

# The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

*November/December 1995*

## Editor's Journal

*Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.-Leviticus 23:2*

Ancient Israel celebrated several annual feasts, even as we celebrate national holidays. The most important of these feasts were grouped around the respective beginnings of the civil and religious years. The spring feasts included the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan (April-May) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the fifteenth to the twenty-first. Fifty days later they celebrated the Feast of Pentecost. In the fall there was the Day of Atonement on the tenth of Tishri (September-October) followed by a seven-day Feast of Tabernacles or Booths.

All these feasts had a dual significance. The spring feasts commemorated the departure of the nation from Egypt under Moses, while the fall feast celebrated the keeping power of God during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They were also thanksgiving feasts for the harvest of the land. The spring barley crop was feted at the close of the Passover feast, on the sixteenth of Nisan, with the waving of the first barley sheaf before the Lord. Pentecost completed the wheat harvest and included a wave offering of two fresh baked loaves of wheat bread, baked with leaven. The fall feast was also a harvest festival, giving thanks to God for the fall crops.

In the American culture we have three holidays grouped together at the end of each year: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. While celebrated in a secular manner, there is a deep religious significance to each of these special days. This issue of THE HERALD is dedicated to these three events.

### **Thanksgiving**

The thanksgiving tradition goes back to the settling of America by the pilgrim fathers. Deeply religious, with many fleeing persecution in Europe, they expressed their appreciation to God for the bountifulness of the harvest by sharing a feast with their native American neighbors. Sadly, the peace that then reigned between the incoming residents and the natives was short lived. A tragedy of American history has been the

mistreatment of the native population by the white men arriving in droves from across the ocean.

In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday. Since then it has become an occasion for families to gather together over a traditional dinner of turkey or ham with all the trimmings. Frequently missing from these celebrations is the original concept of sanctifying the day by praising God for the bounties he has bestowed.

*How Do You Say Thanks to God?* God is in heaven and we are on earth. How can we best express our gratitude to him? An article by this title opens our issue with practical suggestions of ways in which we can tell the Creator, "Thank you!" This theme is continued in the following article, which also asks a question, *What Shall I Render Unto the Lord?* This title is taken from Psalm 116:27, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" Completing the thanksgiving trilogy is our verse by verse study in Psalm 84, entitled *Amiable Tabernacles*.

## **Christmas**

Without question the birth of Jesus ranks as one of the greatest events in human history. After centuries of increasing sin with its debilitating consequences, hopes of a Messiah had grown dim. Even though the "seventy weeks" of the prophecy of Daniel had "all men in expectation of him," they were looking more for a mighty general to deliver them from Rome than for a meek and lowly carpenter's son to deliver them from the larger bondage of sin and death. Since the time, in which the world around us generally celebrates Christmas, more closely identifies with the time of the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary than with his birth, our lead article in this section, *The Song of Mary*, deals with the conception. The account of the angel's announcement to the shepherds in the field forms the subject of *Unto Us A Child Is Born*. Then, advancing quickly to the period shortly following Jesus' birth, two related articles take a closer look at two prophecies given at the time of the babe's presentation in the temple. As the titles of the articles suggest, these two prophets, one male and one female, were *Simeon and Anna*.

## **The New Year**

Another set of articles looks at the challenge of a new year ahead of us. It has been traditional for Bible Students to choose a special text for the year. In *Echoes from the Past* we will look back to a scripture chosen for the year 1950. The chosen verse was Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Brother John T. Read, an editor of this journal for many years, penned the word of *An Admonition for the New Year* forty-six years ago. They are as appropriate today as they were back then, less than five years after the conclusion of World War II.

Standing as it does at the bridge between two yearly periods -- one looking backward and another looking forward -- the advent of a new year offers a good opportunity for introspection. The article on Self Examination seeks to encourage us to do just this and

suggests some practical questions we might each ask ourselves in this exercise in spiritual improvement.

January 1 has not always been the date for the beginning of the new year. In fact many cultures celebrate different starting dates for the year even today. The Chinese new year is in mid-January and the Jewish new year, *Rosh Hoshana*, begins in late September or early October. On one occasion in Old Testament times God bid Israel to inaugurate a new "new year," beginning in the spring. These verses are analyzed in the article *When God Changed the Calendar*.

We encourage each of our readers to look at the leap year ahead as a gift of 366 days from the heavenly Father to sing his praise. What its particular experiences will bring we know not, but we can rejoice with the hymnist who wrote:

*I know not what tomorrow holds,  
But I know who holds tomorrow  
And I know he holds my hand.*

## Thanksgiving

# How Do You Say Thanks to God?

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Ephesians 5:20*

*By Joseph Dolan*

Can we give thanks always and for all things? The best way to express our thanks to God is to demonstrate it through perfect obedience. Although this is our heart's desire, only Jesus was able to be completely obedient to the will of God in all his thoughts, words, and actions. He showed his thankfulness by demonstrating a faith that could firmly trust God, come what may.

The spirit of Christ will have its effect upon the Christian who follows Paul's advice in Philippians 2:5, "let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." Our Lord's mind was fixed on doing his Father's will, thus demonstrating a spirit of love and thanksgiving (Psa. 40:8). As we allow Jesus to take over our lives, this same attitude of praise and thanksgiving will grow; proportionately we will delight to be continually communicating with our heavenly Father (Eph. 6:18). Whenever we are able, by the Lord's grace, to demonstrate "less of self and more of thee" we are saying thanks to God. Despite life's concerns and the perplexing days ahead, no one can separate us from the love and precious promises of our God. As we remember his promises toward us, a calm and thankful spirit is kindled in us—thus we say thanks to God.

We want to say always "Thank you, dear heavenly Father" because we know that he is always overruling all things for the good of our eternal welfare. This he does for "all them who love him and are called, according to his eternal purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Following in the Master's footsteps, we learn of the faithful who have gone before us. This induces gratitude for the way his word has been preserved down through the ages and shows how he readily gives the holy spirit to those who diligently seek him. Remember how Paul and Silas gave thanks to God at the end of a torturous day by singing hymns while locked in the inner prison (Acts 16:25).

### **Obedience Says "Thanks"**

Our thanks are expressed by striving to let him know that obedience is our heart's desire. By his assisting grace, we will show obedience and thanksgiving through our thoughts, words, and deeds (Prov. 23:26). Jesus said that the greatest of all would be as the servant of all (Luke 22:26), and certainly the Creator has been serving his creation since the beginning. He gave us everything we need to live—both now and forever. He gave his only begotten Son as a ransom for Adam and his dying race. He gave his holy spirit to

guide those faithful ones who lived before Christ. He gave us the opportunity and invitation to follow Jesus, promising that if we remain faithful unto death he will give us a crown of life. Throughout the ages to come, he will continue to reveal more good things to both his thankful human and spiritual families.

We give good gifts to our children. Much more does our heavenly Father give good gifts to his creation. How do we say thanks for these gifts? Upon receiving a good gift it is natural to say "thank you." To show our gratitude we smile, embrace, sometimes shed tears of joy, and look for opportunities to give something in return. The spirit of thankfulness prompts a resultant action. This is how we also express our thanks to God for his many benefits toward us.

### **A Morning Resolve**

Our words and actions are prompted by thoughts. Therefore we want to start each day with thoughts pleasing to our heavenly Father. A good time to start saying thank you to God and to Jesus in our thoughts is the moment we awaken from sleep. It is a good time for a morning resolve: "Lord, my earliest thought I desire shall be, what can I do for you today? I will take the cup of salvation and ask you for grace to help me pay my vow of consecration. Remembering your call and invitation, 'Gather my saints unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice,' I resolve that by your assisting grace, I will today, as your saint, fulfill my vows, continuing the work of sacrificing my flesh and its interests that I may attain unto your heavenly inheritance, in joint-heirship with my redeemer. I will strive to be simple and sincere toward all. I will seek not to please and honor myself, but only you, dear Father. I will be careful to honor you with my lips that my words may be unctuous and blessed to all. I will seek to be faithful to you, the truth, the brethren, and all with whom I have to do, not only in great matters but also in the little things of life. Trusting myself to your care and your overruling of all my interests for my highest welfare, I will seek not only to be pure in heart, but to repel all anxiety, all discontent, all discouragement. I will not murmur nor complain at what your providence may permit because I trust you, Lord, and thank you."

Now we may enter into our specific prayers and continue to pray before the day's activity begins. We have become goal oriented. We have set the stage and it is one of thankfulness and partnership for the hours ahead because we have directed our thoughts toward God.

One of the first reasons to say thanks to God is for the wonderful gift of being able to think. We exercise this gift of thought when we pray to him. How precious, also, are God's thoughts to us! How great is the sum of them! "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:17, 23). Both God and Jesus know our thoughts. They are eager to assist any who work at bringing into subjection every thought to the obedience of Christ.

## **God Knows Our Words**

God knows our words. We will always try to honor him with our speech, but James reminds us how difficult this can be. We use the gift of speech to say thanks to God and then to criticize our fellow man, all of whom are made in God's likeness (James 3:9). "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good it is" (Prov. 15:23).

What a wonderful gift is speech! When God returns to the people a pure language they will all call upon him with one consent (Zeph. 3:9). God's word has been written for us. So has some of what Jesus said. "No man ever spake like this man" (John 7:46). Mankind's speech patterns must improve to the point where "every thing that hath breath" shall praise the Lord (Psa. 150:6).

Today, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) is saying thanks to God. Talking with other Christians about the truth is saying thanks to God. There are times along the way when we need to "bite our tongue," and hold back from words we want to speak, to replace them by saying thanks to God. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34).

## **The Voice of Action**

Sometimes our actions speak louder than our words. Body language is universal and comes across loud and clear. How true is the expression, "I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day." We are to do with our might what our hands find to do, but we must be careful to do nothing whereby our brother stumbles, or is offended or weakened (Rom. 14:21).

Though our desire is to be continually engaged in activities to help our brethren and to spread the glad tidings, daily responsibilities frequently require other necessary activities; yet where we have opportunity to serve others we should do it heartily and thereby say thanks to God.

Pure religion is action (James 1:27). Giving thanks to God by doing for others is a special privilege. "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:27). The greatest example of service is our heavenly Father, followed closely by Jesus. He became poor for our sakes, a living sermon of gratitude and thankfulness.

## **We Can Do "All Things"**

After setting the daily stage upon awakening and establishing our goals we, being yoked together with Christ, "can do" whatever he places before us. We "can do" all things each day pertaining to making our calling and election sure, thanking him each step of the way. We can develop a continuous prayer life, "without ceasing." We "can" make that

needed phone call to a lonely brother or sister. We "can" get to the meeting. We "can" hug those near and dear to us and those not so near and dear to us. We "can" send a post card, speak the truth in love, help a brother or sister, visit a hospital, pray for those in need. We "can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us" (Phil. 4:13). Doing these things we will leave, all along our pilgrim journey, an unbroken line of thankfulness between ourselves and God.

Some dear brethren can no longer think and speak and do for reasons best known to the Lord. Having done all, they wait, thankfully, to go up higher. May the Lord help us each to use whatever he has allotted us along the means of natural talents to glorify and praise his name, thus demonstrating our thankfulness to him.

How can we say thank you to God? How can we not say thank you in all that we think and say and do, expressing our appreciation for all he has thought and said and done?

"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."—Hebrews 13:15

## Thanksgiving

# What Shall I Render Unto the Lord?

*What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.—Psalm 116:12-14*

*Contributed*

Daily we ask this question in response to our appreciation of the Lord's loving kindness on our behalf. We, like David once cried unto the Lord in our lowly, sinful hopeless state; he heard us and delivered our soul from death, Adamic death. He heard us in our pain and applied the balm of Gilead to our wounded soul; and reckoned us as perfect in Christ Jesus and called us spiritual sons of God.

