



# *The Standard Bearer*

***A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine***

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*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...*

**Vol. 76, No. 6  
December 15, 1999**

# The Prince of Peace \*

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

Wonderful, indeed!

Wonderful, that the church of the old dispensation, while the mystery was still hid, could thus sing and shout for joy at the prospect of His coming, the coming of the Prince of Peace!

And wonderful is He, as in the light of prophecy He is here beheld, in His power and dominion, in His marvelous virtues and qualifications for the exercise of that dominion in the realm of perfect peace, and in His origin, as of us yet not of us, as born from our loins, yet given by the God of our salvation.

A child is born ... the mighty God!

A son is given unto us ... the everlasting Father!

Christ, the Immanuel, the Prince of Peace!

*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.*

\* Standard Bearer, December 15, 1939

For always the church has understood this prophecy, and has repeated it in song and sermon a thousand times, as referring to our Lord Jesus Christ. And correctly so. That it is of Him that the church of the old dispensation is here enjoined to sing for joy is evident from the words themselves. What other child was ever born to man, to the church, what other son was ever given unto her, to whom even the boldest imagination could apply the names that are here mentioned of this Son? Who was there among the sons of men, whose very name could be called Wonderful or Counselor? Or, if human imagination might conjure up such a being, how could he ever presume to be the mighty God, the everlasting Father Himself? And where among men is he that is entitled to the name Prince of Peace?

Nor is this application of the text to the Lord of glory a mere conjecture.

For this Prince of Peace is the

explanation, the cause, of the joy of victory of which the preceding verses speak. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. They were harassed by the world powers of darkness, but now they see the light of joy and victory; they rejoice as in the harvest, and their joy is as the joy of those that divide the spoil. The enemy is overcome, and they are delivered from oppression. For unto them a child is born, unto them a son is given, and the government is upon his shoulder.

The Prince of Peace!

The Christ!

In order that it might become manifest that He was the One of whom this joyous prophecy spoke, the Lord, after John was cast into prison, departed into Galilee, and dwelt in Capernaum, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, "The people

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which sat in darkness saw a great light! And to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up!"

He preached, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

The Prince of Peace!

Dimly He was seen in the pale light of prophecy, and the church of the old dispensation rejoiced in hope! But He was manifested in the fullness of time, and the light shone upon us, we beheld His glory as of the only begotten God! The light was manifested in our darkness, the darkness of sin and corruption, the darkness of the shadow of death!

And the darkness was dissipated!

The powers of oppression are overcome!

For unto us a child is born! A son is given!

The Prince of Peace!

Wonderful!

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Magic name in a world of woe and turmoil!

Wonderful name, indeed, in a world torn by war, bleeding from a thousand wounds: The Prince of Peace!

Small wonder that even they who know Him not and understand nothing of the peace He came to bring are spellbound by the charm and magic of that name, and every Christmas season speak of Him and sing the praises of what they conceive to be the Prince of Peace! They catch the exquisitely soothing music of the name and they taste the heavenly gift wrapped up in that name, and the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, a world of righteousness and peace.

Seeing they see; hearing they hear.

Yet they do not perceive; still they fail to understand.

They use the name; they reject Him! Their rock is not our Rock; their Prince of Peace is not the Christ of the Scriptures.

He, the Prince of Peace, is characterized by peace in all His appearance, mission, work, and dominion. To establish peace He came into the world. To rule in peace forever He labors and toils and battles and suffers and goes down into the nethermost parts of the earth. For, peace He came to establish, peace indeed. Not the superficial peace that is created by conferences or courts of men, by treaties that are signed, by pacts that are sealed and that are broken by them that make them; but true, real, essential peace He came to create. Quite impossible it is, indeed, to bring peace in the relationships between men and nations, where there is no peace in the heart; and quite hopeless is the expectation of peace in men's hearts, as long as there is no peace with God!

The futility of the attempt to establish peace where there is no peace the world has demonstrated in late years more clearly than ever before. For peace they longed, and war was dreaded. Of peace they spoke in speech and song and discussion around conference tables. Peace palaces were built. Peace conferences were held. Disarmament agreements were attempted. Peace treaties were signed. A league of nations was established. Yet, there was never a time in which the world was so full of greed, hatred, distrust, and war, as our own. They speak of peace, peace, where there is no peace!

Peace is a profound spiritual reality!

It is a matter of the heart. It presupposes and is rooted in love, the love of one another! The love of one another is rooted in the love of God! The love of God is love of God! And herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us!

Therefore, love is also righteousness, holiness, truth.

Without these there is no love — no love of God to us, no love of us to God, no love of one another.

And without this love there is no peace — no peace with God, no peace in God toward us, no peace of us toward God, no peace between man and man, between group and group, between nation and nation. It is, and it must needs be, war!

There is no shortcut to peace!

The sole road hither is that of righteousness, truth, holiness, love, life.

That road He traveled, the Prince of Peace, the Captain of our salvation!

Peace He made, first of all, with God. Everlasting peace, on the basis of an everlasting righteousness. For, voluntarily, in the obedience of love, He placed Himself under the vials of God's wrath in the hour of judgment; obediently He descended into the deepest woe and agony of death and hell to satisfy the unchangeable justice of God, thus to open the way for peace on the basis of God's own terms: His righteousness! That peace He gives unto us. For the Prince of Peace who died to make peace was raised in peace, was glorified and exalted at the right hand of God to reign in peace and to overcome all the evil forces of war, and was given the Spirit to realize that peace in the hearts of all His own. By that Spirit He leads us into His kingdom of peace with God, assures us of our reconciliation with God through His blood, removes the enmity against God that is in our hearts by nature, pours out in us the love of God, and causes us to sing with joy: "We, therefore, being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

The Prince of Peace!

Through that peace with God we have peace with one another!

By nature we are war-makers. For we live in malice and envy and covetousness. We are filled with pride and hate one another. But when the Prince of Peace reigns in our hearts by His Spirit and grace, we become makers of peace, love

one another, humble ourselves, forbear one another and forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake forgave us!

And through Him we have peace with all things!

For, having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we even now are assured that all things are ours and we are His and He is God's, and that He who reconciled us with Himself through the death of His Son will surely cause all things to work together for our good.

And we look forward to the final kingdom of peace!

Then, in the new heavens and the new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell, God's tabernacle shall be spread over all!

The creature shall participate in the glorious liberty of the children of God!

And there shall be nothing that shall destroy in all God's holy mountain!

Blessed Prince of Peace!

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Mighty Prince!

Might and power are, indeed, indispensable requisites for one who would change this war-torn world into a realm of everlasting peace!

And mighty He is!

The government is upon His shoulder! Authority and power have been conferred upon Him. By divine right He is and reigns as the Prince of Peace. By divine authority He comes into this world to claim it as His own possession. By divine appointment He battles His way into His dominion of peace, overcoming all the forces of evil, all the powers of opposition, all the principalities that make for war. And by divine ordination He reigns in His own eternal realm of peace!

The government is upon His shoulder!

Ordained He was as the Prince of Peace from before the foundation of the world. And exalted He

was. Clothed with all authority and power in heaven and on earth, He now is at the right hand of God, still battling until all enemies of His peace-rule shall be subjected under His feet!

And He is strong to save!

Not only authority, the divine right to rule, has He, but also the power and strength to maintain and exercise that authority. Such was necessary. One who has authority must be strong. Strong in power and wisdom he must be. This Prince of Peace must have power to stand and overcome alone! Alone against all! The powers of hell and of the world, of the devil and wicked men, of sin and death He must overcome! He must establish His dominion of peace by removing and overcoming the kingdoms of this world! He must maintain, preserve, and perfect that kingdom, and reign forevermore over all things!

Powerful He is!

For He is called the Mighty God! He is named the Everlasting Father! His name is, therefore, Wonderful! And He is justly named the Counselor!

Mighty God is He, for this Prince of Peace is the eternal Son, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, infinite in might as they are infinite in might, eternal as they are eternal, filled with infinite wisdom as they have all wisdom and knowledge in themselves. And as such He is the Everlasting Father! Not, indeed, as if He were not distinct as Son from the Father, as the second from the first person in the holy Trinity, but as *God*, as being one in essence and nature with the Father and the Holy Ghost, He is the Everlasting Father Himself, whose image He is. In the Prince of Peace we see Jehovah, the God of our salvation, the Father in heaven, come unto us! His name is truly Wonderful, for He is nevertheless our Prince of Peace: God in the flesh, eternity in time, Creator in the creature, the Lord as servant, the Judge being

judged, the Lord of life dying.

His name shall be called Wonderful!

Mighty He is to save and to establish and maintain forever the kingdom of peace that was appointed Him!

Filled He is with all wisdom! For His name is Counselor! God of God in human nature, He has direct, inner contact with all knowledge and wisdom of the Father! All the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are in Him! And He counsels us in the way of peace!

Glorious Prince of Peace!

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Gospel of joy!

Glad tidings of good things!

Let us rejoice as in the time of harvest, and be joyful as those that divide the spoil!

For the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light, and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light shined!

For unto us a child is born! Unto us a son is given!

Born, yet given!

How could it be different? Is not His name Wonderful? He is, therefore, a child that is born of us. Born He is, not of the world, not of the seed of the serpent, but of us and unto us. For He is of the woman's seed, in the line of Seth, according to the promise of Shem, of the seed of Abraham, out of the tribe of Judah, a branch of the royal tree of David, a root out of a dry ground, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary. Man of man, flesh and blood of our flesh and blood, is He. Unto us a child is born!

Yet, though born of us, He is definitely given!

Unto us a son is given!

How could we, who are dead through trespasses and sins, enemies of God and of one another, who are forever making war, bring forth the Prince of Peace, who knew no sin, though He came in

the likeness of sinful flesh, who was found without guile, though in all other respects He was like unto His brethren? And, what is more, how could we bring forth Him who is mighty to save and to

establish the eternal kingdom of peace, and whose name is Wonderful, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace?

