

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 2000

DEITY DESCENDED (God At Risk!)

**Our Lord Enables Us
To Cope, And Even To
Be Thankful**

This Month's Themes

Alex V. Wilson

There are really good articles this month, some long and other short. Don't let the long ones scare you off. If the seemingly unavoidable holiday rush limits your time at present, then read the short ones now and the others later. But don't miss them.

Three articles relate to the Incarnation, when the Deity descended and put Himself at risk! One tells of God's mighty acts which led to the Jewish holiday Hanukkah. Then four articles deal with the hassles and staggering heartbreaks of life, and how we can move from defeat to coping and even to thanksgiving.

As this year draws to a close, may we all trust in the Lord so that He may indeed "bless us every one."

Using Bible Truths to Combat Worry

Vicki Broaddus Scott

I believe God created all things and that man is special in his creation (created in God's own image).

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26).

"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8: 3-5).

I believe that I am very important to God and He cares for me more than my human mind can possibly comprehend.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever (that means me) believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid: you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10: 28-31).

"God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5 & 6).

I believe that God is in control. He created me, He loves me, and He wants only what is best for me. Sometimes things may not seem

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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COSMIC COMBAT

Philip Yancey

In 1993 I read a news report about a "Messiah sighting" in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York. Twenty thousand Lubavitcher Hasidic Jews live in Crown Heights, and many of them believed the Messiah was dwelling among them in the person of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Word of the rabbi's public appearance spread like a flash fire through the streets of Crown Heights, and Lubavitchers in their black coats and curly sidelocks were soon dashing toward the synagogue where the rabbi customarily prayed. The lucky ones connected to a network of beepers got a head start, sprinting toward the synagogue the instant they felt a slight vibration. They jammed by the hundreds into a main hall, elbowing each other and even climbing the pillars to create more room. The hall filled with an air of anticipation and frenzy normally found at a championship sporting event, not a religious service.

The rabbi was 91 years old. He had suffered a stroke the year before and had not been able to speak since. When the curtain finally pulled back, those who had crowded into the synagogue saw a frail old man with a long beard who could do little but wave, tilt his head, and move his eyebrows. No one in the audience seemed to mind, though. "Long live our master, our teacher, and our rabbi, King, Messiah, forever and ever!" they sang in unison, over and over, building in volume until the rabbi made a small gesture with his hand and the curtain closed. They departed slowly, savoring the moment, in a state of ecstasy. (Rabbi Schneerson died in June 1994. Now Lubavitchers are awaiting his bodily resurrection.)

When I first read the news account I nearly laughed out loud. Who are these people trying to kid--a 90 year old mute Messiah in Brooklyn? And then it struck me: I was reacting to Rabbi Schneerson exactly as people in the first century had reacted to Jesus. A Messiah from Galilee? A carpenter's kid, no less?

The scorn I felt as I read about the rabbi and his fanatical followers gave me a small glimpse of the kind of responses Jesus faced throughout his life. His neighbors asked, "Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" Other countrymen scoffed, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" His own family tried to put him away, believing he was out of his mind. The religious experts sought to kill him. As for the common

people, one moment they judged him demon-possessed and raving mad, the next they forcibly tried to crown him king.

It took courage, I believe, for God to lay aside power and glory and to take his place among human beings who would greet him with the same mixture of haughtiness and skepticism that I felt when I first heard about Rabbi Schneerson of Brooklyn. It took courage to endure the shame, and courage even to risk descent to a planet known for its clumsy violence, among a race known for rejecting its prophets. A God of all power deliberately put himself in such a state that Satan could tempt him, demons could taunt him, and lowly human beings could slap his face and nail him to a cross. What more foolhardy thing could God have done?

"Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator," said G. K. Chesterton. The need for such courage began with Jesus' first night on earth and did not end until his last.

WHO IS HE IN YONDER STALL?

Christmas art shows Jesus' family, the Holy Family, as icons stamped in gold foil. In the paintings, a calm Mary receives the news of the Annunciation as a kind of benediction--but that is not at all how Luke tells the story. Mary was "greatly troubled" and "afraid" at the angel's appearance, and when the angel delivered the lofty words about the Son of the Most High whose kingdom will never end, Mary had one thing only on her mind: "But I'm a virgin!"

Once, a young unmarried lawyer named Cynthia bravely stood up in my church in Chicago and told of a past sin of fornication, which we already knew about: we saw her hyperactive son running up and down the aisles every Sunday. Cynthia had taken the lonely road of bearing him and caring for him after his father decided to skip town. Cynthia's sin was no worse than many others, and yet, as she told us, it had such conspicuous consequences. She could not hide the result of that one act of passion, sticking out as it did from her abdomen for nine months until a child emerged to change every hour of every day of the rest of her life. No wonder the Jewish teenager Mary felt greatly troubled--she faced the same prospects even without the act of passion.

In the modern United States, where each year a million teenage girls get pregnant out of wedlock, Mary's predicament has undoubtedly lost some of its force, but in a closely knit Jewish community in the first century, the news an angel delivered could not have been entirely welcome. The law regarded a betrothed woman who became pregnant as an adulteress, subject to death by stoning.

Matthew tells of Joseph generously agreeing to divorce Mary rather than press charges, until an angel shows up to calm his feelings of betrayal. Luke tells of Mary hurrying off to the one person who could possibly understand what she was going through: her relative Elizabeth, who has miraculously become pregnant in old age following another angelic annunciation. Elizabeth indeed believes Mary's story and shares her joy, and yet the scene poignantly underscores the contrast between the two women. The whole countryside is talking about the miracle of Elizabeth's healed womb; meanwhile, Mary has to hide the shame of her own miracle.

A few months later, the birth of John the Baptist took place with great fanfare, complete with midwives, doting relatives, and the traditional village chorus celebrating the birth of a Jewish male. Six months after that, Jesus was born far from home, with no midwife, extended family, or village chorus present. A male head of household would have sufficed for the Roman census; did Joseph drag his pregnant wife along to Bethlehem in order to spare her the ignominy of childbirth in her home village?

C. S. Lewis has written about God's plan: "The whole thing narrows and narrows, until at last it comes down to a little point, small as the point of a spear--a Jewish girl at her prayers." Today as I read the accounts of Jesus' birth I tremble to think of the fate of the world resting on the responses of two rural teenagers. How many times must Mary have gone over the angel's words as she felt the Son of God kicking against the walls of her uterus? How many times must Joseph have second-guessed his own encounter with an angel--just a dream?--as he endured the hot shame of living among neighbors who could plainly see the changing shape of the woman he planned to marry?

We know nothing of Jesus' grandparents. What must they have felt? Did they respond like so many parents of unmarried teenagers today, with an outburst of fury and moral lectures and then perhaps a period of sullen silence until at last the bright-eyed newborn arrives to melt the ice and arrange a fragile family truce?

Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal--it seems almost as if God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance, as if to avoid any accusation of favoritism. I am impressed that when the Son of God became a human being, he played by the rules, harsh rules: small towns do not treat kindly young boys who grow up with questionable paternity.

Malcolm Muggeridge observed that in modern times, with family-planning clinics offering ways to correct "mistakes" that might disgrace a family name, "It is, in point of fact, extremely improbable

...that Jesus would have been permitted to be born at all. Mary's pregnancy, in poor circumstances, and with the father unknown, would have been an obvious case for an abortion; and her talk of having conceived as a result of the intervention of the Holy Ghost would have pointed to the need for psychiatric treatment, and made the case for terminating her pregnancy even stronger. Thus our generation, needing a Savior more, perhaps, than any that has ever existed, would be too humane to allow one to be born."

