

have the freedom of conscience to refuse and hand in his or her notice. The shareholder, however, is in effect passing over to unbelieving executive management the running of the business without being in a position to exercise his or her conscience as to whether company actions are in accordance with the Truth. Hence, the Apostle Paul's command that we should not be joined with unbelievers is apposite. To say that refusing to vote at shareholders' meetings meets our requirement to remain separate, while at the same time accepting the financial rewards of company policy, is not, in the writer's opinion, a sound defence.

My comments were interpreted as a condemnation of all trading and commerce. Whilst share ownership involves trading (buying and selling shares), all trading is not share dealing. There is nothing wrong with buying and selling goods, as long as such is not a preoccupation to which the Truth is subordinated (Lk. 17:28,29).

One correspondent took exception to my view that all company boardrooms are places where Biblical ethics are not valued. He pointed out that his own small family company has a policy of employing brethren and sisters, and issues shares to its Christadelphian employees. The present writer was, however, careful to say that we should not, in view of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, "become a part owner of a *worldly* company". To be part owner of a Christadelphian company and to work for a brother appears to me to have much to commend it.

Bank accounts and pension funds

I did not mention Matthew 25:27 (the Lord's criticism of the slothful servant for not investing his Lord's money with bankers) to justify our having bank accounts, but I did comment that Israel were permitted under the Law to lend upon usury to strangers, without enquiry upon the use of those funds (Deut. 23:19,20). The key point on this issue is that there is no unequal yoking of ourselves to the bank, no joint ownership of shares in the bank, no seeking to profit by the executive management making our investment outperform, by unChristlike behaviour, its peer group. We pay bank charges for a service, which is little different from having a motor-car serviced at a garage.

Turning to the matter of pension funds, I advanced an argument that paying contributions into a pension fund to be invested in equities fell into the same category as having a bank account

(that is, paying for a service, rather than being yoked together with unbelievers in owing a company) and such is therefore acceptable. Some readers thought that I was being inconsistent, and, to be frank, I can see their point of view, although the penultimate paragraph of this reply is relevant in this respect.

Regarding the question of what to do with a building society share 'windfall', the present writer can do no more than highlight the key Scriptures about not being yoked together with unbelievers. A bank (which is what a building society becomes when it issues shares) is no different from other corporations in its single pursuit of creating 'shareholder value'—again the present writer speaks from personal experience.

Adding to the burden of rules and regulations?

I also stand accused of adding to "the litany of Christadelphian prohibitions", creating "another unnecessary stumblingblock", and laying "tenuous burdens on others". I think it is possible that my detractors have overlooked the penultimate paragraph of the article, which said:

"The Brotherhood is not a cult, in which a central authority issues proscriptive directives to its adherents. Ours is a harder way, in which we individually seek daily by the reading of the Word to be renewed in knowledge after the image of Him That created us. This development of character involves an enlightened conscience applied to the circumstances of life, and, regarding such issues as those raised in this article, the Christadelphian must exercise his or her conscience in the light of Scripture".

Finally, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4).

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Israel's dwelling safely

Brother Whittaker's letter under the above heading ([Dec. 2001, p. 464](#)) prompted me to review my own understanding of the end-time events set out in Ezekiel 38. In the course of investigating the use of the phrase "dwell safely" in verse 8 I discovered another aspect to the use of the Hebrew word *betach*, "safely", which may be of interest to readers.

Betach is a Hebrew word expressing the concept of trust, confidence, perceived safety and reliance. In Ezekiel 38 it has as a prefix the Hebrew letter *lamed*, which is the Hebrew letter indicating an 'l' sound. The use of this letter as a prefix, according to lexicons such as Davidson's and Gesenius, indicates a meaning represented by the English words 'to', 'unto', 'towards', 'at', 'on', and 'in'. In Ezekiel 38 it simply means 'in'; the word *betach* in Ezekiel 38:8 means Israel is to be 'in *betach*'.

The noun *betach* (*Strong's Concordance* number 0983) is derived from the verb *batach* (*Strong's* 0982). Effectively they are the same word in two different forms. When we carry out a computer search for the Hebrew word *batach* and Israel in the same context we discover a rather different connotation to that stated in Brother Whittaker's letter, which is solely based on the use of *betach*. In the following passages the words translated from the Hebrew *batach* are in italics:

"So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they *trusted* unto the liars in wait which they had set beside Gibeah" (Judg. 20:36);

"He *trusted* in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kgs. 18:5);

"O Israel, *trust* thou in the LORD: He is their help and their shield" (Ps. 115:9);

"Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and *trust* in oppression and perverseness . . ." (Isa. 30:12);

"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and *trust* in chariots, because they are many" (31:1);

"they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein thou *trustedst*, with the sword" (Jer. 5:17);

"The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and all them that *trust* in him" (46:25);

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and *trust* in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" (Amos 6:1).

Thus, when we investigate the use of the Hebrew word *batach* from which *betach* is derived we find that it is *not* exclusively used in a *positive* sense in relation to Israel. In fact, in four out of

the eight examples shown above it is used to show how Israel trusted in the things they should not have done and developed a false sense of security. Isaiah 30:12; 31:1 and Amos 6:1 are examples involving the chastening of Israel by God because of their misplaced trust. Thus Ezekiel 38:8 is saying that Israel will be "in *betach*", that is, placing their trust in the powers of this world and not in God, when Gog comes down on the them.

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[I would like to comment](#) as follows on Brother Mark Whittaker's letter. As shown in the table published with Brother Whittaker's letter, the word *betach*, translated 'safely' in Ezekiel 38, is applied in some cases to Israel in anticipation of her obedience to the laws of God (see Leviticus and Deuteronomy references), in others to the time of safety during the reign of Solomon, and there are other references to Israel in the future.

The safety of Israel in the past would have been by God actively bringing about conditions of peace in accordance with His promise, and, if necessary, suppressing the aggression of nations around. I believe that God is still deeply involved in the affairs of the nation of Israel, and that He has made a promise in Ezekiel 38 that Israel will dwell safely. This is not conditional on their obedience, but involves an assessment of their safety which is sufficient to give the confederacy described in verses 2-7 the opportunity to be brought forth to invade the land of Israel. Irrespective of the current actions of surrounding hostile nations, God's promise will be fulfilled as and when God requires.

If we look at one of the passages in which the word *betach* is used, Ezekiel 34, we have the answer to the questions of when safety will come to Israel, and whether in the case of Ezekiel 38 it occurs before or after Christ's return. Ezekiel 34:22,28 speaks of Israel being saved and being "no more . . . a prey", with the Lord making with them "a covenant of peace" so that they "dwell safely" (v. 25).

The peace of chapter 34 is categoric. When the Lord Jesus reigns it will not be possible for Israel to be a prey to the nations. Chapter 34 must refer to the Kingdom age, but, if chapter 38 refers to the same time as chapter 34, then it requires the Lord to break His covenant, for the peace promised in chapter 34 is final.