

THE CRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
of the Kingdom of God

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

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Editor: George Booker; Assistant Editor: Donald H. Styles

FROM THE EDITOR

Coming issue

Instead of the July-August double-issue of previous years, we plan a March-April double-issue for 2007. The March-April issue should arrive some time in April.

Announcements of coming events

An alert to those who send in announcements of coming events: Please send in such announcements **AT LEAST** two months ahead of time. This will allow for the best possible publicity for your event.

Apologetics: "The Hard Questions"

Bro. David Levin's series on "The Hard Questions" will resume, Lord willing, with the March-April issue.

Apology

The exhortation that appeared in the December issue of *The Christadelphian Tidings* purports to have been given by Bro. Joe Coutts (Aberdeen). We are now assured by Bro. Joe that while "it did contain parts and phrases of a talk" he gave in 2006, it was "very freely adapted", "presented in someone else's words and style", and might more accurately have been footnoted as "Based loosely on an exhortation by Joe Coutts, Aberdeen". We apologize for this, and we will be exceedingly careful that such a mistake does not happen again.

Editorial

Milk and Butter, Nose and Blood

These last verses of Proverbs 30 (vv. 32,33) point out that the outcome of foolish behavior is strife. Christ-like behavior involves avoiding strife whenever possible.

The command (v. 32)

“If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth!” (NIV).

The activities mentioned in this verse may “stir up anger” (i.e., in others) and thus “produce strife” (v. 33). Therefore they should be guarded against.

The believer “plays the fool” in (1) “exalting himself”, and (2) “planning evil”.

“Play the fool” is a verb derived from the noun “nabal” — which describes someone who is godless and immoral in a crude, overbearing way — as was the man named “Nabal” (1 Sam. 25:25; cf. Psa. 14:1). A “nabal” is a hardened, hateful, and deliberately hurtful “fool” — not just a simpleton!

“Exalt yourself” is the Hebrew “nasse” — to lift up oneself, proudly and arrogantly. This is generally condemned (Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 16:18), and especially if it includes put-downs of others — which is the point in the following verse 33.

“Plan evil” is “zammoth” (one word): signifying “to plan, usually in an evil sense” (Strong). Compare similar thoughts in Proverbs 6:14 (the scoundrel... “who plots evil with deceit in his heart”... will be destroyed without remedy) and 16:27 (“a scoundrel plots evil”).

Finally, “Clap your hand over your mouth!” is — literally, and abruptly — “Hand to mouth!” It is sharp and strident, like a crisp military command. It is not unlike the command of Proverbs 23:2 (“Put a knife to your throat!”). Generally, this phrase may be compared to Job 40:4,5 (“I put my hand over my mouth”), as well as Job 21:5; 29:9; Judges 18:19; and Micah 7:16. This is a gesture of unworthiness, and repentance, as well as a resolution to speak no more, either in defense of oneself, or in continuance of evil words.

The reason (v. 33)

Verse 33 gives the reason for the admonition of verse 32: do not “play the fool” by “exalting yourself” or “planning evil”. These actions will surely lead to and cause the “strife” mentioned in verse 33.

“For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.”

“Strife” is the Hebrew “riyb”. The word occurs at least 12 times in the Book of Proverbs alone. The use of this word strongly implies that the setting is a courtroom, or

some other setting where formal inquiry and debate and deliberation take place. One commentator writes, “This is the kind of person who thrives on acrimony and who seeks a pretext to transform every difference or disagreement into a bitter legal contest” (William McKane, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*).

On the stirring up or producing of strife, we might consider, generally:

- Proverbs 6:14: “[He] who plots evil with deceit in his heart — he always stirs up dissension.”
- Proverbs 15:1: “A harsh word stirs up anger.”
- Proverbs 29:22: “An angry man stirs up dissension.”

Repeatedly, the admonition of the Proverbs is to avoid “strife” (e.g., Prov. 17:1,14; 18:6,17; 26:17,21).

In the New Testament, “strife” (Greek “eris”: strife, quarreling, contentiousness) is one of the kinds of “wickedness” and “depravity” listed by Paul in Romans 1:29-31. Of it Paul warns, “Although [men] know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (v. 32).

Paul has a similar list in Galatians 5:19-21, where among the “works of the flesh” he groups “discords... jealousy... selfish ambition... dissensions and factions”. Are we surprised when it is pointed out that these works are listed right alongside “sexual immorality, debauchery... idolatry... and drunken orgies”? Possibly we feel like asking: *Shouldn’t such ‘trifles’ as discord and dissension and factions be listed in a separate section — marked, perhaps, “minor infractions” or “simple misdemeanors”?*

But Paul firmly concludes with these words: “I warn you... that those who live like this will **not** inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21).

Do we ever stop to think that “strife” keeps such deadly company? We know the rationale, though, don’t we? What is hurtful “strife” for the other fellow is, **for me**, “earnestly contending for the faith” (Jude 3), wielding “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17), and “fighting the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12). Of course it is.

But even *if* it is, **sometimes**... is it **always**? That’s not for me to say about you, or you about me — at least not nearly so much as it is for each of us to ask, and answer, the question about ourselves as individuals: ‘Is what I’m doing, or saying, or writing — right now, at this moment — a righteous, kind, loving labor for God’s Truth, absolutely and only? Or does it include some measure — maybe just the least little bit — of anger, hurt feelings, pride, natural combativeness, jealousy, or ambition?’

And the answer ought to be: “Let a man examine... himself” (1 Cor. 11:28).

“The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be gentle to everyone... Those who oppose him he must meekly instruct” (2 Tim. 2:24,25, NIV).

“Slander no one... be peaceable and gentle... show true humility toward all men” (Tit. 3:2).

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15).

In 1 Timothy 6:4,5, Paul puts “strife” (“eris”) right alongside “conceit”, “controversies”, “quarrels about words”, “envy”, “malicious talk”, “evil suspicions”, and “constant frictions”. In verse 6 he contrasts it with “godliness with contentment”.

“Quarrels about words” (NIV) is the translation of the powerful Greek word “logomachia” — literally, “word-wars”! A variant of this same word, “logomacheo”, is also found in 2 Timothy 2:14. These are the only two places the word is found.

To the wise man, words are no more than tools that he uses to convey his thoughts. He conscientiously defines and uses his words so that they mean only one thing; thus he seeks to lower the risk of being misunderstood.

But to some men, words may be an end in themselves. Those whom Paul warns against “logomachia” are those who spend time in useless debate, trying to ‘win points’ — so much time, in fact, that they never have time for true reflective thinking, much less self-examination. By ‘word-wars’ they strive against — and also encourage strife in — their opponents. Their word-wars create an atmosphere of fear, doubt, and anger, not only in themselves but in others as well.

Such activity leads to judging others unnecessarily for their exact words. “Watching for iniquity”, or “making a man an offender for [one] word”, or “laying a word-snare” for a man are all strongly disapproved of by the LORD (Isa. 29:20,21). Word-wars have caused some to be driven away by the intolerance of others — who contrive a ‘case’ against them, spread it abroad, and then will not listen to reasonable explanation.

Word-wars have led brothers to lie, deceive, and misrepresent matters — concerning their own brethren, for whom Christ died (cp. Rom. 14:15)! Those who fight word-wars set battle lines, choose sides, and form cliques. There are accusations and then too often counter-accusations, leading to grudges and mistrust. And all in the name of “earnestly contending for the Truth”!

Churning and twisting

Back to verse 33...

The NIV of verse 33 has “churning”, “twisting”, and “stirring up”. The same Hebrew word is used in all three cases: “miytz” — to press or squeeze. (These are the only occurrences of this particular word in all of the Old Testament.)

[An aside: a related word, “matzah”, describes flat, unleavened bread — perhaps because of its pressed-out form unaltered by the rising caused by yeast or leaven.]

Also in verse 33, the word “produces” occurs three times. Again, as with “miytz”, the same Hebrew word is used in all three cases: it is “yotsir” — to go out, to result in, to produce.

“Churning the milk produces butter”: A form of butter is produced by squeezing and pummeling animal skins filled with milk. W.M. Thomson, who toured Palestine and studied its Bedouin peoples in the mid-19th century, comments on this practice: “What are these women kneading and shaking so zealously in that large black bag, suspended from this three-legged [tripod]? That is a ‘bottle’.. not a bag, made by

stripping off [in one piece] the skin of a young buffalo. It is full of milk, and that is their way of churning. When the butter ‘has come’, they take it out, boil or melt it, and then put it in ‘bottles’ made of goats’ skins. In winter it resembles candied honey, in summer it is mere oil... There is no analogy between our mode of churning, and pulling a man’s nose until the blood comes, but in this Arab operation the comparison is quite natural and emphatic” (*The Land and the Book*, p. 235).

“Twisting the nose produces blood”: The blood vessels in the nose are weak and near the surface. If the nose is squeezed, hit, or strenuously twisted, these vessels will break and blood will flow from the nose. If the nose is subjected to surgical procedure, this may result in a new weakness inside the nose. Nosebleeds are very common, and a simple “twisting” or “wringing” of the nose — or even a bit more “pressure” at the wrong place — is enough to cause this bleeding. As sure and certain as gravity, a twisting of the nose will rupture blood vessels and bring forth blood.

It is practically a natural law: just as “churning” or “pressing” milk produces butter, and just as “twisting” the nose produces blood — so with the same certainty “churning, twisting, or stirring up” another’s anger produces strife!

‘Stop picking on him!’

When I was growing up, it was called ‘picking on’ (someone). Small children knew exactly what this meant: poking and prodding, calling names, funny looks, or little punches, often in the back seat of the car on a long trip. These were all designed to provoke an angry response from the other child, and if possible to bring parental rebuke or punishment down upon him or her.

These days we sit in our living room and watch the young dog dancing around the older dog, sometimes pawing, sometimes sniffing, sometimes nipping the tail, sometimes grabbing an ear — until finally the older one whines or growls or snaps back. Then the younger one dances away, waits a few moments, and renews his meddling.

Those who watch sporting events — baseball or basketball or football — will notice, especially now that instant replay is available, how many fouls are called on the **second** person to do wrong — while the instigator gets off free. A little push, a clandestine punch, or an insulting whisper may provoke retaliation — and the second party in the altercation is penalized, or removed from the game. The one who incited it all smiles to himself and struts away.

In similar ways ordinary men and women do this too — perhaps subconsciously, or as a matter of habit, or simply for lack of something better to do. A man may repeat some small action that he knows will irritate a coworker, just because he can! A woman may retell someone else’s unkind comment, knowing this will cause anger in her friend — just for the pleasure of seeing her reaction.

The Book of Proverbs has it right: in verse 32 Solomon talks about:

- (a) “playing the fool” — joking or jesting, but with the intent of hurting;
- (b) “exalting oneself” — deliberately pointing out one’s own ‘good points’, and making a listener feel inferior by the comparison; and worst perhaps,

(c) “planning evil” — planting lies or exaggerations that harm another’s reputation.

All such actions — just like those of the children or the athletes — are ‘picking on’ someone else, and possibly provoking that other person into committing the sin of anger. As if there should be satisfaction in seeing the shortcomings of others! And afterward the provocateur may ‘innocently’ deny that he had any part in the final outcome. Or, best yet — that he was ‘only joking!’ *‘He didn’t take that seriously, did he?’* (cp. Prov. 26:19).

In ecclesias there may be some members who do the very same things:

- (1) They deliberately speak, or dress, or act in ways that offend others, or
- (2) They deliberately bring up issues in Bible classes they know will cause arguments (and perhaps even anger and bitter words), or
- (3) They deliberately recall something best forgotten — and then feign surprise when someone else is hurt by such a revelation.

While it is true that love “is not easily provoked” (1 Cor. 13:5), it is also true that there is no excuse for being the PROVOKER!

Paul may not say, in so many words, that love “does not easily provoke OTHERS!” But he does say that love “is kind... it is not rude, it keeps no record of wrongs... it does not delight in evil, and... it always protects” (1 Cor. 13:4-7). All these characteristics are diametrically opposed to the subtle and malicious stirring up of anger that produces strife in the brotherhood!

In the same chapter, Paul also says, quite to the point, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (1 Cor. 13:11).

Children, and child-like adults, engage in childish behavior. Those who are mature in Christ put away such tactics. The truth of the gospel can be upheld without word-wars, bitterness, recriminations, character assassinations, vendettas, or political campaigns. The truth can be upheld in love, and gentleness, and patience, and mercy.

If a man cannot uphold Truth in the right way — with the right motives and attitudes — then it is better for him to do... nothing at all. If he tries to uphold Truth in the wrong ways, then surely the ‘medicine’ he offers the patient is worse than the ‘disease’ it is intended to cure.

George Booker

* * * * *

Footnote: *The editor experienced quite an extraordinary irony. Almost to the day he finished writing this editorial, he had several very significant nosebleeds, at the site of an earlier nose surgery. These were finally treated by a cauterizing process — but not before he spent a few anxious and concerned days... time that allowed him to ponder the deeper meaning of this proverb. And to remind himself to think carefully before he chooses his next Scriptural illustration!*

Exhortation

Lessons from Jonah

No wonder children love the Book of Jonah. The story is packed full of impressive visuals. Jonah being thrown overboard in a raging storm, sinking to the bottom of the ocean and then being swallowed by a whale that vomits him out onto dry land. To young people it is an adventure tale. For the mature mind, however, the book is a challenge, compelling the reader to search for deeper messages hidden below the surface. Today we will focus on Jonah himself and draw lessons from his behavior.

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ‘Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’” The call from God to one of His prophets is a common occurrence in the Old Testament, but the blatant disobedience shown by His servant here is unique. Whatever the reason, be it fear or resentment, or perhaps the feeling that he knew better than the Almighty, Jonah’s response was to board a ship and sail in the opposite direction. ‘How strange,’ we say. ‘How could any human being think he could possibly run away from the omnipotent God?’ But herein lies the lesson.