He is given! Given of God!

Given through the Wonder of wonders, the Incarnation!

God's Son became our Child!

The Prince of Peace!

Glory to God!

Peace on earth! □

## Editorial

# Joy in This Season of Jubilee

Remembering as we do the birth of Jesus Christ, we rejoice at the Jubilee year that that birth has brought.

The purpose of the coming into our flesh of the Son of God was to give the true Israel of God—the elect church in all nations—the year of Jubilee.

Jesus Himself announced this.

At the beginning of His ministry, He described His work as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1, 2. And Isaiah had foretold the mission of the coming Messiah as bringing about the great year of Jubilee.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18, 19).

Having read the passage, which He had deliberately chosen, Jesus announced, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

He came to give weary, tedious, and hopeless time a new year: the year of Jubilee!

With His ministry, this new

year began. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

### Ceremonial Jubilee

Jubilee was originally an Old Testament ceremony. Leviticus 25:8ff. was the law that instituted it. Every 50<sup>th</sup> year—the year following seven periods of seven years—was a Jubilee year for Israel. The name "Jubilee" derived from the Hebrew word for the ram's horn that served as a trumpet to announce the beginning of the year of Jubilee.

Especially three elements belonged to the proper, prescribed observance of the Old Testament Jubilee. Land that the poor had to sell returned to its original owner, so that everyone again possessed his inheritance in Israel. Those Israelites who because of poverty sold themselves as slaves were released. And the Israelites might neither sow nor reap. Fields and farmers enjoyed a sabbatical.

That Old Testament ordinance and type had a rich significance. As the year of the release of prisoners from the bondage of slavery, it was a year of liberation, a year of freedom. The trumpet announcing the year of Jubilee sounded throughout all the land "to proclaim liberty" (Lev. 25:10). The return of the land represented the cancellation of debts. The prohibition of sowing and reaping meant

that both the people and the land had rest. But that liberty and rest were a dramatic enjoyment of covenant fellowship with God. The numbers involved made this plain. The Jubilee year was the 50<sup>th</sup> year as the fulfillment of "seven sabbaths of years ... seven times seven years" (Lev. 25:8).

Adding to the brilliantly clear significance was that the Jubilee year began on the tenth day of the seventh month, which is identified in Leviticus 25:9 as the "day of atonement." That was the day in Israel when the high priest covered the sins of Israel by sprinkling blood on the mercy seat in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. The year of Jubilee, then, was based on the atonement and gave Israel in striking ways the benefits of the covering of their guilt in the sight of God.

To inaugurate this year of Jubilee—the *real* Jubilee year—Jesus was born.

Remembering the birth of Jesus, the true church celebrates the great year of Jubilee.

### Roman Jubilee

Our celebration has nothing whatever to do with the Roman Catholic Church's (RCC) year of Jubilee that will begin this month on Christmas Eve.

On November 29, 1998 the pope issued a bull, "The Mystery

of the Incarnation," proclaiming the year 2000 as a "Great Jubilee Year": "I therefore decree that the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will begin on Christmas Eve 1999, with the opening of the holy door in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican." The Jubilee year will run from Christmas Eve 1999 to January 6, 2001.

For all Roman Catholics, the year 2000 will be special. It will be a "holy year." The pope has made it so. When the year is properly observed, it will bestow special grace on the observing people. The special grace will be nothing less than the blessings promised by the Old Testament Jubilee. For the year 2000 will be a continuation and repetition of that Old Testament ceremony.

The main means by which Roman Catholics will receive and enjoy the blessings of the Jubilee year is indulgences. Proper observance of Rome's Jubilee year will be the various activities by which the faithful are supposed to earn indulgences, especially pilgrimages to Rome's most important church buildings. So the pope declared in "The Mystery of the Incarnation":

Another distinctive sign, and one familiar to the faithful, is the indulgence, which is one of the constitutive elements of the Jubilee.... I decree that throughout the entire Jubilee all the faithful, properly prepared, be able to make abundant use of the gift of the indulgence.

Indulgences are the RCC's application to a sinner's account of the meritorious good works of Mary and other saints, as well as of Christ. These good works, thus applied by indulgences, satisfy the justice of God concerning the temporal punishment of the sinner's sins. This is the punishment that the sinner himself must otherwise suffer in purgatory. Indulgences will also forgive the sins of those who are already in purgatory. The

*Catholic Encyclopedia* defines an indulgence this way: "remission of the temporal punishment due, in God's justice, to sin ... granted by the Church ... through the application of the superabundant merits of Christ and of the saints."

Although the RCC possesses this "treasury of merits" to distribute as it wills, the people must earn indulgences from that Church. They do this by pilgrimages, by prescribed prayers, by giving alms, by donating to charities, and, in the coming Jubilee year, by not smoking for a day.

Because the year 2000 will be a "Great" Jubilee, in it Roman Catholics will be able to earn "plenary" indulgences. Most indulgences are partial. They deliver only from part of the temporal punishment in purgatory. In the year of the "Great Jubilee," complete deliverance from *all* of the pain and punishment of purgatory is available. The bull proclaiming AD 2000 a year of Jubilee states, "Each member of the faithful, having fulfilled the required conditions, can receive or apply the gift of the plenary indulgence.... The Jubilee indulgence also can be applied in suffrage to the souls of the deceased."

AD 2000: year of Jubilee—by papal indulgence!

Against Rome's Jubilee year and its observance, we Protestants protest. We protest against the arrogance that supposes that a mere man can make a year "holy." We protest against the imposing of an Old Testament ceremony upon the New Testament church.

Vehemently, we protest against the main way in which 2000 will be celebrated, and its blessings dispensed: the way of indulgences.

The indulgences that are at the heart of the Roman Catholic year of Jubilee are gross departure from the one apostolic and biblical gospel, that "a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). Jubilee by indulgences denies the cross of Jesus Christ, which was

complete redemption from all the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13). Therefore, the Roman Catholic year of Jubilee will not be a remembering of the incarnation, as the pope suggests. For the Son of God was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5).

Rome's Jubilee is exposed by the very Old Testament ceremony that it pretends to repeat. The blessings of the Old Testament Jubilee were based solely on the atonement. Israel did nothing herself to pay for her sins. And the blessings of Jubilee were simply bestowed upon the people by sheer divine grace. No Israelite did anything to earn his release as a slave, the return of his land, or the rest of himself and his land with Jehovah for a year.

The Word of God in the Old Testament Jubilee was the gospel of salvation by grace alone.

### Real Jubilee

That AD 2000 will not be a year of Jubilee by papal pronouncement and indulgences does not imply that it will be no Jubilee year at all.

Next year will be a year of Jubilee. More precisely, it will be part of the year of Jubilee. Every year from the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry to His return is Jubilee. The entire New Testament age is the year of Jubilee. This age is the *reality* of the Old Testament ceremony. Jesus proclaimed it as such. Having read the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1,2, concluding with the words, "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord," Jesus said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:16-21). In keeping with this authoritative, trumpet-like announcement, Paul announces that "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).

During this age, Jesus Christ bestows the wonderful blessings of Jubilee upon the true Israel of God: cancellation of the debt owed God

of the guilt of our sin; release of us prisoners from the bondage of the curse of the law, as of the demand of the law that we keep it for righteousness; deliverance from the poverty of total lack of righteousness; the rest of the imputed obedience of the incarnate Son of God as the basis of communion with God.

Jubilee!

Debtors! Slaves! Captives! The laboring and heavy laden! Hear the loud ram's horn of a trumpet announcing the year 2000 as Jubilee, as well as what is left of 1999 and however many years may remain to the sounding of the trump that announces the perfection of Jubilee on the Day of Christ!

"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

We enjoy this Jubilee and its blessings, not by means of indulgences but by means of the preaching of the gospel of grace. Jesus plainly said so: "The Spirit of the Lord ... hath anointed me to *preach*

*the gospel* to the poor ... to *preach* deliverance to the captives ... to *preach* the acceptable year of the Lord."

The content of the gospel is this Word and promise of Jesus Christ: "To every one who believes on Me, I give full and free forgiveness, imputing to him as his own My own righteousness. The sole and sufficient ground is My own lifelong obedience and suffering in your stead. The only source and cause of this saving act of justification is the grace of My Father to an innumerable multitude in all nations whom He chose unto eternal life. To receive this blessing, believe on Me—believe *only*, with the faith that I Myself give you and work in you by My Spirit. Do not work! There are no conditions! There may be no pilgrimages! Give no money to charity for any slightest part of righteousness, not one, red cent! Do not even stop smoking for one day! In this way—*only* in this way—you will have freedom,

and the deep and lasting joy of Jubilee."

Well may we Protestants be reminded and exhorted to live in the consciousness of the year of Jubilee.

Too often we share the world's fears of the new millennium. Too often we are burdened and downcast and depressed. Too often we seek solace for our sinfulness and sins in drink and pills and drugs and pleasures and work. Too often we complain as though, well, as though Jubilee had never come. Too often we drag ourselves to church, ministers as well as the people, as though the gospel were not the true treasure of the church.

Ours is the privilege and duty to defend the true Jubilee against the false, to announce it to the world, and to live joyfully in it ourselves.

This Christmas season and in the new year and millennium, have a blessed Jubilee! □

— DJE

**Search the Scriptures**

**Rev. Martin VanderWal**

# The Truly Wise Men

**Matthew 2:1-11**

**O** little town of Bethlehem, lying in the shadow of Jerusalem! What is Bethlehem when compared to Zion, the city of the great King? But Bethlehem, though least among the thousands of Judah, would have a place in the history of redemption. Out of this small city was one to come forth to be ruler in Israel. No

ordinary king, but one whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Bethlehem—not Jerusalem—was to have honored guests: wise men from the east, to bow before this Ruler. An amazing scene Matthew records for us. In this small town we see foreign, learned men, bowing in reverence before a baby held in His peasant mother's arms. To this humble, lowly Child they present their exquisite gifts.