What a grand opportunity the great God of the universe has extended to us. Not only did he make the ultimate sacrifice of his son so that we and the world might have life, but he offered to make us his son's bride and give us his nature. What a magnificent offer to someday be a member of the greatest company that is in the universe, after God and Christ. Contemplate our future as it is described in Psa. 45:17: "I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever." This should make us realize that even now we are one of the "blessed" that "dwell in thy house" and that now and forever we will be of those "still praising thee" (Psa. 84:4). It is almost too much to believe or comprehend; and were it not for the countless assurances that the Father has given us on almost every page of scripture, it would be beyond belief.

"What shall I render unto the Lord," therefore should be the natural response of every consecrated child. The great question is what can we give in return for the gifts bestowed on us.

If we had a great financial benefactor whom we wished to honor because of some great thing done for us, how would we go about it? Our primary job would be to find out what would make him happy. What expression of thanks would best show our feelings of gratitude? We would first realize that we could never adequately repay him because we are not financially capable. And if we were then we most likely would not have felt the need for help to begin with.

### **The Cup of Salvation**

To David, a faithful Israelite and man after God's own heart, God's presence and help were found in the temple and its services. It was the only way an Israelite might approach God and receive forgiveness and help (1 Kings 8). In the context of the temple services,



David sought to express his thankfulness to his God by inquiring what he should render unto the Lord and his answer was "I will take the cup of salvation."

What did David have in mind in this expression? In Leviticus 8 we see the consecration of the priests to the service of God. It was a symbolic expression of full and complete consecration of being and will to the Lord's service.

For the Christian the cup of salvation calls to mind the memorial supper. Here, Christ chose the emblem of a cup to symbolize not only his sacrifice, but, also, our part in sharing his sufferings for the world: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (See also Matt. 20:22.) To us it is a cup of death because only thereby can our salvation be attained.

### **The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving**

David promises to fulfill his vows in the presence of his people, the nation of Israel. He almost seems to append a thank offering to this primary vow. It is termed a sacrifice of thanksgiving (v. 17), but it is all part of the same original vow. A peace or thank offering was presented when an offerer wanted to give thanks for deliverance from sickness, as in Psalm 107; or when the heart was moved at the remembrance of God's mercies, as in Psalm 103; or as was the case in Psalm 116, in fulfillment of a vow. And how firm David was in his promise to carry out his vow of dedication. He did not do it in secret, but actively and publicly proclaimed his thanks in faith and works. "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people."

David assumed his vows as an expression of thanks to God for his recent deliverance from trouble. As David's vow was one of rededication to wholly follow the Lord, so it is with the consecrated, but on a much grander scale. Whereas David was vowing to serve God by wholly following the Law, the Christian vow of daily fulfilling his consecration is not so clearly delineated since he is being trained for something far greater.

What vow of thanksgiving do we assume and how is it carried out in our daily lives? What sacrifices are we willing to give as a thank-offering to the Lord for the benefits received, for being chosen out of the myriads of humanity, for being given the opportunity to be given his precious truths, the offering of the opportunity of life on the highest plane of existence in order to bless the billions of our mankind returning from the grave?

### **A Living Sacrifice**

How can we repay such wonderful gifts? Our first duty is to search the scriptures to see what would make our Father happy? Proverbs 23:26 provides the answer for us: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways."

Romans 12:1 and 2 elaborates on this: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is

your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

The phrase "present your bodies" includes not only a primary presentation of ourselves in full consecration, but also implies a continuation of the living sacrifice to the completion of our work. In our original vow of consecration we offered our all to the Lord and his service: all our time, talents, ambitions, and fondest hopes and desires. We laid all on the altar. Since our sacrifice is a living sacrifice, there is a constant tendency for it to attempt to regain its own will, but we have covenanted to keep the sacrifice bound to the altar. This is an hourly and a daily struggle.

Every morning we present ourselves afresh to the Lord and ask his blessing that we may discern his will for us; therefore, it is a constant surrender of self-will and a daily waving of our offering before the Lord. Sacrificing is not a grievous matter with us, rather it is our daily delight, just as it was for our forerunner and example.

The peace offering was a voluntary sacrifice, a privilege rather than a duty. The feasts associated with it also had the characteristic of being cheerful and joyous occasions (1 Sam. 11:15). This is also true of our peace offering to the Lord. What a daily feast we enjoy sitting at the feet of the master and daily learning of him: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

The thank-offering is a daily renewal of our original consecration vows. True sanctification of the heart to the Lord means diligence in his service; a declaration of the good tidings to others and the building up of one another in the most holy faith. Additionally, we will do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially unto the household of faith. In these various ways our lives, consecrated to the Lord, shall be laid down for the brethren day by day, opportunity by opportunity, as they shall come to us. Our love for the Lord, the brethren, our families and sympathetically for the world of mankind, will increasingly fill our hearts as we grow in grace, knowledge, and obedience to the divine Word and example (Gal. 6:10; 1 John 3:16). The great work God asks of us is not merely for others, it is also a work in ourselves: subduing, conquering, ruling self.

### **Daily Duties**

Heart-loyalty to the Lord means continual effort to bring all the conduct of our lives, our thoughts and heart intent, into subjection to the divine will (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). This is our first duty, our continual duty, and will be the end of our duty. "This is the will of God concerning our sanctification."

In practical terms, how do we carry out this sacrifice of thanksgiving in our daily lives? First, we must learn to attune ourselves to his will. Do we find time to daily study his word, because therein will we find what his will is for us? Do we truly believe that every issue of life can be resolved by going to the word of God, not only in the large matters, but also in the small? Have we a prayer life that is one of continual thankfulness? Do we

note everything that the Father does for us, no matter how insignificant we feel it may be? Are we approaching him less and less to grant our desires and more and more to thank him for life's circumstances?

Do we attempt to daily speak forth the wonderful words that have been given us? Do we find some way each day to give comfort to the sin-sick and heavily burdened world, such as a tract, or a word in due season heralding the coming kingdom? Do we pray daily for greater means and ways to speed the harvest to its completion? Do we desire to find more opportunities in service and, once finding them, heartily put our hand to the plow?

Do we look for ways each day to serve our brethren and lighten their burdens? Do we love them because we see the growth in them that marks them as being the Lord's? Do we overlook and cover their blemishes and imperfections by not making them topics of discussion with others or even giving their foibles credence by thinking about them? Are we cognizant of both their spiritual and temporal needs, ever on the watch to help? Do we give of our time as well as our means whenever and wherever needed? Perhaps we can help in some temporal task. Do we study the scriptures so that we will always have something to give, either in private conversation or at the meetings.

Do we delight to meet with our brethren on all occasions? Do we make the meetings our personal responsibility and feel a burning need to attend? Do we try to gladden the hearts of all who are present?

At night, as we end the day, do we review what we have done and said? Do we see some progress in the development of our characters? Do we admit to our failures and seek ways to do better the next time we are tried and tested? Have we seen and learned all the lessons that the Lord had for us that day?

Is our life in Christ the center point of our existence? Then, this will be our sacrifice of thanksgiving. From one standpoint, doing these things will be a sacrifice. We sacrifice time, money, and cherished ambitions, because now there will be neither time nor means for them. But from another standpoint this same sacrifice will be our great joy in this life, because the Lord promises us: "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it"(Prov. 10:22). Is our lofty goal the completion of the race course, and are we spending our all to win the great prize? When we ask "What shall I render unto the Lord?" is our joyful response "everything?"

## A Psalm of Thanksgiving

# Amiable Tabernacles

*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.—Revelation 21:3*

*A verse by verse study in Psalm 84*

David's psalms cover a broad variety of subjects. Some plead for victory over enemies. Some are expressions of gratitude for deliverance. Some offer praise for the beauties of creation. A few are prophetic in nature. Still others, of which the eighty-fourth is an example, are centered around the dream of David's life, to build a temple as a permanent habitation for the God of Israel. To David it was not the grandeur of the structure, it was the intimate relationship with Jehovah he wanted to celebrate.

### **The House of God—Verses 1 to 4**

*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.*

When this psalm was written the magnificent temple of Solomon had not yet been built. The psalm, however, anticipates that structure and was written for the worship services to be held there. It was written specifically, as its title indicates, for the sons of Korah—one of the three divisions of singers David organized for temple worship.

The reference to tabernacles in the plural suggests both the tabernacle at Gibeon and the temple David envisioned in Jerusalem. The plain coverings of the Mosaic tabernacle were hardly things of beauty, especially after traveling forty years through the dusty Sinai and having stood for hundreds of years during the period of Israel's judges. Yet to David they are "amiable" or "lovely," not for their outward show but for their religious significance.

Similarly today, the humble home where God is worshiped in sincerity and truth is much more lovely than the most beautiful of the world's cathedrals, where lip service is more often common than true heartfelt worship.

The intensity of David's desire to see the house of worship fully used is expressed in the strongest terms. He not only longs to be in the condition represented by God's courts, his very soul is consumed, so as to almost faint, with that longing. This intense longing pervades both his "heart" (or spiritual elements) and his "flesh" (or earthly needs). Not only is true worship of God satisfying to the inner man, it is necessary for even the fleshly creature's peace of mind.

### **Sparrows in the Altar**

Many Bible students treat verse three as a rebuke to Israel, that David is saying that the altar of God had fallen into such disuse that they had become habitations for birds of the sky. The context of this psalm, however, does not seem to permit such a thought. The New International Version addresses this question by suggesting that the birds nest "near the altar," as though finding a haven in its proximity.

We suggest a more correct thought may be expressed by translating the text thus: "as the sparrows find a house and the swallows a nest to lay her young, so I have found my nesting place in thine altars, O Lord of Hosts."

Notice that the word "altars" is in the plural, referring to either the brazen and golden altars in the tabernacle or to the brazen altars in both the tabernacle and the temple. The first of these two thoughts seems most likely. Our habitation with God is both obtained through the sacrifice on the brazen altar and maintained through an active prayer life at the golden altar. When the Christian accepts Christ as his personal Savior, he is both acknowledging the blood atonement which redeemed him and the advocacy of Christ by which he has access for continual cleansing.

Worship of God is not an occasional act. For the Israelite it was not to be only at the time of the appointed feasts. Christian worship is not just a Sunday exercise of faith. Rather, God's tabernacles are a house to be dwelt in where he is "still," or better, "ever" worshiped. When David organized the worship of the house of the Lord, he exempted the singers from any other responsibilities because they were employed in singing "day and night" (1 Chron. 9:33).

## The Blessed Men—Verses 5 to 8

*Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.*

Although the word "man" is in the singular in verse five it does not refer to a given man but to any who match the qualifications. Thus, the succeeding pronouns are in the plural. In these verses we have a poetic description of the journey into the courts of God's house. Both the New American Standard and the Revised Version in verse five give the thought that God will place a road map of the highways to God in the hearts of the believer. The New International renders it, "whose hearts are set on pilgrimage."

The pathway leads through the valley of Baca. Literally, the phrase means "the valley of weeping," "the vale of tears." It is drawn from the story in Judges 2, where Israel is reprimanded for lack of diligence in driving out their enemies in the conquest of the promised land. There the name is expressly given for their tears (Judg. 2:4, 5).

Proper worship of the Lord will turn these failures into victories. The valley of weeping will become a place of springs and the lessons learned will be used eventually in helping all mankind conquer sin and self to serve the living God.

The rain referred to here is the autumn rain. This is the "latter rain" referred to in the latter part of Joel 2:23 which is to fall in the "first month" of the civil year—September to October. It perhaps refers to the time in Joel 2:28 when his spirit is "poured out upon all flesh." This work of lifting up the human race inspires the Christian today in his worship, giving purpose to every experience of life. The fact that the filling of the "pools" by the rain is apart from the main subject of the psalm, but given as a side effect that also happens, further substantiates this meaning.

As the Christian progresses through his "Baca" (weeping) experiences he not only gains insights into mankind's problems but new strength as well—going "from strength to strength." Speaking in similar language of Christian growth, the Apostle Paul urges us to go from "glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), from one stage of heart development to another, growing more and more like Christ.

Each must walk this road individually. The growth is personal. When the long journey is finished each must appear before God to be given his rightful reward. Star may differ from star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), but each must appear in white linen robes, "the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19:8).

