

The Berean Ecclesial News

A monthly magazine devoted wholly to the Berean Christadelphian Ecclesial welfare, with the object of providing Ecclesial news, exhortations, articles and information of fraternal interest to the Brotherhood. Upholding the Truth since 1923.

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God Willing, The Berean Ecclesial News will be published monthly as an avenue of providing information of Ecclesial interest to the Brotherhood. Ecclesial news and correspondence, Fraternal Gathering notices, special activities and up building exhortations are welcome. This is an effort to up build and prepare us in heart and mind for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS COMING SOON AND WILL REIGN ON EARTH

Ecclesial News

RICHARD, Sask. – S.S. 10 am; Memorial, 11:20 am; Wed. Class 8 pm. Meetings held at The Richard Ecclesial Hall. Bro. Dan Jackson, R.R. #1, North Battleford, Sask., Canada S9A 2X3, 306-445-8677

My dear Brethren and Sisters,

We here in Richard hope this finds you all well, and we pray that as we watch the signs around us we might all be strengthened as we await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The news we have to present you begins from the first of the year. We were very pleased to have a number of visitors with us throughout the year, including a very successful gathering, (except for those who got drenched on the hay ride).

Sis. June Jones, Sis. Grace Punter, Sis. Brenda McChesney, Bro. Art Bennett, Bro. and Sis. Ted Mingham, Bro. Noah Brown, (who has now since joined the Richard Ecclesia). We welcome him with open arms, and pray that together we might grow in God's favor.

As I mentioned before, we enjoyed a very uplifting gathering this year with lots of visitors from all over the world. I do believe there was approximately 100 people. Sis. Sandra and I also had the opportunity to attend the Flye and Detroit gatherings. It is so nice to see everyone and to be able to discuss the things that we find so important. We also had the opportunity to attend a study weekend in Edmonton along with quite a few Brethren and Sisters and Sunday School members from here in Richard.

We are having elections here this year and there will be a new Recording Brother. We will pass the information along as soon as the elections are over. Well I had better sign off for now, and leave room for other articles. We look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, and pray that we all remain on the straight and narrow. Remember to always help out each other in times of need, for the days are quickly flying.

Your Brother on behalf of the Richard Ecclesia,
Dan Jackson

DETROIT, Mich. – S.S. & Study class, 10 am; Memorial, 11:30 am; Meetings held at 20116 McKishnie, Clinton Twp, MI 48035. Bro. Tim Stinchcomb, 46093 Rex Ct, Chesterfield Twp, MI 48051, 810-598-3996.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Loving Greetings in the Hope we share,

This has been a busy year for us: We had the pleasure of a visit from Sis. Jo Neely, from Lampasas, Texas in May and in October she returned along with Bro. Paul. We enjoyed their company and fellowship.

This year we enjoyed hosting the Northeast Gathering here in Detroit. We want to say a special "thank you" to all the brothers and sisters who gave us support, helped us out, and attended. It was truly a spiritual lift for all of us. Our theme was "The Millennium" and all the speaking brethren did an excellent job with the

2 subject. It focused our minds on the joyous time that is soon coming on the

earth. A time when the earth will be filled with peace and righteousness. We were blessed with visitors from Edmonton, Vancouver, and Richard, Canada; from Wales, United Kingdom; from Colorado, Boston, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, Houston and Lampasas, Texas, here in the U.S.A. We unitedly look forward to Jesus to return soon.

We would like to report that it is with great pleasure that we welcomed Bro. Antonio LaBarbera, back into fellowship on November 14th, 1999. He has had many trials since his withdrawal, but now has had a wake-up call and has a desire to get back on the narrow path that leads to life everlasting. We pray that he will hold fast to his faith and be able to work out his forthcoming trials.

We send our love to all of like precious faith,
Bro. Tim Stinchcomb

Books For Kenya

There is an ongoing need for books and study material on the Truth for our Brethren and Sisters in the various Kenya Ecclesias. If you have books and material that you can send and would like to help in this effort, please contact Sis. Kaye Yuen for instructions on where to send the needed books. Sis. Kaye is keeping a record of the books sent to each ecclesia and can let you know where the current need to send is and the best route to send them. She can be contacted at Syuen33550@aol.com or fax (604) 925-0649.

FRATERNAL GATHERINGS & ACTIVITIES (To be held God Willing)

HENGOED FRATERNAL GATHERING March 24 thru 27, 2000

Bro. Robert Bennett, 41 Kingcraft Street, Darrenlas, MOUNTAIN ASH,
Mid Glamorgan, South Wales, U.K., 011-441-685-870254 (Bro. Philip Hughes phone)

LAMPASAS FRATERNAL GATHERING June 9 thru 11, 2000

Bro. Rusty Stephen, HC3 Box 16A, Lampasas, TX 76550, 512-556-6771

HYE FRATERNAL GATHERING..... July 24 thru 30, 2000

Bro. Curtis Hurst, Rt. 1 Box 40, Mullin, TX 76864, 915-985-3868

FRATERNAL GATHERING TAPES

Tapes of the Hye and Detroit Fraternal Gathering are available from Sis. Pam Naglieri, 13 Old Coach Rd, Hudson, NH 03051, 603-598-1745

We wish to take this opportunity of thanking the Brotherhood for your continued support of The Berean Ecclesial News. Exhortations and articles are needed from all ecclesias so that we will be able to continue sharing these upbuilding thoughts with each other. We hope to continue keeping the magazine of interest to all.

We have elected to keep the magazine on a non-subscription basis so that it can be produced easier for the Brotherhood and not be burdened by the demands that come with subscription publications. The freewill contributions of the Brotherhood have been quite adequate to keep the magazine issued and mailed to all the Brethren and Sisters throughout the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and Kenya. Please let us know if there are items of fraternal interest which you wish to have included.