God has sent us a message in His Bible, and from its pages we learn that He has called us to serve Him by preaching to sinners. Are we not guilty of running away at times? God has reached out and touched our lives in many ways. Maybe we are given the opportunity to shine as a light in the missionary field, only to find ourselves ‘hiding’ behind the many reasons as to why it is ‘impossible’ for us to go. God tries to craft our character through trials and difficulties. We resist and back away instead of meeting those trials squarely and praying for strength to work through them.

Jonah was fully aware of his intentions. Sometimes this is the way with us; we deliberately refuse to do the Lord’s will. Being masters of self-deception, we convince ourselves that various thoughts and actions are acceptable, even though they fall well below the standards of Christ.

So when the Lord calls, it is foolish to run away. It may seem the safest course, but In the long run it is much easier to obey than to wait for the ‘whale’ to swallow us!

Thankful for problems

Of course, it is highly unlikely that a huge sea creature will swallow us whole. What is more likely is that, after we have resolved one problem, we will become enveloped in an even bigger one. In the vernacular, this is called jumping from the frying pan into the fire. This is precisely what happened to Jonah; he was saved from drowning and then swallowed by a whale. Incredibly, he uttered

a prayer of thanks from the dark, dank and smelly stomach of the fish. Being honest, how many of us could give thanks in such dire circumstances?

Looking at things from a modern perspective, are we thankful for the everyday difficulties to which we are subject, recognizing that they may be trials necessary for our development? According to the apostle Paul we should be thankful: “And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are not true sons...” (Heb. 12:5-8).

Deep beneath the sea in the belly of a whale, Jonah recognized divine chastening. Although his present circumstances were intolerable, he had been saved from certain death by the mercy of the Lord: “In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me... you brought me up from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple” (Jon. 2:2,7). His faith in God’s plan of salvation and the final deliverance from death is evident in his prayer of praise and thanks: “With a song of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord” (v. 9). The response of the Lord God to this declaration of faith and hope was: “The Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (v. 10).

Would that we could be thankful for the discipline of problems and trials and look beyond them to praise and thank God for His promise of salvation.

An obvious lesson

Before we leave this section of the book, we should not miss an obvious lesson: “Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time... Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh” (Jon. 3:1-3). Had Jonah obeyed God’s command the first time, he would have avoided a great deal of aggravation and suffering. In fact the first two chapters would have been superfluous. In the wonderful wisdom of God they were written for our learning. Therefore let us take heed and attempt to be obedient to the Lord’s direction *the first time around!*

Inappropriate response

The outcome of Jonah’s reluctant preaching was the repentance of the wicked people of Nineveh. What is even more surprising is that the prophet’s reaction was one of extreme anger. Apparently he had anticipated that God’s mercy and longsuffering would extend to the Assyrians: “Oh Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That this is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jon. 4:1-3).

There have been many suggestions regarding this extreme reaction of Jonah but whatever the cause, God gently challenged the prophet to re-evaluate it: “Have you any right to be angry?” (v. 4).

Jonah’s reply is not recorded. He went to a place east of the city to watch and await results. Judging from his continued testiness, the inner turmoil had not been resolved. He became angry at the destruction of a plant that God had kindly provided to replace the ineffective shelter that he had made himself: “Then God said to Jonah, ‘Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?’ ” Again came the petulant reply: “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!” (v. 9).

Comparing ourselves with Jonah

On the surface, Jonah’s reaction seems childish, shortsighted and selfish. Are we any different? When things don’t happen quite the way we want, we get annoyed. Whether large or small things, either way, we get riled up and go and sit in our respective corners — just like Jonah.

Sometimes we need to step back and look at the bigger picture. Jonah’s comfort level didn’t really matter; there was a much more vital issue to consider: “But the Lord said, ‘You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?’ ” (Jon. 4:10,11).

Often, we are so distracted by the drying up of our own little ‘vine’, and the discomfort of our immediate situation, that we fail to see the more important and serious issues that should concern us. Ideally we should pray for guidance to learn discernment and the ability to refocus our energy in the areas of greater need.

Whether or not Jonah got the point is not clear, because the book ends somewhat abruptly. However, the lesson of the vine was much more subtle than that of the whale, and God was very direct with Jonah in His last speech. Given Jonah’s propensity to recognize his mistakes, one is left with the distinct impression that Jonah would respond positively at the next opportunity.

So ends our consideration of the man Jonah. Hopefully we have seen some of the lessons that he can provide for us. I know that many of the examples hit home for me. Jonah was an ‘Everyman’; we can all see a little of ourselves in him. Like us he reacted unwisely, especially when under the stress of trials and testing. The uplifting thing is that the Lord God treated His prophet with mercy and compassion. The Lord is unchanging and when we fail and repent, these same attributes are extended to us. Evidence of His plan of salvation is here before us on the table. Let us partake of the bread and wine with thankfulness and praise.

*Adam Booker
(Austin South, TX)*

Exposition

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: (2) How and Why the Letter Came to be so Called

In this study we must endeavour to determine for whom the Ephesian letter was intended, and how it came to be known as the Letter to the Ephesians. In such an exercise of reconstruction, there may well appear to be conjectural elements. Moreover, in this study we shall cover some of the ground already covered in the first article, but this is inevitable.

First, we concentrate on the letter to Colosse, because it contains clear clues which enable us to decide in what circumstances it was composed. This, in its turn, may enable us to see how the longer letter (the Letter to the Ephesians) came to be written. Epaphras had played an important part in the founding of the ecclesia at Colosse: Paul informs us the ecclesia resulted from the work of this "beloved fellow-servant" (Col. 1:7). But his activities had not been confined to Colosse, for he had laboured in the cause of the gospel also in the neighbouring centres of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13). Although Paul had heard much from Epaphras which redounded to the credit of the Colossians (see 1:3-8), yet a strange heresy had found support among certain members of the community: the worship of angels and legalistic practices (2:8,16-23). These details furnish all the evidence we need to conclude there were Judaisers in Colosse. While this is not the place to examine the heresy in detail,¹ what we know of the Jews, even within the confines of the Christian church, demonstrates how subversive their teaching could be. It is not difficult to understand how they could be persuasive, for they could invoke the authority of Moses and appear very knowledgeable because of their familiarity with the Old Testament, especially in the eyes of new converts with a pagan background.

Epaphras, understandably, was experiencing difficulty in coping with the heresy, but he knew there was one well capable of handling the problem: the Apostle Paul. Aware that Paul was in Rome, he made the long journey to the capital with the express intention of acquainting him with the situation in the ecclesia and soliciting his help in dealing with the heresy: hence the Letter to the Colossians.

As already mentioned above, the Judaisers were active in propagating their teaching wherever they could. Close to Colosse lay Laodicea, and it may well have been that the heretical ideas had also affected the Laodiceans.² If we look at Colossians 4:16, we discover Paul there instructs the Colossian brethren to ensure the letter they received would also be communicated to the Laodiceans. Hence it is surely not unreasonable to conclude the heresy had found some support in Laodicea, or at the least there was the danger of such a development.

Now the care of *all the churches* was ever a major concern for the Apostle (see 2 Cor. 11:28). One can therefore see that as his mind prayerfully dwelt upon the

Colossian problem, he may have contemplated the desirability of writing to all the ecclesias in Asia. Prominent among these was the one at Ephesus; Paul knew his letter-bearer Tychicus would pass through the city on his way to Colosse, and there may well have been a chain of Christian churches already in existence in the hinterland of the city. Thus the Apostle would decide to send them a circular letter, with the same basic theme: the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus and his unique place in God's cosmic purpose. Righteousness from God the Father on the condition of faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus: this was the essence of the gospel of salvation, and there could be none other. While the work of the angels as ministering spirits was unquestionably important, the elevation of the Son to the Father's right hand conferred on him a status that was unique, and the supreme visible demonstration of this fact will be on the occasion of the Son's return: "And when he {the Father} again bringeth in the firstborn into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb. 1:6).³

As we endeavour to follow Tychicus on his travels, we see that he would certainly need to pass through Ephesus and from there the direct route was up the Maeander valley, and then along the valley of its tributary, the Lycus. But let us first consider his visit to Ephesus. He would assuredly make contact with the brethren there and give news of Paul's welfare (see Eph. 6:21), and also explain the reason for his mission, reporting on the heresy troubling the Colossians. He would tell them about the letter he was conveying, destined to deal with the Colossian heresy. As Onesimus was in his company, he would explain why they were travelling together and that he was the bearer of a letter to Philemon. All this would be of the greatest interest to the Ephesian brethren. But there was also another letter and doubtless Paul had given Tychicus instructions to make this known at Ephesus, although it was not specifically addressed to them. Its high spiritual value would be immediately apparent and they would want a copy. Indeed it was probable the Apostle had told Tychicus that they were to have one. Paul had foreseen that heresies would disturb the ecclesia at Ephesus (see Acts 20:29,30).

Now Tychicus would not want to tarry at Ephesus but would be anxious to reach the ecclesias in the Lycus valley as soon as possible, so that assistance could be afforded in combating the heresy. We saw in our first study that the manuscript evidence favoured the view that the Ephesian letter had more than one destination. Indeed when we take note of the following passage, we perceive at once it could not refer to Ephesus: "For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and which ye shew toward all the saints..." (Eph. 1:15). Can we imagine him writing in these terms to the converts he had made himself, and among whom he had spent so much time? But in the case of the ecclesias in the Lycus valley, which he had never seen (cf. Col. 2:1), he was dependent on what he had heard from Epaphras. We thus discover a first clue which indicates the *primary destination* of the Letter to the Ephesians was the brethren in the Lycus valley.

If this indeed be the case, how did it come about that the letter generally bears the title it does? We now engage in an exercise of reconstruction, recognising, as we have already done, there is an element of conjecture in it. There can be little doubt

that Ephesus possessed its own copy. Appreciating as they undoubtedly did the quality of the letter, the brethren may have assumed the responsibility of ensuring other ecclesias also had a copy, or indeed they may have been requested by Paul to do this on his behalf. We know already the Apostle's preaching activity, assisted by such fellow-workers as Tychicus, had spread well beyond Ephesus itself. It was this fact which so alarmed Demetrius who, to alert his fellows, declared: "And ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people..." (Acts 19:26).

While we cannot be sure which ecclesias were already in existence in the province of Asia, such ecclesias were assuredly known to each other. They lived in a pagan alien world. It was in their interests to support and encourage each other. Understandably they could exchange letters they had received, especially in the case of epistles written by the Apostle. This could lead to the multiplication of copies, thus ensuring their survival, and their being available to ourselves centuries later.

Moreover, Ephesus — having received its own copy and, being a large ecclesia, with many converts made by Paul during his preaching in the city — could have become in a special sense the custodian of the letter, which could explain why in due course it became known as the Letter to the Ephesians.

At a first glance, we see one letter is longer than another, Ephesians containing six chapters and Colossians only four. But that Paul intended them to be looked at together is made evident by Colossians 4:16, where he requests an exchange of his letters by the Colossians, and the Laodiceans. We can confidently identify the letter *from Laodicea* as The Letter *to* the Ephesians. So in our time we shall do well to embrace for ourselves Paul's instruction.

(Next: Paul sends his greetings)

Tom Barling
(Teignmouth, England)

Footnotes:

1. This I have attempted to do in *The Letter to the Colossians*, The Christadelphian, 1981, ch. 4.
2. See J.B. Lightfoot's admirable chapter on "The Churches of the Lycus", London, 1876. In connection with the proximity of the ecclesias, this is what he says: "Laodicea and Hierapolis stand face to face, being situated respectively on the southern and northern sides of the valley, at a distance of perhaps six miles, and within sight of each other, the river lying in the open plain between the two. The site of Colossae is somewhat higher up the stream, at a distance of perhaps ten or twelve miles from the point where the road between Laodicea and Hierapolis crosses the Lycus... The three cities lie so near to each other, that it would be quite possible to visit them all in the course of a single day" (p. 2).
3. We should take note of the rendering in the RV which rightly brings out the fact the homage paid to the Lord by his attendant angels will be on the occasion of his return to the earth. Other versions (e.g., the RSV) can wrongly give the impression this homage was paid at the Lord's first coming. This verse is discussed in an enlightened manner by B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Macmillan 1906, p. 22: "The first introduction of the Son into the world, described in v. 2, had not issued in an open triumph and satisfied men's desires, so that there was good reason why the writer should point forward specially to the Return in which Messiah's work was to be consummated."

Bible Study

Rightly Dividing the Word: (1) Using the Bible with Reverent Care

The strength of the faith of the Lord's ecclesia lies in its knowledge of God and of His Son, knowledge about their creative purpose and work with people. This is knowledge that we may learn from the Bible. To this end, we as the Lord's people should be thankful that we live in this age of increasing knowledge and increasing access to that knowledge — especially as it relates to the Bible itself.

To maintain our own faith, to teach our young, to edify the Lord's ecclesia, and to preach the gospel... we must learn to “rightly divide the word of truth”, while not arguing over words, but shunning profane and vain babblings (2 Tim. 2:14-16). Thankfully, profane and vain babbling is almost unknown among us, although striving over words to the harm of our hearers is not altogether so.

Rightly dividing the word of truth depends on a reverence for this word as the oracles, the utterances of God brought to us by His prophets and by His Son. The Bible is not written as a dictionary or encyclopedia of religion might be — that is, with chapters on sin, mortality, human nature, God, the Lord Jesus, and the future of God's creation — although it tells us so much on all these subjects. Nor is the Bible a mere collection of proof texts, by which we prove our beliefs and disprove doctrinal error.

First — An overview of the Bible!

Reverence for the Bible means reading it as the account given to us by God of His work with people — a work culminating in a new and perfected creation brought into being through His Son.

The Old Testament

Genesis simply and beautifully describes God's initial creation, as well as His declaration of His creative purpose. It then describes the coming of sin into the world through the choices made by Adam and Eve, and the consequences of those choices for them and their descendants. Then Genesis follows their descendants' decline into lawless violence — a decline that God brought to an end by sending a great flood, while saving eight people for a new beginning.

We read in Genesis 12 that, after the Flood, people multiplied and were dispersed, and the first city-states and nations began to be formed. God tells us how He then called a man of faith to leave his own country and people for a foreign land. There he would become, through God's power, the father of a new and special nation, Israel. God wanted the people of this nation to serve as His witnesses to the other nations and peoples of the world. In other words, Israel was to be the channel of God's communication with all peoples and nations (Rom. 3:1,2).

