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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

VOLUME XXV ISSUE 12

DECEMBER 20, 2001

Preparations for Christmas

The scripturally literate child of God knows that the Bible's story of Christmas begins in Genesis and does not find its completion until The Revelation. The passages in Matthew and Luke provide only a portion of the Christmas chronicles. I realize that by using the word "Christmas" that I approach offending some readers. While I understand the reasons why some of my preacher friends, as did the Puritans of three centuries ago, do not choose to use the word Christmas, I find myself continuing to do so. I could allow the reasonableness of their reasoning and, if I could find a suitable, realistic, recognizable, substitute definitive term, I would gladly use it. At the same time, however, I must also recognize that these same friends do not hesitate to use the common identifications for the twelve months

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this and that

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An eventful year draws to a close and an even more eventful year looms just ahead. Hopefully, we are nearing the final year before the Lord Jesus returns; but if not, we had best prepare for even darker days than we have seen. Are we believers anticipating the day of His return as we ought? The answer is no; and the reason that we are not is that we are not yet in the position of "wanting" the Lord to catch us away from this world. Too appealing is the world as we know it to leave it and too unloved

the Heaven that awaits to want it.

This publication is mailed to you on purpose. Someone who knows you believed that you would profit by receiving and reading it. If you do not agree, we will remove your name from the next possible mailing. We have no desire to intrude or offend.

We need a "revival" of preaching on Heaven. The place does not seem real to us—it remains more theoretical than practical. About all the average believer (in or out of the pulpit) knows about Heaven is that "Heaven is a wonderful place." We say we are going to Heaven much as the ballplayer, after winning the World Series or the Super Bowl, yells, "I'm going to Dis-

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this and that

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ney World"; that is: it is said artificially and on cue. Except that the ballplayer has a rather realistic expectation of what Disney World will be like and the believer has no genuine concept of the realities of Heaven.

May I encourage you to consider Heaven important enough to receive serious study? I pray that your heart will be stirred to do so as we pause to commemorate this special time of the year, designated as the remembrance of the birth of the One Who came from Heaven so that we might go to Heaven.

May the article of this month's Heritage move you to remember Him Who is our Saviour, our King, our LORD. May the very light of His countenance shine upon you and yours this season, when even the ungodly of the world acknowledge, however begrudgingly, that Jesus Christ was born.

—Pastor Manley

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Through the years, the innkeeper has been given a terrible reputation. Described in the meanest of terms, this descendent of Chimham is not honored, but is instead vilified. I wonder if eternity will not reveal a very different character of this innkeeper than that which he is assigned most often. There was another eye watching Bethlehem that night and that wicked one may well have maneuvered to make certain no sheltering room existed in the inn for the birth of the Messiah. This malevolent student of Scripture may have begun his murderous intent even before the slaughter of Bethlehem's babes. I wonder if we will not find that the God of Providence, Who never slumbers nor sleeps, watched over Israel that night in such a way as to fulfill even the most minor of prophecies—Isaiah 1:3, for instance—and, in doing so, also to grant the desire of David to prepare for *the KING that was to follow him*.

I believe David made Christmas preparations a thousand years before Christmas. He prepared a place for the King to be born. What have you prepared for the King among your multitude of seasonal preparations?

—Pastor Manley

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or the standard designations of the seven days of the week—even though all nineteen names originated from a pagan religious dedication to various false deities. Even to speak of Sunday as the Lord's Day is to use a title derived from the worship of the sun. Thus, while I do not question anyone's sincerity in wishing to avoid the use of the word "Christmas," I must acknowledge there is generally an inconsistency in doing so when the commonly accepted names for months and days are not avoided with the same reasoning. I prefer the title "the Lord's Day" for the first day of the week, and use it often, but I also still refer to the "Firstday" as "Sunday." "Sunday" is the term generally used: and only scholars, a few real worshippers of Sol, and some "scrupulous" preachers recognize the derivation of the name. In the same way, I continue to use "Christmas" simply because the word "Christmas" has come into such common usage that it no longer has any suggestion of a special mass or feast commemorating the birth of the Christ. Few who exchange Christmas presents, send greetings, take a Christmas vacation, spend a Christmas bonus, or say "Merry Christmas" even think of the meaning of what is conveyed by that action. The same is true with the names of the months and the days. How many know that Friday is a religious recognition of

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the only female deity in the names of the days, or why Saturday is dedicated to Saturn (the planet, not the car)? How many who say, "See you in church Sunday," realize the day declares a worship of the sun? The word "Christmas," after dwelling nearly a thousand years in the English language, has assumed a wider association than even a given day. It defines the period from Thanksgiving Day through New Year's Day—that is the Christmas season, or even "Christmas" in the mindset of this age.

There are also those believers who think it inappropriate to commemorate the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth in any fashion. Since the Bible does not establish such a "festival," does not record any disciple ever celebrating the birth of Christ, and does not (in their thinking) provide the actual day, such as December 25, the conclusion is that neither should we.