Cold Water In The Pot

I'd like to begin by turning to the prophecy recorded through Zephaniah chapter three, verse one, *"Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!"* This is applied to the people of the kingdom of Judah. They were referred to collectively and symbolically as a city, the city that was their Capitol. In the prophecy, therefore, this city (Jerusalem) became the symbol of the people's sin. *"Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!"* (Filthy and polluted in the ways of the carnal mind.) The spiritual mind was not in her and the reason is given in verse 2, *"She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God."* We know what came upon Judah because of her carnal mindedness, and this is an example for us. An example of the words given to us through Paul that *"to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."* I'd like to repeat verse 2. *"She obeyed not the voice,"* obviously the Divine Voice, the voice of instruction. *"She received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God."*

Turn with me now to Zechariah chapter 7. Let's begin at verse 8, *"And the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, saying, thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, execute true judgement, and show mercy and compassion to every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts,"* the voice of God by Zechariah, *"hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts."* And what came to pass? *"Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; " as God cried and they would not hear, would not hear the voice, "so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts."* Ultimately those who will not hear cannot hear. *"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they lay the pleasant land desolate."* They obeyed not the voice, they received not correction, they trusted not in the Lord, drew not near to God. They refused to hearken; they pulled away their shoulder. They proudly stopped their ears that they should not hear. Stubbornly and self-righteously they made their hearts as an adamant stone; a stone of extreme hardness, as a diamond.

There is a law of God that causes certain objects to sink in water, and there is a law of God that causes certain other materials to be consumed by fire. There also is a law of God that says they must perish who hate instruction; those who in effect in the words of the Psalmist, cast God's words behind them, and who stubbornly and proudly go on still in their trespasses. This is God's law, and this happened to Israel. It will happen again to those who are rejected by Christ in the day of judgement.

4 We think it would be quite impossible for those who have come to a knowledge of the Truth (as we have), who love God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to ever cast God's Word behind their backs. We could never imagine we would ever hate instruction in any situation, or stubbornly and proudly yield ourselves to any continuance in sin, but we do know that it can happen since we are mortal human beings. Obviously what we need to do is to humbly, thankfully, and with all of our desire be sure that we never cease giving ourselves to instruction: thirsting for it,

searching for it, striving to know where our ways are wrong. We must be listening to that voice, striving to be corrected; for as Elihu recommended to Job, "*That which I see not teach thou me.*" The undying endeavor of our lives must be to give ourselves to the voice of God.

Let us now submit ourselves to the instruction of Psalm 101. "*I will sing of mercy and judgement: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off him that hath an high look and a proud heart will I not suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.*" This is King David speaking of his determination and responsibility in ruling over God's people. How would we stand in David's sight?

The word "perfect" occurs in this Psalm three times. The original means to be complete. It has been translated in various ways: upright, sincere, and in connection with the sacrificial animals, without spot and without blemish. When we speak of any job being complete, we mean that all the details have been finished. We know we cannot be complete in the full sense until we are a finished product made perfect with all sin removed in the change to Divine nature. But we know we will not be completed then, at the return of Christ, unless we strive for behavioral completeness now. This must be our constant goal. Our determination through the power of God must be to never cease working until we are complete. This simply means that in this probationary state we can never cease working.

Now concerning any job that we are trying to complete, to perfect, to bring to the finished point - everything we do in that work must lend itself toward the goal. It must lead toward the desired end of completion. If it is planting, for example, we do not throw into the ground poisonous chemicals to destroy the plants that we have laboriously nurtured and placed in the ground. If it is cooking, we do not keep adding cold water that it never reaches a boil; hence the title of the exhortation: Cold Water in the Pot. If it is a construction project of any sort, we do not dilute the glue or the mortar so it will not hold. So many examples could be cited. If we want to get from starting point "A" to the point of completion "B" we do not set up a stumbling block in our own way. It would not make sense to do so. To do this would be obvious foolishness and would lead others to think there is something wrong in our minds. When we come to the subject of spiritual building, human beings can so easily lose all sense. Why? Because that which dwells within us by nature is so powerful and so deceptive. Human beings can think that poisonous chemicals, cold water, and dilutions of other things are perfectly all right. They're not going to hurt anything. These same people know that they could not plant a garden, or cook a meal, or build a brick wall that way, but they think they can build a complete man that way. Could anything be more foolish than that? 5

In Psalm 101, David speaks of the responsibility of the King of God's nation to execute mercy and justice, to lead and teach, to uphold and reward righteousness, to hate cutting off, and to punish wickedness. Brethren and Sisters, if we are faithful, along with Christ and David, then we will soon be in the same position of

responsibility and ruling in the earth. But we have a responsibility even now. Not to actually punish the wicked, but rather in our relationship to the wicked and to wickedness itself, in ourselves or in others. Should we as Christ's co-rulers love, encourage, yield ourselves to, and fellowship the ones we would hate, cut off, and punish? Does that make sense? No. If we do, we will not even be Christ's co-rulers. We are required to teach righteousness and to lead by example, to endeavor to be God's tools to save others as well as ourselves. We are required to hate all that is evil, and to refuse to yield ourselves to it. The poisonous chemicals, the cold water, all dilutions of fleshly things must be put aside. It would be absolute foolishness to think we could build a complete spiritual man with such elements allowed to enter. There are things listed in Psalms 101 that we ought to agonize to put out of our own lives and that we ought not in any way to encourage or to condone in others. Verse 4 for example: *"a froward heart, a wicked person,"* verse 5 *"one who privily slanders his neighbor, one who has a high look and a proud heart."* Verse 7 *"he that works deceit, he that telleth lies."* We read other things we remember in Zechariah in the passage we looked at. In Malachi we read that Israel wearied God with their words, *"When ye say, everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord."* They turned things around. Now although we recognize their error, we can see it very clearly, yet we could in practice say the very same thing simply by refusing to openly stand out against all that is evil, either within ourselves or what we see around us. Even though we would never dream of saying, *"Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord."* We know that's wrong, we know that's backwards. Yet in our own lives can say it very loudly by remaining silent in the presence of wickedness, (internally or externally) politely closing our eyes, and thereby condoning the evil of the world, of disobedient brethren, or the evil that lurks within ourselves. We thus become the friend of the enemy in God's sight. There are no neutrals. We are engaged in warfare and there are no neutrals. We're either friends of God or we're friends of the enemy. Verse 3 (again in Psalm 101) David determined, *"I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me."*