The Virgin Mary, though, whose family was not planned, had a different response. She heard the angel out, pondered the enormous consequences, and replied, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Every work of God comes with two edges, great joy and great pain, and in that matter-of-fact response, Mary embraced both. She was the first to accept Jesus on his own terms, regardless of the personal cost.

HOW SILENTLY, HOW SILENTLY, THE WONDROUS GIFT IS GIVEN

In the birth stories of Luke and Matthew, only one person seems to grasp the mysterious nature of what God has set in motion: the old man Simeon, who had long clung to the belief that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, instinctively understood that conflict would break out. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against. . .," he said, and then gave the prediction that a sword would pierce Mary's own soul. Somehow Simeon sensed that though to all appearances little had changed--Herod was still king, Roman troops were still stringing up patriots, Jerusalem still overflowed with beggars--under the surface, everything had changed. A new force had arrived to undermine the world and its powers.

At first, Jesus hardly seemed a threat. He was born under Caesar Augustus, at a time when buoyant hope wafted through the Roman Empire. More than any other ruler, Augustus raised the expectations of what a leader could accomplish and what a society could achieve. It was Augustus, in fact, who first used the Greek word for "gospel" or "good news" as a label for the new world order represented by his reign. The empire declared him a god, and established rites of worship. His enlightened and stable regime, many believed, would last forever, a final solution to the problem of how to structure a government.

Meanwhile, in an obscure corner of Augustus's empire under the local dominion of Herod the Great, King of the Jews, the birth of a baby named Jesus was barely noticed by the chroniclers of the day. We know about him mainly through four books written years after his

death, at a time when less than one-half of 1 percent of the Roman world had ever heard of him. Jesus' biographers would also borrow the word for "gospel," proclaiming a different kind of new world order altogether. They would mention Augustus only once, a passing reference to set the date of the census that ensured Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

God's visit to Earth took place humbly, in a berth for animals with no attendants present and nowhere to lay the newborn king but a feed trough. Indeed, the event that divided history, and even our calendars, into two parts had more animal than human witnesses. For an instant, the sky grew luminous with angels. Yet, who saw that spectacle? Illiterate hirelings who watched the flocks of others, "nobodies" who failed to leave their names. Shepherds had a randy reputation, and proper Jews lumped them together with the "godless." Fittingly, it was they whom God selected to help celebrate the birth of one who would be known as the friend of sinners. Perhaps the best way to understand the "underdog" nature of the Incarnation is to transpose it into terms we can relate to today. An unwed mother, homeless, was forced to look for shelter while traveling to meet the heavy taxation demands of a hostile government. She lived in a land recovering from violent civil wars and still in turmoil--a situation much like that in modern Bosnia, Rwanda, or Somalia. Like half of all mothers who give birth today, she gave birth in Asia, in its far western corner, the part of the world that would prove least receptive to the son she bore. That son became a refugee in Africa, the continent where most refugees can still be found.

I sometimes wonder what Mary thought about her militant Magnificat hymn during her years of exile in Egypt. For a Jew, Egypt evoked bright memories of a powerful God who had flattened a pharaoh's army and brought liberation; now she fled there out of desperation, a stranger in a strange land hiding from her own government. Could her baby, hunted, helpless, on the run, possibly fulfill the lavish hopes of his people? Even the family's mother-tongue summoned up memories of their underdog status: Jesus spoke Aramaic, a trade language closely related to Arabic, reflecting the Jews' history as a subject people.

Growing up, Jesus' sensibilities were affected most deeply by the poor, the powerless, the oppressed. Today theologians debate the aptness of the phrase "God's preferential option for the poor" as a way of describing God's concern for the underdog. Since God arranged the circumstances in which to be born on planet Earth, his "preferential options" speak for themselves.

THE WORLD IN SOLEMN STILLNESS LAY

There is one view of Christmas I have never seen on a Christmas card, probably because no artist, not even William Blake, could do it justice. In Revelation 12, the Bible contains a scene that pulls back the curtain to give us a glimpse of Christmas as it looked from somewhere far beyond Andromeda: Christmas from God's viewpoint.

The account in Revelation differs radically from the birth stories in the Gospels. Revelation does not mention shepherds and an infanticidal king; rather, it pictures a dragon leading a ferocious struggle in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun and wearing a crown of 12 stars cries out in pain as she is about to give birth. Suddenly, the enormous red dragon enters the picture, his tail sweeping a third of the stars out of the sky and flinging them to the earth. He crouches hungrily before the woman, eager to devour her child the moment it is born. At the last second, the infant is snatched away to safety, the woman flees into the desert, and all-out cosmic war begins.

Revelation is a strange book by any measure, and you would need to understand its style to make sense of this extraordinary scene. In daily life, two parallel histories occur simultaneously: one on earth and one in heaven. Revelation, however, views them together, allowing a quick look behind the scenes at the cosmic impact of what happens on earth. On earth a baby was born, a king got wind of it, a chase ensued. In heaven, the Great Invasion had begun, a daring raid by the ruler of the forces of good into the universe's seat of evil.

John Milton expressed this point of view majestically in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, poems that make heaven and hell the central focus and Earth a mere battleground for their clashes. The modern author J. B. Phillips also attempted such a point of view, on a much less epic scale, and last Christmas I turned to Phillips's fantasy to try to escape my earthbound viewpoint.

In Phillips's fantasy, a senior angel is showing a very young angel around the splendors of the universes. They view whirling galaxies and blazing suns and then flit across the infinite distances of space until at last they enter one particular galaxy of 500 billion stars.

As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. It looked as dull as a dirty tennis ball to the little angel, whose mind was filled with the size and glory of what he had seen.

"I want you to watch that one particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

"Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me," said the little angel. "What's special about that one?"

When I first read Phillips's fantasy, I thought of the pictures beamed back to Earth from the Apollo astronauts. They described our planet as "whole and round and beautiful and small," a blue-green-and-tan globe suspended in space. Jim Lovell, reflecting on the scene later, said, "It was just another body, really, about four times bigger than the moon. But it held all the hope and all the life and all the things that the crew of Apollo 8 knew and loved. It was the most beautiful thing there was to see in all the heavens."

To the little angel, though, Earth did not seem so impressive. He listened with shocked disbelief as the senior angel told him that this planet, small and insignificant and not overly clean, was the renowned Visited Planet.

"Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince...went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?" ...The little angel's face wrinkled in disgust. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"

"I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping, crawling creatures' in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him."

The little angel looked blank. Such a thought was almost beyond his comprehension.

It is almost beyond my comprehension, too, and yet I accept that this notion is the key to understanding Christmas and is, in fact, the touchstone of my faith. If it is true this Bethlehem story, it is a story like no other. Never again need we wonder whether what happens on this dirty little tennis ball of a planet matters to the rest of the universe.

How did God the Father feel that night, helpless as any human father, as he watched his Son emerge smeared with blood to face a harsh, cold world? Lines from two different Christmas carols come to mind. One, "The little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes," seems to me a sanitized version of what took place in Bethlehem. I imagine Jesus cried like any baby the night he entered the world, a world that would certainly give him much reason to cry as an adult. The second, a line from "O Little Town of Bethlehem," seems as profoundly true today as it did two thousand years ago: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Adapted from the book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, (Zondervan).
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TWO Babies in the Manger!

Dan Wilson

As Christmas approaches I want to share a story I received from Russia. It was written to one of the summer team members that went there, by a friend who was able to stay and minister to orphans in the region we have worked in during recent years. This story tells why we continue to strive to share the Gospel with more and more Russian young people.

Here is the true story:

It was nearing the holiday season and time for our orphans to hear for the first time the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger.

Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word. Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small piece of paper square cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. (No colored paper was available in the city). Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out night gown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat--he looked to be about six years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately--until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, "And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then

Jesus told me I could stay with Him. But I told him I couldn't because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use as a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, 'If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?'

"And Jesus told me, 'If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.' So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him--for always." As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him--"FOR ALWAYS."

[Adapted from Goin' Fishing Newsletter]

DADS, GUILT AND CHRISTMAS

Don McGee

This is indeed a great time of the year for Christians, for it gives us many opportunities to teach our children about the important spiritual matters of life. However, some dads may feel they have somehow failed their families because they are unable to provide them with some of the "filler" things in life, especially on Christmas morning. Sad as it is, this is indeed the way it is for some. For many (even some Christians!) the season has degenerated into comparisons of stores shopped, brand names and dollars spent. Many will spend much of 2001 as unwise stewards of God's blessings because they will be paying principle and interest on goods bought which could not really be afforded. All in an outlandish effort to show somebody else something about something that really doesn't matter. And, in the process the important things are ignored. So, how much real joy you reckon this really produces?

Rubel Shelley, a Church of Christ preacher in Nashville, had an article in *Pulpit Helps* which needs to be read by every dad who feels he has to make dumb financial decisions this time of year in order to insure his family keeps up with some other family in the quest for those socially correct labels. Rubel Shelly told this story...

It had been a night the like of which Joseph had never dreamed would occur. Away from home, their friends, and all familiar surroundings, his wife had given birth to a son in a hillside cave ordinarily used to shelter animals in the little town of Bethlehem.

As Joseph looked at Mary, asleep now, he cried. He should have been able to provide something better for her tonight. This precious woman who was "highly favored" and "blessed among womankind" had been entrusted to his care. But the best he had been able to do tonight was a cave, a tiny cleared area, and a bed of straw. "I should have been able to do more for her," he whispered.

Then he looked at the baby. So tiny. So helpless. So dependent on Mary and him. But how could it be! This was God's own Son, not his. This baby was the God of creation, of Abraham, of Moses. He was the God of Joseph and Mary. How could He be lying beside Mary now?

Then, on the verge of weeping aloud and waking both mother and baby, the thought came to the devout man that his self-pity was born of pride rather than holiness. No angel had come to him tonight to say that he had done too little. No dream. No word of divine rebuke.

What has Israel's God ever required of any father? Only that he do what is within his power. And Joseph had done that. He had obeyed Caesar in traveling to Bethlehem. He had protected Mary as best he could from the journey. He had provided the only shelter that was available to them in the home city of his fathers. Was it now his duty to feel guilty that he had not been able to do more?

Perhaps Joseph sensed at that moment what other fathers need to realize: God is served when we do the best we can for our children, in love.

Many fathers feel guilty that they are unable to do more for their families. Not enough money for a nice house. Furniture that needs to be replaced. Things always breaking down. Then there is the guilt over bad decisions. Over the inability to guide a troubled child. Over having to watch a child agonize to find his or her way in life.

A caring, loving father served God's Son at Bethlehem in the only way he could. The Father of us all asks of us only what He asked of Joseph on that holy day.

[Don McGee writes for *Word & Work's* Sunday School Quarterly.]

HANUKKAH

What is it?

Where is it in the Bible?

How does it relate to Christianity?

John M. Jackson, Sr.

Christians observe December 25 as a day to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The Jews also have a celebration during the same time period that commemorates God's deliverance of them from a period of terrible oppression 165 years before the birth of Jesus.

This feast or celebration is called Hanukkah, a Hebrew word that means dedication. Accordingly, in the Gospel of John it is called "The Feast of Dedication" (John 10:22-23). And, for reasons that will become apparent, it is also referred to as "The Feast of Lights."

An Extra-Biblical Feast

Unlike the seven major feasts which God commanded the Jews to observe annually (Leviticus 23), Hanukkah is not found in the Tenach (the Old Testament). The feast is not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures because it is the result of events that took place in what is called "the inter-testamental period," that being the 400 years between the Old Covenant writings and those that came to constitute the New Covenant.

The feast does appear in historic writings that are referred to as "the Apocrypha" (non-inspired). The specific books are First and Second Maccabees. These writings, although not inspired of God, do contain true historical facts which reveal to us the events and people of this unique time period. The Talmud (the written Rabbinic tradition) contains only a few brief statements about Hanukkah, but as we shall see, what it says is very important.

The Central Figure

One of the main characters in the Hanukkah story is a man by the name Antiochus IV, a Syrian king who had Greek blood flowing in his veins. Deluded by vanity, he considered himself to be divine and demanded that he be addressed as Antiochus Epiphanes (meaning "Antiochus the Visible God"). Greeks had no difficulty with this because their religion was pantheistic in nature, and one more god was no problem.

But it was a different situation with the Jews who were monotheists. They were outraged by Antiochus' claim of deity, so they gave

him a derogatory title that was a play on words. They called him Antiochus Epimanes, which meant "Antiochus the Madman."

These were troubled times for the Jews. They were under this madman's jurisdiction and suffered greatly from his edicts. Antiochus sought to completely Hellenize the Jews--that is, he tried to impose Greek culture upon them. He forbid them to practice their religion or their culture. The Jews were not allowed to circumcise their new born sons nor were they allowed to observe the Sabbath.

He placed a statue of Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greek pantheon, in the Temple in Jerusalem and then demanded that a similar statue be erected in every Jewish town and village. He also demanded that each town build an altar on which to sacrifice swine. Not surprisingly, the statue of Zeus had a face that looked like Antiochus. His desecration of the Temple provoked a national outrage.

The Maccabean Revolt

With this background the story of Hanukkah begins in a small Jewish village called Modi'in, located near the site of Ben Gurion Airport today, just outside of Tel Aviv. Syrian soldiers were sent to the village to test the people's loyalty to Antiochus. The soldiers gathered the villagers, together with their priests, and ordered them to sacrifice a pig on an altar to Zeus. An elderly priest by the name of Mattathias refused. But a turncoat Jewish priest offered to comply with the order.

At this point, Mattathias was seized by a holy rage. Taking a sword, this elderly priest killed the traitor and then turned on the commanding officer. Following their father's lead, Mattathias' sons joined him. They drew weapons and killed all the soldiers present.

The first blow of armed Jewish revolt against Antiochus had been struck. The elderly priest Mattathias, who unwittingly became the revolt's leader, guided his ever growing rag-tag army in a series of night time guerrilla warfare skirmishes. However, his old age and the rigors of war caused his health to fail. Mattathias died about a year after the revolt started. Before he died he passed his leadership on to his son Judah.

Judah the "Hammer"

Judah quickly exhibited his skill as a military tactician and earned the title "Maccabee," a name derived from the Hebrew word for "hammer." During the next three years, while living in caves, the Maccabees, as they became known, gradually wore down the might and the will of the Syrian army. They were especially effective with their night time search and destroy missions. They became experts in guerrilla warfare.

With their confidence affirmed in the God of Israel, this now formidable Jewish military unit decided to take on their enemy in traditional open combat. In the process, they dealt the Syrian army two crushing "hammer blows" at Beth Haron and Emmaus. These victories gave the Jews access to Jerusalem, and they once again found themselves in control of the holy Temple Mount.

The Maccabees were horrified by what they found in the Temple. The Syrians had set up an idol of Zeus and had defiled the altar by sacrificing swine on it. The Temple was in much disrepair and in need of ritual cleansing. This was done quickly. They tore down the existing altar and erected a new one. They rededicated it on Chislev 25, in the year 165 BC. This was exactly three years to the day after it was first desecrated by the Syrians.

