

"...you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation..." 2 Timothy 3:15

MEETING GOD, HIS SON, AND THEIR FAMILY

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL
AND THE CHRISTADELPHIANS



Meeting God, His Son, and Their Family

An Introduction to the Gospel and the Christadelphians

I was not raised a Christadelphian;¹ in fact, I was not raised in any church. I knew nothing about the Bible, or God, or Jesus Christ. In my senior year of high school (1975-1976) a friend mentioned a book she had been reading which claimed that Christ would return by 1988.² I was skeptical. I argued that you could make anything out of the Bible; after all, there were so many churches, each claiming their beliefs were based on the Bible, and yet their teachings varied so much. By all appearances the Bible could be used to prove whatever you wanted to prove. Consequently, it was essentially useless to prove anything. Mind you, I knew nothing about it.

When I got home that night, I found a Bible and searched the table of contents for something about prophecy. The book at the very end, called “Revelation,” sounded like it might be relevant. I read it straight through and concluded my earlier argument was clearly correct. No one could know for sure what this stuff was about. It was so highly symbolic, with no obvious meaning anywhere near the surface. Of course, I had no background to make such a judgment and if I had stopped there, I would have been wrong, “dead” wrong! The more important outcome of that night was that I committed myself to learn more about the Bible. I didn’t intend on believing; my goal was merely to be better prepared for the next debate.

Meeting the Christadelphians in Houston

My grandma was a devoted Christadelphian. She read the “chapters” every day.³ I had been with Grandma to Sunday school and church a couple times. The Christadelphians studied the Bible seriously. They knew their Bibles and were eager to help others learn, so it made sense to get in touch with them.

The next Sunday, my friend and I went to the local Christadelphian meeting in Houston. We arrived during the middle of Sunday school.

- 1 The word “Christadelphians” means “brothers and sisters in Christ” and is derived from Colossians 1:2. (See the New International Version translation of this verse).
- 2 The author based this claim on the Parable of the Fig Tree in Mark 13:28-32, claiming that Jesus was referring to a forty-year generation from the formation of the state of Israel in 1948.
- 3 These daily portions of the Bible are taken from the Bible Companion, which is a reading plan that covers the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice each year. Copies are available from the website on the back cover.

“And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. **They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.**”

~ Acts 17:11 (NLT)

After the class was over, several of the members gathered around us. We told them we just wanted to learn about the Bible. One of them (Stan) replied, “We let the Bible interpret itself by comparing Scripture with Scripture.” Over time, I have come to realize how critical this approach is.

The following Wednesday night, I asked my friend if she wanted to go to the weeknight Bible class with me. Sadly, she said her parents wouldn’t allow her to go, so I went without her.



The class was studying the two New Testament books First and Second Thessalonians. Someone mentioned that the second coming of Christ is mentioned in every chapter of these two letters.⁴ Another brought up Acts 1:9-11, saying that we all knew what it said so we didn’t need to look it up. One of the older members (Eunice) glanced at me and said we should read the verses, and so we did:

Now when He [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they [his disciples] watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men [angels] stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”⁵

Earlier in the chapter, the disciples had asked Jesus, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus responded, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:6-7). I found this helpful as it illustrated a general pattern: although the Bible

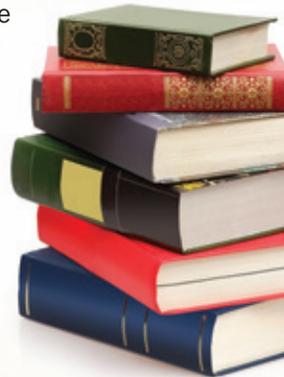
⁴ The verses are 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-16; 5:1-2, 23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:1-2, 8; 3:5.
⁵ All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV), though at the time, we were using the King James Version (KJV).

repeatedly claims that Christ will return to the earth, when that event will occur is not possible to know (e.g., Mark 13:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2).

Visiting Grandma before going to university

I visited Grandma the summer before I was to start attending the University of Texas in Austin. She gave me a bag full of material about the Bible and its teachings – books, pamphlets, and copies of fraternal magazines – lots of stuff.

