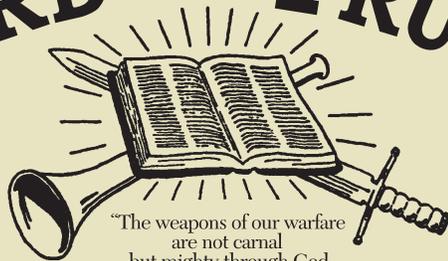


The SWORD and TRUMPET

"Blow ye
the Trumpet
and warn
the People."



"The weapons of our warfare
are not carnal
but mighty through God
to the pulling down of strongholds."

"Take the Sword
of the Spirit
which is
The Word of God."

Guidelines



CHRISTMAS CAROL KAUFFMAN

DECEMBER 2004

\$1.50

The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXII

DECEMBER 2004

No. 12

SWORD AND TRUMPET GUIDELINES monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for “the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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THE SWORD AND TRUMPET (USPS 615-540) is published monthly by *The Sword and Trumpet*, Inc., P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, Va. 22803-0575. Periodicals postage paid at Harrisonburg, Va. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year US \$12.00, 2 years US \$20.00. Bulk rates on the basis of US \$9.00 per year. Add US \$3.00 per year for countries outside USA and Canada. Telephone (540) 867-9419 or 867-9444. FAX (540) 867-9419. E-mail address: fcm@shentel.net.

Person of the Month:

Christmas Carol Kauffman (1902-1969)

Had it not been for a canary's "Christmas carol," the little girl born to Abraham and Selena (Wade) Miller in Elkhart, Indiana, on Christmas Day, 1902, would have been named "Gertrude." The canary, who had not sung before, suddenly began to sing shortly after the baby's birth, so "A. R." Miller decided to name his daughter, Christmas Carol.

Against opposition, the Millers had been early converts of evangelist John S. Coffman. Their faith, which was real and vibrant, greatly impacted their young daughter. There was no doubt in her mind that God was real.

A severe illness in her life at the age of seven brought an awareness of sin to Christmas Carol, as well as an increased sense of the reality of God. At the age of ten she was fully convinced that she was a sinner in need of God's forgiveness through Christ. She gave her life to the Lord in salvation and immediately experienced that forgiveness and cleansing. She was later baptized and became a member of Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart. From her mother, who was also her Sunday school teacher, she learned by example the joy of witnessing to others.

While in high school Miss Miller was given a writing assignment to do for her English and Literature course. The teacher was impressed with her work and gave her much encouragement for she felt that Christmas Carol had an unusual writing talent.

Miss Miller's relationship with Norman Hostetler developed into romance once they were allowed to date at the age of 16. The number "16" became *special* as they began dating on the 16th of September. They began celebrating the 16th of every month.

Their relationship continued to grow until they were finally married, not surprisingly, on April 16, 1924. They were able to set up housekeeping with beautiful furnishings that they bought inexpensively from their respective places of employment due to employee discounts.

Prior to their marriage Norman had repeatedly mentioned that he felt called to go to India as a missionary. Christmas Carol was not pleased with this prospect as she was looking forward to living in her beautiful home here in America. She had told Norman she would go to India with him because she loved him—not because she wanted to be a missionary.

After their marriage Sister Hostetler gave her husband reasons for not going to the mission field and suggested that they be missionaries where they were and give support so that others could go. Despite what she said, God kept bringing vivid reminders to her that she should love Him first and foremost and that her parents had given her to God and felt that He had a definite purpose for her life.

After twenty-six months of bliss, their day of celebration, June 16, 1926, turned to tragedy and mourning—Norman died of electrocution while on the job. Filled with grief Christmas Carol realized she would gladly go to India if she could only have Norman back again, but it was too late. All her beautiful things meant nothing to her now. God used this tragedy to begin to break her will.

Two years later she was invited to go to Hesston College for a six-week Bible term. Before the term was over she had yielded completely to the Lord and was willing to go ANYWHERE and do ANYTHING for Him!

(continued on page 13)

The Never-Ending Story

by Ron Barnes

*The never-ending story of God's presence
with us is our basis for contentment.*

What robs us of contentment? We all have inside us a green monster called jealousy, which has the power to enslave us.

Shakespeare called jealousy "the green sickness," and Socrates, observing the power of jealousy to consume the bones and marrow of a person's moral fiber, labeled it the "soul's saw." On the walls of biblical history hang portraits of jealousy's victims: Cain (Gen. 4), Joseph's brothers (Gen. 37), Korah and his friends (Num. 16:1-3), and King Saul (1 Sam. 18:8, 9), to name a few. If we want to be miserable, all we have to do is compare what we have with that of others.

We choose heartache over joy when we allow envy in four areas of our lives: affluence, appearance, abilities and achievement, and advancement.

AFFLUENCE: We envy what others possess: a nicer car, kitchen, television, neighborhood, or wardrobe we can't afford.

APPEARANCE: We wish we had the looks, physique, or health of someone

else. Or we wish our spouses had the looks, physique, or health of someone else.

ABILITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS: We burn with jealousy that we lack the skills, the education, the fans, the publications, or the community influence that others have.

ADVANCEMENT: We react wrongly when someone else gets the job we craved. We see others offered opportunities we desired, and we feel our jaws tighten.

We read in Hebrews 13:5 that we are to keep our lives "free from the love of money and be content with what [we] have." Why? "Because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" The antidote for envy, then, is recognizing the sufficiency of God's presence.

So why settle for lesser things when the One who created the stars and planets—Emmanuel—has come to live with us and in us? And He is more than enough! ■

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FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR *SWORD & TRUMPET*

God has faithfully supplied the needs for the ongoing publication of this magazine. The subscription rate covers only a portion of the expenses. This has been intentional to allow those on limited incomes to have access to the material. The difference between the subscription income and the actual costs has historically been made up by the faithful gifts of God's people so that the *Sword & Trumpet* has been able to operate "in the black." Now as we draw near the end of 2004, we again ask you to stand with us by financially supporting this ministry. May God bless you as you give.

The Other Side of CHRISTMAS

by David D. Stutzman

God's clock is always right on time,
Each tick rings out a definite chime,
And as the ages come and go
We find it's never fast or slow.

Each great event is strictly geared
To be fulfilled; when engineered
By God alone not one has failed
To be in His good time unveiled.

I've wondered—is the heavenly host
Excited too when it's almost
The proper time for some great plan
Of God to be revealed to man?

On earth it seems the fever's high
When Christmas time is drawing nigh;
So with my feeble mind I've tried
To view the scene from yonder side.

How much the angels know about
God's secrets till He lets them out,
I do not know, but I believe
At least some signals they receive.

They are His ministers to bear
His aid down to salvation's heir;
Though they can't fully understand,
They view with awe what God has
planned.

They get their orders at the throne,
Are pledged to make God's will their
own;
Both angels and the cherubims
And all the shining seraphims.

They quickly move to do His will,
Delivering messages with skill;
With drawn swords they operate
While standing guard at Eden's gate.

I do suppose their hearts were sad
When Adam lost the cloak he had,
And God made him a coat of skin
Because he played around with sin.

I hear one angel cry out loud,
"How can that man reject his God
And yield to that Satanic scheme,
Refusing Him who is supreme?"

The angel quickly lost his frown
When he heard God say, "I'll send down
A Saviour—there will be no lack
Of grace to purchase Adam back."

The angels whispered, "Who will go
To earth—God's saving love to show?"
'Twas plain indeed none of them knew,
God said, "I know what I will do."

Then spake the Son while all was
hushed,
"I'll go and on the cross be crushed,
I'll give my life and blood for man
To save his soul, I know I can."

Then as the time began to near
Excitement filled that heavenly sphere,
But no one knew exactly when
God's moment was to salvage men.

The Father knew and He was thrilled,
Because the time was 'bout fulfilled
When his dear Son through virgin birth
Would make His advent down on earth.

By then the angels might have known
Because their readiness was shown;
And each one had their task assigned,
To do it they were all inclined.

Satanic powers, how they race
To firmly guard that upper space,
Lest Gabriel with his news gets through,
Their combined strength they now
renew.

They've lost so many rounds with God;
To try again seems really odd,
But those imps with their ugly grin
Are always sure—next time we'll win.

But God was really not alarmed
For Gabriel never had been harmed;
He took the news to Zacharias
'Bout John, forerunner of Messiah.

Then next to Mary he proclaimed
How God in heaven had her named
To be the mother of our Lord,
Through whom mankind would be
restored.

The devil now reviews his troops
And orders them to leave no loops
Through which some heavenly host
might slip,
"So be on guard—your weapons grip!"

To him each imp gives quick reply,
"We are prepared to do or die;
We're reinforced in every rank,
Upon our forces you can bank."

Now God's time clock begins to strike,
His hosts prepared, and all alike
Are waiting for their God's command
To function just as God has planned.

Attention! Michael, clear that route,
Move all those imps and demons out
And guard the way and guard it well,
We've glorious news that we must tell!

Then Michael spoke, "In no time flat,
Aye, Captain, I will do just that!"
His forces moved with lightning speed
To carry out their noble deed.

The hosts of darkness quickly rushed
To hold their ranks, but they were
crushed
And wildly fled in disarray,
While Michael's forces won the day.

Attention! Gabriel, quickly go
And share the news on earth below
And tell those shepherds on yon hill,
Messiah's come, now peace be still.

The night was calm and silent,
The stars were shining bright
While shepherds on the hillside
Watched o'er their flocks by night.

They mused in conversation:
"How oft the prophets told

That God would send Messiah
To open Heaven's fold

For all us needy creatures,
So loaded down with sin;
Isaiah said He'd wash us
And make us clean within.

"I wish . . .," and lo the darkness
Was pierced with blinding light,
The heart of every shepherd
Was filled with fearful fright.

An angel from the heavens
Spoke audibly and clear,
And told the trembling shepherds
There was no need to fear.

"Behold I bring you tidings
Of joy, your hearts to bless;
'Twill bring to all the people
Real peace and happiness.

"To you is born a Saviour,
Christ Jesus, Lord of all;
In Bethlehem you'll find Him
Within a cattle stall.

"In swaddling clothes attired,
Asleep on manger hay,
Go worship now Messiah
And there your homage pay."

Then came a host of angels
And praised their God on high,
And peace, good will to earthlings
Rang clearly through the sky.

Then when the angels left them,
The shepherds went with haste
To find the little infant;
There was no time to waste.

They found the King of glory,
Before Him humbly bowed,
Confessed Him as their Saviour
And were with peace endowed.

Then after they had seen Him
They spread the word around,
And all who heard the message
With wonder did abound.

But Mary knew the secret,
Since Gabriel did impart,

The news of Jesus coming
She pondered in her heart.