The Hanukkah Tradition

At the time of this dedication, a miracle occurred that became the basis of the Hanukkah tradition. According to the traditional story, when the Maccabees filled the Temple lamps with oil, they only had enough for one day's time. It would take eight days to secure more of the oil that had to be specially prepared. Miraculously, the one day supply of oil lasted the entire eight days.

This miracle of the lights is not recorded in the books of the Maccabees. It appears only in the Talmud (Shabbat 21b). Since the Talmud consists of oral traditions and was compiled long after the events, many Jewish scholars believe the story of the miracle of the oil was made up after the fact. They believe this was done to stir up a sense of nationalistic pride.

Here's how the story reads in 2 Maccabees 10:1-8:

"Maccabaeus and his companions, under the Lord's guidance, restored the Temple and the city, and pulled down the altars erected by the foreigners...They purified the sanctuary and built another altar; then striking fire from flints and using this fire, they offered the first sacrifice for two years, burning incense, lighting the lamps and setting out the loaves.

"When they had done this they threw themselves flat on the ground and implored the Lord never again to let them fall into such adversity... "This day of purification of the Temple fell on the very day on which the Temple had been profaned by the foreigners, the twenty-fifth of the same month, Chislev. They kept eight festal days with rejoicing, in the manner of the feast of Tabernacles...Then, carrying branches, leafy boughs and palms, they offered hymns to Him who had brought the cleansing of His own Holy Place to a happy outcome. They also decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole Jewish nation should celebrate those same days every year." (The Jerusalem Bible)

Hanukkah in New Testament Times

Hanukkah is mentioned specifically in the New Testament in John 10--"At that time [when Jesus was in Jerusalem] the Feast of Dedication took place...it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the Temple..." (John 10:22-23).

It's interesting that the Jewish people were celebrating their liberation from the oppression of Antiochus while they were still under the oppression of the Romans. They were looking for a Messiah--another Mattathias--to deliver them from Roman rule. This is why they asked Jesus, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24).

Jesus used the opportunity of this question to clearly assert that He was the long awaited Messiah. "I and the Father are one," He declared (John 10:30). But that was not the answer they were looking for, so they "took up stones again to stone Him" (John 10:31). They wanted a military deliverer, not a spiritual one.

Hanukkah Today

Since the Jewish people use a lunar-solar calendar unlike the purely solar calendar which the Western world uses, the dates of Hanukkah vary from year to year, ranging from late November to late December. This year Hanukkah will begin to be observed on December 22nd.

Hanukkah is a time of joy and celebration for being delivered from oppression, so the feast is celebrated with games, singing, and plenty of food. Traditionally some of the food is fried in oil to symbolize the miracle of the oil. Two favorites are potato pancakes called Latkes and jelly filled sugar donuts called Sufganiyot.

The Hanukkah Menorah

The menorah or lampstand used during the celebration of Hanukkah is different from the regular seven branch menorah that serves as the official symbol of the modern state of Israel. The Hanukkah menorah has nine branches for candles to symbolize the eight days that the Temple lamps burned on a one day supply of oil. The ninth candle usually stands taller or apart from the rest and is always lit first. After lighting this candle, which is called the Shammash (meaning "the servant candle"), it is used to light the rest of the candles.

The same lighting sequence is followed all over the world in Jewish homes. On day one, the Shammash is lit, and it is then used to light one candle, starting from the left. Each day thereafter, the Shammash is used to light an additional candle until all eight are lit on the eighth

and final night of Hanukkah. Every time the candles are lit, the following traditional blessings are said over them:

Blessed art Thou our God, King of the Universe, Who has given us life, and Who sustains us and has privileged us to reach this season.

Blessed art Thou our God, King of the Universe, Who hallows us by Thy commandments and allows us to kindle the lights of Hanukkah.

Blessed art Thou our God, King of the Universe, Who worked miracles for our fathers of old during this season.

Following the recitation of these blessings, the family will sing a song called "Maaz Tzur" which refers to God as "Israel's Mighty Rock." It is the Jewish version of "Rock of Ages."

The Spiritual Significance

Hanukkah traditions may vary some in different parts of the world but the spiritual focus is on deliverance and dedication. Sadly, in Israel the majority of Jews don't believe in God. The 20% who are Orthodox, Conservative or Reformed observe the holiday. Some non-believers do it as a cultural thing, but it has no spiritual effect on them. Worldwide, religious Jews are still waiting for their Messiah. Hanukkah is thus a bittersweet celebration because the Jews are still looking for their persecution to cease.

Spiritually, Hanukkah is significant in another way, for it is a reminder that the Bible prophesies that another terrible period of suffering lies ahead for the Jewish people. It will be a time of persecution like the one that produced the feast of Hanukkah.

For you see, Antiochus is a prophetic type of the Antichrist who is to come. Like Antiochus, the Antichrist will profane the Jewish Temple yet to be built (Daniel 9:27). He will seat himself in the Temple and declare himself to be god (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He will then launch an unparalleled persecution of the Jewish people (Revelation 12:13-17) that will ultimately result in two-thirds of them being destroyed (Zechariah 13:8).

But, praise God, the remaining third will come to the end of themselves and turn to God and proclaim His Son to be "Yeshua Ha Mashiach"--Jesus the Messiah (Zechariah 12: 10). When that happens, Jesus will return, fulfilling His prophecy, "I say to you [the Jews] from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Matthew 23:39). In these end time days, the Lord has already started moving in a mighty way on Jewish hearts. In 1967 when the Jews re-conquered the city of Jerusalem for the first time since the days of Jesus, there was not a single Messianic Jewish congregation on planet earth. Today, there are more than 350 world-

wide, with over 50 in Israel. More than 200,000 Jews in America today profess to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

This year during Hanukkah, take time to pray for your Jewish friends and neighbors. Pray that they will come to know Yeshua as their Messiah. Pray that as they light their Hanukkah candles, their hearts will be opened to Yeshua as the light of the world. And express your love and concern for them by sending them a Hanukkah card.

Hanukkah for Gentile Believers

And what about those of us who are Gentile believers in the Jewish Messiah? Does Hanukkah have any meaning for us? I think so. For one thing, the story of Hanukkah should remind us that God has called His modern day people, the Church, to be separate and apart from the world (1 Peter 2:9). Just as the Maccabees resisted the attempt of Antiochus to destroy their cultural and religious heritage, we must stand firm against the modern day pressures for us to conform to the pagan standards of the world. We must be in the world but not of it (John 17:11-16). We must stand against the subtle pressures to assimilate ourselves to "modern ways."

Second, the feast of Hanukkah should serve as a reminder to us of an even greater miracle of light than the one that Hanukkah celebrates. I refer, of course, to Jesus of Nazareth. He is "the light that shines in darkness" (John 1:5). He is "the true light who can enlighten all those who receive Him" (John 1:9). Jesus Himself proclaimed, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5), and He added, "While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36).

During this Christmas and Hanukkah season, let's thank God for the Light He has sent to deliver us -both Jew and Gentile--from the ravages of sin. Let's remember the glorious words spoken by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, when he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied about the Messiah:

The Sunrise from on high shall visit us,
To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace

--Luke 1:78-79

[Reprinted from Lamb & Lion's *Lamplighter*]

Comfort for Those Suffering from Serious Sickness, and For Their Loved Ones

(Alex V. Wilson's letter to loved ones)

Hello, dear friends in Christ.

We are praying for all of you. We know you are going through deep waters, but we also know that Christ is the lord of the winds and the waves. We love you all. The church's members have been praying for you regularly since we heard of your sickness.