Dr. John Thomas initiated the Christadelphian movement in the 1840s, taking the name in 1864 as part of their registration for conscientious objector status in the American Civil War. Among the material I got from Grandma was his “Confession, Abjuration, and Declaration” in which he describes his discovery that the gospel is not merely the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, as taught by most Christians. Instead, it also includes, for example, the promises to Abraham: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’” (Galatians 3:8). In fact, he shows that the gospel has two major parts: good news about the kingdom of God and about the name of Jesus Christ.⁶ What an important breakthrough for him, and for me! For one thing, it means you need to study the Old Testament in order to fully understand the gospel.



I loved reading all the material Grandma had given me. I discovered the flaw in my earlier argument. Though the churches claimed to teach what was in the Bible, they really didn’t. It wasn’t the Bible that was the source of all the competing ideas, it was people. The Bible itself taught one truth, one gospel (Galatians 1:6-8). And that gospel was different than the teachings of all the churches of which I was aware.

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For me, that was a new perspective. It opened my eyes to another critical idea: I had to study the Bible for myself, perhaps with the help of others, but never trusting in what other people taught.

⁶ See, for example, Acts 1:3; 8:12; 28:30-31; Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 7:22-23; Matthew 24:14; Luke 23:25-27, 44-48; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

I was personally responsible for understanding what God said. I could not delegate that responsibility to anyone else. I could read and listen to lots of others, but I had to search the Scriptures myself to separate the wheat from the chaff. I had to be like those in Paul's day: "These [Bereans] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). I had to test things myself as the apostles once urged, "Test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21; see also 1 John 4:1-3).

God, His son Jesus Christ, and immortality

As I started to read the various pamphlets and books, which all quoted frequently from the Bible to prove their points, I learned several key Bible concepts early on, including these:

- **There is only one God and Father of all**, even of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:29-31). "[There is] one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:5). After his resurrection, Jesus said, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17) —clearly indicating a difference between God and Jesus⁷.
- **Jesus Christ was born of a virgin**, without a human father, the only begotten son of God, conceived through His power (2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35). He shared our nature, made of flesh and blood (Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:14-15). As we are tempted by our own desires (James 1:14-15), so too was Jesus. He was tempted in all points like we are, but he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). He was like a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19). Christ learned obedience by the things he suffered (Hebrews 5:7-8). He died on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins, not instead of us or in place of us. He is not our substitute; rather, he is our representative. His sacrificial offering included his ministry, his death by crucifixion, and his resurrection from the dead on the third day (Romans 5:8-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 1 Peter 2:24-25; Isaiah 53; Psalm 22).

⁷ See also 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 20:17; Hebrews 1:8-9.

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I could read and listen to lots of others, but I had to search the Scriptures myself to separate the wheat from the chaff.

- **The phrase "immortal soul" does not occur in the Bible**; on the contrary, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). In other words, immortality is not a current possession. Humans are mortal. Eternal life is something to be sought (Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:50-56; 2 Timothy 1:10). Resurrection from the dead at the return of Christ is the only hope for those who "sleep in the dust" (Daniel 12:2-3; John 5:24-29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-28; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). No one has ascended to heaven except Jesus (John 3:13), not even David (Acts 2:25-36; 13:35-37).

Meeting the Christadelphians in Austin

Let me tell you about my first Sunday with the Austin Christadelphians. I discovered that my new apartment in Austin was about four blocks from the YWCA where the congregation met. The first Sunday I was in town, I walked over, and was welcomed at the door by a woman I had never met (Marie), who said to me, "You must be Joe Hill!" What a nice surprise. Turns out that after my visit with Grandma, and before I showed up in Austin, Grandma had attended the Midwest Christadelphian Bible School where she told one of the couples from Austin (Joe and Marie) that I might show up and asked them to treat me nice if I did. This couple and many others in the Austin congregation "adopted" me as if I were their own.