The shepherds in returning
Gave praise to God on high,
For such a blest experience
Their God they'd glorify.

Now one more time God lifts His voice
And bids the universe rejoice,
He speaks, and lo that yonder star
Responds with light beams streaming
far.

Three wise men from the Orient
Beheld the light, for it was sent
To guide them to that Kingly birth,
A gift from heaven to men on earth.

"That star," said one, "it seems so
strange,
Shines on us from a different range,
It must be heralding truth divine
From God to us—just watch it shine."

They viewed it long, it had them awed,
That star all their attention drew;
They were quite baffled though well-
versed

For in that star they were immersed.

With haste they checked their holy
writ,
And found it said that God saw fit
To use a star to herald the King,
Who would to man deliverance bring.

Their camels quickly were prepared,
The trip, though long, by three was
shared;

They started out that very night,
Were guided only by that light.

They journeyed to Jerusalem,
Not knowing it was Bethlehem,
Till Herod told the scribes to look
If such were written in God's book.

They searched and found it registered,
Then Herod said, "You'll bring me word
So I can come and worship too
This King whose light is guiding you."

The star at last came to a stop,
The wise men from their camels drop,

They bow their hearts and worship
Christ,
Then offer gifts with fragrance
spiced.

A warning came from God on high:
Another route home they must try,
And Joseph—take that infant son
To Egypt till this conflict's done.

When Herod knew he was deceived,
With vengeance his wrath was
relieved;

"I'll get that King if I must slay
All two year olds—we'll start today."

Each soldier quickly grabbed his
sword,
And one by one the babes were gored
And tossed aside, they looked for
others,
Grabbed babies from the arms of
mothers.

Throughout the land all Rachels wailed,
But Herod in his plan had failed;
God had His King snug and secure
And Satan's plan was foiled for sure.

One dreadful day Christ took my load
Of sin, and walked up Calvary's road,
My guilt and shame was gladly borne,
While crucified in awful scorn.

They placed Him in the tomb and
barred
The grave secure and set a guard,
The hosts of darkness now were
thrilled—
But three days were not yet fulfilled.

The third day started with a quake,
And rocks and guards began to shake;
An angel came and moved the stone
Informing men that Christ was gone.

Ascending just as God had planned
He captured all that devilish band,
Before God's hosts He makes display
Of them and now they're doomed for
aye.

He promised those He left behind,
That He'd be back for those who find

In Him salvation full and free,
Redeemed through all eternity.

Since Christ's return is drawing nigh,
Excitement once again is high
'Mong angels as they watch and wait,
Just longing for that final date.

The Son is anxious for that meeting,
When by His side the bride is seating;
The heavenly hosts will then be able
To meet her at that banquet table.

In the book of Revelation,
Saints from every tribe and station
Lift their voice in adoration,
In sheer delight.

Multitudes of voices gifted,
Sounds of mighty waters lifted,
Thunderings loud—the air is rifted
With power and might.

On the face of Christ they're gazing,
Shouts of alleluia raising,
God omnipotent they're praising
In the height.

God the Lord forever reigneth,
Through heaven and earth His rule

retaineth,
His loved and own He still sustaineth,
Arrayed in white.

A table where His own are seated,
And by the Son each one is greeted,
Their faces beam with joy completed,
A blessed sight.

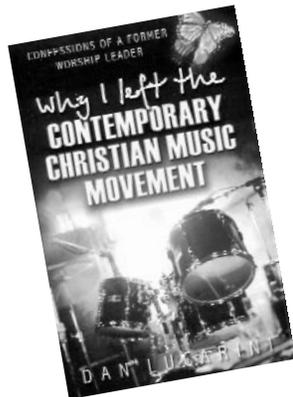
Praise God, at last there's no mistaking,
A wedding there is in the making,
The Son of God His bride is taking,
For aye unite.

At that wedding in the spaces
We'll be done with rush and races,
Earthly cares will have no traces,
And no more night.

I thank God for that Christmas Story,
For Calvary though bleak and gory,
For His return—that will be glory,
'Twill end it right.

Till then, dear pilgrim, keep on yearning,
Your lamps all trimmed and brightly
burning,
The Bridegroom soon will be returning,
We'll take our flight. ■

Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement



by **Dan Lucarini**

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Born to Die

by Alan Morrison

Reading: Luke 2:1-40

Focus Text: Luke 2:34, 35

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Introduction

If we meditate on the Incarnation of God the Son—the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ—what do we see?

We see that before He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, He was God—enjoying the glory and fellowship of the Father and the Spirit as God. He existed eternally in heaven as one of the members of the Divine Being of God.

We see also that He made a number of appearances on earth in human form even though He had not yet been born. These are known as "theophanies" and were events designed to strengthen believers and equip them in special ways to do God's work on earth.

We see also how He was SENT on a mission from heaven to be the Saviour of the world—the One to whom people can turn in order to find their way back to a relationship with God. And we see that the reason He came to this earth as a human being was, as the Apostle John says: "*to destroy the works of the devil*"—the fallen angel that we now know as Satan (1 John 3:8). These works of the devil which the Lord Jesus came to destroy are the bringing of the Lie into the world, spiritual darkness, sin (the inbuilt inclination to break God's Law) and death in all its forms.

He also came—ultimately—to judge the world and create a new universe.

Today, I want to ask the question: "*What does Jesus do in everyone's lives*

(whether they know it or not)?" And in order to pursue the answer to that question, I want to focus especially on a couple of verses in our reading, Luke 2:34, 35. Please look at them in your Bibles.

"Behold, this Child is destined . . ."

That Child lay in a manger (from the French word *manger*, to eat). But that Baby in that animal feeding trough had a destiny—a destiny beyond the wildest imaginings of any of the praising angels, the shepherds, or even, at the time, His own mother.

"Behold, this Child is destined . . ."

Destined for what?

The announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ—although an occasion of "*tidings of great joy*" (Luke 2:10)—has another darker, deeper side to it. The Coming of Christ into space and time—conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a Virgin, God manifested in the flesh—was a perfect demonstration of divine power. The Greek word for such power is *dunamis*, from where we get our word *dynamite*. The coming of God as the babe, Jesus Christ, was DYNAMITE! Guaranteed to bring havoc in the lives of demons and turn the world of men and women upside down!

The truth is that regardless of whether or not people acknowledge the reality of the Son of God—regardless of whether or not they love Him or have any relationship with Him—whatever their view of Christianity, even if they claim indifference, **the destiny of this little Child has a mighty impact on their lives, whether they know it or not.**

How? In what ways?

You see, my friends, it is impossible to be impartial about the story of Christ. As we have said many times before, there can be no neutrality in this. Once you have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, your life can never be the same again. Never. Even

if you think that you can ignore it . . . you cannot! Once you have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, your life is irrevocably changed. For in the hearing of the Gospel, Jesus Christ has an impact on people's lives which they cannot fully comprehend at the time.

What, therefore, can we learn from our text, Luke 2:34, 35? The first thing that we learn is that

I. There Is Destined to Be a Huge Amount of Hatred Directed Against Him.

As our text says, He is destined to be "*a sign which will be spoken against,*" v. 34.

Do you not find this extremely strange? God comes into the world in human form in order to draw people back to God and stir them up to dedicate their lives to Him and to the qualities of love and mercy . . . and yet He is hated beyond measure. Extraordinary! Why should that be?

Literally, the Greek words here say that this little child Jesus was destined to be "*a signal of contradiction.*" His very **presence** in the world would create controversy. Jesus Himself predicted this when He said:

"I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Luke 12:49-53).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a great divider. Truth divides the world but unites the church (I speak here of the true church, the Body of Christ). That is the essence of the doctrine of Christ. So this Child in the manger was destined to be a signal of contradiction—one who would be spoken against.

The fact that this was prophesied so explicitly must mean that it was not referring merely to gossip or the kind of defamation which you or I come up against. It was to be far more poignant and poisonous than that.

Firstly, He was spoken against personally: He was accused of being a glutton, a drunkard (Matt. 11:19), insane (Mark 3:21) and demon-possessed (John 8:52). He was blasphemed against (Mark 14:64). He—as the sinless Son of God—was spat upon and judged by the religious and political authorities to be a troublemaker and a lawbreaker. He was reviled beyond measure. He was "*despised and rejected by men*" (Isa. 53:3).

Secondly, he was spoken against indirectly: At Antioch, "*when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul*" (Acts 13:45). Paul had only been speaking about Christ. At Ephesus, Paul "*went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But . . . some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude*" (Acts 19:8, 9). When they spoke evil of "the Way," they were speaking evil of Christ, for it would not be the Way without Him. As Matthew Henry puts it: "*The Christians are here said to be those of the way . . . Perhaps the Christians sometimes called themselves so, from Christ the Way.*" If Christians are "the Way," it is only because Jesus Christ is "*the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6) and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

"*This Child is destined for a sign which will be spoken against.*" And so it was. "*For concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere*" (Acts 28:22). Yes, the Lord Jesus was spoken against indirectly everywhere—for all attacks on the true church are attacks on its Founder. And so it is to this day.

"*This Child is destined for a sign which will be spoken against.*" What a profound

prophecy was spoken by Simeon when he said this to Mary. During the past 2000 years it has hardly decreased one iota. On this day five years ago, a huge front-page headline appeared in one of the UK's quality national newspapers which read: "*It Never Happened!*" Above this headline was a portrait of the manger scene at the birth of Christ. The very existence of all this is in itself a sign.

There are many ways of speaking against Him. Disregarding His laws is one way. Not to obey Him in the call of the Gospel is another way. For He came saying, "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel.*" To disbelieve the Gospel is to disobey the command of Christ (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17).

But let us here spare a thought for Mary His mother in all this hatred directed towards her son.

One very rarely hears much about Mary from pulpits in what are known as Protestant Churches. No doubt the reason for this is because of the humanly-devised things which are believed about her in Roman Catholicism. For example, she is said to reign with Christ at the right hand of God in heaven. This is why, in Roman Catholic belief, she is called the "Queen of Heaven." Then there is what they call the "Immaculate Conception," a teaching devised in Rome in 1854, which officially declared Mary to be free from original sin, in spite of the fact that she refers to God as her "*Saviour*" (Luke 1:47). Yes, too much is made of Mary in many quarters of the visible church. Indeed, she is virtually worshiped as a goddess, while the Pope has said that people should pray to her.

But let us just leave aside all the dross and superstitions about Mary and look at a little something that is revealed about her here in our focus text.

Bear in mind that these two verses (Luke 2:34, 35) were spoken directly in prophecy to Mary about her Son. Anyone reading these words who is a mother will surely be able to identify with this. What if God revealed to you that your child was

going to be such a controversial character who would be spoken against viciously and even fatally? And what about this final sentence: "*A sword will pierce through your own soul also.*" What does this mean?