## **Our Sun and Our Shield—Verses 9 to 12**

*Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.*

In verse nine the Lord is presented as a "shield" and in verse eleven as both "a sun and shield." As a "shield" he pledges protection, but as a "sun" he is the precursor of new life. The shield looks to the preservation of life while the sun portends new life to come. God is our shield through justification: "it is God that justified, who is he that condemneth" (Rom. 8:33, 34).

But it is as the "sun" that we see the future work of the church. "Unto you shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2). This will be after the Lord hath given "grace and glory" (Psa. 84:11). Before this can occur, however, the pilgrim must pass the tests implied in verse ten.

We must treasure a day in the courts of the Lord as being more precious than a thousand spent elsewhere. We must have the humility that will accept a responsibility as only a "doorkeeper" in the house of the Lord and esteem that better than sharing the luxury of a lifetime in the tents of wickedness.

If we pass these tests of humility and walk humbly through our Baca valley trials with honest hearts and in uprightness of soul, we shall find that truly "no good thing" will God withhold from us. "Blessed," indeed, "is the man that trusteth in Thee!"

## **Selah**

The untranslated word Selah appears twice in this psalm, at the end of verses four and eight. It thus serves as a section divider. The word closely corresponds to our "Amen," serving as an audience response of affirmation, "Let it be so!" However the Hebrew word goes beyond this simple usage and serves as a musical notation to pause and an indication for the reader to likewise pause and reflect. Still further, it connects the passage preceding the word with that which follows.

In this particular psalm it divides the section which speaks of the Lord's house from that which refers to the one who worships in that house. The second half separates the one doing the worshiping from the role God plays in his life to enable him to reach the inner courts of the temple and all that is therein implied.

## Conclusion

The psalm is arranged poetically by Charles Taze Russell on pages 652 and 653 of his book, *The Battle of Armageddon*, and we quote:

"The Prophet David (Psalm 84) seems to have been given a foreview of this great 'Valley of Blessings,' close to Jehovah's 'feet,' when he sings first of the saints of the gospel age and then of those blessed in the next age, saying:

*'How lovely are thy dwelling places  
O Jehovah of Hosts!  
My soul desired, yea, it even fainted  
For the courts of Jehovah.  
My heart and my flesh shout with joy  
Unto the living God.  
Even as the sparrow hath found a house,  
And the swallow a nest for herself,  
Where she may lay her young:  
(so I have found) thine altars, O Lord of Hosts.  
My God, my King.  
Happy are they that dwell in thy house  
They shall be continually praising thee.  
Selah.*

*Happy is the man whose strong confidence is in thee,  
Whose heart reflecteth (wholly) on the paths of (righteousness.)  
Passing through the valley of mourning,  
They change it into a place of (joy) springs— [Valley of Blessings]  
.The autumn rain brings them blessings [Joel 2:28];  
They go from strength to strength  
That each may be presented (perfect)  
Before God in Zion.' (cf. RSV)*



## A Christmas Carol

# The Song of Mary

*And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord.—Luke 1:46*

*Carl Hagensick*

Popularly known as *The Magnificat*, the song of Mary in Luke 1:39-51 is both emotionally powerful and prophetically accurate. It not only expresses the joy of an expectant mother but also the realization that this particular babe was the long-predicted Messiah who would fulfill the Abrahamic promise of God blessing "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 22:18).

### **The Setting**

While the house of Zacharias is not specifically located in the Bible narrative, we are given a clue that it lay in Judah. As a Priest he would have lived in a Levitical city. The probability is that it was in the city of Hebron, a Levitical city of refuge described as being "in the hill country of Judah" (Josh. 21:11; cf. Luke 1:39).

We are further informed (Luke 1:36) that it was at a time when Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy with John the Baptist. The use of the future tense in describing the pregnancy of Mary (vs. 36, 45) indicates that Mary had not yet conceived. Since John was six months older than Jesus, such noted scholars as Dr. Lightfoot have concluded that the conception may well have occurred during this three-month visit of Mary to Elizabeth.

This conjecture seems reasonable and accords well with the place Hebron holds in the history of Israel. It was at nearby Mamre that Abram settled in Canaan (Gen. 13:18); there his name was changed to Abraham (Gen. 17:5); there he was given the promise of the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:1-15); and there his beloved Sarah died and was buried (Gen. 23:2-9). Later it became the burial place for Abraham himself, as well as Jacob and Leah. Hebron was the first conquest of Caleb, opening up the occupation of the promised land (Josh. 14:12-15). It was the site of the first throne of David (2 Sam. 2:11). Hebron was not only a Levitical city but also a "city of refuge" (Josh. 20:7). Thus if it is, in fact, the site for the conception of the Messiah, it is another link between type and antitype.

### **The Leaping Babe**

Since Elizabeth was six months into her pregnancy, this undoubtedly was not the first time the child had stirred in her womb. But this movement she deemed as special, an omen. The word translated "leaped" is the same as that used in the Greek Septuagint of Genesis 25:22 to describe the "struggling" between Jacob and Esau in the womb of Rebecca. The pattern was again being followed of the elder serving the younger; though

in this case it was with the full consent of the elder, as is shown in his words in John 1:27: "he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me."

In Luke 1:15 the angel, in announcing the birth of John the Baptist to his father Zechariah, predicted that he would be full of the holy spirit "from his mother's womb." Later, John was to testify that, as the friend of the bridegroom, he rejoiced "at the bridegroom's voice" (John 2:39). Perhaps this may have been a veiled allusion to this "leaping" when Mary came to visit his mother Elizabeth.

In greeting her cousin, Elizabeth not only echoes the angel's own words to Mary, "blessed art thou among women" (v. 28), but gives the reason for that blessing by adding "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." The faith of Elizabeth is further attested by her ready acceptance of the Messiahship of him who was yet to be born, acknowledging Mary as "the mother of my Lord."

Elizabeth deems it an honor, not an imposition, to provide hospitality to Mary, "But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (v. 43 NIV). Thirty years later her son would echo similar sentiments when Jesus approached him for baptism, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:14). This is an appropriate attitude for all of God's children. It is an honor to entertain the brethren of Christ. In similar manner, Priscilla constrained Paul and his disciples, saying, "if ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there" (Acts 16:15). The principle remains, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Therefore we are admonished, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2).

In verse 45 we have the hint that the conception of Jesus may not have been an accomplished fact, but that one last test lay ahead for Mary to receive the promised blessing of being the mother of the Messiah. "And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." As is so often the case, God's blessings are dependent upon the heart condition of the recipient. In this case the performance of the thing promised, bearing the Son of God, was conditional upon her belief. Mary's response shows the reality of her faith and presumably the conception followed very quickly.

### **The Magnificat**

Mary's response to Elizabeth has been called *The Magnificat* from the Latin word used in our theme text—"My soul doth magnify the Lord." Her response is in many ways similar to the song of Hannah which she sang to celebrate the birth of Samuel.

Hannah began her song of thanksgiving with these words, "My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:1, 2).

Rejoicing in God as her Savior does not confuse the personality of her son with that of Jehovah God. Both are rightly styled as saviors in the Bible. God is the author of the plan of salvation and Jesus the agent by which it is carried out.

The name Mary is to give her son points to this oneness between the Father and the Son. In Matthew 1:21-23 we learn that the name Jesus is to be given to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that he is to be called Immanuel. Both names have similar import. Both mean that God is with men; the name Jesus adding the thought of the purpose for his being with men—to save. (See Numbers 13:16 for the origin of the Hebrew name Joshua which is Jesus in the Greek language.)

### **Personal Mercy**

Mary's song begins with an expression of gratitude for personal mercy; God has honored her despite her low estate. Humility is the starting place for any favor from God. When Saul was little in his own eyes he was selected to be the first king of Israel. Gideon is amazed at his selection to deliver Israel even though he was from a lowly family. Moses, though educated in Pharaoh's courts, could not be used until he realized his need for a spokesman to approach the royal palace. He could no longer fluently speak the language of the Egyptian court. It is not by coincidence that the first beatitude is, "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Even Mary's cry that "all generations shall call me blessed" is not a call for personal honor. To be "blessed" is to receive special favors from a superior and gives the glory to the giver and not the recipient. As Paul states, "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7). The very concept of blessing is connected with the Lord's pity and mercy and not with a deserved favor. (See James 5:11.)

Yet, blessed as she was for giving birth to the Son of God, Jesus calls attention to a still greater blessing in Luke 11:27, 28. After a woman in the crowd praised his mother with the words, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked," Jesus responds by saying, "Yea rather, blessed are they that heed the word of God and keep it."

In recognizing the scope of her favor, Mary is not calling attention to Jehovah's power, but to his holiness. This inviolate purity is always the personal stamp of God's character. For this reason the Christian's prayer frequently opens with the words, "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9).

### **The Principles of Mercy**

"And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:50-53).

The first principle of mercy is that it is inheritable. It can pass from generation to generation. Notice the words of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, "the promise is to you and your children" (Acts 2:39). Just as iniquities were to be spread to the third and fourth generation (Exod. 34:7), so equally were mercies. However, this promise is not unconditional. If a future generation, being of adult age, should not live a godly life, the godly blessings would be withdrawn (Jer. 18:7-10).

The second principle which Mary enunciates is that God's exaltations go to those who are meek, rather than to those who are already highly esteemed. Certainly Mary considered herself in the former category. Many years of precedent had shown this principle. Hannah was favored of those things which were told her from the Lord." As is so often the case, God's blessings are dependent upon the heart condition of the recipient. In this case the performance of the thing promised, bearing the Son of God, was conditional upon her belief. Mary's response shows the reality of her faith and presumably the conception followed very quickly.

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God not only shows his sovereignty but the recipient of his favor is prepared through deprivation to better appreciate the gift bestowed. The outburst of Mary's joy demonstrates just that type of appreciation and contrasts well with her earlier apprehension when informed of her special role by the angel Gabriel.

The same lesson applies to the Christian. In order to receive the mercies of God we need to hold ourselves in low esteem. As Peter has phrased it, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:5, 6).

### **Mercy to Israel**

After applying the principles of mercy to herself, Mary broadens the concept to all of Israel, "he hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy." Not only is the broader application of this principle true when applied to the entire nation, it is also prophetically accurate.

The aged Simeon, who had "waited for the consolation of Israel" expressed similar thoughts at the dedication of the child Jesus in the temple: "this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." In fact, Jesus was to come not only as a child to Mary and as the Savior of the entire world but in a unique role for the nation of Israel as well. He told his disciples, "I am not come, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24).

The psalmist, likewise, connects God's mercy toward Israel with their low estate and the remembrance of Jehovah in Psalm 136:23: "Who remembered us in our low estate, for his mercy endureth forever." The particular feature of God's memory is further refined for us in Psalm 106:44, 45, "Nevertheless he looked upon their distress when he heard their cry; and he remembered his covenant for their sakes, and relented according to the greatness of his loving kindness." God calls to remembrance his covenant. While we may forget to forgive those who trespass against us, God remembers his covenant promises to forgive and correct those who trespass against him.

### **God's Mercy Toward All**

In the closing words of Mary's song her praise broadens as she thinks of the mercy of God, recalling the covenant Jehovah will never forget—the Abrahamic covenant, that unconditional promise made to Abraham so many millennia ago, that in him and his seed "shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Herein is the great cause for our own magnificats, our own praise and exalting of the name of Jehovah God. He has promised and he will yet bring to pass his stated commitment to bless "all the families of the earth" in "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:19-21). This is the great prospect in the miraculous birth of Bethlehem, a birth that had its beginning about this time of Mary's song of thanksgiving and jubilation.

In verses fifty-five and fifty-six we read that Mary remained in the house of Zacharias for three months, until the full term of John the Baptist. While the order of texts seems to place the birth of John after the departure of Mary, it is probable that she stayed to help her cousin with the events surrounding the birth and that the order of texts was merely to complete one episode before beginning the next.

