

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The ***Word and Work***



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

Nov.- Dec., 2004

Why buy *thorns* from the florist?

* * *

The Christians' God and the Muslims' Allah

* * *

God's Coming Produced Puzzles
that Mystify Us

* * *

After hundreds of years,
Gabriel was back in business

* * *

Who Tore the Curtain?

* * *

Five Wrong Attitudes about the Future

* * *

Discuss, or Decide?

TOO MUCH STUFF

An Ode to the Simple Lifestyle

Words by Janet L. Janzen

Tune: 3 Blind Mice

Too much stuff, too much stuff,
More than enough, more than enough;
It's out of the closets and filling our space,
It's growing and spilling all over the place,
We're tripping all over a terrible case
Of too much stuff.

Too much stuff, too much stuff,
More than enough, more than enough;
The piles are staring us in the face,
They multiply at an alarming pace,
And soon we'll be buried without a trace
In too much stuff.

Too much stuff, too much stuff,
More than enough, more than enough;
It isn't easy to run the race
With all of this stuff slowing down the pace.
I think I need some additional grace
For too much stuff.

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"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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Several Articles for the Christmas Season:

Meditations on God becoming Man

[Except for the section headings and a few statements by the W&W editor, mainly in the last section below, the following reflections are from *The CHRISTBOOK*, a commentary on Matthew by F. Dale Bruner.]

We have met the Enemy, and he is US!

“He...will save his people from *their* sins.” Jesus’ central mission is to save his people not from *other* people’s sins but from *their own*. Jesus will not rivet his people’s attention on an external enemy, as most liberators and liberation movements do. Rather, Jesus concentrates all his fire on *his* people, and on *their* sins” [--*our* sins].

In the gospels “hell is not a place with which the external enemies of the people of God are threatened. Hell is always, in Jesus’ teaching, the threat for precisely those who think they are *in* the people of God. The Gospels teach profound self-criticism. Jesus in Matthew is not God-Saves-Us-From-Them. He is God-Saves-Us-From-Ourselves.” [Page 27.]

The Christians’ God and the Muslims’ Allah

“In the Old Testament, God was supremely The Above-Us-God (though he often visited here ‘below’). And in Islam, Allah is, by definition, *always* The Above-Us-God. However, the glory of the New Testament revelation is that the great Above-Us-God *came down and became one of us*. In Islam, Allah *sends* —angels, prophets, books—but he is too holy to *come*. For God to touch earth is, in Islam, called *shirk*, and anyone who claims that God has a Son or became a human being or anything like a human being commits *shirk*, makes God gross, blasphemes God’s glory.

“But in the gospel we have learned to think of God in another way. The gospel’s God is precisely so great that he *can* come down. He is not trapped in heaven above us. And this God’s love is so immense that he *wants* to come down. And he has proven his love by the fact that he *did* come down and touch our ground. Indeed, he even allowed himself to be “shirked” by men, condemned, and nailed to wood. The greatness of the gospel’s God is that God not only sends, he comes.

“Christmas is the story of God becoming one of us. God literally ‘be-littled’ himself in order to accommodate himself to us. In the words of the *Te Deum*, ‘he *humbled* himself to be born of a virgin,’

and he became a regular human being right here with us. The pulse of the gospel is in that great condescension. And that condescension, that great stoop we call Christmas or the incarnation, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of God's coming. Christmas is God's own self-shirking."

God's Coming Produced Puzzles that Mystify Us

"The moment God became one of us, the problem of the Trinity began to be posed. It may have been intellectually easier on us for the Great God to have remained above us as One (to be sure, One in Three). But the moment God touched earth, in person (not by proxy), the problem of our understanding how God can be both here and there at the same time began. How can God be both Above-Us and With-Us at the same time and still be *one* God? God can! The church's doctrine of the Trinity is the careful attempt to show how 'God can,' for God is 'one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost' (The Scots Confession). Christians believe the divinity of the *object* of their faith, who is Jesus, and the divinity of the internal *source* of their faith, who is the Spirit, and the divinity of the *sender* of Son and Spirit, who is God the Father."

Another mystery is the nature of the God-man. How could Jesus be both divine and human at the same time? Was he half and half? Or was he sometimes divine (such as when He performed miracles) but other times human (such as when he confessed his ignorance of certain matters)? Through the centuries God's people have wrestled with such perplexing puzzles, but one thing is clear: Jesus was and is both fully God and fully man. He is Immanuel - "with us is *God!*" He is "the Word," and "the Word was *God*" yet "the Word became *flesh*." He called himself "the son of man" more than any other name or title, yet he claimed that to see him was to see the Father.

On this point too Dale Bruner makes an enlightening observation: "The virgin birth presents Jesus as both the historical Son of David *and* as the divine Son of God at once. Indeed, the virgin birth with its corollary of Jesus' two natures (human and divine) is close to being an exact fulfillment of the great promise of an everlasting king to David in Nathan's prophecy: 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, . . . I will raise up *your son* after you [the Son of David] . . . , and he shall be *my son* [Son of God]' (2 Samuel 7)."

The Savior Came

A GracEmail Series of Meditations
by Edward Fudge

SALVATION HISTORY RENEWED

The Bible relates the story of God's activities in human space and time, by which he intends to rescue very many people from judgment, death and all the consequences of human sin. The British refer to this divine agenda as "the scheme of redemption." Americans call it "the plan of salvation." The Germans label it "salvation history." Scripture writers speak of God's "purpose" or "good will." This salvation history is both earthly and heavenly -- it happens on earth, but with heavenly power and with a heavenly goal. God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary results.

The Old Testament closes on an unfinished note. Daniel sees visions of the End-time, in which evil seems about to have the final word. At the last moment, God appears on his throne, delivers his people and punishes those who once persecuted them. God then bestows ruling power on a messianic figure called the Son of Man, whose reign continues forever. (Daniel chapter 7.) The angel Gabriel instructs Daniel to seal up the prophecy for a future time when its meaning will be made plain (Dan. 8:16-19; 12:8-10).

Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament also ends in anticipation of God's future deeds -- with God's promise that he will "suddenly come" to his Temple, and that he will send "Elijah the prophet" to prepare the way of the Lord (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6). Four hundred years then pass, with no new prophet and no fulfillment of the promises. Some in Israel kept the faith, waiting patiently for God to renew his saving deeds (Luke 2:25). For many, the promises grew old and hope gradually dimmed.

This is the setting for Luke's Gospel, which begins with an old priest named Zacharias offering incense in the Temple (Luke 1:5-23). Suddenly an angel appears and identifies himself as Gabriel -- the same angel who had spoken to Daniel many centuries before! Zacharias' wife Elizabeth will have a son, Gabriel says, although she is old and barren. "How?" asks Zacharias, in temporary disbelief.

This predicted child will be a forerunner for the Lord, "in the spirit and the power of Elijah."

Salvation history has resumed. God has picked up the thread which the Old Testament left dangling. Gabriel is back in business. Salvation waits just around the corner!

THREE ANGELIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Luke was a practicing physician, a prudent man -- and his Christmas story is sober truth. It is sobering truth as well. For it says that approximately 2,000 years ago, on days that were otherwise inconspicuous, in an obscure sliver of the globe three angelic visitations occurred, each announcing the coming of the Savior of the world. The first visitation was to an old priest named Zacharias (Luke 1:5-22), the second to a young virgin named Mary (1:26-38), the third to a group of humble shepherds (2:8-20).

