zion with the psalmists and the prophets, the journey loops back to where we began. We realize that the green pastures, the quiet waters, and the table set in the presence of our enemies are not just future promises for a distant age. They are the reality of dwelling in the House of the LORD for the length of our days—right now. The prophet Isaiah captured this perfectly when he promised that God's holy mountain would become "*a pasture for flocks... for my people who have sought me.*" (Isaiah 65:10). Let us rest in this grace, living today in the presence of our Shepherd who desires to pitch His tent among us forever.

Martha Monahan,
Largo Ecclesia, FL

1 All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are my own translation.

STUFF THAT WORKS

BARAKA BIBLE SCHOOL

*By Sela Msafiri
London Ecclesia, ON*



It might seem ironic to run an article about a new Bible School under a “*Stuff That Works*” column, considering that it has only worked once. However, because we published an article in March about the upcoming school, and because this is a clear example of noticing a need and bringing a lot of people together to make something beautiful happen, I think we can recognize that it really did “work.” And it did so in an impressively quick way. Examples of coming together and working toward a common goal are always helpful for us all.

Jason Hensley

THE week at Baraka Bible School was one to remember, even though the first few days were intense! This is the first time a Bible School like Baraka has ever been organized in North America. It was designed to give Swahili-speaking Christadelphians in the US and Canada a chance to reconnect with other brothers and sisters who had fled the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and spent years in refugee camps before immigrating to the US and Canada. As an immigrant myself, I know there aren't always places near ecclesias to relocate to. My family and I were really blessed to be near an ecclesia. One of the things we struggle with is integrating into an ecclesia that doesn't speak our language. As for my siblings and me, we adapted easily and became familiar with Western culture, learning the language by going to school and getting involved. But we can't say the same for our parents and grandparents, as it has been a challenge for them to become familiar with the Western world. I'm sure we are not alone in these feelings, and that's why Baraka meant so much to many brothers, sisters, and young people.

There were lots of attendees, about 120 total. Interested friends from the local area, family members, and brothers and sisters came from as far as Newfoundland, Montreal, Kansas City, and Baltimore to meet for Swahili classes. Along with all the families, came lots of young kids and teens. The Truth Corps volunteers took charge of kids' classes, which they taught in English for two to three sessions per day, requiring a lot of energy, and ran outdoor activities in the afternoon. The classes focused on the promises about Christ and his Kingdom throughout the Bible. A drama performance led by Sister Martha and Brother Chris Sales was prepared and practiced by the kids, which was to be shared on Wednesday for praise night.

Brother Chris led classes on God's amazing promises for the teens, and Brother Dale Andrews taught his class on Ephesians for the teens. The adult classes were held at Fanshawe College, where we had our rooms, and were taught by the guest speakers Brother Innocent Baruani and Brother Benoit Mukendi. Thankfully, the distance between the main hall and the rooms was short enough for most attendees to walk.



Group photo from the first ever Baraka Bible School

I was on the committee and helped manage meal planning and preparation along with other sisters who volunteered. We got to cook and enjoyed five evenings of a veritable feast of traditional Congolese foods, such as ugali with *saka-saka* (*sombe*, or pounded cassava leaves), fried fish, goat and chicken meat, pork ribs, and African doughnuts (*mandazi*, very different from standard American doughnuts). All these took up to three to four hours every evening, during free time. Since most meals were served at the London hall, where kids' and teen classes were held, there was a lot of back-and-forth, which required many drivers to bring parents and the meals that were being cooked at Fanshawe to the hall to serve to everyone.

It's always an incredible experience to be able to use our bilingual skills, the other young people and me, to be the bridging link for the parents by helping translate during the memorial service or just in everyday life. Baraka

served as a break for us, as it allowed our parents to share and express their faith on their own without needing any language translation. They were able to ask questions during classes, which led to some amazing Biblical discussions on the Truth. There were up to four languages being spoken throughout the whole week: Swahili (the common one), Kibembe (the native one, spoken by all the parents), French (spoken by our Québécois), and English. I enjoyed getting to know the children throughout the week, making myself available to attend the teen classes and help out with the kids' classes if need be. It was incredible to see everyone come together as believers in the same hope of Christ's return we share. People were making connections that were once lost—they were reunited as a family in Christ.

Being able to praise just as we used to in Africa really brought us closer to God's Word. We sang songs of our faith in both English and Swahili, and



Sisters preparing the food for the meals



Enjoying lunch and fellowship together

we all felt the unity of our brotherhood, despite differences in language and culture. Four sisters, the mothers and grandparents of many of the students, sang “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God” and “Sing Hosanna” in Swahili, which others could sing along in English and Swahili.

Some of the really enjoyable performances were by the children’s theatrical performance, which was a big hit. One skit outlined the promises to Abraham, as explained by the resurrected Abraham at the time when he finally received the land. In another, the older teens presented a drama that they scripted and rehearsed during their free time, based on the Lord’s Supper. Some of the younger kids put on an art show (peace around the world) that they presented to everyone; we even had a few Biblical jokes performed as well.

We also had performances of original worship music by Brother Pelo Mulumba, which had a few of us in

tears as he expressed his faith out loud in songs we could all relate to. He organized the Wednesday praise evening as he worked with the young teen boys to practice their dances and with the teen girls to practice some songs which they performed, such as “*Yesu ni wangu, wauzima wamilele*,” translating to “Jesus is mine for eternity” and “*Kwake Yesu nasimama*,” meaning “On Christ the Rock I will stand” and the Truth Corps helped sing with them, plus one Zulu song the Truth Corps team sang on their own: “*Siyahamba*,” translating to “We are marching in the light of God.” This music made every evening just so special.

One lesson that stood out to me throughout the week was how isolating it can feel when you cannot easily communicate with the people around you. At Baraka, I experienced the blessing of being understood. It reminded me of the unity we look forward to in God’s Kingdom, where all people will worship Him together.



Craft programs were well received

We will have one language that reflects our one faith and one hope. In the meantime, it was wonderful teaching the Truth Corps team Swahili. We even created a group chat where they could continue practicing common phrases, and it was exciting to watch them immediately use what they had learned to hold conversations with the children and parents. Those simple conversations meant so much because they allowed people to hear God's family speaking in a language that felt familiar and comforting.

This helped the children build trusting relationships with their teachers, giving them the confidence to ask challenging Bible questions about topics such as whether God's Kingdom will be established on earth or in heaven, and who the Devil or Satan really is according to Scripture. These discussions gave the teaching team the opportunity to answer using Bible references and the first principles of the gospel, encouraging the children to search the Scriptures for themselves.

For many of the children, these lessons were especially significant because they came from Pentecostal families, where they had been taught different beliefs. Throughout the week, they were introduced to what the Bible says on these subjects, often discovering perspectives they had never considered before.

We concluded the week on Thursday evening with a beautiful "Kingdom by Candlelight" event prepared by the Brant County Ecclesia. Brothers and sisters gathered together in both Swahili and English to reflect on what the Kingdom might be like and how each of us can prepare ourselves for it. The basement of the London Hall had been transformed into a space with thoughtful decorations, discussion stations, crafts for the children, picture-taking areas, fruit platters, and beautifully decorated crown-and-jewel-shaped cookies. Ending the week by focusing on our future hope was the perfect conclusion to an unforgettable Bible School.

My experience with Baraka Bible School was equally life-changing. This week strengthened my faith in God, taught me new ways to express and share my beliefs, and deepened my understanding of what it means to go into the world and preach the Good News, as Jesus commands in the Gospel of Mark. Throughout the week, I learned practical ways to begin conversations about the Bible by finding common ground with others and allowing them to guide the discussion. Those approaches led to more genuine and meaningful conversations than I had expected. This experience also changed how I think about people who understand Scripture differently than I do. Rather than seeing those differences as obstacles, I now see them as opportunities to listen carefully, learn from others, and share God's Word with compassion and understanding. Baraka has inspired all of us to study the Bible more deeply so that we come to understand it and can explain its teachings more clearly whenever God opens the door to those conversations.

Beyond strengthening our faith, Baraka helped us grow personally. We learned the importance of teamwork, stepped outside our comfort zone, and built friendships with people we never met before, but share so much culture and tradition with. What began as a thought of uncertainty quickly became a family, reminding us that even when far from home, we can always find belonging among brothers and sisters who share the same hope in Israel.

Looking back, Baraka Bible School was much more than a week of classes and activities. It was a week of reconnection, service, worship, and encouragement. It reminded me that although we come from different countries, cultures, and languages, we are united through our faith in Jesus Christ and our shared hope of God's coming Kingdom. That is the Baraka I will carry with me long after the week has ended.

*Sela Msafiri
London Ecclesia, ON*

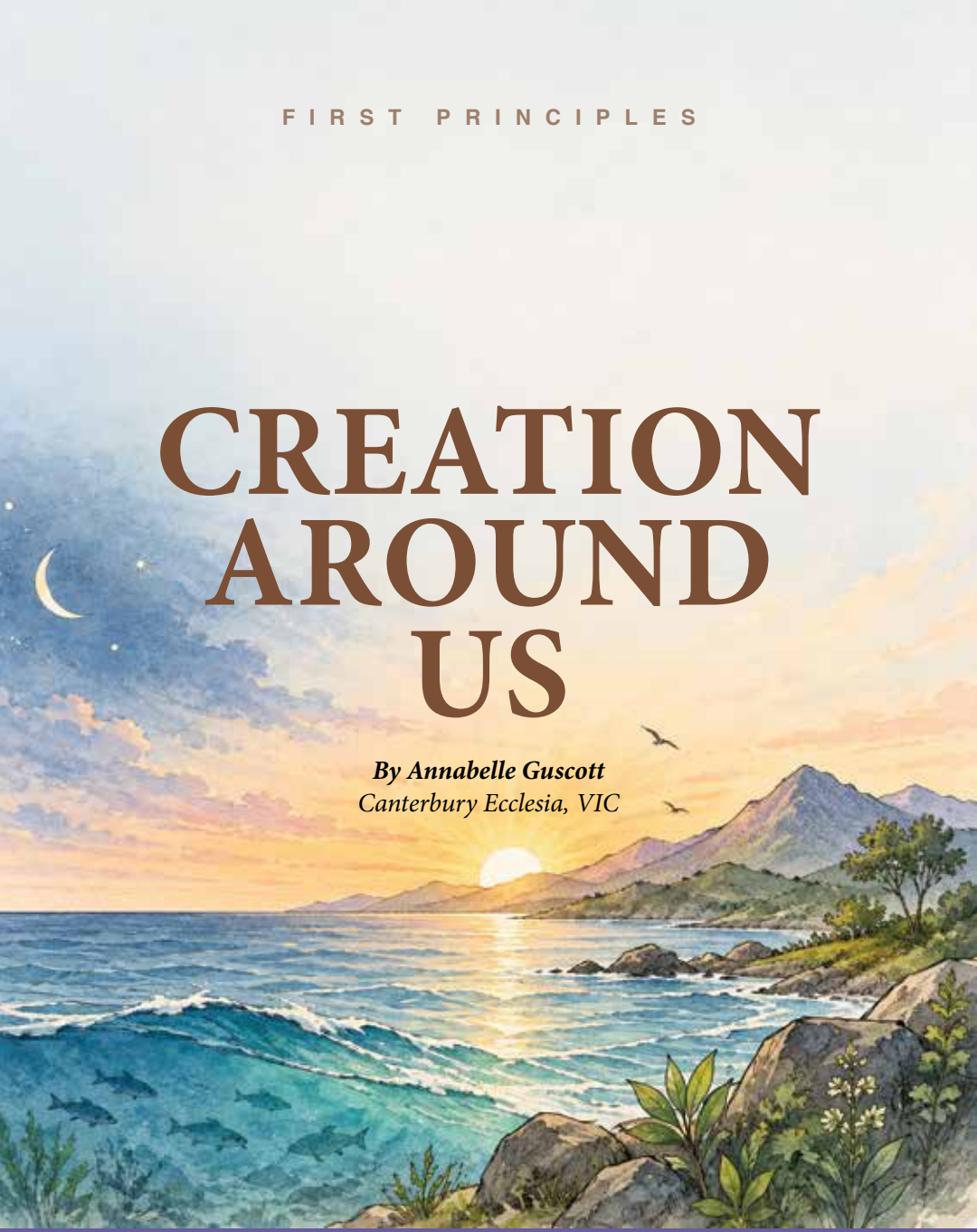


Let the classes begin!