We know that the Lord can heal of cancer, even in "impossible" cases, for He did so with Ruth over 40 years ago. We also know it is not always His will to do so, as in the case of Doe Valdetero. She had cancer the same time Ruth did, and she was already married and had several young children. No doubt as many people prayed for her as for Ruth, yet our Heavenly Father allowed her death despite all that. We remember also the cases of my mother, plus in recent years Richard Ramsey, Teruko Nakahara, Eugene Schreiner and many others. Why He heals some and not others is hidden in the mystery of His sovereignty. Yet His loving kindness endures forever. *"He knows when to lighten or remove our load, & when to strengthen us to carry the load."* He can provide the grace needed in times of pain & uncertainty. "God's grace is sufficient for you," as Paul testified.

Yet that same writer in that very same letter also admitted that due to his many "troubles, sufferings and hardships," he sometimes experienced "distress, despair, anguish of heart, many tears, no peace of mind, perplexity," etc. All those feelings of his are mentioned in only the 1st four chapters of 2nd Corinthians; later in the letter he refers to other similar reactions. I am glad he mentioned those personal feelings he experienced, or we might think that such emotions are always wrong, and signs of spiritual weakness or failure. The Lord can provide marvelous peace and joy to us in our trials, yet even our Savior said, "Now my heart is troubled," and again later He was "troubled in spirit" (John 12:27; 13:21). He is with us and loves us, no matter how our faith and feelings may fluctuate from hour to hour.

Sometimes the sickness or the medicines cause a sufferer to experience noticeable changes in disposition. Their very character may seem to undergo great alteration, and their moods, reactions and words may become unloving and unspiritual. Nothing is harder for loved ones to bear than this. But we may rest assured that they are not themselves at such times, due to influences beyond their control and foreign to their true nature. The Lord understands all this, and in all our distresses He too is distressed and sympathizes with us (Isa.63:9;

Heb.4:15). He has prepared a place for us, and has also been preparing us for that place--so that we shall feel at home there, with Him. What a wonderful savior He is. Forgive me if I seem to be preaching to you! I know that you know these things, but sometimes we all just need to ponder them again.

May His grace and peace be with each one of you.

THANK GOD FOR LICE!

B. Shelburne

THE NAZI LABOR CAMP WOULD HAVE BEEN CRUEL ENOUGH without the plague of lice that infested the dormitory. Corrie Ten Boom and her fellow prisoners prayed for relief from the lice--until they realized it was the lice that repelled the guards from entering the dorm and finding the precious copy of the scriptures hidden there!

It is easy to be thankful in the good times (though we often forget). It is much harder when we have lost our job or been diagnosed with cancer. Yet God's word commands us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything ...with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6, emphasis mine). And again, "...always [give] thanks to God the Father for everything" (Ephesians 5:20).

Two Reasons to be Thankful During Trouble

There are two reasons why a Christian can be thankful regardless of circumstances. First, we still have so many blessings to count which outweigh our trouble. Totaling my car is not so bad if I or my loved ones come out safely. My teeth may be breaking but I don't have diabetes or heart trouble like many people do.

My wife and I did mission work in a third world country among some of the poorest people in the world. Most families had buried at least one child. They live in mud houses with open holes for doors and windows. They are always one crop away from starvation. They live in a sea of disease with little medical care. Yet as a people they are happier than we Americans. While we are spoiled rotten and complain in the middle of our prosperity, those people are thankful for even some good in their lives. Their spiritual eyesight is better than ours.

The second reason for thanksgiving is that we who love God have a perfect divine providence over us. *The more completely we are committed to God, the more certainly everything works together for our good* (Romans 8:28).

Our Great God Can Turn Any Curse into a Blessing

After Martin Luther made his famous stand for his beliefs in the Catholic court at Worms and was condemned as a heretic, Luther was "kidnaped" for his own safety by a German prince friendly to Luther's cause. This time in hiding enabled Luther to translate the scriptures into German, allowing the people to read God's word for themselves. This powerfully fueled the reformation. Similarly John Bunyan, imprisoned for his faith, found time to write the inspiring Christian classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

What appears to be disaster may not be. I heard somewhere about two little tears floating down the river of life. Said one, "I'm the tear of the girl who lost Johnny." "And I'm the tear of the girl who got him!"

We buried my elderly father in January. He was taken from us rather suddenly and we were not ready. Yet we all know now that God's timing was a blessing. Dad was still able to fill preaching appointments a week before his death. Yet he was beginning to deteriorate physically and would have been miserable having to give up the things that were his life.

It would be hard to feel thankful for the direction our country is going morally. Yet as evil becomes more and more open, people are forced to face the spiritual issues of life, to choose which side they are on. And Christians learn they can no longer afford division over peripheral issues; they need each other.

No one would have wished communism on China. Yet in two generations atheistic, materialistic communism has broken the power of ancient pagan religions and has created such a spiritual hunger that people are converting to Christ at unparalleled rates.

God is greater than the curse. He used Judas' betrayal of Jesus to bring about the atoning sacrifice that saved the world. Helen Keller was born blind and deaf. Her need drove her to achieve so much that she became a legend. Had she been normal, you would never have heard of her.

The Greater the Darkness, the Brighter the Light Shines

You may be "trapped" in a miserable job situation where everyone else is ungodly. But far from deserting you, God may have honored and trusted you by choosing you as the only light those miserable people have. You may be "trapped" in marriage to a selfish, difficult mate who won't change. Yet there is an inner freedom in Christ that nothing can take from us--see 1 Corinthians 7:21,22. I learned in a difficult

situation this truth: We never teach more powerfully than when we respond to severe trial in a Christlike way. Jesus' greatest sermon was his attitude while suffering on the cross. If you have faith enough to receive it, your times of suffering as a Christian are your finest hour in God's service.

Troubles Can be a Gift from God

A trial can either be a means for your destruction or an opportunity for growth. You choose which by your response. We don't grow much when things are just fine. Trials force us to make the growth choices we would otherwise put off. God wants us to see life through his eyes, to "consider it pure joy ...whenever you face trials. ..because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ..so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4).

A friend of mine went through a heart-rending divorce he didn't want. Yet the experience forced him to become much more reliant on God's grace. He must either curse God or trust him, and he learned to trust as never before. He told me later that while he would not wish divorce on anyone, he would not wish to change the past and lose what he had learned.

Some of the most thankful people I know are people who have also suffered the most reverses in life. They have "made lemonade from life's lemons" because of their faith in God's care. They know they are never outside God's love, whatever happens to them. One of my heroes of faith, Pam Marson, says, "The safest place in the world to be is in the center of God's will." When you are submitted to Jesus and he is using your life, you can walk safely through the middle of hell.

In the shadow of his execution on the cross, Jesus talks to his disciples about his joy which he will give them and which no one can take away from them (John 16,17). Shortly before he is arrested and bound, he says, "Take heart! I have overcome the world." The care and faithfulness of the Father are more real to Jesus than the ordeal of the cross. We have a Father who does not know how to hurt us.

--B. Shelburne is an elder in New Beginnings Church and president of South Houston Bible Institute both located at Webster, Texas. This article is reprinted from *Gospel Tidings*.

NO CAUSE FOR BITTERNESS

Elisabeth Elliot

Sometimes I've said, "O Lord, you wouldn't do this to me, would you? How could you, Lord?" I recall such times later on and realize that my perspective was skewed. One Scripture passage that helps me rectify it is Isaiah 45:9-11 (NEB):

"Will the pot contend with the potter, or the earthenware with the hand that shapes it? Will the clay ask the potter what he is making? ...Thus says the Lord, 'Would you dare question me concerning my children, or instruct me in my handiwork? I alone, I made the earth and created man upon it.' "

He knows exactly what He is doing. I am clay. The word humble comes from the root word humus, earth, clay. Let me remember that when I question God's dealings. I don't understand Him, but then I'm not asked to understand, only to trust. Bitterness dissolves when I remember the kind of love with which He has loved me--He gave Himself for me. He gave Himself for me. He gave Himself for me. Whatever He is doing now, therefore, is not cause for bitterness.