As we might expect with sudden visits from angels, the recipients in each instance were initially frightened out of their wits (Luke 1:12, 29; 2:9). Each time, the angel immediately reassured, "Do not be afraid" (1:13, 30; 2:10). In each case the angel brought good news that God was fulfilling his ancient promises to save his people -- not only his people who were Jews, but also his people found among all the nations of the world (1:14,17; 32-33; 2:10-11).

Reactions differed to these angelic announcements. Zacharias disbelieved and was struck mute, but later believed (Luke 1:18-22, 63-64). Mary believed, and offered herself to God (1:38). The shepherds believed, and went to worship the Christ-child (2:15-16). Meanwhile, Caesar ruled in Rome and Herod held court in Jerusalem. For the moment, the rest of the world went about its business, unaware that anything of importance had even transpired.

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

She could have said "No," you understand. It was a sacrifice unheard of -- a call to trust and submission unprecedented in human history. This young Jewish virgin sees an angel, who tells her that she will miraculously conceive the Son of God who will reign on David's throne (Luke 1:26-35).

But who will believe her? Joseph, to whom she is betrothed? Her parents? The villagers in Nazareth? Rumors will fly. There will be furtive looks -- and obvious stares. A virginal conception. Right.

But Mary is full of faith. "Behold, the bonds slave of the LORD," she replies. "Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Mary's faith is tested more. Her baby, like ancient Samuel, will not be hers to keep, but will be given to God (Luke 1:46-55; 1 Sam.

2:1-10). Though born a Savior of all nations, old Simeon prophesies, this child will be rejected (Luke 2:25-34). "And a sword," Simeon says to Mary, "will pierce your own soul" (Luke 2:35). How her heart must have chilled at these words, and how often she must have remembered them and wondered -- until the day she saw her son hanging on a cross and understood at last.

BETHLEHEM'S BABIES (1)

We could wish that Matthew's Christmas story stopped with the Magi and the wondrous star, but it doesn't. The Magi had asked Herod's help in locating the newborn king, and the tyrannical despot had asked them to return with the baby's exact address. Instructed by a heavenly dream, they returned home instead (Matt. 2:1-12). When he realized that the Magi had come and gone, Herod ordered that all two-year-old boys and younger in the environs of Bethlehem be massacred (Matt. 2:16). God warned Joseph in a dream, and he escorted Mary and Jesus to Egypt, then back again after old Herod had died (Matt. 2:13-15, 19-23).

Slaughter of the Innocents, this story is traditionally called, and a tragic event it was, but a better title would be Symbol of Universal Guilt. For, as an old couplet puts it, "in Adam's fall, we sinned all."

Adam represented us every one, you see, babies included, and by his transgression the death sentence fell on all of Adam's descendants (Rom. 5:12-20). If Jesus had never been born, the entire human race without exception would surely have died in sin and condemnation. Only a Savior from heaven could answer our desperate need on fallen earth.

The baby who was temporarily spared King Herod's slaughter also had to die. But by his death, he gave life to the babies of Bethlehem, and to all of Adam's descendants around the world who put their trust in him.

BETHLEHEM'S BABIES (2)

The sound of Bethlehem's crying mothers, says Matthew, fulfilled Jeremiah's ancient words: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more" (Matthew 2:17-18). Rachel was the patriarch Jacob's ("Israel") favorite wife, and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Her name had always been associated with babies and with tears. Rachel herself died in childbirth, and she was buried near Bethlehem (Gen. 35:16-20).

More than a thousand years later, Jacob's descendants of the Southern Kingdom were snatched from their homeland and taken at spearpoint to faraway Babylon. Ramah, five miles north of Jerusalem, was a gathering place for the exiles. Rachel's children are dead and dying. Jeremiah captures the scene -- in the verses which Matthew quotes and throughout the Book of

Lamentations. Now, Matthew tells us, a half millennium after Jeremiah, Bethlehem's babies are slaughtered once more and Rachel's cries again pierce the Judean night.

But Jeremiah's weeping text is followed by a ray of light. "They shall return from the land of the enemy," God told the prophet, "and there is hope for your future" (Jer. 31:16-17). The chapter continues with God's prophecy of a new covenant, in which he will forgive his people's iniquity and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34). By Jesus' own spared life and atoning death, he personally became that covenant (Isaiah 42:6). He became the Second Adam, the life-giving spirit, whose representative obedience saves all those from every nation who truly belong to him (Rom. 5:12-20; 1 Cor. 15:45).

THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTMAS

It should never be forgotten that over the scene of the holy birth at Bethlehem there looms a dark shadow. It is the destiny of this Word made flesh, this Holy Child -- the Passion and Cross. The salvation of the world is wrought by the shedding of blood, for He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. No emphasis on the Incarnation can neglect the centrality of the Cross, the reality of sin, forgiveness, atonement. He will be obedient, even unto death, death on a cross.

The challenge of Christmas is that of decision. The Christmas scene confronts us with a sharp, piercing and painful challenge. It is the challenge of discipleship, to follow him in his simplicity, in obedience to his command. Mary knew this. When Mary sang "Magnificat," she told of the putting down of the mighty from their seat and exalting the humble and meek.

Some will respond in faith and obedience and some will find themselves under judgment. The child born at Christmas is set for the rising and falling of many, and when the sword of Bethlehem pierces our own souls, may it find us on the side of those who know the costly secret of Christmas joy.

THE WISE MEN:

Gentiles On A Journey Of Faith

Peter Colon

There are many misconceptions about the magi who visited Jesus. The beloved Christmas carol begins, "We three kings of Orient are," but already it has made at least three errors. First, the number of wise men who made the trip to Bethlehem is unknown. Tradition placed their number at three probably because of the three gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh--the assumption being one gift, one giver. Second, they were not kings. When the early church father, Tertulian, said, "The East considers magi almost as kings," he was not saying that they were actually monarchs. Rather, their powerful standing in court made them "almost" like kings. Therefore, applying Psalm 72:10 and Isaiah 49:7 and 60:3 as prophecies that Jesus would be visited by kings probably is not correct in the case of the magi. Finally, they did not come from as far away as the "Orient"--that is, the Far East. "The East" is identified variously as any country from Arabia to Media and Persia.

Some of the mistaken notions can be corrected by understanding the history of this unique priestly order and considering the influence that each of the three divisions of the Hebrew Old Testament, called the Tenach, had on the magi to aid them on their quest.

The term translated as wise men in the text is *magoi*, which has come to be known in English as magi. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, described the magi as "a priestly caste among sixth century Medes." Therefore, the term magi designates an old and powerful priestly caste who were supposed to be knowledgeable on the various mysteries of Gentile religions. In general, the magi were specialists in medicine, astronomy, and other related fields.

In addition to their research in the sciences, some also practiced astrology, divination, and magic. Some scholars suggest that secret disciplines originated in the Fertile Crescent region of the Middle East. They then moved down to Egypt and eventually back to Mesopotamia for refinement and distribution. By the time of the Prophet Daniel (sixth century B.C.), a special caste of astrologers and astronomers was formed in the region of Chaldea (Kurdistan today) who were referred to as "Chaldeans" (Dan. 2:2).

When Babylon fell to the Persians in 538 B.C., the various disciplines of the Babylonian wise men were incorporated into the Persian sciences. Wise men from Persia were credited with possessing

higher religious and intellectual skills, while the Babylonian wise men, like those in Daniel's day, were sometimes looked upon as impostors. This distinction could be related to the incident when Nebuchadnezzar decreed that all the wise men in Babylon were to be killed for failing to interpret his dream (Dan. 2:9-12).