Whenever we are tempted by the flesh to make friends with evil in any shape or form, to set it before our eyes, or to make provision for the flesh in any way, it is very helpful to remember the words of Solomon in Proverbs chapter 4. These are very familiar words, words to be posted on the bulletin board. Verses 14 and 15: *"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."* *"Enter not,"* now this implies that we can make a choice if we want to. We have the decision making power either to enter or not to enter. If Divine eternal things had entered in and taught us not to give heed to the deceptive flesh, which says, "Enjoy it, all will be well", then we could make the choice. *"Enter not into the path of the wicked."* The wicked are defined in the Psalms

as those who refuse instruction, those who cast God's words behind them, and those who go on still in a trespass of any sort.

6 Here are further definitions in Zephaniah and Zechariah to which we referred earlier. *"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men."* And here are the words we memorize that outline our responsibility. *"Avoid it."* First you have to recognize the obvious thing and that's where instruction comes in, that's where hearing the voice comes in. Once having that instruction, we have the freewill to go either way. *"Avoid it,"* this is the counsel of wisdom. *"Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."* Don't give it a chance. *"Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."* Don't give the flesh a chance to tell us, "Oh, it's all right, no harm can be done." Avoid the error before the flesh has a chance to lead us astray.

Turn back to Psalm 100. *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with singing"*. This is just the opposite of the sad example of Israel who turned away, refused to hear the voice, pulled away her children, turned a deaf ear toward God, and satisfied themselves instead. *"Serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves;"* we belong to Him, *"we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving"* not into the way of the wicked which we are to avoid. *"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise: be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting."* If God were to mark iniquities who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Him - for those who've feared, without reserve to Him and to His holiness. *"His mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."* Let it be said of in the day of judgement Brethren and Sisters, that we obeyed the voice, that we received correction, that we trusted in the Lord, and that we drew near to our God.

Bro. David Burnett

Nehemiah, Our Example

The book of Nehemiah brings us face to face with Israel in their exiled state under the Medes and Persians, with Nehemiah front and center in his effort to restore the kingdom by returning the people to obedience to the Mosaic Law. The city of Jerusalem was always a focus for the Israelites, at least to those who were faithful in their keeping of the Law as it was supposed to be kept. They never forgot their city Jerusalem even while in captivity though they might not keep the law; they still looked to Jerusalem.

In the first chapter, we see Nehemiah receiving a report from the homeland of the state of the Jews there. Certain men were come from Judah and he asked them what the situation was. The people were discouraged and downcast; the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates were burnt with fire. Verse 4, *"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah is very shaken by this report and cries and fasts for days as he struggles to understand and come to grips with this deplorable situation. He turns to the only place where he knows he will be heard, he prays to God for help. He begins by confessing Israel's sin nationally, and by recalling God's promise that if they did sin that they would be scattered into captivity. Verse 7, *"We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst*

thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations." He realized this was prophecy in action. He remembers that Israel, though transgressors of the Law are still God's own people and asks for success in his personal efforts to do something about this deplorable situation. 7 Verse 10, *"Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by*

thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear

be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name:"

Meanwhile all this is impacting on Nehemiah so powerfully that the king notices that something is making him sad. *"Why is thine countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid."* Now we might not think that this is of much consequence, but in those days it could have cost him his life if the king had not turned out to be sympathetic. So the king asks Nehemiah what is bothering him. It was simply possible in those day that the king would order you executed if the king did not like your look or the mood you were in. Again, the answer could have been dangerous for Nehemiah, but God is with him and brings good out of his request. He tells the king what is bothering him. The city of his fathers is lying in ruins and he wants to go and repair the ruins. Perhaps we are not quite aware of the unusual nature of this request. Remember that Nehemiah was one of the Jews that had been taken captive and were in slavery with no rights whatsoever. He may have been under suspicion of looking for a way of escaping or of rebelling. For him to ask this favor for him to go and repair the city of his fathers would be a very extremely unusual request for a captive to make.

However, not only does Nehemiah get a sympathetic ear from the king, but he also gets material given to him for the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem. On top of that, he gets time off to go and supervise the job. He correctly attributes this to the hand of God. Verse 8, *"the good hand of my God upon me."* Nehemiah seems to be a person of faith, similar to Abraham his father. He's a person that talks to God. He determinedly pushes forward with the work in the face of opposition by those who accuse him of revolting. But he keeps focusing and he keeps remembering what his centers are. Through all of this, he always gives God the proper credit and praise. He organizes the people; he builds up their confidence, he strengthens their faith, he defends the work at hand. The people work day and night, probably without much sleep. In the daytime they build and at night they guard. Nehemiah and the people suffer through famine and hardship and because of the famine the people sink into debt to the priesthood, who are also charging them interest, contrary to the law. Nehemiah again intervenes and brings about justice for the common people. He goes right to the priests and reprimands them. Chapter 5:10, *"leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them."* And he is successful. *"Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them so will we do as thou sayest."* Then he takes an oath of the priests. Also Nehemiah forgoes the normal allowance for governors so that no heavier burden be laid on the people. He was allowed to take that allowance. *"I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people.. but so did not I because of the fear of God"* He also forgoes acquiring any land and he further provided food for at least one hundred and fifty men every

day at his personal expense without remuneration. Chapter 5:19, *"Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."*

Again the enemies of the work try to stop the progress or to bring reproach on Nehemiah by tricking him into doing something wrong, but Nehemiah simply dismisses the whole thing with a prayer to God to strengthen his hands and he goes on. Even false prophets try to trick him but he is not deterred.