God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:4-6), and to make His wise laws known to all peoples (Deut. 4:5-8). From its beginnings, God's work with Israel drew the attention of other nations. Out of these other nations God called into Israel individuals whose faith led them to God, and to joining His people Israel.

From Genesis to Malachi, in the first 39 books of the Bible, God tells us about His work with and through His people, Israel. Here we have the words of the God-inspired prophets, who communicated to Israel His instructions, reproofs, warnings, hopes, and encouragements. Through the prophets God also promised His people a glorious future, when He would judge the nations but save forever those who would truly be His own.

In this first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, we read of the ten-command covenant God made with the people of Israel, the civil law that He gave them, and His laws about sacrifice and cleanliness. Even these more technical laws have much to teach us today, about our own approach to God.

The first part of the Bible also includes songs of praise and lamentation, often prophetic, and filled with beautiful imagery and poetry. Finally, there are also books of wisdom about living, books of philosophy about the meaning of life, books of mourning, and even a love poem.

Yet, this inspired account of God's work with people through Israel seems to be more about failure than success — excepting the response to God's prophets of a faithful remnant among them. Incomplete by itself, the Old Testament is always looking forward to a coming savior who will fulfill God's purpose to bring blessing to all families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18).

The New Testament

In the New Testament, the gospels tell of that savior's coming, that is, of his conception, birth, life, death, resurrection and exaltation as Lord and Christ. He is the culmination of all God's work and promises in the past, and he is the focus of all that follows after, as the good news about him bears fruit all over the world.

As that work continues in the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus Christ is the risen and glorified Lord who guides, encourages, and assists in the preaching of the gospel. With his guidance and the blessing of the Holy Spirit that he had promised to his apostles, they establish communities of new believers, and write them letters of instruction.

The New Testament ends with Jesus revealing to his servants the trials and joys that lay before them in the symbolic book of Revelation.

What is the purpose?

This overview of the Bible is intended to illustrate both the unity of its theme and the extraordinary variety of its contents. Some of it is not easy to understand. However, the important truths that the Bible reveals to us are few and simple. Nevertheless, our human nature makes it hard to put these truths into practice in

daily living — which is, of course, God’s whole purpose of revealing them to us. It requires the Lord’s gracious help for that purpose to be fulfilled in us.

“I commend you to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified”, says the Apostle Paul to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:32). The Bible has this extraordinary power to change and sanctify us because it is a revelation of the mind of our Creator and the word of His grace. It reveals Him for the wonderful Being that He is — as we see throughout the Bible in His patient and merciful work with very imperfect people like ourselves.

God is revealing Himself to us in all His word, especially when He speaks to us through His Son (Heb. 1:1,2). In contrasting human wisdom, which has no lasting value, with the wisdom of God given to us by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul rejoices that “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:1-16). The Bible is given by God to teach us to know His mind and that of His Son. This is a knowledge not gained solely by learning facts about them from the Bible. It grows through the practice of living by faith as Jesus’ disciples in an intimate relationship with him. This is the secret of the Bible’s power.

With reverence and care

With what reverence and carefulness must we, therefore, read the Bible and use this word of God in teaching others! In his lovely book, *The Prophecy of Hosea*, Bro Cyril Tennant writes:

“Sound Bible exposition is based upon two very simple but often ignored steps. They are:

1. ‘What is the Bible actually saying?’ and
2. ‘What does the Bible mean by what it is saying?’

So often the meaning is sought from a superficial reading of the text with the context being almost completely ignored. This leads to a fanciful interpretation of scripture and even stretching the meanings of words to make them fit in with a previously conceived theory. Before attempting an explanation one must be sure that everything possible has been done to ensure a correct understanding of what is actually written. This is the only way to listen to what God is saying; and failure to achieve this will not only cause one to miss the truth — it may also lead to sin through teaching others that which is not Bible teaching” (p. 19).

Knowing God and His Son

What Bible words actually say, and the context in which they are said, are both key to understanding the meaning of the inspired word. This may be seen in the lovely prayer of the Lord Jesus for his disciples and for future believers in him in John 17. There Jesus says, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (v. 3).

Sometimes these words are read incorrectly: as though knowing the facts about God and His Son (e.g., that they are not two Persons in a “trinity”), leads, by itself, to eternal life.

But Jesus' words to his Father do not say that. Jesus says, "This is eternal life", i.e., **this** is what eternal life consists in: knowing God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent. "To know" (Greek "ginosko") is used in the New Testament with a deeper meaning than knowing facts about someone. It means knowing someone personally — as we might know a close friend. It is used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to describe the intimate relationship between a man and his wife.

So, the Lord Jesus' words about knowing God and himself mean something more and something deeper than just knowing facts about them — although some facts are essential as a first step. But, above and beyond that, the knowing involves a close personal relationship experienced in life — a relationship that begins with, and grows through, a trusting faith in our Father and His Son.

In the context of the gospel of John as a whole, eternal life is not just life without end. It is a life lived in the closest fellowship with God and His Son.

The words "eternal life" and "everlasting life" (from the same Greek words) are used 17 times in John's gospel — often in the present tense as something that a believer in Jesus has now. Such usage may seem, at first glance, to be confusing and contradictory of other Bible promises of what is plainly a **future** eternal life — but they should not be. For this transforming relationship begins now, however imperfectly, and grows until the day when we shall be changed to be like him, and to see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

We must read carefully and reverently to see what the Bible is actually saying — seeking to understand its meaning in harmony with the context. This is how we "rightly divide the word".

There are many aspects of "rightly dividing". Some of these will be developed in subsequent articles, if the Lord will.

(Next: Respecting the actual words)

*Bob Green
(Brantford, ON)*

"If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5).

"God has hidden every precious thing in such a way that it is a reward to the diligent, a prize to the earnest, but a disappointment to the slothful soul. All nature is arrayed against the loungers and the idlers. The nut is hidden in its thorny case; the pearl is buried beneath the ocean waves; the gold is imprisoned in the rocky bosom of the mountains; the gem is found only after you crush the rock which encloses it; the very soil gives its harvest as a reward only to the laboring farmer. So truth and God must be earnestly sought" (Albert B. Simpson).

Visions of the Third Heaven

The Apostle Paul was apparently rather embarrassed at having to promote himself to the brothers and sisters of Corinth. As he recounts his particular honor, he speaks of himself in the third person. He also immediately counterbalances this self-promotion by highlighting the humbling lesson the messenger of satan inflicted upon him lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations. Immediately following the severe trials and challenges itemized in 2 Corinthians 11, Paul offers a unique validation of his authority: he had been caught up into the third heaven. He heard things he was forbidden to repeat, “*unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter*” (2 Cor. 12:4). It was such a consuming revelation that Paul didn’t know whether he had witnessed it all in his mind or physically experienced it... “*whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell*” (v. 3).

What was this authority-validating, unique honor that Paul experienced? **What is the third heaven?**

Interestingly, the Apostle John recounts a similar experience and similar injunction during his eventful stay on the island of Patmos. John was forbidden to record what the seven thunders uttered (cp. Rev. 10:4 with 2 Cor. 12:4) — when time itself would cease to exist and the mystery of God would be finished (Rev. 10:3-7). This period would seem to be the post-millennial kingdom period, when death and the grave will be totally eliminated (Rev. 20:14,15; 1 Cor. 15:25-28). Time will be meaningless when all of creation will be spirit-based. The infinite will eclipse the finite. This post-millennial kingdom period that John reported seemingly corresponds to the third heaven that Paul experienced briefly. But why would this ultimate period be understood as the “*third heaven*”?

Heaven and earth stages

There is a simple answer that leads into a far more comprehensive understanding — bridging divine promises, dreams, commandments and prophecies. The simple answer is that there are specifically three heaven-and-earth periods defined in scripture. The millennial kingdom is referred to as “**new heavens and a new earth**” (Isa. 65:17-25; 66:21-24). This distinction of newness presumes an old heavens and old earth that must be replaced with the new. This would make the millennial kingdom at least the second heaven-and-earth period. Immediately following the final judgment at the conclusion of the millennial kingdom and the elimination of death and the grave (Rev. 20:11-15) comes this next period described as yet another “**new heaven and new earth**”: “*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea*” (Rev. 21:1).

Since the sea may represent nations (Isa. 57:20; Psa. 65:7; Dan. 7:2,3; Rev. 17:15), “no more sea” indicates the absence of nations. In the previous “new heaven and earth” of the millennial kingdom there was a sea but it was “*like glass*” (Rev. 4:6; 15:2), indicating the presence of nations but without conflict. The sea of nations was calm and glasslike. Yet in the new heavens and new earth that follows the millennial kingdom there is no sea at all. There will be no nations, no governments, and no death in the third heaven period.

The simple answer to the third heaven question would be that Paul (and John) briefly experienced the ultimate plan of God, but were forbidden to share what they saw or heard with anyone else.

Identifying the third heaven as the post-millennial kingdom period opens a river of thought with several significant tributaries.

The heaven-and-earth promises and dreams

Since the millennial kingdom is identified as a **new** heaven and a **new** earth, the logical question would be: What represented the previous heaven and earth? The simple answer would be the previous kingdom of God constructed around the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The foundation for this understanding begins with the promises to Abram in Genesis.

Initially, Yahweh compares Abram's future descendants to the dust of the earth: *"And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered"* (Gen. 13:16). God confirms this promise, comparing Abram's descendants to the stars of heaven: *"Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be"* (Gen. 15:5).

Thus God identifies the descendants of Abraham with earth and heaven. These two parallels are maintained throughout the Old Testament many times. Joseph has two dreams projecting how his authority would eventually exceed that of his brothers and even his father and stepmother. The first dream presents himself and his brothers as sheaves of grain that have grown up out of the dust of the earth. The second dream presents his family as the sun, moon and stars of heaven. This earth-and-then-heaven parallel mirrors the same earth-to-heaven progression of the promises to Abraham. Both divine promises and dreams validate the parallel between heaven and earth with the descendants of Abraham.

Therefore it is very logical to hear God addressing the nation of Israel (through Moses) as heaven and earth: *"Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew..."* (Deut. 32:1-2). God similarly addresses Israel in the first verses of Isaiah: *"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken"* (Isa. 1:2). And in the last verses of Isaiah's prophecies we see a similar parallel: *"And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain"* (Isa. 66:21,22).

Heaven and earth will pass away

The identification of the divinely-constituted Jewish nation as "heaven and earth" is presumed in New Testament prophecies. Jesus presents to his disciples the prophetic parable of the fig tree while looking down on the temple from the Mount of Olives. The parable of the fig tree is a prophecy of how the resurrection of the Jewish nation will herald Christ coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This national resurrection is expressed as the fig tree progressing from

the death of winter to the rebirth of spring — when the branch is tender and puts forth leaves and summer is nigh. By prophesying of Israel's national rebirth, Jesus prophetically presumes its death.

The nation of Israel still existed as Jesus was foretelling its spring-like rebirth. Immediately following this parable and his statement that the generation witnessing the flourishing of the fig tree would not pass away before all things took place, Jesus confirms the conclusion that the nation would have to die before it could be reborn. Jesus says, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"* (Matt. 24:35). In order for new heavens and a new earth to appear, the previous heaven and earth would have to be dissolved. The Roman army, under the father-son team of Generals Vespasian and Titus, accomplished the prophecy. Heaven and earth passed away with the destruction of the Jewish nation.

Peter uses similar terms when prophesying of the destruction of the Jewish nation: *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Pet. 3:10,12,13). Peter describes the military destruction of the Jewish national constitution as the burning up of heaven and earth in the day of the Lord along with the hopeful anticipation of the new heavens and new earth.

The first heaven was the kingdom of God under the Jewish constitution. The second heaven will be the millennial kingdom of God. The third heaven will be the period following the end of the millennial kingdom, when the Creator will be in perfect harmony with creation, when He will be "all and in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Heaven and earth "tributaries"

There are other tributaries from this river of thought that can take us into such concerns as divine law. The two witnesses God calls against Israel (the first "heaven and earth" kingdom) are identified as heaven and earth: *"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live"* (Deut. 30:19). According to divine law, the hands of the witnesses must be first against the accused (Deut. 17:6,7; 19:15-17). These necessary two witnesses of heaven and earth would confirm this law by withholding the rain and dramatically reducing agricultural productiveness.

Another tributary is the progression of "earth before heaven" — the curse of the dust of the earth preceding the heavenly blessing, the natural before the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:46); death before life and humbling before exaltation (in Jesus' case, the towel and the thorns and the cross before the crown).

This principle of "earth before heaven" is beautifully portrayed in the ritual the High Priest performed on the Day of Atonement. To preserve his life, he had to transform the incense into a cloud through fire; this enveloped the ark of the

covenant in the Most Holy so that God would not slay him: “*And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not*” (Lev. 16:13). This transformation of aromatic dust into a mercyseat-enveloping cloud portrays the change in nature springing from the atonement work of the Messiah. Those suffering under the curse of the dust, who offer a pleasing aromatic benefit to their Creator, will be transformed in nature from the curse of the dust to the blessed divine nature of the cloud. God identified Himself as the cloud that led Israel in the wilderness, filled the tabernacle at its dedication, filled Solomon’s temple at its dedication, received up Christ into heaven, and accompanies him upon his return in like manner as he was seen to go. The Day of Atonement transformation from dust to cloud ritually portrays our hope of mortality changing into immortality. The earth-before-heaven progression expounds a divine principle manifested subtly throughout creative activity, and in law, visions, prophecies, historical events and promises. (The book *Creation’s Gospel* examines many of these applications of the “heaven and earth” Scriptural theme in greater detail.)

Paul and John were not allowed to express what they had seen and heard in the third heaven. It was for them alone. One might ask how we could possibly understand without experiencing it for ourselves. Mankind has a very difficult time comprehending even the simplest divine expressions, often distorting God’s words by filtering them through its self-worshipping ego. How can the finite mind explain infinity? It shouldn’t be surprising we are offered very little information in Scripture about the third heaven. Though reluctant to do so, Paul appropriately offered his extraordinary experience with the third heaven as a badge of his authority.