FIRST PRINCIPLES

CREATION AROUND US

*By Annabelle Guscott
Canterbury Ecclesia, VIC*



Annabelle Guscott is an environmental scientist, with a special interest in marine ecology. She also enjoys traveling the world and seeing the diversity in the world our God has created. This diversity powerfully encourages her faith.

Jason Hensley

IN the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1.

This is the very first thing we read in the incredible book of the Bible. It must be important, but what does it mean? What is creation? And why does it matter to us? Throughout this article, we will explore this physical creation, what it means, and why it is important to us.

A Purposeful Creation

Let's head back to Genesis 1. This chapter emphasizes creation: "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*" (v. 1 ESV), "*God said, 'Let there be light'*" (v. 4 ESV), "*Let water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear*" (v. 9 NIV), "*Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit*" (v. 11 ESV), and so on. And He saw that it was good.

Through these passages, you can see the earth as we know it form and take shape, and this is shown to be purposeful. God showed intentionality in creation, as He created life on earth to be self-sustaining and orderly, including vegetation that yields seed and trees that bear fruit, and blessed the creatures of the seas and sky, saying, "*Be fruitful and multiply*." (Genesis 1:22 ESV). He created the livestock and creatures of the land according to their kind, and even created a hierarchy, whereby man is to have dominion over all the creatures and to also "*Be fruitful and multiply*." For it is written, "*And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth*

and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." (Genesis 1:29-30 ESV). This self-sustaining creation is so purposefully created, and we see this throughout life today.

Let's take a look at a few creatures, such as the great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*). How would this shark have been purposefully created by God? Great white sharks help regulate populations, maintain marine biodiversity and genetic diversity, protect habitats such as seagrass beds and kelp forests, and act as indicator species for the health of the marine environment.¹ Another creature we can look at is the Lord Howe Island stick insect (*Dryococelus australis*), which is an insect endemic to a remote corner of an island off Australia's east coast. This insect plays a crucial role in its ecosystem as a major driver of nutrient cycling, which in turn helps maintain fertile soil and directly impacts forest health.² Through these examples, we can see these species have been created purposefully to serve a function in their ecosystem, to help sustain creation, which showcases God's design.

Showcasing God's Glory

Throughout the Bible, creation is also used as a means to convey a message, such as showcasing God's Glory. Creation is something tangible, something we can see, touch, feel, smell, and taste. Therefore, it can be relatable, and we can learn some pretty amazing lessons from it. Consider the following verses:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1 ESV).

O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all, the earth is full of your creatures. (Psalm 104:24-25 ESV).

In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. (Psalm 95:4-5 NIV).

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out their starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. (Isaiah 40:26 NIV).

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. (Psalm 139:14 NIV).

These are just a few of the verses that speak about God's creation, and it is evident that this creation showcases God's glory. Romans 1:20 (NIV) states, *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without an excuse."* This verse further shows how creation reveals God's glory and existence, while demonstrating the intentionality and purposefulness of His design. Everything God has created gives glory to Him and shows His incredible design, demonstrated through generations upon generations.

Jesus and Creation

Jesus also used nature within his teachings and used it as a metaphor to teach his lessons, such as the parable

of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19), the parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13:3-9), and the parable of the vine and branches (John 15:1-6), just to name a few. In Matthew 6:28-30, Jesus used the example of lilies of the field to illustrate that God cares for us and will certainly care for believers. Jesus also spent time teaching and praying in nature, including the Sermon on the Mount, the wilderness, and the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus shows us how we can seek God in nature and look to His creation to learn gospel messages.

In His Image

If we head back to Genesis, we read in Genesis 1:26 (NIV), *"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"* Out of all of creation—the sun, the moon, the stars, the oceans, the mountains—we humans are made in His image. That is pretty special. Being made in His image, we need to bring glory to God in all that we do, both in how we live our lives and in how we interact with the natural world. We need to work together and use our unique gifts and talents to help us form a healthy, harmonious, sustainable ecosystem. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV) states, *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms,"* and Romans 12:6-8 (NIV) reads,

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is

serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

These verses show how God has given everyone a unique skill set, and this is purposeful. These different abilities can be used to serve others and build a healthy ecosystem on our planet and in our community, while also bringing glory to Him. We are also tasked with being stewards of the land, just as Adam and Eve are tasked with working and caring for the Garden of Eden. As it says in Psalm 24:1 (NIV), *“The Earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it.”* We need to respect this and ensure we care for God’s amazing creation, which we are fortunate enough to experience every day, because all of God’s creation is made to glorify God.

What Does This Mean for Us?

Through this article, we have looked into what creation is and how it is described in the Bible, but what does this mean for us? Firstly, it means we should worship God. *“The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”* (Isaiah 55:12 NIV). When we spend time out in nature, watching a sunrise or a sunset, or even walking around a park, make sure to give praise to God, the Creator of all things, rather than just admiring the landscape. If the earth is giving praise, so should we.

Secondly, we need to seek God and look to creation to help teach us the messages of the gospel. Just as Jesus used creation to illustrate Bible teachings, we too should look at creation to better understand gospel teaching and messages.

Finally, we need to make sure we are caring for creation. God created all things and said creation *“was good.”* Just as one prunes a vine to take care of the plant, we need to take care of all creation: nature, animals, and people. Every act of kindness, whether for the earth or for the people, is an act of worship.

So next time you step outside, make sure you look around. Every tree, every star, everything whispers “God.” Creation isn’t just our home; it’s living proof of God, His power, His creativity, and His love. So let’s open our eyes to see creation not just as our surroundings, but as God’s living masterpiece, one that calls us to worship, to wonder and to care.

*Annabelle Guscott,
Canterbury Ecclesia, VIC*

¹ Dedman et al., “Ecological Roles and Importance of Sharks in the Anthropocene Ocean,” *Science* (Volume 385), 2024.

² McGrath et al., “Determining Host Plant Preferences for the Critically Endangered Lord Howe Island Stick Insect (*Dryococelus australis*) to Assist Reintroduction,” *Journal of Insect Conservation*, 2017.

A man is seen from behind, standing in a kitchen at night. He is looking out a large window that looks out onto a dark street. A desk lamp on the counter to his right is turned on, casting a warm glow. On the counter to his left, there is a coffee maker, a mug, and some papers. The kitchen has wooden cabinets and a wooden countertop.

B I B L E S T U D Y

P A R T 7

THE CHAPTERS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

By Ben Brinkerhoff
Christchurch North Ecclesia, NZ

OUR have a Our last article finished where the current article begins, with the inspiring opening words of Romans 8, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* (RSV).

Notice that all recent translations drop the words found in the KJV, *“who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”* This lack of qualification, if correct, means we need to ask carefully what it means to be *“in Christ Jesus.”* Why is there no condemnation for those who are in Christ?

Here’s a further question. Is baptism enough to qualify for being in Christ Jesus and having no condemnation? But it can’t be, for the simple reason that if baptism were alone sufficient without any faithful response, then we

could sin that grace may abound. Why not sin if baptism alone has saved us? No, that can’t be right. What it means to be in Christ Jesus is a question Paul must address in Chapter 8. As so much hinges on it, we will consider it carefully.

However, for this article, we first want to consider the main point of disagreement between Christadelphians and nearly all other Christians as we come to these verses in Romans 8: it concerns the word *“likeness.”* To begin, let’s outline Chapter 8. Doing so is important, as we won’t be doing verse-by-verse exposition through these articles, and I do not want you to fail to grasp the big-picture flow of the chapter. So, in Chapter 8, an outline of Paul’s argument is as follows:

Verse	Unspoken Question Answered	Paul’s Argument
1 - 4	How does Jesus Christ deliver me from the body of death?	Because you are in Christ, and in him God condemned body of death, sin in the flesh through His son, thus delivering you if you’re in him.
5 - 11	What does it mean to be “in Christ”?	Being in Christ means you’re like him, setting your mind on the things of the Spirit rather than the flesh.
12 - 17	What does it mean to set the mind on the Spirit?	To set the mind on the Spirit means living as God’s sons, sharing Christ’s sufferings rather than living for self.
18 - 25	How can I endure suffering?	Suffering is bearable because hope fixes our eyes on the glory God will reveal when our redemption is complete.
26 - 30	What if I’m too weak to endure?	You can endure because the hope is sure and God uses our weakness and to shape us into the image of His Son according to His purpose.
31 - 39	But can I be sure God will complete His work in me?	God’s purpose cannot fail, and nothing can separate us from His love in Christ.

Let's start to get into some detail. So, again, we ask the question: why is there no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus? The short answer is because God didn't condemn Christ, so likewise he won't condemn those "in Christ."

But let's look at how Paul establishes this in Romans 8:2 (KJV): *"For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."*

From this verse, we are presented with further questions: how is Paul made free, and what is he made free from? It is clear that he is not free from a desire to sin. Chapter 7 made that evident enough. Paul, as he writes, is still mortal and will die. So, what is Paul free from exactly?

The answer, as he says, is condemnation or the "law of sin and death."

If life is found in Christ, we shouldn't be surprised to find that the law of death or condemnation is derived from Adam. Turn to Genesis 3:17, 19, where we read about how all humanity fell into condemnation in the first place.

"Then to Adam...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (NKJV).