If so, she would have heard the confirmation of God's promises and prophecies from the mouth of Zacharias: the time had come to "visit and redeem" his people and raise up a "horn of salvation" from the house of David. This is obviously not a reference to the birth of John but of Mary's child Jesus, for the house of Zacharias was Levitical while Mary's lineage was from Judah and David. Mary would have known that deliverance from their enemies was to be in fulfillment of God's oath-bound promise to Abraham. The enemies, thus, are identified not as their Roman oppressors, nor the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, but Satan and sin and death itself. These are the enemies addressed by the Abrahamic covenant.

How we rejoice with Mary, not only during the season when the birth of the Savior is celebrated by those around us but at all times. Our Redeemer has come and we eagerly look forward to the grand consummation of all which that birth brought into being.

## The Story of the Nativity

# Unto Us a Child Is Born

***For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder.—Isaiah 9:6***

*Condensed from a discourse by Robert Seklemian*

One day, in the tiny village of Bethlehem, not far from the old site of the Garden of Eden, a descendant of mother Eve, a young woman named Mary, bears her firstborn son. Whereas Eve hoped that her son Cain was the "man from the Lord" sent to save them, Mary knew her son Jesus was "that man." How? The angel Gabriel had told her. The child had been supernaturally conceived. The angelic choir joyfully announced him as the "Savior, which is Christ the Lord." The shepherds told her all about it. Yes, Eve only hoped; but Mary knew!

The account of the announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds is one of the most hauntingly beautiful ever written. The shepherds near Bethlehem were keeping watch over their flock by night. The night was dark and peaceful. Sheep herding is a lonely occupation and a strenuous one. Grazing sheep range far and wide and need constant watching lest they stray. Being defenseless creatures, they must be watched over by the shepherds, lest lions, bears, or wolves attack them while they sleep. These shepherds, although humble, were necessarily rough and tough men. They were almost constantly isolated; unused to the stir and excitement of city life. The account says they were "abiding in the field." This was their home. Their roof was the vault of heaven. They lived under the stars. There was a sameness and monotony in their lives. Every day was the same. Day in and day out they lived in a silence broken only by the plaintive cries of the sheep, the rustle of the wind in the grass, and the occasional distant howl of the wolf. Nothing exciting ever happened. That is, not until that night.

Suddenly they saw the most glorious sight human eyes had ever beheld!—"the glory of the LORD shone round about them!" This was no ordinary glory. This was the glory of Jehovah God himself! There is no greater glory.

We do not know the exact form or dimension this glory took; but it was a most magnificent sight! Is it any wonder that "they were sore afraid?" Then came the reassuring voice of the angel of the Lord: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11). We may think we witnessed something wonderful when we attend a great symphony concert or a grand opera performance, but these pale into miserable insignificance when compared with what followed the angels' announcement that night: "A multitude of the heavenly host praising God!" We sometimes refer to the best music we know as "heavenly music." This was real heavenly music! Real angelic voices that were exquisitely delightful to the human ear.



That is what the entranced shepherds heard; shepherds to whom nothing exciting ever happened!

### **Why to Shepherds?**

Why was all this glory wasted on those simple shepherds? Why was not so glorious an announcement made to the great religious leaders of the day—to the chief priests, Pharisees, or scribes? Because this was a fine demonstration of God's established principle: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). These humble shepherds were willing and enthusiastic couriers of the good news. They did not waste a moment to visit the child. They said, "Let us now go, even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass; which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger" (Luke 2:15, 16).

The sight of the holy child had a peculiar effect on these normally silent and taciturn shepherds. Their tongues were loosed. They talked! And how they talked! They went about, telling everyone they met the glorious things they had seen and heard and about the wonderful child to whom they had been led. We read in Luke 2:17, "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child." What was the saying to which they referred? They would never forget as long as they lived that angelic voice and those wonderful words: "Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born, this day, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." In their enthusiasm the shepherds told many people. Then the record says: "All they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:18). The record continues, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (v. 19). She treasured everything said about Jesus; and she would remember it in the days to come.

### **A Perfect Baby**

Every young mother thinks her baby is the most perfect and unusual baby in the world. Mary must have thought so too; but unlike all other mothers in the world, she was right! Her baby was the only perfect baby ever born; and the most unusual baby—the only-begotten Son of the Most High God! Before, Mary had "pondered in her heart" the words of the angel Gabriel when he had announced the forthcoming birth of Jesus, saying that her son would be called "the Son of the Highest, the Son of God." Now she had heard the testimony of the shepherds, that the angel had called her child, "A Savior, which is Christ the Lord." How beautiful and how natural that she ponder in her heart these things about her precious baby.

## What Might Have Been

The account of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus is beautifully but cryptically written. All the needful facts are given but the non-essentials are left out. This brevity is necessary, of course, as otherwise the Bible would be too voluminous and unwieldy. At times though it is tempting to speculate about the details.

For example, we read that Joseph, accompanied by Mary, journeyed to Bethlehem to be taxed. The Roman decree was that each person must go to his native city and register for the tax rolls. Though Joseph was a carpenter in Nazareth of Galilee, his native city was Bethlehem. So he went there to be taxed— that is the last we hear about this taxation. Surely, sometime soon after Jesus' birth, Joseph must have gone to the government offices in Bethlehem to register and pay his tax. If Mary pondered the things concerning her child in her heart, undoubtedly Joseph must have done so also. The record says he was a "just man" and he must have been loving and kind for the Lord to have selected him for Mary's husband and to be the foster father and protector of Jesus.

With this in mind, let us see what might have happened. New fathers are insufferably proud; and as Joseph made his way to register for the taxation his mind was full of the wonderful events surrounding the child's birth. He could not keep the thing to himself. He probably told the man ahead of him in line, as well as the man behind him: "My wife Mary just had a baby! A fine boy! A most beautiful child! Absolutely perfect! I've seen many great babies but never one like this. And they predict great things for him too." The men would laugh and congratulate him, winking at one another. "That's the way they all feel about the first," they would say, "but come on, let's keep this line moving."

Getting to the Roman registrar Joseph might have said, "I am Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth in Galilee. My wife Mary is with me. Now there is another member of our family to register. My wife has just given birth to a boy! A most beautiful and unusual child." "The child's name, please?" impatiently the registrar would ask. "We are going to name him Jesus," Joseph would reply. "But let me tell you some wonderful things about him. Some shepherds in the field . . ." "My dear man," snaps the registrar, waving him off, "don't you realize you are delaying Caesar's business?"

How astounded that Roman agent would have been had he realized that this baby he had no time for was the only begotten Son of God. He was God's agent for the whole of creation: "without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). He was the Savior of the world, Christ the Lord, the King of kings and Lord of lords, much greater than Caesar. His life, death, and influence would shake the mighty Roman Empire to its foundations and eventually cause its disappearance. He would be the ransom for all mankind and would be raised from the dead and be highly exalted to the right hand of God. His teachings would be written down in all the languages of the world and would spread from nation to nation, from continent to continent, until it covered all the earth. Eventually, together with one hundred and forty-four thousand kings and priests, each one far greater than the mighty Caesar Augustus, he would establish a kingdom on earth, raise the dead, and bring mankind to perfection and harmony with God.

## **Isaiah's Prophecy**

Centuries before the birth of Jesus the prophet Isaiah had been allowed to pierce the veil of time and see this happy occasion. Seeing it, he wrote with exultation, "Unto us a child is born!" But Isaiah saw further than this. His prophetic vision leaped another thirty years; now he saw not the babe but the perfect and mature man, Jesus. He offers himself as the corresponding price for the perfect man, Adam, who had sinned. In almost the same breath he added, "Unto us a son is given!" In other words: "This is the son of God who became the son of man in order to become the Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

When the redemptive work of the Son is complete, mother Eve will have bruised the heel of the serpent who beguiled her, for it will be the promised seed who will "lay hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan" and bind him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:2) and after that exterminate him (v. 10).

Unto us a son is given. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). What a precious gift!

## **Christ's Government**

After saying: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," the prophet says, "and the government shall be upon his shoulder." There is a great fallacy in the Christian world today. Taking as their authority the mistranslated scripture, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) some teach that Christ rules only in the hearts of men—that when a man accepts Christ, Christ comes to that man; and that when all men have accepted him, he shall have fully come. This, they teach, will constitute the Kingdom of Christ.

Even the pagan ruler Herod knew better. He was a hard and realistic man. When he heard from the wise men of the East that someone had been born king of the Jews he gave no mystical meaning to the words. He considered the new king to be a threat to his physical rulership of a segment of the Roman Empire. Believing in direct and decisive action, he went right to the highest Jewish authorities he knew—the chief priests and scribes—and demanded to know where, according to their prophets, this new king would be born. They quoted to him from the prophecy of Micah 5:2, "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6). In other words, "the government shall be upon his shoulder."

Herod did not ascribe some symbolic meaning to the prophecy. He did not limit it to a mere spiritual rulership in the hearts of men. On the contrary, he considered his worst fears confirmed. Here was a definite threat; unless he acted, the government might be wrested from himself and vested in another king.

At that time it was the policy of Rome to rule as benevolently as possible—with "kid gloves," so to speak. Yet the cynical Herod was so thoroughly convinced that Jesus imperiled his rule that, when his efforts to locate the child were frustrated he abandoned discretion and brutally "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Matt. 2:16). Would he have taken such drastic action if he believed that Jesus was destined to rule only in the hearts of men?

## **Wrong Expectations**

In those days the Jews were in great expectation of their Messiah. They expected a powerful leader who would reestablish the throne of David and break the Roman yoke. They had no spiritual or heavenly hopes.

The early disciples also believed in a literal earthly government, headed by Jesus. The only thing they were confused about was the time of its establishment, hoping that it would be immediately inaugurated. Later, when the holy spirit was given, they understood that it was to be in the future; but they still anticipated a kingdom on earth with Christ the king: they hoped to live as spirit beings and to reign with him a thousand years. They anticipated that Millennial kingdom to solve all the world's problems. They believed that "there shall be a resurrection of the dead" and a "restitution of all things," including the Adamic paradise.

It was after the death of the Apostles and other early disciples that errors began to creep in. Men became increasingly impatient at the delay and sought to establish the kingdom ahead of time. A false system was set up and the truth of Christ's kingdom on earth all but disappeared. After the Reformation there was a tendency to give purely spiritual connotation to the earthly kingdom promises. It was then that the translation was rendered "The Kingdom of God is within you," when it should have actually read, "God's royal majesty is among you." In other words, "Christ is here, the king is present, he is in your midst."

Now we see that the full manifestation of God's kingdom is near. It is to be a literal and actual kingdom on the earth. The signs are numerous and unmistakable. With the nation of Israel an established fact, the "fig tree" of Matthew 24:32 is budding.

Men's hearts are "failing them for fear. While there has always been fear, present conditions have brought heart-failing fear to men as they plainly see approaching "a time of trouble such as never was" (Dan. 12:1).

There are many other significant signs. Luke summarized, "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." Then he adds: "When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (21:28, 31).

It will be an invisible government, taking strong, physical control of earth's affairs. It will bring such wondrous blessings that men will say, "This is what we have always wanted!" As Isaiah 25:9 expressed: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." "Be glad and rejoice," the prophet said. "Good tidings of great joy," the angel said that night in Bethlehem. And when that government which is to be upon his shoulders shall have done its work it will come to pass "that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow . . . and that every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father" (Phil. 2:10, 11).

### **In the Land of Beginning Again**

Many years ago someone, out of a longing heart, wrote a poem entitled *In the Land of Beginning Again*. The poet imagined a land where one could start life all over again while retaining every memory of his previous life. Thus, every mistake of the past could be rectified; every decision that had proven wrong would be reversed. Sins of omission and commission which in the previous life had resulted in injury and grief to one's self or others would be avoided. In this Land of Beginning Again one would know how to live and love and serve God because of the rich experience of the past. Life would be meaningful and full and satisfying, free of doubt and corroding worry. The way would be clear. No matter what he made of his life before, one would have another chance. All the troubles and tribulations of the past, instead of being worse than useless torments, would now be valuable guides. Remembering the lessons of the past, one would walk serenely and confidently in the right way.