What was the destiny of Jesus Christ? Why was He born? **He was born in order that He should . . . DIE!** And the destiny of Mary, His mother, was to be a grieving mother. And why the word "*also*" is used in our focus text. Not only would the Lord Jesus be pierced in His body and soul on the Cross, but His mother too would be pierced by the sword of grief. Most children outlive their parents; but not this One. Just imagine, for a moment, what it must have been like to be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about this carefully.

First, you are told that you are going to become pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that this Child will be the long awaited Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Then He is born. You watch Him grow. One day, when He is 12, you lose Him on the way home from Jerusalem. When you go back there, you search for three days and then find Him sitting among the great teachers in the Temple where He is debating with them—at twelve years old! You have all the normal feelings a mother has towards her child; but yet you know that He is something extraordinarily, agonizingly, special. And all along, you have treasured up in your heart that prophecy of Simeon, that He will be badly received by the world and that because of Him your own soul will be pierced also. Not until He is about 30 years old does His earthly ministry begin; and during that three years of His ministry you realize that He is being increasingly persecuted and that there are even death threats on His life. One day, when you are trying to see Him, He totally baffles you by saying that those who follow Him are His real family, rather than His earthly mother and brothers (Matt. 12:46-50). Then one day, word is brought to you that He has been arrested and taken into custody. You hear the crowds all around you

crying out for your own son's crucifixion. Then you realize that the sentence of death is upon Him. You see Him carrying His own cross to the Place of the Skull outside the city of Jerusalem. You realize that He has been beaten to pulp by the Roman garrison. You see the nails being hammered into His hands and feet, and you watch helplessly as He is raised up on the Cross. A mass of confusion runs through your whole being, as your intense feelings of motherhood are mingled with the Scriptures which you know only too well. He looks down at you out of His hideously battered face on the Cross and shows you your substitute son, saying: "Woman, behold your son"—and to the disciple, John, standing nearby, He says, "Behold your mother" (John 19:26, 27). How that Scripture must have spoken to her then, which says: "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." At least she had been well prepared for it. But not all was doom and gloom. For later she would learn that her Son had risen from the dead, and we discover her after that in the Upper Room with the disciples who brought news of His Ascension to heaven (Acts 1:11-14).

His mother's soul was pierced also because her son was a "sign" which was spoken against.

So, first, we see that there is destined to be a huge amount of hatred directed against Him. He impacts the world, whether the world acknowledges this or not.

The second thing that we learn from our text, Luke 2:34, 35, is that

II. This Child Is Destined to Reveal the Inner Thoughts of Human Hearts.

V. 35, ". . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

The wonderful fact is that an encounter with Jesus Christ will bring the Truth into the open—most of all the true state of a person's heart. There can be no neutrality in this. People will be shown for who and what they are when they come into contact with Christ and His Gospel.

When the words of Christ come to your

ears what is your response? There is no more dynamic searcher of hearts than He: ". . . all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (Rev. 2:23). When His light shines on you in the light of the Gospel, all will be revealed about you. For "everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (Eph. 5:13, 14).

This searching out of human hearts and minds is not only the case with the Incarnate Word of God, but it is also the case with the written Word of Christ, the Bible. "Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29). As He puts it elsewhere:

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:12, 13).

Once a person begins to tell people about the Truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and about the new spiritual kingdom He has come to build, it is **guaranteed** to cause an enormous stir. Those who are false Christians, who are *secretly* opposed to the truth about Christ, will all, sooner or later, be exposed in the light of Christ and His Word. And all those who are *openly* opposed to Christ and who refuse to have anything to do with His offer of eternal life—all these, by their own actions, will exclude themselves from His kingdom. The Living Word shows us for who and what we are.

This Child in the manger is destined to reveal the thoughts of many hearts—if not in this life, then at the Day of Judgment, when all things will be revealed, with fire. The true believer is always willing to have his or her heart scrutinized by Christ:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa. 139:23, 24). He loves the fact that the destiny of that Child was to reveal the thoughts of hearts and minds.

What is **your** response when you hear the words of Christ?

What is **your** response when you hear Pontius Pilate crying out: *“What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?”* (Matt. 27:22). There was no neutrality then. And neither is there any now. Neither will there be at any time in the future.

So where do you stand?

The third thing that we learn from our text, Luke 2:34, 35, is that

III. Our Eternal Standing Before God Is Determined by Our Earthly Response to Christ.

V. 34, *“This Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel”*—and not merely in Israel but across the whole world.

That is an amazing thing to say about a six-week-old baby. What a destiny! But what does it mean? How does Jesus Christ bring about the “fall and rising” of people? There is a teaching which runs right through the Bible about Jesus being “a stone.” He is known as both the Cornerstone (or foundation stone) and the Capstone (or topstone) of a building. In the Old Testament it refers to YAHWEH; but in the New Testament these texts are applied by the writers as being prophecies referring to Jesus. But the Lord Jesus is not just any old stone. He is the stone which the builders (unbelieving Israel) rejected and a stone over which people stumble. The first occurrence of this is in a prophecy in Psalm 118:22, 23: *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”*

This prophecy is then quoted by the apostle in a gospel sermon about Christ in

Acts 4:10-12: *“Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

Again in 1 Peter 2:4-8, where these Old Testament Scriptures about Christ as the Stone are pulled together to great effect, we read about the importance of “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, *‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’* Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, *‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone’* and *‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’*”

But by far the most far-reaching of all these passages about Christ as the stumbling-stone occurs in Matthew 21:42-44. What is interesting about this passage is that this is virtually a parallel text to our focus text in Luke 2:34. It reads like this:

“Jesus said to them, have you never read in the Scriptures: *‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, And it is marvellous in our eyes’?* Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (Matt. 21:42-44).

Only two things can happen when you have an encounter with the Stone which is Jesus Christ: *“Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”* You will be broken or ground to powder. Those are the choices. There is no in-between pathway. This is the same as that *“falling and rising”* mentioned

in Luke 2:34. Allow me to explain.

If you fall on this stone, you will be broken. What does that mean? It refers to the humbling to repentance and the brokenness which is radically involved in any true conversion to Christianity. When you have a genuine encounter with Christ, you will be broken. As David says in his great conversion psalm: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise”* (Psa. 51:17). If you have not had your spirit broken by Christ then you have never been a Christian. That is what it means to fall on the stone (which symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ) and then be broken to pieces. Such “brokenness” is necessary if one wants to come to Christ.

But the Lord Jesus also says here that the one on whom the Stone (Christ) falls will be crushed. The stark fact is that if you are not broken to pieces when you stumble across this Stone—if you go through your whole life having never been broken by it—if you willfully reject the truth about Christ and regard yourself as self-sufficient, then it will surely fall on you, and just as surely grind you to powder. Literally, **that Stone will pulverize you.**

Now THAT is the reality of this babe in the manger: *“Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many . . .”* Whoever is broken when they fall on this Stone will rise. But failing that, on whomever this Stone falls, it crushes him to death.

You see, my friends, there is a sequel to the birth of this little Babe. In fact, there is a whole sequence of events which is not yet finished. That sequence of events is the Birth, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the five aspects of the life of Christ and the destiny of this planet and its population. But that last element is not yet fulfilled. The whole of human history is now poised, waiting for that final curtain to be raised. Let us take a Scripture to explain this. In Hebrews 9:27, 28 we read: *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so*

Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” Here we read that Christ was sacrificed *“once to bear the sins of many.”* How?

“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5, 6).

The first time that Christ came, it was on account of our sin. He came to be our substitute on the Cross, if we will believe. Then we read that *“To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”* The Second Coming of Christ is not to save us from our sins. We had that chance after His first coming. When He comes again, it will be to save those who have believed and to bring in the Day of Judgment. For *“it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”* When He comes again, He will not come as *“gentle Jesus meek and mild,”* but He will come as Judge of all the earth—as the One who *“treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God”* (Rev. 19:15).

Once you have been told about the Christian Gospel—the glad tidings which are involved in the coming of the Christ—you can never be the same again. NEVER! NEVER!

So now you know the truth. You have heard it. But how will you respond to all this? How has this knowledge of who Jesus Christ really is affected your heart? Truth, in whatever form, always has the same twofold effect, wherever it burns. As John Gill put it in his exposition of 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16: *“It is the same fire which melts the wax as hardens the clay.”* It will either humble you, or harden you. This is why we say that it is impossible to have a neutral attitude towards Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the

Inescapable One—sooner or later everyone must take up a position in regard to Him and must choose to be for or against Him. There can be no neutrality.

One day, we will all face Him when He comes again to judge the earth. That time may not be long away.

Here in Luke 2:34, 35 we see clearly the fact that the “falling” means coming under Divine judgment as a result of not believing the Gospel. While the “rising” means being broken or humbled by Christ. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He spoke about the fact that those who are first humbled will be exalted or raised up (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14b).

Conclusion

Our purpose in this brief meditation has been to put the Birth of Christ into its true perspective. For the Manger points directly to the Cross. He was born in that Manger to fulfil one purpose, and one purpose only: To take the punishment for our sins on that Cross and to die and be resurrected, then to ascend into heaven, where He will remain “*until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:21). He was born to die. **The Manger points directly to the Cross.**

So, in answer to the question: “*What does Jesus do in everyone’s lives (whether they know it or not)?*” what is the answer? The answer is that His entrance into your life determines your eternal situation. This you must believe and understand. He was “*destined for the fall and rising of many.*” He was a Child of Destiny—THE Child of Destiny. He was born in order that He should die. This was His destiny—and He knew it: “*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’*” (John 12:27). Of course not! That is something that He could and would never say! As He answered His own question: “*But for this purpose I came to this hour.*” That was His destiny . . . and He followed it through—**for us.**

“*For God did not send His Son into the*

world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:17, 18).

Those are the Lord Jesus’ own words. How can we now refuse to believe them? ■

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CHRISTMAS CAROL KAUFFMAN . . . cont’d.

Ten months later she began dating Nelson Kauffman. On June 10, 1929 they were united in marriage. God blessed them with four children: two boys and two girls. The furnishings in their home were meager and simple but they were completely happy in the Lord!

The Kauffmans lived a while in Kansas but Nelson was eventually called by the Mennonite Board of Missions to plant a church in Hannibal, Missouri. They were in their early 30s at the time. Nelson pastored there for over twenty years.

It was during this time in her life that Christmas Carol Kauffman did most of the writing for which she is so well-known. How many readers of this article can remember reading such wonderful books with titles such as *Lucy Winchester*, *Not Regina*, *Hidden Rainbow*, and *Little Pete and Other Stories*, just to name a few?

Nelson was then called to become the Secretary of the Board of Missions and Charities so the Kauffmans moved back to Elkhart.