*Jim Dillingham
(Dunbarton, NH)*

“One sometimes wonders if we are beginning to worship *worship* rather than worship God. As a brother put it to me, it’s a bit like those who begin by admiring the sunset and soon begin to admire *themselves* admiring the sunset... There are far too few choruses and services and sermons that expand our vision of God – His attributes, His works, His character, His words.

“Some think that corporate worship is good because it is lively where it had been dull. But it may also be shallow where it is lively, leaving people dissatisfied and restless in a few months’ time. Sheep lie down when they are well fed (cf. Psa. 23:2); they are more likely to be restless when they are hungry. ‘Feed my sheep,’ Jesus commanded Peter (John 21); and many sheep are unfed. If you wish to deepen the worship of the people of God, above all deepen their grasp of His ineffable majesty in His person and in all His works” (Donald A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*).

Reflections

Bro. Bill Minor (“Uncle Jay”)

Sis. Melody Mahan reports that Bro. Bill Minor has passed away, at his home in Oklahoma City. Bill was 68.

Bill had contracted mercury poisoning some time ago. And ever since his heart attack a year or so ago, he had been in somewhat failing health. The family last heard from him on Friday, December 15. After telephone calls went unanswered, friends and family investigated, and discovered his body on Monday, December 18. Seemingly he had “fallen asleep” quietly and without discomfort.

He was in his usual pose, sitting in his chair near his keyboard and computer — where he spent countless hours doing research on the internet; checking up on political news; discussing Bible prophecy and “signs of the times” with various brothers and sisters; and writing long, rambling letters of exhortation and encouragement to Christadelphians and others, near and far.

I’ll think fondly of him there, like an Old Testament prophet, or a watchman on the city walls, looking out upon the world in a spirit of concern and eager expectancy — marking the signs that pointed to the return of his Lord and Saviour. Bill died at his “post”, doing his duty as best he could until the very end.

Bill talked, and wrote, in a charming, folksy, and totally unpretentious manner. He told stories, he reminisced, he talked about old cars and football and hunting dogs, he quoted and paraphrased countless Bible passages, and he always looked for something positive and supportive and uplifting to give others. For years he wrote regularly on an ecclesial discussion group, in which — at some times — his seemed almost to be the only voice for love and kindness and courtesy, no matter what “issues” were under consideration. For this reason alone, if there were nothing else, I would love him.

When I knew that I was to become the editor of *The Christadelphian Tidings*, I asked Bill if I might occasionally use some of his (what shall I call them?) thoughts... articles... letters... commentaries in the magazine? He said, “Yes, of course.” But he asked that I use a pseudonym, as he had also used on the discussion group.

And so, in the December issue, he was “Uncle Jay” for the first (but perhaps not for the last) time — writing out of his own personal experiences, and directing his correspondent to consider that a believer’s tribulations ought to be a cause for rejoicing. Why? “Because we have learned that there is a purpose in all things that happen to a believer.”

He continued:

“How can we be bitter? How can we complain? How can we kick against the goads? How can we turn away, no matter how intense the purifying flames of our fiery trials? We are living sacrifices on God’s altar.

“We belong to God, and He belongs to us.

“You ask, How do I know this? I’ll tell you. Because I learned this lesson myself; it’s not ‘theory’. I profited by my painful experiences, by my loneliness, when I called out to my God from a place of desperate need, where it seemed no one else could know what I was going through. And in that place I learned about the truly ‘deep things’ — God’s goodness, His love, and His grace. ‘Springs whose blessings never fail. A sea without a shore.’

“I would not, willingly, undergo the sufferings of that time again, no, not for many millions of dollars! But, as I look back on it now, I consider that time the greatest gift our Heavenly Father could ever have given me. I know now that it did more for me than a ‘good, comfortable, happy life’ alone could ever have done.

“It brought me closer to Him.

“And it will do the same for you.

“Trust me. I know.

“With love in Christ, *Uncle Jay*.”

* * * * *

Sis. Rachel Black writes: “Bill was always ‘there’ with a comforting word (or a thousand!) when it was needed. More than a watchman, he was a trusted friend in Christ — someone ‘safe’ to carry concerns to. Many will remember Bill’s often humorous, homey, wise and loving e-mails, but what really won me over was his ability to listen, really listen — and respond with understanding. Truly understanding and relating to difficulties others may be facing seems a rarity these days.”

* * * * *

Bro. Kyle Tucker writes: “It was not unusual for [Bill’s] e-mails to be ten pages long. The thing that really struck me about his e-mails is just how much they were full of genuine praise for God. Bill was head-over-heels in love with God and with Christ and truly thankful for what they had done for him. Bill was probably the most praiseful person of God that I have ever known.

“I can honestly and embarrassingly say that I found his e-mails in most instances painful to read because of their length. This was somehow justified in my mind because he didn’t net things out. In this world of time management and deadlines, there just wasn’t time to read a Bill Minor e-mail. He would pour out his heart about love, mercy, grace, forgiveness and so forth; things which apparently I didn’t have time for, to my loss. In April of this year, sensing his demise due to his failing health, Bill wrote to me and said, ‘It’s just too bad you have to cash in your chips about the time you finally develop a modicum of “wisdom!” No problem though, if eternal life lies ahead.’

Bill closed that e-mail with these words: ‘Press on! By His Majestic Grace, Love, Bill.’”

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Bro. Dwight Kindred writes: “The writer to the Hebrews, referring to faithful disciples, says that the world was not worthy of them. The world did not even blink on the day Bill Minor breathed his last breath in this age, which is to its shame — for he was a man who understood its ills and knew the Source for its healing. Yet I do not say these things to condemn the world, but to remember Bill.

“I greatly respected Bill for his sterling character that made him so memorable. He had a wry, self-deprecating sense of humor which I thoroughly enjoyed. Sometimes he would poke fun at what he called ‘his towering intellect’ (he was truly a humble man), and then again express amusement (tinged with sadness) at the world situation.

“Bill was also an honest student. Despite his self-deprecation, it was clear the Creator blessed him with a superior intellect. He followed his explorations honestly regardless of where they took him, and he stood with quiet courage and spoke the truth with love to any who would listen.

“Bill was a kind man, loving and merciful. I don’t recall in all he wrote or said that he was ever unkind to anyone, even to those who disagreed with him. One of his greatest desires was to serve those who were in trouble or in pain, and to give them hope in the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God and in His endless mercies. One of the things that grieved him most was the tendency of some to take the ‘sword’ that is the Word of God and turn it against men and women of faith. Bill always tried to use the Scriptures for the healing and encouragement of the faithful, always striving to love his neighbor as himself.

“Most of all, though, Bill’s life was governed by a tireless hope in God’s coming kingdom — and by a determined effort to learn to love Yahweh his God with all his heart, soul, and mind. He always seemed in awe, but absolutely grateful, of the fact that God in His mercy had chosen him a fellow-heir of the promises to Abraham.

“I will miss Bill. He had a lot to say, and he will surely be grateful for the resurrection and a body with stamina, and for a thousand years so that he can get it all said at last. I hope we will all see him again very soon.”

“The Bible in a man’s life is God in a man’s life. Where people place the Bible, they place God. The place it demands is the heart – the throne. With nothing less will God be satisfied. Do you neglect it? You neglect God. Do you allow the affairs of house, or business, or friends... to put it in the corner? Then is God cast behind your back, and great is your danger... You say you have no time to read. The plea is absolutely inadmissible. You take time to eat and drink, and this is the most important kind of eating and drinking... Death will rap at the door, and he won’t ask you if you have time to attend to him. Christ will stand in the earth one of these days, and what about your family, your house, your business then?” (Robert Roberts).

Music in Worship

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The Harp

*“Oh may my heart in tune be found
Like David’s harp of solemn sound.”*

The harp is best known as the instrument that David played, specifically for the soothing and calming effect of its music on Saul’s troubled nerves and conscience. It was suggested to Saul: “Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well... And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him” (1 Sam. 16:16,23).

It appears the harp was small and light enough to be carried about, as the instrumentalist could play it and sing at the same time. This can be concluded from 1 Samuel 10:5: “Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with... a harp, before them.” Also Isaiah 23:16: “Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.”

The harp was used in both secular and sacred rejoicing. The only reference to its use other than in cheerfulness or praise is in Job. “My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep” (Job 30:31). In almost all other Bible quotations where the harp is mentioned there is either merrymaking or thanksgiving. The following quote is typical of its 13 occurrences in the Psalms:

*“Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
It is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the LORD with the harp”*

(Psalm 33:1,2, NIV)

Harp contributed to the selfish carousing of the wicked: “And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands” (Isa. 5:12; see also Job 21:12).

When joy ceased, the harp was silent: “For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon... And they shall break down thy walls, and destroy thy pleasant houses... And I will cause the noise of

thy songs to cease; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard” (Ezek. 26:7,12,13; see Isa. 24:8).

David danced before the Lord to its music: “And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps...” (1 Chron. 13:8; see also 1 Chron. 15:28). David also arranged for its use in regular worship: “Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps...” (1 Chron. 25:1; see also 1 Chron. 16:5; 15:3,6).

The kings Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah also used the harp in worship and praise of God (2 Chron. 5:12; 20:28; 29:25). When the children of Israel returned from exile, at the dedication of the wall under Nehemiah, the harp and other instruments were used to express thanksgiving and gladness: “And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps” (Neh. 12:27).

Most of the references in the Old Testament to stringed instruments involve only two Hebrew words. “Kinnor” is almost always translated “harp”, while “nebel” is rendered “viol” or “psaltery” in the Authorized Version but “lyre” or occasionally “lute” in modern versions. The distinction between them is not certain but was probably as follows:

Both instruments consisted of a set of strings stretched over a wooden frame, which vibrated when plucked. The harp was triangular in shape and each string produced only one note. The lyre was roughly rectangular and the strings differed in thickness and tension and were stopped to give different notes. Often the lyre was played with a plectrum¹ while the harp strings were plucked with the fingers. In very early times the strings were of twisted grass. Later they consisted of strips of sheep gut.

Harps and lyres are both seen in paintings and carvings from ancient Egypt, Greece and Assyria. The oldest actual specimens of musical instruments from Bible times are four lyres found at Ur of the Chaldees by Sir Leonard Woolley. There also exists an ivory carving from the Canaanite city of Megiddo showing a woman playing a nine-stringed lyre.

In Bible times the Canaanites were celebrated for the superiority of their musicianship. The people of Canaan had a higher standard of material culture than the Israelites, and that is one reason why their way of life presented such temptations to the people of God.

In the book of Revelation various groups are described as holding harps and singing praises to God: “And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song...” (Rev. 5:8). “And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps...” (Rev. 14:2). “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire:

and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Rev. 15:2).² The association of harps in these Revelation passages with thanksgiving, praise and rejoicing fittingly represents the immense, unparalleled and indescribable joy of the Kingdom of God.

Bob Burr
(Barnt Green, Birmingham, UK)

Footnotes:

1. A plectrum is a piece of some material such as horn, tortoise shell, quill, or ivory used to pluck a stringed instrument (*The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Dan Randel).
2. There is one other reference to harpers in Revelation 18:22. This verse refers not to the harp accompanying praise and rejoicing, but to the sound of the harp being silenced.

“Hark! Ten Thousand Thousand Voices”

The music for Hymn 296, “Hark! Ten thousand thousand voices sing the song of Jubilee”, was written by Bro. James Flint. He was born in 1813 and he and his wife, Selina, were baptized in 1864 in Birmingham, probably in a bathroom above a barber’s shop.

“Brother Robert Roberts, in his magazine at that time, referred to ‘the advent of a musical family who led us in our singing with a flute, violin and basso (probably a double bass).’ The ecclesial orchestra included Brother Henry Flint (flute), Brother James Drew (cornet), Brethren Thomas Webster and Robert King (violins) and Brother Charles Jennings (harmonium).

“James Flint senior was appointed Leader of Song, and the ecclesia met every Wednesday evening for the cultivation of singing.”

In our current Christadelphian Hymnbook (2002), six hymn tunes are included written by James Flint. They are:

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|----------|--|
| Hymn 83 | “Glory and blessing be” |
| Hymn 216 | “Beyond where Kedron’s waters flow” |
| Hymn 281 | “Light of them that sit in darkness” |
| Hymn 296 | “Hark! Ten thousand thousand voices” |
| Hymn 308 | “Yahweh Elohim, When shall we see,
The sign of Thy coming, When shall it be?” |
| Hymn 366 | “Jesus! Thou Sun of Righteousness” |

*(Quotes and information extracted from the pamphlet by the late Bro. Stuart Cowlshaw, **Some Past Christadelphian Hymn Writers and Composers**, 1991, page 12.)*

CD Recordings of Hymns and Spiritual Songs

A selection of recordings on CDs of hymns from the Christadelphian Hymn Book and other spiritual songs composed by Christadelphian composers is available from the following website: www.speakingofhisglory.com

Current Events

A New Holocaust Archive

Reporter Arthur Max tells of a 21-year-old Russian, sitting before a clerk of the U.S. Army judge advocate's office, describing the furnaces at Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp where he had been a prisoner until a few weeks before.

"I saw with my own eyes how thousands of Jews were gassed daily and thrown by the hundreds into pits where Jews were burning," he said. "I saw how little children were killed with sticks and thrown into the fire."

After half a century, the International Tracing Service is beginning to give the public access to millions of documents — 16 miles of files housed in Bad Arolsen, Germany — that comprise the most complete record of Nazi persecutions in existence.

Today, the Holocaust is known in voluminous and painful detail. Yet the young Russian's words leap off the faded page with a rawness that transports the reader back to April 1945, when World War II was still raging and the world knew little about gas chambers, genocide and the Final Solution.

The two pages of testimony, in a file randomly plucked off a shelf, are among millions of documents held by the International Tracing Service, or ITS, an arm of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

This vast archive — many millions of files in six nondescript buildings in the small German town — contains the largest collection of records of Nazi persecutions in existence. But because of concerns about the victims' privacy, the ITS has kept the files closed to the public for half a century, doling out information in small bits, to survivors or their descendants, on a strict need-to-know basis.

