

## Chapter 1

### Explanations

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?

and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good,

and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto Me:

hear, and your soul shall live;

and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Isaiah 55:1-3.

If you were to visit a certain small country church in California on a Sabbath morning, you would undoubtedly meet Rebecca Smith. If you came early for Sabbath School, she would shake your hand at the door and encourage you to sign the guest register; if you walked in during the Sabbath School lesson, you would see her teaching the main class in the sanctuary; if you came for only the worship service, she would be sure to spot you before you had long been seated.

A small woman, looking much like many other septuagenarians you may have known, Mrs. Smith impresses you first with her ubiquity. She appears to know everybody, and everybody stops to shake her hand, to inquire about her health, or to tease. She leads out in Sabbath School, contributes to the church service, organizes the potluck dinner after the service, and - a member tells you - supervises the free breakfast provided for village children during the summer months.

If you take a seat in her Sabbath School class, you are impressed with her easy knowledge of the Scriptures, her deep trust in Jesus, her ability to evoke thoughtful questions from her class members. Her presentation is touched with humor, though occasionally her face grows sober and she begins a tale: "Back when I was a heathen - "

After the class is dismissed, you ask the man beside you in the pew, "Who is Mrs. Smith, anyway? What do you know about her?"

## A HEART OF FLESH

He laughs and says, “Oh, she’s been around for as long as I can remember. If there’s anything you need to know about this church, just ask Rebecca.”

You pursue the subject further, but he doesn’t have much information. “She used to be a Jew,” he tells you. “Well, I guess she still is, technically, but she’s a Christian Jew now. I really don’t know much about her.”

You go out to the rest room and overhear a conversation about a girl Mrs. Smith brought to the recent evangelistic meetings. You decide to try again. “Rebecca? She lives near here, in a trailer park,” says one woman. “She used to run a home for mentally retarded girls - did it for seven or eight years. Now she’s retired, but there’s no slowing her down. She babysits for people’s dogs when they go on vacation, and then she leaves Adventist literature with them. She must spend half her income on literature, and I know she doesn’t make a lot.”

The other woman breaks in. “She babysits children too; and besides that, she takes care of her crippled sister. But she always has time for church activities. I don’t know how she does it.”

Back in the sanctuary, you try for more information. “Rebecca? She’s quite a woman,” says the person next to you. “She has quite a past - lots of stories to tell. I guess she had a truly miraculous conversion, but I don’t know much about it. You can tell she’s a happy Christian, though. Just wait - you’ll see.”

You sit back in the pew and wait for the service to begin. Early in the meeting you are surprised to hear the pastor call for members of the congregation to share what has meant a lot to them during the past week. Instantly Rebecca is on her feet. “You know those people I told you about last week?” she begins, then tells a story of God’s leading her to a family who needs help, both material and spiritual. She tells of the help she was able to give, and then begs the congregation to support her efforts.

After the worship service she meets you at the back door of the church, puts her arm around you, and guides you to the fellowship hall for the potluck dinner. You are beginning to understand the meaning of the term “Mother in Israel.”

Rebecca Smith is almost an institution in her church. Loved by fellow believers and unbelieving neighbors alike, she is appreciated for her devotion to a cause, for her readiness to help, for her exhaustless fund of stories. Rebecca’s life has been far from average; she has seen

## A HEART OF FLESH

both degradation and glory; she has felt the wooing of the Spirit and has traveled from total atheism to total dependence upon her Lord.

This book is the story of her conversion. It does not have a main plot like a novel, because her life has lacked the flowing rhythm of a well-integrated story. Instead it tells her life story through seven short stories, each complete in itself. The stories do not attempt to maintain a unity among themselves. One is written in third person to recount the anguish of her family home, to show Jjne mood of despair which pervaded the family into which she was born. One shows the background reasons for her leaving home. One shows Rebecca as she lived before she met Christ. The next recounts her introduction to Christianity. One is a thought narrative - almost a stream of consciousness - where Rebecca herself tells the story of her conversion. One is a simple tale of an event in the life of the converted Rebecca, an event which shows God's wonderful leading of those who put their trust in Him. And another is a conversation between Mrs. Smith and the author, in which the two of them look for deeper meanings in apparently random events of a lifetime. The book closes with a prayer.

I like to think of these stories as impressions of a conversion. They cannot tell the whole story; it probably cannot be told. There is too much depth in the radical change of a soul to permit exploring it all on paper. And while more of the story could be told, it would be unnecessary to do so. These impressions cover the vital steps in the growth of the Seed, the Word of God.

One conversion is always different from every other conversion. God works in individual ways with individual persons. But in this story are represented the basic elements of any conversion, whether it be the sudden dramatic turnabout, or whether it be the slow maturing process. The soil is always different, but it must be fertile for the seed to take root. The seed itself must be present in its wholeness. Pruning or weeding is necessary if the plant is to come to maturity. And finally, fruit will appear - but we must never forget that even the mature plant is in constant need of watering and pruning.

This is the story of a conversion from Judaism to atheism to Christianity. It is a lovely coincidence that Rebecca Smith's family traditionally is descended from Levi. Her story can be summarized by a passage in the book of Malachi: "And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." Malachi 3:3.