

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1994

HE CAME
And
HE'LL COME

He CAME

Lord, I find the genealogy of my Savior strangely checkered with four remarkable changes in four generations.

Rehoboam begat Abia:

A bad father begat a bad son.

Abia begat Asa:

A bad father and a good son.

Asa begat Jehoshaphat:

A good father and a good son.

Jehoshaphat begat Joram:

A good father and a bad son.

I see, Lord, from hence that my father's piety [devoutness] cannot be handed on: that is bad news for me.

But I see also that actual impiety is not hereditary: that is good news for my son.

--Thomas Fuller, 1608-1661

He'll COME

Guard your way of life. Never be caught unprepared. Be ready because you simply do not know the moment of the Lord's return.

Come together often, to strengthen each other spiritually, because all your past faithfulness will be no help at that moment, unless you have sustained your faith. For in those last days false prophets and deceivers will be everywhere, leading the flock away. Some sheep will turn into wolves and love will turn to hate, persecution and betrayal.

At that point the great Deceiver will appear, pretending to be a son of God and performing miracles and wonders. The whole world will fall into his hands, and evil will dominate as it has never done before. All the human race will be put on trial, as it were--a trial by fire. Many will fail the test and perish. But those who hold fast to the faith will be saved by the One who bore the curse of sin for us.

And then the signs of truth will appear--the opening skies, the trumpet's blast, the resurrection of the dead. The Lord will come, and all his holy ones with him--and every eye shall see him riding on the clouds of heaven!

--From the *Didache* (or "Teaching"), an early Christian document dating back to around 100 A.D. The author is unknown.

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

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LOOKING BACK, LOOKING UP

Alex V. Wilson

In place of an editorial this month, we are including two remembrances of my father which were submitted to us. Then we move on to our theme articles, some about Messiah's first coming and others about His next one.

At the end of each recent year we have wanted to include an index of all the articles run during the year. This would make it much easier for anyone wanting to find some particular article later on. But lack of time and space has always prevented us. What we are including in this issue, however, is an index of all the themes of our issues since early 1987, when we began focusing on one (or sometimes two) main topics each month. We hope this will prove helpful to you.

Carl Vogt Wilson

Earl Mullins, Sr.

Carl Vogt Wilson! What a man! I had the privilege and honor of being closely associated with him for over thirty-five years. He was a very talented man and demonstrated his talents in many different ways. His talents opened many doors which were always used by him to the glory of God.

I had the opportunity to see him in action as minister and one of the elders of the Portland Avenue congregation and chairman of the Board of Portland Christian School for many years. There were many special experiences, such as travelling with him for several days visiting churches throughout the South on behalf of P.C.S. Lessons I learned from the Lord through him are more than I could ever recall.

But let me try to explain the one thing that was so impressive to me about Brother Wilson. As many know, he was a graduate of Male High School in Louisville, and was very active with his classmates throughout the years. He was also a graduate of Princeton University and likewise remained an active member of his class there. He was also a man with significant experience in the military during World War II. After the war he returned to the business world where he remained until the late 1950's when he responded to the call of the Lord in becoming the minister of the Portland Avenue Church of Christ of which he was already an elder.

This meant that he was part of the leadership team of the school, in that the school administrator was directly under the elders of the church. That is the position he was in when I with my family moved to Louisville. Without apology he used his influence with all his contacts on behalf of a school which in the eyes of the world "does not hold a candle" to either of the institutes from which he graduated. He was committed to Portland Christian School!

His willingness to use the influence and contacts God had given him was truly an inspiration. His love and commitment to both the congregation and the school grew out of his concern for people. People, who were loved by the Lord to whom he was dedicated. His self-discipline, and the discipline he exercised toward others, were reassuring, and his compassion was comforting.

The Lord gave me the opportunity of working with Brother "C.V." longer and in greater depth than my own father. In many ways he was a father to me. For this association, I have nothing but thanksgiving.

Remembering Brother Wilson.

Ragena Mullins

"Good Morning, Madam Queen," was his normal greeting as he entered the Portland Christian School office where I was secretary for the school administrator--my husband, Earl. (My name, though legally misspelled, means queen in Latin.) Brother Wilson would talk with me a few minutes and then he would ask, "Is the maestro in?" "Maestro" was his heartfelt (but humbling) address for one he respected.

I looked forward to his visits when we would share about many things concerning our families and the Lord's work. He was always very interested in what was going on in my life, and I appreciated and loved him. He was my counsellor, my confidante, my prayer partner, and my friend.

I will miss him. But when it is my turn to step into eternity, whether it be by the Lord's coming or by death, I expect to hear him say,

"Good morning, Madam Queen, THE Maestro is in."

Who Is the TRUE Messiah?

Will Varner

We nearly fell out of our cushioned synagogue seats when we heard the rabbi's answer! I had accompanied a group of believers from a suburban Detroit church to a conservative synagogue to learn more about Jewish beliefs and customs. We had been given an excellent tour, and now the rabbi was answering questions. One member of our group inquired, "What do Jews believe about the Messiah?" The rabbi's startling answer was, "God has delivered the Jewish people from many trials during our history, and He will deliver us also from the Messiah!" After we had recovered from our shock, we inquired further about the meaning of his strange answer. The rabbi then elaborated on the numerous *false Messiahs* who have appeared to Israel over the centuries. These *pseudo-Messiahs* inflicted much pain on the Jewish community by falsely raising many hopes and aspirations and then shattering them. The damage they inflicted has been so great that many Jews no longer believe in a personal Messiah. The rabbi included himself among these *doubters*.

Over two dozed individuals have claimed to be the Messiah of the house of Israel over the past 1,900 years. They represent a wide variety of Jews from many different areas, but all of them have one trait in common--they were wrong! Following are descriptions of some of the most colorful.

Simon ben Kozeba, called Bar Kochba by Rabbi Akiba, led an unsuccessful civil war in Israel against the Romans from 132 to 135 A.D. He was killed in his stronghold of Betar, and Rabbi Akiba was later executed by the Romans.

David Alroy announced himself as the Messiah to the Jews of Babylon in 1147. He summoned his followers to revolt against the Persian king and then capture Jerusalem, but he was soon assassinated by his father-in-law.

Abraham Abulafia, a learned mystic, announced himself as the Messiah to the Jews of Sicily in 1284. Failing to gain a following among them, he turned to the Christian world to accept his spiritual program for the liberation of Jerusalem from Moslem rule. Having been rebuffed again, he simply disappeared in 1291.

Solomon Molko, a Portuguese Marrano, traveled from his native home to Italy, Turkey and Palestine, seeking to arouse interest in a joint Jewish/Christian mission to free the Holy Land. After present-

ing himself as Messiah in Greece in 1530, he was arrested, tried by the Inquisition for conversion to Judaism and burned at the stake.

Shabbetai Zvi, the most famous and successful *pseudo-Messiah* in Jewish history, gained thousands of followers all over Europe by 1665. This native of Smyrna, Turkey, boldly demanded from the Turkish sultan that he be allowed to lead the Jewish people back to the Holy Land. The sultan, however, imprisoned Zvi in 1666, and soon thereafter his crushed devotees heard the terrible news that their *messiah* had actually converted to Islam! He died in exile ten years later.

The foregoing *pseudo-Messiahs* are only the most prominent--many others have raised the hopes of some only to dash them in disappointment. Combined with a growing secularism over the past 200 years, this sad history of messianic pretenders has had a notable effect on the messianic views of many Jewish people. Today most Jewish people do not believe in any personal messiah--past, present or future. Some affirm belief in a future *messianic age*, when peace among nations will prevail, but it will be a *messianic age without a Messiah*. Only the small group of orthodox Jews believe that some day the Messiah will personally arrive. They tenaciously hold to one of the 13 principles laid down by Maimonides in the 12th century: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and through His tarry, I will wait daily for His coming." Many orthodox, however, are not clear about whether such belief is essential to Judaism.

Apart from being wrong, each of the *pseudo-Messiahs* had one other factor in common--none of them met the qualifications given in the Hebrew Scriptures which would characterize the Messiah. Most of them ignored these biblical qualifications and based their messianic claims on so-called miracles, supposed visions and involved numerical calculations based *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism). Had the people measured them by biblical standards, they would not have been deceived. What are the qualifications for the Messiah and, more importantly, has there ever been anyone who measures up to them?