The Persian magi gradually acquired influence. Sometimes their power was too great, such as in 522 B.C., when Darius the Great had to crush a magi revolt against his rule. Still the magi retained their prestigious position in the national life of the empire. During the following centuries, many magi roamed far from Persia to offer their skills and knowledge to receptive nations.

By New Testament times, the magi were common throughout the Mediterranean world. According to Philo of Alexandria, there were two kinds of magi. He praised the first group for their extensive research into the facts of nature, calling it "true magic". He viewed the second group as "venomous creatures" who preyed upon the people with charms and incantations. In this group Philo included the practitioners of astrology, whom he called "parasites." So many people were falling victim to their counterfeit science that in 19 A.D., Emperor Tiberius banished all astrologers. Still the magi flourished, and many became experts in the study of stars and dreams. Tacitus, the Roman historian, observed that the Roman people often consulted the Persian magi to interpret dreams.

In the early days of the church, the magi were a problem. A man named Simon used sorcery and witchcraft to show himself to be great among the people. When he saw how the Holy Spirit was given when Peter and John laid hands on new believers in Samaria, he wanted this power. It is possible that Simon viewed them as great magi and thought he could buy this power with money (Acts 8:9-24). Paul confronted an individual named Bar-jesus, who may have been a magi representative at the settlement of Paphos. Paul rebuked him, calling him "thou child of the devil" (Acts 13:6-11). This man was also a sorcerer, and the practice of astrology is strongly condemned by God (cp. Dt. 18:9-14; Isa. 47:12-14).

Three Jewish sources helped the magi discern the time and place of the birth of this King of the East. The first source came from the Torah and dealt with the prophecy of Balaam: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not near: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17). Unknown to the magi, the extraordinary star that they saw may have been the manifestation of the shining glory of God. This glory is referred to in Hebrew as the Shekinah. God may have chosen to overrule the evil of astrology and, on this occasion, to direct these wise men to the place where the Messiah could be found by a

method that suited their habit of stargazing and their understanding of astronomy for the sole purpose of giving homage. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). If the star was a manifestation of the Shekinah glory, it also helps to explain its movement in Matthew 2:9. Such movement would be difficult to comprehend if it was a physical star in the sky.

Interestingly, these Gentile magi did a better job of interpreting the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 than the Jewish leaders did. It is tragic that the Jewish leadership later applied this prophecy to a false messiah. This happened during the second Jewish rebellion against Rome in 132-135 A.D. A rabbi named Akiva proclaimed the leader of the Jewish revolt as messiah and named him "Bar Kokhba" (lit., "Son of the Star"), thus applying the prophecy to him. Hopes were dashed, however, when both the rabbi and his "messiah" were captured, tortured, and killed by the Romans.

The second source of information available to the magi was from the section of the Hebrew Bible called Ketuvim, meaning the Writings. It dealt with the prophecy of the "seventy weeks" in Daniel 9:24-27. As a young man, Daniel was deported to Babylon. There he was instructed in the ways and wisdom of the Chaldeans. Yet Daniel was faithful to his God, who blessed him with a unique ability to interpret dreams. The magi considered this ability important because one of their many functions was to interpret dreams. Because Daniel held a prominent position among the wise men of his day, the magi likely would have studied his writings through the centuries. As a matter of fact, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the word magi for wise men when it says that Daniel was over the wise men. If so, they would have focused particularly on Daniel 9:26, which states that the "Messiah [shall] be cut off" after 483 years. This time frame is within the 490 years that God has determined to accomplish His program for Jerusalem and Israel. For the magi, this portion of Daniel's prophecy provided a timetable for the Messiah's arrival.

Supplied with an understanding of the wonders of God and relying, by faith, on Jewish prophecies, they eventually found Jesus, who was no more than two years old at the time.

Still, with the revelations available to them, there was no specific mention of where in Judah the king was to be born. When they arrived in Judah, they naturally went to Jerusalem. Perhaps they went there to obtain information as to where in the city the Messiah could be found. In Jerusalem the magi discovered another Jewish source. It came again from the Hebrew Bible, this time from the section called Neviim, meaning the Prophets.

Troubled to hear about a rival king who posed a threat to his throne, King Herod summoned the chief priests and scribes. He demanded to know where this king was to be born and was told of the prophecy found in Micah 5:2: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Herod relayed this information to the magi. This was probably the first time that they had heard about this prophecy.

There is something quite astonishing in the contrast between the magi and the chief priests in Herod's court. One would wonder why the presence of foreigners asking about a Jewish king did not capture the attention of the religious leaders. They knew of Herod's cruelty. It would not have been difficult to figure out that Herod's diligent inquiry to determine the earliest appearance of the star might have been to synchronize that information with the arrival of the magi and thereby estimate the time of the child's birth. Then he could have the newborn king killed. Still the religious leaders did nothing to protect their long-awaited Messiah. Their indifference to the things of God was already present before their hatred for Jesus was ever formed.

The entire canon of Old Testament Scripture contributed to the steps of faith taken by these wise men from the East. From the Torah they read the prediction about a star, but this was only the beginning. By itself it was insufficient. From the Writings came the insight from Daniel's prophecy concerning the timing of the Messiah's coming. But still more revelation was needed. Then from the Prophets came Micah 5:2, telling where He was to be born. The culmination of their journey was God's gift to them--Jesus.

These noble wise men represent the first Gentile worship of the Jewish King. Their actions symbolize the universal gospel outreach--that not only Israel can be saved, but also that "the nations shall come to thy light" (Isa. 60:3a).

The familiar saying, "Wise Men Still Seek Him," is still relevant. Are you a wise man?

"But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

--Reprinted by permission from *Israel My Glory*, Dec. 1996

After His birth . . . His death:

THE DAY THE CURTAIN FELL

Dale Jorgenson

One group of people not far from The Place of The Skull on the afternoon of Christ's crucifixion included the priests who were on duty in the temple that day. It was probably a very busy day for them, considering the fact that they were facing both Passover and Sabbath. Whether they were very much aware of the commotion on the *Via Dolorosa* as Jesus, Simon of Cyrene, soldiers and bystanders in the procession behind the Lord took their inexorable march toward the hill of execution is unknown to us. But just after three o'clock, those dedicated men experienced a shock which had to change their lives, almost as surely as the tragic procedure on Golgotha was changing the way the Roman Centurion viewed his own life. "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent; and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised . . ." Matthew reports in his summary of the astonishing aftermath of Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51-52 RSV).

The serving priests had to be greatly alarmed as they watched the precious veil ripping in two, apparently of its own volition and from supernatural power. The curtain was not only a work of art in its own right, but theologically a fundamental barrier between the place where the priests normally were to minister, and the very earthly dwelling of God Himself, over the holy ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple--probably until the Babylonian captivity during the sixth century B.C. Here the High Priest was the only person permitted to enter to carry out his priestly function and that only once annually, prepared by the blood of his sacrificial offering. As they struggled to comprehend the violent and supernatural ripping of the curtain, were the priests on duty aware of the events at Annas' and Caiaphas' houses the night before and in Pilate's judgment hall that very morning? It seems fair to assume that the news of the day must have trickled down to them by Friday afternoon, but whether they were able to connect what they were witnessing with the trial, condemnation, and crucifixion of the Messiah is beyond our ability to know. But we know that Judaism's Mosaic understanding of the awesome Holiness and Greatness of the living God was reinforced greatly by the wonderful design of the ancient tabernacle with its dividing curtain. Each time God's chosen people went to the tabernacle they were reminded of His great love and faithfulness in sustaining them from the time of their Egyptian bondage and escape from Pharaoh's army. And on the

other hand, with that tender love they also knew, as the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, "Our God is a consuming fire!"