In her own words Mrs. Kauffman expressed that she believed God had blessed her greatly and that she was unworthy of such mercies. She felt God had given her a second chance—a chance to give God first place in her life—and we, through her books, have reaped the benefits of her choice.

Christmas Carol Kauffman went home to be with her Saviour January 30, 1969. She was buried in her hometown of Elkhart. —Gail L. Emerson

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

My Family Is Better Than Yours

Partly because Anabaptists are a distinctive cultural entity, we tend to lean toward the pharisaical and believe that our movement is the purest of the pure. However, as those who revel in genealogies almost surely find out, there is at least one horse thief (or worse) in all family lines. We need to remove our rosy-tinted glasses and recognize that among the historic Anabaptists lie many errant deviations. To accept a deviation from Holy Scripture and integrate it into Anabaptist theology is error of the worst kind. This is exactly what is being done on both the extreme liberal *and* the extreme conservative sides of the Anabaptist movement today.

Harold S. Bender, writing in the *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, indicates that the Anabaptists formed a radical but Biblical branch of the Reformation. He further states that Anabaptism “conceived of itself as carrying through in a more complete and consistent fashion the original goals of the Reformation which had been abandoned by Luther and Zwingli; namely the restoration of original, unadulterated New Testament Christianity. The distinctive Anabaptist tenets were: a voluntary church of believers only, with baptism of adults on confession of faith and commitment to discipleship; separation of church and state; full liberty of conscience; holiness of life in full obedience to Christ; nonconformity to the

world; a love-ethic including nonresistance and total reflection of warfare and the use of force; a brotherhood type of church with mutual aid; non-swearing of oaths; literal obedience to the Sermon on the Mount and the other teachings of Jesus; and simplicity of life and dress. The doctrines of the historic early Christian creeds, as well as the Protestant doctrines of justification by faith, the sole authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers, were fully held, though not theologically developed. The Anabaptists emphasized an existential more than a theological Christianity. Their major break with Protestantism was on the central concept of the gathered church rather than the folk-church, and the nature of Christianity as discipleship or transformation of life rather than primarily as the enjoyment of forgiveness and salvation as status. Their rejection of war and insistence on religious liberty in an age when even the church (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) used war and force as an instrument of promotion and protection of faith is remarkable.”

Let us not get so carried away with our Anabaptism that we end up putting words on the lips of the Biblically faithful Anabaptists which they did not in fact speak. Bender’s representation would seem to be accurate and fair. To major on the varied deviations within the movement and call that “Anabaptism” would be folly. ■

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

DECEMBER 5, 2004

Abram: Called to Follow in Faith

Genesis 11:27-12:9

The overall theme for this quarter is “Called to Be God’s People.” The focus is on God’s call of various individuals to specific roles in His great plan of redemption. Our study begins with the call of Abram who was to become the father of the Jewish nation through which Jesus, the Messiah, would come.

God’s call of Abram produced a response of faith. Called to leave his homeland for an undisclosed destination, Abram “obeyed; and went out, not knowing whither he went.” That act of faith, and subsequent faith-actions, earned him the title, “Father of the faithful” (Gal. 3:7).

The genealogical record with which our text begins (read also verses 10-26), establishes Abram in a family and as an individual, a person of flesh and blood and emotions. He is more than a name, he is a person with whom we can relate in the struggles of life. It is also important to note that Abram was from the lineage of Shem, Noah’s righteous son.

The first part of our text identifies Abram and his circumstances (vv. 27-30). We then note the beginning of Abram’s journey, from the idolatrous city of Ur to Haran in the land of Canaan. After Terah’s death, Abram assumed leadership of the family and continued to answer God’s call to journey.

Note that as Abram acted on God’s call,

God pronounced a blessing upon him and his posterity. God promised that He would make of Abram a great nation—and remember, this was to a man whose wife was barren (11:30). God also promised Abram status and respect and that through him “all families of the earth would be blessed,” thus foreshadowing the coming of Messiah through his lineage. God elevated Abram to a status few men have enjoyed.

The latter part of our text finds Abram on the move. Notice in 12:1 the stipulations God had placed on Abram’s move: leave his home country, his kinfolk, and even his father’s household. To make of him what He designed, God wanted Abram to separate himself totally from past associations, relationships, and environments. For Abram it was not only a huge step of faith, it was also total separation from all that was familiar. But God had a purpose. And Abram obeyed.

Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. As he entered the land of Canaan, which his descendants would later possess, God made a promise (v. 7) and Abram responded in worship. Abram moved on, pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, and again erected an altar and worshiped God. In the last verse of our text we find Abram again on the move, heading south into the Negev. Abram was a sojourner, he had no permanent dwelling. (Read Hebrews 11:8-12.) But he moved in obedience to God’s command and always with faith in God’s overall plan. His faith and obedience serve as examples for Christians in our day.

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For thought and discussion

1. Why was it so important to establish Abram's genealogical record in light of his becoming the progenitor of the Hebrew nation?
2. God's children are still called to go out today, to the foreign mission field, the inner city, or some other special place of service. What can we learn from Abram's call and response in this regard?
3. What all was involved in God's promised blessing to Abram?
4. What are some things we may need to leave behind in order to faithfully answer God's call?
5. How ready are we to move at God's command? Abram provides an example for us in his ready obedience.
6. It is significant that wherever Abram settled, however briefly, he erected an altar. That should be a goal for Christians today who move from place to place.

DECEMBER 12, 2004

David: A Man After God's Heart

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Saul had not lived up to God's expectations and He was looking for another person, a person of integrity, to replace Saul as king over Israel. God had picked out His man, "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). Not only would David lead the nation of Israel in its glory years; he was also destined to become an ancestor of Jesus, the Messiah.

For background to today's lesson, read Chapters 8-16 of 1 Samuel. Note especially 15:24-35. Be sure to understand the reasons for God's rejection of Saul and choice of David.

As our lesson opens we find God telling Samuel to quit mourning over Saul and get on with anointing another to take his place. God gave Samuel specific directions: go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse's

sons. Samuel was understandably afraid to go. Suppose Saul found out? Samuel's life would be in danger. So God provided an excuse. Samuel was to go prepared to offer a sacrifice and call Jesse and his sons and the elders of the town to the feast. There he was to anoint him whom God would identify as His chosen one.

God was careful to preserve the secrecy of Samuel's mission. He didn't identify which son beforehand but told Samuel to anoint the one He would name. Before the feast Samuel had Jesse present his sons. Jesse, in true fatherly form, began with his eldest son. When Samuel set eyes on Eliab he said to himself, "surely this is the Lord's anointed." Eliab was a tall, handsome man, a perfect choice for a king. But God said no. He gave Samuel a lesson in choosing leaders—the heart is more important than the physique.

In successive order Samuel reviewed, and God turned down, seven of Jesse's sons. Samuel was understandably perplexed, and inquired if these were all of Jesse's sons. Almost as an afterthought Jesse responded, "No, there's one more, the youngest, he's watching the sheep."

"Call him," Samuel said. The feast would wait.

When David appeared God instructed Samuel, "Anoint him. This is the one I have chosen." David was also a handsome young man, an outdoorsman of strength and skills, qualities which would serve him well in later years as he fled from Saul and still later when he led Israel's armies to battle.

So Samuel anointed David in the presence of his brothers and the elders of Bethlehem. Interestingly, there was no apparent indication of the purpose of this anointing. Only later would it become clear that this anointing was for the kingship following Saul's death.

This anointing brought upon David the blessing of God and the additional anointing of God's Spirit. God had His man—though it would be yet 20 years till David achieved his full status in God's plan as

king over Israel.

Samuel's work was done. He went home to Ramah where he passed his final days. (See 1 Samuel 25:1.)

For thought and discussion

1. How do we discern when it is time to move on from a difficult situation such as Samuel faced?
2. God still asks His servants to do difficult things. What can we learn from today's lesson that will give courage in difficult situations?
3. How does God's lesson to Samuel aid us in choosing leaders today?
4. What do we learn from David's patience as he waited the fulfillment of God's plan for his life?
5. David's brothers were rejected and maybe suffered a bit of jealousy (see 1 Sam. 17:28) over the choice of David, their younger brother. How should we handle rejection and what lessons can we learn from such experiences?

DECEMBER 19, 2004

Joseph: A Man of Integrity

Matthew 1:17-25

It is interesting to note that the third person in our quarter's study of people God called to special roles in His plan of redemption, is in direct lineage of the first two, Abram and David. (Note Matthew 1:1 and 17.) Joseph's role was to be the earthly parent of Jesus, the Messiah, lending legitimacy to both Mary and her baby. His role was not an easy one, but one he filled with grace and humility.

Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience so it was important he identify the lineage of the Messiah he proclaimed. The Jews would have been knowledgeable of the fact that Messiah would come through Abraham's line and be a direct descendant of David (see 1:1). Matthew establishes those facts before presenting the son of

Joseph and Mary as Jesus, the Christ.

Joseph was in a difficult spot. Mary, his betrothed, was with child. From all appearances she had been unfaithful. Two obvious choices were open to Joseph: make a public spectacle of Mary, or divorce her quietly. Being a just man, he was minded to do the latter. But as Joseph pondered his next move, he was visited in a dream by an angel who explained the situation to him and presented a third option, encouraging him to take Mary as his wife, that this was all from the Lord. So he did. And thus saved Mary from disgrace and provided a haven for her son.

Did Joseph believe the angel's story regarding the conception of the child Mary was carrying? Undoubtedly Mary's later explanation of the angel's visit to her helped him to grasp more fully the reality of the situation. But don't assume it was easy for Joseph. However, he was a righteous man, a man of faith and integrity—else he would not have been chosen for the role.

Joseph was informed by the angel that what was happening was in fulfillment of God's plan to provide a Saviour for mankind (v. 21). The angel even specified the gender and name of the unborn child—Jesus, which means Saviour. This child of Mary's was the long awaited Messiah. Joseph was certainly aware of the prophecy regarding Messiah and was no doubt among those who anticipated His coming. The fact that he was to be a participant in that event, however, was sobering and likely he approached it with some trepidation.

Note Matthew's comment to his readers, in verses 22 and 23, assuring them that what he was recounting was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy some 700 years prior. Though long in coming, God was faithful to His promise. He would tabernacle with man and, in and through that relationship, provide a way for sinful man to be reconciled to a holy God. A new day was dawning for Israel, in fact, for the whole world.

Joseph, the just, was also Joseph the obedient. He acted on the angel's counsel and took Mary as his wife. To preserve the sanctity of the relationship, Joseph and Mary lived in celibacy until after Jesus was born.

