

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.

VOL. 3, NO. 2

FEBRUARY, 2000

Please send Ecclesial communications to:

Bro. Fred J. Higham, 20116 McKishnie, Clinton Twp, Mich 48035 U.S.A.

Fax: (810) 790-8519 [e-mail: Fjhigham@netzero.net](mailto:Fjhigham@netzero.net)

ECCLESIAL NEWS	Portland, North Lauderdale
FRATERNAL GATHERINGS.....	Hengoed, Lampasas, Hye
EXHORTATIO N	
EXHORTATION	Looking For That Continuing City 24
Crisis In Russia Thoughts From	Beginning Of The New Millennium27
The Wayfarer	33
	WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? 38
	B.E.N.'S PAGE.....
	40

(Insert)

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

PORTLAND, Oregon — Memorial, 11 am; Study Class Sunday afternoon once a month. Meetings held at various homes. Please send communications to Bro. Dave Burnett, 25321 NE 72nd Avenue, Battle Ground, WA 98604; phone 360-687-5641. Loving greetings to all our Brothers and Sisters in the One Hope.

At the time of writing, the news media have just recently been reviewing many significant events now recorded on the pages of history for 1999 and the 1900's. Not only is such review very interesting, but it is also productive when coupled with resolve to learn from what has gone before.

For us in the Truth, review has the added benefit of renewing our confidence in the certainty of the unfolding plan of God, and in regard to personal and ecclesial affairs it takes on even more critical importance as we seek to avoid the errors and build on the achievements of the past.

In Portland, not unlike other ecclesias, we have experienced our own ups and downs, positives and negatives, successes and failures. So many things could be enumerated in a review of our own history, but we will mention just a few from about the last forty years, the years following the mass "reunions" among those now forming the Central group. During that period, the small remnant in Portland:

- Was wonderfully blessed early on with the joyful return of a few who had been in Central and had seen the need to stand aside if they wanted to continue in the scriptural ways so well expounded by Brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts;
- Experienced the beautiful spiritual birth process of an added few who came out of darkness into the marvelous light of the glorious gospel;
- Went through the disruptive trauma of well-meaning individuals leaving the ecclesial fold because of a misconception of what details should be required in fellowship, and many years later thankfully welcomed those individuals back again;
- Lived through the well-intentioned, but so misguided, lengthy ordeal of agitation and separation of the entire ecclesia from Bereans because of different opinions concerning one of the most uncertain and troublesome matters ever faced, that of divorce and remarriage;
- A few years later divided itself right down the middle over the same issue when some came to realize the error of their new position, but the rest persisted and still do to this day, with sickening effects that tear at the heart strings;
- Endured the disquieting effects of openly, unscriptural, behavior in more than one situation, but stood firmly in defense of the Truth, and lost (hopefully not forever) some parts of the ecclesial body;
- Thoroughly enjoyed the meetings together, and many hours after the meetings and as often as in one another's company, considering and discussing our precious hope, prophecy fulfilled and fulfilling, application of the Truth in the daily details of life, etc., etc.;
- Had great pleasure in association and fellowship with Brothers and Sisters around the world, while visiting or receiving visits;
- And sorrowfully, though not as the world sorrows, but with unquestioning hope, over the years buried those who fell asleep in Christ.

We do not think it is out of place to mention here that, as you probably all know by now, we recently have also seen the death of another who was formerly a member of this ecclesia, Bro. Art Tilling, Sis. Donna's father. The present sorrow is perhaps intensified where fellowship has been severed. We sincerely thank you for your calls and notes of sympathy.

At the beginning of the new year, as we continue to await the greatest new beginning of all, we want to express our heartfelt appreciation and love toward all of you, our brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, for your love and fellowship, your help and consideration, your understanding and forgiveness, your thoughts and prayers through the years as we have endeavored together to learn and grow and develop and mature and walk ever more faithfully toward the kingdom.

We believe we have learned so much and surely profited from all we have gone through, we hope we are a bit wiser for the experience, and we intend in God's grace to hold fast to our blessed hope and to be a loving, edifying ecclesial haven not only for ourselves but also for those who may yet return to us or come anew from the surrounding darkness.

With lots of love from each one here, Bro. Dave Burnett

NORTH LAUDERDALE, Florida – Please send communications to Bro. Bob Bent, 7875 Tamo Shanter Blvd., N. Lauderdale, FL 33068; phone 954-720-0605.
To the Brothers and Sisters of the Berean Ecclesia,

Greetings in our Master's Name. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all for the cards and calls that we received on the joyous occasion of my daughter's birth. Kiara Caprial Bent was born on 12-9-99. She weighed 6 pounds and 12 ounces and was 20 inches long. Right now Mom and baby are doing fine and are both at home. We are thankful to all in the brotherhood and pray that Kiara will become an instrument in Yahweh's work.