Finally the wall is done; the gates are repaired and shut. Chapter 7:1, *"Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors and the porters an_' the singers and the Levites were appointed"* — so the work is finished as far as the building. Nehemiah decides it is time to organize the people. All the people are counted, listed and organized by family genealogies. There are a total of nearly 50,000 people in the city. Even the animals were counted. Next the decision was made to call Ezra the scribe to read the Law for an assembly of the people. Chap. 8, *"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month."* It took from morning until noon for reading and confessing of the Law. The people not only heard the Law, but also were given to understand it and they confessed their faults. Then Ezra and Nehemiah instructed the people to rejoice instead of mourning. Verse 9, *"This day is holy unto the Lord your God: mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."* The people had come to realize that they had failed miserably in the keeping of the Law and they were very saddened. *"Then he said unto them, go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."* He knew that the people needed building up, because they were already sorry by their own realization of sin. So the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated for the first time since the time of Joshua. That was a long time.

In Nehemiah chapter 9 we read about the people confessing their faults before God; then we read the prayer of Ezra. Verse 6, *"Thou, even thou, art Lord alone, thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee."* Then he goes into how God chose Abraham out of the land of the Chaldees and brought him out into the land of promise. Then the taking of the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt and the many, many miracles that God performed for the people of Israel. Now this is a pretty full summary of the history of Israel, at least to this point in time. There is more, I believe, in this prayer than history, that we need to notice. First of all, there is profuse praise for the God of Israel all throughout this prayer. Every chance that Ezra gets, he mentions the goodness of God, the justice of God, the righteousness of God. The people are rightly blamed for their waywardness and sin. God's mercy and righteousness are proclaimed. Also God's plan to preserve a remnant and to yet bring them into his favor are mentioned in Verse 31, *"Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God."* God's faithfulness, love and justice are recalled. The prayer ends with the commitment to do the proper thing from then on. The princes, priests and Levites sealed to it that they would keep on the way of right. They made an oath; they took a promise that they would perform these things. It would seem

that the nation had turned over a new leaf and were set for better things ahead. As a result there was much rejoicing amongst the people. 9

The next three chapters — ten, eleven and twelve, detail the promises that the people made of all the good things that they were going to do to keep the Law and to keep the temple in good repair. In the twelfth chapter we read of the celebrations that were carried out as a result of the revival of the nation. These were quite elaborate. Nehemiah set up bands and singers and it sounded like marching bands that went along the wall for all the people to see and to sing together with and rejoice. *"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off"* So the fame of this occasion was spreading far and wide.

Now that Nehemiah had accomplished his desire, he returns to Babylon as he had promised, to serve under the king. After some time away in Babylon, he asks leave to again visit Jerusalem to see how things are going. After all the great changes he has brought about he wants to go and see this and be encouraged by the things that have happened as a result of his reforms.

One of the first things he finds that the priests had allowed Tobiah, an Ammonite, and an enemy all along, to live in the temple, of all places- moved right in, furniture and all! This would profane the temple, as well as demonstrate the priests' lack of comprehension as to the dangers that they faced. This was probably one of the most disappointing things to Nehemiah. So Nehemiah went into the temple, in the fashion of Christ when he went in amongst the moneychangers, throws him out along with all his household furniture, cleanses the temple and replaces the vessels that rightly belonged there. Not long after, he turns around to find that after all the promises that the priests and the people had made of maintaining the temple, the tithes were not being brought in after all. The tithes were necessary to maintain the priesthood and repair the temple. That made it necessary for the Levites to abandon the care of the house of the Lord and to go and work in the fields to earn their own living.

The house of God was not being cared for. He squares off with the officials about that and gets this process back on track. Just a short while later, he notices that work is being done on the Sabbath Day. Now if you were an Israelite you would know how important it was to keep the Sabbath holy. No manner of laborious work was to be done on the Sabbath. He forcefully reminds the officials that this very thing was one of the causes of the downfall of the nation to begin with. Nehemiah has to threaten the merchants about this very thing. He says, if I catch you trying to bring in burdens again on the Sabbath day, there will be trouble. He then notes how that some of the Israelites had married foreign women, whom we know had not become proselytes. They had not converted to Judaism or the Mosaic Law, because they had not even converted to the language. The children did not understand Hebrew. Nehemiah not only tells them off, but he beats some of them and pulls out their hair. Pretty rough! He reminds them of what happened to Solomon, who had it all and gave it away, mainly because of his desire for women of any sort and of the wealth that these marriages brought. To Nehemiah's horror he finds that the son of the High Priest had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, the chief enemy of the Jews who had repeatedly tried to sabotage the work.

Nehemiah must have gone back to Babylon to his work there with a heavy heart. All his work and all his words seemed like water off a duck's back to Israel.

These people just didn't seem to catch on to what the dangers were out there!

10 What would we think of Nehemiah today if he were in our midst? How would we like a man that pulled our hair out and physically hit us? Not very well, I am sure. But through all the chapters of this book, there is not one haughty word from Nehemiah only this simple prayer — *"Remember me, O my God, for good."* That is all he wanted out of it. He did not expect the praise of the people.