For thought and discussion

1. Why does God ask His children to do difficult things? Maybe you would want to discuss this in your class.
2. Explore the marriage contracts under which Joseph and Mary lived. It will help you to better understand their dilemma.
3. Think about the faith Joseph needed to exercise in this situation. Would your faith have stood the test?
4. How does the past fulfillment of prophecy provide a stimulus to our faith today?
5. Explore the implications of "God with us."
6. Reflect on how through our obedience to God—and only through obedience—we can fill a vital role in His kingdom.

DECEMBER 26, 2004

Simeon and Anna: Anticipation Fulfilled

Luke 2:22-38

Today's lesson highlights two individuals who were living in anticipation of the coming Messiah. Simeon and Anna, both devout servants of God, were privileged to see Baby Jesus whom they immediately recognized as the long awaited Messiah. For both, this experience was the fulfillment of a life-long anticipation. Simeon specifically had God's promise that he would not die before he had seen Messiah.

The setting for their experience was when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple to present him to the Lord in fulfillment of the Law. Joseph and Mary, devout persons as they were, were careful

to fulfill the proscriptions of the Mosaic Law. The Law stated that all firstborn males be dedicated to the Lord. (See Exodus 13:2 and Numbers 3:13.) Mary also offered a sacrifice for her purification. (See Leviticus 12.)

Enter Simeon. All we know about Simeon is recorded in these 11 verses—but they tell us a lot. Simeon was a godly man, devout in his practice of religion, led by God's Holy Spirit, and looking for the Lord's promised Deliverer. His devotion and expectation were so intense that God honored him by promising he would "not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ."

Now here He was. Simeon, led by the Spirit to the temple and filled by the Spirit to prophesy, held the child in his arms and launched into a proclamation of the person and work of this special child. He recognized the scope of Jesus' purpose—a light to the Gentiles, the glory of Israel. (See Isaiah 49:2.) He also recognized that He would experience a mixed reception—some would welcome and embrace Him, some would reject and despise Him. (See 1 Peter 2:7, 8.) He would be a divisive person.

Joseph and Mary pondered Simeon's words. What child was this for whom they were responsible? What did they understand about His mission? Simeon certainly didn't ease their minds with his pronouncement that "a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." What did it all mean? Likely Simeon's blessing didn't totally set their minds at ease. Only much later would Mary understand what it all meant.

In the midst of all this, Anna comes on the scene. Anna was a holy woman, a woman of great age and deep piety and long experience. She had been widowed now for a number of years, and spent her time and energies in prayer and fasting in the temple. She also had been living in anticipation of the coming Redeemer and now it was her privilege also to behold Him.

Anna's response was first of all to give

thanks for His gift of a Saviour. Her second response paralleled that of the shepherds earlier in the chapter. She shared the good news with others who were also anticipating His coming. And therein lies a lesson for us. Anticipation fulfilled cannot be contained. It must be shared.

For thought and discussion

1. Think about hope, anticipation, fulfillment. How can the lesson of Simeon and Anna inspire us in patient waiting for Messiah's second coming?
2. There are many indications as to why

- Joseph and Mary were chosen by God to be Jesus' earthly parents. Explore them.
3. Why do some people turn out like Simeon and Anna, devout, saintly, fully dedicated, and some like, well, like the rest of us? This could make for some profitable class discussion.
 4. How much knowledge did Joseph and Mary have concerning their child? (See verse 33.)
 5. What can we do to develop commitment and devotion among our members today as witnessed in the lives of Simeon and Anna? ■

Newslines . . .

by Rebecca Good

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

Saudi Arabia, Violator of Religious Freedom

The U.S. State Department has added Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, and Eritrea to its list of "countries of particular concern." This is the first time that Saudi Arabia is on the list. Freedom House's Nina Shea comments, "For decades, the government of Saudi Arabia has been responsible for the proliferation worldwide of an extreme Wahhabi interpretation of Islam that fosters virulent hatred, alienation, and even violence toward Christians, Jews, and other religious believers, including moderate Muslims." Other countries on the list are Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan.

—from *Crosswalk.com*

The Precious Children

Researchers project that the number of orphans worldwide will reach 106 million by 2010—a number equal to more than one-third the population of the United States.

—from *Charisma News Service* as seen on *Crosswalk.com*

Women and the Industrial Revolution

"After the Industrial Revolution, the home eventually ceased being the locus of production and became a locus of consumption—which meant that women at home were gradually reduced from producers to consumers."

—from *Total Truth* by Nancy Pearcey

Christian Afghans Face Brutality and Death

Five Afghan men who had converted to Christianity have reportedly been killed by Taliban adherents in a series of incidents this summer.

The first incident occurred in broad daylight at a market where the Christian man was buying fruits and vegetables. A Taliban spokesman told the Reuters news agency, "A group of Taliban dragged out Mullah Assad Ullah and slit his throat with a knife because he was propagating Christianity." Speaking of foreign aid agencies, the spokesman said, "We warn them that they face the same destiny as Assad Ullah if they continue to seduce people." The Taliban have killed at least 33 foreign aid workers in the past 18 months.

In connection with that first tragedy, an Afghan convert to Christianity who visited Assad Ullah's family was killed in early August at the same marketplace.

Three other Afghan Christian men were stabbed or beaten to death in separate incidents during July. Their attackers said they had been studying the Bible, praying in the name of Jesus, or associating with other known Afghan converts to Christianity.

Afghanistan's new provisional constitution declares Islam the religion of the state. All laws must conform to the tenets of Islamic law. Afghan citizens have no guarantee of religious freedom.

—from *Compass Direct* as seen in *Crosswalk.com*

Called to Serve

A man from the remote Barai tribe in Papua New Guinea tells of when he learned about the freedom we can experience through Jesus. He was working at a Bible-translating ministry when a plumbing problem developed. All the workers, both men and women, and even the director and business manager, joined in to clean up the dirty mess. In the Barai culture, toilet cleaning is considered to be a lowly task, beneath men and reserved for women. It is thought that a man who cleans toilets cannot be blessed by

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the spirits of his dead relatives. When the Barai man saw fellow Christians so willingly serve one another, he realized "that we had freedom in Jesus to serve Him."

—from *Crosswalk.com*

Life, Yes, But Now What?

Many in-vitro fertilization clinics regard frozen embryos as living, yet only 16 percent of clinics are unwilling to destroy unwanted embryos. These leftover embryos are created by couples who do not want as many children as the number of embryos they have created. Some embryos will be adopted by other couples, some used for research, others disposed of. Some clinics allow the unwanted embryos to grow until they stop developing; other clinics perform a ceremony, including a prayer when the embryos are disposed of. This appears to be tacit acknowledgment by the clinic workers of both the existence of life and the loss of life. People who work with in-vitro fertilization know that simply placing the embryo into a woman's womb allows it to grow into a fully recognizable person. There are an estimated 400,000 human embryos in frozen storage in the U.S. alone.

Carrie Gordon Earll, of Focus on the Family, says that the responsibility lies on the shoulders of the parents and clinics who created all these embryos. Couples using in-vitro fertilization should not create more embryos than they plan to bring full term.

—from *Family News in Focus*

Fast Food or Fat Food?

Research done by *The Public Interest* found that two-thirds of America's weight problem can be blamed on the multiplication of fast-food and full-service restaurants. But why are Americans eating out more? More women are participating in the labor force. "When Mom started working and stopped cooking, the family ate out, with 'dire' health consequences."

—from *THE WEEK*

SWORD AND TRUMPET

Veils and I.D. Cards in Italy

In Italy, a Roman Catholic nun was not allowed to wear her veil in an identity card photograph. The bishop pleaded for her, but officials said they had also turned away a Muslim woman who desired to be photographed with a veil and the government had to be consistent. Facial features must be fully visible on government identity cards in Italy. Religious groups are petitioning the government to allow head coverings that do not hide the eyes, nose, or mouth.

—from *THE WEEK*

How Much Again?

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the federal deficit will reach \$422 billion this year.

—from *THE WEEK*

North and South

During 2003, 1,285 North Koreans defected to South Korea. It is estimated that 300,000 North Korean refugees are now hiding in China. These refugees remain in serious danger, as China pays informants to turn in runaways from its ally, North Korea. China forces around 5,000 North Koreans back to China every month.

Conditions within North Korea are terrible. Ten percent of North Korea's population (2.2 million people) have reportedly died of starvation, though the government greatly reduces the number. The economy is reeling. Medical supplies are unavailable to many; *The Voice of the Martyrs* reported that children have undergone surgery "with no scalpels or antiseptic," and "drip lines attached to patients via beer bottles." Also, the North Korean government treats criminals brutally. Defectors are retained in "reform institutions" for at least seven years. The U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea states that more than 150,000 North Koreans who have attempted to flee the country are incarcerated in such "Enlightenment Centers."

Across the three-mile wide demilitarized

zone, the 1 million land mines, the razor wire, and the 2 million troops on either side, conditions in South Korea are radically different. The gross domestic product of South Korea is one of the world's top 15. A South Korean government agency claims that South Korea throws out enough food to feed North Koreans every day. Yoido Full Gospel in Seoul, with 800,000 members, is the largest church the world has ever seen. Yoido has planted 680 branch congregations. Presbyterians boast of 7 million members in South Korea. Two of the largest congregations attract 35,000 and 20,000 on Sunday mornings. South Korea's Church of the Nazarene is growing at an annual rate of 8 percent; 20,000 members minister in 259 congregations, a university, a seminary, and numerous orphanages.

Churches in South Korea try to minister to North Koreans discreetly, quietly reaching out to defectors in the South. However, they do not describe their ministry to North Korean runaways in print, for fear that they may no longer be able to send help or visit in the North.

—from *Christianity Today*

The Decline and Fall of America?

On "The Back Page" of *Christianity Today*, October 2004, Chuck Colson writes about how the moral corruption of America incites Muslims to hate us. "When we tolerate trash on television, permit pornography to invade our homes via the internet, and allow babies to be killed at the point of birth, we are inflaming radical Islam." These daily insults to Allah, along with the abuse of Muslim men by American women in the Abu Ghraib prison, and same-sex couples being "married" in numerous U.S. towns, make freedom abhorrent to them— "a blot on Allah's creation." These radical Islamists view themselves "as holy warriors fighting a holy war against decadence." If America does not handle freedom wisely, our enemies may "use our depravity to destroy us."

—from *Christianity Today*

How to Get the Classical Education You Never Had

by Susan Wise Bauer

What if your mind is hungry, but not particularly literate? “Acquaint yourself with your own ignorance,” Isaac Watts advised his readers, in his self-education treatise *Improvement of the Mind* (published in 1741). “Impress your mind with a deep and painful sense of the low and imperfect degrees of your present knowledge.” Today, as in Watts’ time, intelligent and ambitious adults feel unprepared to tackle any course of serious reading. They struggle to overcome an indifferent education that didn’t teach the basic skills needed for serious reading and writing. But Watts’ admonition is still true: No matter how incomplete your education, you can learn how to read seriously, think about your reading, and talk about what you’ve discovered.