Because of my occupation I have had the privilege of visiting various ecclesias, namely Lampasas, Houston, and Detroit. I thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship with Brothers and Sisters of like precious faith. It is a joyous feeling when Brothers and Sisters, who are called out of this world, come together in study and meditation of God's Holy Word. May we all continue to strive for things above and not on things on earth, that when our Master, Jesus Christ returns, we all will be rewarded a place in our Father's Kingdom.

Love in the Truth, Bro. Bob Bent

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 I 6A, 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

Books For Kenya

If you have books and material that you can send and would like to help in this effort, please contact Sis. Kaye Yuen at Syuen33550@aol.com or fax (604) 925-0649.

Looking For That Continuing City — New Jerusalem

This morning, I would like to go into some of the aspects of the epistle to the Hebrews, to bring out some of the meanings in the things that (as I believe it was written by the Apostle Paul) Paul was trying to explain to them.

The term Hebrew, of course, means a Jew — a Jew according to the flesh. These Jews (that are being written to) are not just natural Jews, but also Spiritual Jews, Jews that had previously embraced the Truth. The book is a letter of appeal from one devout Jew (the Apostle Paul) to the Jerusalem Ecclesia. These Jews had realized that the Law was merely a shadow of good things to come; there were better things in Christ. They left the Law (the whole life-style of living the law in Judaism) to embrace the Truth as it is in Jesus. Now many years had transpired since that time, and their faith began to wane.

These brethren, as he said, began to forsake the assembling of themselves together: they considered going back to the Jewish synagogues and to the old Mosaic system. Unfortunately, they considered this just prior (as Paul knew) to that system being removed from the earth entirely. Paul strongly states that such an insult to God would be to crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.

We, brethren and sisters, can glean many lessons from this book, if we apply the things contained herein to ourselves. Realizing that as they lived at the end of the Mosaic economy, we live at the end of the Gentile age. The world is trying to draw us back and away from the things of the Truth that cement us in our walk Zionward, just as they (the Hebrews) were being politically pulled back during the time the letter was written.

This book also contains some of the most beautiful explanations of the life of Jesus Christ himself. The Apostle Paul explains how the life of Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. We see Jesus (in this epistle) in the sense of the past, the present and the future. We see who he was and what he came to do; who he is and what he's doing now; and who he will be and what he is coming to do. And how we have hope now and in the future, by the grace of God, by being his Brethren and Sisters with him as the Captain of our salvation.

Throughout this epistle, the writer continually emphasizes the superiority of the Law of Christ to the Law of Moses. Throughout the letter, the things in Christ are said to be "better." The word "better" is translated from the Greek word "kreitton" which means "stronger" or "nobler." Point by point, we can trace this superior condition in Jesus through the letter.

We begin with Chapter 1. It opens, indicating Jesus as the greatest prophet, because he was God's own son and heir to the world God created for him. Being God's son, and future ruler of the world, caused him to be made, as it says, "so much better than the angels."

Chapter 7 speaks of Jesus with a better priesthood; a better hope; a better covenant. In verses 19 & 22 it says, "*For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.... By so much 24 was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.*"

In Chapter 8, we see that his ministry was founded upon better promises, stating, *"But now he hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises."* This improvement will be fulfilled when God will put His *"laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:"* and *"be to them a God and they shall be to me a people."*

Chapter 9 relates how (through his death, resurrection, and by his ascension and entrance into heaven to be our Mediator) Jesus fulfilled the pattern of the things in the heavens. We read in chapter 9 verses 23-28, *"It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered unto the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us; Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."*

The Apostle Paul refers to Jesus in chapter 10, verses 34-35 as a better reward. He says, *"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward"*

In Chapter 11, the record of the faithful, it says that through faith they desired a better country, a better resurrection and some better thing for us that all God's saints should be perfected together.

Finally, in Chapter 12, the writer reminds the Hebrews (and ourselves) of the responsibilities we have by being sons and daughters of God, and brethren of our Lord Jesus Christ. He now shows that we benefit from the sacrifice of Christ. That his sacrifice eclipsed all the sacrifices of the Adamic race from the very beginning with the "lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He now says that Jesus, as the Mediator of the New Covenant, speaks of better things than Abel enjoyed.

The writer tries to impress these brethren with their high and lofty calling – and therefore great responsibilities. He says in chapter 12, verses 22-24, *"But ye are come unto Mt. Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and ecclesia of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel"*

Brethren and Sisters, what do these things mean to us? We can read these things with awesome joy and appreciation for the wonderful victory Christ secured, but does it have its desired affect on us? Hebrews tell us Jesus is our Captain. The word "Captain" means "chief leader". He will lead us to salvation. He will give it to us only after we have "fought the good fight" with him we cannot just follow. 25

This brings us to the chapter read today - Chapter 13. It contains the crowning statement that implies that the things before mentioned should induce "brotherly

love": *"Let brotherly love continue."* He goes on to advise to let these things have an impact on what we think; what our attitude is toward others (both brothers and strangers); and that it should have an effect on our actions.