From all indications, Joseph and Mary, with their Child-King, had been living in a house of their

own for some time. We can say this, not just because a house is the place where the wise men came. When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, commanding him to return to Israel from Egypt, Joseph's determination was to return to Bethlehem. In Bethlehem Joseph had his permanent residence.

The wise men were, as Matthew records, "from the east." No city, no country, no distant empire is named. Based on the word "magi" we can surmise that their homeland may have been the re-

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gion of Persia. Wherever they may have lived in that distant land, these particular wise men had come to know the Old Testament Scriptures. Recognizing their value and dignity, they made those writings the object of their study—a marvelous example for us to follow. As they studied and searched they came to understand the great importance of the Jewish people in the land of Palestine. In their midst would be born a great King. Somehow, likely by some special revelation, they also understood that a star would appear to indicate His birth. This star they were now privileged to see. How excited they must have been! The ancient Scriptures, gotten from a faraway place, speaking of such things as they saw before them. Even from a human point of view, we can understand why they decided to undertake this long trip.

There had to be more. As they stated on their arrival in Jerusalem, they came to worship Him. They came from a far country, where they had their own king, to pay homage to this King. They came to place themselves under the rule of this One, born King of the Jews. They recognized that the claims of this King far surpassed the claims of any earthly king, even the king of their own native land. This King is heavenly and spiritual. His kingdom was already established in their hearts. They came to signify with their posture what was already true in their heart. They were endued with wisdom from on high!

### **Arrival in Jerusalem and a Searching Question**

So they arrived in Jerusalem—the logical place to go. Jerusalem was the capital city of the Jewish people. They came to the city and began asking their question: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” To their astonishment, no one has the answer. Jerusalem is business as usual. Have these people not seen His star? Have

they no knowledge of this amazing thing that is come to pass? Here in Jerusalem is there no one who knows anything about a newly born King of the Jews? But the wise men do not give up. They have come this far, and nothing will turn them from their quest. They continue to ply their question.

This question produced a strange reaction among the residents of Jerusalem. Herod, the present king of the Jews, and the people became troubled. Herod had the most to fear. He had established his throne, as was common in those days, through political intrigue. A suspicious man, he had shed much blood, even that of his family, to keep his throne secure. Another King of the Jews Herod did not know. Every possible competitor he had already disposed of. The people were troubled as well. They knew all too well the violent history of this man. What possible bloodbaths might the future hold?

Herod, out of his troubling concern, showed himself hospitable toward these wise men. He called together the people who would have the answer, the chief priests and scribes, who made the Old Testament Scriptures the object of their study. Herod presented to them the question of the wise men. He did not ask, as the wise men had. He made a surly demand. Where should the Christ be born? And out of their knowledge the scribes produced the place: Bethlehem of Judea. “Thus it is written by the prophet.”

This passage is from the prophet Micah. The prophecy confirmed the particular place where the King of the Jews was to be born. It showed the wise men where they must go to find the one born King of the Jews. But this prophecy contains much more. Take note of the way in which it describes this King. His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” This “ruler in Israel,” who shall be born, proceeds from

everlasting. This makes Him much more than any earthly king, with an earthly realm. He is the Lord, the Ancient of Days. From eternity He is the King of the Jews. How these wise men must have rejoiced to hear this prophecy! Not only did they learn where to find this child. This passage also confirmed what they had believed all along, that He is worthy of the homage they have traveled so far to pay.

On to Bethlehem! The wise men continued on their journey alone. None joined these pilgrims on their way to worship Him who was born King of the Jews. Not Herod, not the chief priests, not the scribes, none of the common people accompanied the wise men to find this great King. The Scriptures speak of this King. God had announced the King’s birth by means of a celestial event. These magi came from far away with splendid gifts. The news was troubling. Yet, there was no company going to Bethlehem, either out of joy, curiosity, or enmity. There was a lack of interest.

There is a divine reason for this lack of company. The magi alone go, so that the exact location of Christ might not be known. Thus the sovereign God was pleased to preserve His only-begotten Son alive. The people of Judea heard. Herod heard. They are left without excuse. But they neither saw nor knew the King. These men from the east are wise. The people and their king are foolish.

### **Rejoicing at the Star**

When the wise men departed, the star which they saw in the east reappeared before their eyes. The star will guide them to the exact location in Bethlehem. First, the word of the King of the Jews, then the prophecy of Micah, then the star reappeared, filling their hearts with joy. Now they knew that this star was specifically for them. It seems that none but these wise men turned their eyes heavenward, to



behold this strange sight! By this appearance of the star, God Himself approved their journey, and led them the last step of the journey. They made their way to the home of Joseph and Mary. The star beckoned onward. But as soon as they arrived at this particular house, the star stopped in its course. It then stood "over where the young child was."

All we can say about this star is that it was truly a wonder. Matthew wrote of this star, "Lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." Many have conjectured about this star, finding it in a conjunction of planets in a certain constellation, or imagining it to be a comet in a regular course. But every attempt falls short. All we can do is wonder in amazement at this great work of God to announce the birth of His Son to these men. Not only did it appear to them in the east, but it served as their guide to the exact house where this King resides. It moved with them, as if watching their every step. It disappeared, then reappeared, as need arose.

No wonder is it that these wise men rejoiced. Their joy was not due to the star itself. Rather, through the star they received the witness that the Almighty God was with them, guiding them to the King He had brought into the world. They knew through that star the favor and friendship of Jehovah upon them. They had to know, then, that the King they were shortly to see was King for them. They were citizens of His kingdom, though from a faraway country.

### **Worship and Homage**

Entering the house, they came upon an ordinary sight. "They saw the young child with Mary his mother." They beheld a peasant mother and her infant son in a simple house. The house was far from great Jerusalem, in humble

Bethlehem. Everything in that home was far from grand or elegant. There was absolutely no sign of political power or might. No aura shines about the mother or child. Yet these men, endued with true wisdom, bow down before Him. They will not base their judgment on appearances, but on the Word of God. They came for this very moment. Their long search is now over. They are in the presence of Him born King of the Jews, whose goings forth are from everlasting. The Son of God.

To this young King they present their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They offer the

products of their own land, the best they have to give. How eloquently these gifts speak. Gold, the most precious metal, was a most kingly gift. Frankincense was given to Him whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Myrrh was very likely a specialty produced by the region where these wise men lived. It was especially appropriate for this divine King. He came to save His people from their sins. He was born to die in the stead of His people—even in the stead of these wise men. Myrrh would be used in the preparation of His body for burial.

Meanwhile, Herod waits ....

## **Questions For Further Meditation and Study**

1. Concerning the reaction of Herod and the people upon the appearance of the wise men: Did they share the same concerns, or were they troubled for different reasons? How could they have been troubled, yet none have gone with the wise men to find this King?

2. Concerning the wise men and the star: Research what is written about the two. What is the speculation about these men and their origin? What is the speculation concerning the star? Are these exercises helpful, or do they have their dangers? What can we learn about the manner in which we are to search the Scriptures?

3. Putting together what you know about the timing of these events, can we determine Jesus' age when these wise men came to worship Him? Keep in mind that we do not know when the star appeared, before or simultaneous with Jesus' birth. Nor do we know when Herod ran out of patience, waiting for the wise men to return to him—probably not long! Is it accurate to say that Jesus was about two

years old when the wise men came? Many believe that Jesus was less than six months old, and John Calvin believed that the wise men followed closely upon the steps of the shepherds, arriving when Jesus was yet lying in a manger.

4. What does the visit of these wise men as Gentiles have to teach us? What passages of Scripture were fulfilled in this? In what particular way do we stand together with these wise men? What does this say about the nature of this King and His glorious kingdom? What do these men have to teach us about the homage that we must pay to this King?

5. What is the significance of the gifts these wise men present to Christ? Some have seen in these gifts a reflection of the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Others have seen in these gifts an expression of Christ's kingship, His divinity, and His suffering. Which do you think is more accurate? How ought the basic idea of gift govern our thinking concerning this subject? □

# The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

**A**s we make the transition in our doctrinal studies from Christology to soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation, we consider together the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That is fitting, because soteriology is the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the benefits of Christ to the elect.

We read in Acts 2:1 that the Holy Spirit was poured out when the day of Pentecost was fully come, that is, when the day of the Old Testament Pentecost was fulfilled. It was therefore the morning of the next day, the day after the Jewish feast of Pentecost, that these events took place.

That the fulfillment would come the day after was inevitable, according to the outworking of God's counsel.

On Thursday, the 14th of the month Nisan, the Passover lamb had been slain. On the following day came the fulfillment of the type when the Lamb of God laid down His life for His sheep on the altar of the cross.

On Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, the firstfruits of the barley harvest were presented before the Lord. On the following day Christ showed the fulfillment of the Sabbath and of the feast of firstfruits when He arose from the grave as the Firstfruits of the glorious resurrection harvest.

Step by step, you see, the realization followed the shadow. And therefore, 50 days after the first-

fruits were brought to the temple, those Jews who followed the law brought to the temple the first two loaves of bread from the completed harvest for the Old Testament day of Pentecost. On the following day, again the first day of the week, when the type which was Pentecost had come and gone, the Holy Spirit was poured out into the church.

By the amazing wonder work of God's grace, the church in Jesus Christ was ready to enjoy the benefits of Christ's resurrection by the work of the Spirit in their hearts.

## A Necessary Gift

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not only a tremendously rich experience, but a necessary gift for the church of Jesus Christ.

