

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 upbuilding exhortations are encouraged. This is an effort to upbuild 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

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

Dear Brethren and Sisters,
Loving Greetings in the hope of Israel,

Since our last correspondence we have been blessed with visitors: Bro. Gordon Jones and Sis. Linda Jones, from Richard; Sis. Trudy Freeburg and Sis. Jo Neely, from Lampasas; and Bro. Ted Mingham and Sis. Marguerite Mingham. We appreciate these visitors and the words of exhortation from the Brethren. It helps to strengthen our faith in these last days.

We were greatly saddened hearing the loss of Bro. Pat Cassidy of the Lampasas ecclesia. Our hearts and prayers are with those who are suffering these trials as we wait the coming of our Lord and Saviour.

God Willing, our whole ecclesia will be attending the Hye Fraternal Gathering this year and we look forward to the annual Sunday School picnic in Canton and the Boston Fraternal Gathering in October. The contact with those of like precious faith is dear to us.

With Love to all our brothers and sister,
Bro. Tim Stinchcomb

FRATERNAL GATHERINGS & ACTIVITIES

(To be held God Willing)

BOSTON FRATERNAL GATHERINGOct 19 - 21, 2002

Bro. Jim Sommerville, 34 Birch Hill Rd., Northboro, MA 01532, 508-393-2874

Correction: The exhortation for July, 2002 The Parable of the Wedding Garment should be attributed to Bro. Robert Roberts.

Encouraging Words

I had thought about many subjects to bring before your minds this morning which I thought were needful to remember — but, then in Friday's reading we read these words in Peter 4:12-13 — *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings: that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy."* I then felt obligated to center our thoughts this morning on what the scriptures relay to us about the ups and 198 downs we all experience during our probation, especially in light of

the trials and tribulations this ecclesia has experienced in the last two months.

As Paul tells us that ecclesias are not exempt from trials in II Thessalonians 1:4-5 —

"So that we ourselves glory in you the ecclesias of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest (evident) token (sign) of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye now suffer."

The title of this exhortation is Encouraging Words, and if this term sounds familiar, it is because part of this exhortation will be taken from those brothers and sisters — both past and present — who have, over the years, sent words of encouragement over the Internet concerning our trials and tribulations.

But before I go into that, I want to tell you a story about "overcoming," because Christ tells us that "he that overcometh...will I give power over the nations." After all, we all want to reign and rule with Christ and have power over the nations. Now, this story begins when I was in high school, they decided we needed to run through an obstacle course, which was not all that bad, except it included a wall we had to climb over. The good athletes would run at this wall full speed with a running jump, hit the wall with one foot, while grabbing the top with both hands and with one smooth motion land on the other side. But, most of us, like me, ran at the wall hitting with a loud thud that nearly knocked the wind out of us while we grabbed for dear life to get just one arm over the top. Then, after a great deal of wiggling, squirming and kicking, we struggled to get both arms over, then one leg and finally straddling the wall, we pulled the other leg over and jumped down the back side. For some of my classmates it was too much of a challenge and they were unable to scale the wall. The strange thing about it was – the wall did not change – it was the same height for everyone. For some it was a challenge to be conquered; for others, a struggle, but eventually climbed; but for a few it was an obstacle that they could not overcome.

The whole point to this little story is that it is the same with the obstacles of life. Christ has promised us that we will have tribulation in the world, but He says, be of good cheer I have overcome the world. Now there has to be something to overcome, or we cannot overcome. After all you will never have a rainbow if you don't have rain. The scriptural principle is very clear – probation before exaltation.

That wall had to be scaled, just like our trials and tribulations, that we are promised will come upon us, have to be overcome and are sent to us by a loving Father who wants us to climb over the adversities that He has placed before us in order to try our faith that we may prove ourselves worthy of eternal life.

The apostle Paul understood this principle very well when he said - *we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulations worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope, maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.*"

You see, when Paul was given a "thorn in the flesh", he thanked God for it, after he understood that God had given it to him for a purpose and he said that he "took pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches (insults), in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when he was weak, then he was strong.

Now this is the attitude we need to adopt towards the problems, trials, sufferings and tribulations we face! When we understand the truth, we realize that these things are allowed by God, or else we would not have them...for He is in control. The very hairs on our head are numbered, so He knows the most intimate details of our lives. Since this is true, we can be better prepared to take what comes, for we know that *"all things are working together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose. " For "if God be for us, who can be against us?"*

Now let us examine some important scriptures, along with some encouraging words we have received over the years. Turn with me now to II Corinthians 4:17-18.

"For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. "

In an EW that Brother Shauwyn Smith had sent us, he relates - Paul tells us in II Timothy 4:7 that he *'fought a good fight. "* It is of some comfort in the midst of our own troubles to think that those who have gone before us had their turn. We cannot suffer more than they did. Few of us will ever be put to so great a test, and if they could say "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" where is our courage? Admittedly it is very often hard to find. But our sufferings, though they may be lighter are not less important. They hopefully always point to the same result of

fixing the desire and hope on the things that are not seen; for *"the things which are sent are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"*. Our brethren in the first century fortified themselves by the reflection that *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* God permits sufferings to His chosen for this very purpose, "that their trial by faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Christ". He tries us because without trial, our character would not be

complete. A man or woman is worth little as a companion, either for wisdom or sympathy, if they haven't seen troubles. We are to be Christ's companions. This is the word of Christ to the seven churches..."As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." And again, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" It cannot be that this principle should apply to the sons of God during Bible times and not apply now. God has not changed, and if we are His, we are as much the objects of His care as His children were in the beginning. So when we find ourselves in times of trouble, hold on a little tighter..."being steadfast and unmoveable...forasmuch as we know that our labour (and troubles) are not in vain in the Lord."