It seems to me that there is sufficient information in Scripture to make December 25 a genuine possibility. Frankly, after more than four decades of reading all I can find on the matter, I conclude there is more actual biblical (and historical) reason to hold to the traditional date (December 25) as there is for any other day of the year. However, for the sake of peace, I can sincerely concede that the exact date on the calendar is unknown and yet con-

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gelim and this prompted him to ask David to "take care of the boy." David, using some of the family land near Bethlehem (remember the land, as divided under Joshua, was not to "leave the family" forever), established a business for Chimham to operate—something suitable to his ability and nature. Chimham became the innkeeper of Bethlehem. He had, as his father before him, the gift of hospitality, and David made use of it. I wonder if David did not know that one day a weary traveler and his espoused wife, great with child, would arrive in Bethlehem and need a place to rest. The man who was always preparing for *the KING Who would follow him*, prepared an inn to receive Him.

Generations pass and the inn of Bethlehem remains in place and "open" through all the changes of kings and rulers and conquerors. One night, a road-weary Joseph and Mary arrived. The inn that night was already filled to capacity. The innkeeper, however, with the gift of hospitality still evident, somehow was still prepared. In his heart, he could not turn them away. He would find room somewhere, if not in the inn. Perhaps, he thought "this might be the very One for Whom I and my fathers before me were given this job." The inn is full, but he fulfilled his responsibility as best he could; he made room in the stable.

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dan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place. Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel.

Barzillai, ever the practical man, states that he would not be able at his age to enjoy the social life with the king and implies that he would, instead, be a burden to David. He asks David to take his son Chimham and look after him. This David promises to do. Chimham is not a major principal in the kingdom. He is not made a general. He does not become one of "the mighty men" of David. We know that David gives instruction for his continued care to Solomon; but neither David nor Solomon assigns him a royal title. He almost disappears from the biblical account—almost, but not quite.

Centuries pass and Chimham reappears, at least, his name does. With that reappearance, we learn volumes about David and Chimham. In Jeremiah 42:17, almost in an incidental way, we discover that the inn at Bethlehem is known as the "habitation of Chimham."

Perhaps, Barzillai, the practical man, knew his son was not destined to be the next mayor of Ro-

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tinue to use December 25 with a clear conscience.

The queen of England has an actual date of her nativity that is not the same as, and has no bearing on, the day the English Kingdom (or is it Queendom?) annually, officially celebrates her birth. I believe it is proper, indeed, more than proper, for the King of kings to have a day set aside to remember that He was born, even if the particular day chosen is not the same as the actual birth day. However, I do not insist on that as an absolute. What I do insist must be considered as an absolute is that there was a specific day on which the Son of God was supernaturally conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and that there was a particular day on which the Son of God, incarnate in the flesh, was born, in the city of David, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. That His birth was anticipated for over four thousand years by the faithful, announced by angels, verified by shepherds, and commemorated by wise men. Therefore, the customary, traditional English name may be replaced without loss, because the fact remains, He had a birth day. One may dispute with conviction that December 25 is not the proper date for having the remembrance, but no believer will argue that there was no date of birth.

So, debate the date—make it March, June, or

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October--and name it as you might chose--The Day of His Nativity, The Birthday of the Son of man, The Night the Son of David was born, the Day of Messiah's birth, or Christmas--the event that came to pass that night in Bethlehem of Judea is a time well worth remembering. Indeed, a time that ought to be remembered with great joy. I rejoice that my Saviour, the LORD Jesus Christ, the Son of God was made flesh, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and I encourage all other believers to do the same. That fact, that He was born, is worth a commemoration and, even, a celebration. That which made angels rejoice--who have no part in the incarnation, receive no benefit from the atonement, and know no gift from the ascension--surely should cause believers to sing praises and give glory to the great Triune God. To give one day each year to remember His birth is not unseemly, and I think, it is both proper and wise. Select whatever day seems best to you and do, on your day, what I do from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day--rejoice that in the fullness of time, God was manifest in the flesh.

The time of the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ in the city of the David was the day that the prophets anticipated and preached a consistent message to prepare the people since the beginning of the

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said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I *am* this day fourscore years old: *and* can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, *and be buried* by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, *that* will I do for thee. And all the people went over Jor-

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him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

Among those who met David and apparently the motivator of the help was Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim. This is our first meeting of this man who is destined to have a vital part in the preparation for the birth of the Messiah. Notice that the first item mentioned that this man and his friends provided for David is "beds." "For," it is recorded, "they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness." His first concern was to give the weary traveler a place to lay his head. Barzillai was a practical man. As we will see, he viewed all life in the most practical ways "practical."

Time, as it always does, passes. The unavoidable battle has been fought. Absalom is dead. David begins the return to Jerusalem. He desires to honor his friend Barzillai. The story resumes.