At the command of Jesus the disciples had remained in Jerusalem, waiting for the realization of the promise. Just before His ascension, Jesus had promised them that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to Acts, chapter 1, there were about 120 disciples who gathered in the upper room, where the remaining eleven apostles were living, to await the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. Imagine that, can you? Out of all the world, out of that huge city which was Jerusalem, the church was gathered in a rather large room — certainly not a huge sanctuary, not a beautiful edifice, but a large room in the upstairs of a building. There were only 120 believers.

The condition of these 120 disciples surely seemed miserable.

They were small in number, a despised people, united and gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ. They were gathered in unity of heart and mind, all having one desire — the return of Christ. They were as orphans.

But for this small company the promise of Christ was sufficient; for He had left them the promise that He would not leave them orphans, but would send to them the Comforter.

This was the nucleus of the New Testament church.

No, Pentecost was not the birth of the church, as is sometimes said. The church has been from the beginning. It was in Adam already, as redeemed in Christ by promise. Stephen, in the sermon which he proclaimed to those who would kill him, spoke specifically of the church in the wilderness; so we cannot say that on Pentecost the church was born.

However, there was a tremendous change wrought in God's church when the Spirit was poured out. For there in that upper room was witnessed the wonder, the Spirit of the exalted Christ coming to dwell in His church and to abide with her forever.

## A Tremendous Change

It is difficult for us to fathom the tremendous change that God worked in His church in that upper room. We live, after all, in the age of spiritual riches. We live in the age of Pentecost. We have never been without the blessings of Pentecost.

But for the disciples who were gathered in that upper room, the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit was like having all the lights turned on in a pitch dark room, and seeing everything without having to wait for one's eyes to adjust to the bright lights. And yet, even that analogy is far too weak to express the wonder of Pentecost. For we are talking not merely of some natural event, but we are talking about salvation and the experience of salvation in Jesus Christ.

All the blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ had been engulfed in darkness to the disciples until this wonder. That is not to say that the saints in the Old Testament did not enjoy the blessings of salvation. Of course they did. But they enjoyed those blessings in an entirely different way than we do now. For they enjoyed them only as *promissory* blessings.

Whether in the Old or in the New Testament, the Spirit is the Spirit of God, as He is in God and dwells in the covenant life of the Trinity. That Spirit was known in the Old Testament. Scripture makes that clear.

But in the Old Testament, the Spirit operated as the Spirit of the shadows. In the old dispensation of the types and shadows, the Spirit operated in connection with those types and shadows, the law and the ceremonies of the law. He worked in connection with the promise as it always looked ahead and pointed ahead to the fullness of time.

The saints of old experienced the blessings of salvation, ministered by the Spirit. David celebrated the forgiveness of sins, for example, in Psalm 32. But he enjoyed the forgiveness of sins, and the Old Testament people of God enjoyed the blessings of salvation, only and always in connection with the types and shadows. It was known, even by David, that there had not yet been the actual blotting out of sin. There was no cross as yet, there was no resurrection life. That was to be in the Messiah who was yet to come. And if you

ask, how could they then be saved, the answer is, objectively, because they had good credit. Their credit was good, because on the basis of election, God had given His own to His Son. And subjectively, that is, as a matter of their own experience, these blessings of salvation were theirs through the pictures that were explained by men who had the Spirit of Christ as He was promised.

That brings up another interesting fact. In the Old Testament, only those who had been anointed in the office of prophet, priest, or king, had the Spirit and could interpret Christ as He was to come. That the common people did not have. In the old dispensation, if one wanted to know the Word of God, he had to find a prophet. Only a few, by the vision of prophecy, could see a little of the Christ. Abraham saw Christ, but his household did not. He had to proclaim Christ to his household. The same held true for Moses, whose face shone when he beheld the Christ.

The people had to ask the officebearers: Can you tell us a little about the Messiah? Even the pictures, the temple with its altar and sacrifices, the ceremonies and feasts, all had to be explained to the people — until Pentecost. And suddenly, as we read in verse 4, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

What a tremendous change this was! Christ had come; He had accomplished His purpose in His death and resurrection, had ascended into heaven, and was exalted at God's right hand. And having received the Spirit, as the Head of His church, He returned as He had promised — not just to some, but to all. He gave His gifts to all His people. Now *all* are prophets, priests, and kings. *All* understand the wonder work of God in Jesus Christ. All the children of God experience the rich blessings of salvation.

## A Continued Gift

Although it is true that we do not need to be delivered from the types and shadows as did the disciples who were first partakers of this marvelous gift, we need the Spirit that we might understand and bow before God as He reveals Himself in the face of Jesus Christ through the inspired Scriptures.

John Calvin, in a sermon on the opening verses of Acts 2 which has been translated in the book *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*, has much to say about this particular aspect of the application to us of these events on Pentecost.

We are by nature so inclined to unbelief that the truth of God must be sealed in our hearts in such a manner that we may be assured of it and receive it. The Holy Scriptures must be sealed upon our hearts in such a way that we are assured of their inspiration, sufficiency, and authority, and that we do not receive them as from men, but as from God Himself.

For God knows that the object of our faith would have a foundation far too weak if we had only the authority of men. After all, what is the authority of mere men? Whom would we believe?

We would be running here, there, and everywhere — unstable as oil and water — unless we were raised up above those of this world, and firmly founded in God, knowing that this Word of salvation which is also preached unto us comes from Him. Men did not invent what is contained in the Old and New Testaments. But God, by a visible sign at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, has testified that men were instruments of His Holy Spirit.

But that is only one reason why the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a necessary and continued gift for you and for me.

We also need that gift in order to understand the Scriptures which God has given to us. We who are by nature blind cannot understand the Scriptures.

Oh, we can understand them intellectually. We can understand them from a doctrinal point of view. We can understand them factually and historically. We can understand the words of Holy Scripture, even if, from time to time, we need to take out a dictionary to look up a word. Scripture is clear.

So when I say that we cannot understand the Scriptures as we are by nature, then I mean that we cannot understand them *spiritually*, as they reveal God as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ. That we cannot see.

But now the Spirit is poured out. And, as we read in I John 2:20, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Or in verse 27: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not

that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

But there is yet one more thing. We need the Spirit to show us Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Little good will it do you to know all the facts and to understand intellectually all the truth, but to refuse to bow before Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is, after all, our Lord, is He not? Then you and I must bow before Him in all our life.

We must not twist the Scriptures to fit our conception of Him, but we must see that our conception of Him is that of His Scriptures. And for us to do that, for you and me to bow before the

Word, we must comprehend that Word spiritually, by the work of the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit poured out this first Pentecost. We must receive the wisdom of the exalted Christ.

When we see all these things, then we understand that Pentecost is a day that concerns far more than just the 120 or so disciples.

Pentecost is essential to our salvation! What happened as recorded in Acts 2 is not a passing event. It is an abiding act of grace. For from that day on, the abiding day of Pentecost begins. We can say of Pentecost that it is the beginning of the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ into the church. We are now living in the day of Pentecost, a day which extends throughout the whole new dispensation and, in fact, a day which never will end. □

**In His Fear**

**Rev. Daniel Kleyn**

## The Neglected Admonition

**M**atthew 18 has sometimes been referred to as "The Forgotten Chapter" of Scripture. This is because we so often forget the admonition in verses 15 and 16 of that chapter. There we read: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

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In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ prescribes for us the way in which we are to deal with a fellow saint who has sinned against us. But often we forget, or even purposely neglect, this admonition. In its place we use our own method of dealing with the one who sins against us. The God-prescribed way we ignore.

The importance of this oft-neglected admonition is indicated by various references to it in Scripture and in our confessions. Christ gives a similar command in Matthew 5:23, 24, where He states: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be rec-

onciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Our confessions also remind us of this duty. The Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 31, states that the sinner is "often brotherly admonished" before his sin is reported to the church. And in Article 72 of the Church Order we read: "In case anyone errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed."

Christ instructs us in Matthew 18 as to how we should deal with the brother who trespasses against us. The neglected admonition does not speak of public gross sins, for such sins have to be dealt with im-

mediately by the church. The admonition concerns private sins committed against us.

This does not mean that for every sin a fellow believer commits, we must run to him and admonish him. If this were the case, not only would we be always busy admonishing others, but there would also be a constant stream of knocks on our own door because of our sins. We all have faults and weaknesses. We all sin. Believers should be able to overlook each other's faults and trust that by God's grace the brother or sister in Christ struggles and fights against these sins and repents of them.

What the text in Matthew 18 applies to are cases in which a brother "trespasses against thee." The implication is that the brother continues in that sin. The determining questions are these: "Have you been sinned against by the brother? Is this sin of such a nature that it stands between you and your brother. Is the sin such that on account of it peace and unity and proper Christian fellowship between you and your brother, and within the church of Christ, have been disrupted? And does the brother continue in his sin? Does he fail to repent? Does he fail to seek the restoration of friendship and fellowship?"

This often happens. We are still sinners and often sin against each other. And each of us is at times sinned against by a brother.

The method Christ prescribes for dealing with such sins is clear. And remember, what Christ commands is not an option, but a duty. We must obey Him. We may not add to or take away from His Word. And that Word is this: "Keep the sin private! Do so by speaking to the sinner, and to him alone!" That's it.

Christ tells me that when a brother sins against me, I must speak only to him about that sin. I may not speak to someone else about his sin — I must speak personally to him. I may not speak to

the minister or an elder about his sin. I may not speak to my wife and children about his sin. I may not call up my friends and speak to them about his sin. I must talk to the one who has sinned against me, and to him alone.

This command of Christ precludes all gossip, slander, and backbiting. If we are commanded to speak to the sinning brother and to him alone, all other listening ears are out of bounds. We may not tell a single other person of his sin. We usually want to. In fact, we often cannot wait to tell others. But this Christ forbids.