These are universal longings. How many times have we heard the expression, "If I only had my life to live over again!" Or again, "If I only knew then what I know now!" Or the despairing cry, "I know I was wrong; but now it is too late!" Adam and Eve may have used that very expression: "Oh, to have another chance!" This is a universal desire. The Bible says, in Haggai 2:7, "The desire of all nations [or all peoples] shall come." The Land of Beginning Again is exactly what the kingdom will accomplish. The permission of evil has been for man's experience. It will have been futile and useless torment unless man is given an opportunity to use his experience.

This is the significance of Job 33:23-25: "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness, Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth." That will be The Land of Beginning Again.

"Thus saith the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy" (Jer. 31:16). The present evil world, under Satan's rule, has been "the land of the enemy." The grave, to which it has led, is also the land of the enemy."

But they shall return to another land—to God's kingdom on earth under Christ, to the government that shall be upon his shoulder, to the Land of Beginning Again! "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (Isa. 51:11).

## A Symposium

# The Testimonies of Simeon and Anna

*For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.—Luke 2:30*

*Contributed*

When Jesus was forty days old, Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple to make an offering to God. It was an expression of thanksgiving for the birth of their first born. It also represented a hope that when their son became of age he would devote his life to the heavenly Father's service. This custom was followed by Jewish families at that time because they had been divinely instructed to dedicate the woman's first born son to the Lord (Luke 2:23).

The Law also stated that, according to the wealth of each family, the parents could give to the priests at the door of the tabernacle either a lamb, a pigeon, or a turtledove as their offering (Lev. 12:6, 7).

Mary and Joseph were poor; they could not afford a lamb but instead, we are told, they brought a pair of turtledoves. Our Lord, who was created in great glory in the heavenly courts, not only humbled himself to be born in a manger among animals and poor shepherds but to earthly parents who could not even afford to bring a lamb to the temple as their sacrifice of thanks (Lev. 12:8).

When Jesus was brought to the temple the priests did not know that he was the Savior whose birth had been foretold throughout the ages by the holy prophets. Even though these Levitical priests were closely following Daniel's prophecy as to when the coming of the Redeemer would be, their eyes were blinded to the reality that their Restorer would emerge at his first advent from such humble parentage and poor background. Naturally they were looking for a king to come in great glory and power like previous reigning monarchs, such as Solomon.

### **Simeon**

The Luke account tells of a devout and reverential man in Jerusalem named Simeon who had great faith in God. He was anxiously awaiting the restoration of Israel and its coming Messiah (Luke 2:25).

The holy spirit made it known unto Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the promised Messiah (Luke 2:26). Thus his heart was in proper accord to acknowledge the Savior in whatever way God would reveal him.

Additionally, Simeon may have spoken under divine inspiration through the holy spirit as did many of the ancient servants of God at that time, even though spirit begetting did not

occur until Pentecost (Acts 2:18). However, the ability to speak as a result of the holy spirit's revelation did not imply that Simeon fully understood everything he said regarding the purpose of the Master's miraculous birth. Similarly, Daniel did not comprehend the scope of his end time prophecies (Dan. 12:8).

Simeon's noble proclamation upon seeing the baby Jesus, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation," is a testimony that he believed the infant in his arms would grow to be Israel's promised Redeemer.

How wonderful it must have been for Mary and Joseph to witness this beautiful blessing and prayer upon their son by such a consecrated man of God. How their hearts must have been uplifted and overjoyed when Simeon stated that the Lord was to be a light to lighten the gentiles and a glory to the people of Israel (Luke 2:32).

Mary, who initially doubted Gabriel's message that she was to give birth to the Son of the Highest, may have appreciated the truth in his words after hearing Simeon's great testimony. She marveled once again about the declaration that her newborn son was indeed chosen to rule over the throne of David and to reign over the house of Jacob (Luke 1:28-34).

Simeon's statement that the Lord was to be a light to lighten the gentiles additionally reaffirms the divine promise: he is to be the Savior of all mankind in the coming kingdom (Isa. 9:6, 7). We are thankful that God's plan is not merely a redemption for some but that all of Adam's posterity will have the opportunity to receive life in the Millennial age—both Jew and gentile.

It is interesting to note that even though Simeon prophesied about the Lord's coming and not about his death, he spoke about the "piercing of the sword," which would not only penetrate our Lord's being but would symbolically pierce Mary's as well. It is doubtful that Simeon understood the words he uttered. This may well refer to the Master's sacrificial ministry and the ignominious death he was to suffer. Such would be a difficult trial for him but an especially painful experience for his mother, Mary, to witness.

### **The Fall and Rise of Israel**

Furthermore, there is no evidence that Simeon understood the impact of his saying that the child was set for the fall and rising again of Israel. When did the fall of Israel occur? This probably can be dated from A.D. 33 when Jesus stated that their house had been left desolate unto them (Luke 13:35). This repudiation by the Lord after Israel rejected him as the Messiah ultimately resulted in the scattering of the nation from their homeland. Although a regathering process commenced late in the nineteenth century and Israel attained statehood in 1948, to this day the Jews remain without their temple to offer sacrifices, without a High Priest, and without the ability to trace their lineage to one of the twelve sons of Jacob. When Pilate yielded to the demand for Jesus' crucifixion, little did the people realize that their chant, "His blood be on us and on our children" would be



heard in the heavenly courts and would subsequently bring about their sentence of condemnation (Matt. 27:25).

Prominent among the experiences which befell the Jewish nation as a result of rejecting the Lord are the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by Titus and his army and the scattering of their people throughout various European countries. The exile from their homeland reached a climax when they were violently persecuted by political leaders, such as Mussolini and Hitler, who may have been the hunters described by the prophet Jeremiah as being sent to hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and out of the holes of the rocks (Jer. 16:15, 16).

When will the rise of Israel occur? This will fully take place when that nation proclaims, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 21:9). It will be at that time when their blindness shall be removed and they will look upon him whom they pierced and wail. Israel will accept Christ as their Deliverer after the church of God has been glorified (Rom. 11:25, 26; Rev. 1:7).

Likely, Simeon may have seen many parents bring their infants to the temple. Yet we know that God revealed to this righteous man that only this one was the true Savior. Thus Simeon could declare, "Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace." Simeon's eyes truly had seen salvation and he felt satisfied to go into death after witnessing the presentation before the Lord of Israel's promised Redeemer (Luke 2:29, 30).

## **Anna**

Anna was a descendant from the tribe of Asher. She had been widowed for most of her life and probably was over a hundred years old at the time of this narrative (Luke 2:36, 37). She, too, was very religious and had great faith in God. Anna remained in the temple each day fasting, praying, and waiting for the promised Savior.

While Simeon was blessing the baby Jesus, Anna was standing nearby and watching. After witnessing this event, the scriptures indicate that she also was convinced that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah of Israel. Upon realizing this, she gave thanks to God for bringing the baby into her presence. The heavenly Father's dealings with Anna, the prophetess, and the revelation to her that this was the Savior reaffirm in our minds that there is a place in the household of God for women as stewards. God truly is no respecter of persons and his dealings with women throughout the ages attest to this (Acts 10:34).

Although the gospels do not elaborate upon Anna's life after she saw the infant Jesus, the scriptures reveal she testified to others about the promised Messiah. Since Anna was a prophetess, she may well have spoken of a coming Redeemer before she saw Jesus. In any event, the Luke account implies that after witnessing this great event in the temple, Anna shared with her Jewish brethren that she had indeed seen the promised Deliverer of Israel (Luke 2:38).

The scriptures attest that both Anna and Simeon were prophets. Luke does not elaborate on their prophecies but the narrative seems to indicate that such included the promised future blessings of Israel by the Savior (Luke 2:32, 38). It would not be difficult to imagine the scorn which may have been their portion at the hands of some Jewish brethren for expressing that the infant Jesus, who was born of poor parents and not in a king's palace, was to be Israel's Redeemer. In fact only a remnant of Israel accepted the Master after his baptism in Jordan. Thus, during our Lord's childhood, any possibility that the Jews recognized him as the coming Messiah would be extremely remote. Even our Lord's cousin, John the Baptist, did not know that he was the Messiah until after the holy spirit was manifested upon Jesus like a dove (John 1:33, 34).

### **Not Spirit Begotten**

It is improbable, because of their age at the time of Jesus' birth, as well as the scriptural record of Simeon's desire to depart in peace after viewing the holy infant, that either of them were alive during the outpouring of the holy spirit at Pentecost more than thirty-three years afterward. Therefore their faith and devotion to God, no matter how strong, will not result, we believe, in their receiving the divine nature.

What more can be said about the testimonies of these two righteous individuals? If Simeon and Anna received a good report at the end of their course, they will be among those who will become princes in the earth. They both demonstrated great faith before and after they saw the infant Jesus. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews indicates that those approved of God prior to the Gospel age will become members of the Ancient Worthy class. These two servants may well be rewarded by becoming earthly judges in the kingdom, because their testimonies pleased the heavenly Father.

In Matthew 11:11 we read that there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist. This singular commendation probably alludes to the great privilege he had of identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God after his baptism. The testimonies of Anna and Simeon in announcing infant Jesus make them excellent candidates for special recognition in the future.

### **Male and Female**

Significantly, God chose both a male and a female prophet to bear witness of his Son during the Lord's infancy. What could be the lesson here? God has equally chosen from both males and females to develop his new creation. The scriptures tell us how both men and women were baptized into Christ to become members of his royal priesthood and holy nation (Acts 5:14; 8:12). Since both sexes are included as part of the church, both, as saints in the flesh, are responsible for spreading the good tidings during their earthly sojourn.

Although the elders of an ecclesia play a prominent role in terms of shepherding the brethren, it does not diminish the responsibility which sisters have in the church of God. We know that there were women who ministered unto the Lord during his ministry and

the Bible also reveals how Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, tended to his needs by anointing his body prior to his crucifixion (John 12:1-3).

When the angel appeared unto the shepherds and said, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10), we can imagine the apprehension the shepherds may have felt upon beholding such a glorious being, as evidenced by the salutation of the angels for them to "fear not."

Sometimes too, a fear in men's hearts to believe may be evident when we witness the "good tidings" to them. Like the shepherds, many in the world may be reluctant to accept the grand scope of God's divine plan. However, we shouldn't be discouraged by their seeming doubts for the adversary has blinded the eyes of many considering the import of the wonderful gospel message (2 Cor. 4:4).

Our testimonies to mankind should express not only the future greatness of our Savior who humbled himself to a low estate among men, but also the present privilege of calling the elect class to walk as he walked and to suffer, following in his footsteps.

Out of the Mouth of Two Witnesses

## Simeon and Anna

*And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.—Luke 2:34*

*By Michael Brann*

The gospel of Luke favors us with the testimony of two special witnesses regarding the birth of the long promised Messiah. Their names are Simeon and Anna (2:21-38).

Israel had been without any noted true prophet among its people since the days of the great prophet Malachi, nearly four hundred years earlier. During those silent years the religious sects such as the Pharisees and Saducees began to take shape and dominated the nation and serve as the mouthpiece of God.

About the time of Simeon and Anna, many in Israel had begun to anticipate the coming of the promised Messiah which was to save them and appoint them an honored role in God's kingdom (Luke 3:15). Apparently, their expectations were based upon the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:25. Many believed the indicated time was at hand.

Although their full expectations were not to be met until some thirty years later, these beginning expectations caused a heightened pitch of excitement in Israel. The LORD seemed to perpetuate this attitude by once again speaking to and through the medium of prophets and prophetesses.

### **The Witness of Simeon**

The first to testify and prophesy is one called Simeon. In a few words, much is said about the character of this man. He was just and devout.

This elderly man was not merely seeking outwardly to be a man of God. His daily devotion at the temple demonstrated that he was one whose heart conformed to his actions.

