

Clarion

A photograph of a wooden pulpit, likely made of oak, with a decorative carved panel on its front. The pulpit is flanked by two large floral arrangements featuring yellow flowers and greenery. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**Is the gospel central
when we worship?**

**CHURCH SNAPSHOT
CLARION KIDS
YOU ASKED**



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The Sword of the Spirit

*The Bible is a unique book
There is nothing else like it in the world*

With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Lord Jesus equipped the church to meet the challenges of the last days. The church would encounter tribulations and troubles but Christ promised that the Spirit would lead God's people into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit guided the apostles to write down God's subsequent revelation so that we may now possess the complete Word of God. It is through the Word that the Spirit directs the church. Through the Scriptures, God himself speaks to us.

The Bible is a unique book. There is nothing else like it in the world. When we pick it up and read it seriously and with an open heart, we hear the living God speaking to us. To listen to what God has to tell us is an awesome experience. We are in his presence and the divine Word is powerful. It is like a sword that penetrates our inner being and discerns the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Heb 4:12).

The privilege of having God's Word makes the regular reading and studying of Scripture a high priority for us as God's children. The more familiar we are with the Word and what the Lord expects from us, the more the Word can function as a lamp before our feet and a light for our path (Ps 119:105).

In view of the importance of Scripture, it is to be expected that the reading and preaching of the Word should be a central event in our Sunday worship services. In this Pentecost issue of *Clarion*, let us focus on that for a moment.

The centrality of preaching

The events of the day of Pentecost underline the centrality of preaching. When the Holy Spirit was poured out, there was bewilderment and astonishment. What does this mean? Peter then stood up and explained the Scriptures, how prophesy was being fulfilled with the death and resurrection of Christ and the promised outpouring of the Spirit. The application was the call to repentance and baptism. And God gave a blessing to the preaching. That day about 3,000 souls were added to the church (Acts 2). The Pentecost preaching illustrates that the proclamation of the gospel is a means of grace.

It is through the proclamation of the Word that God works faith. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? . . . Consequently faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:14, 17). The power of preaching is in the faithful passing on and explaining the Word of God. It is the Word that the congregation needs to hear. God works by his Word and Spirit. He so created the world (Ps 33:6; Heb 11:3) and also by his Word and Spirit he raises sinners up in Christ as a new creation (Gal 3:26; 2 Cor 5:17).

Small wonder then that preaching dominated the work of John the Baptist (Matt 3:1), the ministry of Christ,

who is the Word made flesh (John 1:1; Heb 1:1-2), and the labours of the apostles (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 1:17). The Apostle Paul solemnly charged Timothy: "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim 4:2). The gospel, it is God's power for salvation (Rom 1:16)! By it one is born again and raised by faith to a new life (1 Pet 1:23; James 1:18)!

And so the gospel must be central as we worship God on the Lord's Day. The centrality of the Word preached is symbolically indicated by the placement of the pulpit in the centre of the podium at the front of the church auditorium. This symbolism is very important.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

This is our Pentecost issue. We begin with Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's editorial, "The Sword of the Spirit." He writes about the centrality of the gospel message in our lives, both on the Lord's Day and in our personal devotions. There is also a Pentecost meditation from Rev. Arend Witten.

There is an article from Dr. Ted Van Raalte which discusses a Bible translation that many readers may not be aware of. The article is entitled, "Introducing The Holman Christian Standard Bible."

Issue 9 contains another Church Snapshot, from Smithers CanRC. We also have an article from Barrhead with news on both an anniversary and a new building.

On these pages readers will also find Clippings on Politics and Religion, *Clarion* Kids, and You Asked.

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Nothing must be allowed to take away the central place that the proclamation of the Word has. The Lord our God desires that as we appear before him, singing our songs of praise and worshipping him, we above all else listen to what he has to tell us – the good news of salvation and the fullness of his Word which is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).

He wants to mould and shape us as a new creation

His Word is an enormous power as the Spirit uses it to impact our lives (cf. 1 Thess 1:5). The power of the Word does not come from the eloquence of the minister or his ability to spice up the message. It is the Word and it alone that convicts and changes sinful hearts. As one inspired and noted preacher put it: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor 2:4-5). The Word of God is after all the sword of the Spirit.

The metaphor of the sword helps us to appreciate something of the power of the Word read and proclaimed and its consequences for our life and worship.

The sword of the Spirit penetrates

After warning his readers that not all Israelites entered the rest of the Promised Land due to their unbelief, the author of Hebrews writes: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any doubleedged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:12-13). There are several things to note here.

Hearing the gospel in a worship service is an awesome event and involves great responsibility. Israel of old heard the gospel, “but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. . . those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience” (Heb 4:2, 6). It is clear that there are serious conse-

quences if we hear the Word but do not take it seriously and embrace it with a true faith.

The Word of God is living and active. It is not a dead letter (cf. Isa 55:11). It is God’s Word and therefore is never without result. It is a double-edged sword, either for blessing or curse (cf. 2 Cor. 2:15-17). It is not something we can dismiss and simply ignore. For when we hear the Word we are in God’s presence and he sees right through us. His Word penetrates our innermost being and it is able to judge the desires and intentions of our hearts. We must not resist the Word but respond positively to it for the Spirit uses the Word to work faith and renewal in our lives. He wants to mould and shape us as a new creation.

All this is God’s merciful gift to us, but faith and renewal are also our responsibility. To resist this gracious intervention of the Most High in our lives is to invite his wrath, as happened to Israel in the wilderness. They did not enter the Promised Land due to unbelief and disobedience. And so the Word as a sword can become a deadly instrument condemning us if we do not accept it in faith. How we react to the Word read and proclaimed exposes us for who we really are – a true believer or not. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:13).

Why would anyone want to miss such an important training session?

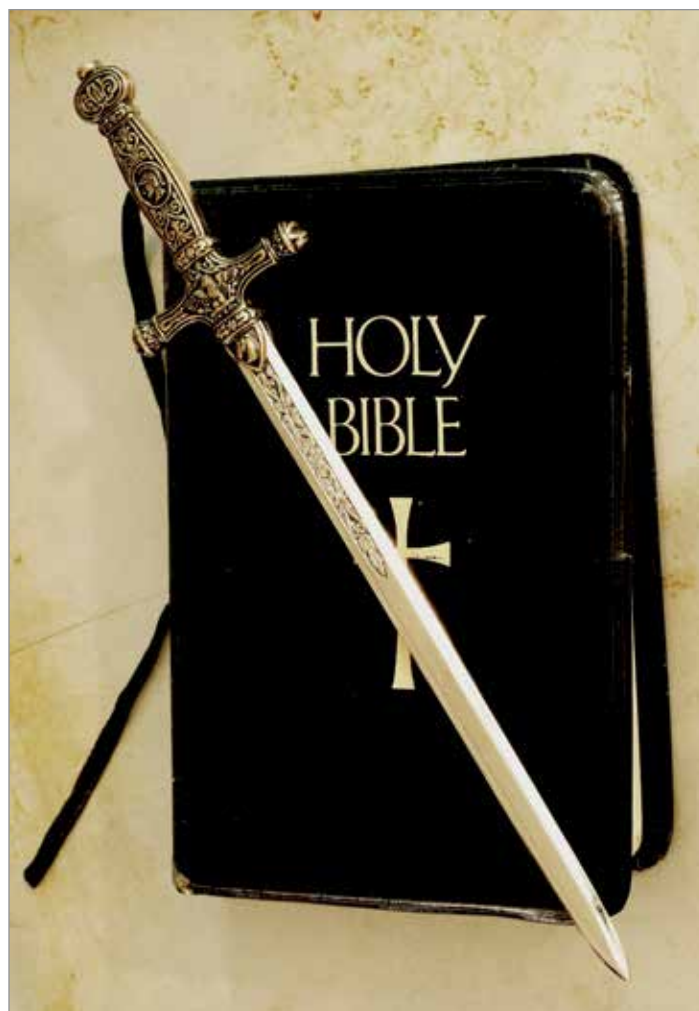
Of course the glad tidings in all of this is that God does come to us in his grace and mercy with the gospel and so confronts us with the Word to evoke a positive response from us. The Word as the sword of the Spirit is able to do that for it penetrates deeply into our very being. It gets right into our most private thoughts and preferences and graciously exposes us for who we really by nature are. It places us in the presence of holy God to whom we must render an account. And when we see our sins and shortcomings in the light of his Word and plead for mercy and forgiveness, then he will bless us. That same Word which exposes us is also full of his gracious promises.

Furthermore, the Word read and preached also equips us.

The sword of the Spirit equips us

When the Apostle Paul enjoins us to put on the full armour of God so that we can stand firm against the powers of darkness, part of the equipment we are to take up is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph 6:17). The sword is a weapon that can be used both to defend oneself and to go on the attack. It is the only offensive weapon mentioned in the armour the Apostle Paul describes. This weapon is the Word of God. With it one can take a stand against the devil’s schemes and disarm him (Eph 6:11).

A good example of this use of the sword of the Spirit is the way the Lord Jesus used Scripture to counter every one of Satan’s temptations in the desert (Matt 4:1-11).



Satan could not stand up to the power of the Word and eventually he had to abandon his quest to tempt Christ to sin (Matt 4:11).

Using the effective power of the Word is also the strategy that those who share Christ’s anointing as Christians can and must follow. In order for that to be possible, one must obviously know what the Word says! Knowledge of Scripture is of paramount importance. True is the prophetic word: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). An important part of the education in the Word is the regular and relevant proclamation of the Word from the pulpit. Preaching is not just passing on information but it is putting the Word deep into the hearts and minds of the hearers. It is a vital part of equipping the congregation to stand fast in the Lord and to be strong in him and in his power. The Word is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

Why would anyone want to miss such an important training session? If one knows the Word, one is armed with the Spirit’s sword and then one can stand one’s ground when the evil day comes (Eph 6:10-13). In the strength of the Lord one can oppose and conquer temptation to sin recognizing that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4). God’s Word is powerful and able to strengthen, nourish, and sustain us in the battle against the forces of darkness. One day the sword of the Word of God will slay all his enemies (Rev 19:15; 2 Thess 2:8).

What a blessing!

Pentecost is a good time to remind ourselves not only of the coming of the Spirit in fullness but also of the great blessing of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which we may now possess in fullness. In private reading and studying and in the proclamation on the Lord’s Day, the living God invades our life through his Word and Spirit, gives and sustains faith, and raises us up a new creation. A huge and central blessing of the worship service is to be exposed to the Spirit’s sword so that it penetrates our life and equips us for a life of service in holiness. May we experience its power and may nothing in our public worship ever displace the prominence of the faithful proclamation from the pulpit. It is a blessing that our gracious God does not want us to do without. **C**



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Prepare to be Unprepared

***"Just say whatever is given you at the time,
for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."
(Mark 13:11)***

The late John Stott told a story of an Anglican clergyman who didn't believe in preparing his sermons. He boasted that the only time it took him to prepare for a sermon was the few minutes' walk from the manse to the church door. "Do not worry beforehand. . . it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." And so he lived a life of leisure and repose.

In Mark 13 the Lord Jesus prophesies a very different life for his disciples. The temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed: "Not one stone here will be left on another." Peter and Co. want to be prepared and so ask "when these things will happen." But Jesus doesn't tell them when. He warns them, you will "hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . earthquakes in various places, and famines." The gospel "must go out to all nations" but in the process they would be arrested, flogged, and dragged before local councils, governors, and kings.

In *this* context Jesus gives them a promise. Standing before a gover-

nor or king they would want to say exactly the right thing. But thrown into prison and abused? How could they be prepared for that? Knowing how offensive their message was to the unconverted, they might be tempted to say nothing at all. In that moment Jesus promises: They would be "given" what to say. The Spirit who would "write his law on the hearts" of his new covenant people (Heb 10:16) and "guide them into all truth" (John 16:8) would give them the words to say. So effective would the help be that Jesus says, "It is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." The message they were bringing was not one they dreamt up (2 Pet 2:16), it was the Holy Spirit's message. And he would give them the insight, courage, and the clarity to bring it. Even without preparation, what needed to be said would be said. Jesus prepares them to be unprepared.