Although the *Tenach* (the Hebrew Scriptures) mentions many messianic qualifications, the following four are most crucial in determining who indeed is the real Messiah.

The Place of His Coming

Micah 5:2 (5:1 in the Hebrew Bible) reads, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This verse simply states that the ruler in Israel will come from Bethlehem

Ephrathah in Judah. Although He came out of Bethlehem, He did not have His beginning there, for He is an everlasting person.

God's Word is very precise about this qualification. There were two Bethlehems in ancient Israel—one in Judah (1 Sam. 16:4) and one in Galilee (Josh. 19:15). Micah 5:2 clearly states, however, that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem in Judah. The ancient scribes and rabbis agreed that this Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Messiah, and they related this information to Herod the Great when he asked for it (Mt. 2:4-6). This birth in Bethlehem, however, does not mean that Messiah is of human origin only, for Micah also said His "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The notion that Messiah is nothing more than a gifted man is contradicted by this plain statement declaring His eternal preexistence—an attribute belonging only to the Lord God (cp. Hab. 1:12). Even the Talmud and a rabbinic commentary on Genesis state that the name of Messiah existed before the creation of the world (Pesahim 54a, Genesis Rabbah 1:4).

So the first characteristic of Messiah is that He will be an eternal being who will come out of Bethlehem in His earthly existence.

The Manner of His Coming

A divine being who comes to earth as a human being would have to experience a supernatural birth. The Bible therefore teaches that the Messiah would be born of a virgin—clearly an event involving the miraculous. Isaiah 7:14 states, "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the *virgin* shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The controversy surrounding this verse hinges on the word translated as "virgin." It is the Hebrew word *almah*, and some insist that it should be translated *young woman* without implying virginity, because the normal word for *virgin* is *be-toolah*. Although this line of reasoning seems to have a scholarly, authoritative tone to it, a closer examination reveals that *virgin* is a very legitimate translation of *almah* in this verse.

The word *almah* appears only seven times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Ps. 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song 1:3; 6:8; Isa 7:14). There is no instance in which it can be proven that *almah* designates a young woman who is not a virgin. Particularly obvious is its use to describe the virgin Rebekah in Genesis 24:43 (cp. Gen 24:16) and the virgin Miriam in Exodus 2:8. The use of the word indicates that it refers to a young woman, one of whose characteristics is virginity. This is borne out by the fact that the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures completed around 200 B.C., renders *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 by the Greek word for virgin, *parthenos*.

Furthermore, the extraordinary nature of this birth is indicated by the "sign": "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." A sign in Scripture is something out of the ordinary that attests to and confirms a word from God. Most of the 80 occurrences of this word in the Old Testament refer to miraculous signs (e.g., Ex. 7:3; Dt. 4:34; Isa. 20:3). With this in mind, it is appropriate to ask, *What is so miraculous and out of the ordinary about a young woman conceiving and bearing a child?* That happens all the time. It would be miraculous, however, if a virgin conceived.

The child born through this miraculous birth is given the name Immanuel, which is comprised of three Hebrew words literally translated "with us God" (cp. Mt. 1:23).

The second characteristic of the Messiah is, therefore, that He will have a miraculous birth from a virgin mother and that He will be God in human form.

The Time of His Coming

Calculations purporting to indicate the exact dates of prophetic events have abounded throughout history. Some *pseudo-Messiahs* claimed that the year of their *unveiling* to Israel was determined by secret numerical calculations arrived at through the mysterious practice of *gematria* (i.e., calculating numbers through letters).

Needless to say, the Bible knows nothing of this practice. The general time of Messiah's coming, however, was revealed to Daniel in chapter 9, verses 24-27. Although there is room for disagreement on the exact details of this prophecy, it is clear that the appearing of "Messiah, the Prince" (Dan. 9:25) would be early in the fourth decade of the first century. It is absolutely clear, however, that the Messiah had to come *before* the destruction of the Temple:

"And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end of it shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined" (Dan. 9:26).

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple took place in 70 A.D. at the hands of the Roman general Titus and his legions. Daniel 9:26 is teaching, therefore, that the Messiah had to come before 70 A.D.

Therefore, the third characteristic of Messiah is that He had to come and be "cut off" before the Temple's destruction in 70 A.D.

The Purpose of His Coming

A Jewish person who is asked "What is the purpose of Messiah's coming?" would probably respond, "To bring peace to the world and

to restore the Jewish people from their exile." These themes of universal peace and restoration are mentioned often by the Hebrew prophets. Another prophetic theme, often overlooked, describes an additional purpose of Messiah's coming--to die for the sins of Israel and of all mankind.

No greater elaboration of this theme can be found than in the *Servant Song* of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This section of Scripture is one of a series depicting the work of the servant of the Lord in Isaiah. At times this servant is Israel (e.g., Isa. 44:1-2), but at other times the servant is an individual who will restore Israel to the Lord (Isa. 49:5-7). In Isaiah 53:4-6 the personification of the *Suffering Servant* reaches a sublime pinnacle:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The servant suffered submissively and silently, and the suffering was vicarious (i.e., for the sins of others). His soul became "an offering for sin" (Isa. 53:10).

The Babylonian Talmud, the Aramaic Targums, and the ancient rabbinic commentaries identified this *Suffering Servant* as Israel's Messiah. Typical of their comments is that of Moshe Kohen ibn Crispin, a 14th-century Spanish rabbi:

"This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah at the divine command for the purpose of making known to us something about the nature of the future Messiah, who is to come and deliver Israel . . . in order that if anyone should arise claiming to be himself the Messiah, we may reflect and look to see whether we can observe in him any resemblance to the traits described here: if there is a resemblance, then we may believe that he is the Messiah our Righteous; but if not, we cannot do so."

The modern Jewish view of the servant of Isaiah 53, however, is that he is a personification of suffering Israel, rather than the Messiah. This interpretation was first introduced ca. 1100 by the great French rabbi, Shlomo Yitzaki, referred to as Rashi. Even though most commentators adopted this novel *Israel* interpretation, many rejected it. As late as the 17th century, Rabbi Naphtali Altschuler wrote, "I am surprised that Rashi and David Kimchi have not, with the Targum, also applied them [vv. 52:13-53:12] to the Messiah."

However, Isaiah 53 itself refutes the *Israel* interpretation and affirms that the servant must be an individual who suffers for Israel. In

verse 8b, Isaiah stated, "for the transgression of *my people* was he stricken."

Question: Who were Isaiah's people?

Answer: Israel.

Problem: How could Israel be "stricken" for Israel?

Taking the words of this marvelous chapter in their normal, literal context demands that they describe the substitutionary suffering of an innocent servant for the sins of Israel.

The fourth characteristic of the Messiah is, therefore, that the purpose of his coming is to give His life as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of others so that they may be forgiven. However, He would be rejected by His own people.

There are many other prophecies concerning the Messiah's identity and work. He would be a descendant of David in the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Jer. 23:6-5); He would be preceded by a forerunner (Mal. 3:1); He would perform miracles of healing (Isa. 35:5-6); He would be crucified (Ps. 22:16); He would rise again from the dead (Ps. 16:10); and He would ascend to the right hand of Jehovah (Ps. 110:1).

Is there anyone in Jewish history who meets these qualifications? Certainly not Bar Kochba or Shabbetai Zvi or any of the other messianic impostors--past, present or future. But there is One who fits the composite figure drawn by the Hebrew prophets. His name was Yeshua ben Yosef. We know Him in the West as Jesus of Nazareth. He was born in Bethlehem of a virgin mother (Mt. 1:23; 2:10. He appeared publicly in the early years of the fourth decade in the first century (Lk. 3:1-2, 21). He was rejected by the greater part of the Jewish nation, died on a Roman cross, rose again the third day, and later ascended to His Father (Jn. 1:11; Mt. 27:35; 28:1ff; Acts 1:9). He fulfilled these and dozens of other specific prophecies.

The title of this article asks the question, "Who is the *true* Messiah?" To the person who bothers to investigate the question, the answer is clear: Jesus, the One born in Bethlehem to a virgin mother, the One who suffered as a sacrifice for Israel and the world 40 years before the destruction of the Temple.