Sustained, serious reading is at the center of the self-education project. Observation, reading, conversation, and attendance at lectures are all educational pursuits, as Isaac Watts goes on to tell us. But he concludes that reading is the most important method of self-improvement. Observation limits our learning to our immediate surroundings; conversation and attendance at lectures are valuable, but only expose us to the views of a few nearby persons. Only reading allows us to reach out beyond the restrictions of time and space, to take part in what Mortimer Adler has called the “Great Conversation” of ideas that began in ancient times and has continued unbroken to the present. Reading makes us part of this Great Conversation, no matter

where and when we pursue it.

But sustained and serious reading has always been a difficult project—even before the advent of television. Much has been written about our present move away from texts, towards an image-based, visual culture: Schools no longer teach reading and writing properly.

Only reading allows us to reach out beyond the restrictions of time and space, to take part in what Mortimer Adler has called the “Great Conversation” of ideas that began in ancient times and has continued unbroken to the present.

Television, movies, and now the Web have decreased the importance of the written word. We are moving into a post-literate age. Print culture is doomed. Alas.

I dislike these sorts of apocalyptic reflections. Television may be pernicious, but reading is no harder (nor easier) than it has ever been. “Our post-revolutionary youth,” complained Thomas Jefferson in an 1814 letter to John Adams, “are born under happier stars than you and I were. They acquire all learning in their mother’s womb, and bring it into the world ready made.

The information of books is no longer necessary; and all knowledge which is not innate, is in contempt, or neglect at least." Jefferson's moan over the stage of modern intellectual culture laments the rise of a philosophy that exalts self-expression over serious reading. Even before the advent of television, serious reading was a difficult and neglected activity.

In fact, serious reading is a discipline: like running regularly, or meditating, or taking voice lessons. Any able adult can run across the backyard, but this ability to put one foot in front of another shouldn't make him think that he can tackle a marathon without serious, time-consuming training. Yet because we can read the newspaper or *Time* or Stephen King without difficulty, we tend to think that we should be able to go directly into Homer or Henry James. And when we stumble, we take this as proof of our mental inadequacy: We'll never be able to read the Great Books.

The truth is that the study of literature requires different *skills* than reading for pleasure. The inability to tackle, unaided, a list of Great Books and stick to the project doesn't demonstrate mental inadequacy—just a lack of preparation. As Richard Foster eloquently argues in *A Celebration of Discipline*, we tend to think (erroneously) that anyone who can read ought to be able to study ideas. "To convince people that they must learn to study is the major obstacle," Foster writes. "Most people assume that because they know how to read words they know how to study." But the opposite is true.

Studying a book is an extremely complex matter, especially for the novice. As with tennis or typing, when we are first learning it seems that there are a thousand details to master and we wonder how on earth we will keep everything in mind at the same time. Once we reach proficiency, however, the mechanics become second nature, and we are able

to concentrate on the game or the material to be typed. The same is true with studying a book. Study is an exacting art involving a labyrinth of details.

Secondary schools don't typically train us to read seriously, how to *study*—their task is to produce students who are reading on the so-called "tenth-grade level," which allows readers to absorb newspapers and Stephen King with ease. A university education ought to follow up by teaching how to read seriously, but many college seniors aren't much further along than their high school counterparts. Often, they graduate with a nagging sense of their own deficiencies; as adults, they come back to the task of serious reading and discover that it has not magically become simpler. Homer is still long-winded, Plato impenetrable, Stoddard bewilderingly random. Too often, these readers give up, convinced that serious books are beyond them.

But all that's missing is training in the art of reading. If you didn't learn how to read properly in school, you can do it now. The methods of classical education are at your disposal.

The classical schoolmaster divides learning into three stages, generally known as the trivium. The first stage of education is called the *grammar stage*. Here, memorization and repetition are the primary methods of teaching. Critical thinking comes into play during the second stage of education, the *logic stage*. The final years of education focus on elegant, articulate expression of opinion in speech and writing—the *study of rhetoric*.

Francis Bacon, a 16th century philosopher, put it this way: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Bacon was suggesting that not every book is worthy of serious attention. But the three levels of understanding he describes—tasting, swallowing, and digesting—reflect his familiarity with

classical education. In the classical school, learning is a three-part process: First, taste. Gain basic knowledge of your subject. Second, swallow. Take the knowledge into your own understanding by evaluating it. Is it valid? Is it true? Why? Third, digest. Fold the subject into your own understanding. Let it change the way you think—or reject it as unworthy. Taste, swallow, digest; find out the facts, evaluate them, form your own opinion.

These are general guidelines, of course, and assume that you are able to devote a little time to disciplined reading. The mastery of grammar, writing, logic, analysis, and argumentation all depends on the single uncomplicated act of carving out a space within which they can exist. ■

—Used with permission. Adapted from *The Well-Educated Mind* by Susan Wise Bauer

"But He Was a Leper"

by Robert Heatwole

Naaman was captain of the host of the king of Syria. But he was a leper.

He was a great man with his master. But he was a leper.

Naaman was honourable. But he was a leper.

Naaman was a mighty man of valour. But he was a leper.

Naaman brought ten thousand talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. But he was a leper.

He brought a letter from his master. But he was a leper.

He came with his horses and with his chariot. But he was a leper.

Naaman was angry and went away. But he was a leper.

He thought. . . . But he was a leper.

Naaman compared the rivers at home with the muddy Jordan. But he

was a leper.

Naaman concluded that washing in clean water would cleanse him just as well as washing in dirty water. But he was a leper.

Ah, such a perfect picture of ourselves and of our race. We believe that we are rich, great, and honorable; but the eternal Sovereign perceives nothing more than leprosy and a candidate for the Jordan River.

We bring our money, gifts, and baggage, but the piercing eye of the Almighty perceives perfectly the leprous hands that bear them. All Naaman's gold could never have bought his cleansing. Had that been the case, he would never have come to Israel. In fact, one probable reason for the extreme judgment on Gehazi was the mutilating of this great type—cleansing of leprosy cannot be purchased.

We reason, think, and barter. We may even chide with God for His simple methods. We hold meetings to discuss the cleanliness of the rivers of Syria, but as surely as the Jordan flows, our leprosy remains.

The story doesn't end here. Naaman went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan River in complete obedience to divine command. And he was no longer a leper.

Oh, amazing grace! The river of God to the unbeliever is muddy and unappealing; yes, even mocked and derided by lepers. But to the man of faith who humbles himself, and surrenders to divine direction its cleansing tide not only removes the leprosy, but also regenerates the soul. ■

—Used with permission

*O the depth of the riches
both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
how unsearchable are his judgments,
and his ways past finding out!*
Romans 11:33

Holiness—Does It Matter?

<Our Message>

Holiness matters in every aspect of life.

by John A. Knight

Holiness: Does it matter? To phrase the question this way evokes a predetermined answer. We may refer to holiness as “it,” but must make a disclaimer. If holiness were a “thing,” then the answer is, “No, holiness doesn’t really matter.” Holiness could be a code of ethics we futilely strive to embrace; an incomplete formula we employ to help us make choices. Holiness could be an ethical lifestyle we produce through gradual reform, following instructions, or by imitating examples. Or holiness could be a fleeting emotional experience, which, like drugs, renders us “high” for the short term.

If we think of holiness in such ways, we invite frustration and failure to fill our spiritual journeys. On the other hand, understanding holiness as a *relationship with God in Jesus Christ* leads us to affirm that holiness matters in every aspect of life.

Holiness matters because life consists of attitudes and relationships—toward God, people, and material things. Holiness corrects our attitudes and our relationships with others. Imagine the positive changes that would occur in our personal affairs, international relations, and attitudes toward all people if we pursued holy lives.

Using Jesus’ words, John Wesley observed that Christian holiness is “loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as our self”—including our enemies.

“Holiness” describes God’s essential nature. To be holy is to be like God. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the

embodiment of holiness (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69). We are to model the holiness demonstrated in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In short, holiness is Christ-likeness.

Holiness matters because the holy God commands us to be holy (1 Peter 1:15). God intended for His holiness, which is a projection of His character, to be shared with His creatures. God issues this command. So being holy and living a holy life is not optional for Christ’s followers. Holiness is the heart and core of the Christian life.

Understanding holiness as a relationship with God in Jesus Christ leads us to affirm that holiness matters in every aspect of life.

Holiness matters because Christ prayed that we might be holy (John 17:17, 20). Jesus not only prayed for our holiness, but went to the Cross to make it real in our lives (Hebrews 13:12). The doctrine of holiness is in harmony with the purpose of Christ’s atonement. He came to restore humankind’s original relationship with God. He came to “seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, KJV). He was manifested that He might “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8, KJV), and purify the heart (John 17:17). By his life, death, and resurrection Christ has won for us the

victory over sin (1 Cor. 15:57).

Holiness matters because holiness of heart and life is necessary for the growth of the Church, and the evangelization of our world.

The Church's health is measured "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty" (Zech. 4:6). Christ's indwelling Spirit provides the love, motivation, passion, and power to grow the church. He enables the Church to invade the world for His glory (John 17:18, 21, 23).

Holiness is the only answer to the world's needs—from the nightmare of war to the shattering collapse of social structures. We will not find solutions in legislation, military might, culture, or education. Our national, social, and international problems are spiritual in nature and require a spiritual solution.

Holiness matters because individuals and society need Christian holiness. Paul admonished "Follow peace with all men, and holiness . . ." (Heb. 12:14, KJV). We long to be holy. Jesus Christ is our "moment by moment" sal-

vation. The Apostle James wrote: "That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4, KJV).

Holiness matters because holiness is necessary to get to heaven—to see God. "Blessed are the pure [the holy] in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8, KJV; see also Heb. 12:14). "Herein is our love made perfect"—that is what Christian holiness is—"that we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17, KJV).

Jim Bond beautifully stated: "Holiness is about love, relationships, and investing ourselves in others. It's the 'Jesus way,' the way God intends us to live. 'Be imitators of God . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us' (Eph. 5:1, 2)."

Such a life is not possible in human strength. It becomes reality by the purifying, indwelling, enabling Spirit of Christ, as we totally submit our wills to His. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it [make you holy]" (1 Thess. 5:24, KJV). ■

—Taken from *Holiness Today*

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code)

1. Title of publication: *The Sword and Trumpet*
2. Date of filing: October 1, 2004
3. Frequency of issue: monthly
4. Location of known office of publication: 6083 Mt. Clinton Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.
5. Location of headquarters of general business offices of publishers: same.
6. Name and address of publishers: *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.
7. Owner: *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. Board Members: Raymond P. Brunk, John J. Forry, Stanley Good, David L. Burkholder, Paul M. Emerson, Christian Good, James Hess, Linden M. Wenger, Marcus Yoder, Lee Kanagy, Norman Kolb, Luke Horst.
8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: none.
9. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months.
10. A. Total number of copies printed (net press run): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3585; single issue nearest filing date, 3615.
 - B. Paid and/or Circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales, none; 2. Mailed subscriptions: average number copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3351; single issue nearest to filing date, 3376.
 - C. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means, samples, complimentary and other free copies: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 85; single issue nearest to filing date, 100.
 - D. Total distribution: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3436; single issue nearest to filing date, 3476.
 - E. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 40; single issue nearest to filing date, 30.
 - F. Total: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months, 3585; single issue nearest to filing date, 3615.