The curtain, behind which the ark had been placed in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple with the seat of mercy as its lid, protected the Israelites from the unyielding holiness of His presence, yet invited their priestly representative in his annual ritual to find atonement at the mercy seat of God's grace. God was available upon intercession, yet maintained a perfect invulnerability to human violation of His Presence, of His Person.

It should not be surprising to contemporary Christians to hear some of the primary objections of many Jewish teachers to the Christian Incarnation: For them it is impossible that God should (a) become human flesh; (b) die. The tabernacle and the temples of David, Zerubbabel, and Herod, with their curtains dividing the Most Holy Place from the crowd, all emphasize this truth for the Jewish mindset.

Personal vulnerability is a quality people naturally try to limit for themselves, especially in time of fear and danger. The present era of despicable dangers to children has taught parents to emphasize self-protection to their little ones, and the dangerous world in which we all now live has tended to make adults continue this protective defense. The process of acquiring friendships, or even the act of courtship, illustrates our carefulness in only "letting down our guard" as we learn to trust the other party in a relationship. Perhaps we never completely outgrow the attitude of maintaining a certain wary approach to each other, even in a good marriage, learning that certain kinds of vulnerabilities can easily lead to hurt from each other. Congregations of Christian believers where there is bitterness and infighting among members (and leaders) are usually places where people learn to be very careful about guarding their weak spots. But foregoing this quality of self-protection is the very aspect of the Incarnation--of God truly becoming human--which reflects the depth of God's love for us.

The temptation of the Christ (reported in all three synoptic Gospels) comes to us as a bone-jarring revelation of what Jesus meant when He called Himself so often "The Son of Man." "Could Jesus actually be tempted?" we ask ourselves. Was it in any way *possible* that He could have succumbed to Satan's temptations--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the lust of power--in the same way that we can? It seems to be almost a sacrilege to think of the humanity of Jesus in this way. But this is the very aspect of God's becoming Man, as Paul explains in the letter to the Philippians, which enables His

sacrificial death to effect our salvation, and His living Presence to be our Advocate in daily life: He "emptied Himself," Paul says forcibly, "taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men . . . he became obedient even unto death, yea the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8 RSV).

But in spite of the protective curtain in the Most Holy Place which guarded the Holiest Place of God's Presence, there runs throughout the story of God's relationship to humankind a remarkable level of His letting down his guard from the very beginning of time. The creation of Man and Woman on the sixth day represents a dangerous step from the heart of God--a step which, indeed was part of a plan which "chose us before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Psychologically, it is true that people who never wish to be vulnerable can never love anyone--or any thing--too deeply. The risk is too great to take a chance if we wish to be perfectly safe from emotional hurt, and even young people happily taking their vows "until death do us part" have to realize that, in spite of their youthful sense of immortality, the "death" part will eventually separate them unless, of course, Jesus returns first to take them eternally to be with Him. The Creator God, with His foreknowledge, knew that Adam and Eve would rebel and break His heart in the Garden of Eden, and that their descendants would also. Yet, His love transcended that firm knowledge of coming heartbreak, and He created our race to glorify Him and to walk with Him in the bonds of love.

The Covenant with Moses opened a way for God's people to know Him and to serve Him, but in a sense postponed the ultimate heartbreak He would experience in redeeming His wayward Creation back to their purpose. The tabernacle was a marvelous device to allow people to offer their sacrifices for sin, to hear the Word of the Lord, and to send their representative (the high priest) into the Holy of Holies each year to offer atonement for their acknowledged sins. The Law served as a "schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:24) to bring us to the time when God would Himself make the final sacrifice--perhaps with tears of His own--to bring us to Christ and to Himself. The riches of the "Golden Text of the Bible," John 3:16, are in both the knowledge of God's love for us, and the pain suffered by the Father as He opened His heart in giving us the Son to die for our sins. At about three o'clock on that Friday afternoon God the Father must have been groaning with tears as He was compelled, in righteousness, to turn away as His Son was crying loudly, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" -- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 28:46).

As the priests watched, open-mouthed, in Herod's temple on the day Christ died, God ripped away any "separation" from men and

women He may have had in the Most Holy Place when the veil was suddenly torn like a piece of paper. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it succinctly:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience; and having our body washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised (Hebrews 10:19-23).

The intimate privilege we share in partaking of the Lord's Supper is a reminder of the unconditional openness and vulnerability of God in providing our access to Him--to His very heart. The bread and wine graphically suggest the tearing of Christ's Body--the tearing of the veil of the temple--which opens the Holy Place of God's Presence to each one of His believing children. And in the same way, they invite us to remove the barriers of our lives to each other, even as the Apostle Paul invites the Corinthians:

We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians: our heart is open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return--I speak as to children--open your hearts also (2 Corinthians 6:11-13 NRSV).

And so in Christ the curtain is torn wide open both in our access to the heart of God and to each other.

**After* the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Cleopas, a disciple, did ask Jesus on the road to Emmaus whether He were the only stranger in Jerusalem unaware of the things taking place (Luke 24:18).

For the New Year:

Facing the Future with Faith

Alex V. Wilson

What will the future hold for you? For your church, your city, your country, and the world? Can we face the future with faith, or only fear?

Avoid Five Wrong Attitudes about the Future

1. Don't Boast

Boasting about the future with smug self-confidence is surely the path of a fool. "I've gotta handle on it, and I *don't* need the Lord or His help."

The Bible answers: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." (Prov. 27:1). Again, "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil." (James 4:13-17.)

It's not wrong to make plans, if you prayerfully seek to know and do God's will. But do it *humbly, tentatively, looking to Him*.

2. Don't Worry, or Even Despair

That's the opposite error: Worrying about the future. Believing that even the Lord has no control over what's coming up. "Nobody is at the helm of history!"

May we rest on those calming words of our Lord,

I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6:25-34.)

Notice: "Do not worry.... Why do you worry?.... Do not worry." Why not? Because of *Who GOD Is*.

Who is He? First, our "Heavenly Father" [mentioned two times] who knows our needs. So He *loves* us (He's our *father*), and He is *wise* (a *heavenly* father). Also, He has a kingdom (so He's a *King* -- *powerful*) and He has righteousness (He is *good*).

A God like that we can trust with our future. We need not be anxious.

3. Don't Doubt or Deny

There's more. A third error is lack of faith. Don't doubt God's forecasts about the future. In other words, beware of unbelief. (Unbelief is often the cause of worry.)

Beware of doubt spread by false teachers who deny the Bible by "spiritualizing" its teachings. Brother Boll told of a Louisville preacher who was prominent and popular around 1950. The man said something like this: "There are people who say Jesus is going to come again -- right down here in the midst of things. I don't believe any such stuff! Jesus has been coming back ever since he went away."

[Let me intervene and say that there is *some* truth in that very last sentence! That is, at certain times Christ *has* "come" or "visited" the world during the centuries of human history -- either in special blessings (for example, the great revivals or "spiritual awakenings") or in special judgments. Check out Rev. 2-3 and see various times He said "I will come" which did *not* refer to His final advent! His "coming" at such times served as previews of His ulti-

mate, personal coming. But, I hasten to add, that's *not* what the modernist preacher meant.]

Quoting that preacher again: "Jesus has been coming back ever since he went away. Every Improvement that's been made, every forward step of Progress, every Invention and Discovery -- every one of those things was a coming of Christ." *Humbug!*

Previously in W&W we have shared with you some of the unbelief that is common in our day regarding the return of our Lord, and how those religious teachers and leaders who spread such unbelief are by their very doubts fulfilling Biblical prophecy. For Peter wrote, "Understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this *coming* he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" (2 Pet. 3:3-4.)