Will you trust Him as your Messiah and sin bearer today?

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WE "WORMS" AFFIRM GOD'S INTEREST IN US

Richard N. Longenecker

Celsus was a formidable second-century opponent of Christianity. About A.D. 180 he wrote a lengthy attack against Christians entitled *The True Word*, portions of which can be reconstructed from Origen's *Against Celsus*, which was written about A.D. 245.

According to Celsus, all forms of revealed religion are impossible since God is too great to be interested in mankind. Furthermore, since God is immutable (changeless) we cannot suppose that he could change his nature and present himself to men and women in ways they could understand, or that he would ever leave his eternal pursuits to meet them in history--either through the prophets or by means of some sort of incarnation. In mocking derision, Celsus compared Jews and Christians to "a cluster of bats or ants coming out of a nest, or frogs holding council around a marsh, or worms assembled on some manure pile," who say: "God shows and proclaims everything to us beforehand; he sends messengers to us alone, and never stops sending them and seeking that we may be with him for ever." How ridiculous!

Origen's reply to Celsus was: We as "Celsus' worms" (1) fervently deny his disparagement of humanity, for all people are created in the image of God, and (2) gladly affirm that God is interested in us, as he has shown most clearly and dramatically in the Incarnation. In fact, not only do Christians affirm that God is interested in us, we proclaim--humbly, yet confidently--that God loves us!

This is what Christmas is all about. The Christian festivals of Christmas (Incarnation), Good Friday (Crucifixion), and Easter (Resurrection) epitomize and bring into focus all that we as Christians believe. Indeed, apart from being created in the image of God, we as humans would be no better than bats, ants, frogs or worms. And apart from the Incarnation, we would have rather skimpy reason to speak of God's intimate interest in us. But we are created by God in his image; and Christmas is the proclamation that God not only is interested in us, but that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" for our redemption (John 3:16).

So phooey to Celsus and his ilk. Let them revel in their supposed wisdom as to what God is like. We might have thought that too. But because of God's own revelation, we affirm with confidence and joy that God is interested in us and loves us far beyond what could ever be imagined. And it is this interest and love that we celebrate during this holy season.

ZACHARIAH'S SURPRISE

Thomas G. Bradshaw

Do you ever wonder whether or not God is really going to come through on his promises? Can we really trust him? When it comes right down to it, and we face the fact that someday we're all going to die, can we be sure that He is going to be there on the other side waiting to take our hand?

Or then again, maybe we won't die. Jesus did promise that one day he will come again and receive us unto himself--that there will be some who will be alive to see that day when he comes in glory, and they'll be caught up to meet him in the air to be with the Lord forever. That could be us! He could come today. He's coming back; at least he said he is.

But that was a long time ago, about 2000 years! He said, "I am coming soon." You'd think he would have been here by now.

Zachariah And Elizabeth

Let me tell you a story about a little old man and a little old woman. The little old man was a priest. He took his turn with all the other priests taking care of things at the Temple in Jerusalem. He had been doing the same routine for years and years, leading the ceremonies, ritual after ritual. It got pretty boring sometimes. But he was a good man, a faithful man, and most of the time he felt the presence of God there with him as he served in the temple. His name was Zechariah.

The little old woman was a preacher's kid, but she was a godly woman in spite of it; her faith in the Lord was strong. She did her best to do what was right, and God was pleased. But sometimes she wondered about God--whether or not he was really there, whether or not he loved her--because she didn't have any children, and she had wanted them so badly. Every time she saw her friends with all their grandbabies on their laps, she grieved. She longed for children, but the Lord hadn't blessed her with them. She and her husband used to pray for God to bring them a baby, but they'd long since given up. It would take a miracle now--an Abraham and Sarah kind of miracle.

The little old woman was married to Zechariah. Her name was Elizabeth.

There were times when Zechariah got a little discouraged. One night, after he had come home from work, he and Elizabeth were sitting at the table drinking coffee and eating some bagels. It was quiet, they were both too tired to say much. And then, all of a sudden, out

of the blue, Zechariah said, "Somebody asked me about those prophecies again today."

"What?" Elizabeth asked

"Somebody asked me about those prophecies again--you know, the ones about the Messiah."

"Oh, you're worrying about those again, huh?"

"Well, I know that the prophets say that *someday* God is going to send us a deliverer. I was reading in the scrolls today in the prophecies of Jeremiah that God said that he would raise up a "righteous branch, a King who will reign wisely" and that Judah would be saved and that Israel would live in safety. But he hasn't done that yet. I was also reading in Isaiah where someone would come out of the desert crying, "Prepare the way of the Lord! Prepare the way of the Lord!"

Elizabeth looked up from her knitting and said, "I don't remember hearing that one before, Honey."

Zechariah said, "Well, it's in there, about two thirds of the way through the scroll. I wish somebody would divide that thing into chapters and verses. It sure would make it a lot easier to tell you about it. Anyway, it sounded kind of strange to me, too, but I kept on looking and I found in Malachi, the last of the prophets, something about a messenger coming to prepare the way before the Lord, that this messenger would come and then the Lord would come, to the Temple, no less. Then Malachi went on to say that God would send the prophet Elijah to come just before the Messiah."

Elizabeth almost dropped her knitting needle, "The prophet Elijah?! Why, he's been dead for hundreds of years!"

"I know, but that's what it said. It said that he would come and turn everybody's hearts around like they're supposed to be."

"Well, what do you say when people ask you about prophecies like that?" Elizabeth asked

"I tell them they ought to believe them, to be looking for the Messiah to come, to look out for a messenger coming to prepare the way for him, to watch for Elijah to come again. But sometimes I have a hard time believing them myself. I mean, goodness, it's been about 400 years since Malachi prophesied, and it hasn't happened yet! And God's been awfully quiet in those years. There's been no great prophet come along or anything, much less a Messiah!

"My father said, 'Be watching, the Messiah is coming!' And his Dad told him, 'Be ready, the Messiah is coming.' And his Dad before him, and on and on it goes! Great-great-great . . . grand-dad

used to say, 'The Messiah is coming, soon!' He's sure been a long time coming!"

"He sure has," Elizabeth agreed.

Zechariah went back to sipping his coffee. But Elizabeth laid down her needlework and said, "Honey, do you ever wonder what life would have been like if we would had had kids?"

"Yeah, it would have been nice to have some children and some grandchildren around to keep us company in our old age. I could just see little Zechariah Jr. running around. Goodness! We could even have Zechariah the third by now! It sure would have been nice to have had some young'uns. What you been knitting there anyway?"

"Aw, nothing," she said, as she tried to hide it.

Zechariah was stubborn. "Naw, let me see. It looks like, uh, what do you call those things? Booties? You been making baby clothes again?"

Elizabeth fessed up, "Yeah . . . I'm sure I can find somebody to give them to."

"Oh, Elizabeth! No wonder you get so depressed about babies!"

"I know," she said. "Honey, this is gonna sound crazy, but could we pray together just one more time that God would give us a baby?-- I know you said a long time ago you weren't going to do that anymore, but why don't we? The worst that could happen is that he would say no."

"Woman, you must be getting senile. We're too old for that kind of stuff! God gave babies to young people for a reason! Could you imagine carrying around a little newborn all the time, and then chasing after a little toddler? Why he'd wear us out before breakfast! I don't know, Elizabeth!"

Elizabeth was stubborn, too. She said, "Ah, but think of the joy a little baby would bring to us! Come on, what have we got to lose!"

"I'll tell you what we've got to lose--sleep, energy, peace and quiet! I don't think this old man is up to it!"

"Oh, Honey, just one little prayer, it won't hurt."

"Will you let me go to bed if I say yes?"

"Sure will!"

"Oh, alright! Let's pray."

So they bowed their two old gray heads and Zechariah prayed like only a preacher can pray,

Oh, Lord God, you who created everything out of nothing, we pray that you would do the same thing again. Please enable these old worn out bodies to produce a baby. You did it for Abraham and Sarah, and we believe you can do it for us. Please, Lord, bring us a little Zechariah! Amen and Amen.

