

## Publishing Editor's column

**I**N RECENT YEARS we have been presented with news stories about the enormous levels of personal debt that there are today. Much of this is mortgage debt, but there is also a large and increasing amount of credit card debt, particularly in Britain, where levels of such debt are substantially more than in any other country in Europe. I well remember in the early days of credit cards an advertisement urging people to have one because it would 'take the waiting out of wanting'. This is surely the key to the commercial success of credit cards; they make money out of exploiting people's desire to have the things they want immediately rather than saving for them. This is not an editorial against credit cards; they have their uses for those strong-willed enough to resist accumulating debts on them. They do, however, well illustrate a prominent feature of modern society, a 'have it now' philosophy of life that is contrary to the way God would have us live.

This 'have it now' philosophy has spread into the religious world. The most successful churches today are the evangelical ones, which by emotional singing and rousing oratory give people a lift. What matters to them is present-day experience, not Bible truth; an immediate 'high' rather than preparing for the far greater joys of a future age. And what of our community? Are we tending the same way with what seems to be a growing number of 'praise days'? Do we approach our meetings with an attitude of 'What am I going to get out of it', rather than, 'What am I going to put into it?', and then ceasing to support them as much as we should if things are not to our liking?

This 'have it now' attitude goes back to the Garden of Eden. The serpent tempted Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit by falsely saying that it would provide instant gratification: "God doth know that *in the day ye eat thereof*, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). And so, when Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (v. 6). She sought instant gratification, and, bringing Adam into her sin, brought disaster upon them both and upon the whole subsequent human race.

In contrast to Adam and Eve, we have many Scriptural examples of those who were prepared to wait for God's promises to be fulfilled. Abraham is, of course, the prime example here. Though promised the Land, in this life he received it not, for, as Stephen says, "[God] gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession" (Acts 7:5). Only by resurrection would he receive the fulfilment of the promise; and by his faith that what God had promised him He would surely provide, he became acceptable to God.

Abraham, of course, showed great faith in trusting that God would fulfil His promises even in matters of this life, notably in the birth of Isaac as the initial fulfilment of the promised seed. Only after a long wait was this promise fulfilled. Joseph, having been promised that his brothers would bow down to him, had to remain faithful in slavery and captivity for many years before the promise was fulfilled. Moses had forty years of shepherding in the wilderness before the time came for him to lead Israel out of Egypt. David had to endure years of fleeing from Saul before he received the kingdom. In contrast, Israel, after leaving Egypt, soon lost their faith. Not being prepared to wait for the Promised Land, they murmured and demanded to return to Egypt and its immediate pleasures.

The roll call of the worthies of faith in Hebrews 11 ends by emphasising that they did not receive what was promised in their lifetimes, but waited in patience for it to come: "these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (vv. 39,40). The next chapter goes on to give the supreme example of Jesus as one who was prepared to wait in faith: "Jesus . . . for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2). By this he made it possible for us to be forgiven our tendency to seek immediate gratification of self rather than looking for the future fulfilment of God's promises. In this he provides us with the supreme example to follow.

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