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FEBRUARY, 2000

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THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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In This Issue

Theme: God Loves The World

Editorial -- Dennis L. Allen	34
Report From China -- Betty Allen	35
A Second Report From China -- Dennis Allen	38
One Crisis After Another Hits Mozambique	40
Voices From The Fields	42
Proclaiming Christ In Israel Despite Persecution -- Joseph Shulam	54
Great Songs Of The Church #2 -- Alex Wilson	55
Joyful Unity Meeting Among Louisville Area Churches Of Christ --Alex Wilson	57
Sarah Fox Has Gone Home	58
Mary Acton Rehom	58
Armageddon: Fact or Fiction? -- Darren Johnson	59
News and Notes -- Bennie Hill	63

ONE COUNTRY, ONE BILLION PEOPLE

Dennis Allen

As we were flying over North China on the way home I was impressed with the number of villages I could see--literally hundreds from the plane window at one time. At first I couldn't believe my eyes. Could each one of those darker areas be a village? In flat farming areas it seemed that the villages, even though the houses were very close together, made up about one fifth of the land area. I thought at the time, "how many of these villages have any kind of Christian witness?" In general, I'm sure there are many that haven't, yet on returning home I read a report that in the three northern provinces of East China the growth of the church is so significant that there are Christian meeting points in practically every village. I think it is also true that there is a much greater number of believers in the rural area than in the cities. Some villages have become "Christian villages" with believers making up 50% to 80% of the population.

This rapid growth is causing some alarm among senior officials in the government. They fear that what happened in Eastern Europe might be repeated in China. The result has been increased pressure for house churches to register with the government. Why not cooperate with the government that far and register? The majority have refused in order to maintain their freedom to choose their spiritual leaders, to evangelize, and to teach and conduct their affairs according to the teaching of the Scriptures rather than by the regulations of the State.

For example, Chinese law prohibits evangelizing children under 18. All printing and distribution of religious literature must first receive permission from the Religious Bureau. It is forbidden to go to any unregistered or un-permitted premise to hold meetings. House churches do all of these things. Also many house churches encourage their members to buy radios so they can receive good Bible teaching such as is sent out by Far East Broadcasting Company. If they register they are in effect placed under the control of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the Religious Affairs Bureau. While some have registered under pressure, the majority have refused saying that Christ is the head of the church and they cannot relinquish His authority to the state. So the pressure continues. Christians are arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and fined. Bibles, tapes, Christian books, even those officially printed in China, are confiscated. Meeting places are closed or destroyed, and yet the church continues to grow.

How can we help? We can pray; we can give. Bibles and Christian books are still greatly needed. Some can go. Korean and overseas Chinese can fit in unobtrusively and conduct leadership training classes

and "share their bread" with those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious" but still need to "grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus." Pray that many will be raised up to carry on this ministry.

REPORT FROM CHINA

Betty Allen

Home again, home again, jiggedy jog! A lot of water passed under the bridge between June 15th and December 20th, 1999. Water has a way of passing under the bridge whether a person is safely at home, or whether he is, for example, in Harbin, China.

What was it all about? Well, we saw a tiny ad in a religious publication for English teachers to go to Harbin. We inquired about it, and in due time had an interview with a Korean brother who is establishing a computer/English school in the large city (pop. 5 million) of Harbin. He was perplexed as to how we knew of the need: "We don't advertise," he said. We were drawn to the simplicity of his approach; he required no denominational credentials, no paper work, no physical exam, no red tape. It seemed straightforward: you want to serve the Lord by teaching English, and we need someone to teach English. If the Lord is sending you, then come on. We'll work together. So we "came on."

It was largely a pioneer effort. The building had been prepared; the curriculum had not yet been decided upon; a student body had not yet been recruited; an e-mail system had not yet been inaugurated. Teachers' quarters were arranged in a nearby hotel. It took 20 minutes to walk to school, or 10-15 to ride the bus. Meals could be taken in the dining room; a large department store was three blocks away and fruit vendors were plentiful. We had our own bathroom, with hot water morning and evening. Laundry was done by hand.

Mandarin is quite different from Cantonese, and no experienced interpreter was at hand.... Dennis had a little phrase book which he carried in his fanny pack and referred to often. We became quite adept at paying fares, finding places (hard to find a map with anything in English) and buying what we needed. Discussing plans for the school, or problems, however, was beyond the level of the phrase book. So we felt in the dark in many ways.

The folk there wanted to start classes with a full staff--start off with a bang! and establish a reputation as "the best English language institute in Harbin". But they needed five teachers and we were only two. So public recruitment of students was delayed at first. Day classes were begun with a handful of young people from surrounding areas, brought into town and housed in a rented apartment near the

school. Later, an evening class was begun--then another--then another--and at last, a Saturday afternoon class of younger children. The age range was from post-grad down to 4 years old! The diversity was challenging.

One of the first things we were asked to do was to write "a proposal" to the government for permission to operate the school. We had little idea what might be expected but fortunately we had an excellent book which covered that subject. The proposal was accepted without alteration. Score one!!!

Locating the book stores and exploring them for curriculum materials was next on the agenda. (On the sidewalk in front of one store there were several lepers. . . you had almost forgotten there were still lepers in the world. . . a graphic reminder of how sin really looks to God). English materials are on the fourth floor--up the escalator. When paying for purchases, you take them to one desk, stand in line, get a slip of paper and leave your books there, then go across the corner to another desk, stand in line, pay your money and get the receipt, then go back and present your receipt and collect your books. Cumbersome - but it employs several more clerks who need to be employed. Then, out you go!... no more browsing after your purchase is made. The bookstores are always crowded.

Getting on-line for Email was of major importance for us. The school was equipped with a number of computers, and a server. What we lacked was a computer expert who knew how to make it all work. The system was very slow, so that often by the time you got into it, it was time for class. Many of the letters I wrote just didn't go anywhere... By the time we left, the staff of the school had been able to learn a pig-path into the computer world - and they will learn more bit by bit. They still need a PC expert on the staff.

Our original students were a delight to work with. They were believers--wanted to learn English so they could take the gospel to Africa. (I asked them if English is spoken in Africa, and they had not thought of that.) Many people in this city have studied Russian, or Japanese, or English! for six or more years. They learn to read it and write it but not to speak it. They learn phonics and grammar. One of our adult students had taught himself a lot of English; he could spell a word, and define it, and tell you what part of speech it was; alas, his pronunciation and intonation were such that he could not be understood. One lady had been teaching English for some years, but had missed out on intonation. It was easier working with these than with those who wanted grammatical or phonics explanations.

We ate many meals in a cubby hole restaurant near the school where the menu was indecipherable because written in Chinese characters. We borrowed a menu and got friends to translate it into English for us. One item on the menu was "silkworms"! Yes, we tried them.

Some other items on the menu were graphic! (Well, we eat tripe and haggis in the west!)

Our hotel was on the edge of the campus of a great university (Harbin has fourteen!). There were--besides dormitories--two Olympic-sized swimming pools, ping-pong rooms, computer rooms, book stores, athletic facilities, dining rooms and a large library on the campus. The whole campus is being face-lifted, spruced up because it is designated as one of several "world-class" universities in China. Students here are privileged; yet we began to sense a kind of quiet desperation among some of them. They compete to come first--but when they get there, there is an emptiness. This may be true in our own institutions of higher learning. We were told that in one month there were three suicides. If there isn't God, there is no meaning to life. We were privileged to meet a believing group, and to be in their home, and to share some precious truths with them.

There are a number of American students living on campus--enough (maybe 30?) that they have a dorm of their own. They come here to learn Mandarin--maybe for business enterprises; one explained to us that he is learning the language so that he can translate "for the Buddhist community in Ohio!" I knew about a Buddhist community in Tennessee, but didn't know there was one in Ohio.

Russian, Japanese and Korean influence is obvious here. Many have roots in Korea but now are Chinese citizens and are recognized as an ethnic minority. Official policies are often more lenient with minorities--for example, the "one-child" policy; but this may be changing.