Let's keep studying our Bibles, and not be misled by such false teachers.

4. Don't Dogmatize

The opposite error from #3 is cocksure, *detailed* dogmatism regarding the future. There have been many sad examples of that, too.

In Louisville during October 1844 "a tent was set up at 7th and Chestnut Streets, where vast numbers of people from all social classes flocked to prepare themselves for an immediate end to the world." This was because of a prophecy by prophecy zealot William Miller, that Christ would return *right* away. "Many who attended these meetings rolled themselves in the dust in penitence. But the world refused to end." [We quote from a Louisville magazine from that time, which continued:] "About this time 2 Louisville residents were overheard arguing politics: Would James Polk or Henry Clay be elected president in the fall elections? As they disputed, a believer in Miller's predictions interrupted them. Neither Polk or Clay would be elected, he insisted. 'Jesus Christ will return and be the next president.'"

William Miller was a sincere and godly man. But he was greatly mistaken on this point. He was far more Biblical regarding other Bible doctrines (Christ's deity, atonement and resurrection) than Charles Russell, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, or Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormons. Like Miller, those latter men made many false predictions, but in addition were wrong about many core teachings of the Gospel. In spite of Miller's orthodoxy on main doctrines, however, he still did much harm by his setting dates for Christ's return.

Still today there are not only many outright false teachers and cults who deny basic truths of the Christian gospel, there are also many teachers who are godly in character and Biblical in basic Christian doctrines but can't refrain from dogmatism and date-setting in prophecy. Beware of anyone smarter than our Lord Jesus, who said in essence, "None of you disciples of mine know the exact timing of my return. And at this point even I don't know." (Check His exact words at Matt. 24:36.)

In Oct. 1995 *Word and Work* ran articles on the theme, "MAY Jesus come soon? MUST Jesus come soon?" That issue listed over 19 examples of false predictions by various Evangelical teachers and writers ancient and contemporary, and refers to other cases of date-setting, etc. by cultists. I hope you won't swallow everything any teacher makes about prophecy (including those of us who write in W&W) unless you check it out carefully.

So what have we seen regarding our reactions to the future? We should not Boast. We need not Worry. We ought not Doubt the clear Biblical teachings about Christ's coming. We must not gullibly Swallow Everything that people claim the Bible teaches, nor be Dogmatic and Divisive regarding prophecy's details. *L-a-s-t* of all, and maybe most controversial of all...

5. Don't be Passive or Fatalistic

Remember the old song, "Que Sera Sera – Whatever will be will be"? Tain't so.

Is this statement true or false? *Nothing can change God's plans, predictions and program.*

I believe that's false--at least regarding the timing and detailed outworking of His plans. *God is not locked into His forecasts!*

Someone observed, "**There is not just THE future we must ADAPT to; rather, there are MANY futures we can CHOOSE from.**" That sounded suspicious to me the first time I heard it. Maybe even heretical! But, on second thought, listen to Jeremiah 18:7-10, where the Lord speaks:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey

me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

That's clear enough, isn't it? Now consider these Bible examples where it came to pass: #1. God told Hezekiah it was time for his death, but in response to his prayer gave him 15 more years of life. #2. At God's command Jonah predicted the fall of wicked Ninevah in 40 days; but *God relented when Ninevah repented!* He postponed His judgment on that city and empire for over 100 years. They chose a different future than the one God foretold, and He gladly gave it to them. #3. After God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, He foretold that He would enable them to conquer the armies of Canaan and settle there. He would give them the land. And He *would* have done it for that generation, just as He freed them from Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh's army for them. But they did not trust Him and thus did not obey Him. They chose the wrong future, so for 40 years they had to live as desert nomads instead of having their own homes and farms in the land God promised them.

What about Us, Now?

Let's pray for a great heaven-sent spiritual awakening, work for reforms, be involved in world-evangelism, and seek to win the lost around us...*even though we know that in general moral conditions will deteriorate* as the age draws to its close. (2 Tim. 3:1-9; 2 Pet. 3:3-4; Rev., etc.)

And let's lovingly ask our friends, "What future are you choosing for yourself, during this life, day by day, and during the eternity which follows it? Are you trusting and obeying the Lord God with all your heart? Or are you missing out on the joys He offers you, and heading for grief and woe? Choose wisely."

And for ourselves, by God's grace let's avoid the five errors, and face the future with faith.

Thoughts on planning for the future

"We can make our best plans to try to carry out in our own strength. Or we can make careful plans and ask God to bless them. Yet another way of working is to begin with God; to ask His plans, and to offer ourselves to Him to carry out His purposes."

-- Hudson Taylor

"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to our known God."

--Corrie Ten Boom

For Thanksgiving:

The Blessing of *Thorns*

Sandra felt as low as the heels of her shoes as she pushed against a November gust and the florist shop door. Her life had been easy, like a spring breeze. Then in the fourth month of her second pregnancy, a minor automobile accident stole her ease.

During this Thanksgiving week she would have delivered a son. She grieved over her loss. As if that weren't enough, her husband's company threatened a transfer. Then her sister, whose annual holiday visit she coveted, called saying she could not come.

What's worse, Sandra's friend infuriated her by suggesting her grief was a God-given path to maturity that would allow her to empathize with others who suffer. "She has no idea what I'm feeling," thought Sandra with a shudder.

"Thanksgiving? Thankful for what?" she wondered aloud. For a careless driver whose truck was hardly scratched when he rear-ended her? For an airbag that saved her life but took that of her child?

"Good afternoon, can I help you?"

The shop clerk's approach startled her.

"I...I need an arrangement," stammered Sandra.

"For Thanksgiving? Do you want beautiful but ordinary, or would you like to challenge the day with a customer favorite I call the Thanksgiving Special?" asked the shop clerk. "I'm convinced that flowers tell stories," she continued. "Are you looking for something that conveys 'gratitude' this Thanksgiving?"

"Not exactly!" Sandra blurted out. "In the last five months, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong." Sandra regretted her outburst, and was surprised when the shop clerk said, "I have the perfect arrangement for you."

Then the door's small bell rang, and the shop clerk said, "Hi Barbara...let me get your order." She politely excused herself and walked toward a small workroom, then quickly reappeared, carrying an arrangement of greenery, bows, and long-stemmed thorny roses. Except the ends of the rose stems were neatly snipped... there were no flowers. "Want this in a box?" asked the clerk.

Sandra watched for the customer's response. Was this a joke? Who would want rose stems with no flowers!?! She waited for laughter, but neither woman laughed. "Yes, please," Barbara replied with an appreciative smile. "You'd think after three years of getting the special, I wouldn't be so moved by its significance, but I can feel it right here, all over again," she said as she gently tapped her chest.

"Uhh," stammered Sandra, "that lady just left with, uhh... she just left with no flowers!"

"Right...I cut off the flowers. That's the Special... I call it the Thanksgiving Thorns Bouquet."

"Oh, come on, you can't tell me someone is willing to pay for that?" exclaimed Sandra.

"Barbara came into the shop three years ago feeling very much like you feel today," explained the clerk. "She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer, the family business was failing, her son was into drugs, and she was facing major surgery."

"That same year I had lost my husband," continued the clerk, "and for the first time in my life, I had to spend the holidays alone. I had no children, no husband, no family nearby, and too great a debt to allow any travel.

"So what did you do?" asked Sandra.