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Paul M. Emerson, Editor

Surrendering Self

by Hans Bayer

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

—Mark 8:14-21

Some of my time in recent years has been spent looking into the entire thrust of the message of the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 8 Jesus directs our focus to a single warning saying, "Watch out." What exactly is Jesus warning His disciples—and us—about?

Jesus leads His disciples and us to face a core issue of the heart. He employs images of blindness, ("Do you have eyes but fail to see . . .?") and deafness ("and ears but fail to hear?"), as well as the metaphor of the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. Jesus singles out an element in the lives of the Pharisees, Herod, the disciples, and an element in our own lives, that must be dealt with and overcome.

Christ, who loves us, comes to us through His Word to cleanse us. Christ comes to redirect our focus in the midst of all kinds of distractions to which you and I are constantly exposed. In the midst of those distractions, He shows us that we are vulnerable to the same problems that characterized the lives of the Pharisees and Herod.

In order to get a better understanding of this passage, we need to realize that the call to discipleship is the climax of God's call to His own people. The call to discipleship is the antidote to the rebellious ways of fallen and sinful man. Here Jesus is working on His disciples, crafting them to be redesigned

according to God's original purposes.

We need to consider how God originally designed us. When God created us, He "wired" us for complete dependency upon Him. Jesus is not the only teacher, the only prophet who brings this to our attention. In Scripture we see a historical chain of God's call to His people to return to such complete dependency. Now He is also speaking through His only Son. Many times, the prophets have spoken about everyone pursuing their own ways—they are without eyes, without ears, pursuing their own course. And now the only and eternal Son speaks of this again, when He warns His disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod.

What could Herod and the Pharisees possibly have in common? Let us consider the Pharisees. Despite recent voices to the contrary, the Pharisees did have a religious disposition that was self-centered and self-driven. It is true, that not all Pharisees were superficial hypocrites; yet, as a group, they overlooked the depth of sin, the depth of alienation between man and God and believed this could be remedied by their own doing. When Jesus warns His disciples to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees, He points to the very vexing problem of a self-centered, self-driven, self-oriented religious disposition. Such a disposition can look very

pious, very good, very devoted to God's honor and yet it is squarely based on self as the determining factor.

Now the "yeast of Herod" is a little different. Herod Antipas was directly under Roman authority. He was clearly an opportunist, pursuing the exercise of power by the means available to him. Herod had

***. . . we are determined,
without Christ, to fight for
our own turf . . .***

killed John the Baptist for speaking critically of his immoral life. The "yeast of Herod" is the yeast of a more ostentatious self-determined agenda. Yet there is common ground between the Pharisees and Herod. In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, both the Pharisees and Herod sought miraculous signs that would authenticate the authority of Jesus to speak in such a challenging and critical way of their lives. By doing so, the Pharisees and Herod avoid facing their chief problem.

Neither the Pharisees nor Herod first ask if there is a problem with the disposition of their own hearts, if there is an attitude problem with which they must wrestle. In such a context the demand for a sign is merely a pretext for pursuing a self-centered agenda.

Do you see how this all works together? A fixed agenda exists and Jesus will not fit into that agenda. Jesus confronts the Pharisees and Herod, but they will not make room for the purpose and agenda of God. In essence, this is the universal challenge to the human heart as we are determined without Christ to fight for our own turf, our own independence, and our own agenda even in the religious arena. In the light of Christ's authoritative presence, the motives of the Pharisees, Herod, the disciples, and yes, the motives of our own hearts are laid bare.

Christ arises as a heart-revealer. The resistance of many Pharisees and of Herod to Christ's teaching and authority exposes

the root disposition of their hearts. As a consequence they plan to get rid of Jesus.

The yeast referred to in this passage is the attitude of unbelief. This attitude says that such an authoritative Jesus cannot be allowed to exist; the agenda is already set. Mind you, this unbelief, this self-centered security can look very pious and very religious. Many Pharisees were living lives of fasting, tithing, worship, study, and teaching God's Word. Yet the essential and fundamental disposition of their hearts was still self-determined and self-centered.

In the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoevsky presents a section called "The Grand Inquisitor" in which Dostoevsky imaginatively describes how Christ appears to the people of Seville and to an old Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who oversees the Great Inquisition. This Cardinal is the supposed guardian of the church and as Christ appears He interrupts the agenda of the church. After the Cardinal has Jesus arrested, he meets with Jesus privately at night. At one point in the Cardinal's monologue, he exclaims to Jesus, "Why have you come to disturb us?" Christ's presence interrupts the Cardinal's job of managing the people's consciences because Christ speaks for freedom and personal responsibility before God. Christ does not say one word in the presence of the Cardinal as the Cardinal continues on with his monologue. This is a fitting fictional representation of an instance where Christ does not get in a word edgewise because the agenda is already set.

Perhaps this would all be fine and good if we could now walk away from this passage having once again "bashed" the Pharisees and Herod. Yet there is one remaining problem: Christ brings this challenge to the disciples and with them, to us. He warns them and us to watch out for the type of self-centeredness and self-reliance to which they and we are vulnerable.

We are being warned of the danger of this self-determined heart because self-determined hearts develop and defend their own agenda, their own brands of life

without daily surrender to, and dependency upon, the living God. I had a little lesson in this even as I was preparing this message. I was jet-lagged and faced a long day ahead. Everything that I thought I had to do in the coming day seemed impossible to accomplish. I thought, "I can't do it!" But as I heard these words spoken within myself, I realized that coming to the end of myself was a blessing. It is at the point of need that we realize how self-reliant we have become. The grace of God brings us constantly to that limit and turns us to the Lord for His supply.

There is an antithesis between the call of Christ on our lives and autonomous self-reliance which cannot be harmonized. The two will never be married. Yet we try daily to integrate those two modes of existence to have a life that is based on our own structure, our own aspirations, and still give it a spiritual overcoating that says God is sovereign. This will never work.

In this Scripture passage the disciples are overly concerned with having enough to eat, and they do not hear Jesus' great warning to watch out for this problem of self-reliance. In the course of His entire earthly ministry Jesus sought to bring His disciples into increasing dependency upon Him. We also must take up the great battle and hear this great warning. Watch out for falling into the default mode of self-dependency. Watch out that you do not automatically try to make things fit into your own agenda.

I praise God that He has put all kinds of serious roadblocks into my life for one single purpose: to wean me of this ill-fated attempt to marry the pursuit of my own ways with the pursuit of God's ways. You see, without Christ I am a troubled Pharisee. Without Christ I am a host to the yeast of self-reliance.

Some 20 years after Jesus gives this warning, Paul warns the Galatians to watch out for the yeast of self-righteousness and self-generated godliness. Paul also warns the Corinthians to watch out for the yeast of willful immorality, which is one of the

results of a self-centered life.

Jesus calls His disciples and us to nothing less than to surrender our self-centered agenda, and to gladly let Him interrupt our lives over and over. In the end it is the glory and greatness of God that is the antidote to a self-centered agenda.

Whatever concerns you most today, whatever troubles you most, whatever is most difficult for you to handle today, that thing may be an opportunity to apply the warning of "watching out for self-reliance." With every challenge we have in our lives, we can either revert to self-reliance or surrender to God. Every difficulty, every factor in our lives can turn us one way or another. Today it is my hope that the situations in which we find ourselves would be turned into opportunities in which God does His work in our hearts and minds. This means letting go, surrendering, knowing God's Word, and having God's presence take shape in our lives and minds.

***Jesus calls His disciples
and us . . . to gladly let
Him interrupt our lives
over and over.***

Jonathan Edwards testified that the more he sought the honor of God, the more he became aware of his own ugliness and his need for God's intervention to strengthen him in his new life in Christ. This is good. It is wonderful to see our great need. The more we see our need, the more we cry out to Him to liberate us from self-centeredness and self-reliance.

Do not miss the opportunity today to watch out for the yeast of self-reliance. Embrace the difficulties of your life today; cry out to your heavenly Father and ask that He would enable you to surrender all and allow Christ to be your Lord and Saviour today. ■

—Article reprinted from the Fall 2004 issue of *Covenant* magazine, with permission from Covenant Seminary.

This Book We Call the Bible

by David L. Burkholder

The Bible—God’s Message to Man

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Bible is God’s entire message to mankind. It is a concise, handy volume. It is user-friendly, arranged by books, chapters, verses. It is clear and understandable to those who read it with a desire to know and follow God’s will. It contains a life-giving message.

A Look at the Book

The physical book, a combination of paper, ink and message bound together in a handy, portable format, is a marvel in itself. The book has been one of mankind’s most marvelous inventions. 5500 years ago in Babylon books were made of baked clay tablets. Later the Egyptians along the Nile River made books of papyrus, a reedlike plant. Later, parchment, or vellum made from animal skins, was used for written records. Still later, in A.D. 105 in China, paper was developed as the medium for writing. The invention of printing in the mid 1400s led to the eventual explosion of publication which is so evident today. Solomon was certainly correct when he said: “There is no end to the making of many books” (Eccl. 12:12).

The Message of the Book

God’s Word spoken: In ancient times God spoke directly to man. The phrase, “Thus saith the Lord” is recorded 415 times in the Old Testament. God also spoke *through* man to other men. Hebrews 1:1, 2a: “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.*”

David said, in 2 Samuel 23:1, 2— “*David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.*”

On many occasions in the past God spoke directly to man. But oral communication has its drawbacks. An oral record is easily lost, corrupted, or forgotten as it is passed from person to person and from generation to generation. A written record, by contrast, is more permanent and available and therefore more useful. It can be referred to over and over again. And it doesn’t change.

God’s Word written: To record His message to man, God’s Spirit directed God’s men to write God’s message. Second Peter 1:21, “*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved [carried along] by the Holy Ghost.*” In Exodus 34:27 God instructed Moses to write the words of the covenant as a reminder to His people: “*And the LORD said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.*” God instructed Isaiah to write His message to the rebellious children of Israel. “*Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever*” (Isa. 30:8). This verse also speaks to the permanence of the written record.