We read in chapter 13, verses 1-3: *"Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."*

We sometimes think we have it pretty rough. How many people do we know who are imprisoned for living or teaching the Truth, that we should remember them? Yet when we consider these verses, certainly we can relate to the second part of the statement we read – "remember them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body." Due to our human conditions, those with adversity would cover a large portion of the body. Yet the exhortation to "remember" implies for us to be concerned with them – to get involved. As it says concerning those bound - as bound with them. This is a fulfillment of the basic 'Golden Rule': "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Verse 4 is probably in response to an ecclesial problem. The writer encourages marital purity.

In verses 5 & 6, he says, *"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."*

Here the writer tries to dispel the typical human problem of lusting after what others have instead of trusting in the Lord. We may think we don't covet what others have, but how many of us are content with what we have? We always want more of something, especially money. It is exactly what the word "covetous" means. In the Greek the word for covetous is *"aphilarguros."* It means a love of silver.

So far, the Apostle has been very clear with his point: love the brethren and the stranger, and don't love silver. It leads to the conclusion that if we really believe what God has said, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"* why should we even be concerned with these material things?

As he continues, the writer mentions again the unchangeableness of Christ – established before he was born saying, *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."* (verse 8). He mentions this in contrast to, and as a warning against, being carried about with different and strange doctrines. It is always interesting to hear of something new, but new things are often wrong. The Truth (as it is in Jesus) is the same yesterday, today and for ever. For any new ideas, we have a simple command – *"TRY THE SPIRITS, WHETHER THEY BE OF GOD."* Here is the test – the Word. The conclusion is *"if they speak not according to the law and the prophets, there is no light"* (or knowledge) *"in them."* It must fit the law and the prophets.

26 Before concluding his argument, the Apostle reaches the apex to the very things that under the Law sanctified the people: the altar and the sacrifice. These things should be paramount in our minds, now, as we contemplate the one great offering of Jesus. He continues in verses 10-14, which reads, *"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the*

camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

It is a memorial spoken from Exodus: *"Whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy."* We can be made holy by our association (or our touch) with Jesus. We can be comforted by the Letter to the Hebrews and what is written within the 4th chapter in the 15th verse: *"For we have an high priest which cannot be touched by the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like unto us, yet without sin."*

Therefore, Brothers and Sisters, let us continue seeking for that continuing city — that New Jerusalem on Mt. Zion; the multi-Christ in action.

ero. ALM/lip

Beginning Of The New Millennium

We have been blessed once again to meet here this morning to remember Christ by partaking of the bread and wine. We meet here for the last time this year, this millennium, and possibly the last time before Christ returns. The world around us is looking for something extraordinary to happen when the year ends. Some look for the Y2K bug to strike our computers and electronics, others look for the world to end, and still others do look for Christ to return. Whether Christ returns this week or not, does not change the fact that his return is near.

In Genesis we are told that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. God does not require rest, so we know this is symbolic. 2 Peter 3:8 tells us *"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."* This helps us to figure out the parable of the Creation, that there will be 6000 years for man to "work out his salvation" or, as most people choose to spend their lives "working the sinful works of the flesh" before God brings rest to His people while abolishing the works of the flesh during the seventh period of a thousand years.

Before Christ was born there were 4000 years and since then there have been 2000 years. Adding these together we get 6000 years. If man has kept the dates correctly we should see Christ return on January 1. Most likely, however, mankind, through his weakness, has not kept the dates correctly. This again does not change the fact that Christ must be at the door, and we have been commanded:

"Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." (Luke 12:40)

While we as God's servants are fully aware of the signs of the times, are we looking hard enough at what is required of us at Christ's return? What should we be doing? Should we not be reading and studying the Bible and pioneer works and attending classes more than ever before? Should we not be doing more and more to strengthen our brethren and sisters? How about our everyday lives? Do we remember God always and strive to be obedient to all his commands? Or are we allowing the cares and pleasures of this world to carry us away from the only hope that we have in this evil world?

This morning we will look at this hope, the hope that Christ will return and reward those who are found worthy.

If there is one doctrine which stands out above all in the New Testament, it is that Jesus will return to this earth again. Yet it is a sad fact that many professed Christians do not understand this even though it's the heart of the gospel hope. Jesus taught his disciples to pray by saying, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will (desires) be done in earth as it is in heaven."* Before this can happen the king must return to the earth. And when Jesus departed from the earth for the last time it was told his disciples:

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

In the book of Revelation, which we are currently reading, we find: *"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."* (Revelation 22:20)

There can be no kingdom until Christ first comes back to set it up and rule the earth in righteousness.

The scriptures tell us that there will be some on the earth with the faith when Christ returns. This is great comfort and inspiration to us to strive to be among those who are found worthy.

When Christ was on the earth the first time, his disciples did not understand there would be a delay before the kingdom would be set up.