After the surprise greeting, an elderly man in a wheelchair (Eldon) pointed me to the teen Sunday school class that was held in the back of the room on the

stage. There must have been 20 students in the class, which was being led by a burly middle-aged man (Rick). The topic was miracles. We were going around the table with each student having to name a miracle. They all had their favorites: Joshua and the walls of Jericho, Daniel in the lion's den, Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace, Jesus walking on water, and others. I knew none of these. From my reading of the material Grandma had given me, I could think of one miracle, the virgin birth of Jesus. But I was last to go, and there was no way it would get all the way around to me without someone giving this miracle. It was too good, too important. I was terrified. Here on my first day meeting these folks I was going to look like a complete ignoramus. What a nightmare. They kept going around the table, naming miracles by Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, and the apostles. I didn't know any of these. There were so many, because the Bible is full of great stories, many of them miracles. It finally came to me, and the virgin birth was still unnamed, so I lucked out. They all thought I was a genius, but I knew better.

That Sunday was an "eating meeting", which meant there was a potluck lunch after the service. They invited me to join them, which I was more than happy to do. The following Wednesday evening, they picked me up to go to a homemade spaghetti dinner and Bible readings at one of their homes. Besides teaching me the Bible, they always made sure I was well fed.⁸

My first "fraternal gathering"

Soon after school started, I attended a fraternal gathering.⁹ It was held at Buescher State Park, about 45 minutes outside Austin. There were dozens of families there from all over Texas. The adult teacher was from California; his name was Bob and his topic was the Old Testament book of Joshua. His content was from the Bible, but his methods were pure Bob.¹⁰ Even though it was over 40 years ago, I still remember vividly some of the lessons from that weekend. For example, Bob gave us each a medicine capsule with the following memory verse rolled up inside:

"Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the

⁸ Eating together is a frequent practice of the Christadelphians. It is one of many ways that emphasize how much they are like a real family.

⁹ Christadelphian fraternal gatherings are weekend retreats for families to get away from the cares of everyday life, study the Bible, and share fellowship together.

¹⁰ Bob was a wonderful speaker, who had a style all his own.

River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:14-15)

Bob also gave us each a round wooden disk with the letters "TUIT" on it. He told us we couldn't use the procrastinator's excuse, "When I get around to it" because we all now had "a round tuit."

I also remember that evening. We all gathered around a Texas-sized bonfire and sang hymns. A couple folks (Stan and Mark) played guitars, but after a while, the enthusiastic singing drowned out their instruments. Someone passed out folders with the lyrics for the songs, but almost everyone (except me) knew the words by heart. Among other songs, I remember we sang these four.

The Law of the Lord is Perfect

(Psalm 19:7-14)

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul:

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold:

Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart:

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold:

Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever:

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous together.

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold:

sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned:

And in keeping of them there is great reward.

More to be desired are they than gold,
yea, than much fine gold:

sweeter also than honey
and the honeycomb.



There is a Green Hill Far Away

(to the tune of "House of the Rising Sun" by The Animals)

There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where our dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.
We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.
There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin.
He only could unlock the gate
Of life and let us in.
Oh, dearly, dearly has he loved!
And we must love him too,
And trust in his redeeming blood,
And strive his works to do.

Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

(Matthew 6:30; 7:7; John 3:16)

(each verse is sung twice with the male voices repeating the words and the female voices singing "alleluia" as a descant)

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And His righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu, alleluia!
Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you.
Allelu, alleluia!
God loved the world so very, very much,
He gave his only Son,
that whosoever believeth in him
shall have life everlasting.

Behold What Manner of Love

(1 John 3:1)

(sung as a round with increasing speed as the hymn progresses)

Behold what manner of love the Father hath given unto us
Behold what manner of love the Father hath given unto us
That we should be called the sons of God
That we should be called the sons of God

The lyrics were simple, yet full of meaning. The passion of the singing was infectious. Hymn sings like this one were wonderful for new folks like me. They helped me learn the words of the Bible and they prompted me to start expressing my own thankfulness to God.

First principles class

Once the university semester was underway, I began taking a weeknight "First Principles Class" led by a man in his late twenties (George), about ten years older than me. George had been a lifelong Christadelphian and knew the Bible like the back of his hand. He was also a CPA; the Christadelphians don't have a paid ministry. George and his wife Barbara hosted the class in their home, and they routinely invited class members to join them for dinner before the class started.

George based the class on a set of notes made up of twenty lessons that provide an overview of the books of the Bible and the fundamental principles of the gospel.¹¹ This was perfect for me, because I needed to learn these Bible ABCs.