The fact of the matter is, that the only thing that really mattered or matters today, is not what others think of our actions, or us, but what God thinks. This was all that Nehemiah was interested in. He was against formidable odds; foreigners seeking to suppress Israel and to keep them in servitude; a wayward priesthood who did not seem to see the danger their people were in. He was up against a weak Israel who wanted nothing more than to be like the nations around them, so that they did not stand out so badly from the crowd. They wanted to fit in and be like the rest. Here was Nehemiah doing valiant things; probably earning the hatred of some that were reprimanded and taking chances with his life for the work of God. We can well imagine that his lot was not so pleasant as it might appear to us even though by every measure he was a successful man.

The apostle Paul says, *"These things were written for our learning,"* our admonition. Why would we think that the things that happened to Israel could never happen to us? Why might we think these things were ever recorded? Our situation today, Brethren and Sisters, is not that much different than was Israel's. What would Nehemiah say to us today?

Aso. Wotdost,josseo,

Strangers and Pilgrims

Many of the personal decisions that we have to make in our day to day life can be made so much easier if we can order our lives after the example of the principles of righteousness laid down by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Among the righteous principles we are to follow, is to be a pilgrim and stranger in the land in which we find ourselves. What does it mean to be a pilgrim and stranger in a land? To answer this, just imagine yourself in a foreign country. All around us, the nations are busy maintaining their state, performing their civic duties with great pride, preparing for wars, working towards economic expansions, studying for next year and its elections. If we were truly in a strange land, say Brazil for instance, would we care? Would we even notice?

There is a natural temptation to get caught up in the affairs of the nations in which we live. There is a natural tendency to hate the injustices of this world, and think that we can do something to alleviate them. We can't, and if we are truly *"pilgrims and strangers"* we won't become entangled with the civil administrations which try.

There are many issues that confront us daily which are the rights of citizens. Being born in a certain country, we automatically have certain rights of citizens awarded us. When we refuse to exercise those rights, or to participate in the responsibilities inherent in those rights, we are looked upon as "unpatriotic." It is not that we are unpatriotic. It is that we are not citizens, and, therefore, shouldn't be expected to behave as citizens. Our patriotism must be intense, but to a different country.

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." Hebrews 11:14-16

The only notice of the nation's affairs that should concern us, are the behaviors of nations that fit Bible prophesy, and which declare the nearness of our heavenly city.

"Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." Joel 3:9

These are the things in the behavior of nations that should excite us, not the day to day workings of the people around us. But, the mind is a deceitful thing. It can find all sorts of excuses to do what the flesh wants to do. It can find no end for the need to justify our assertion of our citizenship to some nation.

First among the list of excuses is that "Paul did it." And Paul did claim his Roman citizenship to avoid persecution and spread God's Word. If all the followers of Christ claimed worldly citizenship limited to Paul's reasons, then there would be nothing wrong with it.

But that is not the reason it is claimed. We once heard a popular preacher, Jerry Falwell, make a plea to his constituents concerning the need to take part in the military machine of the nations. Falwell argued: "Jesus told you '*Occupy till I come.*' (Luke 19:13.) You cannot occupy this land unless you get out and fight for it." Such is the reasoning of the flesh.

It is truly an honor to be called to fight for your country. Such an honor awaits those who look for Christ.

"For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints. Praise ye the LORD."

Psalms 149:4-9

This world too, honors those who protect and fight for its nations. It is simply a matter of which nation we desire to have the honor from. Do we desire current honors and glory, or that of the future? Nations (at least healthy, successful ones) do not take foreigners to fight for their own defense. Rome reached her zenith when every soldier had to be a Roman citizen. As the citizens lost their desire to serve the nation, this policy was modified to where only the officers had to be Roman citizens. Then it's policy was modified again to where foreigners could be officers. Then the foreign officers conspired against Rome, eventually fought against Rome, to help in bringing down the mighty empire.

Loyal citizens fight hard for their country. They love their country, and have little regard for other nations. Such must be our focus, if we wish to live with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in their kingdom to come.

We have many other daily relationships with the world which are so easy to resolve if we just remember the example of the Patriarchs. If we are wronged, should we seek redress in the world's legal systems? The Scriptural principle is clear.

12 *"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if*

the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" 1 Cor. 6:1-3

"Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" 1 Cor. 6:7

And again, the teachings of Jesus:

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Matt. 5:25-26

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Matt. 5:39-41

"Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again." Luke 6:28-29

These commands are clear. We are not to seek redress, but rather, to suffer ourselves to be defrauded. And these things become infinitely more clear when we understand that this is because we are not citizens here. We are strangers. What we have, we are allowed to have by the citizens and the powers of the land, and the mercy God causes them to shed on us. We only need take faith in the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David to understand fully that there is another time coming in which our citizenship will be significant, unlike today.

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Romans 12:19

The flesh will argue, that recourse to law is necessary to defend it's honor. We are commanded to be honorable in all things. Or if we have suffered loss and wish to seek redress in a court of law, the flesh will argue, *"I'm not really doing it for me, but for my creditors. If I am defrauded out of this money, I will have no ability to repay my debts, and then they, the innocent holders of my notes, will be defrauded."* There is really no end to the flesh's ability to rationalize such a matter. And unlike Paul, who used his citizenship for the glory of God, the flesh would do so to aggressively defend it's own honor. Such behavior is only of interest to one who seeks honor in this world.

Bro. Roberts, in Christendom Astray, exhibited what it means to participate in the legal system. As he said, *"the legal system is but the smooth end of the bludgeon. The other side of the bludgeon cannot be a part of the life of those who regard themselves merely as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land."*

"You get the judgment of the law in your favour: and let us suppose the debtor is unable to pay. What happens? Your servants (for the agents of the law are your servants, for the time being, and would not act a moment after your authority was withdrawn) enter his house and sell his bed, and cast him homeless on the street. But suppose he is able to pay and won't, and takes it into his head to resist, enlisting, let us suppose, a band of bold spirits to his aid. The myrmidons of the law arrive at the house; the door is locked, admission demanded in vain. Your agents knock the door down, but they find the passage barricaded. They demolish the barricades, but find the occupants of the house in an attitude of defiance. Your servants of the law push them; the

debtor's friends smite your servants of the law. Your servants smite in return, but seeing they are over-matched, they withdraw.