Because of their misunderstanding, Jesus gave them a parable of a nobleman to help them realize this he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

We have read this parable many times. The parable tells of a man who was leaving to receive authority of a kingdom and then to return to rule over it. Before leaving, he called for ten of his servants and gave them each a pound (a certain amount of money) and instructed them to trade with the money until he returned. But his fellow countrymen hated him and sent a message to the authorities, *"We do not want this man to be our king."*

Then later, after the man received the title to the kingdom, he returns and commands the servants to whom he had given the pounds to come and show what profit they had made for him. The first came and said, *"Lord, your pound has made ten pounds."* And he said, *"Well done, my good servant: because you have proved yourself in this small matter, you will be in charge over ten cities."*

The second came and showed his pound had gained 5 pounds and he commended him likewise making him governor over 5 cities. Then another came and said, *"Sir, here is your pound. I have kept it wrapped in a handkerchief for I have been scared, as I know you are a hard man, always getting something for nothing and reaping where you have never sown."*

The nobleman replied, *"You wicked servant, your own words condemn you. You knew me to be a 'hard man, always getting something for nothing, reaping where I have never sown. ' Then why didn't you put my money in the bank, that when I returned I might have received it back with interest '"*

And the nobleman said to those who were standing by, *"Take away his pound, and give it to him who had ten pounds."* But they said to him, *"Sir, he already has ten pounds!"* "Yes," said the nobleman, *"and I tell you that to every one who has something, more shall be given; but from him who has nothing, even what he has shall be taken away from him."*

This examination being completed, he then said, "And as for those enemies of mine who objected to me being their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence."

By this parable the disciples learned that Jesus was to go away into heaven and to return with the authority from God to reward the righteous, punish the wicked, and reign in righteousness, crushing all opposition to his holy rule. He had indicated this to the disciples of John the Baptist when he said:

"Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." (Matthew 9:15) Even though Christ was going to depart from them, He would not remain away forever. But when would he return?

The disciples themselves were very interested in knowing the answer to this question. So were other saints in past ages-

"And one said to the man clothed in linen which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" (Daniel 12:6)

Just before Christ's ascent into heaven, the disciples asked him:

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

We should carefully note the disciples did not ask, "Will the kingdom ever be restored again to Israel?" To them the question was entirely a matter of time. There were things truly they did not understand at this time, but the Gospel of the Kingdom was not one of them. They had, under Christ's instruction, been preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom themselves during his ministry. Now we have to note the Lord's reply- *"And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."* (Acts 1:7)

This is in accord with his previous words to them:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ... But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mark 13:26,32)

Yet, Jesus knew that God had appointed a day. A day is coming when the Kingdom is certainly going to be restored to Israel, as all the prophets have declared. Jesus was labeled by Pilate, the *"King of the Jews,"* as he himself had stated to him that he was.

And so he is to be! The destiny of those Jews who in their day of opportunity objected to Christ being their King is graphically portrayed, as we have seen, at the end of the Parable of the Nobleman. As Christ had indicated to the apostles, the Kingdom would not appear immediately in their day. So Paul cautioned the Thessalonians that the day of Christ would not come until the terrible Apostasy (desertion from the Truth) had come first.

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; " (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

The Hebrews were told, *"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."* (Hebrews 10:37)

These apostles were eagerly awaiting the return of their Master. Yet if they did not believe he was to come in their day, why did they write in this way? Were they mistaken in their expectancy? No, the apostles were not mistaken, as another parable spoken by Jesus clearly indicates. He explained that they were to be always ready, dressed, with their lamps burning, like servants who waited to welcome their Lord and Master on his return from the wedding feast, so that when he arrived and knocked at the door, they might open it for him immediately:

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself; and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through." (Luke 12:35-39)

The urgency and lesson of the parable is made plain by the commandment of Jesus himself.

"Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." (v. 40)

No wonder the apostle to the Gentiles could remind the Thessalonians in these words- *"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."* (1 Thessalonians 5:2)

Jesus emphasizes this teaching, using the same words in his last message given through John on the isle of Patmos-

"Behold, I come as a thief Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked. And they see his shame." (Revelation 16:15)

The nearness of the second advent of Jesus is sure, but it is also a matter of utmost urgency. We today can see so much more of the accomplished purpose of God than did the early disciples, (though it is true some of them saw in vision that which is to us now history). We have the evidence of the judgments predicted by Jesus which came upon the Jewish race. We can read of the destruction of Jerusalem and the slaughter of the people in AD 70. And then recall Jesus' words- *"But the end is not yet..."*

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24)

30 We can see the long dark history of the Church of Rome, red with the blood of God's saints, Mother of Harlots and Abominations, built upon the traditions of men of corrupt minds.