I remember the first lesson like it was yesterday. The topic was "The Central Theme of the Bible". It highlighted God's purpose and plan, which form the nucleus around which all the details revolve. This study made it clear that there is a common theme running throughout the Bible. This was exciting; it provided a basic framework for my understanding.

CREATION

The central theme begins with the end in mind: God's ultimate purpose is to fill the earth with His glory:

But truly, as I [the LORD] live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. (Numbers 14:21)¹²

¹¹ "A Procedure for Teaching the Truth," Advancement of Scripture Knowledge (ASK), New England Christadelphian Publicity Committee, Meriden, Connecticut.

¹² See also Psalm 72:18-19; Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14; Matthew 6:9-10, 13; Revelation 19:1; 21:10-11. It would be a while before I started to understand the true meaning of the phrase "the glory of the LORD". Among other things, it represents His presence (see, for example, Exodus 24:16-17; 40:34-35; 2 Kings 7:10-11; Revelation 21:10-11, 23; John 1:14). But that is a story for another day.



God's ultimate purpose is
to fill the earth with
HIS GLORY...

In order to accomplish His purpose, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them; He formed the earth to be inhabited:

*For thus says **the LORD, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other."** (Isa 45:18)*

*May you be blessed by the LORD, **who made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S; But the earth He has given to the children of men.** (Psalm 115:15-16)¹³*

The basic principles of creation are given in the first chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-9). In particular, God made humans in His own image and likeness, and gave them dominion over creation:

*God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; **let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.**" So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)*

Physically, God made man out of the dust of the ground, like the other animals:

*And the LORD God **formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.** (Genesis 2:7; cf. 2:19)*

Genesis 2-3 tells how God put them in the Garden of Eden and gave them a command that they could eat of any of the trees except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent's reasoning deceived the woman (2 Corinthians 11:3) and she ate of the forbidden tree. She gave to her husband, who knowingly and willfully partook, thus bringing sin into the world (1 Timothy 2:14; Romans 5:12). The punishment for this transgression included death, which was a reversal of creation: "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" (Genesis 3:19; see also Ecclesiastes 3:19-20; 12:7).

But it also included a critical promise spoken to the serpent: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and **her Seed; He shall bruise your head**, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). George explained that the seed of the woman referred to Jesus Christ; it is possibly an

¹³ See also Nehemiah 9:5-6; Matthew 5:5; Revelation 14:6-7.

allusion to the virgin birth. The bruising of the serpent's head refers to Jesus' destruction of sin and death (Romans 5:15-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 57; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 1:18).

GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

As mentioned above, the gospel was preached to Abraham, who lived around 2000 BC. The promises to Abraham are recorded in Genesis and can be summarized as follows:¹⁴

- **A blessing.** God promised to bless Abraham; and all nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham and his seed (Genesis 12:2-3; 17:4-5; 18:18; 22:17-18).
- **A land.** God promised Abraham and his seed that He would give them a land extending from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Genesis 13:14-17).¹⁵ This would be an everlasting possession. We learn later that this Promised Land would be abundantly fertile, "flowing with milk and honey."¹⁶
- **A great name and nation;** and a multitude of descendants. God would make of Abraham a great nation and He would make his name great (Genesis 12:2; 18:18). God promised Abraham, even when he was still childless at the time, that he would be fruitful and his descendants would be multiplied (Genesis 17:1-6). They would be essentially innumerable, like the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16), like the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5), and like the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore (Genesis 22:17).¹⁷
- **Faith counted for righteousness.** Abraham "believed in the Lord; and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).¹⁸
- **An everlasting covenant.** God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his seed, to be their God (Genesis 17:1-8). The last book of the Bible refers to this promise: "God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

In short, God promised Abraham a large family, a permanent land to live in, and a special relationship to Him. And yet, as George explained, surprisingly,

14 A helpful exercise is to read Genesis 12-22 and highlight the promises: (1) Genesis 12:1-3, 7; (2) Genesis 13:14-17; (3) Genesis 15:5-6; (4) Genesis 15:18-21; (5) Genesis 17:1-8; (6) Genesis 18:17-18; (7) Genesis 22:15-18.