It is stated that he waited for the consolation of Israel. That is to say, based upon the sure promises of God's word, he looked for and fully expected the Messiah. Further, the record says that the holy spirit was upon him. The LORD had indicated to him that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Anointed, that is, the one who was appointed to deliver Israel. Now the time had arrived. Simeon had faithfully waited for many years for the fulfillment of that unique promise made to him. What a fine example we have in Simeon to wait upon the Lord, always hopeful and full of expectation for the things promised to us by God! Even though the fulfillment may come many years later,

perhaps more than we had hoped or expected, God has his own time schedule. It is pleasing to him that we wait upon him.

Simeon's joy at the sight of this child who would deliver Israel was immeasurable. He immediately took him into his arms; and with great confidence he blessed God and proclaimed a message that the child eventually would have a great impact upon all the people of the earth. He further attested that, before these particular blessings are to go into operation, this Messiah will be the focal point of much trouble and conflict amongst his own people. Many in Israel stumbled over him, not recognizing who he was nor understanding the purpose of his first coming. The facts speak for themselves even today as we see how many Jews have not yet recognized him. Regardless of that, we are likewise certain that these same ones who have rejected him are also in line for the special promise to rise again. Once God has called out and prepared his bride for his Son, Israel will once again come into the picture and be blessed with certain privileges and opportunities. (See Romans 11 for more details on this subject.)

### **The Witness of Anna**

Anna (or Hannah from the Hebrew) means favored. In the small glimpse into her character, briefly given us by Luke, we begin to see why she was favored of God. She is described as a prophetess, in the tradition of Miriam, Deborah, and Hulduh. She was from the tribe of Aser (Asher). Asher, a rather undistinguished tribe, failed to completely evict the Canaanites from their inherited portion of the land of Israel. It was one of the few tribes west of the Jordan (along with the tribe of Simeon) to produce no judge, hero, or heroine of faith to the nation. That is, until Anna!

Anna was at least eighty-four years old (possibly as old as about one hundred and three) but still actively serving the Lord. She attended the morning and evening worship services every day. She fasted according to the law and prayed without ceasing. No doubt, the burden of her prayers for the long promised Messiah to arrive was to establish his everlasting kingdom of peace and righteousness, and furthermore, to restore Israel to its promised prominence.

No wonder such a devoted and long-time faithful woman as Anna was favored of God to see the Messiah in the form of this small child; it thrilled her heart so much that she just had to go tell those far and near this good news! Imagine this elderly woman going from place to place preaching the birth of the Messiah, the Great Deliverer, the Lord's Anointed One! She may have been the first door-to-door Christian witness!

### **Lessons from these Two Witnesses**

Many lessons are given by these two witnesses. One is that the elderly have much to contribute to the younger ones as examples of constancy in meeting habits. Many have been faithfully attending Sunday and midweek meetings for several decades and can nearly count on one hand the number of missed meetings. What an example to those of us

who might, over minor excuses, at times prefer to stay home from gatherings with the brethren.

Another lesson is that we need not be concerned with how many meetings we go to but with whether they are helping to make us just and right and good and holy in our everyday affairs, in matters of business, school, work, home.

In a personal way we, who have beheld in a spiritual manner the presence of the Messiah and understand the truths contained in his unfolding divine plan of the ages, are (like Simeon) prepared to die in peace knowing that the Lord is able to save us out of death by the power of resurrection.

As the Apostle Paul says, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Lastly, what an example Anna is to those who likewise witness our Lord's second advent! Like Anna, they are first of all thankful for the privilege to see these things and secondly, to spread the good news of his fast approaching kingdom to all who have hearing ears and who may be looking for that blessed hope.

May this season of the year find us more and more filled with the spontaneous joy and peace which filled the hearts of Simeon and Anna as they beheld with their own eyes the beginning of the fulfillment of all of God's plans and purposes.

## A Text for Meditation

# An Admonition for the New Year

*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.—Proverbs 4:23*

*John T. Read*

In casting about for a scripture suitable to the new year, one easily kept in mind and of constant benefit to us, this admonition from the sayings of Solomon is particularly appropriate. It is taken from a chapter dealing especially with the course of wisdom and was the inspired utterance of one who had been divinely endowed with wisdom and understanding.

Shortly after Solomon ascended the throne of the Lord in the place of his father David, God appeared unto him in a dream and asked what he should give him. Solomon, sensible of his youth and lack of experience and awed by the responsibility of judging the myriads of God's chosen people, requested an understanding heart to know judgment and to discern between good and evil. This request so pleased the Lord that he said to him:

"Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold I have done according to thy words; lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and commandments as thy father David did walk, then I will [also] lengthen thy days."—1 Kings 3:11-14

In all probability the foundation for Solomon's wisdom had been laid in the guidance of the Lord during his youth; and a large part of the honor and riches, which he inherited as king, had been built up by the providence and foreknowledge of God before he came into office. But long life was made dependent upon his faithfulness in walking in the Lord's ways, which constitutes the course of wisdom.

Solomon soon had opportunity to demonstrate his understanding heart. This he did by manifesting much astuteness in deciding the contention of two women over the motherhood of a child to which each laid claim. His unique method of demonstrating which one was the mother of the child gained the approval of Israel and has come down in the records of scripture as a testimony to his understanding of human nature.

But the best testimony to the greatness of his understanding has been in the wisdom of the proverbs that he set forth. According to the statement in 1 Kings 4:32, Solomon

uttered three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five songs or psalms, which means that we have only a portion of them in scripture.

### **The Purpose of Proverbs**

The first seven chapters of Proverbs are addressed to sons and since "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4), they are particularly applicable to all who have become the "sons of God." Grouped together with chapters eight and nine, they voice the praise of wisdom.

The purpose for which the book of Proverbs was written is given in the first five verses of chapter one: "For gaining sagacity and intelligence, for a grasp of wise teachings, for training in right conduct, in duty, goodness, and integrity, for imparting insight to the ignorant, knowledge and sense to the young, for understanding maxims and parables, the sentences of sages and their aphorisms" (Moffatt). And then he further adds: "Let the sage, too, listen and learn, let the intelligent know how to handle life." Rotherham translates this last verse: "A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a discreet man, wise counsels will acquire." In other words, a man may be wise and discreet even though he be young; for wisdom does not consist in knowing everything there is to be known, but in the right application of that which we do have and know.

### **Solomon's Reign Typical**

Many things concerning Solomon and his reign were typical of the thousand-year reign of Christ. Solomon was chosen of God and endowed, as was Jesus, with wisdom from on high; he was declared to be without equal in wisdom and understanding, either before or after his time. The same is true of Christ but on a much grander scale. He was exalted above all kings, and all paid him homage and brought presents—the same again is true of Christ for all kings shall bow before him. As a result of his wisdom and righteous judgments, Solomon's reign was a time of peace and prosperity, for "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:25).

Again in "A Song of Solomon" (Psa. 72), it is said of the reign of Christ: "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea [antitypical of Solomon's dominion, 1 Kings 4:21], and from the river unto the ends of the earth. . . . The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. [1 Kings 10:1-10] Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him."

Besides wisdom, God gave Solomon riches, glory, and honor. His fame spread throughout all the world. Then too, in the beginning of his reign, he built a house for the habitation of God, a place where God did hear and answer prayer (1 Kings 8:28; 9:3). The stones of that temple were prepared during the reign of David, but the erecting of the temple took place under Solomon in the glory age. Likewise the living stones of the great antitypical temple are taken from the quarry of this world and are prepared under the



direction of the Lord during this age of the Church's warfare, suffering, and death; but the erecting of the temple will be the first work of the Glory Age, after Christ takes unto himself his great power and awakens these living stones, that he may assemble them unto himself as the head-stone to form "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:12). It is our opinion, based upon the evidence of events foretold, that the last of these living stones are now receiving their final tests and polishing necessary to prepare them for their eternal resting place. And so it behooves us to give heed to the words of wisdom of which our text is part.

### **The Heart—What It Signifies**

The admonition of our text is "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Why is the heart singled out in this admonition? Why not doctrines or the mind or the tongue? The wise man has not left us in doubt as to the reason: "For out of it are the issues of life." But just what does the heart signify? Why do the issues of life depend upon its condition?

The literal heart is the most vital organ of the human body; through its operation and control of the blood stream, it supplies oxygen and nourishment to all the other parts and carries away the waste products. The operations of all the many organs and functions of the body depend upon the heart. If it becomes affected by weakness or disease, then all the bodily operations suffer impairment. We think and feel because the blood stream supplies life and vitality to the brain. It is because of the vital part that the heart plays in our ability to function as human beings that it is employed to represent the motivating elements of character that determine what we become.

In scripture the heart is used to picture the emotional rather than the purely intellectual part of our thinking. Our desires and affections are represented as coming from the heart, and so constitute an outward indication of its true condition. The study and grasp of truth that calls forth no sentiment in connection therewith will have no beneficial effect upon the life; but if such study includes an appreciation and a desire to order our lives in accordance therewith, then the emotional part of our thinking, the heart, has been called into action and there will be a proportionate result in our lives; for "with the heart the man believeth unto righteousness." The unemotional perception of truth will not lead unto righteousness; but the heart perception, that which calls into play the emotions, will do so, and will become evident in the outward life; for "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

Much of our thinking concerns only the reasoning ability of our minds. Some men have studied the Bible just as they would study a book on mathematics, and whereas this may have its effect upon their store of knowledge and increase their reasoning powers, yet it will not transform the moral course of their lives. Therefore we are not told that "as a man thinketh so is he," but "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." It is the thinking that includes the emotional operation of the mind that determines what we become in character.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, chapter eight, verse one, Paul states that "knowledge puffeth up but love builds up." Love, in this instance, would be synonymous with wisdom, for wisdom causes one to act so as to make the best use of his knowledge. In the connection in which this scripture occurs, the best use of knowledge would be to refrain from eating meat that had been offered to idols, lest there be a danger, in partaking of such meat, of causing a weaker brother to violate his conscience by doing the same. To take advantage of the knowledge that an idol means nothing, under such circumstances, would only tend to puff up; whereas, to be self-controlled, in order that a brother be not harmed, would result in becoming more God-like.

### **The Keeping of the Heart**

Though the emotional part of one's thinking is largely the determining factor in what he becomes at heart, nevertheless this emotional (heart) thinking must be controlled through the will, and the will in turn must be subject to guidance through the operation of the purely reasoning faculty of the mind in its apprehension of the principles of God set forth in his word.

The kind of love thus begotten does not originate in human sentiment or in the natural likes and dislikes but is the result of desires and emotions based upon the principles that activate God. Godly love is not merely sentiment—that is, a mental attitude, thought, or judgment permeated or prompted by feeling—but is kindly, charitable thoughts, words, and acts motivated by principle.

The keeping of the heart consists largely in keeping the desires and affections centered upon things above. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead [to all earthly life, hopes, and prospects], and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).

The doing of this is not an easy task but, as our text indicates, will require the utmost diligence and persevering application. The natural tendencies of the flesh and the allurements of the world all tend to draw us away from the narrow path that leads unto life. Satan leaves no stone unturned in his endeavor to deflect our desires into other channels. He turned Eve's desires toward the forbidden fruit. The desires of Solomon, whose words of wisdom are exemplified in our text, were turned aside to the seeking and pleasing of many wives. Unsanctified desire is the cause of all our downfalls.

James says, "A man [Christian] is drawn away [from the straight and narrow path] by his own lust [desire that has become inordinate]" (James 1:14). The same Greek and Hebrew words have been translated both as "desire" and "lust," depending evidently upon the character of the desire. Peter says: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

Inordinate desire, insofar as the saints are concerned, is not restricted to things that would be looked upon as evil, but includes anything that would draw us away from our covenant

of sacrifice and full submission to the will of God. As Paul explains (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), "All things [not sinful] are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [margin, profitable]; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

Some let their desires for art, music, literature, science, philosophy, business, or sports occupy all their time and attention. Any one engaged in any of these pursuits is almost compelled to give his full time and attention if he would become a success in the eyes of the world. So the faithful follower of Jesus, who may have to earn his daily bread in some such manner, is at a disadvantage, humanly speaking, but not so actually; for he finds that time and effort, redeemed from such pursuits in the service of the Lord and the study of his word, is not only well repaid but is vitally essential to spiritual welfare.