Elizabeth looked up with a grin on her face and a tear in her eye and said, "Thanks, Honey."

Zechariah's knees creaked as he got up, and he said, "I'm going to bed before you get me in any more trouble!"

Elizabeth said, "Well wait a minute, and I'll go with you!"

Zechariah walked off muttering, "Yeah, first it's a minute, then it's five, then it's a half hour"

Zechariah awoke with the sun the next morning and headed off to work at the temple. He hadn't been gone long, though, before he came hurrying back to the house. Elizabeth met him at the door, saw him there huffing and puffing, thought he was having a heart attack. "Are you OK?" she said, "What's going on?"

"Oh, Elizabeth, I've never been better! Something great has happened! I have been waiting for this all my life! I thought I'd never see the day! This is so wonderful!"

"What! What! Tell me!"

"Well, you know how the priests cast lots every week to decide who gets to go into the Most Holy Place and take care of the incense there on the altar?!"

"Yes," said Elizabeth.

"Well, this week, I've been chosen! It's a great honor!"

"Oh, Honey! I'm so happy for you! What a privilege!"

"Pack me some clothes. I've got to stay at the temple day and night for a week."

So Elizabeth packed his bags, and off he went.

Zechariah was so excited to be selected to serve in the Holy of Holies! As he made his way to that sacred place, worshipers gathered outside to pray. Zechariah sensed the presence of God so strongly! It was truly awesome!

But then something incredible happened. Just as Zechariah was getting ready to leave the Most Holy place and go back to the people, he looked up and--he couldn't believe his eyes. There before him stood an angel of the Lord!

He was scared! He began to tremble. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard."

He thought to himself, "What prayer?" But then he found out what prayer.

The angel said, "Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. . . he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord in the Spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah thought to himself, "Those words sound familiar. This is spooky!" He asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I mean, I'm an old man, and my wife, well, she's way over the hill!"

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. Because you have not believed me, you will not be able to speak until all this comes to pass. But these words are true. You will have a son."

Meanwhile, all the worshipers were waiting outside. They were getting worried. Zechariah should have been done a long time ago.

Finally, Zechariah came out, and began making signs and motions about an Angel and a baby. He couldn't speak. He made gestures to them--something about an angel and a baby, but they didn't understand.

When his time of service was done, he went on home to Elizabeth and told her all about his incredible experience (well, he didn't actually tell her, he wrote it out). And was she excited! She got out the stash of baby clothes that she had been making for years and started dreaming about tiny little hugs and kisses.

And sure enough, pretty soon, just like Gabriel said, Elizabeth was expecting. She was thrilled! But she didn't tell a whole lot of people at first. She did tell one of her relatives, though, a girl named Mary, because she was expecting, too. It was fun for them to be able to talk together about their feelings.

During the whole pregnancy, Zechariah was kind of quiet. Elizabeth was a bit worried about that because research had shown that it was important for a baby to be able to hear its father's voice while still in the womb for the right kind of bonding to take place after birth. She figured they would have to compensate for that somehow.

Finally, the day came for little Jr. to make his grand appearance. And that was just fine with Elizabeth, because she didn't think that

her little old body could take even one more day of all that kicking and poking and twisting and turning. She was ready!

"It's a Boy! 8 lbs, 12 oz!"

They were overjoyed!

When it came time to name the boy, everybody wanted to name him Zechariah, Jr. But Elizabeth spoke up and said, "No, we're going to name him John!" The people thought, "Now Elizabeth, you must not be thinking very clearly. You've been through a lot lately. Let's see what Zechariah thinks."

So they went to Zechariah, handed him a note pad, and to everyone's surprise, he wrote, "His name is John."

And at that moment, Zechariah felt a special touch from God. So he opened his mouth, and for the first time in more than nine months, he spoke! Words of praise came flowing from his mouth. And he sang a beautiful prophetic song of rejoicing.

The people who saw all of this were astonished. They wondered, "What is this child going to be?!"

Zechariah knew. He remembered those prophecies that people kept asking him about--the ones about the Messiah. He knew now that there really was something to those old prophecies, even though it had been hundreds of years since they were first spoken. As he sang his song, he sang these words to little John,

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
For you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him."

Zach And Betty

Just the other day, I overheard an interesting conversation at the Daily Bread, you know, the little bakery here in downtown Chehalis. There was a young man there and his wife. His name was Zach, hers was Betty. Zach is the new preacher at First Church, and Betty is a real faithful young lady. They work well together in ministry.

It was late in the day. They were sitting at one of the tables there, drinking Espresso and sharing a pastry. They were both pretty tired; the kids had worn her out, and he had a tough day of ministry. They were enjoying being alone for a little while.

Zach wasn't eating much, wasn't saying much either, but then, he looked up and said, "Jerry stopped by today, asked me about those prophecies again, you know, the ones about the Second Coming of Christ. I wish he wouldn't get so wrapped up in that."

"What did you tell him?" Betty asked.

"Well, I told him not to quit his job and sit on his rooftop and wait. But I also told him that Jesus promised He would come again, and that He could come anytime, that we need to be ready and watching."

"But do you really believe that?"

"Well, He said, 'I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again to receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.' And in his last recorded words in scripture, at the end of the book of Revelation, he said, 'I am coming soon!'"

"But do you believe it?" Betty was persistent.

"Oh, Honey, I try to, but it's been almost 2000 years since he said that! And he's still not here! That's not exactly my idea of soon! Sometimes I wonder if he's ever coming back."

"I do, too, sometimes." Betty confessed. "But then I remember that God is faithful in keeping his promises. I remember, too, that people were saying the same thing about Jesus' First Coming. It had been hundreds of years, hadn't it, since the last of the prophets said that the Messiah was going to come. People were tempted to give up hope then, too. But Jesus came, just like they said he would, and I believe He'll come again, even though it's been a long time."

"You're right," Zach said. "This reminds me of something my father used to say. He said, 'We must plan for the future, but we ought to live as if we knew Jesus was coming back today.'"

"Your father is a wise man," said Betty.



Betty is right. I don't care how long it's been since Jesus said, "I am coming again," it's still true that he will come. Just as sure as Jesus was born into this world, so He will come again in glory.

We're tempted to give up hope, just as Zechariah was tempted to disbelieve the prophecies about the Messiah's coming. But God's word proved true to Zechariah, and His promises about Jesus' coming again for us will prove true as well.

As we celebrate his first coming, may we prepare our hearts for his coming again.

It Really Happened!

Although we cannot fix the precise date of the birth of Jesus on December 25, the indisputable fact of his historicity is beyond quibble. The late Jewish scholar, Joseph Klausner wrote, "If we had ancient sources like those in the Gospels for the history of Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar for example, we should not cast any doubt upon them whatsoever. Only the occasional dogmatic has ever tried to assign mere mythical status to the founder of the Christian religion"

The late Will Durant, not a believer in Jesus' and an agnostic on the whole God question, nevertheless wrote,

That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels. After two centuries of Higher Criticism the outlines of the life, character, and teaching of Christ remain reasonably clear, and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man.

--Rubel Shelly, *What Child is This?*

* * *

Why did Jesus Come to Earth?

Some theologians tend to answer that question from the human perspective: He came to show us what God is like, to show us what a human being should be like, to lay down his life as a sacrifice for us. I cannot help thinking, though, that the Incarnation had meaning in other, cosmic ways

The act of Creation gave God pleasure. Yet Creation also introduced a gulf between God and his subjects. Moses, David, Jeremiah and other bold wrestlers with the Almighty flung this accusation to the heavens: "Lord, you don't know what it's like down here!" Job was most blunt: "Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees?"

