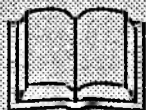


"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

NOV. - DEC., 1997

God Sent His
WORD,

God Sent His
SON

CHRISTMAS:

Two Worlds Come Together

Philip Yancey

Christians share a seemingly odd belief in parallel universes. One universe consists of glass and steel and leather briefcases and the smell of freshly ground coffee. The other consists of angels and demons and places called heaven and hell. We palpably inhabit the material world; it takes faith to consider oneself a citizen of the other, invisible world...

More and more, Christmas has enlarged in meaning for me.

In Christmas, the two worlds come together. If you read the Bible alongside a Civilization 101 textbook, you will see how seldom that happens. The textbook dwells on the glories of ancient Egypt and the pyramids; Exodus mentions the names of two Hebrew midwives but neglects to identify the pharaoh. The textbook honors the contributions from Greece and Rome; the Bible contains a few scant references, mostly negative and treats civilizations as background for God's work among the Jews.

Yet on Jesus the two books agree--at least, in part.

The birth of Jesus was so important that it split history into two parts; before Christ and after Christ.

In the cold, in the dark, among the wrinkled hills of Bethlehem, God who knows no before or after entered time and space. He who knows no boundaries took them on: the confines of a baby's skin, the restraints of mortality. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Paul would later say; "he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

But the few eyewitnesses on Christmas night did not see that. They saw an infant struggling to work never-before-used lungs.

-- From **CHRISTIANITY TODAY**

TELL CITY / LILLY DALE WORKSHOP

February 27-28, 1998

"Families in Crisis"

Earl C. Mullins, Jr.

Held this year at the Tell City Church of Christ

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Jack Blaes, News

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God's Sure Word

Alex V. Wilson

1963. Ruth and I headed to Manila for the first time. Passing through Hong Kong, we spent several days with Dennis and Betty Allen. While there, I browsed through their bookcases--a profitable hobby of mine--and discovered an interesting book, *The Severity of God*.

I read only one chapter, but found it so intriguing that upon reaching the Philippines I ordered the book from England. This month that chapter, condensed and adapted, appears as "Elisha, the Boys and the Bears." Read it, trust the Bible more, study the Bible better.

1997. An agnostic Jew writes a book about the Bible, which is sold mainly in secular bookstores. It stays on the *New York Times*' list of bestselling hardback books for many weeks! But its thesis sounds incredible: by counting out the letters of the Old Testament in intervals--such as every 5th letter, or 31st or 123rd, etc.-- the names of various modern people and related events and dates appear in detail!

When I first heard rumors about **The Bible Code**, my response was, "Ridiculous--whatta bunch of sheer nonsense! God didn't give His Word to be some sort of tricky puzzle-book. This must be a hoax, some clever manipulation of facts." Wise friends of mine agreed, though none of us had read the book. Then when I heard that my friend Dave Reagan was going to preach an entire sermon saying that the Bible code was a valid evidence of Scripture's divine origin, I was aghast. "Oh no--Dave's flipped his lid! He's really gone off the deep end this time. He'll ruin the reputation of Lamb and Lion's ministry!"

But then I learned some facts that seem irrefutable--from Dave and several other sources. I bought the book too, at a big discount. And my opinion has changed.

You may think me extremely gullible, as I considered Dave and another friend who wrote me from Illinois. But it's been shown, tested and re-tested, that encoded in the Bible when it was written are linkings too numerous and specific to be mere coincidence. "Hitler" is linked with "slaughter," "evil man," and "Nazi and enemy." "Newton" is linked with "gravity," "Beethoven" with "German composer," "Rembrandt" with "Dutch" and "painter," and "Marconi" with "radio." As the dust-jacket says, the "Bible code foretells events that happened thousands of years after the Bible was written. It foresaw both Kennedy assassinations, the Oklahoma City bombing, the election of Bill Clinton--everything from World War II to Watergate . . ."

Think I'm crazy to believe that? Maybe so, but read Dave's article. Seems to me that the Lord did something spectacular to grab the attention of this jaded, apathetic, computer-age generation. Guess He knew it would take a real jolt to wake it up.

Another Year Closer

This is our last issue for '97, since we combine November and December. We thank God for His help, and ask Him to make *Word and Work* an ever-increasing encouragement to His people. We are glad for new subscribers, but yearn for many more to be enriched.

Please help us by . . . 1) Prayer; 2) Writing articles for us; 3) Sending us news of church activities; 4) Increasing our circulation. There are numerous people in your congregation who have never read *Word and Work*, but would be strengthened by it. Does your preacher get it? Your elders, deacons, Bible class teachers? If not, send us their names/addresses, and we'll mail them a free sample copy or two. Some excellent Christian magazines became defunct this year. We believe the Lord wants *W&W* to continue; your help can play a part. Your suggestions and criticisms are welcome.

I want to express thanks for Louise Wells, our office manager; Dennis Allen, our missionary editor; Jack Blaes, news & notes editor; and Carl Kitzmiller, who writes the lessons for our Sunday school quarterly. And for your convenience, here's an index for '97.

Themes During 1997:

Know the Lord (His attributes)
 The Unfinished Task
 Strong Families, because Christ Lives!
 Jesus: Fully God, Truly Man
 Our Inner War: flesh vs. Spirit
 Persecution and Missions
 Lessons from Genesis
 No theme. Angels; Satan; Bib. Interp.; Can small churches grow?
 Challenges from Ecclesiastes
 The 10-40 Window (world-evangelism)
 (You're holding it now!)

Jan.
Feb.
Mar.
Apr.
May.
Jn.
Jly.
Aug.
Sep.
Oct.
Nv./Dc.

Subjects of "What the Bible Teaches":

God: One-in-Three
 (None that month)
 God our Father
 God's Son, a real Man
 The Holy Spirit in OC Days & Now
 Angels of all kinds
 Occultism of various types
 Mankind, and Sin
 4 Basic Truths about Salvation
 Christ's Death for Us, part #1
 Christ's Death for Us, conclusion

THE BIBLE CODE

Does it provide new evidence that the Bible is supernatural in origin?

by Dr. David R. Reagan

The evidence that the Bible is the Word of God is overwhelming to people of faith. We know that it is God's Word first and foremost because of the transforming effect it has had upon our lives. We know first hand the truth of the statement that "the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

There are many other reasons we know the Bible is God's Word. For example, there is the amazing fact of its internal harmony. The Bible is not one book. It is 66 different manuscripts written by 44 different people over a period of 1600 years. Yet, it harmonizes as if it were written by one person--which, of course, it was; for the overriding author who worked through human instruments was the Holy Spirit; "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." (2 Tim. 3:16).

Of course, one of the most convincing evidences of the Bible's supernatural origin is the fact that it contains prophecies which have been fulfilled in history. The Bible is the only book in the world that serves as the basis of a religion that contains prophecies regarding the future. There are no prophecies in the Koran or in the Hindu Vedras or in the sayings of Confucius or Buddha.

Two other factors that establish the Bible as the Word of God are its unsurpassed wisdom and its advanced medical and scientific knowledge. The Bible's moral and ethical content could not have originated from fallen human nature. Its precepts for daily living are wise beyond human wisdom. And long before science made the discoveries, the Bible contained the fundamental principles of hygiene (Lev. 13:15) and revealed such things as the shape of the earth (Is. 40:22), the existence of ocean currents (Ps. 8:8), the hydrological cycle of weather (Eccl. 1:7, 11:3), and the second law of thermodynamics (Rom. 8:20-21).

In the 19th Century a new science began to develop that would provide additional evidence of the Bible's historical accuracy--the science of Archeology. The history of Biblical archeology is ironic for it has been dominated by skeptics who have been determined to disprove the Bible. Yet, every time they turn a spade of dirt, they find new evidence that verifies the Bible! They must be the most frustrated group of scientists on planet earth.

NEW EVIDENCE

Now, many people are pointing to a new discovery called "The Bible Code," claiming that it provides new scientific evidence that the Bible had to have a supernatural origin. Does it? Let's take an in-depth look at it.

