

The Country of God

Part III



by A. A. A. Hartvisen

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The Country of God, Parts I to III

The Country of God

Part IIII

When next week Prester Malasar finally asked Misael to attend services with him, Baltassar came to mind.

In Misael's first few years at school, he made friends with another boy his age. This boy was Baltassar, son of a millwright. Baltassar got the best grades in Bible class. Misael was the third best. Between them was an obnoxious girl, who had no real interest in the Bible, but worked very hard to excel at all her classes, although she never quite managed to get her English grammar down.

Baltassar and Misael made fast friends early on. They often spent winter afternoons climbing trees by the river, talking about whatever Bible lessons had most

recently captured their imaginations. They also spoke of their fathers. Baltassar's father Nabuchodonosor was an important elder in the Christian church to which belonged most of those people not taken in by the Quasifacturians. Like Misael's own father, Nabuchodonosor often went over with Baltassar what the boy had learnt in school.

Their fathers asked many questions and encouraged them to draw their own conclusions. Both Nabuchodonosor and Balaam made sure to correct any errors of interpretation. But the viewpoints of the fathers did not always agree. Where Nabuchodonosor stressed the divine origin of the Scriptures and their infallibility, Balaam reminded Misael of the perversion of Holy Writ that had been done by man's sin. Baltassar's father spoke of the Bible's strength and solidity; Misael's of its defectability and the violence done to it by the crude hands of men. Baltassar was warned against reaching conclusions in defiance of Scripture, and Misael was admonished that truth must come from within.

In their twelfth year, Baltassar became increasingly adamant that Misael accept Jesus as his personal saviour. Misael was uncertain, but his father found the idea absurd.

"Man is not saved by Faith alone, Misael," said Balaam. "And this sort of ritualistic prayer is an offense against God's supremacy. Man is judged according to his acceptance of God's wisdom. He is saved by *clean living* and by his recognition of God

as the Source of all things. You can find your salvation in the wisdom of the Christ, but these prayers for his mercy are repugnant to him.”

Balaam allowed Misael to attend church services with Baltassar. Afterward they spoke with the pastor. Both Baltassar and the pastor were very adamant about the importance of Misael’s salvation. They also showed very openly their disapproval of Misael’s father’s private philosophy. It made Misael uncomfortable. They were giving him an ultimatum, of sorts, and it seemed as if he would be ostracised if he refused to undergo the ritual prayer with the pastor. In the end, he could but say he saw no purpose in it and he refused to participate.

Baltassar was silent and thoughtful as he walked Misael home that day. Misael was relieved the ordeal was over. Although he felt during his talk with the preacher that Baltassar’s friendship would be part of the cost for refusal, it seemed an absurd exaggeration now. Over the next few months, Baltassar no longer found time for Misael anymore. When Misael overheard Baltassar speaking to one of the girls at school about him, calling him “the unbeliever”, then he knew his first feeling had been right.

The whole affair served to illuminate Misael’s spiritual isolation in the community. And so it was with mixed feelings that he received Malasar’s invitation.

“I’ll have to ask Father,” he said.

Prester Malasar rose up from the old pine butt whereon he had been resting.

“Well, if you can make it, just show up. Services are at eight. I’ll wait for you at the front door.”

“Okay,” said Misael.

The prester shook his hand and left. Misael turned back to splitting wood. Somehow, without ever being aware of it, he came to his decision by the end of the day.

“I will go,” he said.

It was Friday night.

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As usual, Balaam had to take some phone calls at supper time. Misael ate slowly and listlessly, waiting for an opportunity to speak to Father about Malasar’s offer.

“Eat, pigface!” said Nadab.

Mother wagged her finger.

“Misael! You’ll not get sick!” she commanded.

Misael said nothing, and stayed at it. But, despite his best efforts to delay, the plate was scraped clean before Balaam finished his calls. Nadab took Misael’s plate away and rejected his offer to help in the kitchen. With no good excuse for his presence, Misael was only able to dilly-dally around the dinner table a little bit longer. And still Father was not free. So Misael at last went to bed, promising himself to bring it up tomorrow night, no matter what.

That night, Misael dreamt that he went to Prester Malasar’s church. There, he was immediately embraced by Ecclesiastes and his congregation, and Misael was

baptised according to their ceremony, without delay. It was a great celebration, and all the Quasifactorians were there. None of Misael's family or friends, however, were present, but Misael did not miss any of them.

Ecclesiastes imposed his hands over Misael's head and said a prayer of thanks.

"May the Lord make in you great things," he said.

Then Misael himself addressed the crowd:

"I shall dwell forever in the country of God!"

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