Christ's command also precludes all desire to get even with the sinning brother. Often we seek to do just that. Instead of speaking to the sinner, we mull over the offense within ourselves and become angrier and angrier with the sinning brother. In this way we are really preparing ourselves to commit sin against him. We will end up repaying sin with sin, and not forgiving.

Matthew 18 also precludes first telling the church. It might seem commendable for us to tell the church. Surely the elders and/or the minister need to know about this sinning brother! Surely they are best qualified to speak to him about his sin! And so we immediately run to an officebearer in the church and inform him of all the details of the offense. What often compels us to do this is the hope that we then can wash our hands of the weighty responsibility of speaking to the brother ourselves. But this is sin. To speak to the church before we have privately talked to the sinner is clearly forbidden. Christ does not say, "First tell it unto the church." We must speak first to him who has sinned, and to him alone.

Heeding Christ's command also requires of us that we not wait too long to speak to the brother. The offense must be removed as soon as possible. If it is not, it will certainly fester, as does an infected

wound. The matter will escalate until so many people and issues are involved that the damage caused becomes well nigh impossible to repair.

Consider a moment the terrible consequences that follow from disobedience to this command of Christ. Those consequences are, of course, devastating — not only for the individual members of the church, but also for the church as a whole. Perhaps you have yourself seen and experienced them. Perhaps you can even add to the ones we mention here.

If we disobey this command by refusing to speak to the sinning brother, this disturbs the peace and unity of the church of Christ. Even if you speak to no one else about the sin, yet the sin still remains between you and the brother. As a result you will find it almost impossible to see him, or to speak to him. You will even find it extremely difficult to worship together with him on the Lord's Day. This affects the church of Christ. Within the church there is now strife and conflict between its members.

Worse still is if we disobey this command by doing the opposite of what we should. Instead of our love covering, as it should, a multitude of sins, we are instrumental in making public what should be kept private. Through this we cause untold hurt and misery. The name and reputation of the sinner are damaged. Unnecessary shame is brought upon him and upon the church, both because of his sin, and now also because of our sin of gossip and slander. And that gossip may very well cause the sinning brother to become bitter and angry. As a result, it now becomes much more difficult for you personally, and then for the church, to deal with the sinner. Instead of restoring the fallen brother, we drag his name, as well as the name of Christ and His church, in the dust.

By speaking privately and in

love to the brother, we cover a multitude of sins. For love not only forgives the sins of our fellow saints, it also keeps those sins private. We consider sin so grievous that we strive to keep it as secret as possible. We do so out of love and concern for the name of the brother and for the name of Christ.

Crucial in the matter of speaking to a brother regarding his sin is our motive and purpose. The motive and purpose of privately admonishing the sinning brother is the same as the motive and purpose of all discipline — the salvation of the sinner. As Matthew 18:15 puts it, we seek to gain the brother. This is Christ's concern, too, in giving us this command — the salvation of His people.

To seek his salvation is true brotherly love. Therefore we operate from the principle of brotherly love. For that's what true love is — a concern for one's eternal spiritual welfare. If we love someone, we seek his salvation.

Our desire in speaking to a sinning brother is to lead him to repentance. As long as he lives in that sin he is under sin's control. The only way out is repentance and forgiveness. And while it is definitely true that the one who has sinned should really come to us and voluntarily confess his sin, yet we must not sit back and wait for this. Nor may we think that we may just let the matter slide in the hope that over time everything will come right again. It won't. We are to seek him out in order to lead him to repentance.

We therefore approach the brother with the desire that God may be pleased to use us to deliver him from the power of sin. We direct the sinner to Christ, in whom is mercy and forgiveness. We desire to see him restored again, not only to fellowship with us, but also, and especially, to fellowship with God. Then we have gained the brother. Then there is reason for great joy (not only in heaven, but also among us) over

one sinner that repents. And then God is glorified through this evidence of His sovereign grace in the life of a sinner.

It is absolutely necessary that this be our motive. Not revenge, but repentance. Not a desire to get even, but a desire to be again united in the bond of love with this fellow saint. Not a desire to see him forever under the power of a sin, but again restored to fellowship with God and His people.

This motive of love and concern for the brother's salvation comes to expression in the attitude we have when we speak to him. It determines not only what we say, but also how we say it.

The proper attitude is humility. We manifest this when we say, "I too am a sinner. But for the grace of God, I would also commit this same sin."

Humility therefore precludes all anger and bitterness. It also eliminates any desire for revenge. But what it especially forbids is a "holier than thou" attitude.

It is so easy for us to see the mote (or sliver) that is in our brother's eye and to miss completely the beam that is in our own eye. But the saint who has the grace of humility realizes that he is no less depraved by nature than any other. And he tells the brother that this is so. He tells the one who has sinned against him that he knows himself to be just as liable to fall into serious sin. He views

himself (as he ought) as the chief of sinners. Certainly his prayer for the sinning brother is, "God, be merciful to this saint." But that is also his prayer for himself, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." In that humble and meek spirit he speaks to his brother.

Humility also means that we are ready to admit our own sins. When we speak to the brother concerning his sin against us, we might very well discover that we were the cause of that sin. Perhaps we instigated his offense. Then we too are guilty of sin. This does not excuse the brother's sin, but it does require of us a readiness to confess our sin to the brother and to ask him to forgive.

It is not easy to speak to a sinning brother. Often we are afraid of his reaction. Perhaps he will be sarcastic. Or perhaps he will become angry, or even violent. And what makes it especially difficult is the consciousness of our own sins.

But our speaking to the brother is nevertheless a sacred duty. For it is one of the means God uses to turn His people back to Him and to preserve them in righteousness. Therefore, "brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1, 2). □

### THE REDEEMER

With ardent hope and fervent prayer,  
With patience meet, they wait;  
One all-possessing thought they share —  
These Jews who love their God:  
O, Thou Redeemer, Shiloh, King,  
Make Israel thy care.

A Simeon here, an Anna there,  
Their lives content in worship spent.  
Their father's God their only hope,  
His promises they know and dare  
To trust; serene that He knows best  
When He His Son can spare.

But hearken now, what vision bright,  
What message sweet to hear?  
By angels brought to sinful men,  
What means this radiance?  
O, joy, this holy night has brought  
The King of love and light!

The promised Son, Redeemer, King,  
They see and worship, too.  
These saints content are willing now  
To leave this earthly life.  
O, Savior, wilt Thou haste the day  
We all thy praise shall sing.

*Standard Bearer*, December 1, 1933

# The Standard of the New Millennium

## (1)

**T**he new millennium is almost upon us. Soon the 1900s will be no more. It will be the year 2000. It is natural that many in this past year have been reflecting on the old millennium and what has gone before. The world in which we live has changed dramatically as time has progressed. In just the last century man has advanced in knowledge a hundred-fold! So much so, in fact, that unbelieving optimists contend that, given this rate of development, man in this new millennium will learn how to control his destiny and that of the planet earth.

The media have used the close of the old millennium to reflect on the events of history. Magazine articles and books have been written about the nations and men of the millennium that will soon be passed. Others are written which boast about the advance of medicine, technology, and the arts. It is a time of reflection.

But it is also a time of eager anticipation! The media have been filled with this kind of hype too — the wonders man is going to perform in the next millennium. Unbelieving man has high hopes for himself. He eagerly anticipates a global economy which will assist in eradicating famine and starva-

tion. He looks forward to world peace, when the nations of this world will cease their aggression and strive for the common good of all mankind. He looks forward to overcoming disease and suffering. In short, fallen man looks forward to the establishment of a kingdom where he can discover his full human potential while continuing on in his sin.

Not only has the world of unbelief become absorbed in the new millennium that is soon to be upon us. So has the church. The church too has taken time to reflect upon the past. Many articles have been written in religious periodicals reflecting on the history of the church. There have been many changes in the church this past 1000 years, from the split between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in July of 1054, to the Reformation of the sixteenth century, to the rise of modern theology in the churches of today. It is contended by most in the church world that the church has truly developed for the better. All the old, antiquated doctrines of the past are finally being placed on the bookshelf where they belong. Now we can write new confessions which will impact our society in a much more positive way than the old theology of the church.

Modern Christianity also looks forward to the new millennium. There is a renewed interest in the second coming of Christ and the meaning of the millennium as prophesied in Revelation 20. Some postmillennialists are even optimistic that they can use the total chaos

of January 1, 2000 as a time to make large strides in establishing God's kingdom on earth. Others are ascribing symbolic significance to this coming year, and speculate that it might be the time of the rapture.

So the church world is looking at the future too. In itself, that is not wrong. We too take time to reflect on the past and look to the future. In fact, that is what we are going to do tonight. We are going to take a closer look at the religious development of the past few decades, and in light of this we will consider what must be our standard for the millennium to come.

### Disturbing Trends

When I assess the development of the church of our day, the conclusion to which I come is not as favorable as is that of the Reconstructionist. He boasts that the church is becoming more orthodox and is gaining greater power and influence in the world. And although I would agree that the nominal church is of great influence, I deny that this is for the better. My outlook for modern Christianity is rather bleak — no, *very* bleak!

The one chief characteristic of the church world at the end of this present millennium is appalling ignorance. Men and women who have spent their entire lifetimes within the confines of the church are almost completely ignorant of what the Bible says. They are not able to relate simple Bible history, much less explain the doctrines of the church. They might be able to

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tell a few Bible stories, but they are unable even to place these within the context of sacred history. The doctrines of Scripture are way beyond their understanding.

Even worse is the notion that one *need not* know the Bible in order to be a good Christian. Not the amount of objective knowledge makes a solid Christian, it is contended, but whether a person has had a break-through experience with God! If I am able to feel the power of God in my life, if I can feel His great love surrounding me, that is all that is necessary to be a good Christian! It is not that we should throw away our Bibles. It is not that we should not read our Bibles or even study them. But the Bible should be used as nothing more than a handbook to teach me how to live for Christ or learn to love Him more. Ignored is the controversy God had with the nation of Israel which He spoke through the mouth of Hosea in Hosea 4:1, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."