This policy, which has generated considerable animosity among Holocaust survivors and researchers, is about to change.

In May, after years of pressure from the United States and survivors' groups, the 11 countries overseeing the archive agreed to unseal the files for scholars as well as victims and their families.

ITS has allowed Paul Shapiro of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington to look at the files. It has also given The Associated Press extensive access on condition that no names from the files are revealed unless they have been identified in other sources.

"This is powerful stuff," said Shapiro, leafing through the file containing the Russian's statement and some 200 other testimonies that take the reader into the very heart of Hitler's death machine: its camps, inmates, commandants, executioners and trusted inmates used as low-level guards.

“If you sat here for a day and read these files, you’d get a picture of what it was really like in the camps, how people were treated. Look — names and names of Jewish trustee guards — the ‘little perpetrators,’” he said.

Moved to Bad Arolsen in central Germany after the war, the files occupy a former barracks of the Waffen-SS, the Nazi Party’s elite force. They are stored in long corridors of drab cabinets and neatly stenciled binders packed into floor-to-ceiling metal shelves. Their index cards alone fill three large rooms.

Mandated to trace missing people and help families reunite, ITS has allowed few people through its doors and has responded to requests for information on wartime victims with minimal data, even when its files could have told more.

It might take a year or more for the files to open fully. Until then, access remains tightly restricted.

“We will be ready any time. We would open them today, if we had the go-ahead,” the ITS interim director, Jean-Luc Blondel, said.

When the archive is finally available, researchers will have their first chance to see a unique collection of documents on concentration camps, slave labor camps and displaced people.

“There is a great deal of very interesting material on a very large number of concentration camps that we really don’t know much about,” said Yehuda Bauer, professor of Holocaust Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. “It may contain surprises. We don’t know. It has material that nobody’s ever seen.”

A visitor to the archive comes into direct contact with the bureaucracy of mass murder. In a bound ledger with frayed binding, a copy of a list of names appears of Jews rounded up in Holland and transported to the death camps.

Buried among the names is “Frank, Annelise M.,” her date of birth (June 12, 1929), Amsterdam address before she went into hiding (Merwerdeplein 37) and the date she was sent to a concentration camp (Sept. 3, 1944). “Frank, Annelise M.” was, of course, Anne Frank.

She was on one of the last trains to Germany before the Nazi occupation of Holland crumbled. Six months later, at age 15, she died an anonymous death, one of some 35,000 casualties of typhus that ravaged the Bergen-Belsen camp.

After the war, “The Diary of Anne Frank,” written during her 25 months hiding in a tiny apartment with seven others, would become the most widely read book ever written on the Holocaust.

But most of the lives recorded in Bad Arolsen are known to none but their families. They are people such as Cornelis Brouwenstijn, a Dutchman who vanished into the Nazi gulag at age 22 for illegally possessing a radio. In a plain manila envelope are his photo, a wallet, and some snapshots.

After the war, his family repeatedly wrote to the Red Cross asking about him. In 1949, his parents received a terse form letter saying he died sometime between

April 19 and May 3, 1945, in the area of a German labor camp. The personal effects, however, remained in Bad Arolsen, and, with the family long deceased, there is no one left to apply for their return.

To critics who accuse them of being tightfisted with their information, the Red Cross and ITS counter that they have to abide by German privacy laws and protect the reputations of victims whether alive or dead. They say the files might contain unsubstantiated allegations against victims and that opening them up to researchers would distract ITS from its main task of providing documentation to survivors or victims' relatives.

One area of study that will benefit from the ITS files is the Lebensborn program, in which children deemed to have the "proper genes" were adopted or even kidnapped to propagate the Aryan master race of Hitler's dreams.

Another subject is the sheer scope of the Holocaust system. The files will support new research from other sources showing that the network of concentration camps, ghettos and labor camps was nearly three times more extensive than previously thought.

Postwar historians estimated about 5,000 to 7,000 detention sites. But after the Cold War ended, records began pouring out of the former communist nations of East Europe. More sites were disclosed in the past six years in claims by 1.6 million people for slave labor reparations from a \$6.6 billion fund financed by the German government and some 3,000 industries.

"We have identified somewhere in the neighborhood of 20,000 camps and ghettos of various categories," said Geoffrey Megargee of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, who is compiling a seven-volume encyclopedia of these detention centers.

Over the years, the International Tracing Service has answered 11 million requests to locate family members or provide certificates supporting pension claims or reparations. It says it has a 56 percent rate of success in tracing the requested name. But the workload has been overwhelming. There is at present a massive backlog of hundreds of thousands of unanswered queries. There are worries that the process takes too long since aged survivors are dying every day.

"What victims of these crimes fear the most is that when they disappear — and it's happening very fast now — no one will remember the names of the families they lost," Shapiro said. "If we don't succeed in having this material public while there are still survivors, then we have failed."

Note: The foregoing was extracted from an Associated Press report, November 21, 2006.

Footnote: *What an extraordinary time we live in! On December 11 Iran hosted a conference of those, assembled from around the world, who deny the Nazi genocide and the Holocaust. (Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called the whole affair "a sick phenomenon".)*

The two-day conference, with 67 participants from 30 countries, was initiated by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He once again called the Holocaust a “myth”, and also called for Israel to be wiped off the map. Speakers asserted, among other things, that no more than a very few thousand people (including a very few Jews) were executed by the Nazis, but only for terrible crimes.

Other conference participants included two rabbis and four other members of Jews United Against Zionism. This delegation did not deny the generally recognized facts of the Holocaust, but stated that they oppose the creation of Israel on the grounds that its existence at this time violates Jewish law. (Many Orthodox Jews believe that God has exiled His people from His land until they repent, the Messiah returns, and the Temple of God is rebuilt. Thus they see a nationalist State of Israel at the present time as an affront to His Holy Name.)

Muslim “trash” is Israeli “treasure”!

Off an eastern Jerusalem side-street, between an olive orchard and an abandoned hotel, sit a few piles of stones and dirt that yield important insights into Jerusalem's history. They come from the world's most disputed “holy place”: the square in the heart of Jerusalem that is known to Jews as the Temple Mount.

Some finds that have emerged from the rubble are: (1) a coin struck during the Jewish revolt against the Romans, (2) arrowheads shot by Babylonian archers, and (3) the imprint of a seal possibly linked to a priestly Jewish family mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah. This last item, uncovered in 2005, is perhaps the most valuable find so far. Its incomplete Hebrew lettering appears to name “Ge'aliyahu, son of Immer”. (Immer is the name of an important family of temple officials mentioned in Jer. 20:1.)

The finds continue. On a drizzly November morning, Gabriel Barkay, the archaeologist who runs the dig, sits in a tent near the mounds examining some newly discovered coins from various occupiers of the Promised Land: the Hasmonean (i.e., Maccabean) dynasty of Jewish kings more than 2,000 years ago, a Roman procurator around the time of Pontius Pilate, the early Christians of the Byzantine Empire, two Islamic dynasties, and the British in the 20th century.

Considering the scope of findings, it is extraordinary that this is an excavation that was never supposed to happen. The Temple Mount is the frequent focal point of Israeli-Palestinian clashes, and the volatility of regional politics has largely prevented archaeologists from touching the site for the past 60 years. Wars have been started in the Middle East over far less!

Jews revere the Temple Mount as the site of their two ancient temples. But Muslims believe it's the place from which Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven, as told in the Koran. Two mosques stand on the site, as do some of the temple's original retaining walls, including what Jews call the Western, or Wailing, Wall, but there is no visible trace of the ancient Jewish temple itself (even as Jesus prophesied in Matt. 24:2; Luke 19:44).

In November 1999, the Waqf [the Muslim organization that administers the site's Islamic holy places] opened an emergency exit to an ancient underground chamber of stone pillars and arches known to Jews as Solomon's Stables.

Ignoring fierce protests from Israeli archaeologists who said priceless artifacts were being destroyed to erase traces of Jewish history, the Waqf dug a large pit, removed tons of earth and rubble that had been used as landfill, and dumped much of it in the nearby Kidron Valley (immediately to the east of the Temple Mount: cf. 2 Sam. 15:23; Jer. 31:40; John 18:1). The Waqf takes the official position that the rubble is of recent vintage and without archaeological value.

Zachi Zweig, a 27-year-old archaeology undergraduate student from Tel Aviv, showed up at the dump a few days later. Though Israel's archaeological establishment had shown no interest in the rubble, Zweig was sure it was important, especially after a Waqf representative told him to leave.

Zweig returned quietly with friends, gathered samples of the rubble and discovered a high concentration of ancient pottery shards. The Israel Antiquities Authority charged him with stealing relics (these charges were later dropped). But Zweig finally convinced Barkay, his professor at Bar Ilan University, that the rubble needed to be studied.

In 2004, after spending five years obtaining a dig license and raising money, they had 75 truckloads of rubble moved to the slopes of Jerusalem's Mount Scopus. (Scopus is the northernmost of four mountains that comprise what is commonly called the Mount of Olives today.)

Barkay's dig is financed by the City of David Foundation, a group that spends most of its money settling Jewish families in Arab neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem. This is part of an attempt to make the point that Jerusalem belongs to the Jews.

The Waqf says it wasn't destroying evidence of Jewish presence there — ***because there isn't any!*** "I have seen no evidence of a temple," said the Waqf's director, Adnan Husseini. He had heard "stories," he said, "but these are an attempt to change the situation here today, and any change would be very dangerous."

Such reactions don't surprise Israeli historian Gershom Gorenberg, whose book *The End of Days* documents the fight over the Temple site. "Dig a centimeter beneath the debate over antiquities," he said, "and you hit the debate over whom the Mount belongs to, and a centimeter beneath that is the war over whom the entire country belongs to."

[Some information is taken from an Associated Press report, by Matti Friedman, Nov. 18, 2006.]

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"Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem" (Zech. 14:3,4).

"Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1).

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23:37-39).

* * * * *

Editor’s Postscript: I asked Bro. Leen Ritmeyer, recognized authority on the archaeology of the Temple Mount, to comment on the above. He wrote: *“I was just in Washington, DC, attending and speaking at conferences where I also met Gabriel Barkay again. Your article is a very good summary, but it does not include the latest find, which is an inscription on a stone mentioning the name of Silva, the Roman commander who took Masada. By the way, my work is also mentioned in Gershom Gorenberg’s book.”*

Signs of the Times

The Parable of the Fig Tree (Matthew 24)

The parable of the fig tree in Matthew 24:32-35 has been used many times in our public lectures to indicate approximately when Christ would return. It was especially popular in the late 1980s, as the fortieth anniversary of the re-emergence of Israel as a nation approached. In the author’s experience, the use of this parable for this purpose declined as 1988 came and went, and the 40-year generation that had “seen” these things still had not seen the fulfilment of the rest of the Olivet prophecy. But the parable is still there — and it still has significance. Perhaps it is time to think about it again.

The parable reads as follows: *“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:32-34, KJV).*

The first order of business is to determine what “all these things” are. They obviously refer to something Jesus has just said, but specifically what? The answer is found in the correct understanding of the disciples’ questions in verse 3.

Their first question — “When shall these things be?” — must refer to the destruction of Jerusalem because that is the context (*“There shall not be left here one stone upon another”*: v. 2).

The last two questions, however, ask for signs, first of his coming and then of the end of the world. It is evident from Acts 1:6 that the apostles primarily associated

the return of Christ with the kingdom restored to Israel — not Israel's destruction by Rome. That was also what Jesus concentrated on in the verses preceding Acts 1:6, where he had spoken to them for 40 days about the kingdom to come. It is reasonable to assume that the kingdom was the subject of the apostles' last two questions in Matthew 24.

So their questions were:

1. What shall be the sign of thy coming (i.e., to set up the kingdom of God)?
2. What shall be the sign of the end of the world (i.e., the Gentile world)?

Jesus begins his answer at verse 23 where he speaks of his return for the first time. Before he returns, people will start saying that he's already here and some will even claim to be him! We are not to believe it because he's already told us of the sign of his coming ("*Behold, I have told you before*": v. 25). Verse 27 compares his coming to lightning. It will be sudden and, at least to the saints, unmistakable. But what is the sign?

Carcases and eagles

He tells them (and us) what that sign would be in verse 28. The word "For" is not in the original and the word "eagles" can mean either "eagles" or "vultures"; so what is the sign of his coming?

"Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matt. 24:28).

The sign of his coming is a carcase surrounded by vultures. This picture is identified in two clear passages:

1. Deuteronomy 28:26: "*And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away.*"
2. Jeremiah 19:7: "*And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcases will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth.*"

Both of these passages are about God's punishment upon the nation of Israel because she has forsaken Him.

So the sign of Jesus' coming is the reappearance of the nation of Israel in the midst of "vultures" who want to consume her. She reappears as a carcase. This is a very apt description of Israel when she became a nation. Ezekiel 37 is the prophecy of dry bones; the chapter describes Israel as a dead body — a carcase — just before the spirit enters into her. She is there on earth again, but without the spirit of God or life in her. So the carcase is the nation of Israel at the stage when she has not yet put her trust in God and recognized her Messiah.

When does this sign appear? Verse 24 tells us that the sign comes immediately after a time of great tribulation in which ruling political powers of the earth are shaken. This could easily be seen as the first and second world wars — and it is a

fact that out of these troubled times the state of Israel was born. The prophecy is in harmony with history.

Tribes mourning

What happens next? The sign of the Son of man appears, and the next significant event is the mourning of the tribes of the earth. The Greek word translated “tribes” occurs 23 times in the New Testament. In all but three times it is, without doubt, describing the tribes of *Israel*. The three exceptions could apply to other peoples, but it would also make perfect sense if they are applied to Israel. Nowhere in the New Testament can it be proven that this word does *not* refer to the tribes of Israel; in fact, in 23 of 26 instances, it is obvious from the context that it does.

Why does Christ call Israel in the latter days “the tribes of the earth”? Because it fits perfectly with Israel’s situation in those days. The tribes of Israel are scattered over the whole earth as prophecy suggests.