That is what happened. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was

poured out on Christ's church. The Spirit equipped his church to say what needed to be said. After the day of Pentecost Peter spoke boldly (Acts 2:14) in a way that was entirely unexpected for one so "unschooled" (Acts 4:13).

Today, the gospel still must go out to all nations. "Always be prepared," Peter writes, "to give an answer for the hope you have" (1 Pet 3:15). Often we can prepare for conversations with study and prayer. Sometimes we can't. Although there are no floggings and arrests in Canada, there is the same war here against the spiritual forces of evil (Eph 6:12). The message of the gospel is offensive to the unconverted. The temptation is. . . to say nothing at all. The day of Pentecost gives us the encouragement we need to be prepared to be unprepared.

And the lazy clergyman? His congregation had the answer. They moved the manse five miles away.



For Further Study

1. How do you prepare yourself to "speak of the hope that you have"?
2. Have you recently had an opportunity to speak, but have not taken it? Why?
3. Do you see yourself as in a spiritual war, needing help?

Introducing The Holman Christian Standard Bible



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In my experience, most Canadian Reformed churches are now using the English Standard Version in the worship services and most of our schools are doing the same. A few churches use the New King James instead. Since Synod 2013 the ESV has been the one “recommended” translation for use in the churches, while the NIV84, NKJV, and NASB are “approved.” The NIV2011 is neither recommended nor approved, due to concerns about the way that its gender-inclusive translation policy has affected five texts about who (which gender) may hold special office in the church. Thus it is not to be used.

I am among those who quite enjoyed the readability of the NIV84 but not so much the ESV. Whatever certain readability tests may conclude regarding the readability of the ESV (see the current report of the Committee for Bible Translation), I continue to notice that words and idioms used by the ESV are often uncommon to contemporary speech (archaic), and literalistic in translation (wooden). Word order is often unnatural also. This is not surprising, since the ESV is little more than an updating of the Revised Standard Version, first produced from 1946–1952. It is decidedly not a new and fresh translation. Many passages of the RSV and ESV are identical. That said, our committee has forwarded a number of good suggestions to the ESV translation committee, which is open to continued improvements. I appreciate that.

HCSB as happy medium

Another translation that has never been discussed at Synod or in the reports of the Committee for Bible Translation is the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). I have been using it personally for at least five years now and have come to appreciate it very much. Allow me to present it for your consideration.

The HCSB is a new and fresh translation. The concerns about gender-inclusiveness that the CBT has about the NIV2011 (and which I share) are not a concern with

the HCSB. The concerns of some churches and members about the uncommon and sometimes literalistic language of the ESV (which I also share) are also not a concern with the HCSB. Therefore, the HCSB might give us the happy medium: it might be a translation that churches wanting to use the NIV2011 might find acceptable and that the CBT and Synod might also, after due study, find acceptable for use in the churches (this article has been sent to the CBT).

Note: I’m not advocating a new translation every decade; I would just like to put this translation on the radar. In the big picture, unlike other languages, we are thankfully blessed with an array of good English translations of the Bible.

Here is some information about the HCSB, taken from its own introduction and other sources.

Approach to Scripture as God’s Word

The editors begin their introduction to the HCSB by stating, “The Bible is God’s revelation to man. It is the only book that gives us accurate information about God, man’s need, and God’s provision for that need. It provides us with guidance for life and tells us how to receive eternal life. The Bible can do these things because it is God’s inspired Word, inerrant in the original manuscripts.” The same humble acceptance of God’s Word is evident in their stated goals. They write that their goals were/are,

- to provide English-speaking people across the world with an accurate, readable Bible in contemporary English;
- to equip serious Bible students with an accurate translation for personal study, private devotions, and memorization;
- to give those who love God’s Word a text that has numerous reader helps, is visually attractive on the page, and is appealing when heard;
- to affirm the authority of Scripture as God’s Word and to champion its absolute truth against social or cultural agendas that would compromise its accuracy.

Textual basis is BHS 5th and UBS 27th

The textual base for the New Testament is the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition, and the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, 4th corrected edition. The text for the Old Testament is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th edition.

These are the same base texts that stand behind the NIV84 and for the most part, I assume, behind the ESV. We also use them at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. However, when the HCSB translation project began in 1984, it was in the hands of men who were not just Majority Text followers (as regards the NT), but even advocates of the *textus receptus*. This certainly would not have put their work on our radar (and this is not the place to get into these debates).

I would like to put this translation on the radar

However, control of the translation philosophy passed to other hands when Arthur Farstad died in 1998, and the position about the superiority of the *textus receptus* was abandoned, as the above quotation demonstrates. In my own reading I have found that the HCSB closely follows the BHS in the OT rather than the Septuagint (LXX).

Overall Translation Philosophy

The translation team discussed the differences between literal translation, called “formal equivalent,” and a more idiomatic translation, called “dynamic or functional equivalent.” They opted for a middle option, to which they gave the term “optimal equivalence.” Here is how they describe this translation philosophy.

Optimal Equivalence: In practice, translations are seldom if ever purely formal or dynamic but favor one theory of Bible translation or the other to varying degrees. Optimal equivalence as a translation philosophy recognizes that form cannot be neatly separated from meaning and should not be changed (for example, nouns to verbs or third person “they” to second person “you”) unless comprehension demands it. The primary goal of translation is to convey the sense of the original with as much clarity as the original text and the translation language permit. Optimal equivalence appreciates the goals of formal equivalence but also recognizes its limitations.

Optimal equivalence starts with an exhaustive analysis of the text at every level (word, phrase, clause, sentence, discourse) in the original language to determine its original meaning and intention (or purpose). Then relying on the latest and best language tools and experts, the nearest corresponding semantic and linguistic equivalents are used to convey as much of the information and intention of the original text with as much clarity and readability as possible. This process assures the maximum transfer of both the words and thoughts contained in the original.

The Holman CSB uses optimal equivalence as its translation philosophy. When a literal translation meets these criteria, it is used. When clarity and readability demand an idiomatic translation, the reader can still access the form of the original text by means of a footnote with the abbreviation “Lit.”

Where the translators felt that a literal translation would be unhelpful, they often did yet put the literal translation in a footnote, for the sake of Bible students who might be interested. This could prove helpful for a minister who is explaining the meaning of the original idioms (I noticed this is commoner in the new version I recently downloaded onto my phone than of the older version that I have in hard copy, so it may be newer feature).

Translation philosophy regarding gender

Living as we do in the twenty-first century, the HCSB translation committee also addressed the question of gender inclusive translation. They decided to follow a document called, “Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture” produced by such scholars as Ken Barker, Vern Poythress, Wayne Grudem, R.C. Sproul, and John Piper, among others. Here’s how the HCSB committee summarized their own policy about the language of gender in translation.

Some people today ignore the Bible’s teachings on distinctive roles of men and women in family and church and have an agenda to eliminate those distinctions in every arena of life. These people have begun a program to engineer the removal of a perceived male bias in the English language. The targets of this program have been such traditional linguistic practices as the generic use of “man” or “men,” as well as “he,” “him,” and “his.”

A group of Bible scholars, translators, and other evangelical leaders met in 1997 to respond to this issue as it affects Bible translation. This group produced the “Guidelines for Translation of Gender-

Related Language in Scripture” (adopted May 27, 1997 and revised Sept. 9, 1997). The Holman Christian Standard Bible was produced in accordance with these guidelines.

The goal of the translators has not been to promote a cultural ideology but to faithfully translate the Bible. While the Holman CSB avoids using “man” or “he” unnecessarily, the translation does not restructure sentences to avoid them when they are in the text. For example, the translators have not changed “him” to “you” or to “them,” neither have they avoided other masculine words such as “father” or “son” by translating them in generic terms such as “parent” or “child.”

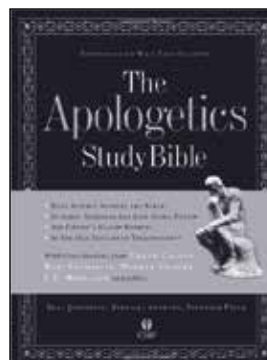
Unique and attractive features of the HCSB

The HCSB actually uses the name “Yahweh” in key places of the Old Testament instead of always resorting to the upper-case “LORD.” In the earlier versions occurrences of “Yahweh” were rare (about seventy-eight times) but the most recent update has used “Yahweh” in 495 places (of the possible 6,800 places).¹ This is an exciting development that I have never seen in any other English Bible translation. The KJV used “Jehovah” in a few key places, but that name is unfortunately based on a misunderstanding of what the Masoretes were doing when they pointed (gave vowels to) the consonants YHWH. “Yahweh” is by far the better translation. How beautiful it is to be able to read the Bible and say the name of our covenant God, Yahweh!

We also find at key points of the New Testament the term “Messiah” instead of “Christ.” This relates such passages back to the Old Testament in a richer manner. On this point the editorial committee wrote,

Where the NT emphasizes *Christos* as a name of our Lord or has a Gentile context, “Christ” is used (Eph 1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. . .”). Where the NT *Christos* has a Jewish context, the title “Messiah” is used (Eph 1:12. . . we who had already put our hope in the Messiah). The first use of “Messiah” in each chapter is also marked with a bullet referring readers to the Bullet Note at the back of most editions.

In line with this sensitivity to the importance of the OT to the NT, OT quotations in the NT are set in indented block quotations with a bold typeface. While this much emphasis may overdue the case, it does suggest that the committee has advanced far beyond their early dispensational roots with Farstad and Hodges.



For a while the HCSB advertised itself as the only translation willing to use “slave” in certain places as the translation of “*doulos*” in the NT, instead of the more socially-acceptable term “servant.” I found this interesting. Both this and the translations “Yahweh” and “Messiah” demonstrate a willingness to be consequential in translation instead of

sticking to whatever has been the tradition, good or bad. Psalm 23:1 is helpfully translated as, “The LORD is my Shepherd, there is nothing I lack.”

At the same time, I appreciate the decision of the editors and translators to retain traditional theological terms such as justification, sanctification, redemption, etc. Also traditional is their decision that nouns and pronouns referring to the Trinity should have an initial upper case letter. I don’t think this decision has good grounds – see the decision of Synod Burlington 2010, Art. 109 (pages 190–191), but I know some people will appreciate it. They also decided to give buyers the option of whether or not the words of Christ would appear in red ink.

One point worth checking would be whether they have produced a translation that uses metric measurements rather than imperial (I would be surprised if this were not the case, but my copy is American and so I don’t know).

Conclusion

I have been reading the HCSB now for at least four years and have been very pleased with it. Thus far I have noted four text passages where I question the translation choices of the HCSB, but by far I have greatly enjoyed both its accuracy (whenever I compared to the originals) and its readability. By no means at all have I made an exhaustive study of this translation. I am not recommending it for use in the churches – that’s not the thrust of my article. However, I do think that there are sufficient grounds to mandate the CBT to study this translation at some point and to let the churches know whether it might be suitable as a translation that is at least “approved” for use in the churches.

¹ I gleaned this from a Wikipedia article. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holman_Christian_Standard_Bible. Accessed March 2, 2016.

Mark and Jaclyn Penninga

Smithers Canadian Reformed Church

Employment opportunities, adventure, and God's beautiful creation were what first attracted a small group of Reformed Christians to make the trek to a mountain valley in northern British Columbia about sixty years ago. And these same things continue to be close to the heart of most of the 475 people worshipping together in the Smithers Canadian Reformed congregation today.