First, let's state the obvious. The Law holds no solution for the condemnation contained in this passage. There's no solution found in good works either. That was a big problem in Judaism. For all their legal rigor, rules, regulations, and traditions, they still couldn't get around the third chapter of the Bible. But it is not just the Jews' problem. For most of Christianity, the sentence to

return to dust does not matter because they believe salvation is bodyless. Who cares if the body turns to dust as long as the soul is in heaven?

So, the Jews have no solution in the Law for the sentence in Genesis 3. Christians, with their doctrine of the immortal soul, do not need to care about it. But for Paul, this condemnation matters, and he wants freedom from it.

For Paul, the sentence of Genesis 3 collectively affects all Adam's children, both Jews and Gentiles. Since they all share a common problem, they logically require a common answer.

Moreover, it is this condemnation that Paul personally wants to be free from: the law of sin and death, the finality of dust. *"For dust you are and to dust you shall return."* (Genesis 3:19). This is the death sentence. This is the condemnation.

So, what is the solution? We are told in Romans 8:2-3,

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh." (NKJV).

The solution is profoundly simple: *"He condemned sin in the flesh."*

Now pause and think for a moment: God condemned sin in the flesh. But I thought sin condemned us. How was sin condemned? Simple... sin was condemned when its source was permanently destroyed in Christ's flesh at death, coupled with Christ

being raised and made free from sinful nature's effects and consequences!

To destroy sin in the flesh, it required that God send his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. What is the "likeness of sinful flesh"? Most Christians think that the word "likeness" means "similar," but not "the same." As in, Jesus's flesh was "similar" to sinful flesh, but he did not actually have sinful flesh. You would have to conclude this (even though it is wrong) if you believed Jesus was God, because how could Jesus, as God, have sinful flesh? If Jesus was born into sinful flesh, then he deserved to die. But if he deserved to die, he could not be a substitute. How could he die in place of sinners (the substitutionary idea) when he was under the same sentence and curse as the rest of us? Many Christians, therefore, conclude that Jesus's flesh was only "like" ours but not the same.

This is the wrong interpretation of the word "likeness." So, which one is right? Paul is using Old Testament language to show that Jesus's flesh was exactly like ours by inheritance from our common father Adam.

This meaning of the word "likeness" becomes clear when we cross-reference Genesis 5:3. "*When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son **in his own likeness**, after his image, and named him Seth.*" (RSV).

In contradiction to the common Christian point of view, Seth's flesh wasn't "like" Adam's, but also somehow different from his. The flesh bore the same sinful urges and consequences for Seth as it did for Adam. Seth inherited from Adam all the consequences

of the judgment in the garden. This inheritance is carried in the word 'likeness'.

Logically, then, from Seth forward, we are all born in Adam's likeness and image. We all inherit the nature Adam was cursed with after his sin, and it was into this likeness (the likeness of sinful flesh) that Jesus was born. That's Paul's point.

Why is it called "sinful flesh"? Because human nature naturally desires to sin. Not because the physical substance of our bodies literally sins, or because flesh is itself sin, but because human nature in its present condition has a tendency toward sinful desires. It is a nature that arose because of sin and that continually gives rise to sin. In this sense Paul uses sin as a figure of speech for the power of sin at work within human nature.

In Christ's body, sinful nature has been destroyed. Thus, Paul says in Romans 8:3 (NKJV), "*He condemned sin in the flesh.*"

But how? We'll need to take that up in our next article.

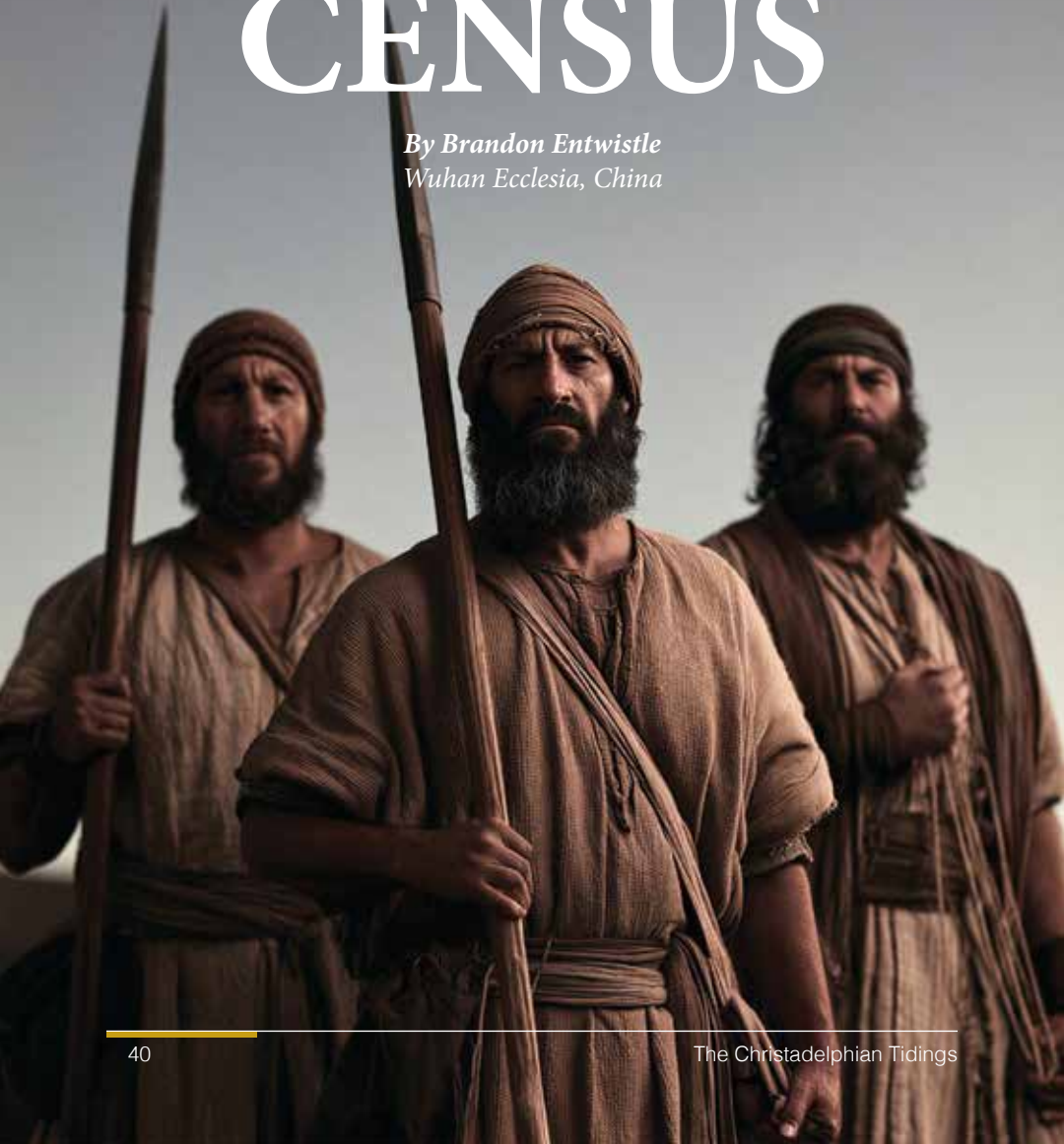
*Ben Brinkerhoff,
Christchurch North Ecclesia, NZ*

B I B L E S T U D Y

P A R T 2

EXPLORING DAVID'S CENSUS

*By Brandon Entwistle
Wuhan Ecclesia, China*



IN this story of David and the census, God brings consequences upon the people. We might be asking ourselves, if David, an old man well-versed in the ways of God, already admitted to his sin, why are these consequences necessary? Some point out that it was not just David whom God had become angry with, as 2 Samuel 24:1 says God was already angry with Israel. Why, we cannot know for sure, but all Israel receives consequences—and when does God discipline a group for the sins of one man, if, in fact, it was only David who sinned? In any case, this discipline is necessary because part of our fleshy thinking only responds to consequences. We can intellectually understand a wrongdoing, but part of our flesh needs to see consequences. Additionally, it is precisely because David understands his sin that God can discipline him meaningfully.

When I studied behavioral psychology as an undergraduate, we examined surveys on parents' attitudes toward consequences in recent decades. They revealed a lot of fear about using consequences, and reasonably so because if discipline is applied incorrectly, it doesn't work and can have numerous negative unintended side effects. However, in the right circumstances, correction can be effective in shaping and changing behavior. There are many necessary conditions for this to be effective: consistency of application, applying consequences immediately after the behavior, and providing those disciplined with examples of what positive alternatives to the behavior look like. But arguably the most important condition is that the individual being

disciplined understands **why** they are being disciplined.

Finally, this consequence stage connects to the process of threshing wheat, an important symbol David has to consider later on. Though David himself is spared from the plague, no doubt witnessing the pestilence spread throughout Israel had a great impact on a man who cared so deeply for his people.

Let us also consider the theological implications of the discipline and God's wisdom in it. We saw in the record that God gives David a choice between seven years of famine, three months of being pursued by his enemies, or three days of plague/pestilence. We know why David picks the pestilence, because he trusts God's mercy, but not the mercies of men (a wise choice, by the way). However, I would suggest that, in one way, it wouldn't have made a difference which one he chose, and I'll explain why. We know his sin, regardless of why he did it, was to take a census of the military, in other words, to learn how many men were stationed at the various garrisons around Israel.

Every single one of these options would have had the effect of rendering this knowledge null and void. If he chose famine, well, what good is a large army if you've got nothing to feed it? Soldiers don't fight well on empty stomachs. Famine is outside of your control, David. I, God, am in control. If he chose to be pursued by his enemies, well, what good is a large army if your commander in chief isn't around to give orders because he's on the run from an enemy? Perhaps from another usurping descendant of Saul, or worse, one of his own kin. Rebellions are

outside of your control, David. I, God, am in control. If he chose pestilence (which he did), it makes this statement: You just had your men spend 9 months and 20 days counting up your soldiers. What's the use in knowing that number when a sickness can destroy 70,000 of them in just 3 days? And as a side note, I don't think God told him how many were killed. For all David knew, it could have been more. The record in verse 15 says the plague spread "from Dan to Beersheba," which, if you look at a map, seems to be from the far north to the far south. In other words, the entire area his men had traveled to do all the counting was rendered useless. Disease is outside of your control, David. I, God, am in control. It is, has been, and always will be God who gives life and preserves it, but also takes it away.

We have seen God provide very intentional, expertly crafted consequences for David's actions, but discipline is not what brings us back into a relationship with the Almighty. A complete understanding of our failing, true remorse, repentance, a change of heart, and putting plans and safeguards in place to avoid failing in the same way again are all part of the atonement process. We can see David's remorse as he pleads with God in verse 17,

And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house."