It was encouraging to us to see the zeal and faith and vision of the Koreans. Accepting Christ for them seems to be truly life-changing. Many of them become evangelists or full time itinerant Bible teachers. One young lady, who was trained as a ballet dancer, changed course and is now an interpreter (Korean/Chinese) very much in demand. We met a sister who had spent a month in jail (offense: hosting an unauthorized meeting of more than six persons in her home). She said she had opportunity to witness to a young man who was scheduled for execution the following day... The TV news reported five young men executed for drug involvement. There seem to be no drawn out appeals... One religious sect was denounced endlessly on the news. The leader incurred disfavor, it seems, by allowing a public demonstration that threatened security. He attracted multitudes by giving them reason to hope; but, as far as I could understand, it was a false hope.

Scripture says "The field is the world". We feel privileged to have seen this corner of it and sowed some seed there.... So many people! God must have loved the Chinese--He made so many of them! Thanks to those who prayed for us.

A Second Report From China

Dennis Allen

If you were imprisoned for a month in a cell where rats ran over your body during the night, where the food was bad and there were no creature comforts, would you feel sorry for yourself? Would I? The Christian lady who told us of her prison experience was not asking for sympathy. On the contrary she had a radiant face. It was a joy to be with her even though our communication was limited. She is still aggressively propagating the Good News just as before.

The underground church in North China is aggressive, prayerful and growing, but has many needs. We went to China for the purpose of serving the house churches there as the Lord opened doors. The doors opened were not all as we had anticipated, but He is the Lord of the harvest, and we are very glad that we went. The Lord proved Himself faithful so many times in answer to prayer. He also kept us in health while we were there. We trust Him for the fruit.

One of the most difficult aspects of our time there was the lack of fellowship, especially on the Lord's day. We knew it could be dangerous for the house churches for us to attend their meetings; so we made it clear from the beginning that we did not want to do anything to imperil their situation. We had hoped to find other Christians who were teaching in Harbin with whom we could have fellowship, but that did not happen until about six weeks before we were to leave. The way it happened caused them and us to feel it was definitely the Lord's doing. That short time of fellowship was great. They were for the most part ELI teachers. We found them to be dedicated servants of the Lord and were encouraged by how the Lord is using them.

Most of our efforts were poured into teaching ten young people. They were very responsive. The original purpose of the school we were to help get started was to generate income to help the house churches. The facilities they had prepared were great. It was in a new building with new equipment. They will need at least five teachers to use the facilities to the full. During the latter part of our time there they enrolled around 35 students whom we taught in three separate classes. To accommodate their schedules we taught three nights a week and on Saturday.

We were able to meet several times with house church leaders. Many of them have 100 to 200 churches under their oversight. Some of them go to other provinces so they know of 1000's of house churches. Of course there is great need for leadership training, Bible teaching, Bibles and literature. The church is growing rapidly. We were working largely with Korean Christians. Many of them have been born in China. Over the centuries many Koreans have migrated

to China and now there are at least two million Koreans living in North China. They speak Chinese, were educated in Chinese schools, and China is their home. According to official government statistics there are at least 88,000 Korean Christians in North China. If the unregistered believers in the underground church are added, the figure must be much higher. Under North Korean law, Korean citizens are not allowed to migrate to other countries. Those caught doing so will either be executed or sent to prison camp for life. Yet because of starvation conditions in North Korea many are attempting to flee across the border. They feel they have nothing to lose, for if they remain they will starve. Some experts believe there are as many as 50,000 North Korean refugees hiding out in Northeast China. If caught the Chinese authorities will return them to North Korea. Many of the Korean Chinese Christians are helping these refugees. There are also Korean Chinese who are going into North Korea at great risk to share the Gospel. So you can see that there is much going on and much that calls for prayer by all of God's people. Korean teachers are coming to North China from Korea and from the States to teach the Bible and to train leaders. We talked to several of them. One lady mentioned that she often taught for ten hours a day but the Lord wonderfully sustained her.

We were invited in November to attend one special Sunday service at a house church. The building was very discreetly located so as not to attract attention, but was adequate for the need. There were about 200 believers seated on the floor on cushions. We also had cushions. After a couple of hours we were longing to change position. After lunch the service continued. Two more hours brought us to the point of having to make a change. They were so eager for us to stay that I told them our problem, so they found two chairs which were placed in the back of the room. The service went on unabated. We finally left at 5:15 and it was still going strong.

We also got acquainted with another house church which is geared to reaching university students. They just met in an apartment. We were invited to a Sunday evening meeting with them. I was invited to speak at this service and a young Chinese brother who has very good English interpreted. I could tell he did an excellent job. Afterward there was a question and answer period. We enjoyed this group very much.

While in China we lived in a hotel room and were very well treated by the staff. When we ate at the hotel, which was once or twice every day, we held hands and asked the blessing just as we do at home. No one ever questioned us. Our Bibles were left in plain sight in our room. In general the atmosphere was much more relaxed than we experienced during the year we spent in Tinjin.

Living in a hotel connected with the largest university in Harbin, about 25,000 students, we had opportunity to observe many things. Most people are well dressed and there is plenty of food. The economy seems to be improving. Through our contacts with students and teachers we sense there is a lot of dissatisfaction among both because of corruption and people buying favors. There is also a spiritual emptiness.

It is certainly not easy to govern 1.2 billion people and deal with their basic needs. In many respects the authorities are doing well. It is sad that they refer to themselves as an atheistic government and have blind faith in what man can accomplish through science and technology. The leaders are afraid of Christianity. They talk freely on TV about the Buddhists and Muslims but you hear nothing about the church or Christians. They are still persecuting Christians and fail to recognize the real blessing they are to the country. We need to pray for China's leaders.

During the time we were in China the government through the media began an all-out campaign against the Falun Gong cult. It had grown to at least five million members. When they began to have large demonstrations in Beijing the government became alarmed. The leader has fled to the States. It probably is a cult, but the fierceness of the propaganda campaign to stamp it out was rather disturbing. We need to pray that the house church movement will not be similarly branded and targeted. The authorities are very uneasy about anything they cannot control. Beijing has little tolerance for those who say the Kingdom of Heaven has precedence over the rulers of the Middle Kingdom, but praise the Lord it does!

One Crisis After Another Hits Mozambique

In recent months we have received many email letters from Martin and Susan Brooks regarding difficulties in Mozambique. First, a co-worker was murdered by robbers; then the tragic flooding of their region began, followed by the more publicized flood crisis a bit north of them (as well as in neighboring countries). Since the flood crisis has been repeatedly shown on tv news (rightly so), we have decided to run only Martin's latest letter about that situation, but then several earlier letters about the death of their co-worker Cecil Byrd.

Anyone wishing to send donations to the Brookses, whether for welfare for flood victims or for repairs or buildings needed at their school, may send them via Larry Graham, 214 Kenli Court, Louisville KY 40214. Checks should be made out to Good News for Africa, then specify your desire regarding its use. If you have questions, you may email Lgraham3@aol.com

Flood Update Mozambique - Sunday, February 27

The survey planes are spotting people in the tops of trees. The water is still rising. There are not enough pilots or planes and everyone is getting very tired. These pilots are flying from 6am to 6pm and landing in some very difficult places. Please pray for their safety.

Some donations are starting to come in. Thank you to each one who has given sacrificially to help the people of Mozambique. Currently we need a way to distribute the goods and wisdom to know what are the best items to buy.

We have found one contact to help purchase food. This contact knows of one camp of 20,000 refugees. Another government official has offered to help us clear customs with the food. Another missionary is working on tracts to insert into the packages to insure the Lord gets the credit.

The UN and the governments of the world are responding in force. Mozambique has been somewhat of a success story as far as developing African nations go. The western world is very interested in helping the country get back on track. Our efforts are only a small part of what is happening, but the Lord can take this "seed" and do wonderful things if we allow Him to lead.

What we really need at this point is a way to transport the items to those who need it most. I have one phone number of a man who is coordinating the airlifts. I'm sure he is very busy. Please pray we can find favor with him or any other source the Lord brings our way.