It has to be designed for good, because He loved me and gave Himself for me.

Is it a sin to ask God why?

It is always best to go first for our answers to Jesus Himself. He cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was a human cry, a cry of desperation, springing from His heart's agony at the prospect of being put into the hands of wicked men and actually becoming sin for you and me. We can never suffer anything like that, yet we do at times feel forsaken and cry, "Why, Lord?"

The psalmist asked why. Job, a blameless man, suffering horrible torments on an ash heap, asked why. It does not seem to me to be sinful to ask the question. What is sinful is resentment against God and His dealings with us. When we begin to doubt His love and imagine that He is cheating us of something we have a right to, we are guilty as Adam and Eve were guilty. They took the snake at his word rather than God. The same snake comes to us repeatedly with the same suggestions: "Does God love you? Does He really want the best for you? Is His word trustworthy? Isn't He cheating you? Forget His promises. You'd be better off if you do it your way."

I have often asked why. Many things have happened that I didn't plan on and that human rationality could not explain. In the darkness of my perplexity and sorrow, I have heard Him say quietly, "Trust me." He knew that my question was not the challenge of unbelief or resentment. I have never doubted that He loves me, but I have sometimes felt like St. Teresa of Avila, who, when she was dumped out of a carriage into a ditch, said, "If this is the way You treat Your friends, no wonder You have so few!"

Job was not, it seems to me, a very patient man. But he never gave up his conviction that he was in God's hands. God was big enough to take whatever Job dished out. Do not be afraid to tell Him exactly how you feel. (He has already read your thoughts, anyway.) But don't tell the whole world. God can take it--others can't. Then listen for His answers. Six scriptural answers to the questions "Why?" come from: 1 Pet. 4:12-13; Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:9; John 14:31; Rom. 8:17; and Col. 1:24. There is mystery, but it is not all mystery.

--From *Wheaton Alumni Magazine*

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR REACTIONS TO LIFE

Dr. Henry Brandt,
a pioneer in the Christian Counseling Movement

I had an interesting conversation with a man following a speech I made centering in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10. These verses explain that there is a power that will enable a person who is in trouble, perplexed, or persecuted to deal with his situation without distress or despair--and without feeling forsaken or cast down.

This man (let's call him Mr. Black) is an engineer. He designed and built some of the equipment that harnessed atomic energy and made possible the bomb that was dropped over Hiroshima. He has a great awe and respect for the tremendous power of the atom. But for years he was a troubled man, in conflict with his boss, who frequently changed Mr. Black's designs apparently without careful study. As a result, sometimes the equipment worked well when it was built and sometimes it didn't. When it worked well, his boss took the credit. When the equipment failed, Mr. Black got the blame. He said nothing but became a very bitter man. These bottled-up resentments caused Mr. Black to take out his feelings on his wife and children. He spent tormented, sleepless nights, endlessly reviewing his grudges about his

boss. He suffered remorse over his cruel words and deeds that made life miserable for his wife and children.

One day, when his boss insisted on a change that Mr. Black disagreed with, he slammed his fist on the desk and vented his wrath on his boss. He flatly refused to work for him another day. It was an embarrassing temper tantrum, and he was unceremoniously transferred to another department.

As the weeks went by, he developed the same trouble in the new department. His new boss pushed him to get the work out. Mr. Black felt they were working too rapidly, and again the tension began to build up within him.

"Slowly it began to dawn on me that perhaps I was wrong," he told me. "As I looked back on my life, I had to admit that this bottled-up rebellion had plagued me most of my life. I began to see that I needed to change and I searched the Bible in hope of finding an answer." He found it in Colossians 3:23-25: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord we shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."

"Upon reading this I broke out in a sweat and began to tremble," Mr. Black continued. "It dawned on me that I was acting like a little boy, sulking at my drawing board and venting my wrath on innocent people. It was a relief to see this and admit it. My heart turned Godward in repentance with a prayer for the power to act like a man, to do my work heartily, to serve God, to let other men's decisions rest with God. Ten years later, my boss still pressures me and changes my designs, but work is now pleasant."

Before his discovery, Mr. Black's reactions were bitter, rebellious, hostile, wrathful. Then he turned to God, began depending on God's power, and work became pleasant. Mr. Black was at ease, relaxed.

What happened? The power of God changed his reactions to life.

Do you ACT, or React?

Formerly at the Christian Counseling Clinic in Detroit, my staff and I used to see about 100 people each week. The ones who came were driven to us because they suffered torment that was sometimes beyond human endurance. If not given help, many would break down completely. This torment was the result of hate, rebellion, indignation, anger, bitterness, desperation, guilt, resentment, cruelty, remorse --an "internal" struggle causing tension and often sleeplessness.

These were the reactions of talented, well-educated, well-read, highly-trained people. It is the other fellow or the circumstances that are at fault, they reasoned, and their reactions under the circumstances were quite normal and natural. Weren't they being mistreated, misunderstood, not appreciated, rejected? Isn't it normal to be upset and fight back in order to free themselves from the turmoil within them? As many counselees put it, "Anyone in my shoes would react the way I have. When I get out of this situation, my natural spirit of goodwill, good humor, friendliness, generosity, and unselfishness will return."

Yes, the troubled one believes that the turmoil within will be relieved when the trouble is gone. It is natural that people get upset in the midst of trouble. Many people have been terribly mistreated since childhood. They have tasted of other people's selfishness. It is unbelievable how hard, harsh, scornful, vicious, and inconsiderate people can be. Curiously enough, many individuals who have received terrible, shameful treatment in the past will themselves repeat the same treatment, or even worse, toward the people in their lives. They will attack or withdraw from anyone who resembles the past--retaliating, wallowing in self-pity, unforgiving. One would think that they would be very considerate and understanding of others since they know what it is to suffer from cruelty, harshness, selfishness. Are they innocent victims of the past and therefore not accountable for their attitudes and conduct?

It is true that a troubled person calms down and is happier when circumstances and the other fellow's conduct become more acceptable. Many in the counseling field reason, therefore, that it is the environment that causes the individual to be upset and to retaliate. They consider man basically friendly, generous, selfless, good. These qualities, some counselors say, will be there if the patient can find the environment that will allow the qualities to come out, or if the individual can be taught to channel any aggressive tendencies into constructive activities.

But the truth of the matter is: trouble exposes man's natural tendency to react in an unfriendly, selfish, or bitter way. But when circumstances and the conduct of others are acceptable to the individual, his basic evil nature is not so obvious.

I know many people in trouble who struggle within themselves. They were distressed, in despair, feeling forsaken, and cast down. They found help only when they faced the truth about themselves and then turned to God for the power to change themselves in the midst of trouble. Their problems didn't disappear; their reactions changed. They discovered that it is not a problem-free life they need, but a change of heart or to lean more firmly upon the God who had already

changed their hearts. Those who had not had a changed heart experienced reactions of hate, rebellion, indignation, anger, bitterness, lust, guilt. Now, with a changed heart, they experienced relief, newness, joy, peace, hope, love, patience, kindness, long suffering. Yet the same circumstances and the same people are there. Problems still must be faced. But they find a new resource, a new spirit, a new attitude toward troubles.

My approach to counseling is based on the Biblical truth that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). Since this is true, trouble exposes the basically sinful and unrighteous nature of a man. This raises an important question: "What is sin and unrighteousness?" We turn to the Bible for the answer.