Smithers may well be the most remote church in the federation. It is surrounded by the coast mountains and sits right at the base of beautiful Hudson Bay Mountain on the Bulkley River. It is about half way between Vancouver and the Yukon and about four hours east of the ports of Kitimat and Prince Rupert. That makes for a somewhat milder climate than many Canadian cities but still with plenty of snow, especially in the surrounding mountains. Although the town is isolated, there are seven Reformed churches in the Bulkley Valley (Smithers, Telkwa, and Houston) – three CRC, two CanRC, and two URC.

Smithers CanRC has long had a heart for local mission work. Already in the late 1970s the congregation



called Rev. C.J. Vanspronsen to share the gospel with the local aboriginal community. Still today, the church hosts weekly Sunday school and Yak'isda Bikah Bible camp in the summer for local aboriginal children and teens. We are always thankful for the local and out-of-town volunteer counsellors.

In addition to local efforts, eight years ago Smithers CanRC called Pastor Jim Witteveen to serve as a missionary in the city of Prince George, four hours east of Smithers. By God's grace, a congregation has been meeting and growing there and the hope is to institute a church in the coming years. Now that Rev. Witteveen has accepted a call to serve as a missionary in Brazil, we are thankful that there will be no vacancy as candidate Tim Schouten has accepted the call to replace him.

Members of Smithers CanRC reflect their nature-loving, back-to-basics, recreation-spoiled community. This is a place where it seems local school children miss school for hunting almost more often than being sick, where wool is always "in," and where there are eight out-



door adventure stores. There is a thriving farmers' market and well-frequented art gallery but hardly a place to buy children's clothing. Common seasonal activities include: December-March – xc skiing, back-country skiing, snowmobiling; March-May – grass burning and sand bagging along the river; June-August – salmon fishing, camping, hiking, boating, and huckleberry picking; Sept-November – firewood gathering, moose hunting, and steelhead fishing.

The forest industry, which first provided jobs to the early immigrants, still directly or indirectly employs about a third of the church community. But construction, transportation, and a wide variety of professions and trades feed just as many mouths today. Thanks to a local airport and the advance of technology, it's much easier to be employed in a variety of fields and to stay connected even in a small town.


About 200 local Reformed youth attend Ebenezer Canadian Reformed School, which started in 1969 and has grown considerably in the last decade. This past summer the membership built a large new gym and converted the previous gym to classrooms. Nearly the entire membership volunteered 100 hours each and a tradesman from the congregation volunteered six months of time to oversee the entire project. This generous spirit is seen more often with neighbours helping neighbours with clearing snow, cutting trees, or setting cross country ski tracks in their field for anyone to enjoy.

Keeping life affordable and not too stressful are important priorities for many in this church community. There is strong government funding for independent schools



and relatively inexpensive housing. The vast majority of homes have one parent staying home to care for the children, and many families have four or more children.

All of these characteristics may well be interesting. But what ultimately describes this church is that it is part of the body of Jesus Christ. Like all churches, Smithers CanRC is a group of broken brothers and sisters that are loved by our Lord. We face the same hardships and trials that all children of God experience, but we also live by the same grace that gives life and hope to all God's people. We are along with you the bride of Christ, made beautiful only by his love.

If you have not visited yet, we encourage you to make the trip and explore this diverse and beautiful area. 



Opposing the Culture of Death



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To all appearances, Canada seems to be well on its way to embracing a culture of death and despair. On February 25, the Liberal-dominated Special Joint Committee of the Government of Canada on “Physician-assisted Dying” released its report, *Medical Assistance in Dying: A Patient-Centred Approach*. It is freely available on the Internet. The recommendations of this report will be very important in how Parliament deals with this issue. The Supreme Court of Canada has given Parliament until June 6, 2016 to make a decision.

Committee recommendations

Some of its recommendations include the following:

Recommendation 3: “That individuals not be excluded from eligibility for medical assistance in dying based on the fact that they have a psychiatric condition.”

Recommendation 4: “That physical or psychological suffering that is enduring and intolerable to the person in the circumstances of his or her condition should be recognized as a criterion to access medical assistance in dying.”

Recommendation 6 (part 1): “That the Government of Canada implement a twostage legislative process, with the first stage applying immediately to competent adult persons 18 years or older, to be followed by a second stage applying to competent mature minors, coming into force at a date no later than three years after the first stage has come into force.”

Recommendation 10 (with regard to conscientious objectors): “At a minimum, the objecting practitioner must provide an effective referral for the patient.”

Recommendation 11: “That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to ensure that all publicly funded health care institutions provide medical assistance in dying.”

The above recommendations full of sanitized language do not use the word “kill,” but that is exactly what “medical assistance in dying” is. It is killing. Since it is illegal

in the eyes of God who gives life, it is also murder. As one can see, the committee recommendations go far beyond those who are terminally sick and humanly speaking in the last stages of their life on earth. It includes as eligible for being killed even minors and those with psychiatric and psychological conditions. And doctors trained to preserve life are to be ordered to make sure that the killing is not stopped by their conscientious objections. The governing council of Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons took a similar intolerant stand when on January 25, 2016, it ratified a policy requiring doctors to refer suicidal patients to those willing to kill them. Not all doctors accept this. According to *The Interim*, pro-life doctors will sue the College for violating doctors’ freedom of conscience. Since when was killing part of health care?

Thankfully, there has been considerable opposition against this government report, including from the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Christian Legal Fellowship. A noteworthy individual protester caught my attention as well, Douglas Farrow, Professor of Christian Thought and holder of the Kennedy Smith Chair in Catholic Studies at McGill University. He wrote an open letter to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, dated February 29, 2016. It is available at the website of the journal *First Things*. This five page document is worth reading in its entirety. Here are some excerpts.

A telling letter

In the first part of this letter Farrow thanks the bishops for their prompt and decisive response to the government mandated report and then exposes it and its recommendations for what they really are.