Sunday, January 23

Dear Christian family,

This is an emotional and troubling letter to write. The missionaries of Good News for Africa need your prayers. On Thursday evening four armed robbers came to the training center where we live. Our friend and co-worker Cecil Byrd, attempting to protect his family, was shot and killed. Please pray for Betty, his wife, and the children Daniel and Debra who were in the house at the time. There are also three children in the States--Ben, Miriam, and Kathy. Please pray for them as well as they work through this with their spouses and children.

We had a guard at the front of the property, but he was unarmed. His primary role is to greet visitors and keep the local people from freely wandering onto the property. He was not equipped for this. He was prepared to give his life for our families. The robbers shot him four times. Currently, he is slightly improved and expected to live. We praise the Lord for this.

My family was several meters away in our house. Unfortunately, I was two days drive away at a training conference. Susan and a friend Jendy Doxey heard the shots and the turmoil. They were able to tele-

phone other missionaries for help. I praise the Lord for a loving missionary community that has rallied to our aid.

Our good friend, Mark Harper with Youth for Christ, was the first person Susan thought to call. He and his wife Les notified the authorities and other missionaries in the area. He drove through the darkness into the unknown and was the first to get there to begin helping our families. Other missionaries were following close behind. Some had gone to pick up the police because they don't have cars or telephones after 5 pm. Others contacted the US Embassy to help make arrangements for the Byrd family. Other missionaries took the guard to the hospital. Others ministered to us and gave my family and co-workers secure places to spend the night. The Lord's servants are such a blessing in times of crisis.

The community loved Cecil and are grieving with us. They have asked that we organize a memorial service so they can share their hearts. They wanted us to know this was the act of a very few. Generally we feel very secure and welcomed in the community.

The primary purpose of this note is to let you know my immediate family is OK physically but emotionally shaken. We are looking to the Lord to help us process this tragedy, and we greatly need your prayers. Please pray for wisdom as we decide how to respond.

To God be the glory as He works all things out for the best.

Monday, January 24

It has been such a comfort to know so many people are praying for us. It's been a good day. God has blessed us in many wonderful ways. Betty, Daniel, and Deborah Byrd left Maputo about 3 p.m. The representative from the Embassy was at the airport making the way smooth. I was impressed with the amount of influence they have when needed. He has been very impressed at the support structure of the missionary community here in Maputo. Indeed it has been wonderful. So many turned out at the airport to bid them farewell. I hope they receive a hero's welcome in Louisville.

One of our missionaries, Manuel de Oliveira was able to speak with the guard who was shot four times. He is doing very well though his spirits are down. Also today the police arrested three men and recovered an AK-47. I was initially suspect that the police had arrested the first three suspicious guys they came across; however, Daniel Byrd went to the police station and was able to positively identify two of the men. Daniel even remembered some corrosion on the gun and is confident it is the same one used in the attack. The third had apparently been with the others when the arrest occurred, but Daniel could not identify him. He may have been a lookout person that had not entered the houses. The leader of the gang, who did most of the violence, has not been captured. He did have a prior arrest record and Daniel was able to identify him from photos. Since the police now know who it was, we are hopeful that they will capture him as well. Betty's testimony of the peace "that passes understanding" has been inspiring and comforting to us all. It has taken me a few days to sort this out and, in

reality, I'm still processing. Betty is confident of the Lord's timing and very grateful for His protection of her family and the rest of the families on the campus.

Daniel is making tentative plans to prepare for the ministry and return to Mozambique in five years. As he left he encouraged me not to let fear interrupt the ministry. He told me he thought it was all right now. He has been very strong through all of this. Please keep him in your prayers as he finds time to reflect.

We contacted a security company today. For \$1200 a month, they will provide two, armed security guards for 24 hours a day. We have agreed to this for one month as we sort out our options. They will patrol around the houses, leaving the college area of our campus to the unarmed men we have always had. Tomorrow the security company is to make further proposals as to how to secure the campus and protect our families. I have mixed feelings about these precautions. I want to be open and available for ministry, but I desperately want my family to be safe. Up until now Mozambique has been a relatively safe place. Thursday night, the rules changed. That's not to say it is all bad now, but I think precautions are in order....

The community of Mozambicans around us is being very supportive of us, security measures are being arranged to help us continue the ministry with more peace of mind, and we have arranged a memorial service on Saturday morning for the community here.

Please pray this will open doors for us to demonstrate the love of Christ in powerful and effective ways. Please continue to pray for the decisions that need to be made concerning the ministry here. Cecil's work in the college and Mozambique needs to be continued, who will carry the torch? One minister said he was praying ten missionaries would be raised up to take the place of this one who has been taken home. Please pray God would frustrate the plans of Enemy to discourage and bring fear into our hearts. I am confident the Church will greet Betty, Daniel, and Deborah with a wonderful outpouring of love. To God be the Glory as the Kingdom marches forward and the captives are set free.

From the Brookses' co-missionary, Manuel de Oliveira:

We are feeling much safer. Tim and I are living at the Compound and the Brooks family will probably be back this week. Our lighting system is much better, we have cut the plants that we had around our yards and that made it impossible for us to see inside each other's yards, and we have two armed guards watching the compound around the clock.

Tomorrow, God willing, a alarm sound system will be installed in each house so that if there is any threat an alarm will be set off at the touch of a button. We praise God for being able to do this so quickly to give us and our families a feeling of safety.

The response of the local community and the religious community has been wonderful: daily we have people from many places come and

want to know what they can do to help. This has brought about a sense of closeness among us, and resolve to continue with the work. It also brought home to me with new force the uselessness of material things; they are just a lot of stuff to be left behind. The only thing that really matters is the heart of the person--how well each one of us is prepared to meet the One who said that He would come as a thief.

We have felt the power of your prayers as God bestows upon us the blessing of peace and works out all things for our safety and installs in us a spirit of being willing to "die daily" in obedience to His call. We need you to continue to cover us in your daily prayers, pray that we may faithfully preach the Word and focus on righteousness and love the community with the love of Christ. The students will be getting here on Feb.10 and the College will start on the 14th; pray that they will get here safely and that we will be teachers filled with truth, urgency and zeal. [Note: The floods postponed school.]

Sunday, January 30 - From Martin

Dear Christian family, I hope you have a wonderful day in the Lord. He has seen us through a difficult week. He is Faithful and worthy of our thanksgiving and praise. We spent our first night in the house since the attack. The electricity was very low, so the lights were dim. It was kind of like eating by candlelight. Other than that, the night went smoothly. We thank the Lord for walking with us through the valleys. He leads us to green pastures and beside still water. The memorial service yesterday went very well. The young men that lead the church that meets at the center led the service. Our co-worker, Manuel de Oliveira spoke, as did Job Chambal, the director of religious affairs for the country. Several local people stood and told how Cecil had impacted their lives. The Portuguese farmer, who had been shot by the same group of bandits, stood and told how Cecil had visited him after he had been shot. Local church leaders that have benefited from the teachings of Cecil stood to express appreciation for what Cecil had done for them and to ask us to continue the work. It was an encouraging day.

I want to thank you who prayed us through this difficult time. I have received more than 150 notes of encouragement and sympathy. I want to thank the local missionary community who rushed to our assistance. They have stood by us as we sorted out our thoughts and feelings. I want to thank the Byrd family for their consistent faith and sacrifices they have made for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ. And I want to thank the Lord who is always faithful to work things together for the good of those who love Him.

VOICES From The FIELDS

James & Karen Ashley
December, 1999

Honiara, Solomon Islands

From the busy hustle and bustle of American life streaming at light speed toward a new millennium, a family has stepped aside in a determined attempt to turn back the clock and return to yesteryear. While shopping malls decorate for the last Christmas of the 1990s and international jetsetters consult the world-wide web for the globe's best "Year 2000" parties from Rio to Rome, this family is attempting to let the tide of time pass them by. They have already decided that the world's best place to spend "millennium's eve" will not be Times Square, but in a far corner of the globe forgotten by time and ignored by the rest of the world. That place is the small village of Sa'a on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands.