In Proverbs 3:11-12 we read of discipline and correction – *"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction: for whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth; even as a Father the son in whom he delighteth."* God is shaping, forming and molding our character through this discipline and correction now, in order for us to be fit subjects in His kingdom later!

Now turn with me to II Timothy 3:10-12 where we learn of Paul's afflictions – *"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsufferings, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions which came to me at Antioch, at konium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live Godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution."*

Brother Rene Growcott shares with us in SEARCH ME, O GOD an article entitled "Rejoicing in Hope; Patient in Tribulation" referring to Romans 12:12 - In all our troubles and problems and disappointments, let us never for a moment forget our blessings and our obligation of constant thanksgiving for them. This is what troubles are for: to drive us ever more deeply into the comfort of our blessings, and to make us all the more diligent to lay secure hold upon them by righteousness and loving

service to God. Our blessings are always infinitely greater than our troubles ever could be. If we cannot see this, we are blind indeed. We have seen people calling themselves Christadelphians reproaching God for their "undeserved" troubles. It is very easy, and very natural to the flesh. But what folly! What tragedy! We are not ready for the Kingdom, or God would terminate our probation, and give us sweet sleep. We have yet labors to accomplish, and lessons to learn. Let us glory in and profit by the tribulations that are of the loving hand of God to PREPARE us frail, erring mortals for eternal joy.

In Phillipians 1:29 Paul tells us *"for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake."* A few years ago Brother Jim Sommerville of Boston area relayed to us this Encouraging Word — with only one day left in 1997 most would focus on the new year, I however will ask you to take a good long look at the past year before it takes its last breath tomorrow and is forever gone. It was ours — it will be God's. We can take one last look and then we must leave it; the question is, will you be able to leave it behind or will you drag all the old PROBLEMS, and FAILURES into the new year with you? "Forgetting those things which are behind, I press forward."

PROBLEMS — How do we view the problems we have had? Why me? — Have we had family problems, like Moses, who had his brother and sister turn against him? But it was not really a problem — it was an opportunity for God to record, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Or have we had business problems like Philemon? They gave him the opportunity to "do also more than I (Paul) say." OR ecclesial problems? "What, could you not watch with me one hour?" "For it became him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Have you had more "problems" this year — or more opportunities which have been recorded as our good record?

FAILURES — Have you had failures? After hundreds of attempts to find a filament for his light bulb an associate of Edison said that it must be very discouraging having all those failures. Edison responded that not one of his experiments had failed. With each experiment he had discovered another thing that did not work as a filament for his light. He continued discovering things that did not work until one thing did work! A ball player wins the batting title with a batting average of .300. That is 3 hits for every 10 times he steps to the plate! 7 out of 10 times he gets out! You all have heard of Babe Ruth because he had 741 home runs, that is really great but did you know he also had 13,030 strike outs??? In life our 202 failures will out number our successes by at least 2 to 1 that is just

the way it is. If we dwell on our failures we will fail! There is one more day to deal with 1997's PROBLEMS AND FAILURES then we can look forward to 1998's

OPPORTUNITIES! -- James writes in chapter 1 verses 2-3 – *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."*

Peter shares in his first chapter verses 6-7 – *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire,-e might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."*

A story a sister shared with us through EW that was entitled "Life Struggles" went like this - - A man found a cocoon of an emperor moth. He took it home so that he could watch the moth come out of the cocoon. On the day a small opening appeared, he sat and watched the moth for several hours as the moth struggled to force the body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and it could go no farther. It just seemed to be stuck. Then the man, in his kindness, decided to help the moth, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The moth then emerged easily, but it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the moth because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened! In fact, the little moth spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly. What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the moth to get through the tiny opening was the way of forcing fluid from the body of the moth into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon. Freedom and flight would only come after the struggle. By depriving the moth of a struggle, he deprived the moth of health. Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If we were to go through our life without any obstacles, we would be crippled. We would not be as spiritually strong as what we could have been.

For we are told in James 5:10-11 – *"Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering, affliction and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure."*

In John chapter 16 verse 33 Jesus prays for his disciples – *"These things I have spoken to you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome _____ 203*

the world." We also need to overcome – for if there were no challenges, there would be nothing to overcome, would there?

Brother Roberts wrote in *LETTERS TO THE ELECT OF GOD IN A TIME OF TROUBLE* on this subject in a segment called *The Life to Come* – It is impossible to conceive the greatness of the reward promised. The terms "eternal life", "the life to come", etc. which express it are familiar enough, but their very familiarity tends to lessen our realization of the blessings they imply. No joys that we have ever experienced will compare with those which everlasting life will bring. Perhaps the most vivid conception that we can get is by contrasting what is, with what is to be. We have all felt the ills of mortality – sleepless nights, flagging energies, headaches and heart-aches. Most of us, too, have suffered from the curse of death or the loss of husband or wife or father or mother or a cherished child or friend. We know also from personal experience the incessant turmoil of present existence – the struggle with the diabolos, both within and without. Immortality, thanks to God, will mean an end of all this - the unloosing of every burden. The attainment of the reward promised will mean the greatest happiness ever enjoyed (absence of mental and physical pain, life really pleasurable) with a nature capable of reflecting and receiving every divine virtue and good. Then, as a brother once said: "Every thought will be a joy; every moment a pleasure; every breath an inspiration of an ecstasy that will only find expression in praise to Him that sits upon the throne." The bestowal of immortal life will make us part of a company, glorious, mighty, God-like, which will not only be free itself, but able to free others also, from the dreadful ills which now make all creation groan. Who will say that the divine promise is not exceeding manifestation? Is there not something very wrong if we do not? Let us see in "the joy set before us" the consolation of trouble that we might experience now.