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law, for sin is transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). A sinner has transgressed the law of God in the same sense that a traffic violator has transgressed a traffic law. Nothing can change the fact that he is a violator. We have all experienced the sense of relief when we get out of a 20 mph traffic zone when we were traveling at 40 mph. We vaguely experience the same tension when we violate the law of God. Thus, sinner and violator are alike in meaning. To declare that a man has sinned--that is, he is out of line with the standard of righteousness--is not to condemn him. We do not leave him there. The Bible makes it clear that there is a way out in such passages as these:

"God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

"In whom [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the *forgiveness* of sins, according to the riches of His Grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

We find that when one comes to Christ with his confession of sinfulness, seeking forgiveness, he receives a relief from guilt. He experiences a sense of being renewed, washed, restored, forgiven--and there's new hope. His troubles remain to be confronted, but his reactions to them change.

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VOICES From The FIELDS

Paul & Virginia Kitzmiller
Nov. 3, 2000

St. Petersburg, Russia

Greetings from St Petersburg, Russia! Since our return here in mid-September we have been enjoying a beautiful fall season and have been blessed with some outstanding opportunities for ministry. We praise God for the splendor of His creation and thank Him for the doors that He has opened in Russia. Let us together pray that God will supply the wisdom and resources needed to meet the challenge of ministry in this vast country.

OUTREACH TO ORPHANS. Due to the persistent work of some Russian believers and to contacts made through American teams visiting St Petersburg summer camps, we are able to have a part in developing a ministry to orphans. More than 620,000 children are housed in Russia's orphanages. In most instances the government allotments of food, clothing and personal items per child are meager at best. Many orphans are automatically branded as "slow-learners" and traditionally the Russian educational system has little use for those who can't keep up. These children are neglected in several ways and they are certainly neglected spiritually. There are several possibilities open to helping and teaching these children. We will not be permitted to teach formal Bible classes in these institutions, but some orphanage directors will give limited permission to "tell Bible stories." The needs and opportunities in this area are still being explored. One "pilot" program is already in place. We hope to be able to tell you more in the future.

OLDER ORPHANS. Once orphans reach a certain age or grade level, most of them are required to leave the orphanage. Many of them are able to go to a dorm just for orphanage "graduates" and it serves as a sort of halfway house. They have more freedom, but still some supervision. The same type of opportunities exist here as with the orphanages (see above), but with the added benefit that these young people are free to leave the dorm to attend church or other Bible classes. A "pilot" program is also in place at one of these dorms.

NEWS FROM NARVSKAYA. Our congregation continues to meet on Sundays at a music school in the Narvskaya district of St Petersburg. Other meetings and classes for the church are conducted in a rented apartment located in another part of the city. We would like to locate a single facility that would accommodate all our needs. We have been conducting a search for several months, but, so far, we have not been able to find anything that is both suitable and affordable.

The Thursday night Bible study (formerly known as the Friday night Bible study) continues to provide us with a good opportunity to study with non-Christians as well as our own church members. The differences in language and background (Russian & American; Christian & non-Christian) often produce some surprising perspectives and lively discussions in our meetings.

Recently, Margarita, a Christian woman with two young sons, began attending at Narvskaya. Her husband is in the Russian Navy and they have moved to St Petersburg while he is at sea. She expects to be in the area at least until May. We are also encouraged to see spiritual growth in Sasha, the young man that was baptized in February. He now takes a regular turn in leading singing and in Bible reading during the worship service. He also gives evidence that he is being more responsible toward the church family and his wife and children.

THE KINESHMA CONNECTION. Our only contact with Kineshma this fall has been by telephone, but, Lord willing, we will visit there next week. We will take a train Sunday evening and arrive in Kineshma mid-day on Monday. We are again taking some Bibles and Bible related books to give to our friends there.

PERSONAL NOTES. Although it has been pleasantly warm outside this fall, 50 degree temperatures outside do not make very pleasant indoor temperatures when there is no building heat.

In our old apartment we had more heat than we could use and had to keep one or two windows open for most of the winter. (There are no individual controls on heat in Russian apartment buildings.) The situation is very different in this apartment. Some days we have no heat; some days, little heat. We are thankful to tell you that during our stay in Russia we have acquired some electric heaters and those seem to be sufficient to offset the failings of the building's system.

We have not attempted to mention every detail of the work in this newsletter, but we trust that this update will enlighten you regarding the work and will enable you to understand the needs a little better and pray more effectively. As always, we thank you for your prayers for our personal needs as well as for the work overall. Your support gives us strength and encouragement.

**James & Karen Ashley Papua New Guinea Nov.21, 2000
ashley@sil.org.pg**

PRAISE THE LORD with us that: Despite the coup and subsequent upheaval in the Solomon Islands, we did not suffer personal harm and, so far, even our belongings have not been lost or damaged.

The militants signed a peace agreement on October 15 and major fighting has ceased.

Our evacuation to Papua New Guinea has brought us to the translation center at Ukarumpa where there is an excellent school for Philip and Susan, as well as a wonderful environment for continuing our translation work.

We have been granted all the necessary visas and permits to stay in Papua New Guinea until the situation in the Solomons is stable enough for us to return.

We have all enjoyed good health in the past few months.

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

Continued good health.

Continued protection from lawless elements in the communities around us.

Stabilization of the political and economic situation in the Solomon Islands.

The return of law and order to the Solomon Islands, especially in towns.

Wisdom in decision-making regarding the children's future education. (i.e. Should we leave Philip and Susan in a boarding home here when we eventually return to the Solomons?)

Our oldest son Kent as he grapples with the challenges of college, a job directing a church choir, and the future in general.

James to make steady progress in improving the accuracy of the translated Scripture drafts despite the difficulties in working from another country.

The Sa'a Scripture Review Committee to keep meeting, catch any weak spots in the translated Scripture portions they review, and be blessed and challenged by God's Word in the process.

The Sa'a translators to not feel deserted, but to be encouraged by the Spirit as they continuing polishing the translated Scriptures.

Robert & Joy Garret

December, 2000

Towards an Eldership: The word of God works in wonderful ways. For the past two months each Sunday morning I have been visiting different congregations giving lessons on leadership. The lessons were concerning the kind of spiritual leadership that the Lord wants in His church leading towards the appointment of Elders. The lessons were not evangelistic but directed towards every believer

serving the Lord. The first time I gave the lesson several came forward at the invitation, one for baptism and others for confession of sin and rededication. The next Sunday at a different congregation the same phenomena happened, and this was repeated every place I gave that lesson. I had not thought of the lesson as being evangelistic, nor in the vein of calling straying believers back to the Lord, yet that was the result the Lord was giving! Surely the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, and who knows which part of God's word the Lord will use to pierce a heart and bring that soul closer to Him.

Kuwadzana: Over 300 attended Kuwadzana's Big Sunday. This was to celebrate and give thanks to God for the use of their new building. Although it is not yet completed they have been able to use building since we put the roof on two years ago. In November I managed to get the steps built on one of the side entrances and the concrete floor with ramp poured for the front and the other side entrance which is also a veranda serving a couple of rooms and the toilets.

Water Tank: Here at the Ruwa Camp our water system is gravity fed after being pumped from a well into an overhead tank. Our existing tanks have taken care of our needs up to this time. However the Boys Bunkhouse is on higher ground and although the water reaches there it will not rise up to the showers. In anticipation of this need I had earlier built a platform about twenty-five feet up on top of a house-sized granite rock. We made a trip to South Africa where we bought a plastic water tank 6ft.in diameter and about 6ft 6in tall. These have become quite common in rural areas as they are very light, less expensive than other materials, and are supposed to last at least twenty years. We tied it to the canopy roof of our pick-up. Although it weighs about a 100 pounds its size created enormous wind resistance. Instead of being able to travel at 65 to 70mph we were only able to do 45 mph and sometimes less. The 480 mile trip took us 15 hours.