Then, too, some have a consuming desire for glory and honor of men. They covet office and power, the direction of large enterprises, and the supervision of successful activities in a social or religious way. It behooves each one of us, in the year now beginning, to examine carefully our motives and desires, that our hearts may be pure in our Father's sight.

The keeping of the heart, therefore, will have to do with the control of the desires and affections that they may reflect the glory of the divine character. This will have to be the object of our daily striving if we hope to make our calling and election sure, for the conditions of the heart will determine the conditions (outcome) of life. Most of those chosen of the Lord have appeared insignificant in the sight of men; but as God said to Samuel when he sent him to anoint David: "Man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." He judges our works by what he sees in our hearts. He is able to know the intent and the motive that activates us and to judge by the loyalty and obedience manifested just what our lives would be if we had perfect organisms through which to operate.

## A Personal Self-Evaluation

# Self-Examination

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?—2  
Corinthians 13:5*

*By Tim Thomassen*

Samuel Johnson wrote: "The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken." Another author added the following: "The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails" (William Arthur Ward).

*Newsweek* magazine's cover story of July 24, 1989, was entitled: "*The Environment: Cleaning Up Our Mess. What Works, What Doesn't, and What We Must Do to Reclaim Our Air, Land, and Water.*" The following is a short quotation from that article: "In environmental affairs it is crucial to draw the distinction between one-shot problems, such as Love Canal, Times Beach, Exxon's idea of steering a tanker, and cumulative damage. Transitory ecological infractions happen fast; usually the restoration can too. But problems that take a long time to build up, take a long time to fix" (p. 41).

What is true of the environment also pertains to problems encountered by humans. First-time offenses, oversights, carelessness, and other minor deviations can usually be corrected if dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner. On the other hand, improper and faulty behavioral patterns which are enabled to continue become fixed and rooted, making rehabilitation and reversal very difficult, if not impossible in some cases.

Machiavelli wrote these profound words: "A social problem is synonymous with a disease, which at its beginning is easy to cure, but difficult to recognize. Yet, at its worst stages, it becomes easy to recognize, but difficult to cure."

### **Biblical Principles**

Personal reform develops from a life based upon non-changing principles. Once personal habits are aligned with those principles and the follower of the Lord trusts in him with all his heart and leans not on his own understanding, any situation can be faced and any problem confronted. Then he can join his voice with with the Apostle Paul when he said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

Essentially, principles are comon-sense wisdom taught in the Bible. However, common sense is not always common practice. Our principles must become more important to us than other people's opinions.

It is never too late to develop principle-centered habits. We should not let past histories become cancers in our life. It is not what people do to us. It is our choice how we react to them. The start of a new year is a good time to begin making better choices.

A sister in Christ who made rapid progress in her understanding of and growth in the Lord was once asked the secret of her advancement. She replied quickly, "Mind the checks."

Perhaps some of us do not know and understand the Lord better because we do not give heed to his gentle checks, his delicate restraints and constraints. His is a still, small voice.

### **Adjustments and Corrections**

We must also sometimes make adjustments and corrections. If the problem is a minor one, it might be rectified quickly. However, if it is more serious, the restoration may be difficult and lengthy.

The Psalmist requested: "Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try [test] my reins [inner emotions] and my heart" (Psa. 26:2). The Hebrew word translated "examine" means to test, especially to test metals. This is reminiscent of Malachi 3:3, "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver: that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness."

All the dross of self-will, personal ambition, and pride must be removed. As the gold refiner watches the metal in the crucible to see his image reflected in it, so the Lord has his eye upon us. The purging does not come all at once. Rather, it is a daily process.

Self-evaluation is an important step in the testing process. We are told in Haggai to "consider our ways." The admonition is repeated twice, in verses five and seven. Notice how Rotherham translates these verses: "Thus saith Yahweh of hosts, Apply your hearts to your own experience."

In Proverbs 23:12 we are also told to "apply thine heart unto instruction and thine ears to the words of knowledge." Once we know what to do, we must do it. James tells us that "if any one be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he resembles a man viewing his natural face in a mirror; for he viewed himself, and went away, and immediately forgot what kind of person he was. But he who looks intently into that which is the perfect law of freedom, and continues in it, not becoming a forgetful hearer, but a doer of its work, this man will be blessed in his deed" (James 1:23-25 Diaglott).

## A Self Test

The questions below are some we might ask ourselves. This is a self examination. The purpose is not to evaluate our family members, friends, or anyone else; only ourselves.

Our theme text tells us, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" The New International Version reads, "Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you, unless, of course, you fail the test?"

Again, in Galatians 6:3, 4, Paul wrote: "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another."

1. Am I seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? (Matt. 6:33).
2. Am I redeeming the time? (Eph. 5:16).
3. Do I have a conscience void of offence? (Acts 24:16).
4. Do I meet with brethren whenever possible? (Heb. 10:25).
5. Do I deny myself, take up my cross, and follow Jesus? (Mat. 16:24).
6. Am I becoming transformed by the renewing of my mind? (Rom. 12:2).
7. Do I search the scriptures daily and study to show myself approved unto God? (Acts 17:11; John 5:39; 2 Tim. 2:15).
8. Am I attempting to please God instead of man? (Gal. 1:10; Col. 3:23).
9. Do both blessing and cursing come out of my mouth? (James 3:10; Col. 4:6).
10. Am I a peacemaker? (Matt. 5:9; James 3:18; Rom. 12:18; Heb. 12:14).
11. Am I ashamed of the gospel of Christ? (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 9:16; Matt. 24:14).
12. Do I render evil for evil? (1 Thess. 5:15).
13. Do I shun profane and vain babblings? (2 Tim. 2:16).
14. Do I behold the mote that is in my brother's eye but do not consider the beam in my own eye? (Matt. 7:3).
15. Am I laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets me? (Heb. 12:1).

16. Am I stumbling my brother? (Rom. 14:21).
17. Am I provoking others? If so, is it to love and good works? (Heb. 10:24).
18. Am I holding fast the profession of my faith without wavering? (Heb. 10:23).
19. Do I love pleasure more than I love God? (2 Tim. 3:4).
20. Am I a respecter of persons? (James 2:1; 3:9; 1 Peter 1:17; Acts 10:34).
21. Am I walking after the spirit instead of after the flesh? (Gal. 5:16-18).
22. Am I putting on the whole armor of God? (Eph. 6:11).
23. Do I follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth? (Rev. 14:4).
24. Am I working out my salvation with fear and trembling? (Phil. 2:12).
25. Am I fighting the good fight of faith? (1 Tim. 6:12).

A New New Year

## When God Changed the Calendar

*This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first of the year unto you. —Exodus 12:2*

*Condensed from the Chicago Bible Student Newsletter*

It is traditional in the United States to celebrate the New Year on January 1. This is not so in all countries. In India it is celebrated the last four days in December; in China, in late January or early February. The Jewish celebration, Rosh Hashanah, is in the fall.

There was a time, back in the days of the Old Testament, when God decreed a new year. We find the establishment of this new "new year" in Exodus 12:2: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." Before this decree it was customary to usher in the new year in the fall, but this "new" first month was the Jewish month Nisan, a spring month corresponding to our March-April.

For many years prior to this statement Israel had been in captivity in the land of Egypt. There they were severely oppressed, forced to make bricks and be menial laborers in the grandiose city building plans of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Now God had intervened in their welfare and, through the persuasive power of ten successive plagues, the Pharaoh of Egypt had been forced to set free his Israelite slaves, or as the old spiritual phrases it, to "let my people go."

Such a dramatic turn of fortune for the Hebrew people was so great that it was indeed a new beginning. God chose to commemorate it by introducing a new "new year."

Following the lunar calendar the months all began with the new moon. The first great feast of the "new year" was held two weeks later, when the moon was full, for that was the time when God brought about the great deliverance of the Exodus by "passing over" their first borns when their counterparts in Egypt were slain in the last of the ten plagues.

### **A Fitting Change**

This was a most fitting change. It was a new beginning. It deserved to be called "the beginning of months." In order to fit into the world order of their time the Israelites continued to celebrate the fall new year as well. Rosh Hoshanah, the feast of the new year, marked the onset of the Jewish civil year while the first of Nisan celebrated the beginning of a new religious new year.

And so it is with the Christian. January 1 may mark the beginning of a new calendar for fiscal purposes, a sort of civil new year, but the real "new year" for the follower of Christ



begins with his deliverance from the conditions of sin and death when he accepts Jesus Christ as his redeemer and makes a full commitment of his life to him.

While the Exodus from Egypt marked the ending of an era for the ancient Israelites, it also marked a new beginning, the beginning of a long and tortuous journey to the promised land. As they traveled they encountered many hardships along the way. Oftentimes they murmured and complained. Many miracles were wrought on their behalf. Yet only two of the men over forty years of age successfully made the entire journey—Joshua and Caleb.

So it is also with the Christian. His commitment to follow the Lord must be followed by the much more arduous task of actually carrying out his initial vows. He, too, will be tempted to murmur and complain. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul describes the similarities between the Christian walk and the wilderness wanderings of Israel.

Let us each, then, seek to celebrate our spiritual new year with renewed commitment to run the race to the victorious end. Only then shall we reach our promised Canaan of rest.

## News & Views

### Bible Student Activities

PBI Director and Herald Editor David Rice recently returned from a missionary trip abroad. Bro. David's primary purpose was to teach at a young peoples' seminar in Nigeria but the opportunity led him to venture to areas he had visited two years ago. Although this is an abbreviated report, more space than normal is dedicated to the narrative because it concerns an area relatively untouched by Christianity. I think the reader will find it a fascinating account, not dissimilar to accounts of early missionary activities as Christianity ventured into the world outside of Israel.

My first stop overseas was London for a brief visit of two days. I arrived early Sunday morning and made my way to the home of Br. and Sr. Terry Nadal. I was pleased to learn I was not late for the meeting, as it was scheduled for the afternoon. At the meeting we were joined by Sr. Connie's sister, Edie. It was a very pleasant afternoon, followed by extended fellowship into the evening, a good night of rest, and an early morning departure. Monday was spent touring the extensive displays in the British Museum. I was thrilled to find, unexpectedly, a display of the Sinaitic manuscript under glass, and next to it the Alexandrian manuscript.

Tuesday morning I left for Nigeria. The Lagos airport was recently "cleaned up" by the government-signs insisted no bribes be paid to customs personnel. I was met by Bro. Joseph Ajise. We travelled back to his home in Ibadan. Their adult son, David, was suffering from typhoid fever, a common malady. Wednesday Bro. Ajise took me back to Lagos to visit Br. Moses Ashiegbu, who recently lost his wife. Thursday and Friday allowed time for resting and casual visits with some of the brethren from Ibadan. Meanwhile, the young people from Warri and Lagos began arriving for the seminar. There were 38 in all attending, with the majority between 14 and 20 years. We had 10 studies of about 2 hours each, for four days.

Wednesday afternoon, August 16, after the young people had left, Bro. Ajise took me back to Lagos to catch my evening flight. The next segment of my journey was a long one-to Karachi, Pakistan, via Germany and Dubai. At the airport in Germany I called (my wife) Ruth to know of the latest responses to my proposed visit to Pakistan and Nepal. Two letters had arrived since my departure, one from each country. The messages were providential. The weariness of the experience and apprehension for the continued journey had caused me to wonder about proceeding with my plans-but these letters left no doubt what the right course would be. With gratitude and clear direction, and restored courage and confidence of the Lord's blessing, we looked forward to the next experience.

I arrived in Karachi at 2 a.m. Friday morning. The offer of one of my Pakistani contacts to meet me did not materialize, so at 4 a.m. I assented to the taxi-driver requests to take me into the city. I waited for daybreak, rested for a couple of hours and set out to find my contacts. Friday is the Moslem holy day for worship. It is like a Sunday in the

West-businesses are closed and it is hard to find people. The headmaster at the Protestant seminary where I had success during my last visit was helpful. I came across Mr. Wilson Gill, the head of the Pakistan Bible Society who I had met two years earlier.