The first person we know of who detected a possible code in the Bible was a rabbi by the name of Rabbeynu Bachayah who lived in the 14th Century. He noted that words could be spelled out by skipping letters in equal distant spacing. His concept was picked up by another rabbi at the turn of this Century--a brilliant man by the name of Michael Dov Weissmandel who lived in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He spent years manually counting letters in his search for words and messages. He discovered, for example, that the word "Torah" is spelled out at the beginning of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy when a skip sequence of 50 letters is used. He called this procedure "equidistant letter sequencing." commonly referred to today as "ELS."

In the mid-80's a world famous mathematician in Israel heard about Weissmandel's work and began to investigate it using computers. He was an Orthodox Jew by the name of Eliyahu Rips. He is the one who refined the Code and established its credibility. He did so through an amazing series of experiments.

Fascinating Experiments

He and two of his mathematical colleagues decided to run the Code of the book of Genesis to see if they could find three hundred common word associations like husband and wife, hammer and anvil, and tree and leaf. To their amazement, all three hundred were found in the 78,064 characters of Genesis. They wrote up this experiment and published it in a European statistical journal in 1988. They concluded that there is definitely a code in Genesis and that it could not exist by coincidence. In fact, they calculated that the odds of it appearing by coincidence were one in fifty-quadrillion.

Their next experiment was even more amazing. They went to a Jewish encyclopedia and selected the 34 greatest Torah sages (scholars) in Jewish history. They then fed their names into the computer to see if the Code could find them in the book of Genesis. All 34 were found, and in the immediate vicinity of each name was either the date of the person's birth or death. They went back to the encyclopedia and selected 32 more names. They too were found in the book of Genesis--a total of 66 names of Torah sages! This research was published in a journal of statistical science here in the United States in 1994. One reviewer concluded that the odds of the names appearing by chance was one in two and a half billion!

To make certain their results were not mere chance, Rips and his team ran the same code searches in other Hebrew documents, including a Hebrew version of Tolstoy's **War and Peace**. The results were totally non-significant.

The editor of the American journal, Robert Kass, wrote:

"Our referees [scientists who reviewed the paper before publication] were baffled. Their prior beliefs made them think the book of Genesis could not possibly contain meaningful references to modern-day individuals. Yet, when the authors carried out additional analysis and checks, the effect persisted. The paper is thus offered to Statistical Science readers as a challenging puzzle."

The research was checked and confirmed by Dr. David Kazhdan, chairman of the Harvard mathematics department and by Harold Gans, a senior code specialist with the U.S. Army. Both concluded that the Torah Code actually exists and that it could not have occurred by chance or by human design.

The Code Goes Public

Until this year few people outside a small circle of mathematicians, Orthodox Jews, and Evangelical Christians knew anything about the Code. What brought it to widespread public attention was the publication of a book by Michael Drosnin called **The Bible Code** (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1997).

Drosnin is an agnostic Jew who lives in New York City and makes his living as an investigative reporter. He is best known as a biographer of Howard Hughes.

In 1992 Drosnin was in Israel on an assignment when he heard about the Code. He decided to investigate the matter, with the thought in mind of writing an article to debunk it. But when Eliyahu Rips began to show him all that he had uncovered, including a prophecy that gave the exact date that the Gulf War began in 1991, Drosnin's skepticism turned to curiosity. He got a copy of the Code's software and took it back to New York with him. He began experimenting with the Code, and in the process he discovered the name of Yitzhak Rabin appears only once, at an ELS of 4,772 between chapters 2 and 24 of Deuteronomy. Crossing Rabin's name he found the phrase, "Assassin that will assassinate."

Drosnin was so disturbed by this discovery that he flew to Israel and hand delivered a warning letter to one of Rabin's best friends, asking him to deliver it to the Prime Minister. That was in September of 1994. Rabin read the letter and shrugged his shoulders. "I am not a mystic," he said. Fourteen months later, in November 1995, Rabin was assassinated.

Fascinating Discoveries

Drosnin's book is filled with amazing findings that he and others have made with the Code. For example, they have found the names of hundreds of world renowned historical figures, and adjacent to their names they have discovered words relevant to their lives. Next to Napoleon's name are the words "France," "Waterloo," and "Elba." Surrounding Shakespeare's name are the words: "presented on stage"-- "Hamlet"-- "Macbeth."

Every major advance in modern technology appears to be encoded, from the light bulb to the airplane. And the inventor's name appears adjacent to the invention.

A leading mathematician at Yale whose last name is Piatetski-Shapiro performed tests of the Code and was amazed to find "Hitler" and "Nazi" encoded together with the word "slaughter." He found "Eichmann" encoded with the words "the ovens" and "extermination." Even the gas used to kill the Jews, "Zyklon B," was encoded with Eichmann's name. The Yale professor concluded, "There is no way within the known laws of mathematics to explain seeing the future. . . . What we're talking about here is some intelligence that stands outside . . . I think the only answer is that God exists."

Amazingly, Drosnin has avoided that conclusion. He says, "I am persuaded only that no human could have encoded the Bible in this way. We have the first scientific proof that some intelligence outside our own does exist, or at least did exist at the time the Bible was written The Bible Code demands that we accept what the Bible itself can only ask us to believe--that we are not alone." A very New Age, Star Wars type of conclusion, to say the least.

The most important future event that Drosnin feels he has found with the Code is a world war in which nuclear weapons will be used. He feels this is more of a warning than a prediction, and this leads to the incredible conclusion of his book: "[The Code] is not a promise of divine salvation. It is not a threat of inevitable doom. It is just information. The message of the Bible code is that we can save ourselves".

That conclusion made me want to scream: "What spiritual blindness! It made me realize that Drosnin is like a man who has discovered the magnetic strip that is embedded in every \$100 bill. That strip can be seen only if the bill is held up to the light. It certifies that the bill is authentic.

The man is so excited by this discovery that he spends all his time holding the bill up to the light, showing everyone the strip. He is so

fascinated by the strip and so obsessed with it, that he never notices the large picture of Ben Franklin on the face of the bill.

That's where Drosnin is with the Bible Code. He is so fixated on something that authenticates the Bible as the Word of God that he cannot see the very clear surface picture that the Bible presents of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Nor can he hear the surface message of the Bible that is calling him to repent of his sins and receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. If the Bible teaches anything, it teaches that we cannot save ourselves!

Is It Valid?

But does the Code really provide new evidence that the Bible is the Word of God? Is it authentic or is it a sham?

The harshest critic of the Code is Dr. Ronald S. Hendel who teaches at SMU. He dismisses it as a sham and a hoax. He does so by quibbling with some of Drosnin's translations. But mainly, he simply asserts that the masoretic text used by Rips and Drosnin (often called the *textus receptus*) is just one of many Hebrew texts, that it differs from others and that it is full of scribal errors.

But keep in mind that Hendel's basic viewpoint is that of a classic modern day liberal who denies the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and argues that the Bible is really a product of Man's search for God and therefore is full of myth, legend and superstition. It is only natural that he should react with vehemence to any evidence that points to a supernatural origin of the Bible. But the important thing to keep in mind regarding his criticism is that he simply has no answer for the fact that the Code works with the Masoretic text and does not work with other texts.

Another critic is Shlomo Sternberg who is both an Orthodox rabbi and a mathematician. He teaches at Harvard. His basic assertion is that "ELS codes can be found everywhere. In sufficiently long text, in any alphabetic language, one can always find hidden messages by the ELS method." He then demonstrates his point by showing that he found the assassination of President Somoza of Nicaragua by using ELS to search the novel *Moby Dick*.

The only problem with Sternberg's argument is that it ignores the overwhelming number of matches made in both of Rips' experiments—matches that could not be duplicated in other documents. Rips has proved statistically that his finds are beyond the realm of coincidence, and Sternberg does not address that point.

But Sternberg does make a very good point when he attacks Drosnin for using the Code like Ouija Board or a crystal ball to try to fore-

tell the future. He points out that "this violates the explicit biblical prohibition against augury, necromancy and the like" (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

Eliyahu Rips agrees with Sternberg on this point. He has also attacked Drosnin for using the Code like a tool of witchcraft: "All attempts to extract messages from Torah Codes or to make predictions based on them are futile and of no value. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the scientific research regarding the Torah Codes is that they exist and that they are not a mere coincidence."

Some Conclusions

So where does this leave us? I can only speak for myself. Like Eliyahu Rips, I am convinced that the Code is legitimate. Because of that conclusion, I believe it is one more piece of evidence that substantiates the supernatural origin of the Bible.

I also believe it substantiates the verbal, word for word, inspiration of the Bible. Jesus Himself attested to verbal inspiration when He said, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter [jot] or stroke [tittle] shall pass away from the Law . . ." (Matthew 5:18). Modern day scholars mock the concept of verbal inspiration. And like Hendel, they also argue that even if it were true, all we have left are corrupted manuscripts. Well, I happen to believe that the same Holy Spirit who wrote the Bible is fully capable of preserving it from human corruption.

Despite my conclusion that the Code is legitimate, I want to speak a word of caution regarding it. I believe the Code poses a danger--the danger of Kabbalism. This is the ancient Jewish mystical movement that has always argued that the true message of the Bible is hidden. They usually find its "true" message by spiritualizing the Scriptures mean whatever they want them to mean.

The Code could easily be used for this purpose, and in the process it could produce some very weird messages. The reason this can so easily happen is because there are no vowels in the text of the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, a series of five consonants could stand for as many as twenty or more words, depending on the vowels supplied by the reader. It is the context that determines the meaning of the word. And that is exactly the problem with the Code that makes it easily subject to abuse--namely, there is no context when using the Code.

Predicting The Future

I think it is interesting that the major future prophecy that Drosnin claims to have found with the Code is the prediction that there will be a

World War III fought with nuclear weapons. He claims this information is encoded in the "Shema" in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Well, that is not new information. The book of Revelation makes it very clear that there is going to be a future world war of unparalleled proportions in which one-half of the population of the world will die. And I personally think that Revelation also makes it clear that this war will be fought with atomic weapons.

The point I want to drive home is that we do not need the Code to predict the future. The future course of world events is laid out for us in the surface message of the Bible in its end time prophecies. The Lord has told us all we need to know about the future in the surface message of the Bible.

Again, using the Code to try to predict future events will result in Satanic deceptions.

Some Further Evidence

I have saved the best for last. Further evidence of the validity of the Code has been produced by a Messianic Jew named Yacov Rambsel. In his newly released book, "Yeshua," he reveals what he has discovered by exploring key Old Testament passages using the ELS approach manually. His discoveries are nothing short of sensational.

In the most famous Messianic passage in the Bible, Isaiah 53, he found the following phrase encoded in verse 10 at a skip sequence of 20 letters: "Yeshua Shmi." That phrase means "Yeshua is my name." Think of it, the very name of the Messiah is encoded in the passage that speaks of His sacrifice for the sins of Mankind!

In like manner, Rambsel found the name of the Messiah in Daniel's famous prophecy of the seventy weeks of years (Daniel 9:24-27). Encoded in verse 26, counting every 26th letter, is the name "Yeshua."

In Leviticus 21:10-12 there is a passage regarding the rules of the priesthood and the sacrifices offered for the sins of the people. Yacov discovered that counting every third letter this passage spells out the phrase, "Hain dam Yeshua," which means "Behold! The blood of Yeshua."

Another Conclusion

Drosnin says he considers the Code to be a "time-lock" that has been waiting on the advent of the computer age. I think he is probably right in that conclusion.

But I think the timing of the Code's revelation is significant in another respect. I see it as just one more sign of the soon return of the Lord. As that day approaches, God the Father is providing us with fresh evidence that the Bible is what it claims to be--the Word of the one and only true God. The new revised Egyptian chronology which I discussed in our May issue of **Lamplighter** provides fresh evidence that the Bible is trustworthy in its historical records. The Bible Code provides new evidence that it had a supernatural origin.

I believe the Lord is providing us with this fresh evidence to substantiate the Bible because His Son is about to return, and the Father does not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. I praise God for His mercy.

[Slightly condensed from the LAMPLIGHTER, 9/97, published by *Lamb and Lion Ministries*. To get the full article or an even more complete message on cassette, write P.O.Box 919, McKinney TX 75069. Or call 1-800-705-8316.]

Why Go To Other Places When There Are So Many Unsaved Souls Right Here At Home?"

Paul Kitzmiller

Efforts to arouse the average group of Christians to support and encourage foreign missions are often countered by this question or something similar. The intent seems to be to discourage or stop altogether any further discussion or activity on the matter. Such a question appears to suggest a genuine interest in soul-winning at home; in some instances that may be true, but often it is not. However, one suspects that what the question really reflects, whether intended or not, is an attempt to justify a selfish attitude that has no regard for foreign missions and giving. In any case, the argument that the question purports to make is unsound. The presence of unsaved souls at home, even many, does not remove the obligation to reach the unsaved elsewhere.

God does not present an "either-or" dilemma for us to solve. Souls at home or away are all precious and need to be won. The Lord is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9). However, we must not suppose that all souls in a given area must be won before we take interest in any other place. When the Holy Spirit directed Saul and Barnabas to depart from Antioch on a mission tour (Acts 13:1-4), weren't there still unsaved souls in that city? When Paul was called to Macedonia, were there not still many unsaved souls in Troas? . . . in Asia Minor? (Acts 16:6-10) Undoubtedly, there were many unsaved in Athens, but apparently due to a limited response there, Paul moved

on to Corinth (Acts 17:32-18:1). We must seek to win those souls that are at home, but we may not neglect those elsewhere. We must move forward on both fronts.

When we honestly examine the issue of soul-winning, it soon becomes evident that we have abundant reasons to evangelize actively in foreign fields. In addition to reaching the souls at home, every Christian and every congregation ought to have some part in reaching souls in other places. Consider the following:

The command of Jesus. Our Lord instructs His disciples to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15; ". . . to all creation," --NIV). In Matthew's account (28:19), He directs His followers to, ". . . make disciples of all the nations, . . ." (lit. "ethnic groups"). Clearly, the obligation includes more than just those "at home." Luke records these words of Jesus, ". . . you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) If we are not charged with saving souls in other places (foreign missions), then we are not charged with saving souls at home. Not all Christians can or should actually go to "foreign fields," but all should accept the responsibility that these words place upon them and seek ways to meet it.

The example of Jesus. He Who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10) did not limit Himself to His birthplace of Bethlehem nor to His hometown of Nazareth. He traveled extensively throughout Galilee and Judea, even venturing into Samaria when ordinarily Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9). Even He Who "was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" had compassion and used His power to bless the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28) and the Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5-13).

The example of the early church. The Book of Acts gives ample testimony to the evangelistic zeal of the first Christians in taking the Gospel to the "nations." The Apostle Paul and his companions are exemplary in this regard. God gave His own stamp of approval to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The Christians at Philippi, who were themselves just a newly established mission work, began almost immediately to participate actively in foreign missions (Phil. 4:15-18, 2 Cor. 11:9).

The need of the unsaved. The need of all the unsaved is to believe the Gospel and trust in the Lord Jesus, but not all of the unsaved stand on equal footing in relation to that need. Most of those here at home have heard the Gospel many times. They have access to many Bibles, many teachers and many opportunities. Their need is to stop rejecting and start acting on what they have heard. Yet, many of those in other places have had only limited opportunity; some have not heard

at all. Their need is to be able to hear. "And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (Rom. 10:14,15).

The numbers of the unsaved. The laborers are few. But nearly all of the laboring is being done in one place--at home. Most of the unsaved are elsewhere. Is this wise stewardship on the part of the Church that has been entrusted with the Gospel? Is this right? "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:38).

The interest of the unsaved. Often those who have the most light and most opportunity do the least with it. Jesus reminds us that "many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian" (Lk. 4:27). Naaman, the foreigner, had a desire to be healed and willingness to obey that those at home in Israel did not manifest. The spiritually needy at home often do not show the interest in their soul that is seen in those who are foreigners to us (Cf. Acts 13:44-48). Shall we work only at home when there are hungering souls in foreign fields who are open to the Gospel?

There are indeed many unsaved souls right here at home, but winning them, even all of them, does not discharge our whole responsibility. Our vision must be wide enough and extend far enough to see the unsaved in other places. Our burden must be for lost souls near and lost souls faraway. We must yet be admonished by the words that Jesus enjoined upon His disciples many centuries ago, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35, NIV)

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ELISHA, the BOYS and the BEARS

D. E. Hart-Davies

(Condensed and adapted, with many changes, from his book, The Severity of God, published in England, about 1940)

"And it came to pass, as [Elijah & Elisha] still went on...that behold there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof..."

"And [Elisha] went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them" (2 Kings 2:11-12, 23-24 KJV).

Skeptics and critics of the Bible often hold up this OT story for condemnation. They say it proves beyond doubt that in the OT there is much that cannot be reconciled with a true conception of God's character. The story seems to support their accusation, and many devout Christian believers have been greatly perplexed and distressed due to this.

There was a Christian scholar in Cambridge, England, back in the 1930s, named D. E. Hart-Davies. [See note under the title.] He specialized in studying archeology, and defending the historic reliability of the Bible by its findings. Once he shared with two scholarly clergymen some strong evidences for the accuracy of the OT records. They were compelled to admit that much of his material was convincing. But then they pointed to this story as a kind of black mark against the Bible which no amount of archeological evidence could remove.

In the same way, a former church leader wrote an essay on "The Bible and Its Value." In it he included these comments: "How could the God of Love send bears out of a wood to devour little children who called Elisha 'baldhead'? We now feel free to reject as assertions of historical fact some of the strange happenings in the Old Testament, because they contradict what we know of God's method of operation."

Due to these attacks, Hart-Davies carried out detailed research on this passage, plus a number of others. In doing so, he followed the principles of Bible study recommended by the great reformer and scholar

John Wycliffe centuries before. Notice carefully those guidelines--still important for us now:

"It shall greatly help to understand Scripture if you notice not only **what** is spoken or written, but **about whom**, and **to whom**, with **what words**, at **what time**, **where**, for **what purpose**, with **what circumstances**, considering **what goes before** and **what follows**."

Let's consider, then, with Hart-Davies' guidance, the **Who? Where? When? What? and Why?** of this story.

1. Who were the People Concerned?

a. Elisha

This story has often been grossly misrepresented, somewhat as follows: An old bald-headed prophet has attracted the attention of a group of innocent little children as they play in the street of their town. As he passes by, they cry out--more playfully than tauntingly, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head!" The old prophet, being very angry, curses them in the Name of the Lord. As a direct punishment from God, two bears rush out from nearby woods and devour 42 of the innocent children.

But that version is a wild caricature of what actually took place. At that time Elisha was certainly not an old man. Probably he was not over 25 years old, for he lived for nearly 60 years after this event. More than that, he almost certainly was not bald-headed, as we shall see. He was a young man who not very long before had been ordained by Elijah as his assistant and fellow-prophet.

As for Elisha's character, his life story reveals him as a man of high principles: gentle, merciful, devoted to the service of the Lord and the welfare of Israel. The stormy ferocity of Elijah is completely absent from the moral makeup of Elisha. His recorded miracles were mostly gracious acts of kindness for the needy and distressed.

He considered revenge to be low and unworthy of the people of God. One time he miraculously blinded the enemy army from Syria. Thus Israel's army surrounded them. The king of Israel, excited to have his enemies so completely under his control, cries out to Elisha, "Shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" The prophet replied, "Do not kill them. Set food and water before them, then let them go back home." The king did so, resulting in the beautiful conclusion to the story, "So the bands from Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

b. The young prophet's assailants

Now let's seek to discover who were the ones who called out at Elisha. The King James Version, quoted at the head of this article, described them as "little children." That was an unfortunate translation, improved in most later versions.

The Hebrew word is naarim, the plural form of the word naar. Notice how other passages use these words. When Abraham went to offer Isaac, the latter is called a lad or boy; the word is naar (Gen.22:12). Isaac was over twenty at that time. Later we read this in Gen.37:2, "Joseph, a young man [naar] of seventeen...." Again, when Ahab ruled Israel, the king of Syria (or Aram) threatened to make war. An unnamed prophet predicted that a victory for Israel would be won by a company of "young officers [naarim] of the provincial commanders" (1 Kings 20:14-15). Obviously, then, to portray Elisha's assailants as a group of small children is not merely misleading. It is radically erroneous. Use modern translations: NASV, "young lads"; NIV & NKJV, "youths."

What actually happened, then, might be portrayed in modern terms as follows: A young evangelist, recently appointed to a difficult ministry, is walking to his dangerous new assignment. A gang of teenage tough guys, motivated by irreverence for God and anything related to church, start following him--repeatedly jeering and cursing.

2. Where did this Occur?

In the city of Bethel -- a very important point.

Do some mental arithmetic: If two bears emerge from some woods and attack a crowd of youths so fiercely that forty-two of them are injured and some perhaps killed -- how many do you think were in that crowd? For obviously as soon as the bears appeared, the young people would scatter in all directions as fast as they could. Probably one or two got away for every one who got mauled. If that is so, then the young people who had gathered and jeered at Elisha numbered over 80 and maybe 120, or even more.

Why were there so many? Answer: Because it occurred at Bethel. This city was a center of apostasy in Israel for many generations. The northern kingdom's first ruler, Jeroboam, set up two golden calves for his people to worship--so they wouldn't go down to Jerusalem. He placed one in Dan, at the north. The other was set up at Bethel. Jeroboam set up an unlawful priesthood too, to administer his new, false religion.

Several times the Lord's prophets denounced Bethel for its idolatry, evil, and selfish luxury. Through Amos, the Lord said, "On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel....The houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished" (3:14-15). Again He said, "Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel...For Bethel will be reduced to nothing" (5:4-5). Hosea also denounced this center of wickedness.

What the corrupt, idolatrous Papacy of the 1500s meant to Martin Luther and his fellow reformers, that is what Bethel came to mean to the prophets of the Lord in the era we are studying. It was the focus of apostasy, the headquarters of false religion.

Imagine the bitter enmity between the fiercely zealous Elijah and the renegade Israelites who served at the altars of Bethel. Then you can understand the reason for the large gathering of ungodly youths who jeered at Elijah's successor, Elisha, as he passed through their city. No doubt many of them were sons, grandsons or nephews of the false priesthood there. Hence the chorus of contempt and reviling which poured from their lips.

3. When Exactly did it Happen?

The opening verses of the chapter plainly tell the time of this event. It occurred within five or six days after Elijah was mysteriously and majestically caught up into the heavens. By now reports of his disappearance have circulated widely. And with those reports has gone the news, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15).

The inhabitants of Bethel are especially interested in this news. It is widely discussed, and the young punks of the city prepare to give Elisha a warm welcome if and when he passes their way. Imagine the scene: "Hey, look! There's the new Elijah--ha! Come on, gang, let's give him a rousing cheer!" So they do, clamoring after him, "Go on up, baldy! Go on up, you baldhead!"

4. What did the Cry and Curse Mean?

What did that cry mean, exactly? It was an expression of extreme contempt. In that part of the world, baldness has long been regarded as an incipient sign of leprosy. So it was like saying, "You leper; you unclean outcast!" Even into this century, to say "You son of a bald head," is one of the worst insults you can hurl at someone in that region.

Well, what did they mean by saying, "Go on up, go on up"? There is little room to doubt about this. The opening words of the chapter, literally translated from Hebrew, read: "When the Lord would cause to go up Elijah..." The verb rendered "go up" in the youths' taunt, is precisely the same as that which occurs in this first verse.

They were challenging the young prophet to follow his master--and leave! "Go away! Get out of here! Follow your master and leave us alone!" Godless defiance of the Lord's prophet clearly shows through their mocking insults.

So Elisha turned around, faced them squarely and "called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord." Then came the two bears who mauled forty-two of them. Whether any were killed, or how many of the gang escaped, is not stated. But it served as a warning which undoubtedly created a profound impression. Contempt for God's faithful servants is always perilous.

Hart-Davies wrote, "I am persuaded that the condemnation pronounced by the prophet was not provoked by a sense of personal insult. He was jealous for the honor of Jehovah. He recognized that it was not the servant of the Lord who was being ridiculed and reviled, but the Lord Himself. And it was in the Name of that Lord whom they had rejected and despised that he pronounced the curse of condemnation."

5. Why Should this Story be Rejected?

Even after we make all these clarifications to the story, some people may still claim that God would never cause nor even allow such a tragedy to occur as a punishment. But there are at least two solemn reasons to see in this event an example of the Lord's righteous dealings with His creatures.

1st, stern judgment on the wicked may be necessary to protect the pure and innocent. An illustration may make this clear. The principal of a reputable high school notifies the parents of two senior boys that their sons are to be expelled. For they have engaged in sexual perversion with each other, and also tried to coax younger students into this vice. The boys' parents are terribly upset--with the principal more than their sons! "You are going to blast the entire future of these two young men--just as they are about to enter university to prepare for careers in public service. This expulsion will be a stain on their record forever! You are condemning them to lifelong disgrace!"

But the principal stands his ground. "I have 500 other students in this school to consider. A plague of immorality may quickly spread if I do not take immediate steps to prevent it. At all costs I must protect the

innocent." The expulsion takes place. All become aware of it. Did the principal do what is right? 1,000 parents would say yes, applauding his high principle and moral courage. [At least they would in 1940, when this was first written. In our time it might be a different story. --AVW]

And shall not the Creator, the Judge of all the earth, do right?

2nd, a stern judgment may sometimes be necessary as a warning lest worse take place. A loving mother will sometimes permit a stubborn child, who insists in playing with fire, to burn its hand. She does so because she dreads a more serious calamity.

The irreverent gang of youths in Bethel, who jeered Elisha with such venom, were the direct ancestors of a generation which was swept into dreadful captivity and deportation from their land. And all because they refused to repent of evil, though the Lord sent prophet after prophet to plead with them.

Not much more than a century after this, the threatened invasion of Israel by the armies of Assyria began. Thus some of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Elisha's assailants were among the people who suffered from the unspeakable tortures inflicted by the "Nazis" of ancient history.

The grim story is recorded in 2 Kings 17. "The king of Assyria invaded the entire land...and deported the Israelites to Assyria....All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God...They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them....They forsook all the commands of the Lord and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil....So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria."

The dreadful deportation occurred in spite of the Lord's repeated attempts to bring His people to their senses. The same chapter records, "The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands...in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey'....But they would not listen....They rejected his covenant, and the warnings he had given them." (2 Kings 17:5-23.)

Professor Sayce vividly described the revolting brutality used by the Assyrians against the peoples they conquered and deported: "The barbarities which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible, were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them....Pyramids of human heads marked the path of the

conqueror; boys and girls were burnt alive....Men were skinned alive, blinded, or deprived of their hands and feet, of their ears and noses....The captured city [was] plundered and reduced to ashes....How deeply seated was the thirst for blood and vengeance on an enemy is exemplified in a [carving] which represents Assur-bani-pal and his queen feasting in their garden while the head of the conquered Elamite king hangs from a tree above."

WHAT IF the young hoodlums of Bethel, and their parents, had learned a lesson from the attack of the bears, and turned to the Lord God of Israel? **WHAT IF** they had given heed to the earlier miracles and message of Elijah, and repented of their sins? **WHAT IF** they took seriously the miracles and message of this new prophet, Elisha, and began to obey the Law of the Lord? Would God have forgiven them, and renewed His covenant-blessings to them? **YES**, of course. **For He even forgave Nineveh, the capital city of ASSYRIA, when its people repented at the preaching of Jonah!!**

It is clear that if Israel had repented in the days of Elisha, and kept following the Lord, it need never have suffered defeat and torture from Assyria's armies in later times. But instead, Israel persisted in flagrant disobedience, until they crossed over the line of God's patience. Here is the sad summary statement found in the closing chapter of the books of Chronicles: "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending; because He had compassion on His people...but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words...until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chron.36:15-16, RV).

WHAT LESSONS DO WE LEARN FROM ALL OF THIS?

- 1) The importance of thorough Bible study!
- 2) We may confidently believe God's Word, in spite of events or teachings that at first raise serious difficulties. There are solutions to many of the "problem passages" in Scripture. Maybe not quick and easy solutions, but solutions just the same.
- 3) We see in this incident both the "goodness and the severity of God," that is, His "kindness and sternness" (Rom. 11:22, ASV/NIV). Therefore, let us give Him reverence and awe, for He is a righteous judge. Let us also trust His grace and mercy, for He is good and longs to forgive. And let us turn from all self-will, and renew our surrender to Him as Lord, for He firmly disciplines His people if we grow careless--for which we should be grateful.

REMEMBERING JESSE Z. WOOD

Mar.11, 1908 - Oct.31, 1997

(A funeral eulogy by Alex Wilson, his son-in-love)

Dad Wood will not be listed in *Who's Who in America*, but he was one of the "salt of the earth" in his life and service. He was blessed with a godly upbringing. His parents, Dr. Eugene and Lillian Wood, loved the Lord, the Bible, prayer, God's people, and their family.

Dad was influenced as well by the college he attended. Abilene Christian College provided him with Bible teaching and encouragement to serve Christ. It also provided some persecution because he was part of the minority group of "pre-mills" in the student body. But persecution can do us good if it causes us to study thoroughly what we believe and why we believe it.

While at A.C.C. Dad won a number of medals on the track team. He ran the 440 meter, 880 meter, the mile relay and the sprint medley. I was a teacher at the youth camp in Winchester, Ky. around 1960--30 years after Dad's student days--when he mentioned in a chapel talk that in college he had run in a number of track meets. Afterwards some of the boys challenged him to a race across the campus. Guess who beat the boys? In the same way he ran a good race spiritually and finished his course well.

Also in college he won the heart of beautiful Gertrude Pettigrew. They once were "campussed" for holding hands! (Times have changed.) She married him, and a beautiful partnership began which lasted for sixty-six years. Few marriages match the love they have for each other--and for their Lord. Evidence for the latter was the regularity of their praying together and reading through the entire Bible yearly.

In 1931 they moved to Louisville to study under R. H. Boll, an outstanding teacher. Under his mentoring they kept growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord. Though Dad had preached his first sermon at the age of sixteen (at Prairie Creek, I'm told), he seems to have begun preaching regularly during the 1930s. Through the years his sermons were Biblical and interesting. But he had the habit of getting off his main topic onto tangents. And sometimes he went off on tangents from his tangents--and had a problem getting back to his original train of thought!

But he was right on track in his emphases. He was Christ-centered. He stressed God's grace, the need to receive Jesus as lord and savior, the importance of holy living and loving service, and the blessed hope of Christ's return.

He ministered in at least ten different congregations through the decades--in Texas, Louisiana and Kentucky. It wasn't always easy to shepherd the Lord's sheep, either. One couple, whose wedding he performed, later divorced. The woman blamed the failure of their marriage on Dad, for he had forgotten to have them hold hands when they exchanged their vows! (Seems like hand-holding, or the lack of it, was a recurring problem in his life.)

Dad was a hard worker. Most of the churches where he served couldn't (or at least didn't) fully support him. So he often worked at other jobs besides his preaching. At various times through the years he ran a grocery store, was a salesman for Heinz 57 Varieties, sold insurance, managed a bookstore, was promotional director for Southeastern Christian College, and farmed.

He had a magnetic personality. He never met a stranger. He was at ease among people who were "down & out," and also among those who were "up-&-in." He had many interesting experiences, and loved to tell about them. For instance, there was the woman who was signing up for an insurance policy. Dad asked her, "Now what's your full name?" "Mary." "Mary who?" "Oh, just Mary." "Well, we have to put your last name too." Hesitantly she said, "Mr. Wood, I can spell it but I can't pronounce it!" (She'd married a man from Czechoslovakia with a multi-syllable name.)

Dad had a great sense of humor. He sometimes ruined the jokes he told by starting to laugh uncontrollably just before the punchline. But that in itself was so funny that we got many laughs even before he finally got the punchline out.

Like all of us, he sometimes did funny things without intending to. For instance, there was the time he towed home his granddaughter's broken car in the middle of the night. Not having attached the tow-chain properly, it came right off but Dad didn't realize it. He got all the way home--a ride of several miles--then wondered where she was! Driving all the way back to where he'd started out, he found a not very happy granddaughter.

Dad wrote a number of poems, many of them for his church bulletin at Mackville, Kentucky. A sample follows this article. He also loved to sing gospel songs. Even after he couldn't really converse due to his Alzheimer's Disease, he would sing. One nite at Friendship Manor he sang the first verse of Amazing Grace over thirty times in a row! Then the nurses sedated him. And at the hospital recently he sang Have Thine Own Way forty-three times without stopping! We laugh at that, but how wonderful that the great truths of such songs and of the Word of God were permanently embedded in his mind and heart. He lived by those words.

I thank God for the privilege of having this wonderful-but-humble man as my dad-in-love, friend, counselor and example. He loved Christ Jesus intimately. He was unwaveringly faithful to his family, and to the churches where he served. He lived a life of holiness, joy and love, and sought to rescue the perishing. May we honor him by imitating his life, and may we follow the Lord as zealously as he did.

"I'm Going To..."

by Jesse Z. Wood
(Based on an actual experience)

"One of these days, before long now--
Just you wait and see--
I'm going to make a change, I vow.
Lord, I'll come to Thee.

"So, friend, just let me alone today,
I've got my work to do.
When my barn is full of corn and hay,
I'll be right there with you.

"Don't push me, now. Just let me be!
I do not want to be rushed.
There's plenty of time for me to come;
I'd rather all mouths were hushed.

"What's the hurry? I've lived this long;
My folks all live long lives.
My old dad lived a hundred years;
My mom still lives and thrives.

"And my doc, he says, 'Your heart is strong;
You've lots of years left yet.'
Friend, if you think I don't, you're wrong!
I'll live--On that I'll bet."

Poor soul! Those chicks--they never hatched.
That barn was never filled.
Those plans--they never came to pass;
Those lips of his are stilled.

"I'm going to," that day he said,
Not wanting to be hurried.
One day soon they found him dead;
The next day he was buried.

VOICES From The FIELDS

Robert Garrett
P.O. Box 30, Ruwa, Zimbabwe

Sept. 1997

We held a prophecy seminar at Binga. (Where I had been in a short three-day meeting last September.) It was a round trip of 972 miles plus an additional 653 miles within the area making that trip a total of 1,625 miles. Bro. Morrow and I teamed up for eight days of solid prophetic teaching. There are some 14 congregations in this area. One group of about 15 walked 34 miles to the meeting. Another group walked 22 miles. Average attendance during the day meetings was close to a hundred with over 200 on the last day. Although the meetings were well attended and many showed intense interest and appreciation for the lessons, I was puzzled as to why there were no responses to the Gospel. I learned why only two hours before we left for our long return drive home. The main leader there has been implicated in an allegation of adultery. This was well known to the community but not told to us till the last minute. I tried to counsel with the brother (who denies the charge) and the other leaders (many of whom believe him guilty) but it is always difficult to get the truth in these matters.

Please PRAY for the situation there. We are so far away that it is difficult to help. Pray for the repentance of any who may have sinned in this accusation. There is tremendous potential for the Gospel here. There are many thousands of people in this rural area and thousands of children and youth. Many of these would respond to the Gospel if the church leadership demonstrated true Christian morality.

The Tonga people of Binga used to live along the Zambezi River and much of their food was fish from the river. They were displaced when Kariba Dam was built back in the 1950's and created what was at that time one of the largest man-made lakes in the world. They were moved to this hilly, hot and dry malaria infested area. The brethren here had made their own bricks and built their building. We helped them to purchase grass to thatch the roof. (Thatching grass does not grow in their area so has to be bought elsewhere and transported in.)

They have no electricity. All the water used at the weeks meeting to cook for a hundred people and for bathing was carried in large buckets on the heads of the women and older girls from a borehole almost a mile distant.

While we were at Binga, thieves one night built a fire against one of the doors to the main Camp building. When enough of the door had been burnt to allow access, they then doused the fire and entered the building. They apparently had a lot of keys of which one fit the pantry door and they stole about \$1,300 dollars worth of spoons, knives,

plates, bowls, pots and pans and a double electric hot plate. The double doors they burnt will cost \$200 to replace. I am having some protective security gates made of iron bars to be fitted on the outside of the doors. These will cost about \$800. (There are four double doors and one single door.) I suppose I shall also have to get some kind of alarm system fitted. (That will probably cost in the thousands.) This building is out of sight and over a 100 yards from our house. What a shame that we have to spend time and money on these things which we would rather spend on preaching and teaching the Way. The Adversary is working hard but we cannot allow him the victory. Our Lord is able to work all things for good.

We plan to have another camp for the children ages 13 through 17 in December so we will need to replace most of those stolen items before then.

[Donations may be sent to Garrett Mission Fund, 3508 Evergreen Circle, Jeffersonville, IN 47130. -AVW]

Ken & Sandra Rideout
P.O. Box 202 Chiang Rai, Thailand 57000

Sept. 1997

(Ken Rideout has been a missionary in Asia, mainly Thailand, for decades. Ruth & I got to know him while we were in Manila. After being a widower for a few years, he married Sandra. The Gallatin Church of Christ helps to sponsor them. --AVW)

We are now only 69 klm from Burma and Laos. We have begun teaching and training the team three days a week. The leaders of the Thailand Lahu Christian convention contacted us as they were officially separating from the Lahu Baptists, as we expected that they would, once the break was completed. Their needs are great, and they want us to help revive the churches. Three of their leaders, Saeng, Tanonchai and Serot are wanting to study with us. All this is very much in process at the moment, but we see in these 38 churches with over 3400 members a great pool from which, once revived, many workers will come to carry the gospel to the Lahu nation. Reviving them may prove to be a mammoth undertaking.

We need much prayer for us and for them!

On September 30 through October 3, Judah and Ken will be at the TLCC convention in Mae Sot, at the western border of Thailand as it joins Burma, where Ken will be the speaker for six sessions. After this convention, we will have more to share on how the Lord is leading in partnering with them as we pursue the vision. When the doors to Laos, Burma and China open more readily leaders from among these churches will be ready for a more open evangelism. In the meantime,

low key, house to house, person to person witnessing is what can be done in Laos. A viable way to carry the message within the illiterate tribes is by cassette tapes. We have purchased a cassette duplicator to produce tapes for distribution to teach Bible and songs.

George Galanis

Piraia, Greece

October 1997

The spiritual situation these days is very poor in this country, and for this reason we are praying earnestly for an awakening to be able to stand and survive. A group of our Church have started praying for a real revival of the Spirit. Our objective is to fulfill God's demands: that is, to humble ourselves agonizing in prayer, seeking the Lord's face and give up all our shortcomings.

Now I have some spiritual news about ministry. For many years, I was preaching that is in the human way with poor effects. But some ten years ago, the Spirit of God woke me up and I began to pray earnestly to be cleansed from all my shortcomings and now I am looking to the Lord to be filled with all the fullness of God, according to Ephesians 3:19. Now my messages according to the testimony of our brethren are much more effective, thank God.

TROUBLE IN THE TOOL CHEST

The carpenter's tools formed themselves into a church, which seemed the logical action for Servants of the Carpenter.

Trouble developed almost immediately, with accusation, criticism, and counter-charges being hurled at one another. **Mr. Plane**, the preacher, was charged with superficiality and having no depth to his work. **Mr. Screwdriver** was accused of twisting everything he touched. **Deacon Sandpaper** was condemned for roughness and rubbing people the wrong way. And though it was admitted that **Teacher Hammer** could drive his point home, he was disliked for his noisiness and bluntness, while **Sister Ruler** was criticized for her unyielding and uncompromising standards, **Mr. Saw** for his cutting remarks.

In the midst of the trouble the Carpenter came to form his work. In his skilled hands, he took the **Hammer, Plane, Sandpaper, Screwdriver, Ruler, Saw**, and all the rest, put their peculiar characteristics to proper use and made a pulpit from which he could proclaim the gospel to those who needed to hear it. As these tools began to work together to his business and under his direction, accusations, criticisms, and counter-charges, died away. In their place came a love and mutual respect they had never dreamed possible. Furthermore, something constructive was accomplished for the Glory of God.

--from the Mackville bulletin

“YOU IN YOUR SMALL CORNER, AND I IN MINE”

Linda Doll, in *HIS* magazine

Some Christian students in a North Dakota college were facing a week of special activities aimed at proclaiming to the campus that Jesus is Lord. The team was trembling in its collective shoes: “But I can’t knock on a door and just *talk* to someone!”

Their advisor said, “When my 3-year-old wanted to help me wash the car, I thought--There’s a certain risk here. If I gave him the big sponge and said ‘Go to it,’ he would first drop it in the gravel and then scrape it the entire length of my new paint job.

“So I showed him the left front hubcap and said, ‘Can you clean *that*?’ And he scrubbed away happily.

“The next year he was able to do all 4 hubcaps, then I could add the bumpers and headlights, and eventually he could wash the whole car.”

Then Bruce concluded, “If you are a 1-hubcap person at this point, don’t worry about it. Just do a good job on your hubcap. Your heavenly Father knows you, and he will take care of assigning to you just what you can handle. As you grow, your skills will increase.”

Bruce set a lot of people at ease that day. It was okay to just be themselves and to look for things *they* could do to help. They went through the week without those feelings of uselessness, able to do their small part with excitement.

And they saw God do some new things. One girl hesitantly helped 3 scared Christians in a dorm invite the people on every hall to a discussion in the lounge. She couldn’t have led such a discussion then--someone else did that--but because of her it took place when it would otherwise have fizzled.

What the Bible Teaches about...

X. THE CROSS -- CHRIST'S DEATH for US

(Concluded from last month)

Alex V. Wilson

Last month we saw that Calvary is like a classroom where the Lord teaches us important truths. More to the point, it's like a science lab at college, where the professor not only tells but **shows** the lessons to his students. God demonstrated vital truths to us there: An example to imitate. How serious our sins are. How helpless we are to save ourselves. How infinite is His love and how perfect His justice.

Now we move from the school to **the battlefield**. For we not only have lessons to learn, but a **fight that needs to be won**.

B. The Cross was a VICTORY: His Death DEFEATED Our FOES.

1 & 2. At Calvary Christ Conquered SATAN and DEATH. Notice **Col.2:15**. It's so good let's look at it from several translations. "Having disarmed the [Satanic] powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." "On that cross Christ freed himself from the power of the spiritual rulers and authorities; he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession." "Having drawn the sting of all the powers and authorities ranged against us, he exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in his own triumphant victory!" "He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets." (NIV; Good News Bible; J.B.Phillips; The Message.)

Wow--let's celebrate! Our Savior's painful, shameful, desolate execution seemed like total defeat. But appearances deceive. Actually He won the war at Golgotha! He was attacked there not just by Jewish religious leaders and Roman soldiers, but by the armies of Satan. But he disarmed them, freed Himself from their challenge, and made them like a bee whose stinger has been removed! But Paul doesn't limit himself to comparing Calvary to a defensive victory, where Christ merely drove off His attackers. Christ won an offensive battle there. HE was on the attack!

Paul compares His achievement to Roman generals who after decisively defeating their foes are given the honor of having a victory parade through the city of Rome itself. Trumpets blare, confetti fills the air, banners wave, people clap and shout and dance. Allies whom the conqueror freed proclaim his praises. The soldiers march in their finest dress uniforms. Captured treasures are displayed in horsedrawn carriages. Defeated enemies, perhaps naked, are put on public display--forcemarched through the streets as the crowds jeer. The Hero rides the finest white horse. And Caesar himself waits to honor his accomplishments with splendid rewards. This is what Paul said Christ's humiliating death was actually like, seen by the eyes of faith! He mastered Sa-

tan's fiercest forces when He sacrificed Himself in death, even death on a cross. He was not vanquished, but Victor!

Other wonderful verses fit in here. Note **Heb. 2:14-15**, again from various translations. "Since [God's] children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." "...so that through death he might break the power of him who had death at his command, that is, the devil...." "...By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil's hold on death and freed all who cower through life, scared to death of death." (NIV; NEB; The Message.)

At Calvary Christ destroyed the devil? What does that mean? Well, while we're at it let's look at a similar verse, **2 Tim.1:10**. "Christ Jesus... has destroyed death." "Christ Jesus...abolished death." "He has ended the power of death." "He has broken the power of death." (NIV; Jerusalem Bible; Good News Bible; NEB.)

Someone is probably sputtering, "This is getting crazier all the time! Satan's been destroyed? Then how come he trips me up so often? And why does Peter say he's a roaring lion looking for people to devour? And that last passage says death has been destroyed--abolished! Then how come we still have morgues and funerals? Why did my friend die last month?"

Yes, Satan and death are very much with us still. We cannot evade their presence. So let's consider what the above Scriptures are saying. The Greek verb used in Heb.2:14 and 2 Tim.1:10 can mean "to destroy, abolish, or bring to nought"--but not in the sense of annihilation. It doesn't mean that its objects don't exist any more. This verb's idea may be grasped by looking at its other possible meanings: "to defeat, deprive of power, break the power of, strip of rank."

Consider SATAN. Yes, he is alive and dangerous. But he has been defeated. The status of Christ's army--of us Christian soldiers--in this present era has been aptly compared to that of the **Allied troops in World War II between D-Day and V-Day.** D-Day was when they invaded Normandy from England, and began their drive toward Berlin. V-Day was when Germany surrendered and victory over Naziism was completed.

For us believers, Christ's death and resurrection were D-Day, and His 2nd Coming will be V-Day. D-Day was the decisive battle, V-Day the winning of the war. **The first without the second was incomplete; the second without the first was impossible. Between those two days there were numerous battles and grievous casualties. But victory was assured.** Think about how this analogy applies to our war against the spiritual Hitler who opposes us. He hates us and fights furiously against us. We suffer casualties too! But our foe

is already defeated. Christ's death guaranteed that. "Lo, his doom is sure," sang Luther. Let's say "Amen" to that. Let's also pray, "Come, Lord Jesus! You've won the decisive battle. Now come and win the final battle. Bring the war to a close."

Consider DEATH. In the N.T., after Christ died we do not read any more that disciples "died." Rather, they "fell asleep." Of course they left this life, and those who remained missed them terribly. But the departed believer herself or himself went "to be with Christ, which is better by far." For to be "away from the body" means to be "at home with the Lord" (Phil.1:23; 2 Cor.5:8). From that perspective we can say to our defeated enemy, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor.15:55). The Risen Lord has the final word; He holds the keys of death (Rev.1). Death is like a general who rebels against his Commander-in-Chief. Due to his rebellion he is deprived of his command, stripped even of his rank, and doomed to die. Yes, and before too long "Death itself shall die"--as we love to sing.

What a difference it makes to have this assurance. Back around 125 A. D., a written description of Christians said, "If any righteous person of their number passes away from the world, they rejoice and thank God, and escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby." And Catherine Marshall, writing about Christ's death, declares: "The cross stands as the final symbol that no evil exists that God cannot turn into a blessing."

3. At Calvary Christ defeated SIN. In Rom. 6:6 Paul boldly declared, "The man we once were has been crucified with Christ, for the destruction of the sinful self, so that we may no longer be the slaves of sin." (NEB.) Other translations say, "Our old being has been put to death with Christ on his cross, in order that the power of the sinful self might be destroyed" (GNB) or "rendered powerless" (NIV). There's that word "destroyed" again. It's the same word we looked at above. But this time it refers to sin. True, we know that even the best Christians are not sinless. Experience proves that point. So does 1 John 1:8, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves...." Yet three verses later John writes, "I write this to you so that you will not sin." And he does not say, "...that you will not sin very much!" He holds up regular, consistent victory over sin as a possibility. That--nothing else, nothing less--is our goal and responsibility.

And it's possible, because Christ died and we are identified with Him in that death. "Let us never forget that our old selves died with him on the cross that the tyranny of sin over us might be broken" (Rom.6:6, J. B. Phillips). Six verses later we read, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires." The Puritan writer, Matthew Henry, made some insightful comments on that verse: "Though sin may remain as an outlaw, yet let it not reign as a king. Let it not make laws, so that we should obey it. Though we may be sometimes overtaken and overcome by it, yet let us never be obedient to it." The death of Jesus provides us victory over sin.

C. The Cross was A PENALTY PAID: Christ's Death Enables God Justly to Justify the Unjust.

Now we leave the battlefield and go to the courtroom. A trial is in session, and we are the defendants! For we are not only ignorant, needing instruction. And we are not only weak and defeated, needing deliverance and victory. We, along with all humanity, are also **guilty sinners, rebels needing pardon.**

And here is God the Judge's problem. How can He justify disobedient sinners like us? To do so would be to pervert His holy character. In the O.T. He said, "...I will not acquit the guilty." And, "The Lord...does not leave the guilty unpunished." And He forbade Israel's judges to do such a thing. "Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent--the Lord detests them both." (Ex.23:7 & 34:7; Prov.17:15.) Yet Paul almost brazenly writes, "To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Rom.4:5). **God who justifies the wicked!**

How can it happen? We saw the answer last month as we studied God's justice. Remember the guilty businessman and his friend the just judge? The solution is an **innocent substitute willing by his own expense or suffering to pay the penalty in place of the guilty.** The prophet said WE are the ones who've gone astray, turning to our own way; but the Lord laid our guilt on HIM. And Paul put it this way, "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse....Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (Isa.53:5-6; Gal.3:10,13; 2 Cor.5:21.)

John Stott explains: As a Man, Jesus could represent men as a substitute sinbearer. As a Perfect Man, He had no sins of His own which deserved punishment. And as the Son of God, the Creator of all mankind, His life had an infinite and eternal value, and could be given in exchange not just for one lost person but for the entire human race. **This is who our Savior is; and this is what our Savior did. For the world. For us. For me!**

And so we conclude: Look at Calvary, and **learn urgent Lessons.** Look at Calvary, and **rejoice in our Victorious Lord.** Look at Calvary, and **trust in the Savior who paid our penalty and offers Peace with God.**

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

Jennings, La. Church of Christ

80th Homecoming--November 2 the Jennings church celebrated 80 years. All of those interested in sharing memories were invited to submit a paragraph or two to be read at the homecoming service.

Bible and Archaeology meeting with Bro. Harvey Porter. Lesson topics were: "Herod's Building Projects," "I am Set for the Defense of the Gospel," "Sumer and the Land of Abraham," "Egypt and the Exodus," "Joshua and the Land of Canaan," "Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities."

Gallatin Church of Christ

What is expected of those who entrust themselves to a local congregation of New Testament believers? How can a person evaluate how well they are fulfilling God-given responsibilities that belong to every member of the Lord's church?

I suggest that to become and be the kind of member every growing church needs will involve the following:

1. Understanding of God's Grace.
2. Growing through prayer, study and worship.
3. Meeting with other Christians in small Groups.
4. Learning about individual Giftedness.
5. Practicing good stewardship by Giving.

Is that a lot to expect of someone? Yes, but it is a small compared to what God has done, is doing and will do for His faithful followers. As the influence of these five G's are evident in our lives we will be the great people God desires. --Julius Hovan

Tell City Church of Christ

Paul Kitzmiller was with us Sunday, Nov. 30th, at 7:00 p.m. to share about his recent trip to Russia and plans to return with his wife, Virginia, to teach the English language using the Holy Bible.

Why A Revival

We have not had a revival at our church for several years. In fact, some churches have said that revivals as we used to know them are no longer effective. However, revivals give us an opportunity to hear a different voice--someone new who can witness to us and teach us more about the Word of God. They also give us a special opportunity to invite neighbors and friends to consider our Lord and our church. They provide an opportunity for us to spend extra time in prayer related to our purpose as a church and to our personal spiritual life. They provide an opportunity for us to spend a little extra time of commitment to the Lord and to the Lord's work. Certainly we could add to this list but let's think about it and make this revival have real meaning to us even before it happens. Re-

vivals use to last two weeks or more. Now they are much shorter so we need to become intensely active from the very first day of the meeting. — Paul Clark in Mt. View Booster, Johnson City, Tenn.

Church In Israel Grows Despite Violence

After a trying period of losing its fourth-floor meeting place, the Tel-Aviv church has a new rented hall that is larger and on the ground floor, said evangelist Ely Levi.

Levi, nephew of well-known missionary to Jerusalem, Joe Shulam, reported that the Tel-Aviv church is growing, with a woman in her late forties baptized recently in the River Jordan. When all the members and their families are present, there is not enough seating, Levi said.

The church in Israel is paying the taxes, telephone and utilities at the new location, a step toward financing its own program, he said. He mentioned the need for a van to use in picking up Christians for services.

While the world's attention was focused on the death of Princess Diana, three bombs went off in Jerusalem, killing five people and wounding 150 others. Twelve Israeli soldiers were killed in a separate incident.

"That week was the most demoralizing since we have been in Israel," Levi commented. "On the news they are warning us to be alert because they expect more bombs. It is getting to the point where, when we leave home in the morning, we do not know if

we will be back at the end of the day."

"I don't see how people cope with this grim reality without God," he answered.

Both Levi and Shulam are involved with the work in Bulgaria, as well as in Israel. Levi reported that, due to the economic crisis in Bulgaria, interest in the spiritual things has actually increased. —GS. From an E-mail report by Levi and Shulam.

For more information contact Newland Street church, 13852 Newland Street, Garden Grove, CA 92844. Phone (714) 893-5636.

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—From *The Christian Chronicle*, 11/97

Exodus International

Homosexuality has become "the moral issue of the '90s." Increasingly, Bible-believing pastors and church leaders like you are confronted with the multifaceted issues surrounding homosexuality, not only in society, but within your own congregation. How do you respond? What are the answers? That's why I'm writing you today. . .

Exodus International is the largest ex-gay organization in the world. Our North American network comprises more than 80 separate regional Christian-based ministries, providing real help to men and women seeking freedom out of homosexuality. For help in counseling or information re: materials, contact Exodus International North America, P.O. Box 77652, Seattle, Washington USA 98177. Telephone: (206) 784-7799.

CHRISTMAS REQUEST

Helene S. Royster

My heart desires most, this Christmastide,
Not just the usual joys, but gratitude.
In all the world, more than all else beside,
I long for this great Grace--this attitude:

I don't deserve the blessings that are mine!

How can I earn or personally claim,
When all things come from Thee and all is Thine,
The gifts I have received in Thy dear name?

They are not mine but merely mine to use.
This God designed when He bestowed His Gift.
If this is not my soul's response I'll lose
Awareness of just what it cost to lift
My soul from Hell where I would surely be
Had not the love of God reached down to me.

"How great the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" I John 3:1