"I learned to be thankful for thorns," answered the clerk quietly. "I've always thanked God for good things in life and never thought to ask Him why those good things happened to me, but when bad stuff hit, did I ever ask! It took time for me to learn that dark times are important. I always enjoyed the 'flowers' of life, but it took thorns to show me the beauty of God's comfort. You know, the Bible says that God comforts us when we're afflicted, and from His consolation we learn to comfort others.

"Sandra sucked in her breath as she thought about the very thing her friend had tried to tell her. "I guess the truth is I don't want comfort. I've lost a baby and I'm angry with God." Just then someone else walked in the shop.

"Hey, Phil!" shouted the clerk to the balding, rotund man.

"My wife sent me in to get our usual Thanksgiving arrangement... twelve thorny, long-stemmed stems!" laughed Phil as the

clerk handed him a tissue-wrapped arrangement from the refrigerator.

"Those are for your wife?" asked Sandra incredulously. "Do you mind me asking why she wants something that looks like that?"

"No...I'm glad you asked," Phil replied. "Four years ago my wife and I nearly divorced. After forty years, we were in a real mess, but with the Lord's grace and guidance, we slogged through problem after problem. He rescued our marriage. Jenny here (the clerk) told me she kept a vase of rose stems to remind her of what she learned from "thorny" times, and that was good enough for me. I took home some of those stems. My wife and I decided to label each one for a specific "problem" and give thanks to Him for what that problem taught us."

As Phil paid the clerk, he said to Sandra, "I highly recommend the Special!"

"I don't know if I can be thankful for the thorns in my life." Sandra said to the clerk. "It's all too... fresh."

"Well," the clerk replied carefully, "my experience has shown me that thorns make roses more precious. We treasure God's providential care more during trouble than at any other time. Remember, it was a crown of thorns that Jesus wore so we might know His love. Don't resent the thorns."

Tears rolled down Sandra's cheeks. For the first time since the accident, she loosened her grip on resentment. "I'll take those twelve long-stemmed thorns, please," she managed to choke out.

"I hoped you would," said the clerk gently. "I'll have them ready in a minute."

"Thank you. What do I owe you?" asked Sandra. "Nothing," said the clerk. "Nothing but a promise to allow God to heal your heart. The first year's arrangement is always on me." The clerk smiled and handed a card to Sandra.

"I'll attach this card to your arrangement, but maybe you'd like to read it first." It read: "Dear God, I have never thanked you for my thorns. I have thanked you a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorns. Teach me the value of my thorns. Show me that I have climbed closer to you along the path of pain. Show me that, through my tears, the colors of your rainbow look much more brilliant."

EARLY AMERICAN WORSHIP

John Gipson, reprinted from Linton Church Bulletin

Sunday morning I was handed an article written by Diana McCain on "The Hardships of Worship." It dealt with the meeting-houses for worship in Connecticut two centuries ago. The typical clapboard meetinghouse of that era was not only "slenderly built...admitting somewhat freely the blasts of the season," as popular nineteenth century author Samuel Griswold Goodrich recalled, but was unheated.

Diana Ross McCain tells us, "There was no fireplace, no stove, no significant heat source of any kind. Half-frozen men, women and children, bundled up in their heaviest garments, hunched into themselves to conserve precious body heat and peered through clouds of condensation formed by their breath. In the pulpit the minister himself might be preaching clad in a greatcoat and mittens. At times it got so cold the Lord's Supper froze."

She continues, "Comfort was not a primary consideration of those who constructed early Connecticut meetinghouses. Here one came every Sunday to attend to the serious business of hearing the Word of God and how it might be applied to daily life. And that solemn duty was to be carried out no matter what weather it pleased the Almighty to provide."

We are told that attendance at religious services was nearly universal in Connecticut in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, since it was required by law of everyone, young and old, unless excused by serious illness or some equally compelling circumstances. Cold weather was not recognized as a valid reason for being absent from worship.

Sometimes in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when it was suggested that a chimney and fireplace be constructed in the North Haven, Connecticut meeting house, "the horrified worshippers arose and would have thrust the thoughtless suggestor headlong from them," North Haven historian Sheldon Thorpe wrote in 1892.

Eventually two violent factions emerged - the Stove Party and the Anti-Stove Party (each headed by the wife of a deacon). Guess which one won!

I am waiting to see the following ad in some newspaper: "Come worship with us. Our building is cold in the winter and hot in the

summer. We use no heat or air conditioning. Our pews are hard. We do not meet for comfort, but for worship. You are welcome.”

[*P.S. by Jerry Carmichael: Now, what was it you were saying about the thermostat?*]

Madalyn Murray O’Hair and Urban Legends

Alex V. Wilson

“Urban legend” is a term meaning a widespread (but *false*) report of bizarre or threatening or antichristian character, which becomes widely believed and causes folks to warn as many others as possible. Here’s one that circulated widely a few years ago: A girl got a letter from her Afghani boyfriend (who’d unexpectedly and suddenly disappeared two days before), saying terrorists were going to strike at U.S. malls on Halloween. Status of that report: False.

I’ve fallen for some urban legends. One summer “the police” issued a warning that the latest craze for inner city “punks” was to pull up to a car stopped at a red light and spray a potent but invisible poisonous gas through the driver’s open window before speeding away with glee. Therefore keep your windows closed, especially when driving downtown. Status of that report: False. But before somebody told me that, I’d sent email warnings to several folks.

No doubt the most widespread urban legend is about the late Madalyn Murray O’Hair. In past years I’ve received this warning not a few times, nor several, but numerous times. Then they seemed to die down. But in the past few months two different people forwarded me an email which claimed to be a “plea for action” by Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family. (That was a new twist.) Among other things it said:

Madeline Murray O’Hair, an atheist, successfully managed to eliminate the use of Bible reading from public schools a few years ago. Now her organization has been granted a Federal Hearing on the same subject by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in Washington, DC. Their petition, Number 2493, would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the gospel our Lord and Savior, on the airwaves of America. And if they succeed, all Sunday worship services being broadcast on the radio or by television will be stopped.

I discovered years ago that this is another urban legend. She is dead now, and her organization has not existed for years. Just to see what Focus on the Family said about it now, I went to Dobson's website (Family.org) and found several articles from their CITIZEN magazine debunking this info. You can read them for yourself at Family.org. [click Focus Magazine: Public Policy Issues]. Here's the bottom line:

“The furor about a **fictional** petition to stop all religious broadcasting is still going strong; and now Dr. James Dobson is being pulled into the fray.” Again, “Information about the FCC's ruling is online, at www.fcc.gov/mb/enf/forms/rm-24_93.html. To date the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] has received more than **30 million** pieces of mail about the 29-year-old petition and innumerable e-mails and faxes. The rumor continues unabated, most recently in a new e-mail. Allegedly written by Dr. James Dobson, founder and chairman of the board of Focus on the Family, the e-mail urges Christians to forward it to their friends or contact the FCC and protest. Needless to say, Dr. Dobson did *not* initiate the e-mail; nevertheless, Focus on the Family has received thousands of calls about it.”

That's straight from the horse's mouth.

Some people out there get their kicks by seeing how many sincere people they can dupe. So some guy tries to persuade folks that his 3rd cousin's great-nephew was abducted by aliens from outer space. Or that Osama bin Laden has been converted but fears to admit it – and now pastors a Baptist Church in inner city Kalamazoo (he had plastic surgery to hide his identity). [I made those up -- pretty creative, right? Do not pass them on!] Such deliberate hoax-inventors ought to be tossed into a 10-foot deep pond of peanut butter surrounded by barbed wire. Come to think of it, they'd find a way to escape and start spreading that story too.

Here are two out of a number of websites which specialize in investigating and classifying rumors about sensational events, threats, virus-warnings, free offers, etc. **truthorfiction.com** and also **hoaxbusters.ciac.org** The truthorfiction site is run by Rich Buhler, a Christian, and thus deals with some issues not found on hoaxbusters. *If in doubt, consult those websites.*

Archaeology and Dirt

Don McGee

For many years the existence of King David was considered a myth by those in secular disciplines. These people enjoy talking about biblical myths such as Noah's flood and King David. However, we haven't heard much from those folks about David since 1993. You see, archaeologists found a clay tablet in northern Galilee that dates from 900 years BC and it mentions the "House of David" and the "King of Israel." In fact, the discovery was so important it made the front page of the New York Times. For an account of the discovery go to *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April 1994, p.26.

People did a lot of writing on clay tablets back then, and those clay tablets are the only things that have survived for thousands of years. Cloth, wood and metal rot and rust, but not clay. That is why archaeology is quite often a very dusty and dirty job and archaeologists are often seen with trowels, brushes, shovels and picks. If you are interested in the fascinating field of archaeology from a biblical perspective spend some time at the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) website at www.christiananswers.net/abr/home.

--from CSM Newsletter. www.crownandsickle.com

A Review and Expansion of

“Are We Christians going to be Judged by God?”

(See the Oct. W&W)

A. V. W.

Here are important points and passages to share with careless professing believers. Notice the two different “confessions” mentioned here—in addition to the initial confession of faith in Jesus as divine Lord and Savior.

1) The **unsaved** -- no matter to what depths of evil they have plunged or how long they have shaken their fist at God -- may have all their sins forgiven. See the story of King Manassah, the worst king Judah ever had, the O.T. “prodigal son” (2 Chron. 33). What stunning grace! But of course the unsaved must repent and believe in Jesus as Lord (during this N.T. era), **confessing** “I’m a *sinner*, I need Jesus as my Savior to forgive me my sins, and as my Lord to lead me out of sin. Jesus, I trust in You; be merciful to me, a sinner” . . . and being buried and raised with Him in baptism. God gives such converts a “Righteous” verdict or standing in His Court, for Jesus’ righteousness is attributed to us! The Lord forgives and

forgets our sins which otherwise would result in our doom. And He adds us to His family.

2) Thus **saved people** are children of God, members of the divine family. When we sin we don't lose our *relationship* as **His sons or daughters**. But we do disrupt the *fellowship* or close communion with our Father and eternal Brother. (Compare your family.) To restore our fellowship, we should **confess our specific sins** to the Lord. Not just "I'm a sinner" (that's fairly easy to say, because so is everyone else), and not just "I sinned," (sadly, even that's too easy to say – since everybody sins). 1 John 1:9 has well been called "the Christian's bar of soap." It tells us, "If we confess our *sins* (our specific infractions), He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins." So our confession to Him should be, "I lied" (or lusted, cheated, was conceited, was selfish and hateful...whatever!). That is humbling, and should be therapeutic too.

Two verses earlier, John amplifies this basic fact. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

What if we carelessly neglect to deal with our sins? Then we forfeit our fellowship with the Lord! (Again, note the difference between relationship and fellowship.) His love for us does not cease, of course, but so long as we retain that careless attitude, the friendship is strained. It takes two to maintain a friendship, and we've turned our backs on the closest friend we'll ever have. To bring us to our senses, our Father will "talk" to us (through the Bible, conscience, friends, circumstances), or if necessary He will "ground" us or "spank" us (through unpleasant circumstances). See Hebrews 12.

What if we still **stubbornly refuse to repent**? (For example, what if David had died before God sent Nathan to him?) Then I would hate to be in your shoes at the judgment-seat of Christ! What sorrow and shame before your Savior. More than that, if you maintain such an attitude it raises grave doubts as to whether you were ever truly converted and saved in the first place! David was, that's true. And Peter was, too, even when he disowned Jesus three times. Their faith was demonstrated by their later repentance. PTL, His "grace is greater than all our sins." Yet He also says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7-8). Also through Ezekiel the Lord pled so movingly with Israel – and still pleads with everyone everywhere who is unrepentant: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11.)

Do not be one of the many people who deceive themselves. Paul warns us, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5.)

VOICES from the FIELD

Michiya and Tomoka Nakahara Shizuoka City, Japan
October 2004

We kicked off our fall season on September 5th remembering my father, Shichiro, 16 years after his home going to be with the Lord. Also, 43 years have passed since the birth of the congregation in Shizuoka. Society, as well as people's thinking in general, has greatly changed and continues to change. But we, as the servants of Christ, need to keep our eyes focused on the Lord and serve Him wholeheartedly until he returns for us.

One of the recent changes that has occurred is the sale of the property which used to be a steel factory. Some type of a new-age religious organization has purchased it and is planning to build their facility in the near future. They paid over 20 million dollars for the property, which tells me that this is no small organization. People in town are somewhat alarmed and uncomfortable with this change. Please pray with us that we can be a lighthouse for Christ and trust God to use us mightily in what seems to be a potential hindrance to our ministry.

We continue to use our 4th Sunday of the month as our "door-to-door" ministry. We distribute over 350 gospel tracts to the neighborhood on these Sundays. On a personal note, my responsibility to teach at OBS (Osaka Bible Seminary) this quarter has been postponed. The satellite program that I was to use is not quite finished, so I will have to schedule my class for the fall of 2005.

Just as you have experienced unsettling weather patterns in Florida, we have experienced strange weather in Japan as well. We normally have typhoons (hurricanes) in the fall, but they started in the spring this year and they keep coming. This weather change certainly affects my neck and spine condition, but God is good. I am very diligent in my exercises the doctor has prescribed, and that seems to be helping a lot. My condition presently is not as painful as in the past and I am able to continue with my daily study and church work. I ask that you remember my physical needs in your prayers.

[Note from the editor: A later email from Moto Nomura said that the powerful earthquake that shook Japan in late October was felt at his place, and probably in Shizuoka too, but did not cause any serious damage either to the Nomuras or the Nakaharas.]

RESTED AND READY TO WORSHIP

Mike Edmondson, in *Pulpit Helps*

Have you ever gone to church on Sunday mornings so tired that you were in a semi-coma, a walking zombie? Have you ever found yourself sitting in Sunday School or worship service so tired and sleepy that you could not concentrate on the matter at hand? When you left you could not tell anyone what the lesson, the sermon, the announcements, or special music was about if your life depended on it!

I can well remember those times as a teenager when we had some special activity on Saturday night. My Dad would always say, "You can go, but just remember that you have to be in Sunday School and church in the morning – WITH YOUR EYES OPEN!" It was hard to hide from him since he was my preacher! It was pure torture on Sunday morning to try to sit up straight, eyes propped open, pay attention, and not fall out into the aisle. I can assure you I did not get much out of church that day.

Why is it we do not learn that we have just so much time and energy, and we have to manage both? An athlete rests up and gets a good night's sleep before the all-important contest or game the next day. We try to get rest during the day if we know we are going to miss sleep at night. What makes us think we can stay up half of Saturday night, drag ourselves to church on Sunday morning, and get anything out of church? The Spirit cannot get you to think, respond, or act if you are asleep!

Vance Havner said, "Another thing I like about my Dad at church; he did his sleeping at home. He never used the church for an adult nursery." I would to God that all of us could have the same compliment paid to us.