"The debtor exults and fearing a return of the myrmidons, he sends for and obtains a reinforcement of roughs. The bailiffs return with assistance. A melee ensues: heads are broken and property destroyed, and the bailiffs are repulsed. What next? A riot. Part of the people take sides with the debtor and part with the bailiffs. What next? The soldiers are sent for. The soldiers are now your servants. If the men in the house don't give in brains will be blown out and lives taken, and all this will be done because you have set the law in motion. In fact, this is the law in motion."

Bro. John Thomas once wrote of our relationship to the legal systems of this world:

"Do ye not know that the Saints should judge the world?" The verb here rendered "judge" is the same as is translated ' go to law ' in the preceding verse. The apostle, therefore, asks if they do not know that they will sit judicially, and dispense justice to the world, according to the divine law; and because this is their destiny he positively forbids believers in the covenants of promise to submit themselves to the judgment of the unjust. It is better, says he, for one to be defrauded than to submit to such a humiliation. Let the heirs of the world arbitrate their own affairs in the present state: for it is a strange thing if men whose destiny is to judge the world and angels, cannot settle things pertaining to this life." Elpis Israel, pp. 244-245.

Any approach to the powers of this word to bring charges against the citizens of this world, to assert our rights and redress our wrongs is excluded to the strangers and pilgrims of this world, who wish to rule in the next. God has spoken of the contempt He has, and the end He plans for the judges of this world, and would we make an appeal to these?

"It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble."

Isaiah 40:22-23

Another arena in which we are called up to perform our "civic duty" pertains to our participation in the jury system which has been set up by those who rule the earth. Is it right for us to exercise our citizenship in this manner?

The jury system, at least in the United States, is said to be set up so that a man, when accused of some crime, may be judged by a jury of his "peers." A peer would be one of the same social group or class as the one on trial. Are we peers of the people of the world? Are we of the same social class, do we share their interests and their likes? If we are, we have no part in the society of those who desire to be Kings and Priests with Christ But if we are not citizens of this world, we cannot justly sit as peers, to those who are. Such would be a disservice to them.

If a man brings charges against another, claiming that he was defrauded, do we concern ourselves with the evidence in establishing a judgment, or do we judge that we should suffer ourselves to be defrauded, dismissing the charges themselves as inconsistent with the Divine law, regardless of their validity?

14 Christadelphians in the 19th century England found no inconsistency in sitting on juries, but this is not "proof" that we should feel at ease with the process today. An

examination of the history of the jury process shows the following:

Encyclopedia Britannica "Thus, there are three important points about the history and development of the jury as a legal institution: first, the effort to introduce it outside the Anglo-American legal orbit has failed; further, in England itself its use was limited by statute to a small category of cases; and, thus, the United States has emerged today as the home of the jury system for both criminal and civil cases. Some 120,000 jury trials are conducted there annually, more than 90 percent of all jury trials in the world."

The modern jury system of the United States, therefore, bears little similarity to the jury system of 19th century England. In old England, the jurist was asked to listen and give his opinion to the judge who made the final decision. In the United States, the jury's decision IS the court's finding. The judge may throw out a jury's finding (in certain cases the judge may not even do this!) and redo the trial, but he cannot find the jury wrong and override them.

We can see how a stranger and pilgrim may give an opinion, when asked, to the people of the land, and Christadelphians in 19th century England did. This is quite different than rendering a verdict, which will be enforced with all the power and force described by Bro. Roberts above, upon the world's citizens. As the apostle Paul counseled:

"For what have I to do to judge them also that are without?" I Cor. 5:12

Paul would not judge those who are without the ecclesia and in the world, and those striving to walk after the example of the strangers and pilgrims who went before us, won't either.

The world also tells us it's our civic responsibility to vote. They tell us if we don't vote, then we have no right to complain. This is true, and we should not complain about the circumstances of the world in which God has seen fit to place us.

"This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."
Psalm 118:24

But more to the point, it is God who rules in the kingdoms of men. We have no reason or right to interfere with the Captain of our Salvation in these matters.

"This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." Daniel 4:17

Some may rationalize that their vote doesn't matter since whoever God has ordained will win anyhow. It is true that who God hath ordained to be in power, will be in power. But this is not an insignificant thing. Such need to consider the wise counsel of Gamaliel to the Jews:

"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." Acts 5:38-39

To work against the plan and purpose of God in such things is to fight against God, even if "haply" or "by accident." Even the Jews understood the force of Gamaliel's argument, and were not willing, for a time, to work against God. They were living in their homeland. How much more should we, who claim to be citizens of the Kingdom of God, not any contemporary nation, seek not to work against God, by accident or by any other way.

Thoughts Gleaned By The Way

By A Wayfarer

"But what things were gain for me, I counted loss for Christ" - Phillipians 3:7

Temporal prosperity rarely ever contributes to the spiritual welfare, but more often the reverse. The Apostle's reasoning is based on the fact that we owe a huge debt to Christ for what he has and does for us. As the employer suffers loss whenever his employee gives more attention to his own selfish interest than to the one who pays him his wages, anything which impairs our undivided service and loyalty to Christ is a loss to Him and may make of the disciple an *"unprofitable servant."* *"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."* -- Prov 24:10.