This is not the rule of law but rather an expression of the mystery of lawlessness, in which positive law is made to embody that which is contrary to the moral law, under cover of discourse about rights and justice

ACCEPTED

Accepted the call from the Free Reformed Church of Armadale, Australia:

Rev. R. deJonge

of Langley, British Columbia

CHURCH NEWS

and dignity and compassion and other good things. . . . It constitutes a repudiation of any connection between the supremacy of God and the rule of law.

He predicts that “much will be done to coerce formal and material cooperation with evil in the matter of suicide, as is already the case with abortion.” Palliative care will be viewed “as an economic burden and an ideological aggravation. Medicine will be perverted and the right of citizens to medical care based on the Hippocratic oath will disappear.” He goes on to note that even the law and relations of trust will be perverted. “Many consciences will become casualties, as the weak give way under pressure and the young are tutored in the ways of death. This will put people at risk of eternal penalty – a situation much more to be detested than the decline and fall of Canada as a just society.”

Although Farrow realizes that some of the report’s recommendations may not be accepted, yet he is, rightly I think, convinced that “the culture of death is to speak now with the voice of the state, and to be backed by the state’s authority. It is to expand by state power.” Farrow counsels determined, unwavering opposition to whatever assisted suicide regime comes about. “I think all citizens of good will have a duty to resist it, even to the point of civil disobedience.” Further on in the letter he writes:

It is my hope that the Church will declare publicly, to the Prime Minister, to the Justices of the Supreme Court, to MPs and Senators and the entire country, that she will not regard euthanasia legislation, even when signed and sealed with royal authority, as having the binding force of morally valid law. And that she is prepared both to exercise and to encourage civil disobedience in the matter, though that require significant sacrifice.

With respect to the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, Farrow expressed the hope

That you and your fellow bishops will make clear to all Catholics under your charge that formal cooperation with suicide or euthanasia, by analogy with abortion, entails excommunication *latae sententiae* [an automatic penalty by force of canon law]. . . . And that you will inform Catholic officials that anyone who votes to create a euthanasia regime or to liberalize one – since this provides immediate material cooperation to those who commit suicide or euthanasia and causes serious scandal by gravely injuring good morals – should not present himself for communion and is subject to punishment by a just penalty; even, if need be, to excommunication *ferendae sententiae* [sentence to be passed according to canon law].

Farrow acknowledges that “these are strong measures, not ordinarily taken. But nothing weaker will sound the clear note that is needed. . . . Resistance that is not wholehearted and unrelenting is doomed to failure.”

Near the end of his open letter, the McGill professor touches on the supposed neutrality of the state. The euthanasia issue has shown that there is no neutrality. The report implies that “the human person is in no wise accountable to God for his life. Nor is the state itself accountable to God, whether in its moral deliberation or in its conduct. It may even kill with impunity, under conditions prescribed by none but itself.” Farrow thus shows that affirming a suicidal regime is “essentially atheistic, unless it is somehow, by reason of cultural senility, merely pagan. Either way, it is not neutral at all, nor could it be. The state is taking a side in the debate about what man is and how far his autonomy extends; hence also about who or what God is, and how far God’s authority extends.”

And so Farrow rightly insists that there must be clear “No!” to this report and the government’s intentions. “A No with hard political and social and legal consequences.” Without that clear No, perhaps even the freedom to preach the gospel could be jeopardized.

Be involved

Farrow’s call to affirming a clear No to the committee’s recommendations in favour of euthanasia is a welcome additional public voice on the momentous issue of protecting human life. It also reminds us to get involved.

ARPA has made such involvement very easy. The opening page of their website (<https://arpacanada.ca/>) has a link to all the critical information that is needed to be informed and to speak on this critical issue to your Member of Parliament. It also features their open letter to Parliament on March 14, 2016 in which the horror of state funded killing is exposed. Their letter also helpfully notes that “an independent legal analysis. . . has proven that Parliament can still prohibit all euthanasia and assisted suicide – without invoking the notwithstanding clause – by clarifying in a new law that the purpose of an absolute prohibition goes beyond what the Supreme Court mistakenly concluded.”

Finally, the EasyMail feature at www.arpacanada.ca makes it easy to send a well-thought out letter to your parliamentary representative. Do it now!

"Taste and See that the Lord is Good!"

The Church at Barrhead Celebrates Fifty-five Years of God's Blessings and a New Building!

"Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." Psalm 115:1

Indeed, the works of the Lord are great! We as Christ's church at Barrhead were able to attest to this on Saturday, January 9, by expressing our thankfulness at being instituted fifty-five years ago on January 1, 1961 and by showcasing our beautiful new church building.

Celebration

The celebrations began on Saturday afternoon with an open house to which the community of Barrhead and the surrounding area were invited. Our Home Mission Committee had worked together with the Church Life Committee to prepare an attractive pamphlet, on the back of which can be found some of the basic tenets of our faith, and which also had the program for that evening's celebrations. These pamphlets were handed out by some members of the congregation who were on hand to welcome visitors. We were pleased to welcome quite a few visitors, including the mayor of Barrhead. Coffee was served along with some cake, the gospel of grace was shared, and invitations were extended for all to join us for worship on Sundays.

That same evening many members of the congregation, and the community, came together to rejoice in the blessings of the Lord. Our Master of Ceremonies, Br. Morris Vogelzang, opened the evening by calling on our pastor emeritus, Rev. Tiggelaar, to lead in prayer and the reading of Scripture, after which we all stood at attention and sang our national anthem and then the magnificent hymn, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*.

The floor was then given to the chairman of the Building Committee, Br. Bert Steenbergen. Bert gave a short review of the building process we had gone through and made note of the fact that the Lord blessed us with many talented congregational members who worked hard to put it all together. Br. Steenbergen further noted that the Lord gave us excellent weather conditions in which the building could be framed and roofed before the snow fell. It was amazing for all involved, how all things simply seemed to fall into place. Yes, it makes us realize that there is indeed a God!

After Br. Steenbergen's speech we were treated to a beautiful power point presentation of the building process prepared by Sr. Linda Koopmans. Looking back at the time when we were in the framing stages I found myself thinking that I was very thankful not to be in those building stages anymore. Yes, it sure is a blessing to be allowed to worship in our beautiful new, comfortable and spacious building!