Acts 14:21-22 we learn that tribulations are necessities... *"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."*

And just Friday, Sister Susan Sumler of Houston, sent in her EW about God's Rainbow – The falling rain dissolves into mist and the thunder begins to die: as the sporadic lighting fades, an arch of color pours from the sky. Rainbows appear after mighty storms when things look their worst. Just when the sky is darkest gray, out of heaven does a rainbow 204 burst. God first sent the rainbow to Noah as a sign that His word is true.

The rainbow's eternal message still speaks to me and you. The rainbow is a sign of God's promise that He will guide us through any storm, that we He will ease all our troubles, no matter what their form.

- When you feel battered by life's storms and you are filled with doubt and dismay, just remember God's rainbow is coming for its blessing you have only to pray.

God often sends troubles to help teach us what He would have us know. If someone later learned the Truth as the result of evaluating their home in time of flood, we would certainly call that rain a blessing although it may have brought much temporary heartache. But it is our ultimate good that concerns God, not our day to day ups and downs, and so if we really put our trust in Him then we can say with Paul that we believe that all things are working together for our good. It is sometimes hard to understand just why some things happen, but then we are seeing through a glass darkly and He has perfect vision – not only of the present, but of the future as well. In Jude 24:25 it reads – "Now unto him that is able to keep you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever amen." Let us not take prayer for granted. Prayer is not a matter of merely closing the eyes and using the tongue, but of coming humbly into the presence of the great Creator. Our prayers may be awkward: our attempts may be feeble, but since the power is in the one who hears it; and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.

God's Word gives us many milestones upon which to work toward while working out our salvation during this short probation He has given us. Not the least of which are certain virtues that were manifested by the patriarchs of the Bible, who all suffered trials, tribulations, afflictions, challenges, burdens, and discipline and correction for the Kingdom of God's sake! These examples are to aid us in attaining on a continual basis what we should be so let us try to have - - -

The wisdom of Solomon
The patience of Job
The humility of Martha
The diligence of Jacob
The leadership of David
The servitude of Moses
The adaptability of Paul
The tenacity of Peter
The trust of Abraham
The courage of Noah

The faithfulness of Ruth

The steadfastness of Stephen

And the obedience and submission of Christ.

In order to attain to any of these qualities and be able to successfully overcome all the challenges this life will give us, we will need to be clothed with the whole spiritual armour of God that Paul says we must have in Ephesians chapter 6:13-17 – *"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. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of righteousness: And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: "*

Also in II Peter 1:5-8 – *"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

I'm sure most of you are aware of my son being incarcerated for the last year and a half – I would like to share with you some of my personal letters from him through his trials and tribulations: "This week I did a lot of reading in the Scriptures. I'm in II Samuel reading about David's trouble after God told him that his sword will not depart his house. Sometimes, I will read several verses or a chapter several times if I miss something. But being the third time reading the Scriptures since I've been locked up, it is a lot easier to catch things, or sometimes, I will know what is ahead before I get there. But there is always something new to learn, every day on how we should be in this world." "Because it is this situation right now, that I am in, that makes me thank our Father for His grace, giving me a chance to see how He works His anger. That his teaching did not go down in vain. But was brought into an understanding of the sins and neglect that I did in the past. And now, knowing that if I refuse to, His wrath will be upon me again, making my life miserable until I show fear in Him. And it is for this reason that I will serve God with love, and do His will with fear, knowing that God could bring affliction on me at any given time." And then last month, he wrote "By the time you see me again I will have been locked up 15 months. I have been thinking about it, and even to myself it is hard to believe that I've been locked up that long. But my time 206 is drawing close and I will have to leave soon. And believe me, I

am ready to go, with no hesitation. But I will say this, I have learned a lot being locked up from meeting different people to the Bible. It has all been beneficial to me in one way or another."

Brothers and sisters we meet here each first day of the week to remember Christ's suffering and sacrifice through this bread and wine. For we are told that he learned obedience by the thing which he suffered; and if God's Son, who was perfect had to learn obedience by suffering, why would we (who are imperfect) expect to be treated any differently.

So brothers and sisters, when we come to the end of our probation and all these storms of life have passed – will we feel confident that we overcame all these trials in such a way that we could rightly say, *"I have fought a good fight (our probation is a constant struggle between flesh and spirit) I have finished my course, I have kept the faith (that faith that must be tried through the fiery storms of life) henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only but also to all them who love His appearing."*

Bro. Jerry Connolly

Why is the Middle East in Such Turmoil?

As has been announced, our subject for this evening is a question.. Why is the Middle East in Such turmoil? The answer is quite simple. The prophet Zechariah tells us:

Zechariah 2:7-12, "Deliver thyself O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye. For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee. And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again."

There is the plain and simple answer. Whoever touches Zion, whoever touches Jerusalem-- touches the apple of God's eye. The Lord shall inherit Judah -- his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem

again. Israel belongs to Jesus and the saints, and anyone who touches or fights over it, or tries to claim it for their own, suffers for it. This is the case today, and it has always been the case.