The measure of anyone's strength—physical, mental, or spiritual—can be determined only by what they are able to do when any crisis comes upon them. One's physical strength can only be known when he is compelled to bear a heavy burden alone. His mental capacity is revealed when he is required to perform a task calling for deep thought and sound reasoning. His spiritual strength can only be known when he is subjected to severe trial and temptation. It is then, and only then, that his or her courage, loyalty to sound scriptural principles, devotion to the service of God and His Truth is proved to be great or small. *"And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, FOR OUR GOOD ALWAYS, that he might preserve us alive, as it is this day"* Deut 6:24.

It is one of the perversities of sinful human nature to rebel against law and restraint, even though the laws are for the benefit of all, except the lawless and the incorrigible. How often the children of Israel murmured against divine restrictions and arrangements, all done for their ultimate good, of which they had abundant illustration!

For lack of understanding, children are inclined to think that all chastisement and restraint placed upon them is unfair and unnecessary, even adults who have never outgrown childish ways think the same way. To all who are instructed in the Word, and who have faith in the guiding hand of a beneficent Father, even though *"no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous,"*—yet they also know that *"afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."* *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success"* Joshua 1:8.

In all of God's dealings with sinful man, his weaknesses and failings are taken into full account. Left to himself, man invariably reverts to savagery; a people having once been instructed in divine things can only remain faithful to such teaching by constantly keeping in mind all that is taught therein. Otherwise, apostasy is the inevitable result. Israel did not conform to the divine instructions given to them through Joshua, except for short periods of time. While many sins are charged against the backsliding nation, their falling away stemmed directly from their neglect of the word of God spoken to them. Not only did they fail to *"meditate therein day and night;"*—they turned aside from the holy oracles to doctrines of men, humanly-invented ordinances, laws, regulations, and formalities. The word of God in its purity no longer had any influence on their lives and characters.

This is the way the Truth has been lost all through the ages; as applied both to individuals and groups. First, neglect of the word for the love of other things; then total abandonment of the pure word of Truth and all for which it stands.

"Now, the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" Jonah 1:17.

No miracle in scripture has called forth more unbelief and ridicule than the account of Jonah and the fish. Even few so-called *"ministers of the Gospel"* will contend for the truth of the narrative, but many join with the skeptics in trying to give some other explanation other than what is given in the unvarnished record. But what all these doubters seem to overlook entirely is that the issue is not between the doubter and this ancient record, but between the doubter and the Lord Jesus Christ, who verified the record as authentic (Matt. 12:39-40).

The weakness of the doubter's arguments against the credibility of miracles lies in the fact that they use their own limited experience and understanding as a basis for what is possible and what is impossible. No miracle can be explained on the basis of natural phenomena. Miracles are simply the use of divine power exerted for the performance of special works over and above the natural laws of the universe. No one miracle is easier to explain than another; all must be explained and understood on the same basis: Spirit power. It borders on stupidity for one to deny the possibility of miracle while viewing the most stupendous miracle of all times—creation. The doubter who scoffs at miracles is himself a miracle, for man, God's noblest creature, is himself one of the greatest miracles.

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As Ye See The Day Approaching

The nations of earth are like the storm tossed sea which cannot rest. The sea and waves roar by reason of the fierce winds of change, ideology, strife and war. The democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are at loggerheads with totalitarianism and paternalism. Ethnicity and nationalism are adverse to universalism and standardization. In the political spectrum the right is set against the left and the extremists are at variance with those holding the center. Conservatives are against liberals and anarchists are opposed to the establishment. Pride, arrogance, audacity, foolishness and stupidity fly in the face of Sound reason, sensibility, balance, truth and justice. Darkness is put for light and evil is called good! In the turmoil of the wind-driven waves, mire and dirt are cast up. The waters are murky. Violence and bloodshed, falsehood and corruption fill the earth. Mistrust and wariness rob mankind of inward peace. Anxiety and anguish drive men to distraction. Luke tells us these things prophetically. *"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."* Yes, the Scriptures plainly state that *"...the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."*

We are living in a time when they say "Peace, peace." But, there is no peace. They are talking of peace between Syria and Israel; between Lebanon and Israel and between the Palestinians and Israel.

17

On Wednesday, December 15, 1999 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa will meet in Washington with American President Bill Clinton to resume peace talks that had broken off back in early 1996. This

resumption of peace talks will be of the highest level between the two nations in more than half a century of conflict. Both nations seem to be optimistic in thinking they can achieve a peace deal within a few months. The Golan Heights is the real bone of contention between Israel and Syria. The Syrians want a full Israeli withdrawal. Israel took the Golan Heights in the June, 1967, Six Day War. A senior US State Department official confirmed that Israel never agreed to a full withdrawal from the Golan. Israel operates a radar station on the top of Mount Hermon and some 17,000 Israeli settlers currently live in the Golan. There is also a military infrastructure there. Total estimated cost of resettlement and relocation of the people and military infrastructure is \$18 Billion! As Israel would not be able to come up with that kind of money, they would look to the US for assistance. The Israeli Knesset appears to be about equally split on the decision to withdraw from the Golan Heights. Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa is supposed to be in agreement to receive UN forces into the area between Lebanon and Israel. The forces would be disarmed along the two borders. This would take place after Israel withdraws beyond the '67 War border. It is felt that simultaneous peace accords can be signed between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon.

It is quite interesting that while Syria is talking peace with Israel, it is demanding full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Note that Israel is doing the giving back of the land so dearly won and will have to probably relocate the settlers and military infrastructure! "Israeli military and intelligence sources say that Syria is developing a longer-range, surface-to-surface missile able to reach all parts of Israel from deep within Syrian territory."

"North Korea plans to export the intercontinental ballistic missile, Taepo Dong. Analysts say the most likely customers will be Iran and the Arab states, particularly Egypt, Libya and Syria."