Historical overview

Being the first child to be baptized after the congregation of Barrhead was instituted, Sr. Arlene Vandersluis introduced us to a historical overview. Looking back at the history of a congregation is always very interesting. As Canadian churches we can see how the Lord, in his grace, started the churches in the 1950s and 60s. Dutch immigrants had come to Canada with little but the shirts on their backs. Bound together by their faith in Christ, even though they had very little, the immigrants diligently set to work to build up the churches. Such was also the case in Barrhead.

It's interesting to see the family names of some of the first immigrants who came to Barrhead in those early years. We read the family names of Br. A. Mulder, Br. Gerrit Dam, Br. Tony VandenBrink, Br. George Wemekamp, Br. John Vogelzang, Br. Bill Vogelzang, Br. Bert Bultena, and Br. Louis Dykstra. Thankfully we may still have some of those people with us today, and as we look at the churches throughout Canada we can see their names as many of their offspring still worship the Lord faithfully, but in different locations.

One of the first things the fledgling congregation did in June of '61 was to purchase a piece of land in town for the purpose of erecting a church building. The cost of the lot came to \$900 and after doing a lot of hard work in free labour, and spending another \$3800, they were able to move into their new building just before Christmas.

After having been a vacant congregation for almost twenty years, a call was extended to Pastor Tiggelaar, who came to Barrhead in 1981 and served the congregation until his retirement in 2011. After another short vacancy a call was extended to Candidate Vanderlinde, who had completed his training at our seminary in Hamilton. We were thankful that he accepted and now labours faithfully amongst us.

With the Lord's blessing the congregation of Barrhead has continued to grow. . . to the point where we were bursting at the seams in our second church building which had been purchased in 1995. For the last few years we knew that it was inevitable; a new building would have to be built. On some occasions we had worship services in which some people had to sit outside, on the front step! Our basement was only one large hall with a kitchen and a council room that was smaller than a good-sized walk-in closet.





Today

A few years ago we were able to purchase a beautiful piece of land and today, as you can see from the pictures, we may worship in a beautiful, and very functional, new building. Our seniors, and some other members with special challenges, rejoice that it is all on one level. We can once again enjoy the presence of one brother, who had not been able to worship with us for many months because of the stairs in the old building. Having a beautiful fellowship hall in which to socialize after the services is incredible! Especially when we remember visiting one another on frosty winter days when the temperatures dipped to around twenty degrees below zero! As you can well imagine there are many other wonderful benefits such as a beautiful council room, excellent classrooms, and an incredibly fine nursery which was decorated with the greatest wall paintings by one of our sisters.

Yes, the Lord's congregation can be very thankful for what he has done. He has given a great many talents to his church; people with tremendous building and trades skills who used them to God's glory. People with excel-

lent decorating taste who used their abilities to create a tasteful and comfortable atmosphere. There were some with excellent organizational skills who worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Other people were more than willing to come after the trades and do the much needed cleanup, and others who kept the grounds in excellent condition and organized the parking lot. Yes, the list is long. Undoubtedly everyone in the congregation has contributed in one way or another!

And so we can give thanks and praise to our heavenly Father for the work that he has done! At the same time we remember that a building is only a building. Far more important is the preaching of God's Word! Therefore we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in his people in Barrhead, so that his Word may be preached faithfully, to his honour and glory and to the upbuilding of his church!

"For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!" Psalm 92:4, 5

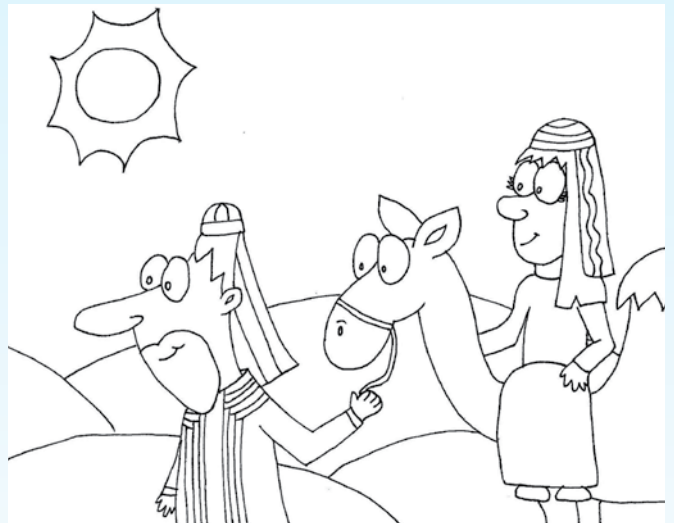


Abraham - Part 1

Genesis 12, 15, 17 & 21

Abram was a man who had a very special relationship with God. His wife was named Sarai, but they had no children. One day, God told Abram to take everything he had and go to the land of Canaan. God promised that he would give Abram a big family. He said he would give the land of Canaan to Abram's children. God promised that he would have a special relationship with them, and this is called a covenant. Many years later, Abram and Sarai still had no children, but God promised again that they would have a son. God said that their names would now be Abraham and Sarah. When Abraham was 100 years old, God gave them a son and they named him Isaac.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture.