2600 years ago, the first world empire, Babylon and its great general/King Nebuchadnezzar, had touched Jerusalem. They had three times destroyed the city. They had torn down the glorious temple built by King Solomon. They had carried away the Jews out of the land. They had destroyed the land. For their actions, this was prophesied by God through Jeremiah against Babylon by Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 50:35-39, "A sword is upon the Chaldeans, saith the LORD, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon, and upon her princes, and upon her wise men. A sword is upon the liars; and they shall dote: a sword is upon her mighty men; and they shall be dismayed. A sword is upon their horses, and upon their chariots, and upon all the mingled people that are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is upon her treasures; and they shall be robbed. A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols. Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited for ever; neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation."

In this prophecy, God says that He would destroy Babylon, and it would be no more inhabited forever. Now this would be no simple act. Babylon was an incredibly strong fortified city. It was one of the leading cities of antiquity. It was established on the mighty Euphrates River. How could this ever happen?

After all, King Nebuchadnezzar himself had personally finished the walls that surrounded the cities. This is what he wrote about his wall, as found in the excavations of Babylon:

"In order to strengthen the defenses of Esagila that the evil and the wicked might not oppress Babylon, that which no kind had done before me, at the outskirts of Babylon to the east I put about a great wall. It's moat I dug and it's inner moat-wall with mortar and brick I raised mountain-high. About the sides of Babylon great banks of earth I heaped up. Great floods of destroying waters like the great waves of the sea I made to flow about it; with marsh I surround it.-- Nebuchadnezzar

This was an incredible feat. Archeologists have shown that the wall was not one wall, but a series of walls, surrounded by a water filled moat 150 feet wide. There was an outer wall around the moat, then a very thick 208 wall about 95 feet thick, thick enough that a four horse chariot

could easily turn around on top of the wall. And there was yet another wall, an older wall inside of that.

The city was built over the River Euphrates. Concerning protecting the city from invasion, Nebuchadnezzar wrote the following:

"In order that no pillaging robber might enter into this water sewer, with bright iron bars I closed the entrance to the river, in gratings of iron I set it and fasten it with hinges. The defenses of Esagila and Babylon I strengthen and secured for my reign and enduring name." Nebuchadnezzar.

The city had been made virtually impregnable by Nebuchadnezzar. So how could the prophecy of God through Jeremiah come true? In fact this city was so well defended with its wall and gates, that with the second great world power, the Medes and Persians, camped outside the city, preparing an attack, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, King Belshazzar decided to throw a party. That is how strong the defenses were, and how confident the Babylonians were in their walls and gates.

But that very night, while King Belshazzar was giving a party, he commanded that the vessels which had been taken from the Temple in Jerusalem which his grandfather had sacked, be brought out and used for his party. And while he drank of them this happened as recorded by the prophet Daniel:

Daniel 5:5, *"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."*

And what the hand wrote was interpreted by Daniel the prophet to tell Belshazzar, *"God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting, Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."*

And that very night, a great construction project that had been started by the Persian prince Cyrus was finished. This project diverted the mighty river Euphrates into a different course. The water no longer went through the city, but was diverted around the city. The great iron gates built by Nebuchadnezzar, no longer had the water for its floor, and the Medo-Persian army marched in on the river bed, under the gates, and conquered that city. That was in the year 538 BC. Nearly 70 years later, the city had a civil war, and the city was mostly destroyed. It continued on as a shadow of its old grandeur till BC 275 when the city was all but vacated and the remaining blocks of the city removed to Selucia on the Tigris. The last record of anyone living there was 80 BC. 209

So while this great city had been watered by the mighty Euphrates, now it was a city in the midst of a desert. Over time, the city withered, and died, exactly as God prophesied. In fact so complete was the destruction of Babylon, that in the early 1800s people who argued that the Bible was a book of fables and untrue, argued that if such a city as the Bible describes as Babylon had ever existed, surely some remnant of it would have surfaced by now. But in fact, that was just about to occur. Babylon was located by a British archeologists named Layard in 1847, and eventually excavated in the very early 1900s, where remnants of the great city were clearly unveiled.

What happened to Babylon is what happens to those who take up a position against Jerusalem and Judah -- to those who touch the apple of God's eye, as Zechariah says. God does not rest until they are destroyed. And what we see in the Middle East today, and so the turmoil we see nearly daily over the city of Jerusalem also will not end until Jesus the Christ returns to take the land for himself, and his chosen saints.

You see, years ago, God made a promise to a special man, Abraham. God took Abraham up on a mountain and we read of the promise that God made to Abraham in:

Genesis 13:14-15, *"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."*

This promise made by God to Abraham, that he and his seed would inherit this land, a promise that was repeated to his sons Isaac and Israel, became the hope that all Israel longed for. God didn't tell Abraham to look up, that he would inherit a kingdom in the skies. He didn't tell him to look down. He told him to look northward, southward, eastward and westward. He told him to look at the Land of Israel. And God promised Abraham that he would inherit this land forever.

But the promise wasn't just made to Abraham. It was made to Abraham and his seed. Commenting on this promise in his epistle to the Galatians, Paul wrote:

Galatians 3:16, *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*

So the promise made to Abraham and to Christ become the cornerstone upon which all the rest of the world's events were to be built. We, living
210 today, have opportunity to become heirs of these promises, heirs of

the land of Israel through Christ, for Paul concluded his third chapter to the Galatians this way:

Galatians 3:27-29, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

We, through baptism into Christ, can be heirs of the promise which God made to Abraham. This is our great hope. Remember Paul, in chains for his beliefs standing before the Roman government? What did Paul tell them. Paul said:

Acts 26:6-7, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews."

This is why Paul was in chains. Because he believed in the promise that God made to the Fathers. He preached it, he was imprisoned for it, and ultimately, he died for it. This promise was what the twelve tribes of Israel were still waiting for in Paul's day, and those promises still have not been fulfilled. Writing to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul wrote of these promises. He wrote:

Hebrews 11:8-13, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 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."

These all, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, received not the promise. But they were persuaded of them, and they embraced them, but they remained only pilgrims in that land of Israel. And there was a reason for this. Paul concludes that chapter giving us the reason.

Hebrews 11:39-40, "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

You see, the land of the Middle East does not belong to either of the peoples fighting over it. It doesn't belong to the Arabs, and it

doesn't belong to the Jews who are there now. It belongs to Abraham, to Christ, and to those who are Christ's through baptism. But this Scriptural principle is denied by both groups fighting over it, and therein lies the reason God has brought the conflict to the region, and why it will not cease, till God makes it cease by sending His son to sit on David's throne. As the prophet Isaiah wrote:

Isaiah 9:6-7, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."*

You know this is sung often at Christmas time. But how often do people focus on the words. Where is the increase of government and peace to be, according to these verses? Upon the throne of David! And where was David's throne? In Jerusalem. And as this verse says, no matter what man thinks, the Lord of Hosts will perform this.

Well, lets look at the claim of the Moslems towards this promise. The Moslem's Holy Book is called the Koran. In the Koran we find this, related to God's promises to Abraham and his offspring.

The Cow 2.124: "And when his Lord tried Ibrahim (that is Abraham) with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make you an Imam of men. Ibrahim said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the unjust, said He.

2:125: "And when We made the House a pilgrimage for men and a (place of) security, and: Appoint for yourselves a place of prayer on the standing-place of Ibrahim. And We enjoined Ibrahim and Ismail saying: Purify My House for those who visit (it) and those who abide (in it) for devotion and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves.

2.126: "And when Ibrahim said: My Lord, make it a secure town and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the last day. He said: And whoever disbelieves, I will grant him enjoyment for a short while, then I will drive him to the chastisement of the fire; and it is an evil destination."

Here, we have the promise to Abraham's seed directly denied. Abraham specifically asks God, according to the Koran, What about my offspring? What about my seed? And the Koran regards God as saying, 212 "my covenant does not include the unjust." And of course by

"unjust" the Koran means any not worshipping Allah. This is a complete and absolute denial of the Scriptures. And a complete denial that salvation is through the promise God made to Abraham and to his seed, which is Christ.

And in the verse 126 above, we see Abraham concerned with the building of the city, and the prosperity of the people. Yet Paul tells us, as we have already seen, that Abraham wandered in the land as a pilgrim, waiting for God to fulfill His promises. In fact Abraham had so little, that when Sarah his wife died, he had to buy a field to bury her. No Abraham looked for another city, whose builder and maker is God.

And the Koran states that Ishmael was included in the promises. In that

2.131: When his Lord said to him, Be a Muslim, he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds.

2.132: And the same did Ibrahim enjoin on his sons and (so did) Yaqoub (Jacob). O my sons! surely Allah has chosen for you (this) faith, therefore die not unless you are Muslims.

2.133: Nay! were you witnesses when death visited Yaqoub, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me? They said: We will serve your God and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq (Isaac), on same chapter we read the following: e God only, and to Him do we submit.

Yet the Bible clearly shows that Ishmael was not permitted to inherit with the true seed, Isaac. This is a changing of God's plan for the earth, and God will not permit that His promises will fail. So turmoil and destruction is the only course available.

The other combatant in the Middle East is the nation of Israel. Their position is different from the Arabs, in that they have some claim to the land, but not in their current and rebellious state. The Jews are the seed of Abraham, but not the seed through Christ. They claim the land due to their descent, but as Jesus warned the Jews in his lifetime:

Matthew 3:9, *"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."*

And again, Jesus had this discussion he had with them immediately preceding his crucifixion: 213

John 8:39-44, *"They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do*

the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God."

"Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself; but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

No, the Jews, who crucified Christ and to this day refused to recognize their savior, also have no claim to the land, though their future is considerably brighter than that of their Arab neighbors. Because for Abraham's sake, God is still working with the Jews. And God's working with the Jews has created the greatest source of unrest that exists in the Middle East.

The purpose of the Law of Moses was to be a schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ. Paul writes this to the Galatians:

Galatians 3:19-24, "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

But this very law, which was intended to be a schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ prophesied of what would happen to the Jews. From the very beginning of that law, from Deuteronomy, written before Moses had died, it prophesied that the Jews would rebel against the teachings of that law, and it said when they rebelled, this would happen to the Jews:

Deuteronomy 28:36-37, "The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, 214 among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee."

This is exactly what has happened to the Jews. They rebelled against God. So thorough was their rebellion, that when the prophet Jeremiah was sent to them to turn from their unrighteous ways, and worship God, this is what they told him:

Jeremiah 44:16-19, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?"

This is how complete their rebellion was. Jeremiah warned them to stop serving the idols, in this case the queen of heaven, and they refused. Not only did they refuse, but they doubted God's power to save them, and put all their faith in the idols. And because of the thoroughness of their rebellion, God sent Nebuchadnezzar against them, and destroyed them, not once, but three times. They continually rebelled against Babylon so that, no matter how patient and kind the King of Babylon wanted to be to the Jews for Daniel's sake, in the end he destroyed the city, destroyed the Jewish king, and carried the people away captive, exactly as God had prophesied in that 28th chapter of Deuteronomy that we have already read.

God told the Jews in the Law he gave them, that if they rebelled they would be punished, and punished severely. God told them in the Book of Leviticus:

Leviticus 26:18-20, "And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits."

What does it mean, to be punished 7 times? Well, a time, in the Bible, refers to a specific period of time - a year. The Jews observed a 360 day year. That is what an original year was thought to be. It is where our mathematical 360 degree circle comes from. 360 degrees in a circle, as there were thought to be 360 days in a year. So a time is 360 days. (215) Now, the Jews are said to be punished 7 times for their sins. 7 times 360 is

2520. The punishments upon the Jews then, were to be for a period of 2,520 years. And you know, an interesting thing in relation to this happened in all our lifetimes.

It was never difficult to see when the punishment of the Jews was ended. It ended in the winter of 1917, when General Allenby of the British Armed Forces marched into Jerusalem, freeing Jerusalem from the Turks at that time, and really freeing them from oppressive rule for the first time since Babylon conquered her. Well, when did Babylon conquer Jerusalem? If you look in almost any of the standard reference works, you will see that the date for the conquering of Jerusalem is given to be somewhere between 612 BC to 610 BC. But this date did not fit the prophecy of the Mosaic Law. Since the Jews were freed by the British in 1917, and the punishment was to be for 2520 years, then the Babylonian invasion must have taken place in BC 603.

But with all the advancements in learning, Archeology too began to advance. And Archeologists soon realized that the 612-610 dates were too early for the invasion. In fact, these dates had only been chosen because of the prophecy of Jeremiah that Judah should enjoy 70 years of rest. It was thought that Cyrus invaded Babylon in 542 - 540 BC, so 70 years previous would be 612 -610 BC. But the Archeological record caused them to update their official records to the winter of 604 BC, and in the 2001 Biblical Archeology Today (which by the way, is no real friend to the Bible,) they acknowledge that the correct date from the most recent data, is in fact 603 BC, exactly as required by God's unchangeable law.

As a side note, it was actually with joy, that some of these archeologists reported their great finds, thinking that they disproved the 70 years prophecy by Jeremiah, and therefore the divine claims of the Bible. But now they are discovering that in fact, the date of 540 BC for Cyrus's invasion was also wrong, and it is closer to 537 BC. And they have found written proof from Cyrus' own hand, that Cyrus did not enter Babylon after he conquered it, but instead sent in his Uncle, a Median Monarch who ruled for two years, exactly as the Bible said. And they have found that the decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem didn't happen till Cyrus' second year as King, which would be four years after the invasion, or 533 BC, exactly 70 years after Babylon had conquered Judah. And so they are again stuck, having to recognize the accuracy of the Bible's prophecy.

So in 1917, the 7 times of punishment upon the land of Israel for her sins was concluded. But this was not the complete fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Israel. It wasn't enough that the land was to be freed from the rule of the Northern powers, but that the Jews would also 216 return to the land. Jeremiah had prophesied:

Jeremiah 46:27-28, "*But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.*"

So God caused Israel to return. It wasn't easy. The Jews were quite comfortable in the lands to which they had been driven by God. They were free to return, but they didn't want to. But the intense persecution by Nazi Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s made Israel recognize the need for a homeland. And from Russia, the Jews also found motivation to return. You see, all individuals were given an identification card which they were required to carry. On the card was listed the state in which you were born, but if you were a Jew, instead of a state, it just said "Jew." This obviously made them very concerned.

So eventually, they immigrated to Israel in large numbers and created a society. In 1947, the United Nations recognized Israel as a state, and on Passover of 1948, Israel declared itself a nation. With that declaration, a war broke out for control of Jerusalem, between Arabs and Jews which has never truly ended. There have been periods of reprieve, to be sure, but essentially, it has been one long war over the city of Jerusalem.

Zechariah wrote:

Zechariah 12:3, "*And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.*"

This has truly been the case. All nations have experienced what a burdensome stone Jerusalem has become. The attacks on the United States on Sept. 11th, 2001, is simply another reminder, in a long line of reminders, of how difficult it is to resolve the problems of Jerusalem.

And it will get worse. How many noticed two weeks ago, the talks between Russia and the NATO alliance, forming a great northern power in Europe. With all else going on, it was barely recorded by the news agencies, yet this agreement unified the militaries of Europe and the countries mentioned in Ezekiel 38 like never before. That chapter begins:

Ezekiel 38:1-6, "*And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince (Rosh-RSV) of Meshech and Tubal, and prophecy 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."

Rosh, Meshech and Tubal are the most ancient names of Russia. Magog is Germany. Gomer is France. Togarmah, or Turkey is also a NATO member. This recent treaty has unified the northern power like never before in our lifetimes. Yet the world sat quiet while this went on. In fact, in the United States, where it was even noticed it was received with rejoicing. It is thought that with all the oil in Russia, an alliance with Russia is a good thing, reducing our dependency on oil from the Middle East. And it is a good thing, for those who look for Jesus' soon return. But not for the world in general. It is another step towards the war called Armageddon.

And there is another uniting factor going on in Europe, and it is called anti Semitism. The news agencies keep asking the American government, why all the European states support the Palestinians. And the American leaders keep dodging the question. But the answer is not historically difficult. Europe is anti Semitic, because its religion - Catholicism - is also anti Semitic. You know, when the common man began to develop the ability to read and write, he started to read the Bible. And he came upon the 17th chapter of Revelations. And he read this:

Revelation 17:3-6, "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration."

And when they read about this woman, they started to ask who this could be? And they noticed that the Revelations said this about the
218 woman:

Revelation 17:9, *"And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth."*

And immediately the people said, Rome sits on seven mountains. And they noticed how the rest of the clues in this verse which describes the power that will resist Christ and the saints, also fit Rome. She had seven heads, and Rome had had seven distinct forms of governments. And matching this clue at the time the Revelations was written, she had already had six of them, the seventh was not in existence when the apostle John wrote Revelations, and the eighth, was actually a rebirth of the seventh form of government. These clues all fit like a glove. And so the Protestant movement was born.

But the Catholic Church, anxious to get away from these verses pointed to Jerusalem, and said that she also is built on seven Hills. And an entire theology (in fact two separate Catholic theologies) were developed to try to prove that it was Jerusalem that is the city that opposes Christ's rule, not Rome. And the teaching of this for 1000 years to the youngest people has generated the anti-Semitism we saw in the Spanish Inquisition, in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France, and in the massacre of Jews in German Concentrations Camps in World War 2. All these things carried out with the Church's blessing - at the time. Afterwards, she tries to rewrite history so that her position is less clear.

But today, the Catholic Church stands with the Arab states as the only political entities in the world not to recognize the nation of Israel. And this is why the Palestinians ask for the Catholic Church to have control over the Temple Mount, instead of the Jews. And the Jews understand this, and will never accept it. And Christians should understand it, because Revelations is very clear. Is this power which will oppose Christ in the wars called Armageddon Rome or Jerusalem? John gives us the answer in the last verse of that 17th chapter:

Revelation 17:18, *"And the woman which thou rawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth."*

No the, things that we have seen these past couple of weeks show the tremendous, 2000 year old conflicts preparing to come to a head. The nations fighting over Jerusalem, with no end in sight. The northern powers of Europe beginning to unite against Jerusalem. And the whole world suffering from fear, with no way out.

Zechariah 14 tells us plainly about these times, when opposing nations touch the apple of God's eye. He tells us the result of the burdensome stone that is Jerusalem, that the nations of the world have picked up, but can't put down. He tells us:

Zechariah 14:1-3, "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."

Yes, when Russia and her European allies come against the mountains of Israel, they will conquer her. Israel will not be able to resist. The city is cut off. Half the city goes into captivity. And older Israeli prime minister once remarked that Russia would never capture Jerusalem. He was wrong. The Jews who are there today, do not know Christ. They rejected their Messiah, and will yet suffer great punishment for it. But when Jerusalem falls, then will God send Jesus to go forth and fight for Jerusalem and for the land, and his saints with him. Zechariah goes on about that day saying:

Zechariah 14:4-5, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee."

Then shall those Jews who are left of the great invasion of Russia and Europe have a change of heart. Then, for the first time in their history, they shall recognize their savior. And what a day that shall be! For Zechariah records this of the land of Israel, after Jesus has freed them, after Jesus has done what their worldly leaders, and their worldly allies could not do.

Zechariah 12:9-11, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon."

They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn for him as one mourns for their first born. And in the 13th chapter, we see the same 220 event again recorded.

Zechariah 13:6, *"And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."*

Still unable to come to grips with the fact, they had crucified their Savior they again ask him, what are these wounds in your hands. And of course they are the marks of his crucifixion. And then Israel shall recognize her savior, and truly become God's chosen people, through Christ. Just as we, now, have that same opportunity, if we take advantage of it.

It is true what Peter said. The people all around us say as they said in Peter's day, where is the promise of his coming. Peter wrote about his generation, but he might as well have been writing about ours:

2 Peter 3:3-4, *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, 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."*

And people do say this. Where is the promise of his coming? Belshazzar also said this. How can the Medes and Persians knock down these great walls. Belshazzar could not read the writing on the wall. But Daniel could. The question for those of us gathered here this evening is, "Can we?"

Bro. Jim Phillips

Our Salvation

...Our salvation is not otherwise to be wrought out in than in fear and trembling. There is no time for pleasure-hunting. The service of Christ is now, as it has always been, a course of self denial. Analyse most men's hearts, and self-comfort, self-prosperity, self-honour, self-pleasure, in some form or other, will be the directing motive. Christ is made to wait on Mr. Self's convenience. It is a dangerous policy; for, without respect of persons, the Father, who judgeth every man's work, will shortly ask of the whole programme, "Did ye it for Me?"

Christ now stands at the door and knocks. If we open to him, and take him in as our friend and counselor, dwelling in our hearts by faith, he will become our Captain, and will direct the whole course of things for us, and enable us to render a good account in the day when the great question is put. But if we listen to other voices rather, and neglect the reading of the Word, giving heed only to demands of business, the love of money, the claims of kindred, the wants of the flesh in houses, lands, clothes, 221

eating, drinking, marriage etc, Christ, after a while, turns away from the door, and the Christless house, joined to its idols, is given over, at last, to desolation. Christ means to bestow immortality and a kingdom, and therefore he asks a high price, even the whole heart and life.

Many no doubt, in that day, will prostrate themselves eagerly before him, as he himself tells us ; but his favours will be reserved for those who faithfully serve him in his absence, declining association with a world that knew him not, taking part in the testimony of him which the world despises, and diligently observing his precepts, while all is untoward, self-crucifying, and silent. He will be to us what we are to him. In this he is like the Father, who to the pure shows Himself pure; to the righteous shows Himself righteous (Psa. 18 : 25). Deny him, and he will deny us; confess him, and he will confess us; neglect him, and he will neglect us; serve him, and he will gird himself and make us sit down to meat and come forth and serve us.

Bro. Robert Roberts - Seasons of Comfort

Why God Allows Evil in the World

We have our answer to the question of "why God allows evil in the world". It is because He is still working out His plan of Salvation for the world. The nations of the world, all of them, are disobedient to God's commands. Some worship false Gods with false traditions. Some manipulate the word of God, making the power of God of none effect, after the example of the Pharisees. But regardless of how they are disobedient, or to what extreme they are disobedient, it is clear that no nation of the earth worships the One True God after the laws He has provided in the pages of the Scriptures. Therefore, God will soon send His Son, to set the world right. May we all be prepared, with our lamps burning, and not caught up in the affairs of the nations, that we might serve the one True God, in wisdom and in Truth.

Bro. Jim Phillips

The Untimely Death of a Saint

We all are painfully aware of the absence of younger Brethren and Sisters who once were active members of our ecclesia but, in wisdom of God, were taken from the land of the living. New to the Truth and full of energy, they would often add life to the meeting and create in each of us a thankful heart knowing that God is still visiting the Gentiles to take out of 222 them a people for His Name.

I can recall one such instance of over 20 years ago. A Sister, both new to the Truth and recently married, whose probation was terminated at 29 years of age after a lengthy bout with cancer. I remember the brethren and sisters praying fervently for the Deity to save her life. Also, I still have memories of many questioning how such a thing could happen. "Why, Lord? Why must she be taken from us so soon?" No satisfactory answer seemed forthcoming. We all knew that we should not sorrow as those who have no hope. Our Sister would soon rest in hope! But the pain over the loss for both the ecclesia and the family was almost impossible to assuage.

Eventually, in one Bible verse many found comfort. It was a passage from what appeared to be an unlikely source: the Prophets. A text that had gone either unnoticed or not understood by most. Once read and reflected upon, it was as if we had discovered hidden treasure: A certain knowledge of God's Will that would lift us up and ease the pain.

Isaiah declared: *"The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and the merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come"* (57:1). The NEB Version has it: *"...the righteous are swept away before the onset of evil..."*

An evil may await that is so terrible it can make such a death as described above look like a blessing in disguise. Did a horrific event await our sister at the next turn of her walk? Only the Lord knows for certain. If so, why would He not circumvent the evil, rather than allowing a slow and agonizing death? Clearly, Providence had a higher purpose. Did she possess the requisite righteousness that the verse requires? The Judgment Seat would reveal it.

At the close of our sister's life, the ecclesia had learned some priceless lessons: Firstly, that true consolation is only to be found in the Scriptures. As the Psalmist declares: *"The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."* (145:17) Accordingly, with respect to the termination of probation we could rest assured that God's timing is always perfect. Secondly, that the Deity alone knows how many days have been allotted for our sojourn. Therefore, we must continuously be taught to *"number our days."* This exercise has to go beyond academics. We need to witness death firsthand, no matter how distressful the experience may be. Thirdly, that our struggle continues.

Today is the day of salvation. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow. It is vital that we make the most of this merciful opportunity God has granted each of us while it is yet today.

What Does That Mean?

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; And it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land. And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briers and thorns." (Isaiah 7:21-23)

I always assumed that the phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" was a description of the bounty of the land of Israel. In the above quotation, however, it is the result brought about by the destruction of the land by the Assyrians. Wouldn't destruction, desolation, and "briers and thorns" be the opposite of an abundance of "milk and honey"?

The assumption made here stems from passages such as Exodus 3:8, *"And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey."*

As an individual acquired livestock, he was required to move from place to place in search of vegetation. The more vegetation he found, the more milk he received. Thus, a land covered with vegetation means a land "flowing with milk". It was also a known fact that honey was most plentiful in those very areas where cattle produced the most milk. The same pastures, rich in greens for the goat and sheep, also sustained myriad flowers used by bees in producing honey. In the Bible, honey is associated specifically with non-agricultural areas covered with wild vegetation. This was a positive and alluring description to the Israelites while they were still shepherds and living in a desert land. However, after they settled the land of promise by clearing the "milk and honey" areas for cultivation, the *same phrase became a frightening description associated with the destruction of productive farmland.*

Isaiah is saying that in the wake of war, destruction will prevail. Instead of cultivated areas, the land will go back to its natural state and wild vegetation will flourish. *"Every place where there had been a thousand grapevines worth a thousand pieces of silver shall be covered with briers and thorns."* The ensuing abundance of wild pasture will provide great quantities of milk, and the multitude of wild flowers springing up in the devastated fields will supply bees with enormous amounts of pollen to produce honey so that "butter and honey shall everyone eat who is left in the land".

To the prophets, lush wild vegetation and the resulting "flow of milk and honey" symbolized destruction, desolation and loss of cultivated lands; but to Moses, the description spoke of the bountiful plenty of the land of Israel. We look for a time when the land will be blessed. The cultivated areas will bring forth so much that the "plowman will overtake the reaper" while those areas that were desert will be turned into flowering grasslands. *"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."* (Isaiah 35:1)