In large part, this widespread ignorance can be blamed on the church itself. The church institute has failed its sheep. This is true, in the first place, in that the church has failed to instruct her members. Systematic instruction in the doctrines of God's Word (e.g., Heidelberg Catechism preaching) has been replaced in the pulpit with short moral homilies. Preaching has been minimized to such an extent that little time is given for a faithful explanation of God's Word.

The children of the covenant have also been sorely neglected in this instruction. Instead of attending the worship services, where they might learn to listen and be instructed under the preaching, they attend kiddies' classes, where they are taught to play. When a Bible story is taught to them, it is superficial and taken out of the

context of sacred history. Sunday school of this sort is the extent of what is taught children in the modern churches of today. When these children grow into their youth, their "instruction" is finished. If there is more instruction given, it is not required by the church. All that is required of youth to become active members in the church is the broad, sweeping statement, "I believe that I am a Christian and that Jesus died for me." The church has left her children ignorant!

Not only has the church institute of today neglected instruction, but it has actually encouraged its membership in the way of ignorance in the lies that it teaches! The Bible is not totally the Word of God. It is culturally conditioned. It is made up in some parts of the personal opinions of men. Certain parts of Scripture can be discarded. Well, if this is the case, then who really needs the Bible? The Bible is not all that reliable anyway! Certainly, it cannot carry any weight of authority. If this is the case, why learn it? Why memorize it? Why spend so much time with it? I can be a good Christian without knowing the Bible! The result of such reasoning? Abounding ignorance!

With this ignorance comes apostasy. This is the second trend of the church world of our day. Apostasy reigns in the church. Since no one is rooted anymore in the truth, the lie can be taught and no one really knows the difference. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," we read in II Timothy 3:13. We are further informed in II Timothy 4:3, 4, that ignorant people with itching ears will heap unto themselves teachers who will turn their ears away from the truth and unto fables. That is exactly what is happening in the church of today! People are always itching to hear something new and innovative. And there are plenty of false teachers available to give the people exactly what they are looking for. Every kind of her-

esy one wants to hear is available in the modern church world. All one has to do is look for it. It all goes under the name of Christianity. Within the realm of the church, people are being blown about by every wind of doctrine which men in cunning craftiness teach.

There is one particular heresy that is especially insidious in nature. It is a heresy that seems to unite the majority of Christianity today no matter how divergent these churches might be in other matters. It is also more and more becoming the line of demarcation between true Christianity and apostate Christianity. At the time of Augustine this error was known as Pelagianism. Later in history, when it was opposed in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, it was known as Arminianism. Today it seems to be so much a part of modern Christianity it no longer has a name! It is the error of a universal love of God for every man, and all that goes with it. Christ died for every person, making salvation available for all. Everyone has a chance for salvation, but one must accept Christ and that salvation. Fallen man is not totally depraved but has the ability to accept Christ. God's election is therefore conditioned on what man does. This heresy which we call Arminianism has pervaded the church world, and it is exactly this lie that is uniting the false church in the world!

And it is uniting the false church with the unbelieving world as well. The apostate church and the unbelieving world are both convinced of the natural ability of man to save himself. They both speak of a God who loves everyone so long as they live a good moral life and are a help to their neighbors. Humanism lies at the heart of both their desires. To the world of unbelief there is nothing offensive in the lies taught by the apostate church. Since everyone is created in the image of God, we all belong to the same brotherhood! We have



every reason, therefore, to join hands in the common cause of mankind and make this world a better place! Apostasy is eating away at the church as a canker!

Finally, when we reflect on just the last few decades of the closing millennium we find the trend of the church world toward relativism. Within the church as well as without, there no longer seems to be any objective right and wrong. Everything goes. And everyone is willing to live with that! You believe what you want to believe and I'll believe what I want to believe and let's just learn to get along. We

are all going to heaven anyway. You probably have some truth to what you teach, but then so do we. There really is no objective standard of truth! Let's not condemn each other!

As a result of this kind of thinking, everyone seems to be getting along just fine in the church world — everyone, that is, except the true church. That institute which attempts to walk the straight line of God's Word is frowned on and pushed aside. Everything goes except the truth. No one wants that church institute which insists that

its members walk according to the commands of God's Word and insists on teaching only what God's Word teaches. That church is judgmental and narrow-minded. The faithful church is too strict. It does not give in enough to others! No one wants that church!

That is where the church world stands today, after all its development in the past 1000 years. It is characterized by ignorance, apostasy, and relativism. As we reflect on the church at the close of this millennium, the picture is not a very pretty one.

... to be continued. □

**Ministering to the Saints**

**Rev. Doug Kuiper**

## **The Basis for the Diaconate**

# **(1) God's Care for His Poor**

*O God, to Thy Anointed King  
Give truth and righteousness;  
Thy people He will justly judge  
And give the poor redress.  
The poor man's cause He will maintain,  
The needy He will bless,  
And He will break the strength of those  
Who would the poor oppress.*

(Psalter 193, stanzas 1 and 3,  
versification of Psalm 72)

**I**n these stanzas, and in Psalm 72, God's saints express their confidence that Jehovah will care for His beloved poor through Christ, typified in Solomon, God's anointed king.

God's certain care of His poor through Christ is the theological basis of the diaconate. This is true, first, because the diaconate is the official means which Christ uses to

care for His poor. Second, through the office of deacon God gives His church a visible picture of what He did for us spiritually. By nature we were spiritually poor, void of all spiritual gifts, deserving to die both physically and spiritually on account of our sins and sinfulness. But God made us rich through Christ! Though rich, Christ became poor for our sakes by taking upon Himself our guilt and corruption, and by suffering and dying to bear all of God's wrath on account of our sin. On the basis of Christ's work, God declares us righteous, causes us to experience everlasting life and fellowship with Him, makes us able to obey His law again, and gives us the promise of an everlasting inheritance, a mansion in the heavens! Spiritual riches, indeed!

The office of deacon pictures this work of Christ, as it supplies the earthly, bodily needs of the poor members of the church with

alms which the more prosperous members of the church have given. In fact, through this office Christ supplies the earthly, bodily needs of His people.

It is important that we understand this basis well. If the church of Jesus Christ finds no basis for the office of deacon, she may not have it in her midst. She may not have it merely for practical reasons. She may not have it merely because she wants it. But if Scripture provides her with a basis for having the office, then not only *may* she have a diaconate, but she *must!* And if that basis is to be found in God's care for the poor, then the diaconate *must* make this care their fundamental work. It is because the Reformed churches have historically understood this basis for the office that they have fought for its place in the church when civil authorities wanted to take over the work of caring for the poor, as we noted in our last article.

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We desire to understand this basis more clearly, that we might esteem our deacons highly, and insist that they perform their fundamental work.

We have already noted one aspect of the basis of the office — its institution, recorded in Acts 6. The church need not simply infer from God's care for His poor and from His saving work for His people in Christ, that she should have a diaconate. The institution of the office shows that God made this work the official work of the church! So the church must have the office of deacon.

Having already gone forward from the record of this institution to treat the history of the office, we will now go backward, treating the scriptural and theological basis of the office in more detail. We begin in this article by examining the truth that God cares for the poor.

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God's care for His poor is evident first from His many commands to the church in the old and new dispensations to care for her poor.

These commands to Old Testament Israel are found primarily in the Mosaic law. The people were forbidden to charge the poor interest: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" (Ex. 22:25). The word "usury" does not here mean exorbitant interest, but refers simply to interest. The Israelite was to give to the poor, not expecting to make any profit from this loan.

According to Exodus 23:10-11, the Israelites were to sow and reap their fields and to work their vineyards and oliveyards six years, but to do no work in them the seventh year, "that the poor of thy people may eat." The poor would benefit because they could gather the stray crops which would grow from seeds scattered during the previous year's planting or harvest.

Leviticus 19:10 and 23:22 contain the laws of gleaning, which required the Israelite to let the poor harvest the crops in the corners of the field and glean what fell to the ground as the men harvested.

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 is an important passage in this connection. We quote it in full:

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be a sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

Deuteronomy 24:12-15 contains God's demand that the Israelite return by sundown the poor man's raiment which he had pledged, and that he pay the poor man his hire by sundown, that his daily needs be cared for.

In His commands to care for the poor, God makes specific mention of the widows and fatherless, those who were poor because they had no husband or father to support them. He commanded that every three years the Israelite set aside a tenth of his increase, which was to be eaten by any Levite, stranger, fatherless, or widow within his gate (Deut. 14:28-29).

In the New Testament, God continued to require charitable giv-

ing of His people. John the Baptist commanded the people to give, if they had food and clothing, to those who did not (Luke 3:11). Jesus exhorted the people to give for the poor. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away" (Matt. 5:42; cf. also Luke 6:30, 34). Luke 11:41 and 12:33 also contain His commands to the people to give alms.

Paul also exhorted the saints to give for the needs of other poor saints. He says to the Corinthians: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Cor. 16:1-2). He returned to this subject in his second epistle.

Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace (the grace of giving, DJK) also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich (II Cor. 8:7-9).

Paul then repeated his exhortation, and explained further:

For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack (vv. 13-15).

The last verse refers to Exodus 16:18, which speaks of God's provision of the Israelites with sufficient manna every day as they needed. God's care of the nation of Israel in the wilderness, a specific instance in which He supplied

the daily needs of His people, is a ground for the church to give to those who have need.

John shows that caring for the poor manifests God's work in us. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (I John 3:16-17).

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God's care for His poor is also evident from His promises to the church that He would bless her in the way of caring for the poor, and judge her for failing to care for them.