15 See also Genesis 12:1, 7; 15:18-21; 17:8.

16 See Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27; 14:8; Deuteronomy 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; Joshua 5:6; Jeremiah 11:5; 32:22; Ezekiel 20:6, 15.

17 See also: (dust) 2 Chronicles 1:9; (stars) Genesis 26:4; Exodus 32:13. Deuteronomy 1:10; 10:22; Nehemiah 9:23; 1 Chronicles 27:23; (sand) Genesis 32:12; 1 Kings 4:20.

18 See also Acts 3:25-26; Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4; James 2:14-26; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14.

these promises were not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime: "And **God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on**" (Acts 7:5). "**These all [including Abraham] died in faith, not having received the promises,** but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). Nevertheless, we can be confident that God will honor His word (Hebrews 6:17-18). In particular, as Jesus explains, we can be sure that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be raised from the dead to inherit these promises (see Mark 12:26-27).

Again, Jesus Christ is the key figure in the working out of God's plan: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. **He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ**" (Galatians 3:16).

As I learned later, these promises to Abraham can apply to you and me. Through baptism into Christ, believers put on the name of Christ. They become members of one big spiritual family of God that includes Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. Belonging to Christ, believers become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promises listed above:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29; see also Romans 4)

GOD'S PROMISES TO DAVID

David, who lived around 1000 BC, was king over the LORD'S chosen people. He reigned in Jerusalem over the united kingdom of Israel. He wanted to build a

Belonging to Christ, believers become Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promises



permanent house for God (i.e., a temple where God would dwell and the people would come to worship Him). Instead, God told David:

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

George highlighted the following key points:

- This promise pertains to a time after David’s “days are fulfilled and [he] rests with [his] fathers” (i.e., after David had died and been buried). And yet it will happen “before” David (i.e., in front of his face). For this latter to be true after the former has occurred implies that David must be raised from the dead.
- This promise involves David’s “seed after [him], who will come from [his] body” (i.e., a descendent of David). The Psalmist sings, “The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: ‘I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body’” (Psalm 132:11; cf. Acts 2:30). On the other hand, God says, “I will be his Father, and he shall be my son,” which implies that this special descendent of David would also be the son of God (see Mark 12:35-37).
- God will establish his kingdom and the throne of his kingdom forever. It will be David’s kingdom and throne restored, established permanently.

- David’s promised seed will build a house and family for God’s name. (“House” in the Bible has two meanings: a dwelling place and the family that lives in it.)
- God assures that this promise will not be taken away. The prophet says it this way, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:3; Acts 13:34).

David’s son Solomon had provided an initial, partial fulfillment of this prophecy (1 Chronicles 28:5-7). He reigned on David’s throne and built a temple for God (1 Kings 1-10). Unfortunately, Solomon did not remain faithful to God, so the kingdom was divided (1 Kings 11). The northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown by the Assyrians in 721 BC. The southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

George showed us that long after Solomon had died, the prophet Isaiah reasserts the promises to David:

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)***

As we have come to expect by now, Jesus is the promised seed of David:

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of **the house of David**. The virgin’s name was Mary... Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found*

**Jesus will establish the house of Jacob forever.
HIS KINGDOM WILL NEVER END.**

favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called **the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.**" (Luke 1:26-27, 30-33)¹⁹

George noted the echoes of God's promises to David. Jesus is of the house of David. He is also God's son. He will sit on the throne of his ancestor David. He will establish the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end.

George closed that first Bible class by citing Acts 1:9-11 (quoted above) – Jesus will return in glory to fulfill the promises to Abraham and David.

Week by week George covered the rest of the course material, which provided all of us with a solid foundation for understanding the Bible and the gospel message it contained. I could now clearly see that "the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15), and that "the gospel of Christ...is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

The gospel is made to stick

It wasn't till much later that I came to understand what made the gospel so memorable. In their book, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Professors Chip and Dan Heath use the mnemonic SUCCEsS to summarize the six properties of successful ideas. SUCCEsS stands for **S**imple, **U**nexpected, **C**oncrete, **C**redible, **E**motional, **S**tories. Reading the book I realized that the gospel satisfies these properties; the gospel is made to stick because it is simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and it has many memorable stories.