During the past week, we have seen a forcible reminder of the Roman Church's influence from the celebration of Christ-Mass. This feast is celebrated by many who think they are honoring the birth of Christ. But if we look into it, and examine all its origins, and compare it with Scripture, we are confronted with the well-established fact that everything connected with Christ-Mass is of pagan origin, and came into 'Christianity' with the pagan corruptions of the early centuries. It is a combination of the idolatries of Egypt, Babylon, Rome, Scandinavia and ancient Britain, united with the idea of Christ's birthday by the Catholic Pope himself, after he could not keep his people from celebrating the traditions and customs of the season. We find this frankly admitted by its more knowledgeable clergy.

We find the early Christians warning and exhorting one another against giving in to these heathen festivities and customs. At the time of persecution, Christians were detected by NOT decorating their houses at the time of Saturnalia, the pagan Rome's December festival of giving presents, singing, lighting candles, decorating houses with evergreen trees in honor of their pagan god Saturn.

Throughout history the true believers have been persecuted for righteousness' sake and for staying separate from the sinful people around them. We read in Revelation of the cry of the saints.

"And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10)

Other prophesy we can read about being fulfilled is how the Turkish power has been drying up during the past two centuries, preparatory to this terrible destruction prophesied in Ezekiel 38.

We can also see today the influence of the weakening ecclesiastical moon caused by Darwinism, or "Science falsely so called," which has blinded the nations and helped man to leave God out of the picture. And everywhere we can see the prophesy of Luke 21:25,

"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; "

Terrorism, violence, nation against nation, class against class, juvenile delinquency, abuse, dreadful and snowballing immorality, crime on the continual and frightful increase; and with nuclear extermination burdening men's minds, the situation is exactly as Christ predicted for the last days.

"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." (Luke 21:26)

Today, both the US and Russia have enough nuclear weapons and intercontinental guided missiles to completely destroy mankind. With Y2K approaching, some worry that the computer chips in these weapons will mis-function and cause them to go off.

31

This most likely will not be the case, but these two powerful nations along with Israel will play key roles in the time of the end, In Ezekiel 38-39, God has prophesied that Russia will come against Israel. Also concerning Britain and US and Russia, we read in Daniel 11:40 *"And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots,*

and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over."

Today Russia is still a powerful nation but lacks a leader to guide her. The people of Russia are not happy with their current government, which opens the door for someone to take control of power. When this happens, everything is set for the beginning of Armageddon.

Another prophecy that tells us that the end is near is Daniel 12:4 *"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased"*

This is certainly true of our time. Man has been permitted to make marvelous discoveries. And now in this space and computer age man is doing things that were science fiction only a few years ago.

With all this new knowledge, man is becoming more proud and self-confident and approaching the point when God will openly manifest Himself with the return of Christ.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:8 *"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:"*

Man is of the earth earthy. For the servants of God, the present day should be a time of great expectation and assurance the Day of the Lord is near. And whether we are alive at his coming or not, we should live with this constant expectation.

True believers of every age since the first century have been living in hope that Jesus would return during their lifetime. If Christ does not appear in the next week or so, don't be surprised if some ask,

2 Peter 3:4 *"Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."*

Bible students know where the promise of his coming is. We know also that all things do not continue as they were, but there is constant movement towards God's Plan. And we watch it accelerate today before our eyes.

The most important historical event to happen this century is the fulfillment of Luke 21:29-31 *"And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand"*

Those who believe that the Jews are not God's people do not realize that the fig tree referred by Jesus is the nation of Israel. In 1917 General Allenby drove the Turkish power out of God's Holy Land; in 1948 the nation of Israel was established after almost 2000 years of absence from the world scene.

This wonderful sign assures us that the Kingdom of God has nearly come.

So this morning, let us examine ourselves and make the appropriate changes to prepare us for our Judge.

We read, *"And at midnight the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went 32 in with him to the marriage, and the door was locked"*

There will then be no time to rush about, to get baptized, to reform, to change our ways, to fill our dark cold lamps. Therefore, let each of us now put God first in our lives, praying always that we may be accounted worthy to stand approved before the Son of God.

Rro. Curtin

Crisis In Russia

Those of us who look for the soon return of Christ watched with dismay just over 10 years ago while Mikhail Gorbachev, faced with a weak economy and the pressures of an unprecedented arms race with the United States, yielded to growing international concerns and brought down the Soviet Union. The USSR had an economy earning about 1 trillion dollars per year, and were spending 300 billions on defense, about 30% of their Gross National Produce (GNP). The United States, meanwhile, was spending the same 300 billions on defense, but out of economy generating almost 4 trillions. This was only about 8% of its GNP. This great arms race seemed to be fulfilling the events of Joel 3, taking us to the great wars of the time of the end, and the return of Jesus.

Joel 3:9-14, "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. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."

While the USSR was feeling the economic pinch of this military buildup, the United States "piled on," announcing a plan calling for the "Strategic Defense Initiative," nick named Star Wars by its detractors. This highly technological effort would require immense new spending initiatives for both sides. The USSR simply had no way to begin to pay for this. Unable to meet the new military challenges, Gorbachev yielded to growing capitalistic pressures within the USSR, and set the stage for the crumbling of this one time powerful nation.