His blessing is spoken of in Deuteronomy 15:10: "for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." David writes in Psalm 41:1: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble." Solomon speaks of this blessing repeatedly. "He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Prov. 14:21). "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again" (Prov. 19:17). Proverbs 22:9 and 28:27 also speak of this blessing. Jesus also taught the rich young ruler that giving sacrificially to the poor was the way to enjoy the blessedness of the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22).

God's judgment on those who oppressed the poor was certain. "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches ... shall surely come to want" (Prov. 22:16). Again, this included how one treated the widows and fatherless. Exodus 22:22-24 says: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I

will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."

The prophets at times spoke of this judgment on those who oppressed the poor. Part of Sodom's iniquity was that she failed to "strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ezek. 16:49). In chapter 18 Ezekiel, explaining that the father will not bear the son's guilt, nor the son the father's, says that the wicked son or father shall be put to death for his own sins. Included among those sins which make one worthy of death is oppression of the poor and needy (v. 12). But he shall live who has not oppressed any nor withheld a pledge, but given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with a garment (v. 16).

Amos also foretold judgment upon Israel (the ten tribes) because of their sins. Among the transgressions for which Jehovah would not turn away their punishment was this, that they sold "the poor for a pair of shoes" (2:6, 8:6), that they would "turn aside the poor in the gate from their right" (5:12), and that they swallowed up the needy and made the poor of the land to fail (8:4). Because they ignored the plight of the hungry, Jehovah would send upon Israel the worst famine, one of hearing His words (8:11-13).

In Matthew 25:31ff., Jesus speaks both of blessing upon those who care for the poor and judgment upon those who do not. Speaking of the great judgment over which He will preside in the last day, He promises the blessing of the kingdom of God and everlasting life to those who fed Him when He was hungry, gave Him drink when thirsty, housed Him when He needed shelter, and clothed Him when He was naked. He shows, too, that He considered these things as being done to Him when they were done to one of the least of His brethren (the least saint

in the church). Those who failed to do such things to Him, or to one of the least of His brethren, were sentenced to everlasting fire and punishment.

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Scripture records the confessions of the poor saints themselves, that they trusted God to care for them in their needs. "He shall judge the poor of the people. He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.... For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy" (Ps. 72:4, 12, 13). In Psalm 132:15 the Lord says through the psalmist, "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." And Paul speaks often of God's care for him in times of hunger and poverty. Sometimes this care consisted of satisfying Paul's needs through the church (Phil. 2:25), while other times it consisted of giving the spiritual grace of contentment (Phil. 4:11-13, 18).

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It is clear that God's care for the poor is not a minor theme in Scripture. God speaks of this care often, and shows that He performs this care primarily through the means of fellow saints in the church who give for the relief of the poor.

The practical point has surely been driven home already to every child of God reading this. Give! As you have been blessed! In gratitude to God for what He has given you! With cheerfulness and simplicity!

That God cares for the poor serves as part of the basis for the diaconate. However, it is not enough in itself to warrant our devoting an *office* to this work, making it the official work of the church. We must examine next, then, why the diaconate must be an office in the church. □

## ■ Bishop Spong— and Church Revival

On October 31 we commemorated the Reformation of the church which began some 480 years ago. Today we witness continued and increasing attacks against the truths maintained in that Reformation. We have been reading of the signed agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and much of Lutheranism in which these now express agreement on a definition of "justification." The agreement is in fact capitulation on the part of these Lutherans.

But the attack against the principles of the Reformation is made on other fronts as well. The *Grand Rapids Press*, November 6, 1999, presents an interview with Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopal Church. This man has caused consternation within the Episcopal Church as a result of earlier books he has written. Added consternation arose as a result of his most recent book, "Why Christianity Must Change or Die."

The Episcopal Church appears to do nothing about his heretical views. There are some, indeed, who urge him to leave the church. He himself said, "I had one minister in Alabama call me a whore. He was saying I'm denying everything the church has always taught and I'm still earning my living from the church." "I would have abandoned the church a long time ago if I hadn't loved it," he insisted.

But what does this man who claims to "love the church" wish to change? In the *Press* interview we have the following:

Only by refashioning traditional Christian doctrines to fit modern understandings can the church survive in the next millennium, said Spong, who was invited by Christ Community Church to lead a weekend seminar.

The concepts he says the church must abandon would stun many Christians:

- God as a separate, supernatural being who intervenes in human affairs;
- Jesus as an incarnation of a supernatural God;
- The virgin birth and physical resurrection of Jesus;
- A heaven and hell that reward or punish our behavior.

Instead, Spong presents God as the mystical source of life and love, or "Ground of Being," whose spirit dwells in each person and who was revealed in Jesus. He calls on post-modern Christians to live fully and love "wastefully," sharing God's gifts with others regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

"I don't want to get rid of the Bible or creeds," said Spong, 68, who will retire in February after 24 years as bishop of Newark. "I simply want to carry the Christ experience into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and find language appropriate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to capture the power and truth that's in that figure."

The article continues:

A kind of manifesto of Spong's previous writings, the book bills itself as "a new reformation of the church's faith and practice." Spong even posted, Luther-style, 12 theses from the book on the Internet. In so doing he confirmed his status as one of America's most visible — some say media-savvy — religious rebels.

Spong doesn't apologize for invoking the image of Luther's 95 theses nailed to a church door in pushing for a new vision of Christianity.

"It really is an attempt to wake

the church up to the fact that at least the mainline churches are dying," Spong said in his soft Virginia drawl.

Churches are dying because legions of people no longer can believe in the literal truth of ancient Christian creeds and concepts, Spong argues. He calls these people "believers in exile." While many are rushing to biblical fundamentalism, others are rushing out of religion altogether, he says.

Science, Spong contends, has rendered meaningless such ideas as Jesus' ascent into heaven and the virgin birth. The miracle stories of the Bible don't hold up in "a post-Newtonian world." He calls the notion of the crucifixion as a sacrifice for the world's sins "a barbaric idea based on primitive concepts of God."

One wonders what this man means when he claims that he does not "want to get rid of the Bible or the creeds." If the views he presents were correct, one had best throw away the Bible and the creeds. One wonders what he means when he claims to "love the church." If this is his "love of the church," there is no need for any to "hate" that church. Spong's ideas would surely serve to destroy the church—except for the fact that Christ has promised to be with that church to the end of the world.

Spong is correct, of course, in his claim that many are leaving the church. He is correct that churches are dying. His proposal for renewal, however, would surely hasten this process. It is exactly the renewal of the church that requires a return to Holy Scripture. Renewal requires a return to the confession of the cross and the atonement through that cross. What Spong proposes to eradicate is, however, the only thing which will hold the church together. Why would Spong, or anyone else, want to belong to a church where the

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very reason for its existence is destroyed?

## ■ Is the Bible True?

It is not strange, I suppose, that within the secular press there has been increasing attention paid to Scripture. It is Scripture which speaks of the end of the age. Now, as the millennium draws near, even within secular society there is a certain perverse interest in the Bible. There is, of course, the first question generally asked: Is the Bible true? The second question immediately follows: What does it say about the "return of Christ?"

That first question was treated recently in *U.S. News and World Report*, October 25, 1999. The report indicated that a number of recent archeological findings in the area of Canaan substantiate what the Bible says. The article begins by pointing out that archeologists have now proved that David was a historical person:

The workday was nearly over for the team of archaeologists excavating the ruins of the ancient Israelite city of Dan in upper Galilee. Led by Avraham Biran of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, the group had been toiling since early morning, sifting debris in a stone-paved plaza outside what had been the city's main gate.

Now the fierce afternoon sun was turning the stoneworks into a reflective oven. Gila Cook, the team's surveyor, was about to take a break when something caught her eye—an unusual shadow in a portion of recently exposed wall along the east side of the plaza. Moving closer, she discovered a flattened basalt stone protruding from the ground with what appeared to be Aramaic letters etched into its smooth surface. She called Biran over for a look. As the veteran archaeologist knelt to examine the stone, his eyes widened. "Oh, my ...!" he exclaimed. "We have an inscription!"

In an instant, Biran knew that they had stumbled upon a rare treasure. The basalt stone was

quickly identified as part of a shattered monument, or stele, from the ninth century BC, apparently commemorating a military victory of the king of Damascus over two ancient enemies. One foe the fragment identified as the "king of Israel." The other was "the House of David."

The reference to David was a historical bombshell. Never before had the familiar name of Judah's ancient warrior king, a central figure of the Hebrew Bible and, according to Christian Scripture, an ancestor of Jesus, been found in the records of antiquity outside the pages of the Bible. Skeptics had long seized upon the fact to argue that David was a mere legend, invented by Hebrew scribes during or shortly after Israel's Babylonian exile, roughly 500 years before the birth of Christ. Now, at last, there was material evidence: an inscription written not by Hebrew scribes but by an enemy of the Israelites little more than a century after David's presumptive lifetime. It seemed to be a clear corroboration of the existence of King David's dynasty and, by implication, of David himself.

The article continues by pointing out other events both in the Old Testament and in the New which appear now to be corroborated by discoveries of archeologists. There are those who would still question the historicity of the Patriarchs as well as the flight of Israel from Egypt. Even then, others seem to argue convincingly, on the basis of known events of that period, that the Bible presents accurate history.

Other discoveries seem to prove to the secular mind the reality of Jesus and of the crucifixion. There is evidence in archeological discoveries that there was a "Pilate" in the land of Judah in Jesus' day.

Two events recorded in Scripture, however, simply cannot be proven from man's study of archeology. There is the creation in six literal days and there is the account of a universal flood. Both are dis-

missed because these accounts can never be harmonized with science, so it is said. The article refers to Augustine, who is supposed to have questioned the literal account of Genesis 1-3. Also, Howard Van Till of Calvin College is quoted. "Creation and evolution are not contradictory," explains Howard Van Till, a professor of physics and astronomy at evangelical Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. "They provide different answers to a different set of questions." At least on the matters of creation and universal flood, the rational mind concludes that the Bible cannot be true.