SIMPLE: The Bible's gospel is simple; it is easily summed up in "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."

UNEXPECTED: The gospel is jam-packed with unexpected elements, as illustrated by these reactions to Jesus:

- **A man attested by God by miracles, wonders, and signs** (Luke 7:22-23; Acts 2:22): "The men **marveled**, saying, 'What manner of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him!'" "When the multitudes saw [the healing of the paralytic man], they **marveled**, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men." "When the demon was cast out, the mute spoke.

¹⁹ See also Matthew 1; Romans 1:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:8; Revelation 22:16.

And the multitudes **marveled**, saying, 'It was never so seen in Israel.'"

- **His teachings:**²⁰ "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings [of the Sermon on the Mount], the people were **astonished** at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." "When [the Pharisees and Herodians] heard these words, [Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's] they **marveled** at his answer, and held their peace."
- **His crucifixion:** A dead Messiah! The king, the hero of the story, suffers the most dishonorable death imaginable (e.g., Mark 15). "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a **stumbling block** and to the Greeks **foolishness**, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).
- **His resurrection:** Jesus Christ raised from the dead, alive for evermore. Even the disciples found it hard to believe (e.g., Mark 16).²¹
- **His ascension:** Jesus Christ now sitting at the right hand of God, all power given unto him in heaven and in earth; the one mediator between God and man.²²
- **His return:** Jesus Christ will return to the earth to raise the dead, to judge the just and unjust, and to establish the kingdom of God, which will catch everyone off guard.²³ "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming... while the bridegroom was delayed, they all [both wise and foolish virgins] slumbered and slept." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."
- **Forgiveness of sins and life everlasting** through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Savior: "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54).
- **Gentiles included as children of Abraham by faith**, heirs according to the promise, by putting on the name of Christ through baptism (Galatians 3:6-9, 14, 26-29).

²⁰ For example, Matthew 5-7; 10; 13; 22; 23; 24-25.

²¹ See also Acts 2:22-36; 13:30-37; 17:31; Romans 4:24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:9; etc.

²² Acts 1:9-11; Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:1-4, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:5-9; 4:14-15; Romans 8:34; 1 Timothy 2:5.

²³ Matthew 24:29-31; John 5:19-23; Acts 1:9-11; 24:15; Romans 2:1-11; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:12-13; 4:13-18; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:1, 8; 3:5; 2 Timothy 3:1; Daniel 12:2.

CONCRETE: The gospel message is concrete. The kingdom of God will be established on the earth: David's kingdom restored, Jerusalem the capital, Jesus the king, his faithful followers the rulers with him, the Promised Land the territory, Israel the citizens, God's rule the law of the land, and the nations sharing in the blessings. *"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). "Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). "That God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:18).*

CREDIBLE: The gospel is credible. "These things were done to fulfill that which was spoken by the prophet..." Jesus came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. He taught as one having authority. The Holy Spirit gifts given to the apostles made them credible; God testified to the authenticity of their message through the signs and wonders He empowered them to do. They had God's stamp of approval. They could do these things only because God had sent them.

EMOTIONAL: The gospel is truly emotional, as illustrated by these hymns:

- "Was it for me that flesh was wounded sore" (Hymn 221²⁴).
- "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."
- "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee" (Hymn 163).
- "Hark, ten thousand, thousand voices sing the song of Jubilee" (Hymn 296).
- "Hail to the brightness of Zion's glad morning!" (Hymn 294).
- "A rose shall bloom in the lonely place" (Hymn 289).

STORIES: The gospel is filled with stories about Jesus and real people and events.

24 Hymn numbers are from the Christadelphian Hymn Book, published in 2002.

The rest of the story

It should be apparent by now that in order to understand Revelation, or God, or Jesus, or the gospel, you must be familiar with all of the Bible. You must make connections from one part to another. The result is truly eye-opening.