Why do they mourn? The mention of Israel mourning draws us immediately to Zechariah 12. There, in verse 10, the mourning of Israel accompanies their recognition of the one “whom they have pierced”. Zechariah tells in some detail what Israel will go through (possibly from the invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and 39) to reach the stage where they will recognize Jesus.

Gathering of the “elect”

Matthew 24:31 continues with the gathering of the elect from all over the world. The word “elect” can mean either elect or chosen. We have the Greek word translated both ways in the New Testament (16 times as elect and 7 times as chosen). Normally it refers to the saints. If there is any chronological order to the events laid out here, however, this verse cannot refer to the saints because they will have already been raised, judged, and glorified with Christ. The recognition of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel comes after he, along with the saints, rescues Israel from the terrible invasion they are destined to experience.

If it is not the saints here, then who are the “chosen” who must be gathered from all over the world? God’s chosen people are the obvious choice, and that too is a very important prophecy that suits these words of Jesus. This gathering is the “second exodus” of Jeremiah 23:7,8 — when God will bring Abraham’s seed back to their land to begin the kingdom era. Here is the final and full return of which the state of Israel today is just a preliminary and partial fulfillment.

The parable of the fig tree

And finally we come to the parable of the fig tree. So far in Matthew 24 Jesus hasn’t said much about the time of his coming — except that it will be after the *sign* of his coming. He then responds to the apostles’ last question, “What shall be the sign of the end of the world?” The parable of the fig tree answers both of these questions perfectly, that is, if we know what the fig tree represents. Perhaps that is where we have run into trouble. The standard view has been that the fig tree represents Israel. This reasoning deduces that the fig tree with leaves and no fruit is the secular nation of Israel today, a nation that does not trust in God but

in the arm of flesh. It is the carcass or dead body of Ezekiel 37 before it receives the spirit (wind, word) of God. When we saw a secular Israel re-established as a nation, in the midst of other nations that wanted to devour her, then this was surely the “generation” that will also see Jesus’ coming.

We have used Scripture to define how long a generation is, and generally taken it to signify 40 years — because of the generation that died in the wilderness. Israel was established as a nation in 1948, but of course Christ did not come in 1988. Where have we erred?

Some have said that perhaps, after all, Jesus was just making a comparison. When we see the sign of his coming then we should recognize that his coming is soon, just as the leaves of a fig tree indicate that summer is nigh at hand. And so we have a general reference to timing. Although not as definitive as we might like, this interpretation still provides a powerful boost to our faith. Israel was established 59 years ago. The coming of Christ must be near. Let us make ourselves ready each day — for there are surely not many days left!

But note that Jesus specifically says this is a parable. By definition the details in a parable represent something more than what they are on the surface. And we must not forget that the apostles asked for two signs. So we should not be too quick to mix up the sign of his *coming* and the sign of *the end of the world*. If the details in the parable are symbols, then it is reasonable to assume we are not dealing here with a simple lesson from nature. The fig tree must be a symbol of the sign of *the end of the world* that the apostles were looking for.

It is interesting to note that the Bible never states directly that the fig tree is a symbol for the nation of Israel. Hosea 9:10 perhaps comes closest: “*I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time.*” If the fathers of Israel were figs then surely Israel is a fig tree. But Israel is already defined as grapes. Some have taken Joel’s words in 1:7 as a definitive statement on the issue. “*He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree.*” These two passages come closest to making a direct connection, but neither compare with the directness of what is said about the vineyard and the olive tree. Isaiah 5:7 says directly that “the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.” Hosea 10:1 says that “Israel is an empty vine.” In Romans 11 Paul says that his brethren the Jews are the natural branches of the olive tree. There are no such direct statements about the fig tree.

How does Jesus use the fig tree? Jesus talks about fig trees four times, one of which is the parable in Matthew 24. In chronological order these are as follows:

1. First he says that he saw Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree when he was calling the apostles (John 1:48).
2. Next he gives the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard that was to be dug about and fertilized the third year before it was cut down (Luke 13:6-9).
3. Next Jesus curses the fig tree during the final week of his mortal life and at the end of his ministry (Matt. 21:19-21; Mark 11:13,20,21).

4. Finally we have the parable of the fig tree, which may have been given on the last day of Jesus' life (Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:28; Luke 21:29).

Except for the first mention of the fig tree (with Nathaniel) there is an obvious connection between the other uses of the fig tree. In all three cases the fig trees were without fruit. This is stated directly in references 2 and 3 above. In the parable of the fig tree, despite that fact that a natural fig tree produces its fruit before (or at least at the same time as) its leaves, there is no mention of the fruit. So we are justified in thinking that, in all three instances, the fig tree of which Jesus speaks represents the same thing.

The parable of the fig tree in the vineyard points us in the right direction. As already stated, Isaiah 5 makes it very clear that the primary symbol in the plant world for the nation of Israel is the vine. It is very significant that in the parable of Luke 13 the fig tree was growing in the vineyard. Isaiah says that the vineyard is the whole house of Israel. So Jesus is focusing on something that is in Israel and that is singled out to be cursed, to wither, and to be cut down, once his three-year ministry is over. Surely the focus of Jesus' condemnation is Jerusalem.

The fig tree of Jerusalem?

In Luke's account of the Olivet prophecy — right before Jesus begins to talk about his second coming — he says: *“And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* (Luke 21:24).

Compare this with Matthew 23:37,38: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, [thou] that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under [her] wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.”*

And in obvious fulfilment of the “fig tree in the vineyard” parable of Luke 13, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem when he finds and curses the fig tree because it has no fruit. He had tried to gather them under his wings to protect them from the evil that is coming, but they will not do so because they do not recognize the time of their visitation.

Is it not possible, then, that the fig tree is a better symbol for Jerusalem than for Israel? The fig tree putting forth leaves is Jerusalem coming out from under her long Gentile oppression — but still not turning to God. The people bear no fruit, despite being given the great blessing of possessing their beloved city once again after nearly 2,000 years.

A “generation”

Now we turn to the other variable in the parable. What is a “generation”? The “40-year” interpretation comes mainly from the “generation” that wandered and died in the wilderness throughout a 40-year period. It also finds some basis in Jesus' use of the term concerning the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in Matthew 23, in the verse that precedes his lamentation. Assuming that he spoke

this prophecy in about 33 AD, then 70 AD and the great destruction of the city was approximately 40 years later.

[Editor's note: But the crucifixion of Jesus was, from other historical accounts and comparisons, probably closer to 27 or 28 AD — since his birth was more likely 4 or 5 BC rather than 1 AD. Meanwhile, the great final war for Jerusalem began in 67 AD, and did not end until 70 AD. Clearly, “approximately” is about as close as we can get to a 40-year period using these historical analogies. For that matter, it may be said that Israel wandered in the wilderness for 38, not 40, years (Deut. 2:14). Any way we look at it, then, using 40 years as a fixed number based on these comparisons is something of a guess!]

Other than these there are no other numbers associated with the use of the term “generation” in the Bible. Most of the time the term refers simply to the people of the particular age being discussed. That is the way Jesus uses it almost exclusively.

But we do not need to remain fixed on an exact number of years. The Greek word can be a general term referring to a group. In this case it is the people who, during their lifetimes, see the fig tree putting forth leaves. In terms of this interpretation, they are the people who see Jerusalem finally delivered out of its “treading-down-by-the-Gentiles” period. So what can we say about the time of fulfilment from the parable of the fig tree?

If we interpret the fig tree to be the unification of Jerusalem after the Six Days' War, then the starting point of the “generation” prophecy would be 1967. Using the traditional period for a generation of 40 years brings us to 2007. To see the culmination of all things included in the Olivet Prophecy by the end of this year is questionable. But if the generation to which Jesus refers is the group of people who were old enough for this event to register in their memories (let's say about 12 years old), and assuming a 70-year lifespan (cp. Psa. 90:10), then we arrive at the year 2025 (1967 plus 70 minus 12).

Perhaps we may think, in the most general terms, of 2007 as the lower limit of a time period and 2025 as the upper limit of the time period. But we may conclude the parable of the fig tree is still a valid indicator of a general time period for the things Jesus discusses in Matthew 24.

In all of our expectations, however, we must always remember the warning in the very next verse of Matthew 24: *“But of that day and hour knoweth no [man], no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”* (v. 36).

*Jim Robinson
(Kitchener-Waterloo, ON)*

“There are joys which long to be ours. God sends ten thousand joys, which come about us like birds seeking entrance; but we are shut up to them, and so they bring us nothing, but sit and sing awhile upon the roof, and then fly away” (Henry Ward Beecher).



Bible Mission News

Latin American Activities 2006 in Review

Baptisms in 2006

In all areas of CBMC (Canada) and CBMA (America) activities, God has truly blessed the efforts of many brothers and sisters. During 2006, there were 22 baptisms throughout the Caribbean (the CBMC's area of responsibility) and 25 in Latin America, which includes Mexico, Central and South America (the main area of the CBMA's efforts). In both cases a goodly number of fieldworkers — mainly from North America but also from other parts of the world — spent days, weeks and sometimes months supporting existing ecclesias and preaching initiatives. Resident missionary families were present in Ecuador and Bolivia for much of the year. Unfortunately, the CBMA began 2007 with no full-time missionaries in the field. But at the same time, our Heavenly Father has guided more Spanish-speaking workers to commit themselves to being part of the schedule of preaching/pastoral trips to Latin America. The combined preaching methods of advertising, correspondence work (postal or internet), and scheduled trips to specific countries — followed by the placement of full-time missionaries — has been blessed by God in recent years. These combined methods all start the process of establishing ecclesias. At present there are over 1,000 active correspondence contacts, with several thousand more who receive regular mailings of information and invitations to special talks and events.

Ecclesial and fieldworker support

Besides the scheduled visits mentioned above, there is a variety of support available for the fieldworkers and ecclesias. A wide array of Spanish language literature is now available — leaflets and booklets on many topics, including *Christendom Astry*. Weekly exhortations and study papers in Spanish are sent by email and post to many members in Latin America for ecclesial and personal use. Cassette tape recordings of Spanish talks are also distributed by mail, and are of particular benefit to those in isolation. Many brothers and sisters in Latin America now have email connections; this has enabled regular communication that was not even dreamed of just a few years ago. This in turn has helped to create a feeling of belonging to the worldwide brotherhood. Inexpensive and in some cases free long-distance phone services, plus cell phones where land-lines do not exist or are unreliable, have made a huge difference in our ability to communicate instantly with brethren in many countries.

The door of faith

God has blessed the work in so many ways, such as the response to advertising and course work, the attendance at advertised talks. But some of the most heart-warming aspects are the confessions of faith during baptismal interviews and, even more importantly, the changed lives! The baptisms during 2006 in Latin America included men and women of all ages and from all walks of life. A 23-year-old man in La Paz, Bolivia — **Victor Hugo Fernandez** — was baptized on November 12. He is a university student who also works almost full-time hours. He was introduced to the Truth by others already baptized in La Paz. He regularly attended meetings and had personal studies with the missionaries. In comparison, **Francisco Gilardon**, an 88-year-old retired lawyer and judge, who also taught law at the university level, was baptized on November 21. He had completed correspondence courses with Sis. Jean Hunter from California and realized the only true justice will be at Christ's return. He answered the interview questions with "great fervour", in the words of the interviewing brother.

We thank our Heavenly Father for continuing to open "*the door of faith unto the Gentiles*" in these last days. The CBMA expresses gratitude to the brotherhood for the constant prayers, the generous financial support, and the loving interest in the CBMA's Latin American activities. Your brothers and sisters in Latin lands are truly grateful for the fellowship of the brotherhood!

Don Luff, CBMA Latin American Committee



Letter

"Crowned with glory and honor"

In "Before the World Was" (*Tidings*, Dec.), Bro. Jim Harper establishes that "*the foundation of the world*" refers to the creation of **man** recorded in Genesis 1:27. Based on this precise identification, he interprets "*the glory which [Jesus] had with [his Father] before the world was*" (John 17:5) as alluding back to Genesis 1:26. I'd like to add another line of reasoning to support his conclusions.

Psalm 8 is a psalm of David celebrating Genesis 1: "What is **man**, that thou art mindful of him? and **the son of man**, that thou visitest him? For...

- (a) *thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,*
- (b) *and hast crowned him with glory and honour.*
- (c) *Thou madest **him to have dominion** over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psa. 8:4-8).*

In particular (as the highlighting shows) the psalm celebrates Genesis 1:26, God's giving **man** dominion over all creation.

Verses 4-6 of Psalm 8 are quoted in Hebrews 2:6-8 to prove that “*unto the angels hath [God] not put in subjection the world to come*” (Heb. 2:5). The inspired writer explains: “*For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*” (vv. 8-10).

These verses show that Jesus was the **man** to whom dominion was given in Psalm 8, hence also prophetically the **man** in Genesis 1:26. Furthermore, they show that the sequence in Psalm 8 (identified as a, b, and c in the quotation above) corresponds to three stages of Jesus’ career:

- (a) his earthly ministry ending with his death,
- (b) his **glorification** and heavenly ministry, which “*now... we see,*” and
- (c) his return to rule as king over all things, which “*now we see not yet.*”

In John 17:5 Jesus is declaring his willingness to lay down his life (a), and he is asking his Father to **crown him with glory and honor** (b), as promised before the foundation of the world.

The underlined phrases above indicate the strong tie between the **glorification** of Christ and his death. The importance of this correlation is indicated by the number of passages in which it is taught: e.g., Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34 (and their parallels in Matthew and Luke); Luke 24:26; John 12:23-26; 13:31,32; Acts 2:22-36; 13:26-39; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 10:12; 12:2; and Revelation 5:11-13.

Finally, these verses in Hebrews show that Jesus is the captain of **many sons** that are being brought unto **glory**. Through his suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus became “*the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence*” (Col. 1:18), “*the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God*” (Rev. 3:14; cf. Gen. 1:1). Thus, as Jesus is “*the image of God*” (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; cf. Gen. 1:26), even so those “*whom [God] did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren*” (Rom. 8:29; cf. Heb. 2:10-15).