God spoke to Jeremiah: “*Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.*” The Apostle Paul wrote: “*If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 14:37). In Revelation 1:19 the Apostle John

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

was instructed to: "**Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.**"

God moved from oral to written communication so His people would have a permanent record of His word and will for them, a record that could be more accurately transmitted from generation to generation and serve as a ready reference to His commandments and will for mankind.

God's Word authoritative: The Bible is authoritative because it is God's Word. W. H. Griffith Thomas says in his book, *How We Got Our Bible*, "While we outgrow the teaching of other men, we never outgrow the teaching of Jesus Christ." The Bible is a timeless book. Its message fits the needs of mankind in every age. Its power to change lives speaks of its authoritativeness. No other book in the history of mankind has had the distinction of bringing such drastic and lasting change into men's lives as has The Bible, the Word of God. In Hebrews 4:12 we read of its effectiveness: "*For the word of God is **living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a **discerner** of the thoughts and **intents** of the heart.***" It speaks to every need of man. It has a word for every situation.

One evidence of its authority is fulfilled prophecy. Norman Geisler and William Nix, in their book, *From God to Us*, say this: "No unconditional prophecy of the Bible about events to the present day has gone unfulfilled. Hundreds of predictions, some of them given hundreds of years in advance, have been literally fulfilled. The time, city, and nature of Christ's birth were foretold in the Old Testament, as were dozens of other things about His life, death, and resurrection. . . . As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the divine authority of the Bible."

Its indestructibility: Jesus said: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*" (Mark 13:31). Again Geisler and Nix say: "Despite its

importance (or maybe because of it), the Bible has suffered more vicious attacks than would be expected to be made on such a book. But the Bible has withstood all its attackers. Diocletian attempted to exterminate it (c. A.D. 303), and yet it is the most widely published book in the world today. Biblical critics once regarded much of it as mythological, but archaeology has established it as historical. Antagonists have attacked its teaching as primitive, but moralists urge that its teaching on love be applied to modern society. Skeptics have cast doubt on its authenticity, and yet more men are convinced of its truth today than ever. Attacks continue to rise from science, psychology, and political movements, but the Bible remains undaunted." Its permanence speaks to its divine origins, as well as to its authoritativeness. The Creator God will not allow His Word to mankind to suffer defeat, destruction, or obliteration.

Its relevance: The Bible has spoken through the centuries and continues to speak to man's basic needs. Billy Graham often punctuated his sermons with the phrase, "The Bible says," thus elevating the Scripture to the highest position of authority for man's needs. Wherever the Bible has gone it has changed men's lives and affected society in positive ways. The Bible is a life-changing book. Its relevance undiminished through centuries of use because it speaks to every circumstance of man in every age of time.

The Bible—How It Came to Us

Man cooperated with God to produce the Bible. On the human side, the Bible was written by 36 to 40 men, most of whom did not know one another. The writings stretch from Moses to the Apostle John, and were written in several languages over a space of about 1500 years, from 1440 B.C. to 90 A.D. The writers were prophets, priests, kings, poets, a farmer, a tax collector, a fisherman, and a tent maker. They wrote in various times and under various circumstances and with

no awareness of the ultimate unity of their work. They were simply recording God's message as given to them by the Holy Spirit.

There are various styles of literature and various methods of expression which reveal the individualities of the writers. From the thunderings of the prophets to the sweet music of the Psalms to the pleadings of the epistles, God has communicated with man. Though separated by centuries, and social and political circumstances, the product of these writers is cohesive and unified and the pattern of God's revelation flows smoothly and logically from Genesis to Revelation. There is one problem—sin, and one solution—the Saviour, which unify its pages. In reality, this Book takes us from eternity past to eternity future. Though not written by one hand, there is ample evidence of a message produced by one mind, the mind of God. There are 66 Books, but one Author. There are various styles, but one purpose. There are various illustrations, but one message. There are many personalities, but one focal point—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, man's Saviour. This Book is none other than the Word of God, His timeless message to man, a message of comfort, of hope and, above all, of salvation.

Again quoting from Geisler and Nix: "The history of the canonization of the Bible is a most fascinating story. It is a book written and collected over almost two millennia without each contributing author being aware of how his 'chapter' would fit into the overall plan. Each prophetic contribution was offered to the people of God simply on the basis that God had spoken to them through the prophet. Just how that message was to fit into an overall story was unknown to the prophet and even to the believers who first recognized it. Only the reflective consciousness of later Christians was able to perceive that the hand of God which moved each individual writer was also moving through them to produce an overall redemptive story of which God alone was the author. Neither the prophets who composed the books nor the people of

God who collected them were consciously constructing the overall unity in which each book was to play a part."

The history of the Bible: The original writings of the Scripture were handwritten manuscripts, written on parchment made from animal skins, and papyrus. The only way to make duplicate copies was to simply copy them by hand, a tedious and lengthy process, and one fraught with the potential for error. There are numerous references in the Old Testament to scrolls, books, and tablets. With the spread of the New Testament church, it became especially important to preserve and disseminate the writings of the apostles. In Colossians 4:16, for instance, Paul writes: "*And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans and you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.*" As the church spread, additional copies of the Scripture were needed but they were difficult to produce.

Later, something of a rudimentary copy machine was employed, where a scribe would read a manuscript aloud and a group of 10 to 15 copyists would each write an additional manuscript. The margin for error was perhaps greater here than in a situation where a copyist would simply copy a manuscript as he read it line by line. However, several biblical scholars have evaluated evidence and concluded that the New Testament text is 99 percent pure in spite of the fact that there are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts which have been studied. In their words, "The integrity of the New Testament (text) is beyond question."

The invention of printing in the mid 1400s opened an entirely new world for the dissemination of the Scriptures. Johann Gutenberg printed the first Bible set from moveable type, in Latin, at Mainz, Germany in 1456. The rest is history. Today there is a proliferation of books. Our shelves are full. It's difficult for us to imagine a time when there were no books or when they were not readily and inexpensively available. In our day,

when a basic copy of the Scriptures can be purchased for less than an hour's wages, it is difficult to imagine a time when Bibles were so scarce they were chained to the pulpits to keep them from being stolen.

Our English Bible: In 1380-82 John Wycliff came out with a handwritten English Bible, translated from the Latin. Twenty-eight years later, in 1408, the government issued a decree forbidding anyone to translate or even read the Bible in the vernacular except with permission from his bishop or provincial council. In 1414 the threat of confiscation of property and loss of life was added to the dictum. About 1521 William Tyndale made his famous statement to an English clergyman, "If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow to know more of the scripture than thou dost." Because of opposition he fled to Germany where, in 1525, the New Testament was first printed in English and smuggled into England for distribution to the populace.

Around 1535 Tyndale was betrayed and condemned to death for being a heretic. He was strangled and burned at the stake. His last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Within a year of Tyndale's death, Miles Coverdale published the first entire Bible in English ". . . with the King's most gracious license." Tyndale had not struggled in vain. By 1539 every parish church in England was required to make a copy of the English Bible available to all its parishioners. In 1611, under the authority of King James I, a new version was published. It was based largely on the research and scholarship of William Tyndale who can truly be called "The father of the English Bible." Within the past 75 years many new versions have come into being, reflecting the constant changes in the English language. That helps to explain why so many now turn to aversion in modern English for clarification and easier reading.

The Bible's effect on one's life: Irving Jensen in his book *Enjoy Your Bible*, says: "The Bible is God's ever-present gift to us. If we study it today, it will be more

attractive to us tomorrow, and still more attractive the next day. God's gifts always increase in the measure of their use." The Bible teaches man how to live and relate to both God and his fellowman. It is unparalleled in the scope of its instruction. It is a life-changing book for all who are willing to approach it as a guide for faith and life. John 20:31 says, "*These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*"

Our obligation with the Bible: J. C. Wenger says in his book, *God's Word Written*, ". . . it will remain the obligation of the church of Christ all through history to see to it that 'God's Word Written' is constantly kept available in the living language of the day, so that men and women may ever be in the blessed condition of being made 'wise unto salvation' and brought into a living relationship with the saving Christ who is presented in this written word." One of the obligations of every generation of Christians is to make God's written Word available to those of every language and nation. We who have been so blessed to have God's Word, and have it in our own language, dare not become complacent in holding it to ourselves. It is a universal book with a timeless message. We must do all in our power to share it with those who do not yet have access to this life-giving Book.

Conclusion

This book we hold in our hands is God's Word. It has come to us down through the centuries, through much adversity and turmoil. But it remains the unchangeable, undefeatable Word of God. We can turn to it at will for comfort, for guidance, or encouragement. It speaks to us in language we can understand, and God's Spirit illuminates the Word for us. It is inexpensive. It is portable. It gives life. This book we call the Bible is indeed a wonderful treasure.

"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16). ■

The Sports Idol

Anonymous

The devil's got a great big IDOL—that is worshiped all the time,
By the masses of the people—every day and night it's prime
Baseball, football, races, swimming—boxing, tennis, basketball,
Any sport to get a fan club—any kind to please them all.

There's a section in the paper that will give the full details,
Just turn on the TV networks—watch the team that wins or fails.
Every school must have its ball team—every town its baseball park,
This will entertain the sports fans in the evening after dark.

Nothing catches more attention than the latest big league game,
Every player is a hero and they know them all by name.
Action is the most important—win the game at any cost,
For it really hurts their ego if a game is ever lost.

Almost every game has gambling, and some like to drink their beer,
There are often girl cheerleaders dressed to make the people leer.
Screaming, yelling, even fighting—sometimes happens now and then,
Such a scene of awful bedlam never makes them better men.

Then, there is the big Olympics where the great athletes compete,
For they want a trophy garland with a victory so sweet
Even though they're mostly naked—they perform in perfect style,
As the world goes almost crazy—Satan surely has to smile!

Some prefer wild auto races and some bet on horses too,
Yes, it costs a lot of money just to make the sports revue.
Maybe it's a game of golfing at the country club so green,
Where some worldly preachers putter—eighteen holes of play is seen.

But by far the strangest IDOL, is the one where churches play,
Little leagues are very common and we hear the "Christians" say:
"We must keep the young folks happy or they'll go some other place."
Christ is not the main attraction—neither is His saving grace.

Most folk think that play is harmless and they like to have some fun,
But when people leave their childhood—entertaining is all done.
Happiness is not in playing—it is found in God alone,
Life is short and soon is over, and the sports will all be gone!

If you worship at this IDOL—if you love the sports insane,
Purpose in your heart forever that you'll quit the sports domain.
God can save from this addiction—give you better things to do,
Spend your time in serving Jesus—say, "Goodbye, old world, I'm thru."

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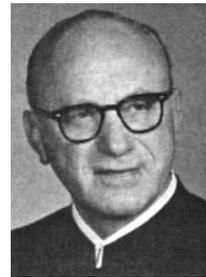
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