As you might imagine, though it was not my intention when I started, I found the Bible's message compelling. It made sense. It was impossible for me to understand these things without believing them. So, after nine months of studying the Bible with the Christadelphians, I was baptized into Christ and have been a "brother in Christ" ever since. I love God and our Lord Jesus Christ His son. I continue to learn more about them every day. I do my best to obey their expectations for me. I love my brothers and sisters in Christ. We worship our heavenly Father. We love our neighbors. We eagerly await the return of Christ. And as long as he remains away, we will share the gospel with anyone who will listen. This is what it means for us to be Christadelphians.

The Christadelphians: A spiritual family in Christ

As mentioned earlier (see footnote 1), the word "Christadelphians" means "brothers and sisters in Christ." John Thomas coined this term during the U.S. Civil War. It emphasizes that believers are members of God's spiritual family:

*For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one [family], for which reason **He [Christ Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brethren**, saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." (Hebrews 2:11-12)*

*But **as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** (John 1:12-13)*

*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, **that we should be called children of God!** (1 John 3:1)*

As of 2014, there were around 60,000 Christadelphians in 120 or so countries worldwide. This number continues to grow as the gospel reaches more places, even within Muslim countries.

Following the practice outlined in the New Testament, Christadelphians are organized in congregations that we call "ecclesias". The word "ecclesia" is based on the New Testament word for a group of believers. This word emphasizes the people rather than the building. It also emphasizes the gathering together of believers, so our ecclesias are also called "meetings". We have no paid ministry and no organizational hierarchy. Each ecclesia manages its own affairs and

members volunteer their time and energy to the work of the Lord. Our ecclesias recognize one another by belonging to a common worldwide fellowship community.

Central to all our beliefs is that the Bible is the inspired word of God:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

*Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through **the word of God which lives and abides forever**, because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but **the word of the Lord endures forever.**” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:23-25)*

The Bible is our only source of authority for understanding God’s purpose. Because of its importance, we read our Bibles regularly, often using a daily reading plan called the Bible Companion (see footnote 3). Besides personal Bible reading and study, we have weeknight Bible classes, Sunday school for children and adults, weekend fraternal gatherings, and week-long summer Bible schools.

In addition, following the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, we have weekly “memorial services” in which we remember his sacrifice through the emblems of bread and wine. These worship services are usually held on Sunday mornings, but sometimes on other days of the week depending on local custom. They are made up of hymn singing, prayers, Bible readings, an exhortation, and the partaking of the memorial emblems. Sometimes they are followed by a communal lunch.

This pamphlet has described my journey. As a young man having no religion, I never expected to end up actually believing the Bible and the hope it offered. My story is just one among millions. As far as the gospel is concerned, my desire is not that you will believe me, but that you will search the Scriptures to see for yourself if there is any truth in them. The Christadelphians offer a number of resources to aid you in your search. You will find a website on the inside back cover of this pamphlet. I encourage you to check it out, but, as with me, always remain skeptical until you prove for yourself whether these things are true.

~ Joe Hill

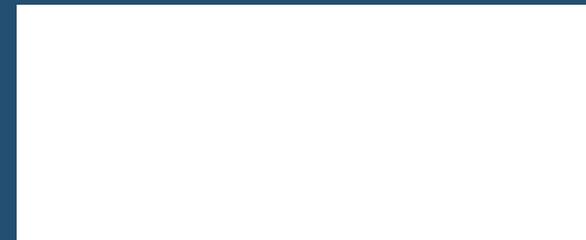


The Christadelphians, meaning “*Brethren in Christ*” (Heb. 2:11), believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God and our only guide in life. It is our desire that you experience the joy of discovering God’s word for yourself.

If you would like to explore other Bible topics,
please visit:

www.tidingsbooklets.com

Here is where you can contact Christadelphians in your area:



MEETING GOD, HIS SON, AND THEIR FAMILY

As someone who grew up without any religion and full of skepticism about the Bible, my journey to discovering Biblical Christianity may resonate with the reader.

I didn't expect to end up believing these things; indeed, I was very resistant at first, but the weight of what I found could not be dismissed.

In this booklet I share not only the many things I learned along the way about God, His Word and His purpose in our world, but also something of the people I encountered, their way of life, and the community in which I eventually found a home.

I invite the reader to consider my journey and the things I discovered. My hope is that you will be encouraged to begin a similar journey of discovery.