According to the Law, what would a man who had sinned do to ritually atone? Go to the priests with the

appropriate animal and have them sacrifice it to make a sin offering or a trespass offering. We do not see God have David do this. God, through the prophet Gad, tells David in verse 18, "*Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.*"

Why did God make such a command? What role did it play in David's atonement process?

Some commentators focus on the city of Jerusalem. They emphasize that it was the site of the future temple and that God always intended it to be Israel's capital city. This may very well be true, but I wonder: what does it have to do with David reaching a greater understanding of his sin and the need to change?

I suggest the symbolic reason has more to do with the name, Jerusalem, the city of peace. This would send a clear message that this is what God wants for David. My altar must be built in a city of peace. God may be saying that a certain kind of communion with Him can only be achieved when one's mind is at peace, not preoccupied with war and defense against enemies.

More important still, however, is the threshing floor itself. To understand the rich symbolism of the threshing floor, a brief description of the wheat harvesting process is necessary. First, there was reaping, or cutting down, the plants and bundling them together until it was time to thresh. In English, the word "threshing" is derived from "thrashing," which we know means to beat or hit. This is exactly what was done to the crops to separate the edible part of the plant, the grain, from the inedible part, the chaff. This was

done in many ways: hitting the plants against the ground and shaking them, hitting them with wooden flails, and having animals or people walk over them. All methods involved forcing the chaff from the grain. Finally, there was winnowing, which represented the last stage of separating the wheat from the chaff. The grain farmers would toss the material that had been loosened in the threshing process up into the air by hand or by winnowing fork so that the lighter chaff would be blown away by the wind or by other workers nearby waving large fans, while the heavier, more valuable grain would fall back to the ground. Chaff still on the threshing floor could be collected and burned as fuel while the grain was gathered, washed, and later used for food.

The Bible is filled with references to the spiritual significance of this process, but I've limited myself to just three examples of its use. Two of these come from the psalms, so we know the symbolic significance was not lost on David. Psalm 1:3 compares the godly to *"a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."* But he says of the ungodly, *"The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away."* (v. 4). Again, in Psalm 35:5, David begs God regarding those who seek to kill him, *"Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them."* And, we have John the Baptist famously speaking of Christ in Matthew 3:11-12,



Within us all, there is good grain, the fruit of the spirit grown by God, but there is also chaff: that which is useless except to be burnt in the fire. David, just like the rest of us, required spiritual threshing and winnowing by God.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire: Whose winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

While the spiritual metaphor can be applied to groups of people, righteous and unrighteous, I believe it can also be applied to a single individual. Within us all, there is good grain, the fruit of the spirit grown by God, but there is also chaff: that which is useless except to be burnt in the fire. Similar to the process of separating impurities from gold by heating, God, through trial, through spiritual threshing and winnowing, helps us separate what is valuable from what is worthless within us. David, just like the rest of us, required spiritual threshing and winnowing by God.

And yet, with some artistic liberty taken, I want us to consider extending the metaphor of the chaff a bit further. In many places in the Bible, it represents sin and that which is useless. But was the chaff always useless? God designed and created plants and all their parts, each with its own purpose and function. What did chaff used to be before it became chaff? Chaff is composed of the once-living pieces

of the wheat plant, including the stem, leaves, and husk. The husk once surrounded the plant's edible seed as a protective shell. In the earlier stages of the plant's life, its purpose was to protect the grain from the elements, from disease, from certain insects or other creatures that would otherwise have consumed the fruit of the grain. As the grain grew, reached maturity, and the plants were harvested, the husk dried out and died, becoming chaff. So we see, in its own time and season, the husk, the chaff, had its purpose. There is a time for war, and a time for peace.

I extend the metaphor this way because I believe this is the exact spiritual position David was in. In his life, in his kingship, he played the role of the husk and the children of Israel the grain. He protected and defended Israel from those who would consume her, though, of course, we know it was God who was actually protecting them. But now, David has reached a time of spiritual harvest, a time when the protective warrior's mindset needs to be threshed and winnowed. A time of peace both for Israel and within David's own mind needs to be transitioned into. It is time for his old way of life, his old mindset, to be put away, cast off, to be sacrificed; it needs to cost him something. It is time for the husk to become chaff, blown away and burned up.

And what do we see David say and do when he arrives at the threshing floor?

When Araunah offers to give David the land and materials for offering for free? He responds in 2 Samuel 24:24, *“Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing.”* And what is the first offering he offers? A burnt offering, completely incinerated. No part of it was eaten by the offerer or the priest, and while this has so many symbolic connotations, here I believe it represents the burning up of his old mentality. And, incidentally, in the Old Testament, unlike other offerings, the burnt offering could atone for sins.

But we find that David did not just offer burnt offerings. He also offered peace offerings. In contrast to burnt offerings, peace offerings were not associated with sin. They were offerings of gratitude, including gratitude to God for saving one's life in some way. A part was offered to God, a part was eaten by the priest, and a part was eaten by the offerer, so that everyone was filled by this offering. It was voluntary and, according to some Jewish scholars, will

be the only offering in the time of the Messiah's Kingdom, when sin is gone from the Earth.

And yet, we have a symbol greater still than the threshing floor and offerings. God specifically sends David to the threshing floor of Araunah in Jerusalem to meet Araunah. Already, in the Mosaic legal context, Araunah has been cast in the role of a priest, despite not officially or ritually being one. In what ways was Araunah a priest? What kind of priest was he?

Let us first consider what he tells David in verse 22: *“Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood.”* In the Chronicles account, he says in 1 Chronicles 21:23, *“Take it [the threshing floor] to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.”*



Consider the wheat. It took the right weather, time, and hard work to plant, reap, bundle up, and thresh. Freely given as an offering to be burned up or eaten, as in some cases with certain offerings. Consider the threshing instruments. Those cost money, time, skill, and hard work to build. Freely given as firewood to be completely burned up. The oxen? Those cost money, time, resources, and hard work to protect and feed. If you ask some farmers, there might have even been an emotional connection to them. Freely given to be completely burned up.

And there is the land. You might be thinking that the year of Jubilee might be just a few years off from when all land was returned to its original ancestral owners. He could have gotten it back. Not so. You see, Araunah, Ornan in Chronicles, was not a Jew. The record says he was a Jebusite dwelling among the Jews. I'm not sure how he remained there after David's taking of Jerusalem. In any case, because Araunah was not a Jew, as far as I can tell, according to the Law, he was not eligible for his land to be returned to him in the year of Jubilee. And even if he was, we know he never took it back. It was never returned to him because this altar became the site of Solomon's temple, a building considerably larger than the original threshing floor site. The Chronicles record gives another sobering detail in 1 Chronicles 21:20: he had four sons. Maybe other family members—we don't know. What about their inheritance? Freely given away forever. Essentially, to be completely burned up, to them at least. What Araunah and his sons did for a living for the rest of their days is left a mystery in the Biblical record.

Would it have been easy for a non-Jew living in the land to purchase property, wheat fields, and start over again? This is unclear, but after the threshing floor was sold to become an altar, it was clear the lives of Araunah and his family were changed in a single day.

True, Araunah was paid for what he gave up; he didn't actually walk away from the deal with nothing, but we should not view him with any less reverence. Why? Because he was **willing** to do so. Abraham didn't actually sacrifice Isaac, but he was willing to, and in doing so, he manifested God in one of the most direct and meaningful ways ever recorded in all of Scripture.

And so, in 2 Samuel 24, we have this beautiful picture of redemption. A man has sinned and is separated from God because he cannot let go of his former self. And God provides him with a man willing to sacrifice his possessions, his land, and quite possibly his entire way of life when he had done no wrong, so that the other man could have his sin forgiven. I think the parallel here speaks for itself in terms of how this story connects to why we are here this morning. Araunah is surely a type of Christ.

I have called Araunah a type, a symbol, but in one way, I was wrong to do so. I was wrong to do so because he is greater than a symbol. He is a manifestation. You see, symbols are powerful, but their power derives from their ability to connect to other images, emotions, and ideas already present in the minds of those who perceive them. Give them different contexts, and they have different meanings; gold can mean tried faith, but can also mean greed; scarlet can mean sin, but is also the color of

the thread that Rahab used to save the Hebrew spies in Jericho; seven is the number of completeness, of creation, but also the number of deadly sins. Take away their contexts, their associations, and connections, and gold is just a shiny rock, scarlet is just a color, and seven is just the number that comes after six and before eight.

But a manifestation is far greater than a symbol. An object, a color, a number can symbolize the characteristics of God, but it cannot manifest them. Only a living, breathing, thinking being can be a manifestation. The Greek uses two words for manifestation: *phanerosis*, also meaning “an expression or exhibition,” and *apokalypsis*, meaning “a revelation.” A symbol has the power to remind, but a manifestation has the power to reveal God’s character and spirit. A manifestation is real.

What we do every week at the memorial table is a rather special circumstance, because the bread and wine are symbols of a manifestation. Yes, they are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, who perfectly manifested the Father’s character, but there is another form of God manifestation that Christ alludes to when he instituted the ritual of taking the bread and wine. At the Last Supper, Christ did not say in regard to the emblems, “Look at this,” or “Think about this,” or even “Talk about this in remembrance of me.” He said, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” You might say, “Yes, the ‘*Do this*’ means to eat,” but eating is just the symbol. The letting go of self, the suffering for the sake of others, the giving up of a way of life, even one that was once useful for God’s

purpose as David’s was: these are the manifestations. God has not promised us that manifesting him wouldn’t be hard or painful, but he has promised us it will be worth it.

I’ll close with two final passages. Matthew 19:27-29,

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

And Romans 8:18-19,

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be manifested in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be manifested.

In this world, there are many symbols of God and of Christ: the cross, the bread, the wine. But when we look out into the world, there are so few manifestations. Suffer yourself to be one of them.

*Brandon Entwistle,
Wuhan Ecclesia, China*

B I B L E S T U D Y

JUDAS AND PETER

By Geoff Henstock
Happy Valley Ecclesia, SA



MATTHEW 27 opens with the Jewish elders delivering our Lord to Pontius Pilate. Why? Because, although verse 1 makes it clear that they are determined to kill Jesus, only Pilate has the authority to sentence him to death.

The Jewish leaders were brutal, unethical, and conniving. They were not squeamish about killing those who threatened their position. In Acts 7, they were complicit in the death of Stephen by stoning at the hands of a maniacal mob. But in this case, they want Jesus to be condemned as a criminal, and they know the Romans will crucify him. That would bring Jesus under the curse of the Law: “*He that is hanged is accursed of God.*” (Deuteronomy 21:23).

It is for this reason that, immediately after telling us in verses 1 and 2 that Jesus was delivered to Pilate, Matthew was inspired to record the fate of Judas Iscariot:

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3-5).

An Enigma

What an enigmatic character is Judas! Corrupt? Yes. A thief? Yes. Traitorous? Absolutely. A villain? Undoubtedly. Yet for three years, Judas willingly bore the opprobrium and discomfort of being

a disciple of our Lord—one of the 12 apostles chosen by our Lord.

We do not know when Judas began stealing from the common bag, but from the record of our Lord’s very humble mortal life, it is hard to believe there was ever a large amount of money to steal. If Judas had been no more than just a petty thief, he would have had much greater opportunities for gain in the wider community. So, what happened to Judas that led to his betrayal of Jesus?

Judas started out as a faithful follower, willing to endure hardship as a disciple of Jesus, but he changed direction. In John 6, we have what may be a hint as to what triggered that dramatic shift. The chapter starts with the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. This was a time of considerable economic distress in Galilee, and malnutrition was rife among the people. It is not surprising, therefore, that this miracle excites their imagination. They see it as evidence that Jesus is their Messiah, and they are keen to install him then and there as their King:

Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. (John 6:14-15)

The people did not understand that God’s plan required that their Messiah be killed and raised again long before he reigns as Messiah on the restored throne of David. They want deliverance from Roman oppression, and they

want it now! They want Jesus as their Messiah-king, and they want to enthrone him now! To prevent them from doing so, Jesus withdrew himself, departing to a mountain alone. We may be certain our Lord spent that night in communion with his Father and drew strength to continue his ministry.

Challenging Words

The next day, the people who had been miraculously fed searched for Jesus and found him in Capernaum. In his exchange with them, Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life and speaks about the need for them to eat that bread and drink his blood (vv. 53-58). This is very confronting imagery for Jews steeped in the Law of Moses. Even for those of us who are familiar with the words and understand the symbolism underpinning them, the language is confronting. It is implicit in these words that our Lord's blood will be shed. In verse 61, our Lord recognizes that some of his followers are offended by the grossness of this imagery, and in verse 66, John records that many turned their backs on him from that day. A suffering, dying Messiah is not what they expected: they want a King who will restore the kingdom to Judah. We know from Acts 1 that all the disciples expected Jesus would soon assume his rightful position as King on the re-established throne of David. Judas also nurtured that hope, but perhaps on this day in Capernaum it dawned on Judas that Jesus is not about to become king. The poignant words with which John 6 concludes hint that this may be the case:

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Then

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered them, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spake of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve. (vv. 67-71)

Simon Peter expresses confidence that, despite the challenging words they had just heard, at least 11 of the disciples still look upon Jesus as their Messiah. In response, for the first time, our Lord openly acknowledges that one of the twelve is a devil—a diabolos, a false accuser, a slanderer. With the benefit of hindsight, John explains that he was referring to Judas.

Our Lord knew that Judas could not be trusted. Despite that, Jesus entrusted Judas with responsibility for the disciples' funds. Throughout his ministry, right up to that night in the upper room, our Lord worked with Judas even though he knew that Judas would betray him in the end. That being the case, how could we doubt that our Lord loves and cares for us despite our many failings?

In Matthew 26, we gain a curious insight into Judas's mind as we near the climax of our Lord's earthly ministry. When they are in the upper room, just as he was about to initiate the ritual of breaking bread and drinking wine, our Lord tells his disciples. *"One of you shall betray me."* (Matthew 26:21).

Lord or Master?

Even though it isn't the first time he has told them this, the statement shocks 11

Judas addresses Jesus as “Master,” or rabbi. Rabbi is a term of respect that Jews used for their teachers, but it falls well short of the dignity of the title “Lord” used by the other eleven disciples.

of the disciples. We must admire the candor of each man in acknowledging that it could be possible that he might betray their Lord: *“They were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, ‘Lord, is it I?’”* (v. 22). Note how they address Jesus in their bewilderment: *“Lord, is it I?”* They speak of him as their Lord, and so he is. Judas also asks, *“Is it I?”* but Judas does not use exactly the same wording as the others. He says, **“Master, is it I?”** (v. 25). Judas addresses Jesus as “Master,” or rabbi. Rabbi is a term of respect that Jews used for their teachers, but it falls well short of the dignity of the title “Lord” used by the other eleven disciples. Jesus was often addressed as Lord by his disciples, but there is no record of Judas ever addressing Jesus as his Lord. Judas only ever acknowledges Jesus as a teacher; he never recognizes his authority as his Lord. In verse 49, as he betrays our Lord in the garden, he again addresses him as “Master.”

There is a sobering message for us in this distinction. Jesus is our master, our teacher: indeed, he reminds us that he is our only teacher (23:10 NKJV). Like Mary of Bethany, we revel in the privilege of sitting at Jesus’s feet and being taught. But many have learned the lessons that Jesus taught without ever submitting to him as their Lord. We do well to ask ourselves whether

we truly submit to the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ or regard him merely as a teacher. If Judas had truly acknowledged Jesus’s authority, he surely could not have betrayed his Lord. Before the disciples gathered in the upper room with their Lord, Judas had already betrayed him to the chief priests and elders, and they had rewarded him handsomely. In effect, Judas came to the upper room via the house of the High Priest and his fellow conspirators. Perhaps he came with the thirty pieces of silver jingling in his purse. Judas departed the upper room earlier than the others to set the wheels in motion for the arrest of our Lord.

After the supper, our Lord went with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas, knowing they would be there, led the arresting party to the garden to seize Jesus under the cover of darkness. The plot unfolded perfectly, but Judas was troubled. Matthew says that Judas repented. We often make the point that repentance involves a change of mind or direction, but that is not the case here.

Remorse or Repentance?

In Matthew 27:3, the Greek word used is not the one that means a change of mind or direction. Here, the word primarily conveys remorse. Judas was remorseful. Weymouth says that he



was “*smitten with remorse.*” He was sorry that he had betrayed innocent blood, deeply sorry, sorry enough to hand back the bribe he had been paid.

Judas was remorseful, but he was not repentant. And obviously, Judas did not believe that he could be forgiven, despite all that he had heard about forgiveness from the man he acknowledged as a teacher. He could see no other alternative than to end his life.

At about the same time that Judas was smitten with remorse, another disciple also betrayed Jesus by denying him. We read of this in the closing verses of Matthew 26. Peter denied his Lord three times in a short space of time. Like Judas, Peter was also deeply sorry for what he did, but there is a world of difference between the actions of the two men, and it is the difference between remorse and real repentance.

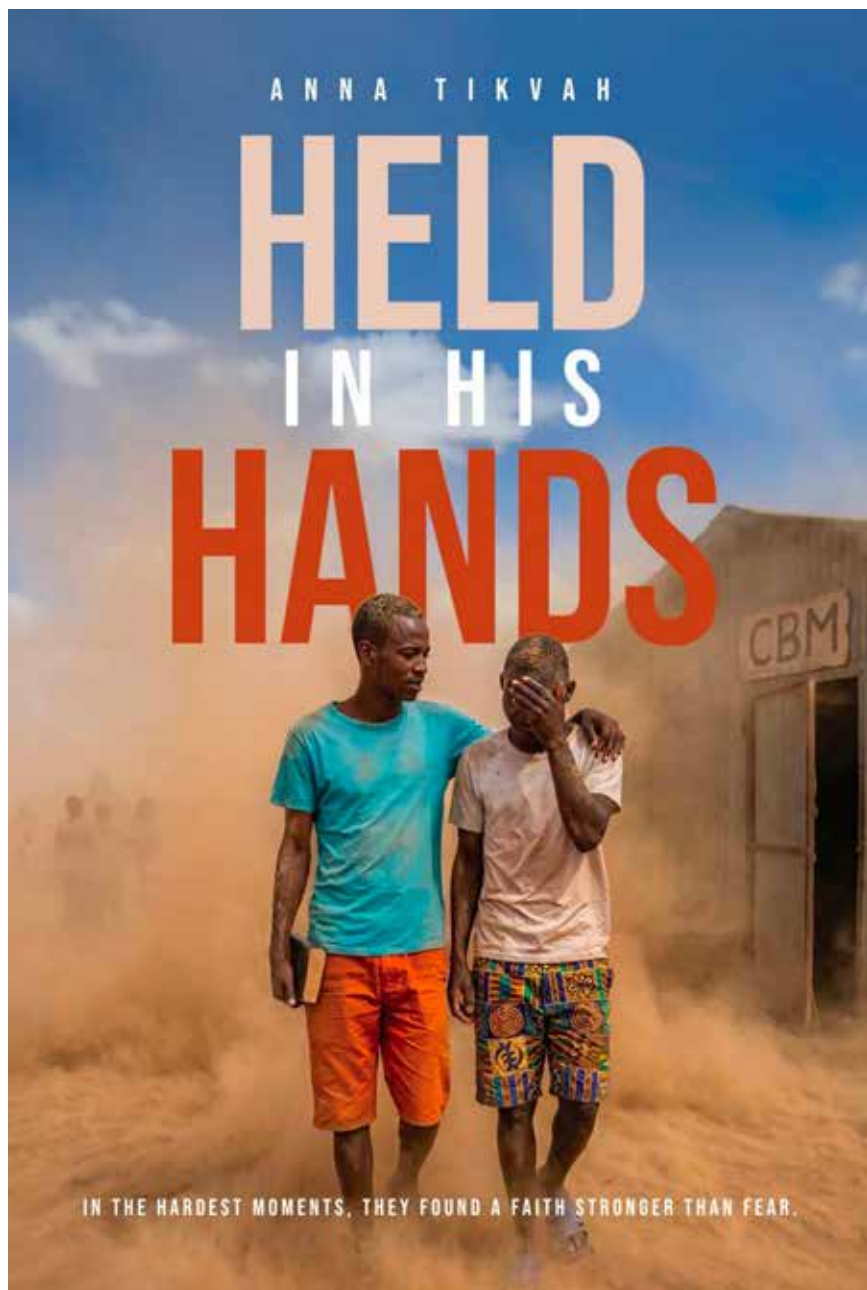
Look at Peter’s response: “*Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*” (26:75).

The chapter division masks the comparison we are meant to make between Peter’s case and that of Judas. When Judas betrayed Jesus, he was overcome by self-pity and remorse and hanged himself. When Peter denied his Lord, he wept heartfelt tears of repentance.

As we await our Lord’s return, there may be times when we betray our Lord by denying our association with him. At such times, let us remember the contrast between Judas and Peter and come to our Lord confident in the forgiveness available to all who follow him. Forgiveness is much more than a theological concept. Sometimes we might become distracted by arcane debates about the atonement, but don’t let such debates obscure the main truth. There is nothing theoretical about the forgiveness extended to us through our Lord’s sacrifice; it is real, it is effective, and it is always available. Judas did not believe that, but Peter did, and so do we.

*Geoff Henstock,
Happy Valley Ecclesia, SA*





David's Story, From One to the Other

For weeks, the young men endured the ill treatment of the soldiers. If they were cross, or unhappy with the boys' conduct, the soldiers would beat them with a pipe. The top officer would state the number of blows, and the others would inflict it. Fearfully, the boys tried their best to please, but there was never a word of thanks, and it didn't take much to make the officers angry.

Often there was nothing to eat until a farm was raided. Then perhaps the rebels would come back with chickens, or a bag of maize, and there would be food for a day or two.

David missed his family dreadfully—Jean, Musa, Miriam, Zakaria, Jibu, and especially little Furaha. He missed fishing with his father on Lake Tanganyika and talking about life. Sometimes he thought about his mother's promise that God was always looking after them, and recalled her words, "Amini katika Mungu, mwanangu—Trust in God, my son." But if this was true, then why would God allow him to be captured by these brutal men and forced into a life where he would have to kill others for a cause he didn't believe in? It seemed there would never be any way to escape, and his own life could be so easily snuffed out in a second should they make a mistake or displease the rebels. He felt that God had forgotten him. Mani kept praying to his prophet, but there were no miraculous interventions. Day after day, was full of worry and strict control, as the youths were trained to load the magazines and shoot the guns.

One night, after his third beating that week for minor mistakes, David lay on the dirt floor with tears in his eyes and bruises on his back. Once again, Mani was praying very hard to Papa Kimbangu, the Protector. David didn't fully understand what his friend believed, only that it was similar to Christianity, except that a man—Simon Kimbangu, was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

Lonely and missing home, David thought about a conversation he'd had with his baba only a few weeks before his abduction. They had been out on the banks of Lake Tanganyika fishing for dinner. In his mind's eye, David wistfully remembered his slim, dark-skinned father reeling in the slender, silver sardines, all the while keeping his eyes open for lurking crocodiles.

"I was the only son of my father," Baba had told him as he baited his hook once more. "I had two sisters. My father and I were born in a small village called Ekala, near the far Western border of the DRC. For some reason, my father became the chief even though he was not from the chieftom lineage, but when he passed away, I was only eighteen years old."

“He died when you were eighteen?” David had asked, making sure the fish didn’t flip out of the pail.

“Yes, only eighteen...barely a man!” his father exclaimed, shaking his head in dismay.

As he cast his line out again, his father had continued the story, “I knew I couldn’t be the next chief, as I had no right to this, so I didn’t even attempt to take his place. But, once my father was buried, another chief was appointed, and this chief said that my father had stolen land. So, he took the property that my mother farmed and even the land that my father was living on before his death, and I was left with nothing! I hoped that someone from the family would stand up and support me, but I was driven out and told to never return. So, I fled here to Baraka.”

“That’s a long journey, Baba,” David had replied sadly.

“Right across the country!” his father had agreed. “But I love it here. I love the lake and the hilly regions of this area, and this is where I found your beautiful mother.”

Smiling, as he lay in the dark, David remembered his father had said this very fondly. He knew his father loved his mother.

“So, I want you to remember this, mwanangu,” his father had said, looking over to make sure his son was listening. “You must always work hard in whatever you do. Poor people have no rights. No one listens to them, and even when they simply greet others, it is assumed that they are begging. But even more importantly than this—you must always forgive everyone. I have forgiven my family, and my village, and this gives me great peace in my heart. Don’t hold onto grudges. Don’t try to avenge yourself—choose to forgive.”

Rolling over on to his other side, David winced in pain as his bruised flesh pressed up against the hard ground. Every day now there were so many opportunities to forgive.

Unable to sleep and desperately homesick, he tried to think of the beautiful stories his mama had told him about Heaven. It had always helped him fall asleep at home. She had said there were streets of sapphire, and a city of gold with many precious gems. Beautiful light would be shining everywhere. And there would be glorious music. They would see God in all His glory... and Jesus...

The next morning, the burly soldier, who they now knew as Bemba, blasted them out of their dreams, shouting, “Get up! Get out here immediately!”

Stumbling awake, the boys filed out of the makeshift shelters, dirty, tired, and hungry.

“We’re heading out to fight the government, and you had better not disappoint!” Bemba scowled. “Show yourself to be good soldiers and maybe we’ll make something of you.”

“But we aren’t trained,” Ntinu complained.

“You’ve had your training!” Bemba roared. “Quit your complaining, kid! You need to keep your mouth shut!”

Reacting to the look of dismay on all their faces, Duma, another one of the rebels, spoke harshly, “If you want to live, stop arguing and do as you’re told. You know how to shoot these guns. That’s all you need to know. Just kill as many soldiers as you can.”

Holding back the anger that was rising within his chest, David remained silent. He knew they were not prepared to go up against the trained Congolese army, and he could see that the other students felt the same way. They had been taught to shoot, but not how to hide, or when to run, or how to defend themselves. “This is the end,”

he thought bitterly. “We’re all going to be shot dead!” After one month with the rebels, what he had learned the most was that his life was no longer his to control. There was nothing he could do but obey orders or be shot dead. And now, even if he obeyed orders from one side, he would be shot by the other.

Mani gripped his arm. They shared a look of despair. There was no opportunity to encourage each other. The soldiers were forcing guns into their hands and telling them to march.

For twelve hours the young men and boys followed the rebels to a place called Kikonde. Disheartened, hungry, weary, and fearful of what the battle might bring, David couldn’t even say the Lord’s prayer in his mind, as he had been trying to do every day. It seemed God had completely forgotten them and abandoned them to the Devil. They were in a living hell. There was no one to appeal to, no one to bring hope.

That night they slept in the bushes, knowing the doomed battle was to begin at four in the morning. “Perhaps,” David thought, trying to comfort himself, “I’ll be in Heaven before the day is over!”

However, first he had to get through the nightmare. In the early hours of the morning, before the sun was up, they attacked the government camp. The plan was to capture the village before ten o’clock. Shots rang out, people died on both sides. Duma crumpled to the ground with a shot to his chest, only a few feet away from the boys.

David couldn’t bring himself to kill anyone. This wasn’t how his parents had brought him up to live. Young and afraid, he had no desire to take the life of another human being. Mani’s religion was completely against violence, so the two of them purposely fired their rifles towards non-living matter, hoping to empty their magazines as quickly as they could.

Suddenly, a loud shot rang out nearby, and the boys heard it whiz through air. Mani stumbled, cried out, and fell to the ground.

Running to his side, David was greatly alarmed. Blood was pulsing from Mani's leg! His eyes were closed and he lay lifeless on the ground. "No! No!" David wailed, flinging himself down beside his injured friend. Rebels were fleeing from the government army to hide in the forest, gunshots were ringing out continuously, but there was no way David was going to leave his unconscious companion. Desperately, he yanked at his uniform, trying to tear off a piece of cloth to wrap around Mani's leg, all the while, wary of the ongoing battle and the danger of lifting his head too high.

Frightened and confused by the counterattack, other schoolmates ran over to them. Terrified, they flung themselves down beside their wounded comrade, trying to stay as low as possible, hoping the fast-flying bullets would whiz past above their heads.

"Hey, you!" a voice called out angrily. A government soldier was standing over the group of boys with his gun cocked. "Whose side are you on?"

"Please," David begged helplessly. "Our friend is hurt... badly. He might be dying! We don't want to fight. We don't want to be with the rebels!"

"And where did the rebels go?" demanded another soldier, running up.

Fearfully, David raised his thin hand and pointed to the bushes. "I saw some flee through there."

"Shut up," Ntinu scolded. Proudly, he answered back to the soldier, "Why would we tell you?"

One second later, Ntinu was hit with a bullet to the head. He didn't have time to say another word. He would never speak again.

Instantly, the other young men cowered on the ground.

The soldier who had shot Ntinu so quickly, challenged, "Are you lying to me, you rebels? If you do, you'll get what he got!"

"We're students," David pleaded earnestly. "They kidnapped us from school. We didn't ask to be on their side. I didn't shoot anyone! Please take us with you."

Looking down at the blood pulsing out from the unresponsive teen's leg, the soldier nodded. "We'd better get him to the hospital," he agreed.

With great relief, the young men were very thankful to be captured. Mani was rushed to the hospital and the others were accepted as soldiers-in-training, for the government army.

Anna Tikvah



A VISIT TO PERU

By
*Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links for Peru*

HERE are some pictures we received from Bro. Ruben Barboza of Cordoba, Argentina. He and his wife, Roxana, spent nearly a week in Lima, Peru, at the end of June. They found a place to have some meetings (it seems to be a school, and apparently it worked out really well), got in contact with all the members, and arranged a dinner after the meetings.

We were delighted to see all the baptized members out, plus their families. It's been such a long time since

we've visited that it was wonderful to see them and see how the kids are growing up!

Everyone in Lima loves Ruben and Roxana, so they are good people to visit. Bro. Ruben gave a couple of classes, then Bro. Nahuel, a local member, gave the exhortation.

*Jim and Jean Hunter,
CBMA Links for Peru*



The Carmona family: Bro. Flavio, Sis. Gloria, and their son, Bro. Nahuel, with Stephanie, a friend of Nahuel's. And Bro. Ruben and his wife, Roxana.



Dinner time!

GROWING TOGETHER THROUGH JOY AND SORROW

*By Kevin and Rebekah Hunter
CBMA Links for Ecuador*

RETURNING to Ecuador the first week in July was a tremendous blessing. We had a wonderful time reconnecting with people in our ecclesial community and were reminded once again of the depth and beauty of the relationships that God has allowed us to build over many years.

This year's Bible study conference brought together brothers and sisters from across Latin America and beyond, including Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Brazil, Peru, Canada, and England, with about 50 participants.

We focused on fellowship, Bible study, and spiritual encouragement across Latin America and beyond, and included elderly members facing the challenges of aging, highlighting their strong faith and gratitude. It was organized by local Ecuadorian members, emphasizing service, hospitality, and unity.

Adult studies focused on the Book of Job, exploring themes of suffering, friendship, and faithfulness. Children's classes centered on Jesus' compassion as depicted in the Gospel of John.

The baptism of **Belén Duchi** was a highlight of the weekend, symbolizing commitment and the continuation of faith across generations. Her journey and dedication inspired many attendees, since she started attending Sunday School over 25 years ago with extended family members. We have watched her grow from a child into a young woman who has become a source of inspiration and leadership within her own family and within the larger ecclesial community in Quito.

Reflections from participants emphasized a renewed sense of spiritual family, personal growth, and the importance of disconnecting from daily worries to focus on faith, and emphasized the importance of community, support, and spiritual growth across generations.

The Ecuador fellowship weekend was a spiritually enriching event marked by deep intergenerational connections, meaningful study, personal milestones, and a strong sense of community. It



Belén Duchi's baptism

served as a reminder of the enduring value of faith, fellowship, and mutual support within the Christadelphian family.

*Kevin and Rebekah Hunter,
CBMA Links for Ecuador*



The July 2026 Study Weekend in Ecuador

TRUTH CORPS

By Team Members

THE following are some highlights from Truth Corps 2026, from the perspective of both leaders and members.

Week One: Training and Preaching in the Brantford Area

Sis. Martha Sales: My favorite moments were going door-to-door on Canada Day and the great conversations we had with all our neighbors that day. And that night, we were also recognized by a group of people who had seen us in our T-shirts walking around town that day and wanted to know more about us.

Sis. Sela Msafiri: My experience with Truth Corps has been truly incredible. Throughout the week, I learned practical ways to approach conversations about the Bible, such as finding common ground with

others and allowing them to guide the discussion, which helped create more meaningful and genuine conversations.

Sis. Serenity Abel: Another highlight from this week was handing out the same flyers at the fireworks on Canada Day. We got to go around and talk to a few families and some groups of teenagers. This was good for us as we learned that it is pretty easy to talk to people that you don't know.

Week Two: Baraka Bible School

Sis. Serenity Abel: The Baraka Bible School was one of the most enjoyable experiences of Truth Corps. The joy of seeing a group of people in love with the Bible and working with them was incredible. We all came away from it with new perspectives and a burning fire and passion for the truth.

Sis. Martha Sales: I took videos of all the kids during lunch hour, asking James questions about the Bible and whether we go to heaven or not. They were thinking hard and seeing the implications of the lessons that he and Aunt Cassie were teaching them.

Sis. Sela Msafiri: I really loved watching everything from months of planning come to life. Really appreciated God's blessings throughout each day.

Bro. James Bates: While at Baraka Bible School, many brothers and sisters made a great effort to put on a "Kingdom Night," in which all of us at the school got to record our vision of the Kingdom.

Week Three: Trine Bible School

Sis. Martha Sales: The testimonies from the Truth Corps members were really powerful, and I do hope they result in other young people realizing

that doing the preaching work that Jesus Christ has asked us to do is actually something that we can find stimulating and enjoyable on a whole new level in life.

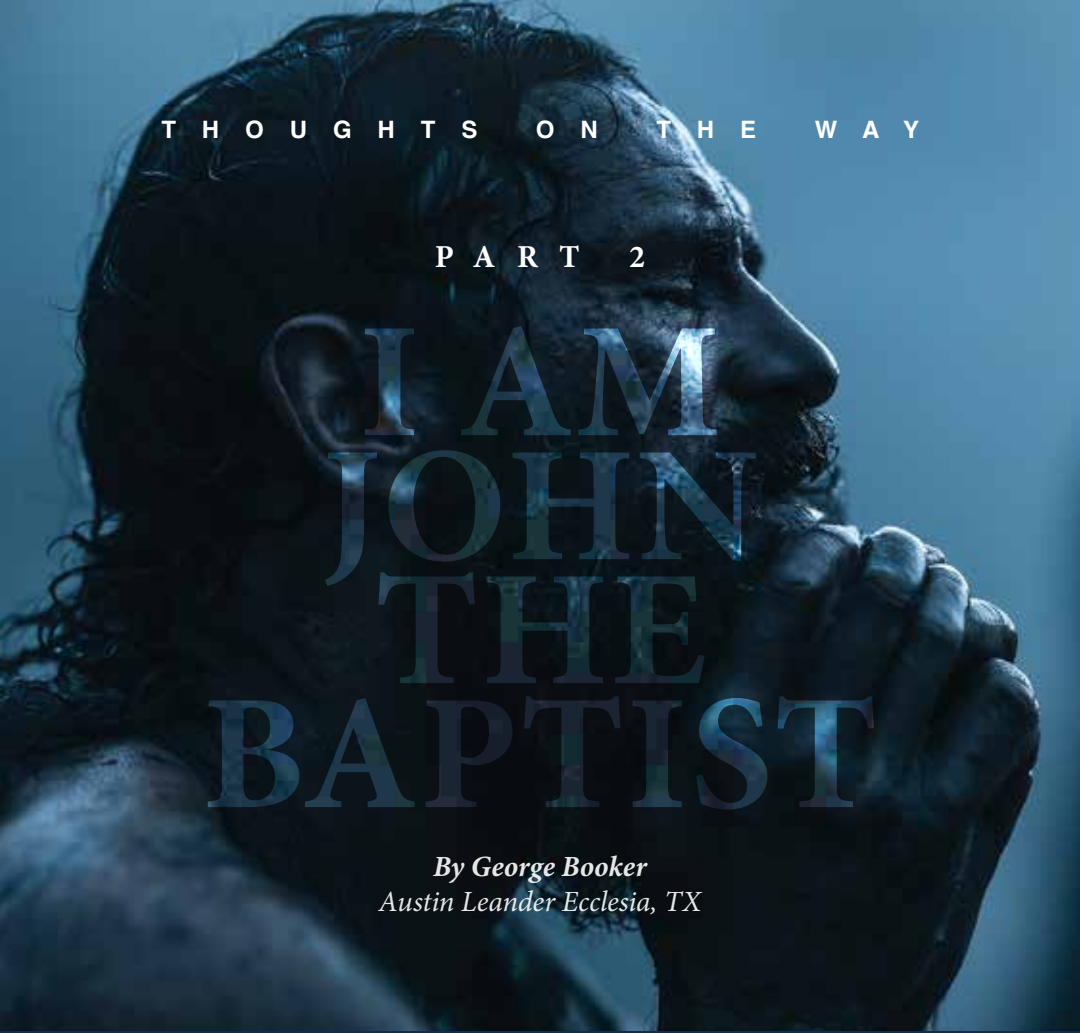
Bro. James Bates: Ultimately, Truth Corps taught me that perfect love of God casts out fear, whether in knocking on doors, teaching kids classes, or taking the next steps in life; that sincere peace, love, and joy in our calling and hope is crucial in service to God, and without such things we aren't really living in an acceptable or profitable way; and that we have to be willing to change and grow daily as we watch for our Lord's swift return.

To see the full testimonials, go to:

cbma.net/news/truth-corps-2026-2/



The 2026 Truth Corps Team



T H O U G H T S O N T H E W A Y

P A R T 2

I AM JOHN THE BAPTIST

*By George Booker
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX*

FINALLY, my parents both died, one departing soon after the other, as often happens with older couples. They had lived together and prayed together for many, many years. At times, they had wondered if the Divine One heard them. Which of us doesn't have such thoughts, at least once in a while? But then their persistence in faith and prayer was rewarded in a special way, and I was the result. I was their legacy to the world, and I could not let them down, any more than I could turn my back, so to speak, on the words of the great angel Gabriel. Now I knew what my life's work would be, whether long or short.

I would forsake Herod's temple, the place where my father had served as priest with great distinction. I would turn my back on the splendor of one of the world's great buildings. Its beauty was no more than a façade hiding, from some eyes, the greed and graft and lust of men who knew not the Lord of heaven and earth.

With one last look and, I must admit, one final thought of regret for the comfort and security I would be leaving behind, I turned away and set my course out to the wilds of Judea, to a place called Bethabara, just beyond the Jordan River. I left behind the beautiful

garments fashioned by my loving mother; they would not serve me well in the desert. I would eat what I could find; I would wear what I could put together for myself. I would impress no one by my fine appearance, but I hoped to touch the hearts of any listeners with a simple message: “Repent. Turn your life around. Be baptized—washed—for the forgiveness of your sins, and be ready for the One who shall come!”

I was determined to give up all the pretense in the regulated, regimented life of that great institution, the priesthood of Aaron. Once it had been useful, but by now it had outlived its purpose. It was decaying from the inside out, and soon everyone would see its rottenness. Even if I had little to eat and little to wear, I would have little to leave behind when my time comes—as it comes for us all—to depart this life. I would do so gladly, knowing that the one thing I would carry with me was the hope of a better life to come. I did not know how long or how short my sojourn would be in the vastness of the wilderness, but I hoped that it would not last long. And indeed, I believe now that it will be a very short time.

When I preached, I preached with the fierce urgency of one who sees an imminent danger, but at the same time, of one who sees a great blessing as well! God be praised, many came out to listen, repent, and be baptized. They came from Jerusalem and all of Judea, from Jericho, and even from Galilee. Rich people came; I told them to share what they had with the poor. Tax collectors came; I told them, “*Be fair and honest in your dealings.*” Roman soldiers also: “*Don’t take bribes, and be content with your wages.*” And to all, I gave the same simple message: “Repent. Be ready. The Messiah is coming!”

In my preaching, I did not hold back anything, but declared what I saw and what I knew to be true. I singled out Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, for his adultery, knowing I was making myself a target for rich and powerful enemies. The Jewish leaders, priests, Levites, and Pharisees came out to hear me. I expected them. They came in groups, like wolves or wild dogs, to hunt me, but first they interrogated me. I knew my mission now, and I remained firm in my resolve. Nothing they could offer me, and no threat they could make to intimidate me—neither had any effect on me. No, I told them, I am not Elijah. Nor am I the great Prophet, or the Messiah. I am the voice of one man crying out in the desert: “*Make straight the way for the Lord to come to Israel!*”

And I continued to cry out, so loud at times that the sound of my voice echoed from the distant hills and sounded in our ears again: “Repent, and be baptized. The Holy One is coming from God!” I knew such a ministry was very dangerous; I could see my enemies at times, gathered on the outskirts of the crowds, salivating at the prospect of tearing me limb from limb. But I knew I was safe for the time being, because an angel from heaven had given me the message: “You will see the coming of the Messiah.” So I preached and waited, and waited and preached.

My Reward

It had only been a few months, not even a year, when my waiting would be rewarded. But when the Coming One arrived, I did not recognize the man who would be my blessing and my reward, at least not at the beginning.

First, a message came to me. I can’t say who delivered it, for it truly felt like a dream. I realize that when a person thinks seriously and long enough

about something, he may dream about that very subject without any divine intervention. But this message was so powerful and so memorable that, unlike some dreams, it didn't leave me. Weeks later, I still held the words in my heart, and wondered from time to time if it represented my wishful thinking, or a true revelation from on high:

When you see divine power descending from heaven, and resting upon one man, then you will know that you are seeing the only true Son of the Almighty. He will come with such power that you cannot imagine.

Finally, one afternoon, I learned the answer to my question: What I thought was a dream was indeed a message from Heaven. A young man came to the river. He was a very ordinary man; nothing in his appearance set him apart from anyone else. But as he came closer to me, I felt there was something very special about him. It was, and still is, difficult to explain. He seemed to project kindness and love that touched everyone near him, as though his very presence were speaking to others: "I love you, and I care about you." Now the other folks, who had been instinctively drawn to him also, moved aside just enough for him to pass through them and approach me. It was like the Jordan River parting when the ark of the covenant entered its waters.

There was also a great calm about him, which he wore like a garment. I sensed that he could stand in front of a raging storm or a charging army and not flinch. It felt as though nothing could frighten or intimidate him. Wherever he went, he was in charge. And I found it practically impossible to take my eyes off him.

I asked him his name, and he replied: "Yehshua, from Nazareth in Galilee." It was a Hebrew name of great meaning,

dating back to the days of Moses and his close confidant and successor, Yehshua, or Joshua, who led the people of Israel into the Land of Promise. The name means "One who saves." The mention of Nazareth brought back old memories of my parents telling me about a young woman, one of my mother's distant relatives. She came from Nazareth in the north to visit them in Judea and revealed to them that, independent of my parents, she had also been visited by the angel Gabriel. She explained that, although betrothed to a young man in Nazareth, she was miraculously with child, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Could this Yehshua, this Jesus, be her son? Could he be the child of the Almighty?

Jesus now asked me to baptize him. I felt so unworthy—it's hard to say why—and I spoke up: "But it is you who should be baptizing me." "No," he contradicted me, but with real gentleness, "It is my Father's will, and it must be this way, for now." And I consented.

When I baptized him, then there appeared something very much like a dove, which slowly descended from the clouds until it settled down upon his head, as gently as though it were another dream. And then there was a voice, much louder than the others I had heard earlier: "This is my beloved Son. I am well-pleased with him." I do not know how much others heard, but I heard those words distinctly. It was my dream, now come to life before me, and I praised the Lord.

There came to me one more message, and I know this one was from the heavenly Father. It was the same voice, but I heard it even more plainly, and it was directed toward me alone. The message itself settled down on me like another dove from heaven, enveloping me in a warm embrace of love. I knew

then that nothing could ever separate me from that love: “My dear child John, you have served me well; you have been my new ‘Elijah,’ and you have prepared the way for my Son. Now, my friend, you may begin to lay down your burdens and take your rest. You may tell your disciples to follow him and do as he directs them. In the proclaiming of the good news, you will decrease while he increases. Your labor is nearly over, while his work is just beginning. He is the bridegroom come to claim his bride, but you are the great friend of the bridegroom, and when he rejoices, you will rejoice with him.”

My Blessing

I, John the Baptizer, tell you, my friend: I am fully prepared to die, whether it be soon or much later, it matters not. I will not fear what any man can do to me, for my eyes have seen the greatest Glory, greater than that which resides in Herod’s temple. I have seen the Lamb of God coming out of the desert, the true Lamb who will take away the sins of the world.

I have heard rumors that Pilate’s soldiers or Herod’s minions will be coming to arrest me, either for being a general troublemaker or for calling attention to the sinfulness of Herod’s lifestyle—or for both. But I am not at all troubled, nor should you be troubled. I know that I have a Redeemer and a Savior, and at this very moment, he is walking about among men. I know that I have completed the task the Almighty has given me. I have prepared the way for the King of the Jews to begin the great task of declaring his Kingdom and taking his throne.

I tell you, my new friend: I do not expect to live long, but I have no regrets. Don’t

mourn for me when I am gone, for you and I will meet again. Follow your new Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and show you the way into the presence of his Father. Follow Jesus, and even the gates of death and the grave will hold no fear for you, because your heavenly Father will be pleased to give you all things, including a glorious eternal Kingdom. I bestow upon you the great priestly blessing, which I learned from my own father:

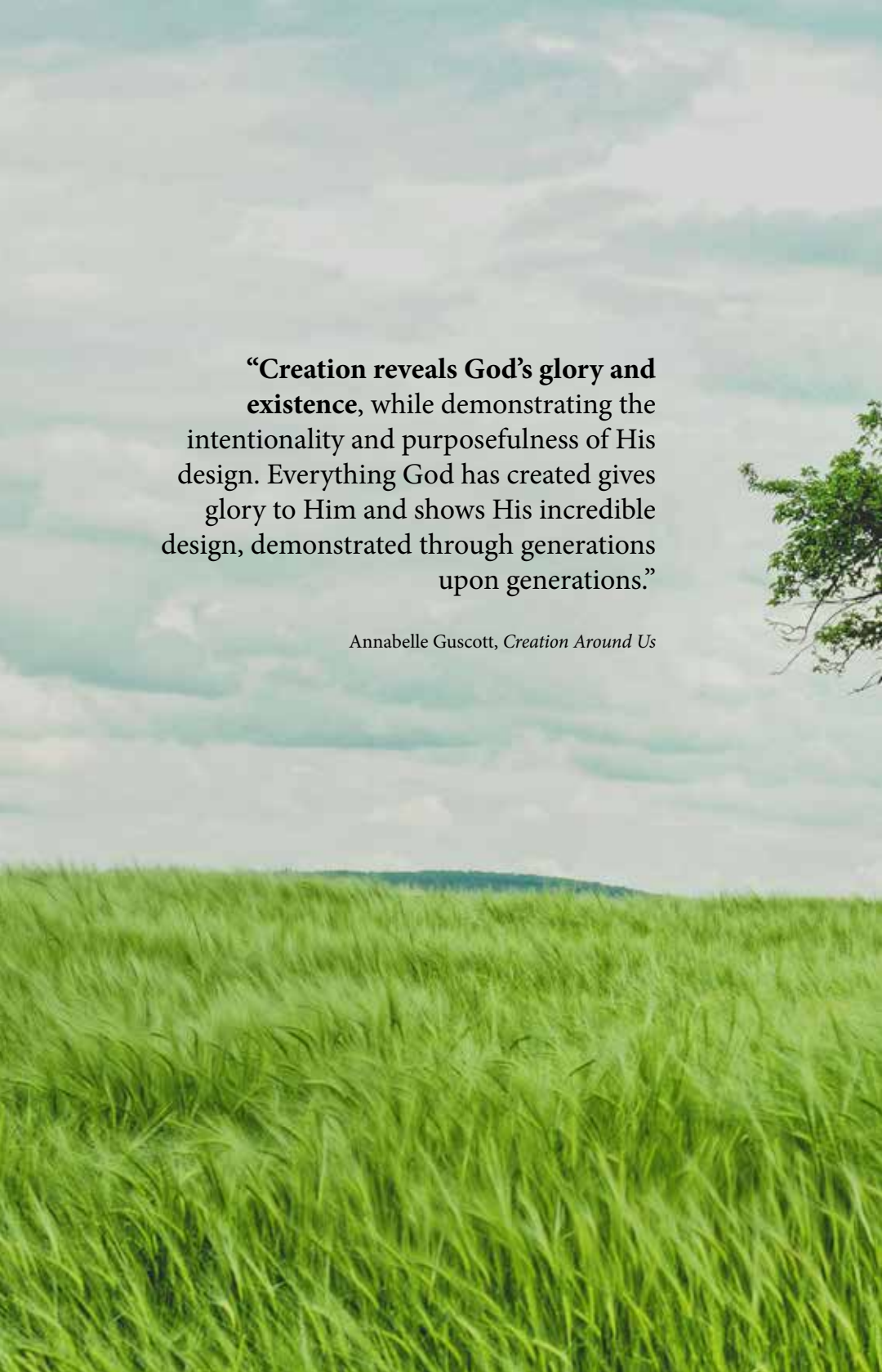
*May the Lord bless you and keep you;
may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
may the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

Amen.

*George Booker,
Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX*

References:

- A place called Bethabara: The KJV uses “Bethabara”, while most modern authorities and translations use “Bethany.” It is quite possible that John the Baptist moved from place to place to reach more listeners with his preaching. “Bethabara” signifies “the house of passing away, or crossing over.” This suggests the passing away of the Law of Moses, facilitated by the efforts of John the Baptist and then by Jesus.
- My reward: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23; Luke 1:26-56; John 3:26-30.
- My blessing: John 1:29; Matthew 3:11; Numbers 6:24-26.



**“Creation reveals God’s glory and
existence,** while demonstrating the
intentionality and purposefulness of His
design. Everything God has created gives
glory to Him and shows His incredible
design, demonstrated through generations
upon generations.”

Annabelle Guscott, *Creation Around Us*



THE CHRISTADELPHIAN **TIDINGS** OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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

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), Linda Beckerson, Peter Bilello, Nancy Brinkerhoff, Steve Davis, Jeff Gelineau, Dave Jennings, Allen Laben, William Link, Maritta Terrell, David Fraser.

Christadelphian Tidings Editorial Committee: Jason Hensley (Editor), Shawn Moynihan (Social Media Editor), Jim Sullivan (*High Calling* Editor), Section Editors: Jessica Gelineau (Music and Praise), Steve Cheetham (Exposition), Jason Hensley (First Principles), Jason Hensley (Teaching and Preaching), Jan Berneau (CBMA/C), George Booker, (Thoughts on the Way, Q&A), Tim Jennings (Scriptural References) and Melinda Flatley (Writer Recruitment and Final Copy).

Subscriptions: The Tidings Magazine is provided **FREE** for any who would like to read it. The Magazine is available in PDF Format online at tidings.org. If you would like to order a printed subscription to **The Tidings** you may do so simply by making a donation to cover the printing costs. The suggested donation for printing and shipping to the US is **\$70.00**; (we ask for a minimum donation of \$50.00.) Foreign countries are higher, see www.tidings.org.

All subscription information is available online at www.tidings.org. You may subscribe online and make donations online or by mail to the above address. Information on how to subscribe in other countries is also available online at www.tidings.org/subscribe.

The Christadelphian Tidings is published on the 15th of the month for the month following. Items for publication must be received by the 1st of the month. Correspondence to the editor, Jason Hensley at editor@tidings.org. Publication of articles does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine as set forth in the BASF. Letters should be sent via email to letters@tidings.org. Please include your name, address and phone number. The magazine reserves the right to edit all submissions for length and clarity.

©2026, Tidings Publishing Committee. In the spirit of Christ ask for permission before reproducing any material. Contact us at editor@tidings.org

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are from *The Authorized (King James) Version*. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the *New King James Version*®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the *ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)*, copyright© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked (CSB) have been taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

An exciting new digital service
providing Christadelphian content
— anytime, anywhere

- Magazines
- E-books
- Podcasts
- Audiobooks
- Music



*"Though our outward self is wasting away,
our inner self is renewed day by day"*
2 Corinthians 4:16



Web App: Now Live!
Mobile App launch: later 2026

The
Christadelphian

is delighted to announce the launch
of our new website and app

renew

renew.thechristadelphian.com

Renew — supporting daily discipleship

**Sign up
and explore!**



To make a donation or to subscribe, visit us at

WWW.TIDINGS.ORG

The brothers and sisters who write for *The Christadelphian Tidings* do so on a voluntary basis, and the magazine is provided FREE to any who would like to read it. The magazine is available in digital formats online at www.tidings.org.

If you would like to order a printed subscription to the *Tidings*, you may do so simply by making a donation to help cover the printing and mailing costs. The suggested donation is US\$70.00, and minimum donation is US\$35.00. (Check online for rates in other countries.) If you can afford to donate more, please do so in order to help out those that cannot afford the cost.

The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom of God

First Class Postage paid at Simi Valley, CA

Send address corrections to:

The Christadelphian Tidings

567 Astorian Drive

Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941

Stay connected and up to date. Find us
on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!