Saturday I visited Peter Bashir, who leads a group under the name "The Universal Gospel Pentecostal Church of Karachi." They were very happy to see me. They had expected me Friday, and arranged a large gathering, but I did not get there. Saturday and Sunday I had three meetings with them. The attendance ranged from 80 to 200 on each occasion. All the messages were well received.

Sunday is not a special day for most in Pakistan. However, businesses permit Christians to report for work late so they can attend morning services. After a morning service I was escorted to Waqas Moazzam, the young man I was seeking. He apologized for not meeting me at the airport. He had misplaced my letter and recalled the wrong time for my arrival. He is a pleasant, likable, intelligent young man of great potential. He has read *Tabernacle Shadows*, sent two years ago, which was the subject of his special study for graduation from the seminary.

Sunday evening we traveled with the Bashirs to a distant location and a very large gathering of 200 at an evening service gave me an unforgettable reception. It buoyed my spirits and filled my heart with love for these dear people. They listened with eager attention. We soon walked the narrow winding alleys back to the main street and picked up a transport. When we reached the hotel it was time for a round of fond farewells.

Monday morning I met with five of the leaders and pastors of the groups led by Peter Bashir to discuss future cooperation. We all agreed that when I returned home I would supply Truth literature in English for their group. It is possible they may translate some smaller pieces into their native Urdu and publish them there. Further cooperation will depend on their progress. Monday evening I met with another indigenous church for an evening service with about 70 persons.

I was advised by my contacts in Karachi that Pakistan has and enforces laws which make it a capital offense to speak ill of the Prophet, or to convert from Islam to Christianity. At the airport in two discussions with friendly Pakistanis I mentioned our belief the time would come when Christianity would be worldwide. The thought was met with a distinct coolness. I realized that my public statement at my first meeting, commenting on Zechariah 14:9, that the time would come when Islam would be no more, might be considered an indiscretion.

Tuesday morning I left for my flight to Kathmandu. My host and friend Ravi Adhikari met me there. I met him in Tokyo two years ago while riding on a train with Sr. Junko. He is the assistant editor of the Kathmandu Post, the largest daily in Nepal. As we had talked on the train, I told him my only purpose in traveling was to do Christian work, and asked what opportunity there might be for that in Nepal. In his next letter to me he invited me to visit, assuring me he would be glad to do some advance work to make contacts for me.

Ravi had set up six appointments for me with Christian groups in Nepal. Without his willing assistance my journey would have had no success. The caste system is very much in place in Nepal. Ravi, with the privileges and opportunities of the high caste, had attended Christian services while in schooling in Karachi. In Nepal, it is illegal to change one's religion from the native Hindu to Christianity. The work in Nepal was exploratory. We were well received on each occasion and established a friendly rapport with promises to mail English study materials. On my first visit to a Catholic church, the leader and his assistant admitted that the 18 or so priests in the country were useless when it came to teaching people anything about the Bible, so they were delighted to know we could supply study materials. The assistant, though born Hindu, was raised with a Catholic influence. In order to convert to Christianity he joined the Jehovah's Witnesses. They had a program to bring people to India for conversion and reintroduce them to Nepal as Christians in order to skirt the law. He left the Society because of their restrictions.

After a day and a half, Ravi insisted that we finish our official program and see some sights around the city. I assured him repeatedly and sincerely that without his assistance my visit would not have been successful. The next morning Ravi came to my hotel to escort me to the airport. He insisted again that he could assist our work.

The long journey home was sweet with reflection.

## **Around the World**

### **Israel**

The proposed withdrawal from biblical lands is causing divisions among Israeli soldiers, some of whom are secular and some of whom are Orthodox. At the Negev desert academy of Bahad Echad, debates now occur regularly following a July 12 ruling by a group of influential rabbis which said that the Torah forbids Jews to withdraw from any part of the biblical land of Israel. The rabbis told soldiers to disobey the order to tear down Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. In a historic move, the army held its first court-martial for a soldier who refused to evict settlers from an encampment near Hebron. An Israeli lieutenant said "For me as a religious man, the Halakha (religious law) is the first thing. An observant Jew cannot obey an order which violates it. He can't." That the Labor Party government should contemplate giving up Judea and Samaria is cited by some religious Zionists as a declaration of war. "This is the moment before the first fatality," wrote right-wing militant Geula Cohen.

- *Washington Post*, 8/24/95

The fates of the Middle East peace process and the Labor-led government of Yitzhak Rabin are closely intertwined." A peace treaty with Syria makes all the difference, because it is the last piece of the puzzle and will end Arab-Israeli conflict," said Uzi Baram, tourism minister for Israel. Rabin's chances of being reelected are being hung on the successful consolidation of Palestinians and Israelis. However, Rabin's preoccupation with security leaves the government vulnerable to the plans of Islamic extremist groups Hamas and Jihad. A wave of attacks next year would severely damage the government's standings before the election. In an interview, Rabin said, "I believe in what I am doing. As long as I have a majority in the Knesset, I will continue the peace policy." Rabin said he felt all countries in the Middle East need partners to face the new threats of the future. "The enemies of the future are not the enemies of the past. They are the Islamist extremism-Khomeinism without Khomeini. This is the threat, not Arafat, not even President Assad."

-*Financial Times* 8/10/95

Yitzhak Rabin ruled out any prospect that Israel would retreat from greater Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, land that was won in the 1967 war. Rabin said that the final phase of the talks, due to begin next May, must exclude any discussion of shared authority over Jerusalem.

-*Financial Times*, 9/4/95

Israel is moving to build tighter economic ties to its Arab neighbors, shifting from a strategy of focusing on its military might to its economic might. "There is a significant change in Israel's perception of what constitutes national power," said Efraim mbar, director of the BESA Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Tel-Aviv. "Once we viewed power through the barrel of a gun. Now we want economic power, because that is what is important strategically." More companies are moving into Israel as a result of the commitment to developing its importance as a strategic force in the Middle East. "Steps toward rapprochement between Israel and the Arab states create a process that turns economics into the moving force that shapes the regional relations instead of national interests that were dominant in the past," a 1994 report from the office of Prime Minister Rabin said. Recent moves, unnoticed by some, appear to verify the commitment. Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Turkey formed the East Mediterranean Association to plan joint tourism projects, including developing the Sinai and the Red Sea area. A delegation from Israel's Chamber of Commerce attended a meeting in Cyprus to set up a regional economic council before the Middle East Economic Summit in Amman in October. A deputy general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry summed up the change by likening Israel's past position as one of a pariah, known more for military might and stating that "at last, we can look at the area where we belong. We are finally part of

After decades of isolation from its neighbors, Israel is a land of dead-end roads. With the prospect of peace looming in the Middle East, Israel is seeking to establish its role as a trade and transport hub of the Middle East. Two new projects will begin work to develop the roads across Israel. The Carmel Tunnel, which will bypass the congested port of Haifa, will begin early next year. The Cross-Israel Highway, the largest road construction since the inception of the Jewish state, will begin in early 1997. Israel is also upgrading its existing road network within the next four years. Additionally, urban rail networks, including an underground and metro are underway. In June, Israel announced a \$1 billion improvement to the ports of Haifa and Ashdod. A rail link from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea for joint Israeli Jordanian use in transporting chemicals will begin once the peace process is complete.

*-Financial Times, 9/95*

The city of Hebron in the West Bank of Israel is put forth as an example of religious intolerance, fanaticism and the difficulties of Arab Jewish coexistence, and representative of the biggest obstacle of a lasting peace. Palestinians are prevented from raising flags while orthodox Jews are forbidden from reciting prayers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The tension in Hebron is so great that Israeli housing minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer warned: "Hebron is a difficult problem . . . that could light a powder keg and maybe threaten the whole process."

*-Financial Times, 8/95*

## **Middle East**

Seven ministerial changes in Saudi Arabia, announced in August, represented the biggest shake-up to the kingdom's government since the assassination of King Faisal in 1975. Mr. Fouad Al-Farsi replaced Gen Shaer, who was close to the king and saw his job in mainly authoritarian terms. Subjects claimed that he manipulated the news, and saw it as his job to prevent any criticism of the government. He did not allow the press to report the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 until three days after it had happened. He was popularly known as "the minister of denials." Al-Farsi is believed to be much more interested in developing a good image of the kingdom.

*-Financial Times, 8/95*

Iraq was prepared to unleash the use of deadly toxins and bacteria against U.S. and allied forces during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, U.N. Ambassador Rolf Ekeus said. Iraqi officials admitted in Baghdad that in December 1990 they loaded three types of biological agents into roughly 200 missile warheads and aircraft bombs that were then distributed to air bases and a missile site. Officials said the Iraqi weapons contained enough biological agents to have killed hundreds of thousands of people and spread horrible diseases in cities in Israel, or wherever the medium-range missiles were aimed.

*-United Nations Report, 8/25/95*

## **The Nations**

Boris Yeltsin warned the Europe is in danger of returning to the cold war, with the continent splitting into two opposing blocs, as a result of the trouble over the former Yugoslavia. Pro-Serb and anti-American sentiment is growing strongly in Russia.

*-Financial Times, 9/10/95*

A new watchdog group ranks nations in terms of a "corruption index." Using seven surveys made by risk analysts and business organizations, Transparency International, based in Berlin, ranked 41 countries from least to most corrupt in the opinion of people who have worked with them. The most corrupt nations were cited as Indonesia, China, Pakistan, Venezuela, Brazil, Philippines, India, Thailand and Italy. The group said it was primarily looking at corruption in government and public life, but also reviewed business practices and social and cultural patterns of behavior.

*- New York Times, 8/13/95*

Threats of the resumption of the Cold War concern those involved in the November 1995 deadline for compliance with the treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. Since late 1993, Russia has been arguing that the treaty needs radical revision to allow for more conventional forces in the region around Russia. General Vladimir Semyonov, a Russian commander, explained that “the interests of Russia’s security and territorial integrity should prevail over fulfilling the document to the letter.”

- *Financial Times*, 8/95

In an important shift of scientific judgment, experts advising the world’s governments on climate change are now saying for the first time that human activity is a likely cause of the warming of the global atmosphere. A growing body of data suggests that the warming of the last century and especially of the last few years, “is unlikely to be entirely due to natural causes,” according to a new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The draft summary forecasts an increase in the average global temperature of 1.44 degrees to 6.3 degrees by the year 2100. These changes would be more rapid than any in the last 10,000 years, the panel said. This would likely cause more intense tropical storms, destruction, of some communities by rising seas, damage to and the loss of natural ecosystems that cannot adapt, diminished agricultural output in some places and an increase in some tropical diseases.

- *New York Times*, 9/3/95

The police in Dili, the capital of East Timor in Indonesia, took control of the city after the worst rioting in the territory in a year. Gangs of youths rampaged across the city, attacked Muslim immigrants and burned buildings. Muslim Buginese immigrants from the southern part of Sulawesi island dominate the city. Religious and ethnic issues are sensitive in predominantly Catholic Timor. It was annexed by Indonesia, but the UN does not recognize the rulership.

- *Reuters News Service*, 9/9/95

Any plan to divide Bosnia on ethnic or religious lines is going to have devastating effects for the peace and stability of Romania according to defense minister Ioan Pascu. Ethnic conflicts are one of the major threats to European security. The concern for Romania is that there are between 1.5 million and 2 million ethnic Hungarians living in Romania and about 800,000 Turks in Bulgaria. If the same philosophy prevails that is dividing Bosnia along religious and ethnic lines, it could become a source of division of the countries of Romania and Hungary as well, displacing thousands of individuals.

- *New York Times*, 9/10/95



### **100 Year Ago ...**

Where [Jesus] is remembered in his spirit, men are nobler and women are purer. Where he has entered the human heart, charity abounds and hope is strong. Where he is imitated in his spirit, woman is revered and childhood is sacred, and there grows the sweetest flower that ever bloomed, the violet of meekness spreading its perfume in the human heart.”

- *The Jewish Exponent* (R1819).