What has led us to this decision? Since starting furlough in 1996, we have been swept up in the fast pace of American life. School functions dominated our calendar as the children studied and participated in sports, band, choir, and drama. Karen and I taught linguistics at our mission's training school, and then, at the request of the Board of Directors, I took a position in the administration of the global organization that Wycliffe has become. Working as the Assistant to the Executive Director challenged and stretched me, while giving me many opportunities to make a difference in the future of Bible translation around the world. The experience has been good for the whole family as we have all learned a great deal, while at the same time very much enjoying the fringe benefits of all-night Walmarts, paved roads, air-conditioning, and close contact with uncles, aunts, and grandparents. Through the whole time, however, our hearts have hung on to the dream of eventually returning to the Solomon Islands and finishing the Sa'a Scriptures.

That time has now come. Someone else is now capably assisting the Executive Director, and we are now on our way back to the Solomon Islands to resume the Sa'a translation work. Arriving on Guadalcanal the last day of November, we have just three short weeks to re-adjust to life in the tropics and buy several months' worth of supplies before heading over for Christmas in our village home on the island of Malaita.

There we will be stepping back into a time before microwaves and before air-conditioning. We will be returning to our village home, and to our old schools, and to our old work. Everything will be the same - same house, same home-school, and same translation work with the

same co-workers. It should be easy, right? Not! Nothing will be the same, for three years have passed. Please pray for all the adjustments that will need to be made.

First, our eldest son, Kent, will remain in America at Bryan College where he is now a freshman, majoring in Music Communications. If you may be interested in writing to encourage him, his address is Box 7053, Bryan College, Dayton, TN 37321.

Secondly, the situation in the Solomon Islands has changed. There has been an armed militant uprising on the island of Guadalcanal where the capital, Honiara, is located. Many Guadalcanal people have become upset that so many people from other islands have come, taking jobs, starting businesses, and moving onto their lands. The militants have instituted a campaign of what amounts to ethnic cleansing--going door to door in many Guadalcanal villages, they have forced people from other islands off their land and back to their home islands. Though the economy has been badly hurt, things have calmed down somewhat since mid-year, and foreigners do not seem to have been much at risk. The main target of this campaign has been the people of Malaita - among them the Sa'a people for whom we are translating God's Word. Pray that the people will not have a spirit of bitterness or a desire to take revenge.

Pray, too, for the translation team, as all have struggled in their own ways from the pressure of trying to continue separately these past three years. All are keen to resume the work, but team dynamics will need to be worked through again as we come back together. Karen will return to her role as home-school teacher with Philip in the tenth grade and Susan in the sixth.

All of us are eager to be back in time, back in the Solomons this Christmas. As we go, we want to express again our grateful appreciation for each of you, our team members who are making it possible for the Sa'a people to also have God's Word in their own language.

Tom & Sharon Schreiner **Tschreiner@bigfoot.com**
9209 Wildwood Lane, Louisville, Ky.

Proverbs says, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." We have found this to be quite true for us these last few months.

When we last wrote in July, we were slated for a position in Madagascar working with street children, but word was received shortly after this from the team leader on Madagascar, that due to unclear goals on the part of the National organization that operated the

ministry, AIM would not be able to participate in it. He said he was investigating other possibilities on the island for us and we did not hear any more until late October when we were offered a teaching position working with rural pastors.

Due to a misunderstanding that developed after we had talked with several mission agencies last year, we had gained an erroneous impression that my specialty of Pediatrics was not in great demand on the mission field. We were all set to accept the position on Madagascar when God stepped in and shook things up. At a medical missions conference, held at Southeast Christian Church here in Louisville last month, we had the opportunity to speak to several missionary physicians of many years experience who impressed upon us the need for physicians and, in particular, pediatricians on the mission field. We learned that there were many hospitals very much in need of a Pediatrician. Indeed some mission hospitals in Africa are without any physician at all. This was the first real chance we have had to discuss our situation with veteran medical missionaries, and their advice was greatly appreciated and an answer to our prayer for just such counsel. We were also advised that, as a pediatrician, my skills would be best utilized in a hospital setting.

Paul's prayer in Philippians was for our love to abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best. Our desire is to truly discern what is God's best for us. We have asked AIM to look for a medical position in which my skills and abilities would be used to their fullest. We also hope to be involved in a work that is directed towards unreached people groups. They have started inquiries to their various fields of operation and are waiting for the team leaders to respond.

We really covet your prayers at this time. We are burdened for fields that are white unto the harvest, but are unable to proceed until we have an assignment. Please pray that God would move on our behalf and make clear where he would have us.

While we don't have a definite assignment yet, those funds which have been contributed thus far are accumulating in our outgoing expense account. This will cover transportation and shipping costs, Tropical Medicine School, and language school as well as various other items. We are thankful for those of you who have made commitments to support us.

Nakahara News Nakahara Mission Fund January 2000

One hardly knows how to begin this letter. When we last wrote you, our sister in the Lord, Teruko Nakahara, had made the decision to

return to Japan to assist in the church work with her family. When she left the states in December, we knew that she was feeling some physical discomfort. She decided that she would have a thorough examination at her earliest opportunity when she returned. All the tests were completed during her first week back, and it was determined that she had colon cancer. Surgery was performed immediately. This was successfully done and she is recovering nicely from the surgery. However, during the surgery the doctors discovered massive cancer throughout the abdomen and liver, so much so that no further surgery would be beneficial. The doctors explained to Michiya that the only option left to them was traditional chemotherapy, and that was given less than a 20% chance to be partially successful. Teruko has opted not to go through that process. When she recovers sufficiently from the surgery she plans to go back to her apartment. While I do not know all the details of this, it is my understanding that there is an experimental drug that she has begun to take which is very expensive, but it is helpful in some cases. So, while we knew that Teruko was having some physical problems here, no one ever dreamed or expected this series of events since she returned to Japan.

At this point our faith in Christ reminds us that Teruko is in the hands of a loving Father in Heaven. He loves her more than we ever could, so we trust Him to do what is best in this case. We can pray for her full recovery if it is in His will, but we can all pray as Jesus taught us, "Thy will be done." As you can well imagine, her girls here are filled with emotion concerning this news. Teruko has asked that Annette and Stephanie come to see her ASAP, so they have made the decision to go to Japan the week of January 19. We plan to help them with travel expenses and also to help Teruko with her medical expenses from the Mission Fund.

Later update from Teruko's daughter Annette Uza, 6019 N. Jim Miller Rd., Dallas TX 75228. (214) 327-0545

Unless God decides to intervene right now to perform a miracle, it does not seem that we will have Mother with us much longer. In her coherent moments (a few hours each day), she is tremendously encouraged by the cards and e-mail messages she receives from many of you and is deeply thankful to all of you for your prayers. But at the same time, she feels that should it have been God's will for her to be healed, she would have already been healed because so many are praying for her every single day. She said she has been praying that God will just take her home soon. So, I join her in her prayers now.

Late Newsflash: Our sister went to be with our Savior on the night of Feb. 29 - Mar. 1. She "fought the good fight & finished her course."

Irene Allen

Now in Iowa

January 2, 2000

The past three months have greatly changed my situation. On Oct. 12 a friend picked me up at my home to meet an appointment with my lung doctor. Little did I know that I would not be returning to that home again before leaving Alaska. I was admitted to Providence Hospital that evening with pneumonia and stayed until Nov. 13. Both of my boys were called to my bedside as survival seemed uncertain. The Lord was gracious and the crisis passed. Other complications occurred, including internal bleeding from having taken coumadin for a heart condition (A-Fib). As the Dr. said, it seemed to be one step forward and two steps backward. Ladies from Spring Brook Church came to feed me and others came to visit and pray. On Nov. 13 I was transferred to Alaska Regional Hospital Rehabilitation Center. A nurse there later told me that I was so weak upon admittance I could not even hold the straw in a glass. The twice daily therapy sessions were demanding but eventually I was released from 24 hour oxygen use and could get about with a walker. The birthday card shower was a great success and the nursing staff was impressed with the number of friends who remembered me. The Sunday afternoon of my birthday a group from Spring Brook Church gathered in the hospital visitor's lounge to sing, pray, and share birthday cake.