They had a point, a point God himself acknowledged by visiting planet Earth. Choosing words that astonish, the author of Hebrews reflects on Jesus' life as a time when he "learned obedience," "was made perfect," and became a "sympathetic" high priest. There is only one way to learn sympathy, as signified by the Greek roots of the word *syn pathos*, "to feel or suffer with." Of the many reasons for the Incarnation, surely one was to answer Job's accusation. *Do you have eyes of flesh?*

--Philip Yancey in *Christianity Today*

HE'LL COME:

LOVING HIS APPEARING

R. H. Boll

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give to me at that day; and not to me only but also to all them that have loved his appearing." So wrote Paul in his final charge to his son Timothy. He was then in prison in Rome, in the death cell, but we can not miss the spirit of peace and the certainty of hope that pervaded the last utterances of that great soul. He looked back upon his career with quiet satisfaction; he looked forward to the future with joyful confidence and anticipation. He knew quite well that the Lord, the righteous Judge, would award him the crown of righteousness in that day. Now if he had ended his sentence at that point, it would all have been right and good--but it would not have held out any great hope and prospect for the rest of us. For there are not many whose life and work could be compared with Paul's. If the Lord would give *him* a crown of righteousness that would be fair and fitting; but hardly could he grant such honor to any of the rest of us. But the apostle says, "Yes--it is not to me only but also *to all them that have loved his appearing.*" Now we can take new hope and courage. The promise is for ordinary people, then, such as we are, sore troubled with trials and temptations and the burdens of life, indeed for all who love His appearing.

Who Is Included?

Now we will want to ask who they are that love His appearing. The answer is simple and obvious: it is *those who would be glad to see Him come*, to whom the coming of Christ is a hope, an event welcome and much to be desired. Those who love His appearing can from the heart join in the prayer of John in Patmos, and say, "Amen: even so come, Lord Jesus."

Not of all professing Christians could this be said. There are those "who mind earthly things," and have set their affection on things below. There are those who have their hearts set on plans and purposes which would be sadly voided if Jesus came now. There are those also to whom the coming of the Lord would be a dread and a calamity rather than a hope. Hardly could any such as these be said to love His appearing. But there are those who expectantly wait for Him, and to whom His return is a matter of deep interest and joyful anticipation.

If we inquire more narrowly into the question, "Who are they that love His appearing," we would have to conclude first of all that it would be those who *love* the Lord Jesus. Now this is the real essence of the Christian faith. Peter sums it up in these words, "Whom not having seen, ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice greatly, with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). "If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema. Maranatha," says Paul; and "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible" (1 Cor. 16:22; Eph. 6:24). The one thing he wants to know of us, first and above all things, is what He once asked of humbled, penitent Peter: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" Those who love you are glad to see you come back, after some long absence. But it is not only that. We could conceivably get to see Him and be with Him by going to Him. But the thing the New Testament holds out as the goal of hope is His return from heaven. It is not only that we want to see Him, but we want to see His triumph and glory. For

"Our Lord is now rejected and by the world disowned,
By the many still neglected, and by the few enthroned;
But soon He'll come in glory, the hour is drawing nigh,
For the crowning day is coming bye and bye."

And many great things are bound up with that--among them our hope; for "when Christ who is our life shall be manifested, then shall we also be manifested with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). Then will be "the revealing of the sons of God"--the event for which all creation waits in eager expectancy; the hour of the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:18-23). "For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." That, and more shall transpire in the day when Christ shall appear a second time to them that wait for Him, unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

Hope and Grace

But true and glorious as are these promises, they would still leave our hearts with misgivings and fears, if it were not for another factor that enters into the matter. The coming of the Lord can hold no hope to any except those who stand in the grace of God. All Christians are conscious of deficiency and personal unworthiness. I say not this to excuse or condone sin. But as we advance in the Christian life and our conscience becomes more tender and sensitive, we are less and less disposed to bank on our own record of faithfulness, and more inclined to say, "Lord, be thou merciful to me a sinner." However we have grown we feel that we fall immeasurably short of the likeness and stature of the glorious Lord whom we adore. If taken simply at my personal worth and value, how could I be joyful in the expecta-

tion of my Lord's return? Would I measure up under His all-seeing eye? Would I not rather be inclined to "put far off the evil day?" I fear that is what many do, and that is the explanation of their repugnance to the doctrine of Christ's return. It is evident that unless *this* point were settled that the coming of Christ can be no comfort or hope to us. But the Lord has provided an answer of peace to this question.

"Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind," writes Peter, "be sober, and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13). He will come with *grace* to His own. Now grace is always God's free favor to the unworthy and undeserving. Grace meets us where we are, and makes good all our lack. It was, and is, by grace that we are saved; and there will be no boasting on the part of any of God's redeemed ones. It is on this grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we are bidden to set our hope perfectly. If He had said that we may have this hope on condition that we first purified ourselves, it would not have helped us; we could never come up to that. But the hope is ours first, and freely given; and everyone who has such a hope will on the strength of it purify himself even as He is pure. The hope of Christ's coming therefore is a purifying hope. And they who have it will also love His appearing; and to all such will the Lord, the righteous Judge give the crown of righteousness in that day.



"Occupy [Work] till I Come" (Luke 19:13)

The sincerest saints can become so captivated with the 666 that they forget that an unsaved world is sick, sick, sick. Some are so involved investigating the ten toes of Daniel's image that they never use their own two feet to "go and bring forth fruit." They watch, but they need to occupy.

On the other hand, some become so occupied with occupying that they hardly have a thought about the "blessed hope." They get frustrated wondering, "What is this world coming to?" because they forget Who is coming to this world! They want to keep their ears to the ground, and that is all right, but they fail to keep their eyes on Jesus, and that is all wrong. They occupy all right, but they need to watch.

--Raymond Cox in *Eternity*

THE SECOND COMING

Michael Green

So far from being irrelevant and incredible, the doctrine of the Second Coming can, I believe, be shown to be both reasonable and able to answer the deep longings which most people have in their hearts. Here are four avenues along which the Return of Christ can reach and fire people today. It answers the twentieth century quest for purpose, personal identity, realism and relevance.

Purpose

People are notoriously purposeless, restless and dissatisfied these days. No man is happy unless he has a worthwhile purpose in life. Is there no purpose in history as well? The doctrine of the Second Coming asserts that the world is not meaningless; that God's purpose for the world will prevail in the end. This world is moving on, not to chaos but to Christ, to the final appearance of the one whose First Coming to the world forever settled its destiny.

History is not a circular road: it leads to the God who has already been along the road, and who is even now in control of the traffic. How can we be sure of this happy ending? Because of the victory won over all the forces of evil through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That was the decisive act which assures us of the final outcome. The doctrine of the Second Coming asserts that the really crucial acts in the world's history have taken place, and the future will reveal this fact.

Personal Identity

We live in an age of mechanization, of mass movements, of brainwashing, of power blocs and of increasing automation. We are fascinated with the quest for personal identity. What is man worth? What does he matter? What is his destiny?

The Second Coming gives the answer. It asserts that the ultimate in the world is love, that final truth is personal. This love and truth has burst forth in the person of Jesus Christ, the proper Man, the Ideal. He shows what it is to be really human: He exhibits true human nature and destiny. By that Man we are both judged and saved. And one day he will return. We shall meet him, and our future will depend on our relationship to him. This emphasis on personal love, personal value, the need for personal encounter is a ready point of

contact with modern depersonalized man. And it is one of the main themes of the Second Coming.

Real

People are impatient, in this scientific age, of theories unsupported by evidence. Is there, they may well ask, any justification for the Christian hope about the future?

There are two solid grounds for assurance that this doctrine is realism, not escapism: the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit. We find Paul arguing in Acts 17:31 from the certainty of the Resurrection in the past to the certainty of the Second Coming in the future. The one is the guarantee and the foretaste of the other. The Holy Spirit, too, is the assurance that the Christian story is true. His work in changing lives all the world over is a constant pointer to what God will complete one day. He is the foretaste here and now of God's future for his world. The Resurrection and the Holy Spirit will face the most searching quest for intellectual and practical realism: they constitute the grounds for our hope in the Return.

Relevant

Unless a theory makes a practical difference to people's lives, they have no time for it these days. And rightly so. Does the Advent hope pass this test? I think so. In the first place it makes for holiness: *The coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble*, writes James. Secondly it encourages evangelism. Peter suggests that evangelism in the hope of the Coming actually hastens that Day (2 Peter 3:12), just as before him Jesus also had related evangelism to the End (Mark 13:10). Thirdly, it encourages *discernment*, not just for the generation alive at the Coming, but for all Christians. As we learn to discern our Master in the daily opportunities, challenges, needs, so we shall have our characters equipped to face up to his searching scrutiny at the last. As we are now, so then. That is what makes the doctrine of the Second Coming so shatteringly relevant to every one of us each day. Whether we welcome him or shrink from him then, depends on the small choices in which we obey or withstand him now.