Israel is suffering from severe water shortage. This past year and so far this year, Israel has had below normal rainfall. The Israeli Water Commissioner stated that the drought is the worst in a century. Water levels in Lake Kinneret and the nation's two other main underground reservoirs are either on or below their respective minimum marks. Water quotas to Israeli farms this year were cut by 40%! They may have to be cut even more this next year if there is less than average rainfall. Thirty-eight more farms (there evidently have been others) had their water supplies for irrigation terminated due to the severe shortage. The government is finally starting an educational program to teach its citizens to conserve. Israel's population is roughly 6,145,000. It is under commitment by international treaty to supply its neighbors with water. Within the next five years, demand will outstrip availability. Desalination of sea water seems to loom as the only alternative other than importing water. Both options are very costly.

Looking from the Middle East to other areas, the State Department released a 100 page report entitled "*Ethnic Cleansing in Kosovo: An Accounting.*" In the four month period of the Kosovo War from March through June, an estimated 10,000 Albanians were killed. One and a half million people were driven from their homes. Tens of thousands of homes in 1,200 cities were damaged or destroyed. There were 500 sites where summary executions were carried out throughout Kosovo. They may never know how many perished in the awful slaughter, as there were burials and bumings and reburials after the destroying of evidence. The report indicated ten types of human rights abuses. These atrocities are horrible to even mention, but indicate just how depraved and beast-like man is. The Assistant Secretary of State, Harold Koh, said: "Five months after the UN and NATO arrived in Kosovo, we're still piecing together what is undeniably a widespread and systematic attempt to cleanse Kosovo of much of its Kosovar-Albanian population." Reports indicate that revenge-motivated violence had increased over the 18 past six months in Kosovo, mostly by Albanians seeking revenge on Serbs and

other minorities. Man just doesn't learn!

There is war continuing in Chechnya. Russia has completely encircled Grozny, the Chechen capital. She is now tightening the noose around Grozny after weeks of heavy fighting against Urus-Martan, a town twelve miles southwest of Grozny which had been occupied by some 900 militants. When the Russians finally took the town, they had killed 300 militants. Six hundred had fled to the south into the Caucasus Mountains of Southern Chechnya. Urus-Martan had been an important supply line for the militants. But since it fell, the Russians have been consolidating their grip on the roads and crosspoints to cut off supplies to Grozny. The capital city is heavily defended. The Russians have been carrying out regular and even massive air and artillery attacks. There are believed to be from between 10,000 to 12,000 people in the City, with 4,000 being militants. Civilian casualties have been high, estimated at 4,000 by Chechen leaders. However, there is no way yet to verify this figure independently. There have been 240,000 civilians driven from the territory. Russia has lost about 500 men since the beginning of the conflict, which started back in August in the northern neighboring country of Dagestan.

While in China this past week, Boris Yeltsin lashed out in an angry outburst against President Clinton who had strongly criticized Russia for her offensive in Chechnya. He said *"It seems Mr. Clinton has forgotten Russia is a great power that possesses a nuclear arsenal. We aren't afraid at all of Clinton's anti-Russian position. I want to tell President Clinton that he alone cannot dictate how the world should live, work and play. It is us who will dictate."* *What a statement,* and that in front of reporters and the Chinese leadership! It is also of great interest that Russia and China now have mutual agreement of their 2,630 mile long common border and are going to share formerly disputed islands. Both the Russian and Chinese leaders looked on while their foreign ministers signed three accords dealing with this matter. China is in full understanding and support of Russia in her war with Chechnya.

Brethren and Sisters, in light of these things, let us not sleep as do others around us. Let us be on guard and watching as we see the day approaching. As the sea of nations roar in our ears, let us take courage. We know Him who has set the bounds of the sea. It is written in Job 38:8-11, *"...who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?"* He who made the sea also made the nations upon earth and set their bounds. It is written in Deut. 32:8-9, *"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance."*

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

Bro. Oscar Beauchamp

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What does that mean?

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" John 21:15

At the close of the feast of the 153 large fish, the Lord turned to Peter with this question, "...lovest thou me more than these?" The question is as ambiguous in Greek as it is in English. It could mean either:

1. "Do you love me more than you love these?" or
2. "Do you love me more than these do?"

The answer to this can be found by extrapolating each interpretation:

1. *"Do you love me more than you love these?"* There is no justification to believe that Christ asked Peter if he loved him more than the 153 fish he had caught, or the net and boat, or any other worldly enjoyment. Peter had his failings, but placing worldly things above Christ was not one of them.

This first interpretation could also be construed as Christ asking, "Do you love me more than you love the other disciples?" It is very true that Christ demands that we put our love for him above all others, but Jesus had spent much of his time encouraging his disciples to love one another a great deal more than they did. The way they could prove their love for him was by showing love one to another. Why would he ever then try to put love of disciples in competition with love for himself? Clearly, this was not what he was asking.

2. *"Do you love me more than these do?"* On the night of the betrayal, Christ intimated that his disciples would forsake him in the trial he was about to suffer. Peter spoke up and asserted that, though all the other disciples may be offended at Christ and may deny or forsake him, *he would not*. Peter then inferred that what Christ said might be true of the *others*, but *he was willing to die for him*. Yet before the cock crow of the next morning, Peter had thrice denied that he knew Jesus. The confident disciple who felt he "loved the Master more than these" was being asked by Christ, "do you still feel that you love me more than the rest of the disciples do?"

"...Lovest thou me more than these?" That question would at once recall to Peter his boastful claim, his awful fall, and would pierce him to the heart. He could no longer claim that he is the truest of the apostolic band, but answered, *"Thou knowest my heart; thou knowest that I love thee."* This is all any one of us can claim.

Brethren and Sisters, when we begin to compare ourselves with other Brothers and Sisters, we go where we are not permitted. If we begin to feel that we have greater faith, love or devotion to Christ than others, we, like Peter, have gone too far, and need to be taught the lesson that Peter learned:

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!"