Because of a long recovery ahead, I accepted Norman's invitation to move to Oskaloosa, Iowa, to live with him and his family. They have lovingly opened their hearts and home to me. Spring Brook Church paid the air fare for a dear Christian friend to accompany me on the flight "Outside" and she was an ideal companion for the trip. She and others in the church had gone into my home and packed up clothes and personal possessions to mail to Iowa. I was dismissed from the hospital late on Dec. 8 for the midnight flight out of Anchorage.

It was not easy to leave Alaska after 35 years but I am assured this is God's will for me and I am content. I do thank each one who has prayed for me and for the cards and gifts that have been received. May this all work out for God's glory. I am walking short distances alone now. My current address here in Iowa is: 401 11th Ave. West, Oskaloosa, IA. 52577 Phone: 515-673-8135

**Robert & Joy Garrett Zimbabwe; now visiting in the US
January, 2000 502:267-7759**

Neiyo Dec Ma Kristu is the name of our new Shona Hymnal. In English that would be Songs of the Christians. It contains 211 songs and hymns in the Shona language. I wrote about this in our newsletter last June. I had completed the computer printout of the book before we

came to the USA and the printing and binding was left for the brethren there to do. They did a good job of completing the work and sent me a finished book. The churches have been struggling for some years using other unsatisfactory books which were often difficult to obtain. There is much rejoicing now that they have their own book from which to sing praises to the Lord.

How God has worked. Since we started the *Youth Bible Camps* 16 years ago we have seen a tremendous spiritual benefit in the churches. The Lord has truly blessed in that we are no longer losing so many of our young people. Many, many more are committing their lives to the Lord and remaining faithful to Him. More of our young people are marrying properly in the Lord. *Our Young Married's Camps* have been well attended in recent years with a large number of couples attending to worship and study together. They have been eager to learn how to conduct their relationships in Christ and to raise their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Gospel wheels: Most of our church families do not own a car, so how can they travel to the camp? Several years ago the Lord made it possible for us to buy three used 3-Ton trucks which we have been using as buses for the camp and for other large church functions such as a joint Bible study the second Saturday of each month (we have 11 congregations in Harare). The oldest of these trucks needs to be replaced as it is no longer economical to maintain. A new replacement would cost about \$25,000 and a good used one about 3/4 of that. If you should be led of the Lord to contribute to that please mark your checks Vehicle Fund.

Virgilio Torrefiel
December, 1999

Dasmariñas, Cavite, Philippines

[Bro. Torrefiel shepherds two flocks near Manila, and also teaches in Central Bible College. The one church he mentions here is in a very depressed area. But the church has grown very rapidly in the past couple of years. --avw]

We have laid the entire foundation, and all the posts on the ground level are partially erected. The wall around the entire chapel is partially in place as well. But the needs are still great.

At Central Bible College I am teaching two subjects this semester, namely Cults, and Minor Prophets. I have about 40 students for both. There are six students from our place here in Cavite who study there. I praise the Lord for them. Some of them help me with the ministry. They can assist in the preaching work as well as church administration.

Our church ministry keeps growing but no longer as surprisingly fast as during last year. It now needs more of an equipping of the saints for service. We are concentrating on the married couples ministry. We meet all the married couples once every month for special fellowship. Our objective is to strengthen families as well as to win some unbelieving husbands to the saving knowledge of Christ. This ministry has proven effective.

Tim & Dawn Yates
January, 2000

Charlestown, Australia

We are busy getting into the second year of our ministry here at the Charlestown Church of Christ. Much has happened in this past year, but we have tried not to change too much. We have been using our time to get to know the people, the culture, and gain the necessary trust we need to lead them into positive spiritual and numerical growth.

Now's the time, though. We are starting on some new programs that really need your prayers.

Given the difficult attitude most Australians have toward the Church, we needed to find a way into their families. We looked around and realized that most Australians, though they don't appreciate the Church themselves, didn't mind their children coming to Sunday school. In fact, most parents try to encourage their children to come along.

We decided to take that opening into the family very seriously. We are now organizing a free pick-up service in the surrounding areas to encourage the children to make it to Sunday school. We've also planned a Fun Day to promote the start of the new Sunday school.

Our strategy is to teach the children all that we can, but also to invite the parents along to special programs. These, of course, are held during our Sunday morning services and will actually get the parents into the building, something that up until now has been a nearly impossible task. Once there, the parents are exposed to the Gospel Message, and maybe some of the false pretenses about the Church begin to fade.

This is just one of the areas we have planned, but it is the biggest. We also plan to begin using our Wednesday night Bible Studies as more of an outreach to our friends.

They will become small home groups geared toward dissipating the false ideas some people have about the Church.

The work in Australia is slow, and needs much prayer. We have seen some huge victories this past year. When we arrived, the church here averaged around 15 people in the service. A year later, the Lord has more than doubled that, and we've seen nine people baptized into the Lord.

We are still just a small church, especially by American standards. But we are excited about what the Lord is doing and where he'll take us in the next several months.

Which brings me to more pressing matters. We are already looking toward our next term of service. Our current visa runs out in October of this year, but we are looking at becoming permanent residents here. That will allow us to have a bit more freedom to come and go when we need to, rather than when they tell us to.

I won't go into all the boring details, but would you please put this on your urgent prayer list. It is always frustrating to deal with red tape, and we're looking at a big pile of it. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful prayer.

Paul Kitzmiller

Russia

February 22, 2000

It has been almost four weeks since we returned to St. Petersburg from the States and during that time there have been several encouraging developments in the work at Narvskaya church. Here are some of the highlights:

A NEW BIRTH! On Sunday, February 13, we all rejoiced when a young man named Sasha made the good confession and was baptized into Christ. Sasha, a 29 year-old wholesale food salesman, had been attending the worship services for several months and more recently had been engaged in a home Bible study conducted by Yan (rhymes with "John"), another one of our young men. There are no facilities for baptizing at our (rented) meeting place, so following our worship service, most of the congregation reassembled at our apartment where we could use the bathtub for such a purpose. First we had a devotional period with Bible readings and prayer; then we proceeded to the bathtub for the baptism. Following that, everyone returned to the living room to visit, to congratulate Sasha and to enjoy sandwiches, fruit, cookies and hot tea. (Our baptismal "services" last two to three hours.) Sasha has a degree in music and has already expressed his desire to use his musical abilities for the Lord. Please pray for this young Christian that he will grow and mature in the faith.

ATTENDANCE INCREASES. We are also thankful to tell you that on February 13 there were 27 present for the worship service--the most since we started working here (except for two Sundays last fall when a group of Americans was visiting) and nearly double the number that were present on our very first Sunday here last September. We

are cautiously optimistic that this represents a trend although we are fully aware (and want you to be also) that attendance for worship or classes does fluctuate wildly here. Consistent participation is very difficult to sustain here and even more of a problem than in the States. Part of the increase comes from our very active college students who are inviting roommates and classmates.

MARCH WORKSHOP SET. On March 16-19, we are planning for a team of American teachers to conduct a workshop for the church. Ben and Linda Rake from Winchester, KY, will be joined by Billy Ray and Mary Lewter coming from England to present lessons on the general theme "Our Place in the Family of God." Earl Mullins, Sr. will also be coming to help coordinate the program. The congregation is very excited about the program and looking forward to the lessons especially since all of the topics deal with very specific needs in our church.

Crystal Hardin Seoul, South Korea Jan. 22, 2000
crystalhardin@hotmail.com

I am still teaching Bible, two music classes, and first year Spanish. I am also teaching 12th grade English literature this semester because the former teacher will be having a baby soon. I'm enjoying being back in the English classroom. It's a little extra pressure, but I'm not too overworked as yet.

It is exciting to see what God has done in our school this past semester. There are students from 25 countries, and quite a few have made professions of faith. Of course we all know that some of that may be just desire to please teachers, or a response to positive peer pressure, but some do seem to have been genuinely converted. One former muslim girl wrote a lovely poem about how her life before had been all darkness but was now filled with light. Her family will be returning to Sri Lanka in one week, and we are praying that she finds encouragement and discipleship there. One of the difficult things about this ministry is that students frequently are pulled out of here before they are really established in Christ. Though we can't go with them, God can.