CHRIST'S PREDICTIONS AND THE CHURCH

William J. Rowlands

Two days before our Lord was crucified, He left the temple after pronouncing woes on the rulers of Israel and having uttered those memorable words:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often I would 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*. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is *He that cometh* in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:37-9).

With these words He led His disciples out to the Mount of Olives, after having further emphasized the coming demolition of the temple. He had spoken of two things in particular, viz., the desolation of Jerusalem and of His own coming. They therefore asked Him privately about these two things. "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" (Mt. 24:3). The Lord's reply, therefore, embraces these two events, giving the sign by which His disciples should know when the coming *desolation of Jerusalem* was at hand (recorded specially in Luke 21:20) and also the signs by which they should know when *His coming* was nigh, even at the doors (Mt. 24:15, 29-33).

By many of the Lord's people, during the last century and up to now, it has been maintained that this prophecy (Mt. 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21) is entirely Jewish, that it was given to Jewish apostles as representatives of the nation, that it deals with Jewish desolations and troubles, and finally with the coming of their Messiah, according to Old Testament prophecies, to gather the spared ones of the nation. Those holding this view affirm that although all Scripture is for our instruction, this prophecy does not directly concern the Church.

This statement has always been questioned by those who hold the earlier view, for we ["We" includes brethren such as George Muller of Bristol; Dan Crawford, missionary to Africa; S.P. Tregelles and B. W. Newton, Bible teachers and writers; in addition to the present writer. *Author's note*.] believe that this prophecy, given by our Lord two days before He was betrayed, does directly concern the Church, both as to her present path of service and witness and also her blessed hope. It is clear that Jerusalem is the center of this prophecy, but its circumference is world-wide, speaking as it does of international up-

heavals, witness of the gospel among all nations, and culminating in a coming that is universal as the flood, when angels shall gather together God's elect from the uttermost part of earth to the uttermost part of heaven (Mark 13:27).

For Israel or the Church?

The Lord here instructed the apostles not merely as individuals, but as members of a body of people which would experience the very circumstances He described, and which should profit by the very warnings that He uttered. Now the question comes: What body is it? Is it His body the Church, or Israel the nation? The first must be the correct reply, because the nation had just been "left desolate" and would remain so until the hour of their national conversion, which will take place at the glorious coming of Christ (Zech. 12:10; 13:1, 8-9; Rom. 11:25-27). During this age Israel as a nation are unbelievers and Christ-rejecters, and therefore could not share the hope of the apostles. The Olivet sermon (Mt. 25-25), according to its own distinct statement, was addressed to the "disciples" of the Lord. Being disciples, they were not representing those who are the opposite of being His disciples--Israel in its unbelief. They were not the representatives of Israel, but were themselves destined to suffer at the hands of the rulers and representatives of Israel, as described in the book of Acts.

In Mt. 23 the Lord spoke *of* the scribes and Pharisees as "those who sit on Moses' seat," and *to* them as "blind guides," pronouncing woes against them for leading unbelieving Israel to her ruin. The woes of Mt. 23 were directed to the rulers and representatives of Israel, but the instructions of Mt. 24 and 25 were directed to the apostles as part of the body of redeemed ones. Nothing could be more emphatic than the contrast between the representatives of Israel who had just been rebuked, "Ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell," and the beloved apostles who had followed Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. And when in Christ's parting words to Israel He said, "Behold, your house is *left unto you desolate*," He definitely did leave them--left them until the end of the age, until His glorious appearing. These prophetic instructions in Mt. 24 and 25 are therefore not for those whom He had left desolate, but for those to whom He said two days later "*I will not leave you comfortless*" (John 14:18).

Mt. 24 and John 14 Both for the Church

The promise of John 14:3 was given to the same apostles within two days of Mt. 24. Both concerned Christ's promise to come and receive an elect people. The word *paralambano* used in John 14:3, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself," is used in Mt.

24:41 and translated "taken," in the words "One shall be taken, the other shall be left." (Note that in the two illustrations used in this connection by our Lord, vis., those of Noah and Lot, those taken (*paralambano*) were the saved ones, and those left were for judgment. Noah was "received" into the ark and Lot was "taken" from the overthrow. Those "left" were the doomed ones. When it says "the flood came and took them away," an entirely different Greek word is used.)

Did our Lord give the apostles, up to two days before His betrayal, full teaching about His coming in glory with which they were acquainted from the Old Testament Scriptures, and of which He had spoken to them on previous occasions; at the signs of which they were to "look up,"--and then without any explanation give them only *two nights afterwards*, in one brief sentence, *a different hope*? No! Especially when this one brief sentence, "I will come again and receive you unto myself," contains no hint of secrecy; no hint of being a new revelation; no hint of being anything else than a simple reference to the coming of which He had already so fully instructed them! If they received John 14 as apostles of the Church, why not Mt. 24? Both discourses are prophetic, and deal with conditions pertaining to this present age. Any attempt to rule the Church out of the Olivet discourse (on the ground that this teaching was given before the day of Pentecost when the Church began) would equally apply to John 14 and to the words of Acts 1:11, "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go."

Conclusion

We see, therefore, that it is the Church, the Lord's disciples throughout this age, who are addressed in this prophecy of Mt. 24. And they are instructed, first as to those things which mark the *general current* of the age, and secondly as to the *specific signs* for which they asked. *Armies surrounding Jerusalem* would be the sign of the city's devastation (Luke 21:20). This occurred in A.D. 70. The *abomination of desolation* set up *in Jerusalem* would be the sign of the great tribulation. That tribulation period would be followed by the shaking of the heavenly bodies and then the coming of the Lord to gather His people to Himself (Mt. 24:15-31). Such is the summary of Christ's predictions concerning His Church.

(To be continued)

BAPTISM AND THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT PIONEERS

Alex V. Wilson

Step back with me into the past, over a century ago, and let us see if history has any lessons to teach us. The time is 1809, the place is Pennsylvania. A group of earnest seekers after truth is wrestling with questions like, "How can we live for God and serve Christ acceptably? How can we enjoy fellowship with other children of God even if they disagree with us? How can we break down the widespread walls of intolerance that separate God's family into suspicious, warring factions? What should be done about practices in the Protestant churches which seem only traditional rather than Biblical?"

A middle-aged man is speaking, quietly but with intensity. He is Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian preacher who recently was ousted from one splinter-group of the Presbyterians because he didn't agree 100% with their doctrines. He had even dared to extend fellowship to members of rival splinter-groups!

Campbell is nearing the end of his message, and his closing words sound forth: "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent."

A solemn hush fell across the assembly that showed the intensity of the emotions of the hour. Campbell sat down. Andrew Munro, a rather sentimental person, was the first to break the silence. "Mr. Campbell," he said, "if we adopt that as a basis, then there is an end of infant baptism." Campbell replied: "Of course, if infant baptism be not found in the scriptures, we can have nothing to do with it." Thomas Acheson then arose and cried: "I hope I may never see the day when my heart will renounce that blessed saying of the Scripture, 'Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'" Saying that, he burst into tears. James Foster arose and cried out: "Mr. Acheson, in the portion of Scripture you have quoted there is no reference whatever to infant baptism."

—Earl West, *Search for the Ancient Order*, Vol. I, P. 48

Not long afterwards, the same James Foster asked Thomas Campbell, "How could you, in the absence of any authority in the word of God, baptize a child?" Campbell's face changed color. He became irritated and offended, and tersely replied, "Sir, you are the most intractable person I ever saw." For Campbell believed the Bible

must surely give support to infant baptism. After all, for centuries Bible-believing Christians had practiced it.

However, as Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander studied this practice further, they could find no Biblical basis for it. Since they had already determined to follow Scripture alone, they decided that from that time forward they would only baptize believers, not infants; and by immersion, not sprinkling. "But," said Thomas, "for those of us who are already members of the church and participants of the Lord's Supper, there is no need for rebaptism. We would merely be going out of the church for the sake of coming in again."