2 Samuel 19: 31-40 And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man. And the king

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world, as Zacharias reminds us. The apostle John informs us that the Godhead arranged for that particular day from before the foundation of the world. This was not a day that arrived unexpectedly or unannounced to a world unaware or unprepared. The birth of the Messiah is promised to Adam and Eve in the first conversation with the LORD God after the Fall. Every prophet that lived before His birth, in promise or picture, proclaims that His day of birth is to be expected. "He is coming" was their unwavering, universal message. Since that day of His birth, every preacher of the Gospel has been privileged to announce that He was born. At the appointed time, God sent forth His Son into the world and told men to call His name Jesus. Multiplied millions have rejoiced at the news, believed the message, and received Him as Christ the Lord, the Saviour of the world. How can I not devote attention to His birth? Why would I not desire to do so? The Creator entered His creation by being made flesh that He might dwell among His creatures to seek and to save that which was lost. That such did occur is worthy of a special remembrance. We grant a day to remember the "birth" of our nation, why not at least a day to recognize that Jesus Christ was born? (As a side note, historians squabble as to when the nation was actually birthed—but those who were there

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used July 4, 1776 as the day. That day was chosen because the Declaration of Independence was signed then—this is the document that the ACLU, the atheists, and the one-world-ers hate. It speaks of God as the Giver of rights. So, they insist on “understanding” the Constitution apart from the context of the Declaration.) I do not think that a proper-in-manner, suitable-in-decorum, appropriate-in-style, acknowledgment of the birth of the Son will be deemed wrong by the Saviour.

To consider the exquisite preparations that our God invested in this one event on this one day is a blessed contemplation to me and I believe it must be also to you. Before the foundation of the earth was laid, the “groundwork” for this day and this event was established. Before Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, the LORD God committed to their keeping a promise of the birth of the Redeemer. Announcements of that promise of this day and this event were continually repeated for the next four thousand years by a succession of prophets specially selected and purposefully called to that unique mission. When Satan, in his attempt to defeat this promise, had so corrupted the race, a worldwide flood intervened to remove the contamination and preserve the line of the Seed in the ark to protect the purity of the race to enable the event

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Jerusalem. Sometimes as I look at this event, it seems as if David abandons his throne and yet, it is also as if David is content to leave the question as to whether or not he is on the throne of Israel to the Throne in Heaven. David leaves Jerusalem, traveling down to the Jordan River. Pausing there, he receives word that the rebellion is established and that his life is to be taken.

2 Samuel 17:22-29²² Then David arose, and all the people that *were* with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan. Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, Brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched *corn*, and beans, and lentiles, and parched *pulse*, And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that *were* with

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abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, *which* I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses *withal*: The gold for *things* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who *then* is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?

The plans for the Temple were given to David (1 Chronicles 28:19) and he transmitted them to Solomon and charged him to build according to that pattern. He was faithful and meticulous in his preparation for this Temple.

However, King David had another preparation on his mind. He knew, because of the promises of God, that of his seed would come Messiah, the King, Who was his (David's) Lord. He knew this and he prepared for this event. That preparation seems to begin the night the war with Absalom began.

Rather than fight against his son, David left

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of this day. Later still, a man and, through him, a nation was "designed" and separated to bring this very day and this very event to pass. Still later, a tribe and then a family of that tribe were designated to bring this very day and this very event into reality. As the fullness of the time approached, an entire empire was disturbed so that one man and his espoused wife would be in a designated village at the exact time required for the event of that special day to transpire in the prophesied and prepared place.

Not only were Joseph and Mary in the land of Judea, in the city of David, Bethlehem, exactly as the promises of the prophets had prepared the people of God to anticipate, they were at an inn that was also prepared for this very night. The story of the preparation of that inn is also a blessing to me. It all begins the night Absalom instigated an insurrection against his father King David.

One of the intriguing traits of the character of David is that he was one who was always preparing for the future. He had an ability to see beyond the horizon. One early indication of this is his provision for his parents when King Saul determined to kill him. His was not the act of the fool, having eyes "in the ends of the earth." David was preparing for what God might do for or with him next.

No King setting on any throne ever gave more

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thought, devoted more energy, or expended more personal money in actual preparations for the King who would follow him than did the son of Jesse. King David was one who readily acknowledged that the great God of Heaven, his King, made great preparations on David's behalf. He quickly gives thanks for those provisions (Psalm 23 and 61 come to mind as examples) and, David, recognizing that God had prepared him for the throne through the events of his life, became a man given to measures that provided arrangements for the King that should follow him.

David made a Tabernacle for the Ark of the Covenant. This act in itself is a very interesting study. While the altar to receive the sacrifices remained in the Tabernacle of Moses, David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and erected a Tabernacle there to house the Ark. He instituted the orders of singers in this connection. Sometime we will explore David's "adjustments" to the worship of Israel, David's Tabernacle, and the relationship all this has with our worship and service today; however, for now, in this article I only call attention to his preparation of that Tabernacle and its order of worship. The desire of his heart was to build a house for the LORD. Though he was denied the privilege of the actual construction of the Temple, David established the

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preparation for the Temple as the highest priority of the last years on the throne. He made it not only a personal calling, but also the function of his kingdom.

1 Chronicles 22:5 And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD *must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it.* So David prepared abundantly before his death.

1 Chronicles 29:1-5 Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for *things to be made of gold*, and the silver for *things of silver*, and the brass for *things of brass*, the iron for *things of iron*, and wood for *things of wood*; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in

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