The article concludes:

Modern archaeology may not have removed all doubt about the historical accuracy of the Bible. But thanks to archaeology, the Bible "no longer appears as an absolutely isolated monument of the past, as a phenomenon without relation to its environment," as the great American archaeologist William Albright wrote at mid-century. Instead, it has been firmly fixed in a context of knowable history, linked to the present by footprints across the archaeological record.

Just as archaeology has shed new light on the Bible, the Bible in turn has often proved a useful tool for archaeologists. Yigael Yadin, the Israeli archaeologist who excavated at Hazor in the 1950s, relied heavily on its guidance in finding the great gate of Solomon at the famous upper Galilee site: "We went about discovering [the gate] with Bible in one hand and spade in the other." And Trude Dothan notes that "without the Bible, we wouldn't even have known there were Philistines."

It is interesting to read accounts which show that events recorded in the Bible have actually occurred—as proven by science. Yet, there is something frightening about all of this. Man will believe that part of the Bible which can be confirmed through archeological or

scientific studies. The rest is rejected—until perhaps science can likewise confirm it to be true. This can only mean that the heart of Scripture will never be believed—because it cannot be proved according to the science of man. The creation and flood accounts are dismissed out-of-hand. Though the

death of Christ on the cross might be recognized as a historical fact, no science could ever confirm that He arose from the dead and ascended into heaven. No earthly science could confirm the reality of atonement and of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

What natural man rejects, the Christian continues to confess, "By

*faith* we believe that the worlds were framed by the Word of God...." Without such faith, it matters not how much of the Bible one might hold for truth. With faith, one holds to all of the testimony of Scripture, without claiming a need for any confirming testimony from unbelievers. □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

**Y**ou will have to allow me some freedom in this issue of the "News." Having just returned yesterday from sixteen days in the United Kingdom, I find it almost impossible to think about anything else. What a privilege and opportunity Rev. A. Spriensma and I had to visit first in South Wales and then in Northern Ireland with the congregation of the Covenant PRC in NI.

In each place I was humbled by their devotion, commitment, and knowledge of the Reformed faith. God is indeed prospering the work of our missionary, Rev. R. Hanko, in that part of His kingdom. In addition to making many new friends in the Lord, we also had ample opportunity to see some of the sights and sample some of the local dishes. I returned with an acquired taste for strong tea and scones, and an appreciation for driving on the left side of the road and for roundabouts.

Rev. Spriensma was able to lecture three times in Wales and preach twice on the Lord's Day. He was also given the privilege of preaching once on the Sunday we

were in Northern Ireland. In addition, we spent every evening at the home of different families in Wales and NI getting to know them better. We also had time to spend with Rev. R. Hanko and his family encouraging them in their work, and to conduct church visitation with the council of Covenant PRC in NI. Two weeks is not a long time, but it was long enough to indicate to us that God certainly has His people there, and that there is indeed much work for our churches to do there.

In news from Ghana we learn that our missionary, Rev. R. Moore, is preparing to bring to our Foreign Mission Committee and to Hull's council in late November a proposal concerning property for worship. He believes that it will be necessary to obtain a place outside of the home where they can meet as a mission and can work towards the goal of forming a congregation.

A joint delegation from the council of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI and our Domestic Mission Committee, consisting of Rev. R. Cammenga, Rev. J. Slopsema, elder Don Doezeema, and deacon Bern Zandstra were in Pittsburgh the weekend of November 14 to meet with our home missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, and the group there.

Rev. C. Terpstra and elder Dave Moelker were in Spokane, WA for the Domestic Mission

Committee's annual visit with our missionary, Rev. T. Miersma, as well as with members of the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church, the group among whom our missionary is laboring.

### Congregation Activities

**B**ack in September the congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA voted to accept a bid from a local construction company to build an addition to their parsonage. This construction should begin right after the first of the year, the Lord willing. They also approved buying additional chairs for their worship services. Most services, both morning and evening, are full, so these chairs will be a welcome addition.

The congregation of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI approved plans to do some needed repairs on their roof and to waterproof some brick. However, they tabled a proposal to expand their narthex, replace carpet, and make some landscaping changes until later.

Saturday, November 6, the congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI met formally to dedicate their sanctuary to the worship of our Heavenly Father. Rev. R. VanOverloop, their pastor, addressed the congregation from God's Word found in I Peter 2:4-5, reminding them that their building is a picture of the spiritual house of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that

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*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

as lively stones we reflect the beauty and glory of God. We rejoice with the Georgetown congregation in this evidence of God's goodness. And we use the occasion to remind ourselves that the dedication of any church sanctuary means nothing without first the dedication of ourselves to God. May God give us the grace to rededicate ourselves continually.

#### Denomination Activities

**P**rofessor D. Engelsma was the guest lecturer at a Reformation Day public lecture sponsored by First Presbyterian Church of Woodville, MS. Prof. Engelsma spoke on the subject, "Justification by Faith Alone." He was also welcomed to the pulpit of Woodville the following Lord's Day, where he was able to preach twice, on Romans 8 and Galatians 2.

The Ladies' League of the Iowa and Minnesota churches held their annual Fall League Meeting on November 9 in the Hull, IA PRC. Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, spoke on the topic, "The Child of God's Approach to Y2K."

#### Evangelism Activities

**N**ovember 5 Rev. R. Miersma, pastor of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, spoke at a Reformation Day lecture sponsored by their Evangelism Committee. He spoke on the subject, "The Authority of Scripture."

#### Minister Activities

**R**ev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, continues to consider the call to serve as pastor of the Hull, IA PRC.

#### Food For Thought

"How delightful it is to behold with the eye of faith Darius, Cyrus, Alexander, the Romans, Pompey, and Herod, all conspiring without knowing it, to promote the glory of the gospel."

— Blaise Pascal □

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### TEACHER NEEDED

Eastside Christian School announces the honorable retirement of Miss Ruth Dykstra. Because of her intended retirement in June 2000, Eastside Christian School will accept immediately applications from persons who are confessing members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for the teaching position in the primary grades 1-3 for the year 2000-2001. Send a letter of application and a résumé to Eastside Christian School, attention Agatha Lubbers or James Holstege,

2800 Michigan St. N.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

If you have any questions call Agatha Lubbers, (616) 942-2939 or (616) 458-2057 or James Holstege, (616) 285-9096.

#### NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 2000, at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 12, 1999.

Jon J. Huiskens

Stated Clerk

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and consistory of the Randolph PRC extend their sympathy to Marty and Karen DeVries and family in the death of her mother,

**MARILYN GNATKOWSKI.**

Even during times of loss and sorrow, our heavenly Father continues to guide and lead them with His strengthening power. "Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort" (Psalm 119:76).

Gary Buteyn, Clerk

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 21, 1999 our parents, **KENNETH and JOYCE RIETEMA**, will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We have been greatly blessed by their faithfulness to our churches and their instruction of us, their children. We are especially thankful to our covenant God that we may celebrate this joyous occasion with them.

"Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm 40:5).

- ❖ Michael and Brenda Engelsma  
Mark and Elizabeth Langerak  
Meghann and Kayley  
Sam and Heather Copple  
Braden, Mitchell, and Tyler  
David and Jaime Ritsema  
Jason, Luke, and Seth Engelsma
- ❖ Henry and Bonita Boyd III  
Henry IV and Hannah
- ❖ Bruce and Barbara Bomers  
John and Carli Kaptein  
Audrey and Austin  
Jessica and Brent (fiancé)  
Ben, Brent, and Rebecca
- ❖ Kenneth and Cathy Rietema  
Ashley, Aaron (in glory), and Joseph
- ❖ James and Ronda Slendebroek  
Erika and Cody

Grand Rapids, Michigan

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Southwest PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. William De Kraker and Mrs. Kathy Spaman and their families in the death of their beloved father,

**MR. HERMAN KUIPER.**

May the bereaved family be strengthened by God's Word in Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid."

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.

Darrel Huiskens, Clerk

# The Standard Bearer

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The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration is less than a year away. The event is scheduled for June 19-23, 2000. Many of the plans have been finalized for the upcoming event. An additional opportunity that will be available at the Celebration, one which we have not yet discussed in any detail, is the opportunity to purchase books and videos of the event.

There will be two interesting books available when you register for the PRC 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The first one is "Our Goodly Heritage Preserved." This book traces many of the historical highlights of our churches, schools, seminary, and mission activities. This book will be provided free of charge with your full on-campus registration. Additional copies will be available for \$13.00.

The second book is "For Thy Truth's Sake," written by Professor H. Hanko. This book will trace the theological history and development of our churches. It will be available during the week of the Celebration. The price of the book has not yet been determined. It will be handled by the RFPA.

There will also be two videos available to commemorate God's faithfulness to us. The first video will have several interesting interviews with members of our churches, some of whom are able to remember events that date back to 1924. This video will have many old pictures of our early church history and will be a real pleasure viewing with family and friends. The second video will be of highlights of the anniversary week itself. This will help you remember the week of fellowship, friendship, and the thanksgiving to God for His covenant faithfulness to us.

The two books and the historical video will be available for sale during the Anniversary week. The video of the week's events can be ordered at the Anniversary for delivery when it is completed.

The registration brochures will be available in January, so make sure you look in your churches and in the *Standard Bearer* for them. We ask that you fill them out in a timely manner so we can arrange the lodging and other necessary details. Once we receive your reservation, a confirmation will be sent to you with a package of information regarding the items that you will need, a schedule of all the activities, and where they will take place.

Please pray that the Lord will bless this event as we give thanks and praise to Him.

The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee