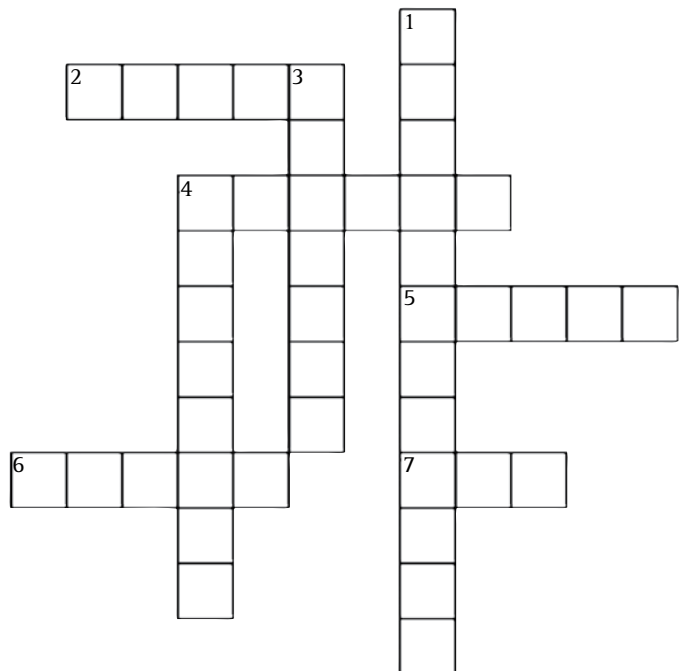


Across

2. Her name was changed from Sarai to _____.
4. God told Abraham that his children would live in this land.
5. Abraham named his son _____.
6. His name was changed to Abraham.
7. God promised that Abraham would have a _____.

Down

1. A covenant is a kind of special _____ with God.
3. Abraham was one _____ years old when Isaac was born.
4. God made a promise to Abraham called a _____.



by Emily Nijenhuis



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Q **The introduction to the book of Revelation in my Bible suggests that there are four interpretive challenges of this book: the preterist, historicist, idealist, and futurist approach. Which of the four approaches do we as church subscribe to? Why is this particular approach chosen? Why are the other three less favourable in our circles? These three, being less favorable, ought they to be completely avoided in teaching and preaching?**

A Let me begin by stating that as church we do not subscribe to any of these approaches. Perhaps we can say that there is *something* attractive or convincing in them, or that there are some *elements of truth*, in each of these views for the interpretation of the book of Revelation. At the same time, we can say that in each of these approaches there also are aspects that we *cannot* and *do not* accept at all. In the history of the church there have been exegetes who adopted the one or other of these approaches, people whom we hold dear for their Reformed understanding and teaching of the Scriptures, such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and later scholars such as Greijdanus, Grosheide, and VanderWaal, to mention a few. Yet, the church never coined any of their views or approaches as the most favourable or most scriptural interpretation of the book of Revelation.

Preterist approach

The preterist approach (from the Latin *praeteritus*, meaning “gone by,” i.e. contemporary historical), for instance, interprets the book of Revelation from the viewpoint that the events prophesied were fulfilled in the

first century (some including even the second coming of Christ!). They believe that the book reveals what happened at that time or what was to happen shortly. Then we can say that certain parts (as well as other apocalyptic passages, like Matthew 24) were fulfilled in AD 70, like the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem; yet others are to be fulfilled in the future (in the final judgment) and were foreshadowed by this destruction (i.e. a view that is both preterist and futurist). This fulfilment ultimately, at the end of time, however, is the overriding focus of the book of Revelation: the new heaven and the new earth!

Futurist approach

The futurist approach, on the other hand, views the book of Revelation mostly as a prophecy of what will happen in the last phase of history. This view we find among the chiliasts, the pre- and post-millennialists. They take their cue from the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth at the end of the age; they sometimes divide the history of the NT church in dispensations (based on the seven letters to the churches in Asia-Minor), until the rapture, the day the Lord takes up his church to heaven, leaving the others behind. In the book of Revelation we do not just find revelation for these churches in Asia-Minor

only, however, but for the entire church that will be till the return of Christ. We, also, cannot place specific dates in the history of the world to determine certain dispensations, neither would the believers in the first century have benefitted from the revelation of events that would happen in the later phases of the history of the church.

Historicist approach

During the Middle Ages and the Great Reformation we find the historicists, who forecasted the course of history in Western Europe with particular emphasis on popes, kings, and wars. Someone like Joachim de Fiora looked for patterns in history; he also divided the history of the world into three eras: the reign of the Father (OT, era of the law), of the Son (NT, era of grace), and the era of the Holy Spirit with continued direct revelations. This third era, he said, started in 1260 (based on the 1260 days in Revelation 12). We see a similar approach to dating in history with the Anabaptists and others, who speculated on the return of Christ and predicted his coming (1533, 1843, 1914, etc.). However, reformers like Luther and Calvin, too, interpreted certain revelations in such a very specific way as well, equating the Vatican with the harlot Babylon that corrupted and persecuted the church.

Idealist approach

The idealists, on the other hand, viewed the book as containing just timeless and symbolic revelations, portraying the spiritual and timeless nature of the battle between good and evil. The visions (and symbolisms) they believe represent a universal message to all believers about God's defeat of Satan and the spiritual victory of faith in Christ as the church contends with a world ruled by wicked potentates. There are others who hold this view, however,

in a modified way. They speak of a redemptive-historical interpretation of the visions, observing a repetition or pattern in redemptive history. They use what has been called by Reformed interpreters the "prophetic perspective," and apply the same to the visions in the book of Revelation. This "prophetic perspective" suggests that every prophetic message has a threefold fulfilment: the first in his own days, the second in the coming of the Messiah, and the third when he returns in glory and makes all things new. They consider this the key to the understanding of the book of Revelation as well.

How to approach this

This brings us then closest to the most current and *accepted* interpretation "in our circles." Then we may observe that such interpretations as the chiliastic, pre- and post-millennial views, as well as the hard preterist approach, or the sole symbolic interpretation must be avoided in preaching and teaching; not only because they are less favourable but also because they are too speculative, or based on a wrong interpretation of Scripture (e.g. the total fulfilment before AD 70, or the rapture idea). Rather, the book of Revelation is given to the seven churches in Asia-Minor and in them to the church of all times until Christ's return. It reveals to us the entire history from Christ's ascension till his return, a history that Christ governs as the Lamb to whom the scroll is given! He brings the seals, the trumpets, and the plagues over the earth, at the times and the places that he has determined, i.e. where it happens and when it happens. Then we need not figure what event is meant where in the book, but we concentrate on the signs of the times, living for Christ at all times, and awaiting his coming with eager longing, ready and working when he comes!



**Is there something
you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?**

Ask us a question!

**Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander
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