In conclusion, I’d like to thank our brother for his insightful and stimulating thoughts.

Joe Hill
(Austin Leander, TX)

The overhead projector is a teaching aid that has become a great labor-saving device. It takes material that is clear and transparent and then ensures that it goes over everyone’s head.

Theologians used to take years to learn to do this.

News & Notices

HAMILTON (GREENAWAY), ON

Our Sis. Diane Hewer has requested that her ecclesial membership be transferred to the Hamilton (MacNab) ecclesia. We commend her in love to the brethren and sisters at MacNab and thank her for her help and company over the many years she attended Greenaway.

We are pleased to welcome to Greenaway Bro. Bob and Sis. Joy Jennings, who have transferred from the Brantford ecclesia. We pray for our Heavenly Father's blessing on our time together, that it may bring glory to His great name.

Tom Thorp

JASONVILLE, IN

With great joy we report the baptism of Brian Ross Adams on September 30, 2006. Brian is the son of Bro. Dana and Sis. Rebecka Adams of Cincinnati, who are members of the Jasonville ecclesia. His grandparents are Bro. Ted and Sis. Lois Plew, and he is the great grandson of Sis. Mary Higham. Brian's paternal grandmother was Sis. Helen Adams of Boston who just recently passed away. May God bless and keep him on his walk to the Kingdom. Brian will be attending college in Chicago in January.

We wish to thank the following brethren from the Avon, IN, Ecclesia who have helped us with exhortations: Bre. Tom Gadberry and Dean Brown. These brethren have provided a valuable assistance to our small short-handed ecclesia.

Ted Plew

KAMLOOPS, BC

Bro. Jon Fletcher has taken over the duties of the recording brother, replacing Bro. Gregg Ferrie as of November 1, 2006. Address correspondence to: 2515 Partridge Cres., Kamloops, BC V2B 6W5. Contact by phone at 250-579-2291 or e-mail at jfletcher@kamloopsbiblestudy.info

We have received by transfer Bro. Nathaniel Massey, from the Prince George Ecclesia, in July 2006. We welcome our brother to this small ecclesia and greatly appreciate his assistance.

In addition, our Bro. Daniel Ferrie is currently living and working in North Battleford, SK, and is attending the ecclesia there. Sunday school student Joel Ferrie is living and working in Victoria and attending the ecclesia there. Bro. Nathan and Sis. Crystal Bartholomew are living and working in Kamloops and attending our ecclesia.

We were blessed with the birth of Zechariah Nathan Montgomery on July 8, 2005 — a firstborn son for Bro. Dean and Sis. Jennianne Montgomery.

Our gospel proclamation work over the past year and a half has included a Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar followed by studies of Genesis and prophecy. We

are almost finished with the Revelation seminar. We presently have two contacts, one of which is studying for baptism.

We have had many visiting speakers over the last year and a half and are very grateful for their fellowship. We thank Bre. Skip and Stephen Bartholomew, and Graeme, Tim and Paul Osborn (Okanagan); Bill Hlina, David Drysdale and Dean Bailey (Vernon); Wesley Butler (Vancouver); Rapheek Soolaman (Maple Ridge); Mark Higgs (Victoria); Ron Kidd (London, ON); Mike LeDuke (Kitchener-Waterloo); Wayne Osborne (Denver, CO); Colin Hollamby (Glenlock); John Sivor and John Knowles (Adelaide, Aust.); and Bernard Burt (Coventry, UK) for their adult Sunday school classes, exhortations and, in some cases, midweek Bible classes. We also would like to thank the sisters and families who accompanied these brethren in their labor of love. Bro. Jim Cowie (Brisbane) also led a study day for us on “Christ in the Wilderness”, and Bro. Geoff Higgs led our 2006 fraternal in a study on “Peter”.

We have had many visitors as well over the past year, too many to record them all here, as it seems Kamloops is geographically at the crossroads of the ecclesial world here in BC. We truly enjoy all the company and support we receive, particularly at our study days and fraternals; we encourage anyone passing through to give us a call and stop to visit.

Upcoming events, God willing, include our annual fraternal to be held March 31–April 1, 2006, led by Bro. Stephen Hornhardt.

Jon Fletcher

DETROIT (MILFORD ROAD), MI

We have been blessed with many brethren and sisters visiting our ecclesia over the past several months. We especially would like to thank Bro. Lee Livermore (Avon, IN) and Bro. George Booker (Austin South, TX) for their words of exhortation. Also, we would like to thank Bro. Steve Cheetham (Moorestown, NJ) for leading our Sunday school class, and Bro. John Ramsden (London Forest Hill) for leading our midweek Bible class. We rejoiced in the marriage of Bro. Jonathan Perry to Sis. Katy Jarvela of the Ann Arbor, MI Ecclesia on October 14, 2006.

Once again, we plan to commence a series of monthly lectures starting in January entitled “The Visible Hand of God at Work”. Our proclamation committee has also updated our website: www.milfordroad.net

John Betteley

PRINCE GEORGE, BC

As we begin a new year, we look forward to our annual Fraternal Gathering on May 19-20, 2007. Our speaker this year is Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC), who will speak on “Biblical Examples of Personal Sacrifice.” We extend a warm welcome to any who are planning to attend.

Our thanks to brethren who have visited and spoken during the fall period: Jon Fletcher (Kamloops, BC); Gordon Dangerfield and Jonathan Lawrence (Victoria, BC); and Caleb Lawrence (Cambridge, ON). Their visits were much appreciated. To any who are traveling through northern BC, please stop for a visit.

Ken Loveridge

SUSSEX, NB

We are saddened to report the falling asleep of Sis. Violet (Vi) Harvey on Sunday, January 7, 2007, at the age of 81 years. Sis. Vi was a servant of our Lord both in Ontario and New Brunswick for 60 years. We admire her excellent example to all of us. We eagerly look forward to the day of reuniting with our dear sister at our Lord's return.

By transfer we lose our Bro. Philip and Sis. Janice Baines, as well as their daughter Sis. Amanda. We commend them to the brethren and sisters in Cambridge, ON. We will miss them dearly here, but rejoice to see them embrace their new spiritual family in Ontario.

Brad Goodwin

WORCESTER, MA

We are very pleased to announce the baptism, in November 2006, of KAYLA ADAMS into the saving body of Christ. Sis. Kayla is the daughter of Bro. David and Sis. Monica Adams, and granddaughter of Sis. Beryl Adams. Sis. Kayla is a devoted Sunday school scholar and CYC student. Her excellent statement of faith showed her knowledge and commitment to our Heavenly Father. We look forward to our walk together to the kingdom with Sis. Kayla; may God bless her.

We are also pleased to report the birth of Robert John Wells to Bro. John and Sis. Elisabeth Wells. Baby Robert is the grandson of Bro. Les and Sis. Suzanne Wilkinson and Bro. Roger and Sis. Jan Wells. He was born approximately one month prematurely but is home now and doing fine. Our prayers for baby Robert are that he may grow up strong in the one hope that we all hold so dear.

Mark Fulmer

Adult Study Week

During the week of September 9-14, 2007, there will be an "Adult Study Week — The Bible School with a Difference," at Wildwood Manor, Ballinafad, ON. The topic of study will be Zechariah 1-7. For information about the workbook or to register please contact Bro. Bob and Sis. Joy Jennings by e-mail at bobnjoy@vif.com or by phone at 519-754-0902; or Bro. Martin and Sis. Lois Webster by e-mail at mjwebster@vif.com, or by phone at 519-442-0544.

Mid-Atlantic Christadelphian Bible School

God willing the Mid-Atlantic Christadelphian Bible School will be held June 30-July 8, 2007 at Shippensburg, PA. Our theme this year is "Thou Wilt Shew Me the Path of Life" (Psa. 16:11). Our youth program theme will be "Old Testament Types of Christ — Joseph, Moses, and David."

Bro. Nigel Patterson (Newquay, UK) will speak on "The Letter to the Christadelphians (Studies in Colossians)" to the adults and "Daring to be Different" to the teens. Bro. Mark O'Grady (Tawa, NZ) will speak on "All the Tithe is Holy" to the adults and "Genesis 1" to the teens. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC) will speak on "Exodus — Escape from Bondage" to the adults and "Preparing to Preach" to the teens.

Early registration rates, before May 1, 2007, are: Adults: \$395; 12-19 years: \$330; 3-11 years: \$200; and 0-2 years: \$25. Prices include room and board for the first Saturday

dinner through the second Sunday breakfast. Early registration is critical because we have limited housing facilities. First preference will be given to full-time registrations. Roommate preferences are accommodated whenever possible, although not guaranteed, and late registrants should understand such accommodation is less likely.

Part-time registrants will be conditionally accepted until the full-time deadline of June 15, 2006. All persons planning to attend the Bible School, either full-time or part-time, are requested to contact the registrar prior to the Bible school. For those not staying at the school, a daily facility fee of \$18 the first day and \$10 per day for subsequent days will be charged to those coming in for a day's classes. Upon arrival please check in with the registrar to settle accounts.

Limited financial assistance is available for those experiencing severe need. All requests will be coordinated with the home ecclesia. Financial assistance requests should be mailed to Bro. Gordon Macfarlane, 462 Evergreen Ave., Ancaster, ON, Canada L9G 2P8; telephone 905-648-1161 or e-mail gordee@lara.on.ca

Checks should be made payable to MACBS. Canadian registrations and deposits are: \$20 CDN per person with a \$50 CDN family maximum, or \$20 US per person with a \$50 US family maximum. Mail deposit and registration to Jeff Livermore, PO Box 135, Novi, MI 48376; telephone 248-349-8793. For additional information and forms send a request to MACBSRegistrar@hotmail.com or check <http://www.christadelphians.net/MACBS>

Robert C. Kling

New York Metropolitan Sisters' Retreat

During the weekend of May 5-7, 2006, the New York Metropolitan Sisters' Retreat was held in Pennsylvania. On Friday, blessed with perfect spring weather and filled with anticipation, a group of 45 like-minded sisters and friends from ecclesias in the metro New York area, New Jersey, Baltimore and California, retreated to the Pocono Manor Resort in Pennsylvania for a weekend of renewal and growth in the Lord.

With Sis. Carol Link (Baltimore, MD) and Sis. Gabriela Kilburn (Brooklyn, NY), we were absorbed in their presentations on the theme: "Is Your Relationship Right with God?"

Sis. Gabriela stimulated our minds by posing pertinent questions about interdependence of relationships in the ecclesia and the world. Sis. Carol likened us to "Sisters in Nature". Using bees as examples, she ably demonstrated how as sisters in Christ we can function effectively in our natural as well as spiritual relationships. Each talk was followed by lively and sometimes spirited discussion, which dealt with real-life issues affecting our lives in the truth.

After lunch on Saturday, we made use of the free time to shop in the nearby town, hike along the trail or engage in sports activities, while others simply relaxed or explored the beautiful historic manor built by the Quakers.

The quizzes, hymn sing, ice cream social, and indoor pool games were all part of our Saturday evening program and presentation.

Our most touching moments came from a prayer session on Sunday morning, where everyone joined in remembering our brethren and families before the Lord in special prayer requests.

As the two speakers concluded the weekend with the Memorial Service, Sis. Gabby stressed that we should truly love each other and genuinely strive to have the best interest of our ecclesia at heart. We must resist the temptations of the world by drawing close to the word of God.

Sis. Carol took us back in time where we observed some of the women with whom Jesus shared relationships. We saw Martha and Mary in their home, and then Mary Magdalene anointing the Master's feet, demonstrating her understanding of his imminent death.

You won't want to miss the next upcoming retreat on May 25-27, 2007, God willing.

Pacific Coast Christadelphian Bible School

God willing, the Pacific Coast Christadelphian Bible School will be held in Idyllwild, CA, July 22-28, 2007. The speakers and subjects at this year's school will be:

1. Bro. Matthew Blewett (Durban, South Africa): "Finding Faith";
2. Bro. Kitson Reid (Birmingham, UK): "The Hand of God in our Lives"; and
3. Bro. Ted Sleeper (San Francisco, CA): "That I Might Know Him."

The school offers a wonderful environment for the whole family to study God's word and enjoy the fellowship of other brethren and sisters. For further information, please contact Jeff Gelineau at: 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065 or by e-mail at mail@gelineau.org; Bro. Gary Patterson, by e-mail at garympatterson@hotmail.com; or visit our website at www.californiabibleschool.org

Gary M. Patterson

Simi Hills Preaching Fund

The Simi Hills Preaching Fund continues to be available to assist with funding for ecclesial-sponsored preaching efforts and other ecclesial activities. The Fund normally provides assistance on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis with the ecclesial budget. The percentage can be higher depending on the nature of the project and the need. The goal is to enable ecclesias to increase their ability to present Bible seminars and other outreach programs, both in frequency and in the amount of advertising. The fixed costs — both in physical effort on the part of the presenters in preparation, and the hall rental expense — do not increase with the number of people who attend. That factor, coupled with the natural falloff in attendance as the series progresses, means the more advertising we can do, the more attendance we will have, and therefore the better use we will make of the time and money that goes into each program.

To request funds, send a brief e-mail outline of your program, budget, and need to both of the following addresses: kenandbonnie@simihills.org and ksommerville@unitedagencies.com.

Ken Sommerville

Sis. Eunice Coy

We regret the failure to report the falling asleep in the hope of the resurrection of our Sis. Eunice Coy on March 13, 2006, at the age of 92. She had been baptized for over 70 years; most of those years were spent, along with her late husband Bro. Walter

Coy, as steadfast workers in the Detroit area ecclesias, where Sis. Eunice served as organist and Sunday school teacher. At one time or another, “Aunt Eunie” taught many of the brothers and sisters who are now members of the four area ecclesias. She earnestly looked forward to the coming of God’s Kingdom.

Rose Madge

Even as her health deteriorated in the last year, Sis. Eunice would dwell on the wonderful promises we shared in Christ Jesus. Psalm 72 was a favorite of hers, and she would recite it as it was read to her. On one such occasion, remembering her childhood and the faith passed on to her by her parents, she smiled and said, “I have a rich heritage.” And so do we all.