But in 1812 an event occurred which made the question existential rather than theoretical. Alexander's wife gave birth to their first child. Would they now stick to their newfound beliefs, and give up their time-honored practice? They did: the daughter was *not* baptized; instead, her father and grandparents *were*! Soon the other members of their congregation followed suit, and believer's baptism by immersion became their standard practice.

During the 1820's

Eight years later (1820), Alexander held a public debate with a Presbyterian preacher. It was at that time he first suggested--somewhat tentatively and without premeditation--that baptism was for the remission of sins. But by 1823, when he debated another Presbyterian, the idea had become a matter of clear conviction to him.

In 1828 he wrote in his magazine *Christian Baptist*, "Forgiveness of sins and Christian immersion were inseparably connected together in the proclamations of the apostles. Everyone, in the very instant in which he was put under the water, received the forgiveness of his sins." The next year a reader asked him the question, "Is a believer in Christ not pardoned before he is baptized?" Campbell replied, "Is a man not clean before he is washed? . . . No man has any proof that he is pardoned until he is baptized."

Two differences on this matter existed between the churches led by the Campbells and the Baptist churches with which they were associated for 17 years. The former administered baptism upon a simple *confession of faith* in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God; the latter insisted upon a *testimony of Christian experience* before anyone would be baptized. Second, the "Disciples" taught that baptism leads to forgiveness, while the Baptists taught that forgiveness precedes baptism.

Divine Provision, Human Response

In 1827 a young preacher named Walter Scott, who was a close friend of Alexander Campbell, began serving as a travelling evangelist in Ohio. Many of his hearers had a background of ultra-Calvinism. They believed that the elect would be saved and the non-elect lost no matter what they did. The sinner could do nothing, they concluded, except wait to see if God called him through some emotional experience. Preachers who believed this way never urged people to turn to the Lord, because sinners were dead in sin so it was impossible for them to turn and believe. Because such ideas were widely held, many who wanted to be saved just waited--often with anguish--to see if God would call them.

Scott saw that the apostles' approach was different. So he began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God and the only Savior, and that God called men through *the Gospel*. He had made His move at Calvary, and now through His Gospel He called men to make *their* move! Scott then usually presented five points: three were conditions the Lord demanded, and two were blessings He offered. Men must (1) have faith; (2) repent; (3) be baptized. God would then (4) forgive their sins and (5) give them the Holy Spirit.

When they heard these facts presented from scripture, multitudes responded with amazed relief and joy. Churches grew by leaps and bounds, and new ones sprang up in many places.

The common error up to then among many churches was to stress God's provision for salvation but to minimize the need for man to respond. They preached *redemption* (God's part) but muted *conversion* (man's part). Or, to put it another way, they preached the Gospel (Christ died for our sins and rose again) but twisted the needed *response* to the Gospel (faith and repentance, expressed in baptism). Therefore Scott's emphasis was needed to produce a balanced message. Many were brought to Christ.

But, as happens so often in human experience, later the pendulum swung to the other extreme. In later decades and even till now in many places, the opposite and even deadlier error is held. A number of Churches of Christ preach man's response to the Gospel while hardly mentioning the Gospel itself. They preach Scott's formula while minimizing Christ's cross! (Scott didn't do that.) In fact, Scott's points were changed till they became five steps, all to be done by man. One version was hear/believe/repent/confess/be baptized. Another version was believe/repent/confess/be baptized/remain faithful to the end. God's grace was scarcely mentioned, and of course

the doctrines of God's election and calling were never heard at all (though they are Biblical terms too.)

For example, years ago Victor Broaddus and Dennis Allen were invited to attend a conference for elders and preachers of some Churches of Christ in the southern Philippines. A Filipino preacher spoke on "the five steps," using the rungs of a ladder as his illustration and outline. Later, another man also spoke on the five steps, picturing them as the five fingers of your hand. And believe it or not, still another sermon on the topic was presented: the stairway to heaven, with its five steps! And this was a conference, not for the lost or even for Christians in general, but for church leaders and preachers! The men knew nothing else to preach. When his turn came, Dennis Allen proclaimed the grace of God; that marked a turning-point in one legalistic missionary's thinking, as the Lord opened his eyes to whole vistas of truth he had never dreamed of before.

Another time, someone put copies of a tract in the mailbox of every teacher at an interdenominational school. In the tract the words BAPTIZE and BAPTISM were fully capitalized every time they appeared--which was often--while "God," "Christ," "salvation" and "faith" were not so printed. Needless to say, the tract evoked disgust rather than serious study. Sad!

Over half-a-century ago, R. H. Boll pointed out that times and attitudes change, and our preaching should be adjusted accordingly. People in Campbell's and Scott's day, though often ignorant of the way of salvation, yet believed in God's goodness and power and had reverence and devotion to Him. They "needed nothing so much as to be shown where they were in error and what they must do." But "now" (i.e., 1910) "the bulk of the hearers need to be convicted of sin." Many are "hardened, indifferent or conceited." They "march up unhumiliated to make their confession, feeling, to all appearance, as if they were doing God a favor."

Instead of detailed and polemical discussions of the "plan of salvation," these men need to be taught of God; made to realize their individual responsibility to him and their personal relation to him. Christ needs to be held up before them. Man's part should not be overlooked; but it might be well to put more emphasis on God's part, especially his grace, which takes all boasting out of all mouths.--*Truth and Grace*, pages 16 and 142.

What About the Unimmersed?

We have seen how Alexander Campbell's thinking about baptism developed, and how Walter Scott preached it (along with faith and re-

pentance) as a step necessary for salvation. Influenced by Campbell, Barton Stone reached the same conclusion. At the end of 1831, many congregations led by Stone united with congregations among whom Campbell was the most influential teacher.

Earlier that year, Stone had written about the differences between these two groups of churches. One difference was as follows:

We have fellowship and communion with unimmersed persons. They (Campbell and his fellow-workers) contend that, according to the New Testament, none but the immersed have their sins remitted, and therefore they cannot commune with the unimmersed. On this point we cannot agree with them. The reason is that this sentiment will exclude millions of the fairest characters (that is, believers of outstanding holiness and love for God—AVW) for many centuries back, from heaven. I know they say: "We do not declare that they are excluded from heaven, but only from the kingdom of God on earth. We leave them in the hand of God." But does not this sentiment lead to that conclusion? We believe and acknowledge that baptism is ordained by the King as a means for the remission of sins to penitent believers, but we cannot say that immersion is the *sine qua non* (absolutely essential for salvation--AVW), without maintaining the awful consequences mentioned above and without contradicting our own experience. We, therefore, teach the doctrine, "Believe, repent, and be immersed for the remission of sins," and we endeavor to convince our hearer of its truth, but we exercise patience and forbearance toward such godly persons as cannot be convinced.

So Stone and his followers proclaimed the Gospel, God's mighty acts on behalf of lost sinners. And they proclaimed the Biblical demand for response to the Gospel: repent, trust in Christ, and be immersed. But Stone did not believe that all unimmersed people were lost. For that would mean that Bernard of Clairvaux (whose hymns we sing), Francis of Assisi, Luther, Calvin, Whitefield and the Wesleys and Newton were lost. Yet those men trusted in Jesus, magnified God's grace, believed the Bible, obeyed God's will as they understood it, served him wholeheartedly and bore the fruit of His Spirit in their lives. And the Lord used them greatly. Stone felt certain they were saved, along with similar but less-notable unimmersed disciples in his day. And if they were saved, then why not have "fellowship and communion" with them? Thus he reasoned.

Within six years Alexander Campbell came to agree with him!

(To be concluded)

DON'T REFUSE THE FREE TICKET

In a conversation with others about the matter of morality and salvation, one woman said, "Well, I cannot understand why a man who has tried to lead a good moral life should not stand a better chance of heaven than a wicked one."

"Simply for this cause," answered another. "Suppose you and I wanted to go to a place of amusement. The admission price is one dollar. You have half a dollar, and I have nothing. Which of us would stand the better chance of admission?"

"Neither," answered the woman.

"Just so; and therefore the moral man stands no better chance than the rebellious sinner. But now suppose a kind and rich man, who saw our perplexity, would present a ticket of admission to each of us at his own expense. What then?"

"Well, then we should go in alike. That is clear."

"Thus it is, when the Savior saw our need of entering heaven, He came and died, purchased the church, and obtained eternal redemption for us; and now He offers you and me a free ticket.

"Only take care that your half-dollar does not make you proud enough to refuse the free ticket, and be refused admittance. The free gift of God's grace must be accepted by a faith that leads one to obey the gospel of Christ. When one by that faith repents and is baptized for the remission of sins, he accepts the free ticket of salvation."

--From Locust St. bulletin, Johnson City, Tenn.



Many readers' subscriptions end with this Nov.-Dec. issue. If you are one, have you renewed for 1995? Many good issues are planned. Don't miss even one of them. Still only \$6.00 for 11 issues.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

Opportunities For Stewards

Recently 2 little birdies told me of some pressing financial needs on overseas fields. Perhaps the Lord will lay it on the heart of some congregations or individuals to become regular backers of these workers.

One is Central Bible College (formerly Institute) in downtown Manila. Almost 100 students are enrolled in this school, which was begun in the mid-1950s by Victor Broaddus and Dennis Allen. Later on, Harold Preston, Billy Lewter and Alex Wilson also taught there. While missionaries were on the faculty they were not paid by the school, since they had support from the U.S. churches. But since 1983 all teachers have been Filipino; this plus skyrocketing inflation has hit the school hard in recent years. Lately teachers have not been paid on time, & at least once the electricity was cut off due to inability to pay the bill on time.

The Lord has raised up many dedicated Christian workers & leaders through CBC. In fact one graduate is the national director of a countrywide ministry to students in high schools, nursing schools & colleges. Another is editor of one of the most important Christian magazines in the land. A 3rd grad. is national director of an organization that through the years has distributed many 100s of 1000s of NTs, Bibles & correspondence courses throughout the Philippines. And a 4th has become leader of a national ministry to children. CBC offers a 1-year basic Bible course, a 3-year

leaders' course, and a 4-year course for evangelists/pastors/ministers.

The other needy ministry mentioned above is that of Brother Moto Nomura in Japan. He is well-known to many W&W readers, & his letters appear in it from time to time. What you may not know is that the U.S. dollar is worth only about 1/3 of its value 10 years ago, which means that Moto & Yoriko's support has dropped very low.

Funds may be sent to either of these ministries through Victor Broaddus, Church of Christ Worldwide, P.O. Box 54842, Lexington KY 40555. All donations sent through CCWW are forwarded 100% to the field. Nothing is deducted for Bro. Broaddus' expenses (unless you designate gifts specifically for him, which is also a good thing to do). He can also keep you informed about which overseas workers are most in need at any particular time.

As urgent as giving to missions is, praying is even more important. And Bro. Broaddus publishes a yearly Missionary Prayer List with specific information for intercession. Write him for copies to distribute at your church

-- Alex Wilson

Thanks To Each Team Member

As the year draws to a close, W&W is grateful to the Lord for enabling us to carry on this ministry. And a hearty "Thanks" to all of you who read, subscribe, donate

and pray. Several people not only subscribe for themselves but for several others too. And there are those who send donations in addition to all that!

I am especially grateful to Louise Wells, who handles the office matters: circulation, financial records, mailing (several friends assist in this), etc. All her time is freely donated as a labor of love to the Lord and His people.

Other team members include Jack Blaes, our News & Notes editor, and Carl Kitzmiller, who has written the study notes for our Sunday School quarterly for many years.

Recently I enjoyed a visit with sisters Edith & Mildred Lale, who formerly ran the business affairs of W&W for a long period. We looked at pictures, reminisced & praised God for the editors, writers & others leaders He raised up through the decades. Sister Edith gave me a compilation of tables-of-contents dating back to 1950, to make it easier for me to find past articles.

For all of you I magnify the Lord.
—Alex Wilson

Need Some Pews?

The Tell City, Ind. Church has four 8-foot oak pews they no longer need. If you are interested, call their minister,

Tim Hill: (812) 547-6778.

Worldwide Ministry

The international scope of the radio program Words of Life is seen from their latest bulletin. It includes letters from listeners in Liberia, Jordan, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. WOW!

Remembering Bro. C. V.

Bro. C. V. Wilson was called home to be with the Lord and several from here were able to attend the Praise Service at the Portland Ave. Church of Christ where he had ministered since 1956. He was among the Giants of the Faith and was remembered for his ministry of encouragement. I personally appreciated Bro. Wilson and thank the Lord for having had the opportunity of knowing him and seeing how the Lord can truly use people totally committed to Him! — Bennie Hill, Cramer & Hanover, Lexington, Ky.

Take Responsibility

The subject of a letter recently received by the elders and deacons is worthy to be brought to the attention of all of us. The letter dealt with damage done recently to a chair in the library. The chair, donated in memory of a deceased member, was left in its damaged condition. The letter encouraged us to treat church property the same way we would treat our own possessions at home.

This admonition should be heeded by all of us, young and old. If we damage an item while at church, or if we find something broken or damaged, we should immediately attempt to have it repaired, or report it to someone so that repairs can be made. —David Schreiner, in Gallatin, Bulletin

Jennings, La.

God continues to heal Bro. Doug Broyles, who is slowly but surely mending. Thanks to all who have called, visited, sent cards and prayed for recovery. He must remain indoors for several more days to avoid the risk of infection, but he misses very much being with fellow

Christians and worshipping with them.

*Pleasant words are as a Honeycomb,
Sweet to the Soul. Prov. 16:24*

Note of Thanks

To the ladies of Turkey Creek Church, La. Thanks so much for the lap robes. Each one was prettier than the other. Our ladies are thrilled with them. May the Lord bless you all. -- Jan Potts, Maple Manor

Locust Street Church, Johnson City, Tenn.

Brent Copenhagen began work with us as an associate minister on Aug. 14. He and Christine have been active in work with the young people and in visitation. Today we are to hear him as he preaches the word of God. Brent is not an experienced preacher, but he is a capable young man and we look forward to his work in this area as he gains experience. We believe you will be hearing good things from him. Support him with your prayers and your sincere attention.

GOING FOR ONE YEAR . . .

The evening prayer services for men and women (at 6:30 P.M.) complete one year today. They were begun last year preceding our meeting and have continued since. We have seen some of those prayers answered with a "Yes" and perhaps many of them are in the process. Some individuals have been very faithful in participating.

—Carl Kitzmiller, Locust Street

Good News From Mozambique!

From Corrine Johnson, Robert Johnson's widow, missionary to Maputo, Mozambique. She ministers among university students. Official permission is almost always difficult to obtain. Excerpts from here recent letter: "The first week of October we were asked to meet with the Director of Student Affairs. This threw the students into a panic, for they felt sure he was going to stop the studies in the housing. The student was late coming, so alone I went with fear and trembling to meet Sr. Domingos. He graciously welcomed me and inquired about our group. I gave him a copy of the constitution and registration, explained our activities, and plans in the near future. The student entered in time to hear Sr. Domingos say this was the sort of programs he wanted on campus.

"In full and plain words, he gave us full freedom on campus for Bible study groups in housing, lectures of interest on campus in rooms he would arrange, distribution of literature and Bibles, viewing of videos, hospital visitation, and social gatherings. What more could we want? He let us know that the old customs (going to classes, back to room, going to eat, back to room) was past and the new way of planning for the complete person and future leader was his goal. Really, the student and I danced down four flights of steps to the car. We quickly called for a party on Saturday, October 8 to celebrate our great gift of OPEN CAMPUS. As I baked goodies, I realized this gift was given on Robert's birthday and I did have reasons to rejoice. Sing praises to His name!"

NATIVITY

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father (Father of Eternity), The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

-- Isaiah 9:6, 7.

The Counsellor so wondrous wise
 Surveyed the world with sightless eyes.
The Mighty God in manger lay,
 Too weak to grasp a wisp of hay.
The Father of Eternity
 Gulped Time in breaths of brevity.
The Prince of Peace and Lord of all
 Intruded on a cattle stall.
This Child was born, this Son was giv'n
 For us to purchase peace and Heav'n.
This God, this Prince, this Father, He
 In wisdom gave Himself for me.
That manger then contained the Food
 To make me, beast, a child of God.

--Donald M. Taylor