You cannot do your best, whether it is teaching, singing, praying, or just listening, if you are worn-out and sleepy. The preacher cannot give God his best in the pulpit if he is not rested and refreshed after a good night's sleep. In our home, we try to make it a practice to not be up until the wee hours of the morning on Saturday night.

It is really a sin to come to church tired, sleepy and unrested when we can discipline ourselves to "rest up and be ready" to worship. Our worship is such an important, personal thing in our lives; and we owe it to God, to ourselves, and to our fellow Christians and church attenders to give ourselves to worship in Spirit and in truth.

God may be saying to us, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light." Ephesians 5:14)

--via Linton Church of Christ bulletin (Jerry Carmichael)

Normalization of Deviation

JOYce Broyles

As children, we are trained to keep rules or adopt behaviors that are acceptable at home, school, and worship. If our parents are Christlike, these values are highly moral and the seeds from those lessons never leave us. Once the seeds are firmly planted, the harvest is set. Conforming to that standard makes it normal for us. Should we choose to disobey or pull out those seeds when we are older, we are straying from the "norm" as we know it.

Normalization is conforming to a standard while deviation is straying from it. If enough time is spent on the deviation, the deviation itself takes over and is accepted as the norm. How do we get from one to the other? It begins with just a small step in the opposite direction from the good standard.

In 1986, NASA's Challenger explosion left questions about what went wrong. Analysts finalized three causes. First, joint tests were not adequate because no standards were given for some of them. They were deemed unnecessary so that even after many memos were sent, the importance of the risks was lessened. Second, the system for tracking variances was not adequate so deviations were not documented if they were accepted. Third, because there were no immediate consequences, the deviations were accepted.

The conclusion was that deviation had become normalization. Just as in the realm of science, this is a possibility in the spiritual realm. A step in the wrong direction, if not corrected, can eventually become the path taken.

The greatest commandment is given in Matthew 22:34-40. It is not normal to love one's enemies. Just as NASA had specifications, we have specs to follow. They are contained in the Bible, but if we are not careful, we can deviate from them.

We love God. That is easy enough to do; however, we have a problem loving others, especially if they are unlovable, think or look different, or hurt us in some way. It is difficult because of the way our personality desires to show love. To express it, we have to serve others, as Jesus tells us in the books of Matthew and John.

In I Corinthians 13, Paul explains what love is. Once we deviate from the scripture, we may tend to normalize. Just as the scientists discovered with Challenger, we find that if we deviate, there will be consequences!

In America today, society has normalized many deviations. After seven years in Saudi Arabia where television was carefully censored, I remember how shocked I was when I returned to the U.S. That was some twenty years ago. Television has gotten worse, yet few of us are shocked at what is shown. It has become the norm.

Those of us in the church may normalize **not** doing what Jesus told us to do in Matthew 25.

That includes feeding, clothing, visiting, and helping others who need it. If we do not do those things, and we let it become our normal way of life, we will be deviating from the standard of love that Jesus set for us to follow.

If we deviate from any instructions we have in the Bible until they become normalization, we will lose out on the blessings of Christian living. That means missing what Jesus has for us, just as Challenger missed its projected outcome.

Another observation: Isn't it amazing how the deviations *always go from good to bad*. They never go from good to better! This is another reason the evolution theory is not correct. Man should be evolving better and better, but instead, we are getting worse and worse.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

Great Fellowship in Glenmora, LA. (by Bennie Hill) Everyone attending this year's 30th annual meeting enjoyed a time of spiritual renewal. I was able to attend briefly and distribute the Prayer/Praise Booklets from the Mission Office. Dillard & Doris Fontenot of Lecompte put out the red carpet once again for me to enjoy their gracious hospitality. The ladies of various churches outdid themselves again by serving lunch each day. Everyone was challenged with the "Church's Responsibility in the 21st century" with special emphasis on several "Prophetic Portrayals in Exodus."

Thanks to the leadership of many faithful servants in working together in putting forth another great fellowship.

Any or all tapes of the messages & singing can be obtained by contacting:

Donald R. Stump
1720 Plum Creek Rd.
Taylorsville, KY 40071
(502) 477-2252
e-mail: ddrspas@aol.com

Glenmora Church of Christ (Dennis LeDoux) recently dedicated a new building consisting of

a basketball / volleyball court - state of the art kitchen and bathroom facilities. The building is being used to attract young people in the area.

Stan & Nan Broussard were honored Nov. 7, 2004 in a special service at Bayou Jacque. This commemorated 50 faithful years of service to the Lord. After attending Portland Christian School - Bro. Stan went on to the Kentucky Bible College (KBC) before going back to Louisiana where he ministered along with his wife for much of the time. Over 200 attended this special day and enjoyed a time of fellowship and great singing by the Glenmora chorus and other specials. Bro. Don McGee was there and shared many experiences of knowing Stan & Nan.

Prayer/Praise Booklet: that contain updated information of over 27 different works both foreign and home are available by contacting:

Bennie Hill
P.O. Box 54842
Lexington, KY 40555
(859) 269-1312
bhll40482@aol.com

They are free of charge and provide valuable information that you might use to encourage your congregation in Missions Around the World.

Three Who are Now with the Lord:

Brother G.I. Oginni, longtime preacher and leader among churches in the U.S. during at least two trips, if not more. More information about him will appear

in the next *Words of Life News*. Everyone should get this free bi-monthly newsletter in order to keep abreast of the international radio ministry of "Words of Life." Dale Offutt is the preacher. Address: P. O. Box 221, Sellersburg, IN 47172-0221.

Sunny Faith Istre, wife of A.J. Istre in Jennings, LA, went to Glory on Oct. 21 after a long illness. She was a godly wife and mother and faithful co-worker for the Lord along with A.J., a long-time minister and elder.

Paul Heid of Louisville, KY, 63, very suddenly and unexpectedly went to Heaven on Oct. 26. He worked for many years in public school administration, and was active in various works for Christ--especially in planning the annual Thanksgiving Day meetings. Pray for his wife Barbara and two children.

Renewing Ties: Flavil Hall was a friend of R.H. Boll's, and wrote for W&W back in the 1930's and '40's. He also wrote the music for the song "Jesus is Our Loving Shepherd" (and maybe other songs as well). Recently his great-grandson, Gardner Hall of Port Murray, New Jersey, wrote to the W&W office ordering a copy of Tom Bradshaw's biography, *R. H. BOLL -- Controversy and Accomplishment*. He learned about the book from Hans Rollman's informative website. Copies of the book are still available @ \$14.00 plus postage. We are delighted that Brother Hall got in touch.

School of Biblical Studies

2105 Buechel Bank Road
Louisville, KY 40218
(502) 499-2704

Schedule for Spring, 2005

Written Comp & Library Orientation	James Redden	Mon. 9:00-Noon
Daniel/Revelation	Jerry Carmichael	Mon. 1:00-4:00
Work of the Church II	Bud Ridgeway	Tue. 9:00-11:00
Christian Ethics	Bennie Hill	Tue. 1:00-4:00
Song Leading	James Embree	TBA

All classes will be held at Buechel Church of Christ except for Song Leading, which will be held at Portland Christian High School, 2500 Portland Ave., Louisville.

Registration fees & schedule can be obtained by calling (502) 499-2704. Spring semester begins January 10, 2005 and ends May 6, 2005.

SBS Spring Seminar will be held March 10-11 (Fri. night/Sat. Morning), 2005. Bob Ross and Ann Cook will present "**Marriage as the Path to Personal and Spiritual Growth**". Mark your calendar now to attend this important seminar at the Buechel Church of Christ, 2105 Buechel Bank Road, Louisville, KY 40218.