Most of the seniors are in tension now about being accepted in colleges in the States. It is very important to them to go to the top universities because of the pressure here, so they apply to Harvard, Yale, etc., and many face rejection. There are some very bright students whose SAT scores are above the 90th percentile, even though English is their second language. Very few apply to Christian colleges, although some of our graduates are at Liberty. I wish that the families were more concerned with putting the kids in a topnotch Christian environment in addition to topnotch academics.

PROCLAIMING CHRIST IN ISRAEL DESPITE PERSECUTION

Joseph Shulam

[World Radio has stepped up its involvement in the "Kol HaYeshua" (Voice Of Salvation) broadcast in Jerusalem with Joseph Shulam as the speaker. Joseph, who speaks seven languages, is one of our most experienced evangelists in the Middle East. He has established three congregations in Israel; two of them are Jewish and one is Arabic. He is also an Adjunct Professor for Abilene Christian University and is a Ph.D. Candidate at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Joseph has lectured internationally on the subject of the Early Church in Jerusalem. He also directs the Messianic Midrasha, a Messianic Jewish Bible School in Israel. Despite death threats, Joseph continues to preach the gospel of Jesus with clarity and courage. We are thrilled to partner with him in this bold effort.]

On Sunday, August 8, 1999, a group of young Orthodox Jews gathered in front of our building and started passing out tracts to everyone who came into our building. Then they brought a photographer and started taking pictures of our members as they were coming into the building.

These pictures they will use later to intimidate and get people fired from their jobs. The wonderful thing is that none of our members or visitors were intimidated. Many of us stood for a long time in front of our building witnessing and arguing with these young Orthodox Jewish boys and their Rabbi and photographer. Netivyah is one of the more open and public ministries of Yeshua (Jesus) followers in Israel. We are all well-known by the Orthodox Jewish community, and their press has articles and even pictures that they stole from our web page on the internet. One of our members said, "We feel encouraged that the 'enemy' thinks that we are worthy to share the burden of Yeshua's persecution. We must be doing something right."

I am not sure that it is such a great pleasure to be stalked and photographed with intent to do harm, but what choices do we have? We receive our marching orders not from men, but from God. We love our people, the Jewish people, because God loves them; we have something wonderful to share with them that will bring them salvation and forgiveness of sins. We have no choice but, for the sake of Israel and God's kingdom, to continue to teach and preach the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings of God with the message of the Messiah.

The most encouraging thing in all these situations is to see the support and tenacity in which the brothers and sisters of the congregation take these events and stand firm in their faith.

The reaction of these Orthodox Jews is not so much to Yeshua the Messiah, or to us as individuals, but it is against the legacy that so-called "Christian" history has left in the collective memory of all Jews.

Praise the Lord that I was able to give an answer face to face to those who accuse us. We were also able to use the radio broadcasts to counter the misrepresentations that they gave against Yeshua and the word of God.

We are getting responses from the radio broadcast, and the ratio of attacks to positive responses has changed in favor of the more positive responses that we are getting.

We love you and appreciate your support and interest in what God is doing here in Israel. Our strength is only as strong as the strength of you who support us in prayer.

--From *CrossView Magazine/World Radio News*

End of an Era:

GREAT SONGS Of The CHURCH, #2 to be Published No More (?)

Alex Wilson

Some months ago I wrote ACU Press, asking if there was any chance they might reprint *Great Songs of the Church, #2* if we could get any certain number of orders for it. Thom Lemmons of ACU Press sent an informative reply, which we reproduce here in part:

We made a strategic decision, some time back, to get out of the hymnal business. At this point, we see no need to review that decision. It's unfortunate for the congregations who may be using *Great Songs #2* and who are in need of replacement copies, but as you know, wonderful books go out of print every day, and this is a case where that has happened.

In recent years, due primarily to changes in Churches of Christ and their worship styles and preferences, *GS #2* has fallen out of favor with the majority of hymnal purchasers. We can have whatever opinions we like about the factors involved, but the facts remain. Due to rapidly declining sales, it became financially unwise for us to continue

producing this hymnal. I see no likely scenarios that would cause us to think otherwise.

I would wish godspeed to anyone who desired to reprint this hymnal, nor would...anyone here raise any barriers to such an effort. Should anyone decide to undertake a reprinting, my advice to them would be as follows: wait until you have firm orders (actual entities committed to purchase at the time of printing; not folks who would "love to see the book reprinted") for at least 2,000 copies. 5,000 would be better, and more would be wonderful. These purchasers should be willing to pay \$10-15 per copy, in order for the printing to be profitable, in my opinion. Let me explain.

Hymnals are a specialized product, and printing them is more expensive than other types of books. Our last print run (in 1994) of 2,635 copies cost us about \$19,000, including shipping, which amounts to \$7.21/copy. It took us about five years to sell them all. To make a 20% gross profit margin (about half what we really need) would require a selling price of \$10.41, not including shipping to the customer.... With Howard [Publishing] selling their hymnal for \$9.99, you can perhaps appreciate the difficulty of this prospect.

GS #2 is a great, historically important hymnal. But we can't afford to print it anymore with current pricing and sales volume constraints. I wish you well in any effort you may decide to pursue.

I planned to leave out his figures, but then thought that if any businessman or philanthropist reading this wants to pick up the ball and run with it, he at least has a knowledgeable estimate to go on. If anyone has a good reason to contact Brother Lemmons, his website is www.acu.edu/acupress

Sadly, it seems wise to begin looking for other good hymnals. So I ask any of you who know of hymnals you recommend to let us know. Musical tastes differ widely from congregation to congregation, of course. But if W&W can share helpful information with our readers, we'll try to do that.

It would be helpful to know the book's title, compiler, publisher, date, whether it includes Scripture readings (and what versions), number of songs, how arranged (what major topical divisions, if any), whether well indexed, cost, size (some of the larger ones might require replacing your hymnal-racks!), and whether shape-note editions are available. (Whew!--that's a lot of info.) Very important additional factors are the balance between traditional and contemporary songs, and between gospel songs and hymns. It would also be helpful to tell us what features you (and your church) especially like and dislike.

Changing hymnals is hard, just like changing Bible versions. But when it must be done, it should be done with careful thought. We can help one another in this matter, so let's do.

Joyful Unity Meeting Among Louisville Area Churches of Christ

Alex Wilson

The Okolona Church of Christ hosted a "Millennium Celebration" on the afternoon of Jan. 2. No, it wasn't to celebrate the 1000 years mentioned in Rev. 20, but the entry into the 2000s A.D. It was a time of great blessing to those of us who attended.

The written program thanked six other congregations "for their support," and song leaders from nine churches took part. Invitations (not only to attend but also have a song-leader participate) were sent to many Churches of Christ of all "brands" in the area, including us "premls" (though some of "our churches" said they had not received the invitation). Folks from 4-5 such churches came. Over 700 people attended in all, including a large representation from predominately black churches--which was good to see. After the 2-hour meeting everyone was invited to stay for a fellowship meal, which gave additional opportunities to meet new friends or renew old friendships.

Two brethren gave short messages. Jerry Stephenson presented a challenging "Call to Service." He is a major leader in the attempt in Louisville to foster Christian values in the family and keep the homosexual lifestyle from being spread, also to get Christians to vote according to moral issues not just on the basis of party. Larry Sawyer, a minister at the host church, spoke on "A Call to Unity." He said Biblical unity does not mean cloning (we're to become like *Christ*, not other people). Nor does it mean everybody believing the same thing about everything. Nor does it mean somebody telling everybody else what's what (our authority is God's Word itself, not just what any preacher or editor says). Unity is a non-party spirit among believers (1 Cor.1), and sends a message to unbelievers (John 17), and is something to work for, not against. He concluded with remarks on how to *achieve* unity among God's people: Realize that unity's foundation is Jesus Christ, its enemy is Satan, and its purpose is fulfilling the Great Commission. Amen, brother!

We hope and believe the meeting will continue to bear good fruit for God's glory. We thank all who put it on, and pray God's blessing upon all Bible-based peacemakers.