We Thank God for each of you who gave towards the "Capital gains Tax" on the transfer of the Camp property from my name to that of the local church Board of Trustees. If we needed any confirmation from the Lord that he wants this work to carry on, He certainly gave it! We received about three times the amount asked for. I propose to use the extra in our building fund - for the Camp and/or our church buildings as needed. If you feel that your contribution should not be used in this way I will be happy to re-direct it to your pleasure.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

Beuchel: On Thanksgiving Day, Betty and I will prepare dinner for all the senior citizens and the ones who have no place to go for dinner. This is in the fellowship room at the Buechel Church of Christ. If you know of someone that has nowhere to have Thanksgiving dinner - contact Bud Ridgeway at (502) 499-0724. Also, the monthly men's prayer breakfast is scheduled for Dec. 9th and will include women. Bring your wife and join us.

Jennings: (November 5th) Some 82 years ago a group of Christians began worshiping as the Jennings Church of Christ. Much has happened during those years - many have gone forth to preach the Word around the world - much has been given to missions and other works - many saints have gone to their reward. Our job, as we continue to labor in the vineyard, is to please the Lord. **Prophecy conference** was held November 12th with Earl Mullins Sr., A. J. Istre, and Bro. Val answering questions about Bible prophecy.

Doctor's stance draws threats, intimidation. "...as a Christian, I will not willfully promote behavior the Bible teaches is immoral." --Dr. J. Barrett Hyman. The battle Dr. Hyman is fighting gained national attention in September 1999, when his lawsuit became the first challenge to a

new Louisville ordinance that extended civil rights protection to homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals. The law, which carries a \$50,000 fine - per day - for violators, forbids discrimination in employment based on "actual or imputed heterosexuality, homosexuality or bisexuality." It's no wonder the doctor feels a little like David facing Goliath.

Reunion Planned: We have engaged the old Library Building on the old campus of SCC, which is now Winchester's "College Park." and also the Picnic Pavilion which is nearby, for **May 28, 2001** for a reunion party for KBC, SCC, Bible Institute alumni and former teachers. SCEC will provide meat and drink for those who tell us they are coming, and participants are expected to bring pot-luck dishes of potato salad, vegetables and/or dessert. Contact Cecil Garret at 399 College St., Winchester, KY 40391 or e-mail at rgarrett@mis.net

SBS Spring Semester 2001 accepting registrations now. Classes begin January 8th and end April 27th. These classes are geared toward prospective ministers, present elders / deacons, teachers, and Christian workers. **Classes offered:** Creationism (Earl Mullins Sr.; Mon.9-12); N.T. Survey (Jerry Carmichael;

Mon.1-4); Cn. Education (Joyce Zimpelmann; Mon.1-4); Biblical Ethics (Bennie Hill; Mon.6:30-9:30); Preacher's Life & Work (Mike Abbott, Tue.12:30-3:30); Computer Basics (Ramona Marsh, Tue.4-6). If you have questions, contact SBS at 2500 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212; 502: 778-6114.

Spiritual Battle Rages for control of our country! Chuck Colson on a recent James Dobson program said: "Democracy cannot survive without a moral consensus. If the election is won by improper means this nation will be in turmoil and the President will not be able to rule." **Christians can make a difference if they'll apply 2 Chronicles 7:14** "If My people, who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." **Don't let the enemy win because of our negligence!**

9th Annual Crusade for Christ is being planned for March 26-29, 2001 at the Ponchatoula Church of Christ in Louisiana. Theme: "The Beatitudes" and speakers will include: Joe Stone, Louis Schuler, Ed Coon, Kenneth Istre, Ray Naugle, Robert Gill, Kenneth Preston, Harry Coultas, Bennie Hill, and Orell Overman.

Thanks... to you who have supplied us with News & Notes during this past year! Several churches respond on a regular

basis and willingly share with others what the Lord is doing among them. The intent of this section of the Word & Work is to inform and encourage others and I am personally thankful for the good response we've had. As revival dates or other important happenings become available **please share them with us.** You can contact Bennie Hill at www.bhill40482@aol.com

Getting to Know Missions... pamphlet was handed out during the recent Thanksgiving service in Louisville. It contains the names & addresses of several mission works among the churches. If you would like additional copies or have your name placed on our mailing list for periodic information and financial report, write to:

Church of Christ Worldwide
% Miss Carla Potter
P.O. Box 54842,
Lexington, KY 40555

or call the Cramer church office at (859) 269-1312.

Woodland Bible Camp: Mike Abbott mailed out a president's annual report. It contains news about improvements, some exciting future prospects, and a financial report.

During 2000 there were 6 camp weeks and 2 fall retreats. Total attendance at the camp weeks was 398. 10 young people confessed faith in Christ. A year-by-year review shows the attendance and number of baptisms from 1964-2000. To obtain a copy,

write brother Mike at 520 W. Water St., Borden IN 47106.

Letter from a Friend "W&W is a blessing for me. Lately I have especially appreciated Gary Pearson's article and the older one from Stanford Chambers. It is also a joy to keep in touch with the Kitzmillers in St. Petersburg, whose fellowship I have enjoyed in that city. --L. Wesley Jones"

Brother Jones is a dear man of God who has worked for years with World Christian Broadcasting Corporation -- a Church of Christ ministry which reaches out to a large part of the earth with the Gospel. He has established churches in at least 3 different lands, including Russia. In the 1950's an entire issue of W&W was devoted to a rather "forceful" written debate between him and Stanford Chambers(!). The issues were prophecy, & whether different beliefs about it justified disfellowship.

Ruth and I met him a few years ago at Pepperdine's Bible lectureship. Soon after that, he and Graham McKay made a gracious bridge-building trip from Nashville to Louisville. They met with a few of our churches' leaders, and expressed regrets for sad attitudes & incidents in the past by "mainline" churches. Warm fellowship and a moving prayer-time followed, as all of us thanked God for lessons He has

taught us and sought His grace for the future. --avw

The 26th Central Louisiana Christian Fellowship was a rich blessing. Tue.-Thur. morning & afternoon sessions were on Biblical men of outstanding character -- Abraham, Joseph and Daniel. Night sessions were divided between the 2 Earl Mullinses! -- who spoke on building strong families & churches. The teaching, singing and fellowship were strengthening.

Ruth & I were privileged to stay again with sister Sylvia Johnson, & her lively little dog, Samson. We learned that Bennie Hill stayed with them last year, & Samson enjoyed getting Bennie's socks & strewing them around the front yard. You'd think our news editor would be more careful. But maybe Samson thought the socks needed airing out, so he volunteered to become a de-fumigator!

The Louisville Area Thanksgiving Day Service was a vibrant time of celebrating God's goodness. Congregational singing plus the Portland Christian High School chorus ("best yet," according to many) were followed by Earl Mullins Sr.'s challenging word. 514 attended (compared with 503, 525 & 508 in '97-99), and arround \$5700 was given for P. C. S.

(Continued from Inside Front Cover)

best to me but I only see for the moment. God knows the whole plan for my life and allows things to happen that will work for the good that He has planned for me. I need only to believe in Him and His sacrifice of His Son for me on the cross. I need only to accept with faith what He has in store for me, knowing that when all is over, I will be with Him in eternity and there can be no better place to be.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds! **Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?** Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?' (Luke 12:22-26).

God promises that in all things we will be more than conquerors. God has always kept His promises and I know that He will keep this one. Romans 8: 28-39 is my favorite passage of scripture. If I believe what it says, then I have no cause or excuse to worry.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those **who love Him who have been called according to His purpose.** For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.

"What then shall we say in response to this? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? **Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "