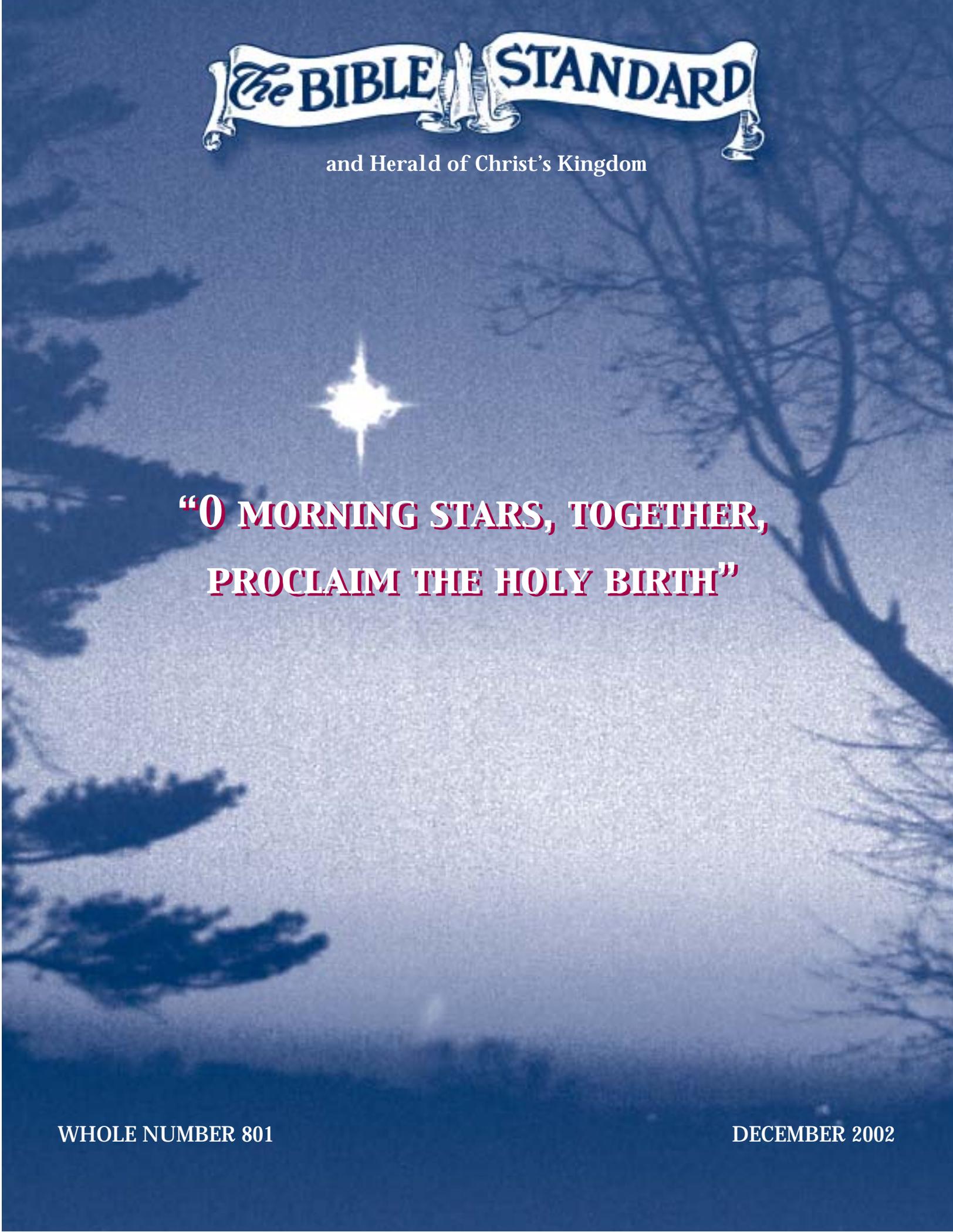




and Herald of Christ's Kingdom

A bright, multi-pointed star is centered in a clear blue sky. The silhouettes of trees are visible in the foreground, creating a serene, winter-like atmosphere.

**“O MORNING STARS, TOGETHER,
PROCLAIM THE HOLY BIRTH”**

Little Town of Bethlehem

*“The hopes and fears of all
the years are met in thee tonight”*

The circumstances of our Lord’s birth were of the humblest kind, and the surroundings of his birthplace were connected with memories of toil and hardship. Yet on that night it seemed that Heaven must burst to proclaim the good tidings of great joy which would in due time embrace the entire human family.

Wakeful shepherds watched their flocks in the fields where Ruth, the Savior’s ancestress, had gleaned, and where David as a shepherd boy had followed the ewes great with young. Awe-struck and trembling at the visit of a special messenger of the Most High, and thrilled to the depths of their being at the heavenly chorus of angels praising God, these humble men were the first to gaze upon the face of Him who was to be the world’s Savior.

While utterly believing the evidence of their ears and eyes, they must have been amazed at the manner of His coming. The promised Messiah was to be their nation’s Deliverer. The throne of David would be rightfully His, and He would be acclaimed as “mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” His destiny was to establish a righteous government which would continue unto all eternity — “good tidings of great joy” for all people (Isa. 9: 6, 7; Luke 2: 10). Yet He came without public acclaim or recognition, revealed only to the favored few.

*“How silently, how silently
the wondrous gift is given!”*

Princes are born in royal palaces, amid the trappings of wealth and worldly honor. The announcement of the birth of the Prince of Peace was not made to an assembled world, or even to an expectant Israel, but the Son of the King of Heaven was found by the shepherds lying in a manger, the animals’ food trough, in the stable of a humble wayside inn. Here, the shepherds would feel at ease as they told Mary and

Joseph of their extraordinary experience, and the visit of those faithful men was surely a benediction upon the holy family that night — another blessing that Mary, especially, kept in her heart, doubtless to relate to her firstborn Son in the years to follow.

*“O morning stars, together
proclaim thy holy birth”*

The Scripture record does not tell us the name of the angel who came to the shepherds that night. Very likely it was Gabriel, already active in this momentous feature of God’s Plan, in that he was the one delegated to announce to Mary the forthcoming birth of “the Son of the Highest.”

Of high rank among God’s special messengers, and evidently of glorious appearance, he came alone at first to convey to the shepherds the glorious tidings of salvation. And *suddenly* — possibly come at his bidding — “a multitude of the heavenly host” were present also, lifting up their voices in praise to God. It was as if Heaven itself exploded into a spontaneous anthem of joy and praise, shaming a world unheeding and undeserving of such a Gift from a loving and merciful Heavenly Father.

Towards the end of Jesus’ ministry on earth, when a multitude of disciples did indeed shout and rejoice as they welcomed Him into Jerusalem as their King, the Pharisees asked Him to rebuke them. “I tell you,” He said, “that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19: 40). There are times when great joy cannot be contained in silence.

*“For Christ is born of Mary;
. . . our Lord Emmanuel”*

The shepherds, we are told, made known far and wide the news of the birth of the Messiah. Evidently these were men of God, waiting in expectation for the “seed” promised to Abraham, who would bring blessings to all families of the

“Lift up a standard for the people” — Isa. 62: 10

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earth. They believed in that Gospel. So the glad tidings were spread abroad and all who heard marvelled at the strange events of that night in Bethlehem.

In the following weeks and months a few others were favored with special insight. In accordance with the Law, the child was circumcised on the eighth day, and named Jesus. When Mary's 40 days of purification were complete, she and Joseph took him to the temple in Jerusalem, where the prophet Simeon held the babe in his arms and exulted: "Lord, . . . mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . . prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2: 21–32). Anna, an aged prophetess, also gave thanks for the Savior, and afterwards witnessed to all that looked for redemption in Israel (Luke 2: 38).

"Wise men" — possibly philosophers or astrologers of Persian origin, came in search of the one born to be King of the Jews, very likely approaching the court of Herod for information as to His whereabouts. Though nothing is known of their identity or number, it may be that they were members of the 12 tribes scattered abroad, who had retained something of the sacred writings. Or they may have been noble heathen, followers perhaps of Zoroaster, who may well have come to understand and accept the prophecies of Daniel, the princely Hebrew prophet at the Babylonian court during Israel's captivity there.

The tribute of these eastern intellectuals to the newborn King was gladly accepted, and their being warned in a dream by God not to return to Herod indicates Divine approval of their homage. Thus, even in His infancy, the light that was to lighten the Gentiles began to shine into some waiting and devout Gentile hearts.

So Christ was born of Mary. At the time appointed, Emmanuel (*God with us*) had come (Isa. 7: 14; Matt. 1: 23). And as St. Paul later proclaimed: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3: 16).

GOD WITH US

That our Lord Jesus existed *before* He was "made flesh, and dwelt among us" is clearly stated in the Scriptures, and His former existence was of a far more exalted nature and condition than that of a perfect human being. The Apostle John was apparently witness to Jesus' prayer near the end of His earthly ministry: "Father, the hour is come . . . I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 1: 14; 17: 1, 4, 5).

Our Lord's change of nature was a miracle, the processes of which transcend the limits of human thought. Like all other miracles, it was performed to meet an emergency for which no natural law could otherwise

It was necessary for the proper satisfaction of Justice that the One to take upon himself Adam's penalty for sin — the death sentence — should be as Adam originally was, a perfect human being.

provide. The Son of God was made flesh that He might *give* His flesh — His humanity — for the life of the world, and that as by a man (Adam) came death, so by a man (the man Christ Jesus) might come the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15: 21). In other words, He was transformed from the spiritual to the human nature, so that in giving His life for the world's redemption He might give the exact equivalent for that which was lost.

The Divine Geneticist

The Bible teaching on the virgin birth of Jesus has been discredited by many, even by some claiming to be Christians, as a mythological element in the Christian faith tradition, rather than a statement of fact. But the accelerating increase of knowledge has so transformed human thought and expectation, that to dismiss the virgin birth as impossible is now more a stubborn prejudice than a reasoned judgment. Whereas it was difficult for the scholars of A.D. 1 to 30, *not* having seen, to believe, it would seem difficult for the scientists of today, having seen, *not to believe*.

The growing understanding of genetics and the DNA code, the practice of *in vitro* fertilization and embryonic transfer, and the alarming concept of "designer babies" being produced for selfish human gratification, all demonstrate possibilities undreamed of even a generation ago.

How, then, can it be asserted that the Creator of things could not, by His holy spirit or power, have implanted in Mary the perfect genetic material which would result in the birth of the perfect Christ-child? Accepting that the soul qualities and the life-principle of the Word (*Logos*) could be transferred to a being of a different nature by the Great Geneticist, it becomes clear how Jesus, though partaking of human nature, was not a son of Adam, but the Son of God. And though the mother of our Lord Jesus was herself a daughter of Adam, it was well within the capabilities of the Heavenly Father to ensure that the embryo growing within her womb carried none of the Adamic imperfection.

It was necessary for the proper satisfaction of Justice

that the One to take upon himself Adam's penalty for sin — the death sentence — should be as Adam *originally* was, a perfect human being. But until Jesus came, the situation remained as the Psalmist had expressed it: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49: 7).

The turning point in the history of the human race came when God's great love *provided* a ransom, when He sent His Son to be our Redeemer, and when our Lord Jesus Christ willingly laid down His life for the sins of the world (John 3: 16, 17; 1 John 2: 2).

THE JOY AND THE SORROW

Bethlehem-Ephrathah, though called the city of David, was in fact a small Judean village at the time of the nativity. Yet no town in the world has such a joyous history or exalted status in the hearts and minds of Christians everywhere, as this place, whose name means "House of Bread." Perhaps over-romanticized in the popular view, the events associated with the birth of Jesus were not without their dark side.

Being but six miles from Jerusalem, the inhabitants would be well aware of prevailing conditions in the capital, and ever wary of the corrupt leadership of the nation in the person of Herod and his courtiers.

A native caution, therefore, may well have restricted the telling of the shepherds' story to those whom they could trust not to make trouble. But trouble came. Probably unaware until later of the visit of the Magi and the malignant jealousy of Herod at the news of a rival "King of the Jews," they must have witnessed and grieved at the atrocious deed which came to be known as "The Slaughter of the Innocents," and they probably suffered the loss of infants in their own families.

Only Matthew records this atrocious crime, which he says fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 31: 15: "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matt. 2: 18). The wild wail of anguish which rose from the mothers robbed of their infant sons could not be hushed, and all who heard it might imagine that Rachel, the great ancestress of their race, mingled her voice with the lamentations of those who wept inconsolably for the loss of their little ones. Her

tomb stood by the roadside just outside the village, a memorial to the beloved matriarch who had died giving birth to Benjamin.

JESUS' BIRTHDAY

For a while the shepherds' amazing experience would be uppermost in their thought and conversation. At first they would count the months and the years, but as time passed, with no apparent unfolding of further features of God's Plan, the memories were no doubt stored away, to be wondered at from time to time as the ordinary business of life continued.

No record has survived as to the exact date of that angelic visit, an omission which should not be attributed to carelessness on the part of the Gospel writers, but which indicates that the date of our Lord's nativity is not of primary importance. Nor did Jesus in later life ask His followers to remember His birth, but rather, His death.

It is generally accepted that our Lord was born in late September or early October, so that there may be some truth in the claim by early church historians that December 25 was originally celebrated as the date of the annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel. At this time also our Lord would have laid aside the glory that He had with the Father before the world was made, and His change to human nature began.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Thirty years were to elapse before much more became known of the Savior born that night, and the younger shepherds may well have lived long enough to become His disciples when He began to lay down His sacrifice, for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Their good and honest hearts, and their faith in the promises, would evidence that they were "Israelites indeed" — like Nathanael, whose character our Lord commended and who was granted exceptional and immediate insight as to the person of Jesus: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (John 1: 45–51).

True, Philip and the other disciples had already identified the new Teacher as the one spoken of by Moses and the prophets, not without some perplexity at times, or even misgivings. It was with hindsight that the Apostle John wrote: "The Word was made flesh . . . (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father),



full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14). The power of the holy spirit bestowed at Pentecost overcame the deficiencies of human understanding, and taught them all things, as the Master had promised during his heart-talk with them as the end drew near.

During His earthly ministry, the nobility — the *glory* — of perfect manhood was unmistakable in the “Son of man,” a name Jesus often used of Himself. His personal magnetism drew the multitudes to hear Him speak, and while His command of the respect, admiration, and love of most ordinary people owed much to His unique relationship with His Heavenly Father, Jesus *the man* surely appeared as though “crowned with glory and honour” (Psa. 8: 5; Heb. 2: 7). Thus in the person of Jesus, another kind of “glory of the Lord” shone round about the humble shepherds and other true-hearted Israelites who believed that the Savior, Christ the Lord, had come.

*“So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven”*

As we consider again the wonder of the first Christmas message, we can rejoice that in Bethlehem on that holy night the world’s destiny was determined. Though even at this late stage in God’s plan of redemption, darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people, we can enter into the spirit of rejoicing because we know that a greater and more glorious season of festivity and gladness will come to the waiting world in God’s due time.

So our hearts are truly blessed as we remember what our Lord told us: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10: 10). The Rachels of the world will rejoice as they see their children raised from the death state, to the prospect of life eternal: “Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears . . . they shall come again from the land of the enemy . . . thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jer. 31: 16, 17).

The fears of all the years will vanish. The hopes of countless generations will become realities — in Bethlehem and throughout the whole earth.

* * *

Bethlehem Today

Greatly changed since New Testament times, Bethlehem is now a city of over 25,000 inhabitants. For many decades it has been more a bustling tourist resort than the holy place one might expect, with souvenir shops, hotels, restaurants, and bars more in evidence than churches and religious institutions, though there are many of these also.

Lying along a narrow ridge about 2,500 feet above sea level, the city has long been revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Church of the Nativity is built over the reputed site of Jesus’ birth, the tomb of Rachel still stands not far away, and the ancient Pools of Solomon are to the south. Bethlehem has been a magnet for centuries to Christian pilgrims especially, and local artisans still find buyers for the carved olive-wood and mother-of-pearl souvenirs for which the town is renowned.

Now an agricultural market and trade center closely linked to nearby Jerusalem, the predominant language is Arabic, but English is widely spoken, and French, German, and Spanish are also heard. A university was founded in 1973 which now includes Faculties of Arts, Sciences, Education, Business Administration, Nursing, Tourism, and Hotel Management.

The Changing Scene

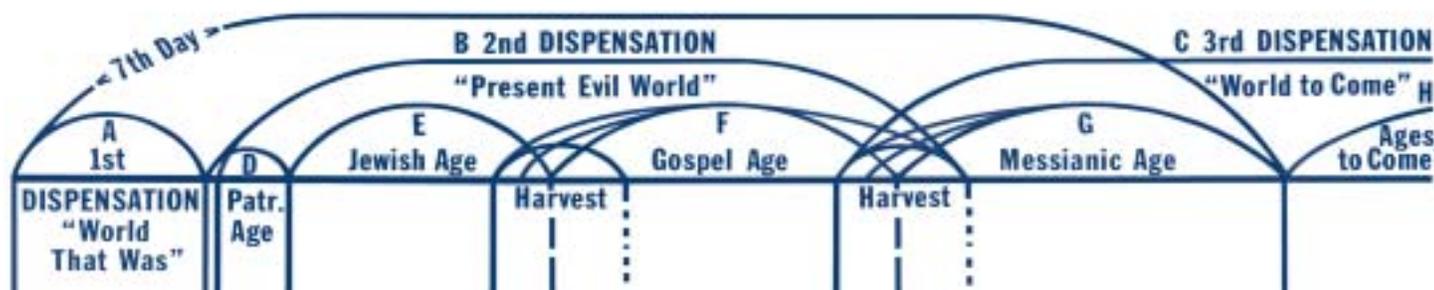
Occupied by Israel in 1967, Bethlehem came under the control of the Palestinian Authority in December 1995. The transfer of power gave momentum to a trend already apparent in other areas under Palestinian government, and in fact throughout the Middle East — the departure of Christians. For the first time in its modern history, Bethlehem now has a Muslim majority, with Christians representing only about 40 percent of the population.

The causes are complex and have to do with life-style, social status, culture, and the whole area of demographics. Also involved are the ancient rivalries between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac, and between Jacob and Esau, which lie at the root of the Israeli-Arab hostilities. And while in times past Muslims often lived with Christians in reasonable harmony, the pressures of Islamic militancy have driven a wedge between them, and fear of reprisals keeps even friends apart. Violence is never far away, and the blood of slain innocents is still lamented in the land.

The Siege in the Church of the Nativity

Though prospects are not good, Bethlehem is trying to rebuild its reputation as a happy and prosperous town, following the violent scenes that erupted recently, when Israeli tanks encircled the Church, demanding the surrender of 39 wanted militants sheltering inside. The siege ended when the militants agreed to go into exile in Gaza or abroad, and Manger Square is once again a parking lot. But there are few tourists now, and the episode served to erode what measure of peace and contentment the population still enjoyed. For many the promise of peace on earth and goodwill towards men, seems an impossible dream.

Habakkuk 2: 2 — Conclusion



Part 11 in our series on Habakkuk 2: 2: "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it."

This article ends our year-long series on this text .

WE TRUST that our Habakkuk series, which has run through the year 2002, has proven to be a blessing to our readers. In this issue, we will first provide a summary of our series, and then examine in some detail the three parts of Habakkuk 2: 2: (1) "Write the vision," (2) "and make it plain upon tables," and (3) "that he may run that readeth it."

SUMMARY OF HABAKKUK SERIES

Following is a recapitulation of the highlights that have been covered in each issue. For more details on any of the topics, we refer our readers to the pertinent issues:

(1) **January:** God, the great Master Architect of the universe, having foreseen before man's creation, his fall into sin and the chaotic conditions that would result, devised a great Plan for his recovery. Immediately after man's fall, over 6,000 years ago, that Plan went into operation. Since then it has been systematically progressing, despite all obstacles and opposition, through a series of dispensations and ages, each with its own specific purposes, its own schedule, and its own set of conditions. When His Plan is concluded, and man's recovery complete, all His obedient creatures will witness the grand and glorious outcome.

(2) **February:** The final and greatest age in God's Plan for the recovery of man from sin and the curse of death is the Millennial Age. This 1,000-year period will witness the awakening of those in the Adamic death state, and the offer of restitution — a return to the human perfection that Adam enjoyed in Eden — to all the willing and obedient. God has spoken about this glorious age through His prophets, and it has been the focus of a majority of the Bible's prophecies (Acts 3: 19-21).

(3) **March:** God's Word reveals that He has provided for two separate and distinct salvations. The first, the *special salvation*, is designed for an elect class — Jesus' footstep followers, the Little Flock. Their call is a heavenly one, their period of development is the Gospel Age, and their reward

is joint-heirship with Jesus, heaven being their eternal home. The second, the *common salvation*, is designed for the non-elect, those not called to the heavenly salvation. The period for their gaining salvation is the Millennial Age, and their reward will be eternal life as perfect human beings, the perfected earth being their eternal home.

(4) **April:** Two of the most important events in the Divine Plan are our Lord's First and Second Advents. The purpose of His First Advent was to lay down His human life as the Ransom-price for Father Adam. The purpose of His Second Advent is to make that Ransom-price available for the recovery and restitution of mankind. During His First Advent, our Lord was human, and therefore visible; however, during His Second Advent, He is a spirit being, and therefore invisible to the natural sight. The Scriptures indicate that the due time for Christ's Second Advent is during the seventh 1,000-year period after Adam's fall into sin.

(5) **May:** The Patriarchal Age, so named because it was during that time when God dealt with the Patriarchs — such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — is the first of the three ages that make up the second dispensation, this *present evil world*. This Age began at the end of the flood, and ended at the death of Jacob. It had three purposes: (a) God revealed His Plan to Abraham, through the Covenant He made with him and his Seed, (b) He furnished many types shadowing forth numerous details of His Plan, and (c) He selected certain individuals who will be Princes in the earthly phase of His Kingdom during the Millennial Age.

(6) **June:** The reign of sin and death for over 6,000 years is sometimes spoken of as the time of "the Divine permission of evil." In Num. 21: 4-9, God gives a typical illustration of the curse of sin and its remedy. These verses describe the incident in the wilderness when the Israelites were being bitten by fiery serpents, and as a result were dying. God instructed Moses to set up a brazen serpent on a pole

so that when the people looked upon it they lived. The fiery serpents picture sin, which has been putting mankind to death, and the brazen serpent pictures Christ, and that belief in Him and His sin-atonement is the only way to gain release from the condemnation, power, and effects of sin, either in this Age or in the Age to come.

(7) **July:** God has been working out His Divine Plan through many different covenants. Following are five important ones: (a) *Adamic Covenant* — the contract between God and Adam, which Adam broke through disobedience, bringing death to him and his race; (b) *Rainbow Covenant* — the promise that God made to Noah, his family, and all creatures of the earth, that He would never again destroy all flesh with a flood; (c) *Abrahamic Covenant* — the promise that God made to Abraham that his offspring would bless the whole world of mankind; (d) *Law Covenant* — the agreement between God and Israel whereby God promised them everlasting life upon perfect obedience to His laws; and (e) *New Covenant* — the coming Millennial-Age agreement between God and the world of mankind in which God will promise them eternal life upon obedience to the laws of His Kingdom.

(8) **August:** The holy spirit is God's: (a) power and influence, and (b) His disposition. For the willing and obedient among mankind during the Millennial Age, God's holy spirit will first work repentance, faith in Christ, and consecration. The consecrated will then be granted a new human heart, mind, and will, culminating in a character like God's and Christ's — one full of wisdom, power, justice, love, and all the other Christian graces.

(9) **September:** The Bible teaches that there are two hells: (a) the first hell is the Adamic death state, and will be destroyed when all the dead in Adam are awakened from it in the Millennial Age, (b) the second hell, or Second Death, refers to eternal annihilation, and is brought on by fully willful sin. In the next Age, when the non-elect go on trial for life, the obedient will gain eternal life, whereas the disobedient will go into the Second Death — eternal non-existence.

(10) **November:** Many of the ages in God's plan — the Jewish, Gospel, and Millennial Ages — have an important feature at the end of each, called a *harvest*. This is a period of testing all of God's professed people, separating His true people from those who are only His people by name, and finally rewarding the faithful and punishing the unfaithful.

We now consider the three parts of Habakkuk 2: 2:

“WRITE THE VISION”

In this first part, the word “vision” comes from the Hebrew word *chazown*, meaning “revelation.” *What* revelation is being referred to? The answer is God's Plan of the Ages for the salvation of the Church and the world, the very center of that Plan being Jesus Christ, and His ransom sacrifice.

A great amount of knowledge is available in the world at the present time on a variety of subjects, yet the only place

An important reason for God causing His Plan to be written is to share it with others. To gain a knowledge and understanding of His Word brings the responsibility of witnessing it to others, rather than merely hoarding it for one's own personal information and guidance.

where God has revealed information regarding His Plan is in His inspired Word.

God did not cause His Word to be written in a way by which anyone reading it can easily discern His Plan. It is written under the principle of Isa. 28: 10: “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”

God has had a wise purpose in not making His Plan known to the world in general as yet. Had He desired to do so, undoubtedly the world would know of it, for all of God's purposes are assured of coming to pass (Isa. 46: 11). No, the time for all to know His Plan is during the time of Christ's Millennial Mediatorial Reign, when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11: 9). At present, it is meant only for the meek (Psa. 25: 9) — those whom God is selecting, and who will be used to help the world of mankind travel up the Highway of Holiness to human perfection when God's earthly Kingdom is established (Isa. 35: 8).

The word “write” (*kathab* in Hebrew) means to describe or record by engraving. The first clause therefore means to *write*, or *record* God's Plan of the Ages. To do so presupposes a knowledge and understanding of God's Plan which, as was indicated above, is reserved for the meek.

A prominent characteristic of God's Plan is that it is continually advancing to a grand consummation, therefore, those watching for its fulfillment at the present time are better able to understand its details than were those living in the past, and those in the future will have an even better understanding than those living now (Prov. 4: 18).

An important reason for God causing His Plan to be written is to share it with others. To gain a knowledge and understanding of His Word brings the responsibility of witnessing it to others, rather than merely hoarding it for one's own personal information and guidance.

Although some features of God's Plan are more pleasant than others, all features should be declared. However, special emphasis should be placed upon its heart-cheering parts — the deliverance of God's people, the overthrow of Satan's Empire, the establishment of God's Kingdom upon the earth, and the restitution and eternal salvation of all the willing and obedient from among the world of mankind.

“AND MAKE IT PLAIN UPON TABLES”

Whereas the first part of our text answered *what* the vision is — God's Plan — the second part answers the question, *How* can it be spread to others?

In the second clause, the word “tables” can also be translated “tablets.” This suggests permanent inscription, as was practiced in the ancient world and, for example, in the tables of the Law, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 32: 15, 16).

A helpful method of explaining God's Plan is through the use of charts, diagrams, and the like, as in the case of the Divine Plan chart which has appeared at the top of each article in the Habakkuk series. Though people can learn by hearing and reading, most seem able to grasp concepts even better with the additional use of visual aids. Certain features of God's Plan have fulfillments in which God has fixed times of beginning and ending, such as the Dispensations and Ages that have been discussed, and charts seem to be particularly helpful in grasping these features of His Plan.

An important feature of our text reads to “make it plain.” This part stresses how important it is for the one who has been given some knowledge and understanding of God's Plan, and who desires to spread the Good News of the Gospel to others, to do so plainly — in an orderly and systematic manner.

What does this mean? It means the presenting of His Plan as a logical progression from start to finish. God's Plan for man begins with his creation in the Garden of Eden in perfection. Next, comes his fall into sin and under the curse of death. The next feature is the sending of Jesus Christ into the world as a perfect human being to die as the ransom, or corresponding price for the perfect man, Adam. After that comes the call of the Church during the Gospel Age, to become the Bride of Christ, and to attain to glory, honor, and immortality. Finally, with the completion of the Church, comes the call to the world during the Millennial Age — restitution to the human perfection which Adam lost in the Garden of Eden.

In order to help others gain a knowledge and understanding of God's Plan, one needs first to have a knowledge and understanding of it himself, and that is where study of God's Word — its doctrines, precepts, promises, exhortations, prophecies, histories, and types — is so important (2 Tim. 2: 15, 1 Peter 3: 15). True study implies proving the truthfulness of a subject so as to build a sound foundation for belief. But the most important thing for the one who desires to spread the Gospel — in fact, the main object

in studying God's Word — is to develop the superstructure of Christian character, for one's example is the most powerful sermon of all (2 Cor. 3: 2).

“THAT HE MAY RUN THAT READETH IT”

After answering *what* the vision is, and *how* it can be spread to others, we now come to the third part which answers the question, *Why* is it important to know and understand God's Word, and the Plan embodied within that Word.

This question is answered in the third clause. The thought is that the one who knows and understands His Word and Plan will be profited by it. This then brings up the question, How can one profit from it?

The key Scripture that answers this question is found in 2 Tim. 3: 16, 17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” For the Christian, this verse is all comprehensive, as it covers everything that he or she needs in order to be successful in their Christian walk: (1) “doctrine” has to do with *what one is to believe*, (2) “reproof” has to do with *what one is not to believe*, (3) “correction” has to do with *what one is not to do and be*, and (4) “instruction in righteousness” has to do with *what one is to do and be*.

There are many benefits for knowing (1) *what to believe*. Perhaps the two most important are: (a) to know the main features of God's Plan (many of which have been discussed in our series), and (b) to become better acquainted with God's and Christ's person, character, word, and work.

The benefits for knowing (2) *what not to believe* are also numerous. Perhaps the two most important are: (a) to protect the Christian from the errors that abound in the world, and (b) to keep him firmly founded upon the truths of God's Word.

The main benefit for knowing (3) *what one is not to do and be*, is that it prevents one from being overcome by the Christian's three main enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil. These three enemies are always seeking to defile the Christian with sin, selfishness, and worldliness through his inherited and acquired depravity.

Finally, the main benefit for knowing (4) *what one is to do and be* is that it gives the Christian everything that he or she needs in order to build a good Christian character, with all its graces.

As we end our series on Habakkuk, we hope and pray that God will bless all of us with a greater appreciation of Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Plan of the Ages.

* * *

BIBLE QUESTION BOX



Q Is it possible for one to hold false doctrines, such as the inherent immortality of the human race, the consciousness of the dead, and eternal torment and yet have the holy spirit?

A God's people are all those who have repented of their sins, accepted Jesus as their Savior (granting faith-justification), and are seeking to live righteous lives. Some have taken a further step and consecrated their lives to Him — promising to be dead to the world and their own wills, and alive to His will. All who have taken these steps and come into relationship with God through Jesus, have a measure of His holy spirit — the spirit of truth, righteousness, and holiness.

All possessing the holy spirit have differing degrees of spiritual appetite, knowledge of God's plan, and development in the graces of a Christlike character. These varying measures of the holy spirit in God's people are dependent upon many factors — one's degree of dedication to God, one's ability (natural and spiritual), use of the means that God grants to gain a greater infilling of His spirit (such as the study, spread, and practice of His Word, watchfulness, prayer, and assembling with fellow believers), and the length of time that one has been a disciple of Christ.

Growing in Grace and in Knowledge

Ideally, knowledge and grace should work together, so as one grows in grace, one also grows in the knowledge of God's Word (2 Peter 1: 5-11; 3: 18). Occasionally, the two are out of step, and we observe some who are more advanced in knowledge than grace, and others who are more developed in grace than in knowledge. Particularly dangerous is a great amount of knowledge with a small development in the Christian character graces, for we read that "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (1 Cor. 8: 1).

Greater knowledge and ability increase one's responsibility "for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12: 48). Knowledge that is misused lessens one's measure of grace; and if this lessens, one's knowledge of God's Word and Plan begin to fade. As disciples, we should also have more of the holy spirit now than we had earlier in our Christian course.

The Christian world as a whole is still laboring under strong delusions in the darkness of error, and consequently does not have much of God's holy spirit (Isa. 60: 2). After God called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light," some of us were astonished to see how little we knew — how ignorant we were of some of the precious messages of God's Word and of the way to grow in grace (1 Peter 2: 9).

Many of us, too, were believers in Jesus as our Savior and even consecrated servants of God for a considerable time before receiving a correct understanding concerning the true meaning of the Bible hell — the unconscious "sleep of death" (Psa. 13: 3) — as distinct from the eternal torment nightmare of the Dark Ages. Also, that the human soul is not inherently immortal, but that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" — be destroyed (Ezek. 18: 4, 20; Matt. 7: 13; 2 Peter 2: 1, 12). Doubtless there are others who, as believers and consecrated children of God, have His holy spirit but have not yet received the correct understanding of these and other important truths of God's Word.

In due time, when God's Kingdom is established in the earth, conditions will be favorable for all to obtain a knowledge of the Lord and His Word (Isa. 11: 9). Let us not let this fact tempt us to abandon our efforts to disseminate His Truth, for there are many children of God, still unenlightened as to His Word and Plan, attempting to live on the skimmed milk and husks of Dark-Age doctrines, and they are in need of assistance. They have a measure of God's holy spirit and "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10: 2). If we have been favored with a knowledge and understanding of God's Truth as due, let us be faithful in sharing it with others, wherever and whenever possible, and not disdain those who have not yet broken free from creedal errors.

Q In Eccles. 1: 18 we read: "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." If this is true, then would it not be better for us to remain ignorant, and not seek knowledge and wisdom?

A The quoted statement is true, for God inspired Solomon to write Ecclesiastes (1: 1, 12), even as He inspired him to write the bulk of Proverbs, in which

we read: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding"; "For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it"; "The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom" (Prov. 4: 7; 8: 11; 10: 21). Since God's Word does not contradict itself, these statements in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs must have been written from different standpoints.

Matters become clear if we keep in mind that in writing Ecclesiastes, Solomon apparently represents the Ancient Worthies as a class (from Abel to John the Baptist; Heb. 11; Matt. 11: 11); and his thoughts therein seem to represent their natural, human, and pessimistic thoughts as they reasoned on the vanity, the emptiness, of their and others' varied experiences under the curse of Adamic sin and death, and on why these experiences were permitted. Accordingly, Ecclesiastes does not give a complete answer as to why such vain experiences under the curse were permitted, but only such an answer as the Ancient Worthies understood from their limited viewpoint.

The Reason for Evil

It was not until in the Harvest of the Jewish Age (after our Lord's First Advent) and more particularly not until in the Harvest of the Gospel Age that this matter of the permission of evil was understood in its fulness. But, as we see from Eccles. 12: 13, 14, the Ancient Worthies understood enough of the subject to see that man's experience under the curse was to teach him the vanity of earthly things and occupations under the curse, and from it learn to reverence God and keep His commandments, for all men owe this to God.

The words of this book are set forth as the teachings of the Ancient Worthies, who were the executives of God's Old Testament matters (v. 1). One of the main themes of their preaching was the utter emptiness of all the experiences with earthly things, considered in themselves, under the curse (v. 2). At the end of one's life under the curse, what gain did one have for himself from his labor, viewed as the Ancient Worthies thought (v. 3)? They contrasted the transitoriness of each generation with the permanence of nature (v. 4). They considered that the sun runs its course continually (v. 5), that the winds have their circuits (v. 6), and that water in its course takes the forms of vapor, clouds, and rain,

which then passes in turn through springs, brooks, rivers, lakes, and oceans, and then repeats these processes in endless succession (v. 7).

They meditated on the overwhelming burden, on the unsatisfied condition of sight and hearing (v. 8), on the repeating cycles in nature and society (vs. 9, 10), and on the collective amnesia of society as to its past and future experiences (v. 11).

The Ancient Worthies as executors in God's Old Testament matters for His people (v. 12) loved to investigate matters of knowledge on this earth, but found it a wearisome

task (v. 13). All their meditations thereon brought finally a realization of their emptiness and unsatisfactoriness to the mind (v. 14), and the impossibility of reforming man's depravity and of numbering the things lacking (v. 15).

As they successively in their generations meditated on their own condition, they recognized the wealth of privilege and knowledge that was theirs as above their predecessors, and the greatness of their heart experiences as to the Divine Word (v. 16). Indeed, they were disposed to judge accurately the things of truth, of superstition, and of error; and they concluded that such pursuits led to perplexity (v. 17),

since they found that in much truth there is also much sorrow, on account of the curse, and since he who increases his understanding of the curse, uncleared by the light of the New Testament, greatly causes more distress to abound (v. 18).

The book of Proverbs speaks prophetically of wisdom and knowledge from a different, higher standpoint than that found in Ecclesiastes. We note how beautifully Prov. 2: 1-11 portrays the precious heritage of God's people. Wisdom is indeed a valuable possession (Prov. 3: 13-24; 4: 5-13; James 1: 5; 3: 13-18). May we treasure it, as we "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," that we "neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3: 18; 1: 8).

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announcements

MEMORIAL DATE FOR 2003

Monday, April 14, after 6:00 p.m.

Our Lord's Memorial falls on Monday, April 14, after 6:00 p.m. This is calculated as follows (all times Universal Time, or Greenwich Mean Time): The vernal equinox is on March 21, 1:01 a.m.; the new moon nearest this equinox is on April 1, 7:20 p.m.; add to this, 2 hours 21 minutes to get Jerusalem time = 9:41 p.m.; so Nisan 1 is from 6:00 p.m. April 1, to 6:00 p.m. April 2; Nisan 14 begins 13 full days later, on Monday, April 14, 6:00 p.m., ending Tuesday, April 15, 6:00 p.m. May God bless all His consecrated people in this connection. Please send us reports.

GENERAL CONVENTIONS FOR 2003

At-a-glance

United States: *California*, February 14-16; *Florida*, March 14-16; *Massachusetts*, April 25-27; *Michigan*, May 24-26; *Philadelphia Area*, July 3-6; *Ohio*, August 15-17; *Illinois*, October 3-5; *Oklahoma*, November 7-9

Details

United States

California, February 14, 15, 16 (Friday-Sunday)

Site: Country Side Suites, 204 N. Vineyard Ave., Ontario, CA 91764; telephone (800) 248-4661 or (909) 937-9700; Sales Fax (909) 937-3414 *Rates and Reservations:* 1-2 occupants, \$69.00, 3-4 occupants, \$79.00; all rooms plus 11.85% tax; check-in after 3:00 p.m.; check-out noon. Any cancellations of guaranteed reservations must be done 24 hours prior to arrival. Free and frequent shuttle bus transport is available (only 5 minutes from airport to hotel). Please make room reservations through the Class Secretary, Mrs. Mary Detzler, 6941 Abel Stearns Ave., Riverside, CA 92509; telephone (909) 779-0331.

Florida, March 14-16 (Friday-Sunday)

Site: (New Location) Oceanfront Comfort Inn, 1515 N. First St., Jacksonville Beach, Fla., 32250; Telephone: (800) 654-8776 *Rates and Reservations:* \$72.00 for 1-4 guests, plus 13%

tax. Reservations must be made directly with the hotel, and by February 15: be sure to inform them that you are attending the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement Convention to secure the special rate. Please make all other enquires to Mrs. Beverly Blaine (Class Secretary), 3569 Anderson Drive, Ormond Beach, Fla. 32176; telephone (386) 441-9836.

SERVICES BY VISITING MINISTERS

Carl W. Seebald

Grand Rapids, Michigan, December 8; Grand Rapids, Michigan, February 2

Ralph Herzig

Boston, Massachusetts, January 26; New Haven, Connecticut, March 16

Richard Blaine

Waycross, Georgia, December 15

Robert Herzig

Springfield, Massachusetts, December 1; Auburn, Massachusetts, March 9;

John Detzler

California Convention, February 14-16

Leon Snyder

Muskegon, Michigan, March 2

Baron Duncan

New Haven, Connecticut, January 19

Evangelists' Services

Robert Branconnier, West Palm Beach, Florida,

December 8; New Haven, Connecticut, December 15;

Chicago, Illinois, January 11, 12; Pittsfield, Mass.,

February 9; Boston, Mass., March 23

Daniel Herzig, Pittsfield, Mass., December 8

Harold Solomon, Springfield, Mass., February 2

Robert Steenrod, Sand Ridge, W. Virginia, December 14, 15

E. Tomkiewicz, Minneapolis, March 29, 30

Jack Zilch, New York City, December 15; Minneapolis, December 29

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