Sarah Fox Has Gone Home

(1897 - 1999)

Sarah McGee was born on June 18, 1897. At about the age of 20 she met Herman Fox whose utmost desire was to be a missionary. She, also, at a very early age had voiced her desire to be a missionary's wife someday. The Lord brought them together and in June 1920 they married.

They left for Japan on their honeymoon to serve the Lord in that capacity for as long as they were able. They were missionaries for 22 years. They left Japan on the very last boat leaving there before the war broke out. Then Herman's health did not allow him to go back. He died at the age of 63, but Sarah lived to be 102 yrs. old.

She was a devoted wife and homemaker and the mother of 7 children. Very gentle, kind and loving and also very strong in her faith. She loved the Lord beyond all else. She went home very quietly and gently on a Sunday morning: Oct. 17, 1999. A hymn comes to mind when we reflect on her life and that is, "Jesus is all the world to me, My life, my joy, my all." She is now truly "at home" and I can "see" her kneeling in awe before Him who has blessed her so richly. He is so worthy to be praised! — Evelyn Fox Clark

Marie Acton Rehorn

(1905 - 1999)

Marie Acton was born and grew up in Kentucky. After teaching school for two years, she came to Louisville to study the Bible in Bro. Boll's classes in 1930. She herself taught Sunday school and ministered in other ways too, such as doing housework and cooking for families where the wife was ill. She married Miles Rehorn in 1934. He preached at several Churches of Christ.

Throughout the years, Sis. Rehorn was a zealous intercessor and financial backer of many missionaries. She also compiled a number of articles which Bro. Boll wrote in *Word & Work* regarding Jesus' teaching about and practice of prayer. This book, *Christ's Teachings on Prayer*, is still in print, and very helpful in its insights. Sis. Rehorn went Home on Dec. 17, 1999. She is survived by three daughters.

This Year Also

The Husbandman,
The Owner of the Vineyard
Comes seeking fruit
and finding none, He says
"I've waiting been
And patient three long years.
A tree of mine that bears no fruit
It cumpers but the ground.
Cut it down!"
The vinedresser lifts pleading hands
And if you closely look
the nail prints you will see.
O Lord, No hireling, I,
I love that fruitless tree.
I, too, came seeking fruit
And finding none, am grieved.
Let me but try with this poor tree

A little longer.
Just one more year.
I will dig about it
And fertilize it --
The rains will come
The early and the latter rains.
The tree will surely answer
To my care and love
And bear some fruit.
Perhaps, at first, not large or perfect
fruit
But fruit, withal, I'll have for Thee
From this poor tree
Of Thine.
And then with constant, sweet abiding
More fruit --
Much fruit.

-- Marie Acton Rehom

Armageddon: Fact or Fiction?

Darren Johnson

An asteroid the size of Texas is on a head-on collision course with planet Earth, and humanity's only hope rests in a misfit crew of oil rig workers. Their assignment: to drill a hole into the core of the asteroid and insert a nuclear device, thus exploding the galactic menace and saving life as we know it. The name of the movie is *Armageddon*.

The word is taken from Rev. 16:16, but it has become such a fixture in modern lingo that it can serve as the title of a blockbuster movie. Most moviegoers have only the slightest understanding of the Biblical Armageddon, but they are well aware of the connotations the word has come to bear: doom, destruction, "the end of the world as we know it."

Unfortunately, the church has remained largely silent while Hollywood writers and doomsday cults have busily refashioned "Armageddon" according to their own whims. As a result, many Christians associate "Armageddon" more with comets and Communists than with our "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13). What a tragedy! It is hoped that

this brief study of the word "Armageddon" and its Scriptural environs will go some way towards separating the fact and fiction of Armageddon.

Where in the World is Har-Mageddon?

The meaning of the term *Har-Mageddon* seems evident enough. *Mageddon* is OT Megiddo, a city of northern Israel. Megiddo was located in the Esdraelon valley, a hotly contested trade route in the Ancient Near East. It was the site of the famous defeat of Sisera (Jdgs. 5:19-20) and the scene of Josiah's assassination at the hands of Pharaoh Neco (2 Kgs. 23:29). Some scholars estimate that over 200 battles have been fought in its vicinity.

But the identification of *Har-Mageddon* with literal Megiddo is notoriously uncertain. *Har* is Hebrew for mountain, but there is no mountain at Megiddo. The closest thing to a Mt. Megiddo is the artificial mound (*tel*) that developed over centuries of the city's ruin and reconstruction.

Given the difficulty of pinpointing a Mt. Megiddo, perhaps it is best to see Armageddon as a symbol (not necessarily the geographical locale) of the end-times battle. After all, many place names of OT origin--Babylon, Sodom and Egypt, Mt. Zion--serve symbolic functions in the pages of Revelation. Whatever its import, literal or symbolic, we may be sure that Armageddon refers to a real point in history and to real persons who will encounter God's just sentence.

With these preliminary matters out of the way, let's deal with fact and fiction of Armageddon.

Fiction #1: *Armageddon is the result of an exploding asteroid, an invading alien race, or an incurable virus.*

Fact: *Armageddon is the consequence of human sin.*

Revelation 16:16, the only Biblical passage that mentions "Armageddon" by name, pertains to a divinely decreed outpouring of wrath *against sin*, not a celestial mishap or random act of nature. Note the larger context: the seven bowls of God's wrath (16: 1f). Seven is the number of completion, symbolizing the full display of God's judgment against sin. Unlike previous series of seven--the seven seals that unleashed terror on a fourth of the earth (6:8), or the seven trumpets that plagued a third of the earth (8:7-12)--the seven bowls are total in scope (16:1-9). No fractions here, and no repentance is forthcoming. Men gnaw their tongues in agony rather than glorify God (vv. 10-11).

The sixth bowl of wrath issues in the battle summons that leads to Armageddon. Whereas the previous bowls of wrath resemble the plagues of Egypt, the sixth resembles the Exodus itself, albeit more of an anti-exodus. The great River Euphrates--the boundary between the Roman and Parthian Empires, the Occident and the Orient-- becomes bone dry (v.12). Only this time, the drying of the waters is not to create a path for the people of God, but to open a way for the kings of the East, political allies of the Beast and opponents of Christ. Thus, the stage is set for "the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (v.14), commonly called "the Battle of Armageddon."

Where in our text is there any hint that Armageddon is a comet, a computer bug, an alien invasion, or anything other than the wrath of God against sin? Pop-apocalyptic scenarios suggest that humanity's greatest foe is something "out there," ready to pounce on us in our helplessness and innocence. But Revelation asserts that the most potent threat confronting us is internal: our own rebellion against the will of God, our sin. Armageddon is a day of judgment upon an enemy that is "among us."

A second fiction: The battle of Armageddon will be like any other battle ever fought. The only difference being that it is the grand finale. A nuclear explosion, perhaps.

Fact: The battle of Armageddon will be unlike any other battle. It will be short and the victory will be decisive. In fact, it won't be much of a battle at all. The all-powerful Word of God, not military might, will save the day.

The actual "Battle of Armageddon" occurs in Rev. 19 when the Lord Jesus returns. He is accompanied by the vast armies of heaven (19:14); surely a grueling showdown with the forces of Antichrist is in the works. But from all indications the battle is already won, over before it even begins. The robe dipped in blood signifies that the victory is already Christ's (v.13), as do the many diadems upon His brow (v.12). Christ was, and is, and always will be "King of kings and Lord of lords" (v.16).

If the outcome of the battle has already been decided, then what is the purpose of "Armageddon"? The victory achieved in weakness and love on a lone Judean hillside is here demonstrated in power and judgment for the entire world to witness. With the unconventional weaponry of God's sovereign word, Satan and his allies are swiftly brought to justice (19:15; 2 Thess. 2:8). No other weapon is necessary. As Martin Luther wrote in a hymn, "one little word shall fell him!" And that's a fact!

A third fiction that must be addressed concerns the aftermath of Armageddon. *Often it is supposed that Armageddon represents the end of the world, the destruction of the space/time universe. At Armageddon, Christ scraps everything and whisks his followers off to an ethereal existence, unencumbered by matter.*

Fact: *Armageddon is not the end of the world per se, but the beginning of the world as God intended it to be.*

The Battle of Armageddon serves to usher in the rest of God's story--the story of resurrection and renewal. Revelation 20 depicts those once asleep in Christ *raised and reigning*. John's millennial vision is followed by the unveiling of a new creation: the new heavens, new earth, and New Jerusalem. Is this the "end of all things" or the "regeneration of all things" of which the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles prophesied? (See Isa. 65:17-25; Ezek. 47:6-12; Mt. 19:28; Acts 3:19; Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Pet. 3:10-14.) Let the Almighty speak for Himself: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

It is not God's objective to do away with creation, but to make creation what He always intended it to be. The universe is not God's enemy. Sin is. And once God has purged away His ancient nemesis, the work of new creation can be accomplished in full. The restoration, not the annihilation, of the universe is the object of the Christian hope. It's the stuff of resurrection. What God creates, God redeems.

Perhaps, then, it is better to speak of Armageddon as the end of an age: the end of the church's persecution; the end of famine and epidemic; the end of infant mortality and teen suicide; the end of economic injustice, of warfare in the Middle East, of racism and oppressive regimes. At last the time has come for beating swords into plowshares, for the lion to lie down with the lamb, for the beginning of a Renewed World Order!

So what is Armageddon? It's not the product of exploding asteroids, but persistent sin. It has little to do with nuclear warheads and everything to do with the Word of God. And, surprisingly enough, it is not so much the "end of the world" as it is a new beginning, our "blessed hope." Robert Mounce, in his commentary on Revelation, sums it up well:

"Har-Mageddon is symbolic of the final overthrow of all the forces of evil by the might and power of God. The great conflict between God and Satan, Christ and anti-christ, good and evil, which lies behind the perplexing course of history will in the end issue in a final struggle in which God will emerge victorious and vindicate all who placed their faith in him. This is Har-Mageddon."

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

Lexington, Ky. (excerpt from recent letter sent to churches)

"In October 1979, the Cramer & Hanover Church of Christ established the Church of Christ World Wide with Bro. Victor Broaddus as Director. This work has continued for over 20 years and Bro. Victor is to be commended for the hard work and effort that he has put forth in keeping this noble work going. Due to failing health, Bro. Victor can no longer meet the demands of this work and is therefore stepping down. He and Sis. Mae will continue to serve our newly formed "Missions Committee" and will serve in an advisory capacity. In 1983, Miss Carla Potter was appointed to the position of Assistant Treasurer to the Missions Office. Carla will serve as chairperson and will work with Bro. & Sis. Broaddus along with Mrs. Peggy Carter who assisted recently in installing a new computer and software for the office. The work of the Missions Office is vital to our continuing support and encouragement to those willing to be sent. Our prayer is that we will never lose sight of the ONE we serve." (Bennie Hill)

Jennings: (Paul Estes) Watch night a success! A nice crowd of 86 gathered to hear the Word proclaimed as the year wound down. Bro. Jack Harris condensed 2000 years of church his-

tory into an interesting hour; Bro. A.J. brought back fond memories of today's church a few years ago; and Bro. Paul gave a challenge for the church of tomorrow to keep Jesus HEAD of the church; be motivated by love in all we do; always be faithful to the WORD, and keep the pulpit for preaching the WORD, not for entertaining. Bro. Val and Danny added more good comments. Special songs by Phil Doucet and Danny Broussard were beautiful. We ended the old and began the new singing: "To God be the Glory." What a great night.

Salem, Ky. continues to search for a minister. In the meantime, 3 new deacons have been installed: Larry Tuttle, Brian Campbell, and Chris Kinney.

Early Reminders:

Ladies Inspiration Day is being planned for April 15th and hosted by the Southeast Church of Christ. Theme: "On Wings of Eagles."

Kentucky-Indiana Christian Fellowship is scheduled for August 7-10 with theme: "Standing at the Crossroads."

The annual Ladies Overnight Retreat is scheduled for Sept. 22-23. This is the 4th weekend in Sept., as usual, but NOT the last weekend since this year Sept. has 5 weekends.

Hamburg: homecoming day is being planned for April 9th and all former members and friends are encouraged to be a part of this special day.

Southeast (Paul Anderson) Small groups on Sunday evenings are going great. We meet at different locations on the 1st & 3rd Sundays every month at 6:00 p.m. Attendance and participation is very good. We are anticipating the imminent sale of approximately 10 acres of the church property. The most exciting news is that we recently installed 4 new deacons on Feb. 6. We now have 9 men who are serving as deacons and 2 men who are serving as elders. More men who have been nominated for eldership are currently being evaluated. We are also anticipating our homecoming this October, as this will be the congregation's 20th anniversary.

From Ave. "E" in Crowley, Louisiana (Valdetero) Fifty-eight people were present for the first session of the Acadian Christian Workers' Clinic. Bro. Sennett had an excellent presentation. Bro. Bruce Runner will be the next featured speaker at the May St. Church in Jennings.

Portland Avenue Church, Louisville: We are looking for a youth minister, part-time or possibly fulltime. He needs to have a burden not just for young people but inner-city young people. Someone with the courage of David, the perseverance of Job, & the love of Jesus. Someone al-

ready experienced would be such a Godsend: before you meet Goliath we hope your slingshot has killed a lion & a bear or two. (We can dream, can't we?) We prefer someone married, whose wife could help at least some, but that is not essential. If desired, he could study some in local Bible school(s) or seminary or U.of L. He or his wife might be able to teach some in our Christian school (K-12). Call Alex Wilson, 502-897-2831.

Words of Life Broadcast: During Jan. & Feb., Dale Offutt gave a series of 7 messages on the Christian's Armor. Some of his topics in March will be "Christianity & the Church," and "Bringing Joy in Heaven & on Earth." To get the W.O.L. news- letter, write P.O.Box 221, Sellersburg, IN 47172, or email wordsoflife@juno.com

Goin' Fishing Ministry

4136 Hickman Ave., Louisville, KY 40213. The Lord continues to bless GFM in making it possible for teams to be in former Communist Pioneer camps for the third consecutive summer. Four of the five teams that were guests last summer in some of those camps will return to the same camps this year, one team for the third consecutive year. Four other teams are committed to going. Two or three other groups are a possibility. The camps range in size from 300 to 1000 campers plus the adults who supervise and work at the camps. This means between 3 and 5 thousand Russians will be

reached with the Gospel by these teams. -- Earl Mullins, Sr.

Maple Manor Christian Home, Adult Division. Our new addition is filled to capacity. We now have 42 beds in our nursing wing. It has not been at all difficult to find residents who needed our care. We are so thankful that we can now provide a loving caring environment for a greater number of those in need.

Our major problem has been staffing. Unemployment is low in our area and finding enough staff for our needs has been difficult. We have had to rely on agency employees and this becomes a very expensive way to maintain our needed staffing level. We are happy to report that we now have a full staff of qualified employees.

Nursing homes are notorious for having a large turnover of employees. We are blessed at Maple Manor with having some very long-term employees. One has been with Maple Manor for 26 years and several for ten or more years. We recently welcomed a new Director of Nursing. Laurie Warren began her duties in December and has become a valued addition to our administrative staff.

December, which was a three payday month, put our finances in a bind. Medicaid has adopted a new way to determine their daily allowance and that means less income from that source. This is done on a quarterly basis, so could again increase in the future.

S.B.S. Annual Seminar

March 24-25, 2000

(Fri., 7-9 p.m.; Sat., 9-11:45 a.m.)

Southeast Church of Christ,
12610 Taylorsville Rd., Louisville

Theme:

**The Lord's BODY,
the Lord's FAMILY**

FRI. Mar. 24, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

"Diversity With Unity In The Church" -- Julius Hovan

"The Church's Responsibility To Youth" -- Sonny Childs

SAT. Mar. 25, 9:00-11:45 a.m.

"Diversity And Unity In The Home" -- Cameron Cox

Simultaneous Workshops:

"Effective Ministering to and by Senior Saints" -- Hovan

"Effective Ministering to and by Home Builders" -- Cox

"Effective Ministering to and by Youth" -- Childs

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