Communism was regarded as a failure by many within the Soviet sphere, and it lost strength. Political enemies in its satellite states quickly gained the upper hand, and began to break away from the Central power authority which tried to replace what the USSR had had. This was the famed "domino effect" in reverse. One nation after the other left the principles of Communism behind in favor of closer ties with the economically powerful west. The forces within what has become known as the "Russian Confederation" suffered through what might be termed a bulletless civil war while these States struggled for some identity. The communists suffered huge political losses in the early days of the new Russia

But as the policies of those who replaced them have proved at least as bad, and probably worse than the communists before them. Corruption reaching an embarrassing level in the highest parts of the government. This has allowed the communists to rebuild their party. Reaching a power base of over 33% of all Russians (which may actually be a higher percentage than when she was a totally communist nation), she became a complete "thorn in the side" to any capitalistic advancements. But the Communist party fractured into many groups and ideologies that cannot seem to get along with each other for any purpose other than thwarting the efforts of the "Unity Party."

The course for capitalistic Russia was not made any easier by the Western States. Money was lent by the West, when the necessary controls were not in place. This encouraged wide spread corruption, and made the future bleak for Russia, who will not be able to repay those loans. Much of the money lent by the wealthy nations of the world (called the G7 nations) has never been put to use for Russians. The money was taken by the leaders and invested outside of Russia. Indeed, the day following the resignation of the Boris Yeltsin of the Unity Party and President of Russia through this experimental period, Swiss Banks froze several accounts while they determined whether or not the millions of dollars in them were actually owned by Yeltsin.

The following is Yeltsin's own evaluation of his presidency from Newsweek:

"On his last day in office, Yeltsin acknowledged for the first time what is plainly obvious to most of Russia's citizens: his era, which began with such soaring possibility, has declined into a dispiriting mix of economic despair, rampant corruption and war. And for that reality, Yeltsin was contrite. "I want to ask your forgiveness," he said, "because many of our hopes have not come true, because what we thought would be easy turned out to be painfully difficult. I ask you to forgive me."

Into this background of seeming hopelessness came a new figure just a few months ago named Vladimir Putin. A 47 year old former top agent with the KGB, Putin gained his political understandings working in intelligence in Germany under the old Soviet Union. He had been Yeltsin's head of national intelligence in the Russian Confederation until recently. When Yeltsin was forced to appoint yet another Prime Minister by the Duma, he selected Putin, partly because he was not very well known, and was not a political threat to anyone. When Putin was appointed Prime Minister, he became nearly a one issue politician, and that was to stop any further breakup in the Russian Confederation. This gained him strong support from his greatest enemies, the blend of communists and nationalists who had emerged as the front runners for the upcoming elections.

A news story said of his focus to hold the Russian Confederation together:

"Putin, 47, showed some political savvy when he skipped a fancy dinner in Moscow to celebrate the new year with the 100,000 troops engaged in a three-month-long battle against what the Kremlin calls Islamic terrorists based in Chechnya.

34 " I want you to know that Russia highly appreciates what you are doing,' Putin told soldiers as he pinned medals on their chests.

" 'This (war) is not just about restoring the honor and dignity of Russia. It is, rather, more important than that. It is about putting an end to the breakup of the Russian Federation,' he said in remarks carried live on Russian TV from a Russian-held town near the Chechen capital, Grozny."

Putin has shown no inclination to allow the status quo to continue. This has his own party and those in the West who have buoyed up the corrupt Unity party, very concerned. The following is from the New York Times:

"MOSCOW -- Only Vladimir Putin knows for certain where he wants to take Russia as the nation's acting president. But if his visit last week to the Railways Ministry is any indication, Russia may be in for an interesting trip indeed.

"As the Moscow daily Kommersant reported, Putin performed the rote ceremonial duties at a packed meeting of ministry employees eight days ago, doling out awards and praising the railroads' contribution to the economy.

"But then his tone turned icy. Why, he asked, did the railroads beseech the Kremlin for money when certain customers got special shipping discounts? And was it not odd that the ministry had granted certain unnamed people the rights to collect a mountain of unpaid freight bills? And why was the ministry buying rails from Japan when Russia's steel mills were idle and offering fire-sale prices?

"Then he left, even before the flustered deputy prime minister for industrial policy could read remarks congratulating the Kremlin on its victory in that week's parliamentary elections.

"The extraordinary scene suggests there is more than one way to look at Putin's pledge, made even before he became acting president Friday, to restore a strong central government to Russia.

"Among Westerners, that promise mostly raises fears of a crackdown on civil liberties or a return to authoritarian rule, fears fanned by Putin's direction of the savage war in Chechnya. But his admirers insist that what he truly wants to subjugate is the untamed and fantastically corrupt Russian bureaucracy and economy."

During the years that Yeltsin was in political control, he worked to have tremendous powers legally given to the President. He never used the powers, saying that he didn't need to. It was always unclear whether or not the army would support him if he did. But no doubt the rules are in place within the Russian Constitution for a strong handed and popular man to restore order to the Russian Confederation.

It is in this venue that Putin becomes a strong political figure. Earning respect and admiration from the Army, and finding the one lone issue that cements the various factions of the Russian people together, Putin has become the clear front runner for the elections coming up in March. The interesting thing is that this one lone issue, is an issue with great potential to bring them into confrontation with the Western states.

The significance of the recent war in Kosovo has not been lost on the ruling powers in Russia. The bombings and massacres of the Moslem population in Chechnya dwarfs any of the atrocities carried on in Kosovo by the Serbs against the Albanians. In Kosovo, a nation was told that it could not control a dissident majority within its own borders. Russia is very sensitive to any attempt by the world nations to do the same thing to them.

Human Rights Watch and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees have been foremost among those condemning Russia's tactics. According to these organizations, civilians in large towns like Urus-Martan and Sharoi have been repeatedly shelled and bombed. Many of these people are women, children and the elderly — those who have not gone to the hills to fight with the rebels. Because of the ban on journalists, casualties figures are unreliable. But Russia's onslaught has been ravaged enough that two cities — Gudermes and Achkhoy-Martan — surrendered without a fight. No safehold have been allowed. Refugee convoys and even a Red Cross convoy have been bombed. And refugees reaching the neighboring republic of Ingushetia tell of deliberate killings of civilians.

The Western States complained of these atrocities to the Soviets at a recent European Security Summit in Istanbul. The most forceful statement came from Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who said "the massive use of force which hits the civilian population before all else must be ended." President Clinton added, "There must be political dialogue and a political settlement."

The Russian response to this by then President Boris Yeltsin, was complete rejection. He vowed the Chechen rebels would be "completely destroyed." Further, he made no concessions for civilian casualties. The continued policy by Putin, which is all but guaranteeing him success in the up coming election is challenging the Western States on their new world strategy, potentially bringing them into conflict.

Putin has shown to be realistic about Russia's economic strength. He said in his first speech as president that Russia would have to sustain a growth of 8 % per year for 15 years to catch up to Portugal. She would have to grow at 10% per year to catch up to Britain, or France.

There is no doubt that the cause of nationalism when correctly manipulated such as Adolph Hitler did prior to World War II, can greatly reduce the time needed to heal the economic woes. To heal the economy, Putin says they must begin immediately.

The March, 2000 elections now take on an interesting twist. Whether these events play any part in shaping the future, we can't say. What we can say is that there is now a man on the political scene in Russia with deep roots to Magog (Germany) who seems ready to become the leader of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, or the Russian Confederation. And strangely, the Communists and Nationalists alike seem happy to have him in place. The leading candidate to win the election only three months ago, for the Communists and the Nationalists, Yevgeny Primakov, will not even say if he will run for president.

36 The United States is clearly concerned about the new front runner. Already the American Security Advisor is issuing cautioning words about his capability to carry out a fair election. Particularly galling to the West appears to be the fact that the more

Putin supports the policy of war in Chechnya, the more the Russian people support him.

The prophets are very clear. It is Russia with her confederation of States in some sort of organization which comes down upon the mountains of Israel at the time of the end.

Ezekiel 38:2-6, *"Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee."*

These ancient names all indicate the Russian people with her allies will be the great force which invades Israel in the latter days. It is these peoples who stir up the wrath of the Lord God Almighty to finally send his son, Jesus the Christ, for the deliverance of his people.

Exactly how the events all play out, the prophets do not say. But they do say that this will happen. Though we cannot see with complete accuracy all that is happening, we can see enough to know that there is still a vital and active force in Russia which is working for the good of all Russias. As Brother Thomas pointed out years ago, nations move politically due to their desire for their own self aggrandizement.

This force, when presented to the Russian people gains almost immediate popularity, so much so that this force has unified a people who have done nothing but fight for years over various economic schemes and philosophies. But now with a man whose bent is the growth and power of Russia, all controversy seems to be set aside with the hope that this man can restore Russia to her former place in the world, as a world wide super power.

Is he communist? He says he is not, but he says it is also important to never forget all that the communist era did for Russia. Is he nationalist? Clearly he is. Is he progressive, such as has been his party's platform? This is a question that will be answered in the years ahead, but judging from the support given by the communists and nationalists to this point, the answer is more than likely, no. And the great mystery may be how he came to head a party that he shared so little with ideologically.

The answer is no doubt found in the book of Daniel,

Daniel 4:17, *"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."*

THOUGHTS GLEANED BY THE WAY

By A Wayfarer

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3 The word vocation or calling, in ordinary usage, refers to a stated or regular occupation or profession to which one gives the most of his talents and energy. The same idea holds good in the spiritual sense; that is, when one is called to the service of the Truth, it must be his chief occupation or profession to which he is to "hold fast without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23), and to which all other interests are to be subservient.

When anyone aspired to a vocation or profession he assumes certain obligations and agrees to uphold the ethics, rules, and regulations governing that particular vocation, sometimes with an oath. If he is faithful to the moral principles governing his vocation and faithfully, energetically, and conscientiously performs the duties incumbent upon him, he thereby honors the vocation to which he is called and proves himself worthy of such vocation. On the other hand, if he fails to abide by the principles governing his profession, and performs his services in a slovenly, neglectful manner, and brings disrepute upon himself by doing things contrary to the ethics of his profession, he at the same time, to a certain degree, dishonors his profession.

The vocation to which we are called is the highest of all callings. It is the highest of all because it is "not after man," not after the desires of the flesh, but we are called of God through His word. We are — "*called to be saints*" (Romans 1:7). It is "*a holy calling*" (2 Timothy 1:9); "*to glory and virtue*" (2 Peter 1:3); "*the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phillipians 3:14); "*Partakers of the heavenly calling*" (Hebrews 3:1); "*called unto the fellowship of His son Jesus Christ*" — called to suffer for Christ as he suffered for us- "*called unto His kingdom and glory*" (I Thess. 2:12), "*called that ye should inherit a blessing*" (I Peter 3:9); "*that worthy Name by which ye are called.*" James 2:7 Seeing then, that we have such a high and holy calling which requires our keenest interest, our most faithful service and undivided loyalty, walking "worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called" is no small

matter, but just as the calling is higher and the rewards far greater than any 38 other calling, responsibilities are greater in proportion

* * * * * * * * *"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand"* Ephesians 6:13. In a historical account of the battle of Waterloo, the historian relates that the British troops under Wellington, at a crucial point in the battle, "were beaten to a standstill, but there they stood." And there they stood until the legions of Napoleon battered themselves to pieces against the serried ranks which refused to retreat.

No matter how well armed, trained, or armored a soldier might be, unless he had the courage and endurance to stand his ground when the crisis of the battle came upon him, he was of little value as a soldier. Just so the disciple of Christ, no matter how learned he might be, how well instructed in the word, how well informed as to his duties as a servant of Christ; if he lacks the courage and the spiritual stamina to "withstand in the evil day," he is unworthy of the calling which he has professed to follow.

How sad it is that so many, who began their service with such confidence and zeal, have failed to "stand" in the crises of their lives; who have retreated back into the world from whence they came when trials and temptations were too much for them to bear. How many have weakened and failed to "stand" when given an opportunity to testify for the purity of the Faith when faced with great odds! How many have failed to stand up against the encroachment of seductive false doctrine and lax principles of conduct, lacking the courage to stand up for the Truth in the face of strong adverse influences exerted by spiritually-weak majorities, well-meaning, but mistaken kinfolk and friends!

All of which goes to show that the strength to stand in the evil day is something which cannot be acquired by a mere knowledge and understanding of the Word anymore than the mere swallowing of food could be expected to give strength and vigor to the natural body. But, just as good food must be properly digested and its life-giving vitamins assimilated into the bodily structures before physical strength sufficient to withstand the many shock and exertions daily encountered in human activities can be acquired; in like manner the principles

of truth and righteousness contained in the Word of God must be so assimilated as to become a veritable part of our being; strength so great that we will be able to "withstand in the evil day." It is only by nurturing and building up and renewing the inner man day by day that this can be accomplished.

Bro. Oscar Beauchamp

39

What Does That Mean?

"...if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."
(Matthew 6:22)

We know how difficult it is to get proper perspective and to judge distance appropriately with one eye covered. Since we see more clearly with both eyes in use, why would Christ imply that having a "single" eye is a positive thing?

The theme of Matthew 6 is that we must be single-minded in our devotion to God (a "single treasure", v. 19-21; a "single vision", v. 22-23; a "single master", v. 24). Christ condemned the Pharisees in the beginning of the chapter for doing the opposite - almsgiving, praying and fasting publicly in an effort to gain approval from the masses. They kept one eye on the hoarded treasures of earth, and rolled the other eye proudly up to heaven— thus dividing their loyalty between God and mammon. As our life in Christ demands that we abandon all else, we confuse our vision if we "see double", as the Pharisees did.

There is no room for anything but single-mindedness in those who follow Christ. As James states in James 1:8, "*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*" He goes on to show how this concept of singleness must be all pervasive - it should affect how we treat people, not having one standard for the rich and another for the poor: "*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool.*" James 2:1-3

This singleness must also be displayed in our speech and in our

interactions one with another: "*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? ...*" (James 3:10-12) There must be that purity - *that singleness* – of focus that Christ was emphasizing. Duality is not acceptable.

James ends the chapter by discussing "wisdom which is from above." This wisdom is, above all things, *pure*. It is free from double-mindedness; free from any kind of defilement. If we possess this pure wisdom, then we will manifest it by being "*...peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*"

Brethren and sisters, let us possess that wisdom from above and keep our eye single.