Barbara Booker

Taipei Ecclesia, Taiwan

Two and a half years after Bro. Jonathan and Sis. Dianne Burke arrived in Taiwan, there is now a small ecclesia of nine brethren and sisters, seven of whom are local Taiwanese. We are blessed by regular visits from brethren and sisters from various parts of the world, and welcome any brother or sister who wishes to visit for a short time, or to stay for an extended duration.

Those visiting Taiwan can make direct contact with the local secretary, Bro. Jonathan Burke, by email at: jb@thechristadelphians.org, or by mobile phone at: 09-3966-77690. Memorial meetings are held every Sunday afternoon after lunch, around 2 pm, and there are weekly public Bible studies. Contact Bro. Jonathan for details.

Also, Bro. Abraham Wang can be contacted in either English or Chinese by email at: chih_wang@hotmail.com

All meetings are in English with Chinese translation. Alternatively, contact ACBM Secretary Bro. David Evans by e-mail at: taiwan@acbm.org.au or by phone at: 61-8-8431-4310.

Youth Leader Seminar

During 2005, 446 young people, of CYC age and older, completed an online survey. The purpose of the survey was, first, to identify and assess the prevalence of moral issues facing our youth in these last days; and second, to better understand how effective help might be offered by the brotherhood. The results of the survey have been presented to arranging brethren, parents, and youth leaders internationally. In discussions arising from these presentations there has been much encouragement to reach out to youth leadership.

To this end a Youth Leader Seminar is being held, God willing, on February 24, 2007, in Garfield, NJ. Bre. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON) and Ralph DiLiberto (Finger Lakes, NY) will be co-leading the day. The goal of the seminar is to promote discussion amongst youth leaders regarding these issues, and to better equip them with Bible-based tools and strategies to address these moral challenges with the young people in their home ecclesias.

For additional information, please visit www.letusrise.com, and/or contact Bro. David Perry (Manhattan, NY) at dperry1@gmail.com

Minute Meditation

We Must Decide

“He who created us without our help, will not save us without our consent.”

We certainly did not ask to be born, but God knew when we would be born and what we would be like before our parents ever met. In speaking to Jeremiah, God told him, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

As with Jeremiah, when God created us, he knew our character beforehand, and He made us without our knowledge or assistance. This fact does not guarantee that He will save us. God may not even hear us when we ask Him for help if we have not made the right choice to serve Him. The Psalmist tells us, “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.” But he continues, “The face of the LORD *is* against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” If we choose not to acknowledge God or obey His commandments, then we put ourselves in the class of those who do evil, and we cannot expect God to protect us. We want to be able to say, as David did, “As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me.”

The choice is ours. God does the calling, but we must do the responding. Christ tells us, “For many are called, but few are chosen,” and the reason is that — tragically — many who are called do not respond to that call.

God gives us free will. He wants to save us. The prophet Ezekiel tells us, “ ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?’ ” The time of judgment is fast approaching, these are the last days of a degenerate world, and we long for the fulfillment of the promises when the earth will be renewed — and the peace and contentment of the kingdom age will begin. But God is merciful, and He is providing a time of opportunity, a last chance for men to repent before the return of Christ. Peter said, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Even though the Lord is not willing that any should perish, the sad fact is that most *will* perish. The reason is not because God has not given men the opportunity to be saved, but because most choose to ‘do their own thing’ rather than obey His commandments.

Moses challenged the chosen people of his day to make the right choice. He said, “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse

if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you.” History attests to the fact that most did turn away and perish.

Joshua said to the people of Israel just before he died, “If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

The people gave a good answer but later turned away from their good intentions. We read, “And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua.” But, unfortunately, soon afterwards every man was doing whatever was right in his own eyes, which turned out to be a bad decision because they chose not to be faithful to their God.

Elijah threw down a challenge to the Jews of his day: “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, ‘How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.’ And the people answered him not a word.” The people would not acknowledge God until after fire came down from heaven and burned up the offering on the altar of God; then they chanted, “The Lord, He is God, the Lord, He is God.” Nevertheless, soon after, Jezebel was out to kill Elijah — causing him to flee for his life.

God gives us tests to see if we will follow Him or not. He tested Adam and Eve in the garden and they failed; there was only one thing they were told not to do, and they did it. He tested King Hezekiah: “But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask Hezekiah about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.” Sadly, he failed this test in showing off all his wealth, and then learned that every item he had proudly displayed would be carried off to Babylon.

God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, and he passed the test; God mercifully provided a ram once Abraham demonstrated his intention to obey exactly what God required.

We will be tested. Hebrews tells us, “For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.” God promises us these challenges for a good reason. We need to learn: to learn obedience, to learn to trust God, and to understand how much we need forgiveness and the salvation God offers. Even the Lord Jesus needed testing, as we can see from when he was tempted in the wilderness — as well as the comment in Hebrews, “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”

God knows us and what we need, and every trial He sends us is for our good. Paul tells us, “No [trial] has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be [tried] beyond your strength, but with the [trial] will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” God tests us because He loves us and wants to improve our character and prepare us for future glory. It is comforting to know that God will not send us a trial we cannot handle,

and that God helps us to endure the trials He sends if only we will trust in Him. Jesus tells us to cheer up when we are being tested. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

We too can overcome, and there is a special blessing upon those who do. “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.”

God created us and He wants us in His kingdom, but it must be our decision to say along with Joshua of old, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” If we do, we can join David in saying, “As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me.”

Robert J. Lloyd

Coming Events (Lord Willing)

FEBRUARY

3,4 Camp Ladore Young people’s gathering. Bro. James DiLiberto: “Spiritual Welfare: Spirit vs. Flesh”. Contact Bro. Ryan Mutter rmutter1@umbc.edu 202-437-0641

17,18 Saanich Peninsula, BC Fraternal gathering. Bro. John Mannell (Toronto West, ON): “Behaviour in the House of God: A Study of 1 Timothy”. Contact Bro. Richard Morgan richest@telus.net

24 Youth Leader Seminar Garfield, NJ. Bre. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON) and Ralph DiLiberto (Finger Lakes, NY). For additional information, please visit www.letusrise.com, and/or contact Bro. David Perry (Manhattan, NY) at dperry1@gmail.com

MARCH

3 Worcester, MA Sisters’ study day: “Women at the Well”. Contact Sis. Beth MacAdams 978-870-0492 beth.macadams@gmail.com or Sis. Linda Reding 508-769-9003 lreding@charter.net

3,4 Baltimore, MD Study weekend. Bro. Allen Laben (Norfolk, VA): “Meet the First Century Ecclesia”. Starting Sat. 2 pm. Supper will be served. Sunday 9:45 am; 11 am. Lunch will be served. Contact Bro. Andy Bilello 410-692-9855 andrewcbilello@yahoo.com

10,11 Victoria, BC Study weekend. Bro. John Pople (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): “Road to Atonement”. Contact Sis. Pat Williamson 250-721-4938 pwilliamson@telus.net

24 Toronto East Ecclesia study day. Saturday 1 to 6 pm. Bro. Jim Styles (Livonia, MI): three talks plus dinner. Contact Bro. David Willoughby 905-427-3756

31-April 1 New Westminster, BC Fraternal gathering. Bro. Steven Hornhardt (Australia).

APRIL

6-8 Wichita Falls, TX Annual Spring Gathering. Texas Christadelphian Camp and Conference Center, Freestone, TX (near Buffalo, TX). Bro. David Jennings (Pomona, CA). Contact Bre. Larry Beutel 940-592-9418 or John Clubb jclubb4081@aol.com

6-9 Kilcoy, Guyana Bible School Bre. Ted Hodge: "The Only Thing that Counts"; Bro. Clive Drepaul: "The Truth of the Fourth Beast". The school will incorporate a preaching campaign, extending to April 12. Contact Bro. Ted Sleeper tsleeper@rcn.com

7-14 Florida Bible School, Bradenton, FL. Bre. Jeff Gelineau (Simi Hills, CA), Tec Morgan (Birmingham, UK), John Pople (San Francisco Peninsula, CA). Contact Bro. Norm Luff 579-754-1251 normluff@yahoo.ca. Registration Sis. Diane Jennings 727-528-1886 mikejenn@ffn.com

14,15 Richmond, VA Petersburg Fraternal Gathering, Bro. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON). Contact Bro. Dave Kerr gr8eats@comcast.net 804-360-5299

28,29 Washington, DC Study Day, and Baltimore/Washington Gathering. Bro. Mark Vincent (Boston, MA): "What's the point? (The message of Ecclesiastes)". Contact Bro. Bob Kling rkling@computer.org

MAY

11-13 Nanaimo, BC Vancouver Island Sisters' Weekend, Beach Acres Resort, Parksville, Vancouver Island, BC. Sis. Yvonne Rosenau (Nanaimo, BC): "My Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness". Contact Sis. Beth Dangerfield, 1155 Ranger Place, Victoria, BC V8X 3P5 gdanger@shaw.ca 250-479-8422

18-20 Hartford City, IN Fraternal gathering, Lake Placid Retreat. Bro. Paul Billington (Brantford, ON): "Signs of the Times". Contact Bro. Jerry Asbury 618-288-5023 JerryandDot1@cs.com

19,20 Prince George, BC Fraternal gathering. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC): "Biblical Examples of Personal Sacrifice". Contact Bro. Ken Loveridge loveridgeken@shaw.ca

25-27 New York Metropolitan Sisters' Retreat. Pocono Manor, Pocono, PA. Sis. Gerry Ann Lloyd (Simi Hills, CA): "Facing Today's Challenges / Dilemmas". For complete information and registration contact Sis. Averil Ferguson 718-881-8705 averilpsm23@juno.com

26,27 Sussex, NB Study Weekend. Bro. George Jackson (Toronto East, ON): "God's Striking Revelation of His Son: A Study in Hebrews". Contact Bro. Brad Goodwin 506-433-6681 braddeb@nb.sympatico.ca

JUNE

16,17 New York Fraternal South Ozone Park . Contact Bro. Gideon Drepaul yerubbaal@yahoo.com

24-30 Rocky Mountain Bible School Glenwood Springs, CO. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC): "The Exodus"; Bro. David Lloyd (Simi Hills, CA): "Forgiveness"; Bro. Mark O'Grady (Wellington Tawa, NZ): "Phanerosis". Registration forms at www.denverchristadelphians.org

30-July 5 Terra Nova Bible School, Terra Nova Park, NF. Bro. Jeff Johnson (Australia): "Be Ye Transformed"; Bro. Jim Harper (Meriden, CT): "Meditations on the Ministry of Our Lord". Information and registration at terranovabibleschool.com. Contact Bro. Gary Hynes, 32 First Street, Mount Pearl, NF, Canada A1N 1X8 phone 709-747-2750 info@terranovabibleschool.com

30-July 8 Mid-Atlantic Bible School, Shippensburg, PA. Bro. Ron Hicks (Washington, DC): "Exodus — Escape from Bondage"; Bro. Mark O'Grady (Wellington Tawa, NZ): "All the Tithe is Holy"; Bro. Nigel Patterson (Newquay, UK): "The Letter to the Christadelphians (Studies in Colossians)". Contact Bro. Jeff Livermore, PO Box 135, Novi, MI 48376. Forms at www.christadelphians.net/MACBS. Information from MACBSRegistrar@hotmaail.com

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JULY

8-14 Southwest Bible School, Schreiner University, Kerrville, TX. Bro. Tec Morgan (Birmingham, UK): "Romans: The Gospel of Salvation"; Bro. Nigel Patterson (Newquay, UK): "David: From Sheepfold to Palace"; Bro. David Styles (Shelburne, ON): "The Ecclesia of the Living God: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth". Contact Bro. Joe Hill, 11110 South Bay Lane, Austin, TX 78739-1580; joehill@io.com www.planofgod.org

14-22 Eastern Bible School, Ascutney Mountain Resort, Brownsville, VT. Bro. Mark Giordano (Norfolk, VA): "Wonders of the Kingdom"; Bro. Richard Morgan (Saanich Peninsula, BC): "The Two Sauls"; Bro. Michael Hughes (Hamilton, NZ): "The Message of the Miracles". Contact Bro. Peter Dixon peter@tecbs.org

22-28 Pacific Coast Bible School, Idyllwild, CA. Bro. Matthew Blewett (Durban, South Africa): "Finding Faith"; Bro. Kitson Reid (Birmingham, UK): "The Hand of God in our Lives"; and Bro. Ted Sleeper (San Francisco Peninsula, CA): "That I Might Know Him". Contact Bro. Jeff Gelineau, 567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065 mail@gelineau.org or Bro. Gary Patterson garympatterson@hotmail.com or visit our website at www.californiabibleschool.org

21-29 Midwest Bible School, Hanover College, IN. Bro. Peter Forbes (UK): "Romans: The Gospel in a Nutshell"; Bro. Dev Ramcharan (Toronto West, ON): "Titus"; Bro. Roger Lewis (NZ): "The Sign of the Prophet Jonah". Contact Bro. Lee Livermore, 7323D Chapel Villas Lane, Indianapolis, IN 46214, 317-271-1568, e-mail llivermore@hotmail.com

AUGUST

11-17 Niagara Falls Bible School, St. Catherines, ON. Bre. John Roberts (UK), Mick Roberts (UK), Mike LeDuke (Ontario). For information please contact Bro. David Brierley 416-236-5295 David.Brierley@sympatico.ca

12-18 Ojai, CA Kids Camp, Camp Arnaz for Christadelphian children ages 9-16. Bre. Jim Cowie (Australia) and David Wisniewski (Ontario, Canada) kidscampcalifornia.com or Bro. Tom Graham tom@bigbrand.com

SEPTEMBER

9-14 Adult Study Weekend Wildwood Manor, Ballinafad, ON. Topic: Zechariah 1-7. For information about the workbook or to register please contact Bro. Bob and Sis. Joy Jennings bobnjoy@vif.com 519-754-0902 or Bro. Martin and Sis. Lois Webster mjwebster@vif.com 519-442-0544